MFAS Journal

Contents

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد
وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين وسلّم

Editorial Policy

Each issue of the MFAS Journal contains contributions drawn from a range of currently active, credible and reputable Muslim authors and academics who are professionally engaged in higher education, teaching or research, and whose work, in the opinion of the Editorial Board reflects our preferred emphasis on the convergence of the soundest of Western intellectual tradition with the most penetrating of contemporary Muslim scholarship and insight with a view to producing a publication that will contribute to the dissemination of a much-needed understanding of the profoundest roots of the modern state and the systemic social, economic and political tensions that have arisen in Western society within recent decades, which remain a threat to civic stability, security and social cohesion. It is our aim as Muslims to generate well-articulated perspectives on every important aspect of the political terrain presented by the dominant Western paradigm, and to present an intelligible and reliable voice that will enable the emergent Muslim intelligentsia to enter the arena with a confidence born of cultural relevance, historical legitimacy and intellectual authority founded upon an effective combination between the Muslim and the Western knowledge traditions to assume a politically and philosophically integrative role, both nationally and internationally, and to offer a valuable resource in the face of contemporary challenges. Therefore, we are particularly welcoming of contributions deemed to fall within, add to or extend learning in the fields of *adab*, *siyar* and beneficial knowledge, as explicitly set out in the official organizational literature that explains the aims and objectives of the Muslim Faculty of Advanced Studies, and which it is the foremost goal of MFAS to cultivate for the greater common benefit. Beyond this, given our practice of soliciting articles and contributions from different authors, MFAS does not accept ownership or responsibility for views that may be expressed by independent contributors to the MFAS Journal.

Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison,
Warden MFAS

Foreword

The past hardly ever dies with its passing. It turns into memories that continue to run for decades and centuries, resonating in myriad ways in the present and into the future. As a repertoire of ideas, concepts, feelings, glories, defeats and fulfilled or unfulfilled aspirations, the past acts as a site of claim and counter-claim, validation or denial, and as a ray of hope, a screen of blinding darkness or a stance of indifference. At the heart of this dynamic lies an important truth: those who surrender the past surrender control over it, handing its ownership to others to do as they wish with it. This is particularly true in turbulent times where the voices of gloom and doom dig up the past to advance their agendas with all the intellectual barbarity at their disposal.

This volume has the past fully fixed in its gaze. It asks questions of it and advances its own interpretations to construct a contextual stance of variation and accommodation. But this is also a volume of contestation, in the positive sense of the term, which no group, community or society can afford to surrender. Readers may agree or disagree with what this volume has to say or stands for, but this should not matter as long as the engagement that will follow is pursued with intellectual integrity and a mind open to all possibilities.

Professor Yasir Suleiman
CBE, FRSE, FRCPE
Founding Director
Centre of Islamic Studies
University of Cambridge

Introduction

Abdassamad Clarke and Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison

In order to facilitate what we feel to be a necessary and universally beneficial convergence and inter-action between the Muslim and Western intellectual traditions, this inaugural volume of the MFAS Journal aims to signal the opening of a clearing for intellectual exertion, endeavour and research, in which channels of discourse are generated and maintained, particularly in the fields of political philosophy, economy and the relationship of knowledge and truth to the rise of techne and modern scientific method. These ongoing discourses are expected to give rise to an evolving body of vocabulary that will serve as a proof of the constructive process of cross-pollination, and as a common ground for reliable interpretation and mutual intelligibility between the two alternative perspectives on the prevailing ontological discourse in today's world, including its political implications as experienced from the viewpoint of each of these quite distinct yet historically related traditions. The keynote is one of integration, invited in such a way as to enable the emergent Muslim intelligentsia to enter the arena with a confidence born of cultural relevance, legitimacy and intellectual authority to make their demographically positive, politically constructive and philosophically regenerative contributions as a source of national and international socio-political adhesion at a moment in history where currently, the structures upon which these orders rely for their stability are evidently tending towards disintegration.

To that end, although it may not be immediately evident to the reader, this set of apparently disparate lectures, presentations and writings – on subjects as diverse as nihilism, secularism, the rise of the modern state and modern finance, what appears to be an obscure theological controversy in the Osmanlı polity, and the valiant efforts of one of the last Sultans to rescue that polity – tackles this central theme from a number of different angles, accentuating diverse perspectives and drawing on a variety of approaches.

In the process, MFAS lecturers and writers draw upon scholarship from traditional Muslim sources and

contemporary Western scholars in a way that presages well for a new breed of thinker who is able to see beyond the facile polarisations of recent history and the even more profound fractures that lie in our more distant past.

