The Language of Muslim Universality

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A global history only becomes possible once the human race emerges as its subject. All other claims to such a history are concerned only with expanding old ideas of context to the ends of the earth, so as to locate within them the ever-growing patterns of interaction and interdependence among men. But as the subject of a global history humanity must be conceived of in its sheer materiality, the sum of living beings making up the species. Anything else, such as the figure of a humanist individual, dissolves the race into a mere category in the history of ideas. And while the species is also a figure of this kind, its elevation into the subject of history quite transforms the latter. For unlike the humanist individual, who serves either as a universal ideal or as the reality of some particular history, mankind is always self-equivalent and can neither match up to nor fall short of itself. In this way the species provides history with its first global subject, and indeed with its most sublime actor after God.

Of course humanity cannot be said to exist as an actor in any unified or self-conscious way, these criteria being themselves borrowed from the individual. And the species is for the moment deprived even of the collective agency provided by political institutions. Yet it is clear that the history of mankind can no longer be confined to the doings of men and women in their multiplicity but must deal with the fate of the race as a singularity. While nineteenth century thinkers in Europe produced a number of accounts purporting to be histories of humanity, often entailing the rise of some race or civilization to global dominance, it was in the twentieth that the species came to achieve a properly historical reality. But this only happened when the interconnections and dependencies first created by colonial expansion suddenly put the world itself at stake in moments of political or economic crisis beginning with the Great War. In diverse fields ranging from literature to medicine, but not politics, the human race began to assume an historical countenance during this period, emerging as the globe's true subject during the Cold War, whose nuclear arsenals made its extinction a real possibility. It was mortality that endowed the species with a properly historical reality.

The vocabulary of mutually assured destruction and nuclear winter may have fallen into disuse after the Cold War, but humanity continues to be imagined as the globe's truest subject, if only in its negative form as a victim of pandemics or climate change. The species therefore takes on a paradoxical form in our day, as a potential actor in history, yet one whose reality cannot be discounted. For with its transformation into a statistically measurable figure, one whose future we can both predict and even determine, humanity has ceased to be the abstraction and ideal it once was. As such it provides a sociological model of universality for global movements of all kinds. In this essay I want to look at the way in which Islam comes to provide the species with its subjectivity in modern times. Beginning with the example of how those who participate in global forms of militancy attempt to speak in the name of humanity, I will go on to consider the history of this claim among Muslim thinkers in South Asia and conclude by reflecting upon the consequences of such efforts to represent mankind. Rather than tracing the development of this extraordinary endeavour within some continuous genealogy, I will show how detached it is from any single intellectual or political position, being in this respect part of a truly universal enterprise.

Though in hiding somewhere between Pakistan and Afghanistan, one of al-Qaeda's chief spokesmen was able to answer a series of questions from friends and foes around the world in April 2008. Submitted to Ayman al-Zawahiri through the Internet and responded to in the same fashion, these queries included many expostulating with Osama bin Laden's lieutenant about the indiscriminate violence resorted to by those fighting in the name of Islam. Typical was this condemnation of militant methods:

> How do you reconcile the values of your medical training – to help people and prolong their lives – with the fact that you killed Anwar al-Sadat and that you shape the minds of bombers and suicide commandos? (Zawahiri, 2008: 8)

Zawahiri responded to his questioner in the following way:

> During my medical studies, I learned that life is Allah's miracle and his gift. Thus, one must be careful to obey him. I have learned from surgery about how to save the body by amputating failing organs and removing cancers, and how to cure illness-inducing bacteria. Medicine, when practiced as a sacrifice to Allah and to help the oppressed, will grant the soul happiness and joy, which will never be experienced by those who have twisted it into a tool for greed, robbing others and exploiting their pain for their own benefit. (Zawahiri, 2008: 8)

This justification of violence illustrates the crucial role that the language of humanity plays in the narrative of militancy. Rather than being dedicated solely to the cause of Islam, in other words, militancy stakes claim to mankind itself as an ideal. Thus Zawahiri describes terrorism as a form of surgery whose aim is to save the human race from the cancers and other ailments that threaten its global body. Identified with medicine practised according to the Hippocratic oath, this vision of militancy as a form of sacrifice for the sake of mankind is opposed to humanitarianism in its conventional and commercially organized forms, which Zawahiri argues are founded

upon exploitation and profit. By representing the species as an individual, or rather by making the two interchangeable, Zawahiri treats it as a potential subject, one that requires the healing touch of jihad to speak in its own name.

