Appendix on Quantitative Onomastics

THIS APPENDIX elaborates on the methodological aspects of the discussion of the popularity of male names on pages 76–78. Conferral of given names involves many influences that differ in particulars from family to family and child to child. Family custom, desire to preserve the name of a deceased relation, emulation of an esteemed public figure, and honoring a friend or mentor may all play a role. Yet however complex and personal factors of this sort may be, they tend to remain more or less constant over time and therefore to cancel one another out when large numbers of names are aggregated.

Other factors change systematically in response to parental expectations regarding the future. When parents think seriously about the kind of society in which their sons will live their lives, they give names that tacitly reflect that anticipation. In this way they reveal their individual appraisals of the trajectory of change they see around them. Since in most

cultures parents still tend to see sons as likely autonomous actors in society, and daughters as living their lives within family units whose public identities will derive from male members, male naming betrays this factor of societal anticipation more surely than female naming.

As a benchmark for name change in a society making a transition from religious identity to secular identity, I have systematically extracted a sample of male names from the list of students graduating from Harvard College between 1671 and 1877. I have estimated birth-dates by subtracting 21 years from the date of graduation. Though none of the males involved was assured at birth of becoming a Harvard graduate, it is safe to presume that the parents who gave them their names were, or became during their sons' younger years, literate enough to value higher education; prosperous enough to spare their sons from laboring on the farm or in the workshop; and resident near enough to Boston, the Massachusetts colonial capital, to facilitate a son's sojourn in Cambridge on the other side of the Charles River. These considerations imply a measure of homogeneity with respect to social class, and this class identity in turn implies a relatively homogeneous worldview. Historians of colonial America agree that this worldview was dominated, at the outset of this period, by the strongly religious traditions of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Graph 1 (p. 76) records the change over time in the frequency of Harvard names drawn from the Old Testament. It dramatically illustrates both the strength of religious sensibility and the waning of that sensibility over time. In the earliest usable age cohort (1671), Old Testament names—e.g., Samuel, Nathaniel, Benjamin, Ezekiel—account for 40% of all names. This proportion rises to 45% by 1760. (By way of comparison, the names of early graduates of William and Mary College, in non-Puritan Virginia, show no particular bias toward Biblical models.) Then between 1760 and 1860, the rate of Old Testament naming falls to below 10%, where it steadily remains until Harvard expands the geographical and social scope of its undergraduate recruiting in the 1950s.

No special expertise in American history is needed to identify the point where the curve turns downward, particularly if one allows for the likelihood that many students of that era graduated from Harvard at a somewhat younger age than 21, which would put the inflection point of the curve a bit later than 1760.[1] The Seven Years War, known in North America as the French and Indian War, ended in 1763. Seeking to recoup its military expenditures, Britain immediately began to enforce the existing Navigation Laws and then imposed a series of new taxation measures—the Sugar Act (1764), the Quartering Act and Stamp Act (1765), the Townsend Acts (1767)—that bore heavily on the commercial class of a major port city like Boston. Thus were sown some of the seeds of the American Revolution.

Given the continuation of the decline in Biblical naming through and after the period of the revolution, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the tendency that set in during the 1760s had a good deal to do with the rising current of political tension and protonational identity that exploded into war in 1776 and gave birth to a new nation. Massachusetts citizens had lived their lives within the sound of their churchbells since the colony's founding by Puritan settlers. But now Boston became a hotbed of rebellion and agitation for a new national identity. In this climate, it is not surprising that more and more well-to-do parents anticipated that their sons would grow up in a public arena in which religion would play a diminishing role. This does not necessarily signal a decline in personal piety, only an increasing number of parents guessing that their sons would do better with a nonreligious name than a religious one. (Ironically, the names they initially turned to were the names of the English kings: Henry, Edward, George, etc.)

