The voices that will enunciate the pivotal ideas for the next great phase of Islamic history have probably not been heard yet.

CHAPTER 4

The Edge of the Future

ISLAM IS IMMERSED in a crisis of authority. From coed swimming and playing rock music to condemning Salman Rushdie and declaring a jihad against Jews and Crusaders, there are several positions on every question. If each position matched up with a particular authority, believers could make their choices. But it is no longer clear what constitutes an authority. The imam of the local mosque is the last word for many, but others follow the advice they glean from pamphlets, magazines, radio preachers, and Internet sites. For everyone who heeds the prescriptions of a government appointed dignitary, there is someone else who considers all dignitaries sellouts to the regime. Group gurus tell their followers what to think while noted intellectuals cast aspersions on all groups and sects.

Resolving this crisis of authority will take several generations. The history of religious fragmentation and divisiveness in the Christian West holds some clues to how things might

evolve in the sibling faith community of Islam, but analogy has limits. Thirty years of thinking that Islam no longer counted for much, followed by twenty years of borderline hysteria about Islam as a looming threat, have prepared America poorly for looking dispassionately into the future of Islamo-Christian civilization.

A Muslim tradition holds that with every new century there comes a "renewer" (*mujaddid*), literally, a person whose mission it is to make Muslim religious life new. The renewer's role differs from that of the messiah *(mahdi*), who comes only at the end of the world. The tradition of the renewer testifies to an ingrained Muslim confidence in the capacity of their faith to restore itself after periods of disunity or flagging spirit and to adapt to the challenges that the passage of centuries inevitably brings. Typically, no one agrees on who the renewer of a given century is until long after that individual's death—if then.

Some western scholars seem to believe that a professional career devoted to thinking about Islamic matters gives them the insight to recognize the renewer. A few may even dream of penning something of unutterable brilliance under a Muslim *nom de plume* and claiming the title for themselves. The British poet and traveler Wilfred Scawen Blunt may have thought he had spotted the renewer when he wrote *The Future of Islam* about the modernist thoughts of the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh. The year of publication was 1882, the very cusp of the Muslim fourteenth century, which began the following year. Traditionally, the beginning of a new century is a ripe time for the renewer to appear. Of more relevance to present-day matters, the turn of the fifteenth century in 1980—the Muslim lunar century is three years shorter than the solar century—brought with it not only the Islamic revolution in Iran but an enhanced feeling among Muslims and non-Muslims alike that something new and titanic was brewing. Since then, scores of authors have argued that Islam is in need of a Reformation, or more specifically, a Martin Luther, the Christian renewer *par excellence*.

The scholarly community has organized its search for renewers, redeemers, and messiahs with Cartesian finesse. Over the last two

decades, conference papers and learned articles devoted to observing the contemporary Muslim religious scene and dividing the observed phenomena into analytical categories have multiplied like mushrooms on a dead log. Devising categories is second nature to academics. Authors usually feel free to construct their own typologies, classifying individual thinkers and movements as modernist, fundamentalist, jihadist, conservative, radical, moderate, Islamist, traditional, activist, quietist, rationalist, obscurantist, liberal, democratic, totalitarian . . . the list goes on. Since categories are indeed analytically useful, these efforts are not to be denigrated. Yet the Muslims subjected to classification seldom employ such categories in talking about themselves. Muslims who seek to lead their brothers and sisters into a better realization of their common faith more often speak in inclusive terms, leaving the reality of the proposed categories in limbo.

I will seek here neither to identify the renewer nor to classify Muslim thinkers and movements. Despite the urgency of Islam's crisis of authority, I see no reason to think that it will be resolved during my lifetime. Socioreligious developments tend to play out over decades and centuries because they involve a succession of generations becoming socialized to new religious expectations and conditions. Many of my students have heard me divide all of Islamic history into four-hundred-year segments: 600–1000, the initial era of conversion to Islam; 1000–1400, the era of conflict within Islam over what sorts of religious understandings should predominate in different Muslim communities; 1400–1800, the era of resistance to Christian expansion and of stable states built on societies that had resolved the problem of competing understandings; and 1800–2200, the era of the destruction of various Muslim social syntheses in the course of confrontation with the West, and of the creation of new socioreligious syntheses appropriate to the modern world. Ending this admittedly simplistic and half-facetious periodization at a point two centuries in the future is supposed to teach the lesson that a resolution of the crisis facing the Muslim world, and facing the West in its relations with the

Muslim world, may not be found in the next ten or twenty years, much less in the remaining years of the Bush administration. *The voices that will enunciate the pivotal ideas for the next great phase of Islamic history have probably not have been heard yet.*

As a non-Muslim, I do not feel comfortable surveying the multitude of tendencies and ideas currently competing for attention and highlighting those I find attractive and those I find repellent. But I do have biases. I favor articulations of Islam that include commitments to participatory government; I deplore articulations that advocate terrorism.

These biases do not represent any claim to clairvoyance in predicting how hundreds of millions of Muslims will choose to live their lives in the course of the twenty-first century, but I have never agreed with historian colleagues who shun envisioning the future. I think historians are at least as well prepared to think about the future as political scientists and sociologists. Better, in fact. The historical profession trains its practitioners to cobble together from fragmentary remains credible representations of times long past. The future shares with the distant past the feature of being outside contemporary experience. So why should the craftsmanship of the historian not work as well in putting together bits and pieces of evidence to project a plausible picture of things to come? I will divide my predictions into two categories, the edge, and the future.