Militant Islam's attempt to represent humanity as an historical actor comes to the fore in Ayman al-Zawahiri's response to another question put to him over the Internet:

> Can you clear up the confusion that many Westerns [sic] have about technology – on one hand, you shun modern values, but on the other hand you accept modern Western technology such as the Internet? (Zawahiri, 2008: 7)

Hastening to brush aside any account of terrorism that would confine it to some contradiction between Muslim tradition and Western modernity, Zawahiri makes it clear that even the greatest enemies must share a common history and partake of each other's achievements as members of the same species. In other words he moves beyond the narratives of race or civilization from which the distinction of traditional and modern is often derived to focus on the human race as history's true subject:

> This question is based on two false premises. The fact that I accept or shun a certain value is not based on whether it is ancient or modern. But I am opposed to polytheism; scorning the religion; establishing relations based on material benefit and achieving sensory pleasures; lying, deceiving; acting on self-interest; alcoholism; gambling; vices; taking over other people's countries and oppressing them; stealing the riches of others; double standards; immunity against being held accountable for crimes for which others will be punished; spreading killing, abuse, destruction, and the destruction of the environment and climate merely to master the land, rob, and plunder. Scientific knowledge is neither Eastern nor Western – it is the property of mankind which circulates among us equally in various times and places. The scientific progress of the West was originally based on our riches, which they are still plundering to this day. Where is our stolen share? Secondly, the West tried to cover up its crimes against us and against the rest of mankind by priding itself in its scientific supremacy. Under the cover of this progress, they have attempted to convince occupied and weaker nations that they [the West] are superior to them, and more deserving to manage the world and to plunder its riches – and to demean other people. Neither the Muslims, nor anyone else, will be fooled by this trick any longer. (Zawahiri, 2008: 7–8)

Arguably the operative category of militant thinking, humanity brings Muslims and infidels together in such a way as to make possible relations of amity as well as enmity among them. I will be concerned here with the ambivalence that marks this relationship of would-be friends and foes, a quality evident in the passage from Zawahiri cited above. For at the same moment that he claims the achievements of his enemies as a properly human inheritance, Bin Laden's most eminent follower also suggests that some of the credit for amassing this legacy was stolen from Muslims and needs recovering. Now this kind of reasoning possesses a history going back to the nineteenth century, when Muslim reformers sought by such apologetics to explain as well as learn from the scientific and technological dominance of Europe's colonial powers. This they did by devaluing the categories of race and civilization as sites of European privilege, and bringing humanity to the fore as history's true

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subject. Islam therefore represented the species by refusing to differentiate between its various components.

Losing Islam to the Infidel

Perhaps the first and certainly the most influential Muslim thinker to forge such a link between Islam and humanity was India's Sayyid Ahmad Khan, an immensely successful "reformer" of the nineteenth century whose life was dedicated to modernizing his co-religionists largely by way of inculcating Western education among them. In a monumental effort of scriptural interpretation and exegesis, Khan contended that Islam, when cleansed of superstitious accretions, was both the most natural and the most universal of religions. This in the sense of being wholly in conformity with the laws of nature and so founded for the benefit of all mankind (Khan, 1995). Whatever the precedents and implications of this claim, extrapolated from writers like Gibbon and Carlyle as much as from any Muslim source, it is clear that Islam's universality was predicated upon its equivalence with nineteenth century notions of nature and therefore with the human species, both of which stood outside the doctrinal sphere of religion to provide the criteria of its veracity. But this did not entail subordinating religious truth to varying conceptions of science, only insisting that it be continually engaged with the times, whose forms of knowledge regulated scriptural interpretation while keeping Islam at the centre of contemporary concerns.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan saw something miraculous in the Quran's ability to keep pace with scientific change, which in his own times meant its successful interpretation within the bounds of natural law, a notion that stood apart from earlier definitions of nature as an essence (ذات), disposition (طبيعة) or ingrained constitution (فطرة). Islam's conformity with nature conceived as law had to be repeatedly demonstrated so that it might be presented as the universal religion of mankind. One consequence of naturalizing religion in this way was to generalize its doctrinal vocabulary beyond the boundaries of Islam, so that it now became possible to think even of its central concepts as being universal to humanity. Of course Muslim thinkers in the past had sought precedents and prognostications for Muhammad's revelation by linking it to religions pre-dating Islam, well beyond the monotheistic coterie this latter formed with Judaism and Christianity. While the Muslim doctrines thus discovered in Hinduism, Buddhism or Zoroastrianism might place all these religions within some universal history, there was no question about Islam representing its pinnacle. But the Victorian naturalization of religion meant that if Muslims could be said to have discovered the unity of mankind by way of Islam, or even to have developed this unity to its fullest potential, they could not claim to possess it exclusively or indeed forever. There was always the possibility that others might be able to lay claim to Islam itself, albeit under a different name, if Muslims were to abandon their duty to represent the human race.