Now for a Muslim example: Turkish naming between 1820 and 1908. The names used to produce the curve on Graph 2 (p. 76) are the names of members of the Büyük Millet Meclisi, the parliament of the Turkish Republic established in 1921, along with the names of their fathers and the names of the members of the short-lived Ottoman Parliament of 1876. Birthdates are available for all three

groups. The name set I have adopted as equivalent in the Ottoman cultural setting to Old Testament names in Massachusetts consists of three names associated with the person and family of the prophet Muhammad: Mehmet, Ahmet, and Ali. In terms of social class, it is obvious that these men came from families with sufficient money, prestige, and political awareness for them (or their sons) to stand for elective office. They represent, in other words, a stratum of elite families distributed across Turkey. (I have excluded non-Anatolian representatives from 1876.)

As with the Harvard names, religious names dominate the early onomasticon, the three under examination being borne by 30–35% of the group. In 1839 the curve abruptly reverses direction and continues steadily downward heading for a nadir of 7% during the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, with only one temporary recovery during the 1890s when Sultan-Caliph Abdülhamit II was actively promoting Pan-Islam and his own role as the paramount leader of the Muslim world. As for the cause of the dramatic downturn, a sudden crisis beset the Ottoman Empire in 1839. Muhammad Ali, the rebellious Ottoman governor of Egypt, had taken control of Syria in 1833. In 1839 his son Ibrahim invaded Anatolia and thrashed the newly reorganized army of Sultan Mahmud II. That same year, Mahmud's navy surrendered to Muhammad Ali at Alexandria, and Mahmud himself died. European intervention alone prevented the fall of Istanbul. In return, and in addition to the demands they made on Muhammad Ali, the Europeans sought far-reaching Europeanizing changes from Mahmud's son and successor, Sultan Abdülmecit. The sultan's highly publicized "reform" decree of 1839, the Imperial Rescript of the Rose Chamber, inaugurated the period of institutional change known as the Tanzimat ("Reorganization") during which European-style schools, law codes, and bureaucratic practices steadily replaced their traditional, religiously imbued counterparts. These changes affected most the stratum of elite families that subsequently emerged as the political class of the late empire and the subsequent Turkish Republic. It is from this stratum that the names are drawn.

It is hardly surprising that the families who were most aware of the Europeanizing aspirations of the Tanzimat's architects increasingly bestowed nonreligious names on their sons after 1839. Except during the brief flurry of Pan-Islamic sentiment stirred up by Sultan Abdülhamit II, the trajectory of Turkish public life that they saw evolving was distinctly one of assimilation to European values and practices, culminating in the revolution of 1908, which was initially hailed by politically aware Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike as a triumph of national over religious identity. (The social-psychological roots of Atatürk's subsequent success at formalizing secularism as the ideology of his Turkish Republic stand sharply revealed by this evolution in naming.)

Two case studies are not sufficient to validate an analytical technique, but the similarity between onomastic developments in societies as far removed from one another as eighteenth-century Massachusetts and nineteenth-century Turkey encourages a third comparison: naming in Iran. Work by Iranian sociologists studying the impact of the Iranian Revolution provides the data. Graph 5 summarizes some of the findings of these studies. Line A comes from Nader Habibi's study of Hamadan, a provincial capital.[2] It shows that a decline in the popularity of "Islamic" names prior to the 1970s reversed during the years immediately preceding the revolution of 1979 and then recommenced quite quickly after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Over the period covered, 1962–1987, the decline in the inclination to bestow "Islamic" names exceeded 25%. Line B combines Ahmad Rajabzadeh's findings for Hamadan and Arak, another provincial city.[3] It is also the line shown on Graph 3 (p. 77). It shows "Islamic" naming accounting for between 70% and 80% of all names down to the mid-1930s. Then begins a marked decline that coincides chronologically with Reza Shah Pahlavi's promotion of Iranian nationalism as the state ideology and his efforts to suppress religious customs, most dramatically his 1936 prohibition on women wearing the *chador*. More and more parents opt for nonreligious names throughout the next three decades. Then the trend reverses in the

prerevolutionary years of the mid-1970s. This brief resurgence of "Islamic" naming peaks around 1977, and then the decline resumes. By 1993 when the study ends, 44% fewer urban parents are choosing "Islamic" names for their children.