The Edge

My book *Islam: The View from the Edge,* published in 1994,[1] dealt for the most part with medieval Islam. But in it I advanced an approach to Islamic history that applies today. I focused on the experiences of people living in what I called "edge" situations, by which I meant situations where people were in the process of becoming Muslim through conversion, or of reconnecting to their religious roots through some sort of spiritual renewal. I called such social situations the "edge" of Islam for three reasons. First,

I wanted to distinguish between people in these situations and people living in the "center," a term I used to designate what historians conventionally consider the political and religious core of Muslim history: the caliphate and its successor states; the post-Mongol empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals; the development of Islamic law; and the intellectual issues arising from the medieval confrontation with Aristotelian ideas. Secondly, I wanted to avoid the words "periphery" and "margin" because readers often understand them in purely geographical terms and instinctively consider the "center" more important. Thirdly, terms like "edgy" and "cutting edge" fit with my contention that the edge in Islam, rather than the center, has been where new things happen. Alas, a number of reviewers took my "edge" to be synonymous with geographical periphery, and even with provincial peculiarity. So I need to restate my argument.

In the absence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, narratives of Islamic history put political institutions at the center of the story: first the caliphate and then a plethora of successor states, each with its judges, jurisconsults, and market inspectors as prescribed by the shari'a. Nevertheless, these political institutions generally lacked an extensive capacity for religious guidance. From the death of the Prophet onward, Muslims who wanted to know what was expected of them religiously did not look to the government. They followed instead the practices of their local community, as transmitted from generation to generation in written or oral form. Alternatively, they sought pastoral instruction from religious scholars and saintly individuals. Sometimes these were government officials, but usually not. In most times and places, the prevailing political institutions had little interest in or control over these sources of guidance.

Like people of all faiths, Muslims find important elements of identity and solace in observing as adults the practices they first encounter as children. Local custom does not offer such clear guidance, however, for people who are considering a change in their religious identity either by embracing a different variant of

their ancestral faith; or by converting to a different religion. Nor does customary practice help people who think their community is too little involved with religion and who seek a more intensive religious experience; or the other direction, people who desire a more or less nonreligious way of life. All of these manifestations of the edge raise questions about how to behave and what to believe.

Edge situations, which have parallels in other religions, have been unusually creative in the history of Islam because answering questions raised by prospective converts to Islam, and by Muslims in spiritual quandary, exposes underlying ambiguities about the sources of spiritual authority. Muslims committed to the beliefs and practices of the center have few uncertainties in this area. The Quran; the hadith, or collected accounts of the words and deeds of Muhammad; the shari'a; and the consensus of learned Muslims on spiritual matters make it clear to them what it means to be a Muslim. But Islam's edges have often lacked such clarity, sometimes because of confrontation with local non-Muslim traditions, and sometimes because of the preaching of assertive individuals whose views differ from those of the center.

Zones of intercultural confrontation and unconventional preaching by charismatic individuals pose problems for all religions, of course, but formalized ecclesiastical structures usually suffice to minimize them. Absent such ecclesiastical structures, problems arise. Who is authorized to answer the questions posed by believers? Does the notion of "authorized response" mean much in edge contexts? What determines the legitimacy of charismatic preachers?

In drawing attention to the edge in Islam, I make no claim that the edge distinguishes Islam from other religions. I want, rather, to highlight the comparative potency of developments on the edge in conditions of weakly institutionalized religious authority. The center in Islam has a frequently expressed horror of innovation (*bid'a*) in matters of faith and practice. This position buttresses the widespread impression that Islam is an unchanging religion. The

vitality of Islam's edge communities has developed in the face of this rhetorical abhorrence and given rise to remarkable diversity under the name of Islam. Confrontation between the conservative center and the creative edge will surely continue in the future as the current crisis of authority in Islam plays itself out.

Diversity exists in every religious tradition, but diversity has been particularly pronounced in Islam. This does not mean, however, that individual Muslims necessarily consider their faith to be marked by great diversity. To the contrary, uncertainty about what is authoritative can foster a tenacious adherence to practices and beliefs that specific communities consider to be the truest version of Islam. When there is no church acting as guardian of the faith, after all, the duty falls to the individual believer.

In the past, lack of contact between the Islam of the law courts and seminaries and edge communities in various regions resulted in some communities becoming strongly devoted to interpretations of Islam that differed a great deal from the legalistic norm. Some heartfelt expressions of Muslim faith even sound scandalous to other Muslims when they first hear of them. Examples may be found in many areas and periods, but two extreme illustrations from India and Indonesia will illustrate the point.

In the northern Indian state of Bihar in 1545, Mir Sayyid Rajgiri, known as Manjhan, composed a long poetic romance he entitled *Madhumalati*. Manjhan belonged to the Shattari Sufi brotherhood, an unquestionably Muslim devotional group. His tale of love treats metaphorically the Sufi's love of God. The poem begins:

> God, giver of love, the treasure-house of joy
> Creator of the two worlds in the one sound Om,
> my mind has no light worthy of you,
> with which to sing your praise, O Lord!
> King of the three worlds and the four ages,
> the world glorifies you from beginning to end . . .