In fact there were many instances from the last decades of the nineteenth century of prominent Muslim figures in India warning that unbelievers had come into possession of Islam's central concepts and categories. A good example of this is provided by the century's most popular Urdu text, an epic poem on the rise and fall of

Islam by Sayyid Ahmad Khan's disciple Altaf Husayn Hali. First published in 1879, the *Musaddas* (مسدس مدوجزر اسلام) sings of the virtues that brought Muslims political power in times past and put them at the forefront of the arts and sciences. Hali then catalogues the decline of India's Muslims in particular and those of the world at large in practically every department of social life, attributing their decadence to the betrayal of Islamic virtues. Chief among these was fidelity to nature, seen as providing both the form and the content of human knowledge as a set of universal laws. While Muslims might have forsaken such virtues, others, like Europe's Christians, but also the poet's Hindu neighbours, are said to have embraced them and thus moved past the Prophet's followers in representing humanity. So Hali tells his readers that the nations of the West have succeeded Muslims at the head of the species by naturalizing religion into the service of mankind:

Love for God's Creatures

This was the first lesson of the Book of True Guidance: All creatures belong to God's family.
The beloved of the Creator of the two worlds is the one who maintains the ties of love with his creatures.
This is devotion, this is religion and faith, that man should come to the service of his fellow man in the world.

The Public Spirit of the Peoples of the West

Those who act on the basis of this weighty utterance today flourish upon the face of the earth.
They are superior to all, high and low. They are now the central axis of humanity.
Those covenants of the Holy Law which we have broken have all been firmly upheld by the people of the West. (Hali, 1997: 163)

In order to make the argument that Islam's role has been taken over by the Christian West, Hali had to redefine the Muslim *ummah* (أمة) or community in sociological terms. No longer a juridical or theological category defined by ritual authority and political practice, the *ummah* instead became a society that could never again be contained within legal categories, and one whose global character placed Islam outside the jurisdiction of any state. While the loss of political power, therefore, was seen in the poem as a sign of decline, its restoration did not serve as a condition for Muslim greatness, which was why Hali could take colonized populations like the Hindus as models of virtue. He has this to say about Islam's loss of worldly dominion, and its as yet unsuccessful quest to find another way of representing the progress of the human race:

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Address to the Poet's Community

Government may have drawn aside from you, but you had no monopoly over it
Who possesses a remedy against the vicissitudes of fortune? Sometimes one is an Alexander here, sometimes a Darius.
After all, kingship is hardly divinity. What one owns today is someone else's tomorrow.

The Secret of the Muslims' Dominion

When God's wisdom demanded that the teaching of the Best of Scholars be set in force,
And the religion of right guidance became famous in the world, He bestowed world dominion upon you, saying,
'Spread the ordinances of the Holy Law throughout the world, and bring to an end the Master's reasons for objecting to His creatures.'

Our Present State

Now that government has performed its proper function, Islam has no need for it left.
But alas, oh community of the Glory of Man, humanity departed together with it.
Government was like a gilt covering upon you. As soon as it peeled off, your innate capacity emerged.
There are many nations in the world who do not possess the special quality of empire.
But nowhere can so great a calamity have come as here, where each house is overshadowed by abasement.
The partridge and the falcon, all are high up in the sky, it is only we who lack wing and pinion. (Hali, 1995: 145–146)

A sectarian minority like the Shia, who had few pretensions to power, provided a suitably depoliticized model of Muslim society for Sunni thinkers in colonial India. After all the great drama of Shia history had to do with the sect's military defeat and the martyrdom of its leaders, all resulting in the establishment of a political order separated from religious authority, which was now vested in a messianic future. Whatever its historical validity, this account seems to have had a certain plausibility for Hali, who very deliberately patterned his epic poem on the elegies composed and recited by the Shia for their martyred imams. So the *Musaddas* was written in the same metrical form as the ritual elegy and made use of many of its narrative devices. It was from such disparate sources that the *ummah* was put together as a new kind of historical subject, one envisioned as a global society whose reach exceeded the bounds of any state. Indeed the history of its constitution can be traced quite minutely by looking at the way in which traditional poetic genres such as elegies on the imams or laments on the ruin of cities were transformed by Hali into a narrative of Muslim decadence where the *ummah* was for the first time defined in sociological terms as a global community.