Questions of gender and of what constitutes an "Islamic" name complicate analysis of these findings. Rajabzadeh, for example, tabulates male and female names separately but does not break these tabulations down into rural and urban, as he does his more general figures. Abbas Abdi, in a study of children's naming in Tehran, addresses these problems.[4] However, drawing data from the national capital, where political currents are felt more acutely and with more volatile effect than in the provinces, adds further complications. Line C reflects his tabulation of "Islamic" naming
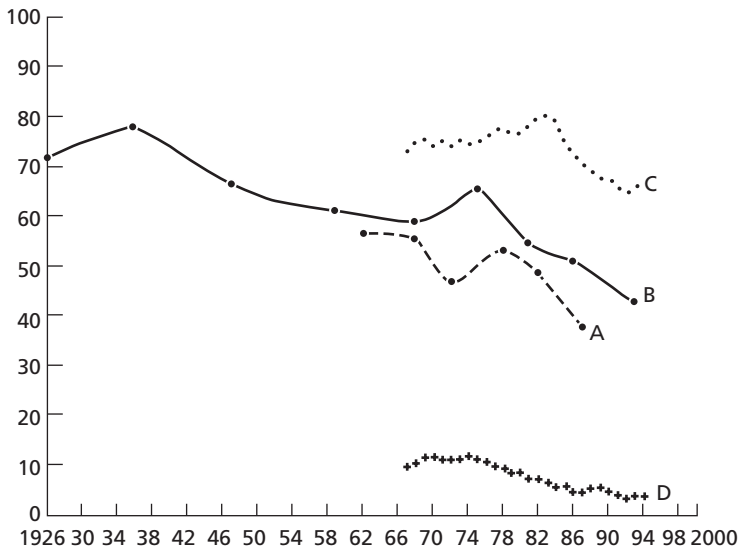
5 Frequency of Islamic names in Iran: **A** "Islamic" names from Hamadan (Habibi), **B** "Islamic" names from Hamadan and Arak (Rajabzadeh), **C** Combined "religious" names among boys in Tehran (Abdi), **D** "Customary religious" names among boys in Tehran (Abdi)

among boys. The numbers are substantially higher than those recorded by Habibi and Rajabzadeh, and the sharp decline that the other studies date to the onset of revolutionary activity in 1977–78 does not set in until 1983, possibly as a disillusioned reaction to the war with Iraq or the civil war between the government of the Islamic Republic and the Mojahedin-e Khalq. The decline remains steady after that, however, in consonance with the findings of Habibi and Rajabzadeh.

This summary presentation of the findings of three independent research projects does not do justice to the complexity of their work, but there would seem to be no doubt about their broad import. In religiously oriented societies, strong assertions of a collective identity divorced from religious affiliation trigger sharp declines in religious naming: the onset of republican revolutionary ferment in Massachusetts, imperial endorsement of Europeanizing changes in Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), and Reza Shah Pahlavi's highly publicized secularizing measures and advocacy of Iranian nationalism in Iran. As more and more parents begin to visualize a future in which public and political life does not revolve around religion, they signal their expectations of change in the names they bestow on their children. In the Iranian case, the decline briefly turned around in the mid-1970s as agitation against the Shah's rule acquired a strong religious complexion, just as it briefly turned around in Turkey when Abdülhamit II promoted Pan-Islam as an imperial ideology.

Graph 4 (p. 79) compares the rate of naming change in Iran with the rates in Turkey and Massachusetts. Setting equal at 100% the level of religious naming at the highwater points of the respective curves, 1760+, 1838, and 1936±, we can see how rapidly parents in the three different situations began to bestow other sorts of names. The points are plotted 10 years before the inflection point and then 10 years after, 20 years after, 30 years after, etc. The Turkish sample shows the most rapid decline in religious naming, at least down to the brief recovery in the Hamidian period. The skewing of the sample toward elite and politically aware

families may account for this. As for the curves for Massachusetts and for the provincial Iranian cities of Arak and Hamadan, they virtually coincide up until the short-lived reversal of the Iranian trend before the 1979 revolution. The rate of decline subsequent to the revolution is slightly steeper than that in Massachusetts.