> Listen now while I tell of the man:
> separated from him, the Maker became manifest.
> When the Lord took on flesh, he entered creation.
> The entire universe is of His Essence.
> His radiance shone through all things.
>
> This lamp of creation was named Muhammad!
> For him, the Deity fashioned the universe,
> and love's trumpet sounded in the triple worlds.
> His name is Muhammad, king of three worlds.
> He was the inspiration for creation.[2]

Anyone familiar with Hinduism will immediately recognize many of the religious doctrines contained in these lines. The cosmically creative syllable Om, the three worlds and four ages, and the presentation of Muhammad as a divine incarnation, correspond directly to Hindu doctrines and have no resemblance at all to most other versions of Islam. Evidently the Muslim faith community of northeastern India included many people who thought of themselves as Muslims but still retained their previous beliefs.[3] This was Islam on the edge: passionate, creative, adaptive, and attractive.

The Gayo highlands district of northern Sumatra in Indonesia affords a second example. As portrayed in a penetrating study by anthropologist John R. Bowen,[4] a local ritual specialist known as the Lord of the Fields bears the burden of negotiating a good harvest with the spirits, ancestors, and pests that affect the growing rice plants. The educated Muslim elite, the ulama, deplore the Lord of the Fields' rituals, but they do not openly contest them. For his part, the Lord of the Fields aligns his rituals with Islam, reciting "Qur'anic verses," which are actually spells in the local Achehnese language, that begin with the Arabic formula "In the name of God." He explains the spiritual connection between rice and Islam by means of the following myth:

> The prophet Adam and Eve had a child, Tuan [Lady] Fatima. They lived on leaves from trees and rarely had enough to eat. Tuan Fatima

wanted to marry the prophet Muhammad. She talked to him but without touching him, without intercourse—there was a barrier between them; he had seen her but not yet married her. But merely from that contact there was a spark between them, and she became pregnant by him without intercourse. She had a daughter, Maimunah.

God sent word to Muhammad by way of an angel that he should cut the child's throat, cut her up into little pieces (as you would a jackfruit—but you needn't write that down), and scatter the pieces into the field. The pieces became rice seeds, and grew to become rice plants.

Adam asked Fatima where her daughter was. She answered that she did not know. Adam replied that Muhammad was the father of the child and that he had scattered the child into the field. Eve said that Fatima must have slept with Muhammad and must marry him. Fatima swore that she had not, that they had only spoken, with a barrier between them. Then Jibra'il, Mika'il, Abu Bakr, Uthman, 'Ali, and Shi'a all came down from the sky and married the two (Shi'a sits to the immediate left of God). Muhammad did not refuse.

Muhammad then took Fatima into the field and showed her the rice and Fatima called out her child's name. Maimunah then answered, saying: "Don't look for me anymore, mother; I have become your means of life."[5]

For most Muslims, this story is horrifying. Nothing is so strongly and explicitly condemned in the Quran as female infanticide, and the intimation of incest in the relationship between Fatima and Muhammad, who was historically her father, is morally appalling. One might also sense Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist influences in the story. The sacrifice of the child born of a virgin for the well being of the whole community sounds Christian. The descent of heavenly beings sounds Hindu or Buddhist, even though the first two of them bear the Arabic names of angels; the next three commemorate early caliphs, including Fatima's historical husband, Ali; and the last is a personification of the Shi'ite sect of Islam, which has few practitioners in Indonesia. Yet despite this mixing of religions, there is no question that the Lord of the Fields

who narrated the myth to Bowen considered himself a Muslim, and was so considered by the farmers in his community.

I have chosen for these examples versions of Islam that depart dramatically from what most people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, consider Islam to stand for. Such radical departures from an imagined norm sound strange, if not outright offensive, to most Muslims. But they are not uncommon in certain parts of the Muslim world, and they were probably even more common prior to the spread of literacy and modern media. What they share, in most cases, is a development on the edge. In the case of northeast India in the sixteenth century and Sumatra more recently, the edge was also part of a geographical periphery, but this does not mean that divergent articulations of Islam cannot be found in the old Islamic heartland of the Middle East and North Africa. The Druze of Lebanon, the Alevis of Turkey, and the Alawis of Syria, for example, profess doctrines that many neighboring Muslims find unconventional. These happen to date from medieval times when edge communities, consisting mostly of new converts, formed in many parts of the geographical heartland. In more recent times, the nineteenth-century movements of the Baha'is in Iran and Ahmadis in Pakistan showed great vigor and a capacity to attract both converts to Islam and Muslims looking for new spiritual experiences. Both movements carried out successful missionary operations in non-Muslim lands such as the United States, where the Ahmadis met success among African-Americans and the Baha'is among white Americans.