<center>* * * * *</center>

But to return to our own time and the writings before us. The story of our time continues to revolve around the nation-state, and the contradictions sometimes contained in the tension between 'nation' and 'state'.

> The definition of the nation-state as it has developed since Westphalia may be understood in simple terms by looking at the constituent elements of the term separately. The nation may be regarded as that population whose shared linguistic, cultural and traditional heritage provides the substance of their collective identity. This sense of the word can be seen clearly in reference, for example to the Zulu nation or the Sioux nation, or indeed in the Qur'anic reference to, "*peoples and tribes...*" [Al-Hujurat: 13]. The state, on the other hand, is essentially an administrative, geopolitical construct. Therefore, the conjunction of these two terms suggests the geographical convergence of the realities they each represent.[1]

The legacy of the contradiction inherent in the nation-state arguably includes the two World Wars and the carnage of a Cold War that was anything but cold for a great part of the world. In spite of efforts to contain its harm, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, it continues to be a source of conflict, although history is rarely short of an excuse for conflict. Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison continues:

> For most of the last two centuries, the modern nation-state proper has held sway as the recognised vehicle for the geopolitical organisation of the world's populations and the repository for their cultural patrimonies. Although, it must also be said that the various historical and current expressions of nationalism have often transcended state borders, leading on many occasions to serious political tensions and bloody conflicts such as we have seen relatively recently in Central Africa, the Balkans, and even closer to home, in Northern Ireland. By recruiting to its cause the forces of myth, folklore, ancient history, language, religion, racial theories, art, literature and music, regular eruptions of popular nationalism have provided a constant counterpoint to the process of controlled state formation, bringing

---

[1] Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison, "Demo-cracy and the 'Post-nation' State", see below, pp.65-76.

into high relief the underlying tensions between what has variously been called state or civic nationalism and popular or ethnic nationalism. Some historians have posited these contrasting currents on the one hand, in terms of the drive to 'state-building' (which equates to the state-driven state formation I referred to earlier) and on the other hand, in terms of cultural/identity driven nation-building which once politicised, becomes the basis for nationalist claims ranging from Black and Southern separatism in the USA, to the case for devolved government for the Scots and the Welsh here in the UK.[2]

In 2014, for example, there was the conflict in Ukraine, a nation built on a fault line if ever there was one, a nation whose existence threatened to open old wounds or new arenas for conflict.

Then the British state itself threatened to come apart because of the Scottish Referendum on independence.

Most alarmingly for some, there was the 'Islamic State'. Tellingly, some discerning commentators have seen that the 'Islamic State' is built on the model of the French Revolutionary state and not on the model of the

Caliphate, in spite of its insistence to the contrary.[3]

The latter is most pertinent to the themes of this Journal. IS, the 'Islamic State' and its claim to restore the Caliphate while nevertheless duplicating the French Revolutionary model even to the extent of its penchant for cutting off heads straddles the themes of our two modules on the History of the Khalifas and the Politics of Power.

Even though by the time the reader comes to this passage, IS may well have been consigned to the dustbin of history or, alternatively, may have achieved some form of statehood, nevertheless, we know that the issues it so well illustrates are not going away any day soon.

Kevin McDonald writes:

It needs to be said very clearly: contemporary jihadism is not a return to the past. It is a modern, anti-traditional ideology with a very significant debt to western political history and culture.[4]

McDonald writes that IS ideology

---

2 Ibrahim-Morrison, "Democracy and the 'Post-nation' State".

3 See, for example, Gertrude Himmelfarb, "From Robespierre to ISIS, Edmund Burke's war on terror—and ours." *The Weekly Standard magazine*, September 29, 2014, vol. 20, no. 03. www.weeklystandard. com/articles/robespierre-isis_805329. html?page=1

4 Kevin McDonald, "ISIS jihadis aren't

derives directly from Maulana Maududi:

> When he made his speech in July at Mosul's Great Mosque declaring the creation of an Islamic state with himself as its caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi quoted at length from the Indian/Pakistani thinker Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami party in 1941 and originator of the contemporary term Islamic state.

> Maududi's Islamic state is profoundly shaped by western ideas and concepts. He takes a belief shared between Islam and other religious traditions, namely that God alone is the ultimate judge of a person, and transforms this – reframing God's possession of judgment into possession of, and ultimately monopoly of, "sovereignty". Maududi also draws upon understandings of the natural world governed by laws that are expressions of the power of God – ideas at the heart of the 17th-century scientific revolution. He combines these in a vision of the sovereignty of God, then goes on to define this sovereignty in political terms, affirming that "God alone is the

> sovereign" (The Islamic Way of Life). The state and the divine thus fuse together, so that as God becomes political, [and] politics becomes sacred.[5]

He goes on to examine the origins of IS's concept of the state not in Islamic political philosophy but in Maulana Mawdudi's, which he attributes to Maududi's understanding of the French Revolution and the state to which it gave birth.

