

# Religions, Lifeways, Same Difference: Defining *Dīn* in the US, the Middle East, and South Asia

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## Abstract

A number of far-right politicians and conservatives in the United States continue to argue that the First Amendment's freedom of belief does not apply to Islam because it is not a religion in the western sense of the term, but a way of life that includes politics. By providing definitions from both western sociologists of religion and conservative political lobbyists and think tanks, I show that most experts on religion in the United States define religion as a way of life that governs behavior in the public sphere. I also argue that these definitions match similar definitions, offered by Muslim scholars in the Middle East and South Asia for the last fifty years, of the Arabic word *dīn*, typically translated as "religion." By tracing the origins of the idea that *dīn* signifies something other than religion because of its relation to regulating public behavior, I show that earlier mid-twentieth century Muslim critiques of equating *dīn* and religion had little to do with any intrinsic nature of Islam itself and far more to do with western scholarship of that period's understanding of secularity, conceptualization of the state, and prediction of the inevitable demise of religious belief and practice.

**KEYWORDS:** *Dīn*, Religion, Ethics, Politics, Islam, Islamophobia, Sociology of Religion, Law, Shari'ah, Theology, *Taṣawwuf*, Secular, *Dunyāwīyah*

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## Introduction

While speaking at a Tea Party event in 2011, radio host, Baptist minister, and GOP House Candidate from Georgia Jody Hice made the following claim: “Most people think Islam is a religion, it’s not. It’s a totalitarian way of life with a religious component.”<sup>1</sup> The following year in his book *It’s Now or Never: A Call to Reclaim America*, he wrote: “Although Islam has a religious component, it is much more than a simple religious ideology. It is a complete geo-political structure and, as such, does not deserve First Amendment protection.”<sup>2</sup> Other statements in this vein include that of Oklahoma state legislator John Bennett who, in an interview with Alyona Minkovski for HuffPost Live, remarked: “I would even submit to you that Islam is not even a religion. It’s a political system that uses a deity to advance its agenda of global conquest.”<sup>3</sup> Evangelist Pat Robertson also made a similar statement on an episode of the 700 Club for the Christian Broadcasting Network, which he founded: “Ladies and gentlemen, we have to recognize that Islam is not a religion. It is a worldwide political movement meant [*sic*] on domination of the world. And it is meant to subjugate all people under Islamic law.”<sup>4</sup> It might be suggested that this type of rhetoric has become the norm among many right-wing Christian conservative politicians in America.

And yet there is a clear contradiction here: While right-wing politicians say that Islam is not a religion, western academics, including those affiliated with conservative Christian religious institutions, define religion as a “way of life.” These definitions match similar definitions, offered by Muslim scholars in the Middle East and South Asia for the last fifty years, of the Arabic word *dīn*, typically translated as “religion.” By tracing the origins of the idea that *dīn* signifies something other than religion because of its relation to regulating public behavior, I will show that earlier mid-twentieth century Muslim critiques of equating *dīn* and religion had little to do with the nature of Islam itself and far more to do with western scholarship of that period’s understanding of secularity, conceptualization of the state, and prediction of the inevitable demise of religious belief and practice.

## Modern Definitions of Religion

Martin Riesebrodt (1948-2014) was professor emeritus at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School as well as its Department of Sociology. His most important contribution to the sociology of religion is his thesis that religion is first and foremost “based on communication with superhuman powers and is concerned with warding off misfortune, coping with crises, and laying the foundation for salvation.”<sup>5</sup> He rejects the notion that this concept was a product

of western modernity and that the term should not be used to refer to any concept or practice from pre-modern society or outside the West, arguing that when “soccer games are seen as religious phenomena and the recitation of Buddhist sutras is not, something has obviously gone wrong” [with the study of religion in the social sciences and humanities].<sup>6</sup> Religion is primarily defined as a set of practices “that are based on the premise of the existence of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, that are generally invisible” and are practiced as a means of contacting these superhuman powers in control of those aspects of existence that are beyond the direct human control.<sup>7</sup> In chapter 2 of *The Promise of Salvation*, Riesebrodt presents his theory of religion in three parts: defining religion, understanding it, and explaining it.<sup>8</sup> His theory is based in part on what William James referred to as the “ontological imagination.”<sup>9</sup>

Riesebrodt’s practice-oriented theory is distinct from the concepts of religious tradition and religiousness that, as will be illustrated in the definition of *dīn* offered by Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abdallah Draz (1898-1958), have historically fallen under the label “religion” in earlier definitions offered by western academia. Religions are first and foremost a set of practices in relation to superhuman powers, relegating theologies, or worldviews as Riesebrodt refers to them, to a secondary position. This leads to an avoidance of discussions regarding purity of dogma or correctness in ritual, and the equation of these with religion, in favor of a study of the whole of these systems of practice whether or not they are deemed orthodox, unorthodox, heterodox, authentic, or heretical by a particular clerical body.