Today there is a strong impetus in many parts of the Muslim world to suppress divergent local beliefs and win people to more conventional interpretations of Islam. Missionary (*da'wa*) efforts based in Saudi Arabia are particularly active. This does not mean, however, that unconventional practices and beliefs on the edge are necessarily doomed to be overwritten by stronger influences from the center. Several major developments that are now considered integral to the Islam of the center originally formed on the edge. Collecting the sayings of Muhammad, for example, flourished in Iran at a time when conversion to Islam was at a particularly dynamic

point. All six of the collections that Sunni Muslims eventually canonized as the truest expressions of their prophet's faith and practice were compiled in Iran during the ninth century. A second example: Religious seminaries (*madrasas*) first appeared in the tenth century far to the northeast of the Arab heartland in the frontier zone that today separates Iran from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Some historians suspect a Buddhist institutional origin. Only after two centuries of local development on the edge did these institutions spread throughout much of the Muslim world and standardize both Sunni and Shi'ite education. Sufi brotherhoods afford a third example of creation on the edge feeding back into the center. Some of the most successful brotherhoods, such as the Mevleviya and the Bektashiya, originated in what is today Turkey during the period of religious ferment that followed the collapse of Byzantine Christian power there in 1071. Other popular brotherhoods that enjoyed widespread success arose in other edge situations, such as the mountains of central Afghanistan (the Chishtiya), among the mixed Arab-Berber populations of North Africa (the Tijaniya), and, as we have seen, in northeast India (the Shattariya).

Developments like these demonstrate that Muslim communities that are remote from what appears at any point in time to be Islam's center have shown remarkable dynamism, creativity, and adaptability. They further demonstrate that some of edge developments have subsequently become incorporated into the Islam of the center. A search for parallels in other religions would most likely lead to the history of sects and denominations. However, the flexibility that has characterized Islam historically discourages such an approach. Though divisions within Islam have from time to time acquired names and become formalized, the flow of ideas, practices, and beliefs within and among communities discourages efforts to discover precise and permanent intrafaith boundaries. The annual mingling of hundreds of thousands of Muslims of every variety of belief during the pilgrimage to Mecca symbolizes this fluidity.

Looking at contemporary circumstances, it is evident that Muslims are living in a time of many edges. Observers agree that Islam

is growing rapidly through conversion, the most common locus of edge developments. This is occurring in interfaith frontier zones in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, and Europe rather than in the old geographical heartland of the faith. Just as importantly, Muslims in many regions are actively seeking to intensify their religious lives while others are trying to adjust their religious observances to a secular society. Edges of this sort exist in all parts of the Muslim world. In the old Muslim heartland, they are often accompanied by an attitude of self-help and social responsibility framed against the failure of nationalist anticlerical government. In the re-Islamizing post-Soviet republics, violence in the name of Islam garners the headlines while the quiet multiplication of mosques and schools begins to reverse two generations of official atheism. In European and American diaspora communities, Muslims discuss ways of coping with governments and societies that they increasingly see as unfriendly, if not actually hostile.

Given the history of edge phenomena in Islam, what should be expected today is the appearance of myriad diverse movements addressing the spiritual and social needs of specific groups of believers. What should further be expected is that conservative voices from the center—including both governments in majority Muslim countries and the marginalized traditional ulama—will weigh less in the future spiritual balance than some of the new expressions of Islam on the edge. Overviews of Muslim religious activity worldwide, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims (and among non-Muslims, whether by people gazing about in fear and hatred, or by others of more friendly disposition) support both of these expectations. Thus in all likelihood, tomorrow's center will develop on today's edge.

The Future

Two things separate the edges of today from those of the past: the speed and ease of communication, and the disappearance or devaluation of institutions conferring credentials of religious au-

thority. For the first time in history, Muslims from every land and condition—a preacher in Harlem, a terrorist in Mombasa, a political party leader in Kuala Lumpur, a feminist in Marrakesh—can access a worldwide audience as easily as traditional authorities like a Shaikh al-Azhar in Cairo, an ayatollah in Najaf, or a royally appointed mufti in Riyadh. Moreover, the devaluation of the old authorities by the modernizing regimes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the creation of mass youth literacy by these same governments, have led many Muslims on the edge to believe that they are free to choose whatever brand of Islam best suits their circumstances. Of course, Muslims of conservative bent still declare that Islam can only be authoritatively defined by officially empowered qadis, muftis, and ulama. But others contend that Islam is whatever they and their friends believe it to be on the basis of the teachings of the person whose writings, audiotapes, and videotapes they find most convincing.

The edge perspective on Islamic history indicates that the resolution of this crisis of authority will depend less on ideas than on institutions, and in particular on institutions that convince large segments of the Muslim community that a semblance of spiritual order has returned. A free market in religious belief is a mixed blessing, at best, at a time when war clouds are gathering, voices of religious hatred are gaining a hearing, and millions of Muslims are struggling to raise their families in countries that are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty and disorder. People who turn to religion for spiritual and moral sustenance, and for the comfort that comes from living within a caring and supportive religious community, prefer assurance to debate in the delineation of the right path. At the present moment, the paths are many, but assurance based on recognized authority is in short supply.

Again, I claim no clairvoyance about the path or paths that will lead the world's Muslims through the coming century. I am inclined to doubt, in fact, that the options currently before them include the ones that will prove the most fruitful in the long run. Instead of describing religious ideas and interpretations, therefore, I

will devote the remainder of this discussion to the challenges facing new experiments in institutionalizing authority.