Important about the new Muslim community is its elegiac character. And while this mournful vision of the *ummah* is often considered the consequence of colonial

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dispossession, I would like to argue for a more complex reading of the trope. For the narrative of Muslim decline pioneered by Hali is related to another common in Europe at the same time. This is the story of European decadence conceived not in political or juridical terms, exemplified by the fall of kingdoms and dynasties, but in the vision of exhausted civilizations and depleted races (Foucault, 2003). Like the *ummah*, in other words, race and civilization are categories that may incorporate state power but continue to embody a people's greatness beyond its confines. As a consequence they have since the eighteenth century also been global categories, whose context is provided by other civilizations and races spread across the surface of the earth. From Gobineau to Spengler, the modern history of this narrative coincides with that of Europe's greatest triumphs in domains ranging from the political to the scientific, so that it becomes impossible to see its story of decadence as a reflection of some general crisis there. Of course the groups who subscribed to such accounts might well have been the losers of this history, which still tells us little about why they interpreted it in global terms. Could it be that Muslim ideas of community in the age of imperialism, as much as Christian ones of civilization and race, were attempts to imagine sociological formations at a planetary level well beyond the jurisdiction of states?

By the nineteenth century race, civilization and religious community had become categories that took for their context the human race as such, though they could only do so by dividing it into a set of comparable and competitive sociological formations. And this meant that while humanity had abandoned its earlier roles of essence, abstraction and regulative ideal to provide the demographic background for such global categories, it still did not exist as a subject in its own right. So the narrative of decline characteristic of these new formations might well represent a degree of ambivalence about their lack of political reality as much as that of the species itself. For built into the categories of race, civilization and religious community during this period was the fantasy of encompassing humanity as a whole, either by a process of assimilation or within some kind of hierarchical order. Now the *ummah* imagined by writers like Hali dispensed with race and dealt with civilization only in a minor key, these categories existing uneasily in languages like Urdu merely as new glosses for older terms like lineage (نسل), pedigree (نسب), habitation (تمدن) or refinement (تهذيب), none of which possessed a territorial character. Indeed the Muslim community was celebrated precisely for its ethnic and cultural diversity, and therefore seen as being more natural to the species than race and civilization. But as an expression of Islam's fidelity to nature, this kind of universality surpassed the *ummah*, constituting a line of flight towards the horizon of humanity. It was only in this fleeting way that the Muslim community could represent a species still lacking subjectivity.

Like some of the narratives dealing with the decadence of races or civilizations, the story of Islam's decline was predicated upon the inability of its adherents to keep pace with their own universality. In making this case, of course, Hali was invoking an old literary model, in which the fall of kingdoms was attributed to the moral corruption of their rulers, itself a consequence of worldly success. More than the ancient kingdoms that had in the past provided such cautionary tales, it was the career of Christianity that now offered Muslims warning about the perils of victory. Both Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Hali saw in Christianity's very success a premonition

of failure, with its religious spirit eclipsed by Europe's material glory in much the same way they thought had happened to Islam. It was not these gentlemen of the nineteenth century, however, but a writer from the twentieth who had the most to say on this issue. Acclaimed today as the spiritual father of Pakistan, Muhammad Iqbal argued that when Christian virtues were universalized in Europe to become secular values, they ended up perverting both religious and profane life there. So he thought that the division of liberal societies into public and private realms had as its premise the metaphysical distinction of matter and spirit, which turned religion into a merely individual ideal and gave collective life over to exploitation of every kind, thus bifurcating humanity into master and slave classes, races and even continents. As Iqbal put it in a speech from 1930:

> Europe uncritically accepted the duality of spirit and matter probably from Manichaean thought. Her best thinkers are realising this initial mistake to-day, but her statesmen are indirectly forcing the world to accept it as an unquestionable dogma. It is, then, this mistaken separation of spiritual and temporal which has largely influenced European religious and political thought and has resulted practically in the total exclusion of Christianity from the life of European states. The result is a set of mutually ill-adjusted states dominated by interests not human but national (Iqbal, 1992: 163–164).