> But Maududi's debt to European political history extends beyond his understanding of sovereignty. Central to his thought is his understanding of the French revolution, which he believed offered the promise of a "state founded on a set of principles" as opposed to one based upon a nation or a people. For Maududi this potential withered in France; its achievement would have to await an Islamic state.[6]

Pivotal to that idea of the state is secularism, and here we cite Tobias S. Andersson's treatment of the matter in our Winter Symposium 2012 on the subject of Identity and Time:

> The classic thesis of secularisation identifies three essential elements: firstly, a structural differentiation of

---

medieval – they are shaped by modern western philosophy." *The Guardian*, September 9, 2014. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/09/isis-jihadi-shaped-by-modern-western-philosophy

5 McDonald, "ISIS jihadis".
6 McDonald, "ISIS jihadis".

social spheres resulting in separation of religion from politics; secondly, a privatisation of religion; and thirdly, a decreasing social significance of religion.[7]

The separation of religion and state is not immediately evident, either in IS's or in Maududi's thoughts. Yet, as a chorus of Muslim scholars and other commentators have made clear, there is no basis in Islamic political philosophy for the foundation of the 'Islamic State' in the mode IS have chosen just as there is no basis in Islamic Law for the barbarities they have perpetrated, such as the murder of non-combatants, mass executions of Iraqis and Syrians and the seizure of property. Thus, we can say that the 'religion' of Islam has been used to bring about a 'state' which operates in a secular fashion in spite of proclamations to the contrary. The 'Caliph' is authenticated by a spurious interpretation of Islamic law and then acts as an arbitrary despot with a clear separation of religion and state. Significantly, far from being a uniform and homogenous 'Islamist' force, there are sizeable contingents of Saddam-era troops in IS ranks. Similarly, Maududi's Islamic state is founded on

'principles' and thus produces a 'state' just like any other with Islam merely the token religion in the mosque and in the private sphere.

The devastating consequence of secularism is that religion being relegated to the private sphere is prey to doubt and disbelief, and the public sphere becomes the zone of nihilism. Although in our example 19th Century Tsarist Russia was ostensibly a Christian society, in reality it fulfils most of our criteria for secularism with Christianity relegated to the private sphere and to a ceremonial role in public.

Dostoyevsky documents how, during the advancing decay of a Christian civilisation, the middle class was determined to ignore the crisis and continue living bourgeois, moral lives entirely within the constraints of what other people thought respectable and proper, in spite of their own loss of faith. The younger generation rejected the hypocritical solution of their parents and earnestly decided that if you don't believe in God then you must live by your own standards of accountability.[8]

These young people were to be the

---

7 Tobias Sahl Andersson, "Discourses of the Secular", see below, pp. 57-61.

8 Abdassamad Clarke and Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison, "Nihilism and Nothingness", see below, pp. 46-54.

'nihilists' of their time, destroying themselves and others in suicide bombings and assassinations. Russia was finally to succumb to the French Revolutionary model.

The MFAS module, the *Politics of Power* seeks to map the rise of the modern state during and after the French Revolution. The *History of the Khalifas* in its later lectures outlines the seemingly inevitable encroachment of that statism into Islam. The lecture in that module on the rise of the Kadızadeli movement, precursors of the progenitor of the Saudi state, Muhammad ibn Abdalwahhab – delineates the controversy that arguably weakened the Osmanlı *dawla*, hemmed in as it was by increasingly hostile forces, and which thus contributed to Mahmud II's seizure upon all things European as his salvation. He remodelled the *dawla* after the pattern of a European state, not realising the fulfilment of that would mean the Young Turks' seizure of power and the overthrow of the Caliphate.

It is vital to note in passing that Saudi Arabia, contrary to popular perception, is not a theocratic but a secular state. Whereas Islam is used very prominently in the enforcement of matters such as attendance at prayer, the dress code, and in the application of capital and corporal punishments, it is completely absent from the commercial world, which a large part of Islamic law is intended to regulate.