Though some students of the Islamic Republic of Iran consider its effort to combine religion with government an abject failure, and others consider it a fascinating experiment in implementing democracy in an Islamic religious state, most would agree that its constitution writers boldly came to grips with the problem of institutionalizing religious authority, in the person of the "governing religious jurist" (*vali faqih*). To date, no parallel has emerged in the Sunni world. There are doubtless many reasons for the Shi'ite ulama's comparative success in this endeavor, but looking toward the future, one reason that is particularly suggestive concerns a five-century debate between two factions of those ulama, the Akhbaris and the Usulis.

The Akhbari school of thought maintained that all authoritative Shi'ite knowledge could be found in voluminous texts from earlier times. "Akhbar," the modern Arabic word for "news," refers to those texts, which were mostly composed when Shi'ism was out of power and strongly marked by political quietism. This school held that the ulama should remain aloof from political affairs until the return of the Hidden Imam. The opposing Usuli school of thought took its name from the Arabic phrase *usul al-din*, meaning "roots of the faith." It asserted that by virtue of their understanding of fundamental religious principles, the *usul*, the top ulama were qualified to pronounce binding judgments on contemporary problems because they were more likely than any government official to know how the Hidden Imam might judge things. In Usuli thinking, there was no need to be bound by bygone texts. A truly learned scholar was fully qualified to exercise his independent, but informed, judgment, or *ijtihad*.

The debate developed from the sixteenth century onward against the background of the rise and fall of the Safavids, the most powerful Shi'ite dynasty ever to rule in Iran. The crux of the matter was whether in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the shah's government was legitimate enough to declare jihad and perform

other religiously authorized functions. The Usulis supported government authority, and then went farther and claimed that they themselves knew better how to rule.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Usulis had won the argument and assumed control of the major Shi'ite seminaries. The most highly esteemed ulama were judged by their fellows to be *mujtahids*, or scholars qualified to exercise independent judgment. Ordinary believers were expected to conform their beliefs and actions to the guidance of a single living mujtahid, a "reference point of emulation" (*marja' al-taqlid*), and to shift their allegiance to another living mujtahid upon the death of their first. These developments paved the way for Ayatollah Khomeini and others to create a new form of government on their own initiative and to command the respect of the majority of the population in doing so.

The religiously questionable legitimacy of the Safavid shahs anticipated by three centuries similar problems that confronted Sunni societies in the nineteenth century. In India, Algeria, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Muslim territories absorbed into the Russian empire, Sunni ulama saw their political institutions fall prey to aggressive Christian imperialism. Meanwhile, in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, Westernizing regimes undermined the ulama in unsuccessful efforts to stave off imperialism. In the face of what they saw as an assault on their religion and their professional status, some Sunni ulama concluded that what Islam needed was a renewal of the seldom exercised—some thought banned—practice of *ijtihad*, the same practice that their Usuli Shi'ite counterparts had already resuscitated.

Unlike the Shi'ites, however, they did not reach a consensus on what would qualify a person as a *mujtahid*, nor did they figure out whether or how ordinary Muslims could be made to follow new independent judgments. The problem that the Usuli Shi'ites, with a long head start and a smaller and more concentrated body of followers, had solved by recognizing a few "reference points of emulation," and requiring ordinary believers to follow their rulings, remains unsolved in Sunni Islam to the present day. The widespread

loss of trust in the old authorities and their institutions has resulted in hundreds of acts of *ijtihad* embodied in *fatwas* (legal opinions) or less formal declarations, but no way of telling which of them should be followed. Moreover, many of these new pronouncements have been made by individuals whose religious credentials would have been laughed at in the eighteenth century. Thus ordinary Muslims are understandably uncertain as to where true authority lies.

My contention that institutional developments will prove more important than doctrines, innovative or otherwise, over the coming decades is rooted in this crisis situation. Judging from history, Sunni Islam will surely not continue indefinitely under the current radical breakdown in its structure of authority. Nor is it clear that the Usuli Shi'ite solution will prove sufficiently adaptable to survive. The issues are clear for both Sunnis and Shi'ites: New ways must be found to credential and empower religious authorities. Ordinary believers must be persuaded to follow the decisions of those authorities. And people with inadequate credentials must be accorded a lesser standing. Getting ordinary Muslims to accept a new authority structure, however, will depend on whether that structure is responsive to today's moral, political, and social problems.

While the religious edges of our time seem certain to generate a number of creative ways of resolving Islam's crisis of authority, Islamic history cannot predict what form these will take. In the past, the developers of authoritative religious institutions assumed that political boundaries were irrelevant. Schools of legal interpretation, the practice of collecting and winnowing the traditions of Muhammad, the establishment of seminaries, and the formation of Sufi brotherhoods all crossed political boundaries. Rulers enjoyed the right to appoint judges to law courts located within their realms, but the law itself reflected the thoughts and decisions of legal scholars from many lands and was beyond state control. Similarly, while rulers and their families often patronized seminaries and Sufi sheikhs, they could not dictate the curricula of the schools or the teachings of the sheikhs. Nor could they curtail re-

lations between chapters of Sufi brotherhoods situated within their territory and those located elsewhere. Islamic scholarship and piety did not march to the beat of the sultan's drum.