Taking warning from the history of Christianity, Iqbal thought that Muslims should reclaim their lost universality by purifying Islam of the corruption wrought by its worldly success, which for him included ridding it of what he called 'the stamp of Arabian imperialism'. For like Hali before him, Iqbal was ambivalent about Islam's history of worldly success, and thought that Muslims had the opportunity of rethinking the universality of their mission in its aftermath. He had this to say about Islam's post-imperial mission in a diary entry from 1910:

> As a political force we are perhaps no longer required; but we are, I believe, still indispensable to the world as the only testimony to the absolute unity of God. Our value among the nations, then, is purely evidential (Iqbal, 1961: 15).

Islam's post-imperial mission, however, was not to be a quietist one, but instead an effort to represent the species against the false claims of states both colonial and national. Muslim universality, in other words, was now to be found in the idea of human solidarity alone, and set against what Iqbal saw as the factional brutalities of nation states in particular. He thought that nationality, or indeed any other form of collective identity, had to transcend territory if it was to co-exist with other forms of self-definition within the human community. Islam's post-imperial universality, then, was supposed to aim precisely at this goal, which like that of communism or liberalism had to be ideological in nature:

> With us nationality is a pure *idea*; it has no material basis. Our only rallying point is a sort of mental agreement in a certain view of the world (Iqbal, 1961: 24).

While Muslim states might still exist and could even be cherished, Islam's abstract universality could no longer be grounded in them, being manifested rather in the

adoption of a critical attitude to all politics. It was this purely human universality that Muslims had to recover, not simply from their own history but from the virtues of others as well. The many public figures who recommended such efforts of self-recovery often did so to draw attention to the virtues of Hindus or Christians and encourage Muslims to join them in some worthy enterprise. Thus in the days before the Great War the influential cleric turned journalist Abul Kalam Azad, who would go on to become president of the Indian National Congress and his country's first minister of education after its independence from Britain, wrote admiringly of the efforts that Hindus struggling against oppressive Indian traditions as much as against their British rulers expended in these efforts, which he identified as a jihad truer than the archaic one professed by Muslims. In the war's aftermath, when Gandhi launched his first great movement of non-cooperation to protest the Ottoman Empire's destruction, the famous satirical poet Akbar Illahabadi dedicated a laudatory mock epic to him. This *Gandhinamah* not only described the Mahatma's practice of non-violent resistance as manifesting the Islamic virtue of صبر or fortitude, which the poet considered to be more crucial than the ideals in vogue among Muslims themselves, he also represented the holy water that pilgrims bring back in bottles from Mecca finding its freedom by being poured into the Ganges (Illahabadi, 1948).

Of course generalizing Islamic virtues beyond the Muslim community was an ambivalent process, since it could serve to promote cohabitation as much as competition with unbelievers. Two of Muhammad Iqbal's poems, probably the most popular Urdu compositions of the twentieth century, provide good examples of this. Among the many imitations of Hali's epic on the *ummah*'s decline, and composed in the same metre as the *Musaddas*, this pair of laments is regularly recited on Pakistani radio and television, with the country's most celebrated performers recording their own versions of it as a rite of passage. Published in 1909 and called *Complaint* (شکوہ), the first work dares to accuse God of abandoning Muslims for unbelievers by showering upon them the good things of the earth and leaving the former with a merely imaginary world (Iqbal, 2001a: 163–169). This dereliction was all the more unjust given that Muslims had by means of great sacrifices freed men from slavery and spread the doctrine human equality among them. Iqbal pictures idols rejoicing at the sight of Muslims departing the world with Qurans tucked under their arms, thus providing us with one of the first posthumous descriptions of Islam, a vision standing apart from earlier apocalyptic narratives concerned with the coming of the messiah and the end of time. He even goes so far as to call God a woman dispensing favours now to her Muslim lover and now to his infidel rivals. Deploying the erotic vocabulary of the traditional lyric to great effect, Iqbal turns the stock figure of the rival for a mistress's affection into that of the strangers who would replace Muslims as God's elect and the spokesmen of their race.