But to return to our theme, in the tenth lecture of our *Politics of Power* module, "From State to Market", we show the emergence of finance from the underbelly of society to centre stage:

> And because the old Estates had sunk into mayhem because of an unmanageable debt, the new order was not going to make the same mistake, and Napoleon quickly recognised a small group of wealthy men as the Bank of France. But remember, as in all such cases, although the 'Bank of France' sounded rather grand and patriotic, it was no more national than the local bakery or laundry. In other words, the Bank of France, as the earlier Bank of England and the later Federal Reserve, was a private company rather than an office of state. But this private company had a very important customer: the French nation, and indeed had a monopoly on that customer's business.[9]

Similarly, in the lecture on Sultan Abdalhamid II's reign Dr. Asadullah

---

9 Abdassamad Clarke, "From State to Market", see below, pp. 77-92.

Yate shows his valiant but vain attempts to rescue the polity from the inexorable growth of the debt that, as Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi proposes in *The Return of the Khalifate*, was the real cause of Osmanlı collapse:

> He almost succeeded in paying off the debt and freeing his people from the banker creditors. His shortcoming was perhaps not to fully realise the nature of the attack against him and that it was partly hidden in the technology he needed. Technology came at a terrible price: indebtedness and the adoption of the capitalist system. Europe had had centuries to come to terms with technology and capitalism. The Europeans, at least the modernists and the progressives, had realised that it necessarily entailed the end of personal sovereign power – with the result that the kings and princes of Europe were disappearing or had been reduced to mere figureheads; they realised that high finance and casino capitalism had to have unfettered licence in order to succeed and this only came through democracy which declares that the markets are free, i.e., that the financiers were free to finance whatever project they liked irrespective of its benefit to the society as a whole, and must not be subject to any outward control, least of all a king or a prime minister. Sultan

Abdülhamid's dilemma was that the technology he wanted for his people could only come at the sacrifice of his authority and this he was not willing to make because he knew that his authority represented his responsibility towards Allah and his *umma*.[10]

Sultan Abdülhamid was deposed, followed by the desultory rule of a couple of largely ceremonial figures, until Ataturk abolished first the sultanate and then the caliphate. The vast multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Osmanlı polity had disappeared and the 'Turkish nation' appeared, leaving its former *wilayats*, including 'Winston's Folly' Iraq,[11] Syria and Israel/Palestine, to sink into the anarchy we see today.

As to Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley's perceptive and instructive account of the governance of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which opens our collection, it both represents the original model from which all subsequent polities derive as well as that to which the Muslims repair. particularly in times of disorientation

10 Dr. Asadullah Yate, "The Last Decades of the Osmanlı Khalifate – the last Decades of the *Deen*", see below, pp. 31-44.

11 See Christopher Catherwood's *Winston's Folly* (London: Constable, 2004), which is a study of how a nation was assembled from three mutually antipathetical Osmanlı *wilayats* and called Iraq.

and confusion.

Although there is a long tradition of political writing in Muslim scholarship, such as al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyya*, they often represent the needs of the *dawla* within which they were written, such as in his case the Abbasids, adducing precedent in Prophetic example. Thus it has become commonplace to think of the elaboration of the Muslim *dawla* as being largely presaged in the *al-Khulafā ar-Rāshidūn* epoch, but taking full shape in an elementary fashion in Umayyad times, and then reaching its fullest expression in Abbasid times when it drew on the great legacies of the Empires to which it was heir: Rome and Persia as much as (and sometimes more than) Madina. What Shaykh Abdalhaqq has done here is perhaps unique. It is an attempt to see the Prophetic model of governance in its own right.

> Although it is true that nearly all the compilers of the *sira* and those who write about the Prophet ﷺ do acknowledge him to be the political leader of the growing Muslim umma, almost none of them really go on to specify what that meant in real terms. It is frequently implied that real government and political administration within the Muslim umma did not actually come

into being until the time of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, with the accompanying implication that the governing structures they employed were in fact based on, and borrowed from, Roman or Persian models. That is far from the case. The truth is that the guidance of the Qur'an and its implementation in the Sunna of Prophet ﷺ were as much in evidence in matters of governance and administration as they were in any other aspect of the life of the first community of Islam and the Prophet ﷺ was as much a model in respect of these matters as he was in every other area of life.[12]

We have seen in recent history how, without this deep insight, Islamic aspirations to caliphate or state are coloured either by the post-Westphalian, post-French Revolutionary state, the desire to relive Abbasid glory, or some mix of the two. It is our contention that the model outlined in this singular lecture is indeed the proper response to modern nihilism and the descent into barbarity that we see on all sides as the nation-state itself comes apart or springs to life in ways that make us deeply uneasy.

12 Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley, "The Prophet ﷺ as Ruler", see pp.9-28.