A crucial question for the future, therefore, is whether the nation-state has become so firmly established in the Muslim world as to set political limits on new efforts to credential religious authorities. Many of today's governments act as though they have such power. They try to limit the participation of religious activists in elections and in the direction of citizens' organizations like bar associations and student governments. Some of them also control the building of mosques, regulate the appointment of mosque officials, and dictate the texts of Friday sermons. In legal affairs, even a religious state like Iran has a national law code that does not apply beyond Iran's borders.

As against this evidence that religion is constrained by national borders, hundreds of Muslim organizations and movements operate in disregard of national boundaries. Some are highly publicized terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda. Some are welfare and service organizations that raise money abroad for relief of distress at home. Some are Sufi brotherhoods or other pious associations that have chapters in many lands. Some are formally international, like the various offshoots of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. And still others embody less formally the traditional commitment of Muslims to viewing their faith community as a single *umma*, and to looking to the tradition of a universal caliphate, with authority over all Muslims, as a live option for the future.

The tug-of-war between national and transnational expressions of Islam does not have an obvious resolution. If the nation-state should prove the stronger force, resolution of the crisis of authority could well involve organizational forms with little prior history in Islam, such as national councils of ulama, Islamic political parties operating within single states, state-regulated religious educational institutions, or even formal sectarian denominations with national officials. On the other hand, if the transnational tradition should win out, the sovereignty of the various Muslim

nation-states, already under real or prospective assault by the new American imperialism, will suffer further erosion, possibly accompanied by rearrangements of state boundaries to fit religious trends.

In this whirlpool of possibilities, activities on the edge will warrant greater attention than those in the center. If history is any indicator, the current governments of Muslim states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan will play minor roles in reconstructing Islam for the twenty-first century. The same may be said of the traditional centers of learning, whether large and famous seminaries like al-Azhar in Egypt, or "one room schoolhouses" like the *pesantrans* of Indonesia and *madrasas* of Pakistan. The creativity and vitality needed to effect change has come in the past from dynamic edge populations, not from the establishment.

Three edge situations will bear careful watching:

1. Muslim diaspora communities in non-Muslim lands, primarily in Europe and America.
2. Democratically oriented political parties in Muslim majority countries.
3. Higher education, either private or governmental, in countries where seminaries of traditional type have lost their cachet, such as Turkey, or where they never had great importance, such as Indonesia.

Diaspora communities have a long history in Islam. Muslim voyagers were famous for establishing trading colonies that became the nuclei of more extended communities composed of both immigrants and local converts. Today's diasporas, however, are developing within new political, legal, and social situations. In the past, diasporas of all sorts tended to form inward looking communities. Political restrictions sometimes threatened a community's well-being, as did social and religious customs in the host country; but the anxieties raised by these threats helped the community maintain cohesion since people felt they had no one to rely on but them-

selves. Today, diaspora communities in Europe and America—as opposed to migrant labor communities in the Persian Gulf region—seek economic inclusion and legal normalization, and social assimilation is becoming increasingly attractive to diaspora born children. Maintaining community boundaries and preserving traditions from generation to generation becomes problematic in these situations. But the benefits offered by the promise of legal equality in the western secular democracies make this burden bearable. Diaspora leaders who expect to see their grandchildren living permanently in their host country accept the reality that they will never live under a government or legal system based on Islam. This assumption is clearly at odds with traditional interpretations of Islamic law, much of which is predicated on the existence of an Islamic state. This legal difference creates for the diaspora a unique edge situation. They need to figure out how to be Muslim and avoid a loss of Muslim identity under these conditions.

The attacks of 9/11 brought the dilemma of life in the Muslim diaspora into high relief, not just in the United States but in other countries as well. Arab intellectuals who once considered the distinction between Muslim and Christian irrelevant to their common nationalist interests began to see the world through religiously tinted lenses. Muslims from non-Arab lands began to discover that apprehensive non-Muslim host societies were paying less attention to language and ethnicity and more to the common profession of Muslim faith. And immigrant communities began to come closer to local groups of Muslim converts as both confronted the religiously based suspicions of non-Muslims. In short, talk about Islam in the diaspora became decidedly more intense and more anxious

Within the American and European diaspora communities, articulate and educated men and women abound. Since 9/11 they have taken the lead in appraising the problems of Muslims—whether in the diaspora, or in their countries of origin, or throughout the umma. Speaking out and writing constitute only one form of community leadership, however. An Egyptian émigré

in France may offer an acute analysis of the Egyptian scene, but have little say about the conditions of Muslim life in France. A Moroccan theologian in California may publish a penetrating study of Quranic views on human rights, but regard it as pertinent to the umma as a whole rather than to his or her local Muslim community.

If the edge communities of the diaspora are to become the seedbeds of new approaches to authority, bridges will be needed between outspoken intellectuals and local community institutions. At present, this sort of coordination is more apparent in non-diasporic communities. In Muslim majority countries, intellectuals commonly work with, or try to form, political and social organizations. This is understandable inasmuch as government surveillance and restrictions, combined with government failures in the area of jobs and social services, invite social action and political organizing. Parties and movements in these countries, and the intellectuals that sympathize with them, shape their programs within, and as responses to, the limitations imposed by dictators, monarchs, and generals, with the implicit endorsement of the western governments that support them. By contrast, the diaspora communities generally work within contexts of legal freedom and constitutional equality, and their leaders focus more on sustaining community life and ensuring that legal rights are observed than on organizing to oppose tyranny. As a consequence, strong-minded diaspora intellectuals often find the local challenges less compelling than those posed by the plight of Muslims elsewhere.