A few years after the publication of this acclaimed and controversial work, Iqbal wrote a *Complaint's Answer* (جواب شکوہ), in which he blasphemously had God respond to the first poem, thus claiming for his composition the status of divine speech (Iqbal, 2001b: 200–208). In this heavenly monologue of 1913, Muslims are blamed for abandoning their duty to represent mankind not only by taking leave of world-making activities like science and industry, but more importantly by forsaking the quest for

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freedom and equality to live upon past glories, described as the worship of so many idols. If infidels adopt the ways of Muslims, says the poem's divine interlocutor, then it is only right that they should receive the damsels and palaces promised believers. But Muslim decline is finally blamed on the modern age itself, likened to a fire that feeds on traditional communities, though its flames can purify religions as well as destroy them. To find a garden in the midst of modernity's fire Muslims must take charge of the stylus and tablet God resigns to them and write out their own destiny, forsaking Islam's political and doctrinal inheritance if they must as long as they remained loyal to the Prophet.

Muhammad Iqbal made it clear in this poem and elsewhere that the only thing keeping Muslims true to their religion's legacy was fidelity to the Prophet, who represented the historical origins of its universality. For in the apostle's claim to be God's final messenger Iqbal saw the emergence of humanity as an actor in its own right, one cut off from the leading strings of divine guidance and put in charge of its own destiny. The founding of Islam thus signalled the coming to maturity of the human race, with the Prophet renouncing divine authority to mankind in the same way that certain European writers thought Christ had done (Iqbal, 1990: 126). In either case the old theme of God become man is reactivated, drawn as it is from a long Christian as well as Muslim history. Paradoxically it was the very particularity of this origin that served as a link to Islam's lost universality, whose other virtues had all escaped the grasp of religion to be generalized across the human race. Once Islam had ceased to provide a conceptual matrix for mankind's unity, in other words, it could only represent the species by such fragmentary acts as fidelity to Muhammad. But this means that history had now replaced nature as the criterion of Muslim universality, something of which Iqbal was fully conscious, claiming that Islam set itself against the particularity of what he called nature's race-making work (Iqbal, 1997: 304–326). So in an open letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1936 he had this to say:

> The student of history knows very well that Islam was born at a time when the old principles of human unification, such as blood relationship and throne-culture, were failing. It, therefore, finds the principle of human unification not in the blood and bones but in the mind of man. Indeed its social message to mankind is: 'Deracialise yourself or perish by internecine war.' It is no exaggeration to say that Islam looks askance at nature's race-building plans and creates by means of its peculiar institutions, an outlook which would counteract the race-building forces of nature (Iqbal, 1992: 285).

History had of course been a major preoccupation among Muslim writers from the nineteenth century, and Hali devoted a whole section of his *Musaddas* to its writing, though he judged such texts by their fidelity to nature, which was supposed to provide rational and objective criteria for historians. However for Iqbal history not only housed the origin of Islam's universality but formed the substance of its character as well, since he thought that the human race had to achieve self-consciousness by setting itself against nature. In this way the *ummah* abandoned its relations with race and civilization to join ranks with twentieth century ideologies, which meant that Islam was now set against liberalism or communism, whose politics of class conflict was to be rendered meaningless within its universal embrace. Yet this purely ideological foundation for human unity was by that very token remarkably vulnerable

to attack, with Iqbal attributing Muslim conservatism, misplaced though it might be, to a glimmering recognition among the Prophet's followers that their religion and its universal mission was based upon nothing but a set of ideas:

> Islam repudiates the race idea altogether and founds itself on the religious idea alone. Since Islam bases itself on the religious idea alone, a basis which is wholly spiritual and consequently far more ethereal than blood relationship, Muslim society is naturally much more sensitive to forces which it considers harmful to its integrity (Iqbal, 1992: 248–249).

The very strength of Islam's universality, therefore, was paradoxically also its weakness, necessitating what might be called a fanatical attachment to the religious idea insofar as it cannot be naturalized or taken for granted. Iqbal's view of Islam here comes close to that of Hegel, who defined that religion's modernity precisely by its attachment to an abstract idea of universality. While Hegel paired Islam with the Enlightenment in his admiring criticism of its universal ideal, in our own times such an analysis has been directed more against twentieth century ideologies like communism, also regarded as the Enlightenment's twin. And so it is no accident that for Iqbal communism was Islam's greatest rival because it possessed a comparably universal mission. All of which only went to show that if the history of such ideas might be claimed by Islam, only the immense effort required to instantiate them could prevent the disintegration and theft of their universality.