Despite their intellectual energy and the freedom of expression they enjoy, diaspora communities illustrate in microcosm the broader problem of old authorities versus new authorities. Imams and community leaders resemble the old authorities of majority Muslim lands. But they enjoy greater respect because they have not been subjected to colonial domination or radical anticlerical pressures. These individuals gain authority through personal leadership and direct work within their communities, and they focus most of their attention on the problems of their own followers

within the diaspora. The Muslim intellectuals and preachers whose voices are more frequently heard in the public arena represent the contrasting trend. They are new authorities insofar as they seek to influence people through ideas and arguments propounded in books and through the electronic media. They are more gratified by learning that their ideas have had an impact thousands of miles away than by gaining a respectful hearing in their local mosque.

All is not black and white, of course. Many individuals work within both realms. The problem with working within both realms, however, is finding a balance between what is meaningful for the diaspora and what is meaningful for Muslims elsewhere, whether in the intellectual's home country or in the umma more generally. One might envision diaspora communities building national organizational structures—the new national Muslim council in France comes to mind—and using those structures to assert control over who can speak authoritatively for Islam in the national diaspora community. But given the traditions of free speech in the secular western democracies, it is hard to see how such structures could hope to rein in the free-wheeling thoughts and writings of individual intellectuals.

Turning to the second important edge, the politically restless societies in the lands of tyranny, the problem of localism versus transnational tradition rears its head in a different fashion. Before 9/11, and despite the transnational propaganda for Islamic revolution that briefly followed the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, most religious activists couched their appeals in national terms and organized their political parties with a view to competing in national elections. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, was not the same as the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan or in Kuwait. Since 9/11, however, the transnational appeal of a jihad of all Muslims against all of the enemies of Islam—rhetorically Jews and Crusaders, but stretching the terms to include Indians in Kashmir and Russians in Chechnya—has gained both publicity and headway. Enormous numbers of Muslims, frustrated by the military

feebleness and domestic political oppression of their national governments, have come to agree with Osama bin Laden's geostrategic analysis and to respect the austere image he conveys of a selfless warrior for the faith. But his program of action has far less appeal, in large part because it has nothing to offer but death.

By projecting a global rather than a national scale for his jihad, Bin Laden excited an audience that had never imagined such boldness. Yet he also cut himself off from working within national political systems. Overthrowing the Egyptian or Saudi government might be an expedient tactic, but establishing Islam-friendly democracies in those countries would be no substitute for combating the Jews and Crusaders. For political vision, all he can offer is a vaguely articulated revival to the universal caliphate, an option whose hollowness became patent when he claimed that post for the religiously undistinguished leader of Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

Ideological alternatives that focus on working within national political systems have far greater long-term potential than anything that has so far materialized among the advocates of jihad. But most of those national alternatives, including the many that call for free elections, have been severely repressed by police state regimes. The result has been a classic example of empowering the violent extreme by crushing the nonviolent alternatives. Incorporating Islamic political movements and parties into liberalized political systems structured on open elections is the best tactic for undermining the appeal of transnational jihad.

Implementing a policy of this sort would put strong pressure on would-be participants in elections to move beyond the rousing but insubstantial rhetoric of mass mobilization to the proposal of specific governing programs. Successful programs would result in religious parties forming governments or gaining significant parliamentary influence, and this in turn would tend to cast any new structures of Islamic religious authority in nation-state molds since they would most likely be based on the platforms of the parties. As in other democratic systems, successful party leaders, in

this case, of avowedly Islamic parties, would come to be viewed as authorities credentialed by popular electoral appeal. This might not make them truly religious authorities if they lacked spiritual stature or knowledge, but it would delegitimize ideologues committed to rejecting electoral institutions.

In principle, the role in of independent intellectuals in countries where Islamic parties actively participate in free elections should be similar to their role in the diaspora. (Some Muslim countries, of course, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia, permit religious parties to run for office at the present time. However, electoral laws and government control of broadcast media sometimes limit democratic freedom.) Ideally, they would be free to air their views and court audiences both within and beyond the national boundaries. But real politics tend to absorb intellectual energies. In all likelihood, intellectuals would tend to align themselves with one or another Islamic party, something they are not so likely to do in the diaspora. Given freedom of electoral participation, in other words, an Egyptian philosopher working in alignment with an Egyptian Islamic political party could hope to see his or her ideas contributing to new Egyptian realities. But a Muslim philosopher working in France can have few expectations, as a specifically Muslim voice, of effecting significant changes in French governing policies beyond those directly affecting the diaspora community.