The Guilt of Still Being Alive

Once Islamic concepts and categories are universalized in the language of humanity, moving outside the field of religious doctrine and practice, the Muslim community risks sinking into a particularity from which it must constantly be rescued. Lost within the universality of mankind, this community can only reclaim greatness by being faithful to the history of its founding. Even when this fidelity is so extensive as to determine the entirety of Muslim lives, as among fundamentalists for example, it still possesses a minimal character. For such all-encompassing forms of Islam continue to remain self-conscious minorities in the world beyond fundamentalism. But what allows loyalty to grasp at the universal is precisely its fragmentary character, whose devotion to the past is conceived as a practice of withdrawal from the inevitable partialities of the present. And the present of course belongs to democracy, where men jostle to represent the interests of the greatest number, and Islam's universality takes on a new countenance. Instead of embarking upon the futile task of representing the interests of all men, or even all Muslims, a number of thinkers following Iqbal argued that such political forms were both morally suspect and in any case appropriate to states alone. Since the species cannot be represented politically, it is only the absence and indeed the sacrifice of particular interests, and therefore of politics itself in its conventional sense, that might capture its unity. Or to put it in Iqbal's own words:

> I am opposed to nationalism as it is understood in Europe, not because, if it is allowed to develop in India, it is likely to bring less material gain to Muslims. I am opposed to it

because I see in it the germs of an atheistic materialism which I look upon as the greatest danger to modern humanity (Iqbal, 1992: 196–197).

Like Ayman al-Zawahiri's Hippocratic ideal, the kind of loyalty broached by Muhammad Iqbal is thus sacrificial in form, claiming to abandon the self-interest that defines politics by pointing to the disinterestedness of its practices. And so it is no longer the contested claim to some common interest that defines humanity, but rather its negation for a set of ideals and historical peculiarities that appear meaningless in the calculus of interests defining political representation. Islam has therefore come to represent mankind by sacrificing the very possibility of interest in the supposedly archaic demands it makes upon Muslims, for instance regarding forms of dress or comportment, whose antiquated provenance and incomprehensibility to modern minds only guarantee their impartial character. The turn to history, in other words, has little to do with nostalgia and is certainly not an effort to 'put the clock back', as fundamentalism's liberal critics assert. For it is precisely because the culture of Islam's origin is dead that its habits can be universalized into a kind of technical routine freed of particularity and therefore political interest. Indeed this form of Muslim devotion rejects the very idea of culture to focus on abstract and dislocated practices that make religion into something fully portable and universally convertible (Roy, 2005). Such at least was the argument put forward by the Pakistani fundamentalist Abul Ala Mawdudi, who supplemented the older naturalization of Islam's universality with this new faith in the resources of history. Thus he contended that the more resistant Muslim practices were to the rationality of political representation, the less likely would their misuse be in the politics of class or ethnic particularity (Mawdudi, 1962). And if Mawdudi made neutrality and disinterest into touchstones of the universal by focussing on a life lived for the sake of God alone, today's militants concentrate on death in God's way as the only kind of sacrifice capable of representing humanity.

What is extraordinary about terrorist argumentation is the familiarity and even intimacy with which it approaches those seen as the enemies of Islam. So al-Qaeda's foes are considered to be people of the same kind as its friends, their supposed persecution of Muslims being reciprocated by the latter in procedures of mirroring that make it difficult to tell one from the other. Instead of dehumanizing their enemies, or even condemning them to subhuman status in the name of race or civilization, militants routinely aspire to compete with such foes in virtue as well as vice, something we have seen in Zawahiri's utterances quoted above. But without defining humanity by means of a hierarchy Osama bin Laden's acolytes are unable to establish any firm distinction between friends and enemies. So refusing to take responsibility for acts of violence by describing these as responses to infidel provocation does more than excuse such crimes. It serves to account for the dispersal of responsibility in a global arena where all are complicit in crimes against humanity, whether these are concerned with environmental degradation or genocide. Not accidentally the only act militants claim full responsibility for is the minimal yet excessive one of martyrdom. Sacrifice therefore becomes the only distinctive element in al-Qaeda's rhetoric, which otherwise shares everything with its foes.

Not the common virtues and vices of men, therefore, but the claim to martyrdom

is what demonstrates Islam's universality in militant circles, though even such practices of sacrifice can be stolen from Muslims and so must be repeated in the most egregious of ways. And martyrdom is crucial because humanity cannot be represented in any positive fashion, lacking as it does a political or juridical form despite being invoked by lawyers and statesmen at every turn. As the supposed abnegation of all particularity and interest, sacrifice constitutes a kind of negative embodiment of the race. It provides in fact the most appropriate manifestation of this mysterious being, which exists without having become a subject in the global arena. But such an embodiment of the species is not peculiar to Muslim terrorists, and may be found in the sacrificial practices of many who dedicate themselves to humanitarian causes, from pacifists and environmentalists to those engaged in aid and relief work. Indeed the idea of sacrificing oneself for humanity has a long and explicitly Christian history, having become common sense in the story of Jesus as a martyr not for God's sake but that of mankind. Representing as they do the most excessive forms of sacrifice, militant acts of martyrdom may be said to have placed themselves at the vanguard of all such procedures of embodiment.

The philosopher Karl Jaspers was perhaps the first to see varieties of sacrifice like martyrdom as efforts to trace the lineaments of a species that could not otherwise be represented. In a lecture of 1945 subsequently published under the title 'The question of German guilt', Jaspers distinguished traditional forms of guilt such as the moral, political and criminal from something he called metaphysical guilt. This latter, he said, was felt by those who were innocent of wrongdoing in all its conventional senses but continued, nevertheless, to accuse themselves of living while others had died under Nazi rule. Though he took Germany as his example of a place in which metaphysical guilt had come to the fore, Jaspers was clear that fascism and the war it occasioned provided only the origins of this widespread phenomenon, which arose out of the fact that responsibility could no longer be confined to particular individuals or groups in events like the Second World War, and belonged instead to the history of mankind:

> It is only now that history has finally become world history – the global history of mankind. So our own situation can be grasped only together with the world-historical one. What has happened today has its causes in general human events and conditions, and only secondarily in special intra-national relations and the decisions of single groups of men (Jaspers, 1961: 23–24).

The problem, of course, is that humanity has no political or juridical status and thus does not exist as a subject of history. Yet it cannot be said to be a fiction either, and Jaspers tells us that metaphysical guilt is a sign of the race's otherwise invisible solidarity, betraying as it does a consciousness of shared responsibilities in the global arena brought to light by the war:

> Metaphysical guilt is the lack of absolute solidarity with the human being as such – an indelible claim beyond morally meaningful duty. This solidarity is violated by my presence at a wrong or a crime. It is not enough that I cautiously risk my life to prevent it; if it happens, and if I was there, and if I survive where the other is killed, I know from a voice within myself: I am guilty of being still alive (Jaspers, 1961: 71).

Going beyond all moral, legal and political determinations of responsibility, meta-physical guilt invokes the species as a potential subject of history, if only by the desire to die in its name. For dying alone provides access to its negative being. Jaspers points out that such examples of unconditioned sacrifice are to be found, and are indeed celebrated, at the level of the family or between lovers, the source of metaphysical guilt being that they are not available, or very rarely so, at a purely human level:

> That somewhere among men the unconditioned prevails – the capacity to live only together or not at all, if crimes are committed against the one or the other, or if physical living requirements have to be shared – therein consists the substance of their being. But that this does not extend to the solidarity of all men, nor to that of fellow-citizens or even of smaller groups, but remains confined to the closest human ties – therein lies this guilt of us all (Jaspers, 1961: 32).

By confining his analysis to the guilt of being alive, Karl Jaspers is able to deal with death in the form of desire alone, thus mitigating its Christian thematic. I would like to suggest, however, that the contemporary practice of Muslim martyrdom acts upon this desire to answer the call of an invisible humanity. For whatever the politi-cal calculations of al-Qaeda and other movements that value sacrifice, their rhetoric of dedication to the species is founded upon metaphysical guilt alone. How else do Osama bin Laden's minions justify their acts of violence if not by invoking the guilt of living while others die? These others are not the terrorist's relatives, friends or even countrymen, but unknown people in unknown lands, who by their suffering represent the race's victimization and lack of historical subjectivity. Indeed the global Muslim community serves as a kind of model of humanity insofar as it, too, pos-sesses neither political nor juridical reality, and exists for militants only in the spec-tacle of its apparent victimization. Dying for Islam, therefore, means acknowledging the existence of Muslim solidarity around the world, and in the same moment the solidarity of the species as well. For in the end it is their unfettered hold over the language and practice of sacrifice that allows militants to represent their own com-munity together with the human race itself as historical subjects, both of which enjoy the curious distinction of existing without existing in the global arena that came into being after the Second World War.

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