Hypothetical situations neither predict nor shape the future. They are helpful, however, in highlighting the importance of scale in visualizing possible outcomes of Islam's crisis of authority. Islam is and will remain a faith based on a universal message and an indestructible sense of brotherhood across the broad expanse of the umma. Muslims will continue to draw inspiration from a glorious past and to keep alive the idea of the shari'a, the law of all Muslims. Yet people do not lead their lives at the universal level. Advocates of comprehensive change, whether they are calling for a reintroduction of ijtihad, or precise adherence to the practices of Muhammad and his Companions, or global jihad against Jews

and Crusaders, may stimulate the mind or stir the blood, but politics are ultimately local. And politics in the American and European diaspora communities differ profoundly from those in Muslim majority states suffering under tyrannical rule. These two Muslim worlds have much to say to each other, but the circumstances of their respective worlds inhibit dialogue.

Ways of bridging the politics of local concern are sure to materialize, but it is hard to see them evolving either from Islamic political parties or from the preoccupation of diaspora communities with building Islam in their host countries. Hence my suggestion that the structures of higher education throughout the umma deserve scrutiny. Over the last two centuries, Islam's Christian sibling in the great Islamo-Christian civilization has seen the professoriat overtake the clergy as the most influential international body of authorities bound by common credentialing procedures. It is not at all impossible to envision a parallel development in twenty-first century Islam.

It is already the case that a substantial proportion of the new authorities that have gained national and transnational followings over the past forty years hold advanced degrees from secular institutions. Far from disguising this fact, they implicitly use it to enhance their appeal. Their degrees advertise that their religious thinking has not been shaped by a stifling and old-fashioned seminary curriculum, and they also mark them as leaders whose ability has been recognized—credentialed—even by people who care nothing for Islam. (A comparative census of successful Protestant evangelists in the United States—and probably of the U.S. Congress—would be hard pressed to find so high an average level of secular educational achievement.) An optimist might conclude from this that Muslims are yearning to follow people whose intelligence they respect, and that they are inclined to see educational attainment outside the seminary system as a respectable credential. A pessimist might respond that possession of an advanced degree in medicine, engineering, law, education, or economics does not qualify a person as a religious thinker and leader.

Though traditional seminaries are comparatively few, at the present time there are thousands of professors of Islamic law, Islamic theology, and Islamic missionary enterprise in universities of recognizable international form throughout the Muslim world. They train people to attend to the religious needs of Muslim communities at home and to spread sound Muslim practice in communities abroad. But in most Muslim countries, this religious professoriat is employed by state universities and thus subject to autocratic government control. For the professoriat to assert itself as a wellspring of religious authority that can compete with religious political parties and self-proclaimed renewers, a higher level of intellectual autonomy will be needed, something like the intellectual freedom enjoyed by the western professoriat—or the economic and curricular independence of the traditional seminaries before the era of modernization.

The Rector of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, Azyumardi Azra, maintains that "*pesantren* [traditional religious schools] and Islamic universities [in Indonesia] are in fact turning out Muslims with moderate thoughts and strong religious tolerance because they perceive Islam as a social phenomenon." Extremists, he observes, are more likely to come from institutions with strong science programs, such as the University of Indonesia, the Bogor Institute of Agriculture and the Bandung Institute of Technology.[6]

Azyumardi Azra earned his doctoral degree at Columbia University under an Indonesian government program to encourage promising scholars of Islam to study in western secular universities rather than traditional centers of learning such as al-Azhar in Egypt. Many of his faculty have similar backgrounds. The head of al-Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, who completed his doctoral studies on Islam in the United States at the University of Chicago, concurs with Azyumardi Azra's analysis. The problem, he contends, is that the secular, science-oriented universities do not impart a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of Islam.

There is obviously something absurd about the implication that first-rate training in moderate and tolerant interpretations of Islam is best acquired at secular western universities. This absurdity encapsulates the educational dilemma, however. Higher education in the Muslim world divides into two tracks, one secular and the other religious. The secular track, which originated in the programs established by westernizing regimes in the nineteenth century to train government personnel, involves only limited religious training. Yet the most popular, outspoken, and innovative religious thinkers, including many who strongly advocate jihad and intolerance, come from this track. The religious track, which saw its financial independence and aura of authority undermined by those same governments, trains competent, and often moderate, specialists who resent the prominence of their less qualified rivals from secular institutions. But they generally lack both the societal respect and the intellectual freedom to make a significant public impact. Unfortunately, renewed respect for solid religious education, which might help alleviate the crisis of authority, runs counter to the anticlerical ideology of many Muslim governments, and to the secular spirit that generally underlies modern education worldwide.

Indonesia never developed a high-level religious educational network under Dutch colonial rule so it has been freer to experiment with Islamic education than countries with more entrenched educational traditions. Many major cities have a State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN), largely staffed by professors trained in Islamic studies in the West. Azyumardi Azra directs the first IAIN to be accorded university status. While this experiment may well remain confined to Indonesia, it shows that secular governments are not incapable of thinking creatively about the problem of religious authority if they are not burdened by fear of the ulama becoming once again a rival political force.

Diaspora communities, Islamic political parties, and university training in religion do not exhaust the list of edge situations from which institutional initiatives for change might develop. However,

they serve to illustrate some of the problems that will have to be overcome as the world Muslim community confronts its crisis of authority. Given what Muslims have created from their religious tradition over the past fourteen centuries, I have no doubt whatsoever that solutions will be found. And I fully expect that the next twenty to thirty years will see religious leaders of tolerant and peaceful conscience, in the mold of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, eclipse in respect and popular following today's advocates of jihad, intolerance, and religious autocracy.