Religious traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, refer to the “cultural ways of life” to which a system of symbols provides continuity over time and by which systems of practices relating to superhuman powers are encompassed. Religiousness is a subjective category regarding the individual appropriation of religiosity that can be socially conditioned within a religious community. It is also a product of religion that, for the sake of Riesebrodt’s sociological theory, must be clearly distinguished from religion itself along with religious tradition. In defining religion, two other important terms are presented and defined: *religious tradition* and *liturgies*. Part of Riesebrodt’s terminological distinction among religion, religiousness, and religious tradition are reminiscent of the type of distinctions Marshall Hodgson was hoping to make by referring to that which is “Islamic” as opposed to that which is “Islamicate.”<sup>10</sup>

I agree with Riesebrodt’s centralizing of worship over metaphysics and ethics as, in the case of Islam, these two concepts, the first being that of metaphysics or theology, falls under the Muslim philosophical tradition of *kalām*,

which often concentrates on the study of monotheism and (memorization of) God's names and attributes, and the second being that of ethical or moral philosophy, in Islam *'ilm al-akhlāq*, are made religious when "performed" as worship (*'ibādah*). For Riesebrodt, *liturgies*, meaning "institutionalized rules and guidelines for humans' interactions with superhuman powers," is the primary locus for the meaning of religion, as opposed to a work of speculative rational theology. Liturgies are the collection of rules and meanings for human communication with superhuman powers. These interventionist practices, as Riesebrodt calls them, include, among others, prayer, sacrifice, and chanting, and are related to discursive practices and behavior-regulating practices. In the case of Islam, a sociological study should entail the study of such rituals as prayer, supplication, pilgrimage, and animal sacrifice as well as the rules governing them and how they are practiced within Muslim communities. The discursive practices, including the more fundamental aspects of theology as outlined in creeds, assist in the transmission of interventionist practices, their understanding, and their explanation.

It is in that aspect of religion having to do with behavior-regulating practices that one finds a great level of confusion regarding the interplay, or lack thereof, between religion and politics, the public and the private sphere. Riesebrodt states that practices of behavior-regulation "pertain to the religious re-shaping of everyday life with respect to superhuman powers" that revolve around "the avoidance of sanctions or the accumulation of merits."<sup>11</sup> Included among these practices are one's treatment of others, eating customs and diet, marriage and burial rites, dress codes, and specific times allocated for specific acts of worship. He astutely observes that while many of these practices of behavior regulation are not worship rituals in and of themselves, it is only their being practiced at the behest of these superhuman powers that legitimates them. Interpreted in such a way, they can develop a significance like that accorded to the interventionist practices of liturgies: "[E]thical behavior or the intensive study of sacred texts can be interpreted as a form of religious service and thus take on the quality of an interventionist practice."<sup>12</sup>

When he states that "it is as if the limits were constantly in flux" as regards the secularity and religiousness of these practices, he touches upon a dialectical problem into which other sociologists of religion, such as José Casanova, have delved quite deeply. Indeed, it parallels earlier discussions regarding the distinction between that which is *dīnī* (religious) and that which is *dunyawī* (worldly), or the dichotomy of *mu'āmalāt* (social transactions) and *'ibādāt* (ritual worship) to be found in premodern Muslim scholarly discourse.<sup>13</sup> It is at this level of religious practice, that of behavior regulation, that religion and

secularity blur, as all social interactions, including economic transactions and infrastructure, as well as governance and the establishment and enforcement of laws, are conducted by humans informed by some notion of what is or is not properly regulated behavior.

In sum, the three types of religious practices (interventionist, discursive, and behavior regulating) relate to one another so as to comprise religion in such a way that interventionist practices lay at the center. Riesebrodt provides a convincing reason as to why interventionist practices take center stage in the concept of religion: Those sociologists of religion and religious studies experts who lend primacy to the behavior-regulating practices present religion as a mere subcategory of morality and ethics. I would add that by making these practices primary, many of them consequently conflate religion with politics. When discursive practices are made central, religion is identified first and foremost as a subcategory of philosophy, a scholastic theology and the construction of worldviews by classes of priests or clergy who claim authority over it, while the overwhelming majority of religious practitioners, who do not belong to those classes, play an insignificant role.

Riesebrodt's emphasis on worship practices highlights religion as a "system of warding off misfortune, overcoming crises, and providing blessings and salvation."<sup>14</sup> These three themes can be identified in religions throughout history and across cultures and geography. The construction of theological worldviews and the regulation of both public and private behavior are important aspects of religious practice; however, they play a role secondary to and contingent upon the interventionist practices.<sup>15</sup>

Casanova cites a statement by anthropologist Mary Douglas that many in Islamic studies would do well to heed when discussing dichotomous relationships, like those of Salafī and Sufī, traditionalism and modernism, or *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*: "Binary distinctions are an analytic procedure, but their usefulness does not guarantee that existence divides like that. We should look with suspicion on anyone who declared that there are two kinds of people, or two kinds of reality or process."<sup>16</sup>

One of the most ambiguous binaries is that of public versus private, especially with regards to that which is religious versus that which is secular, another binary with contested boundaries. As Casanova states, theories of secularization fail to account for the many ways in which social movements and mobilizations worldwide defy easy categorization as either political or religious movements. The privatization of religion with respect to the modern social order is understood as an essential characteristic of modernity, as an outcome of the freedom of conscience and the right to privacy that would lead

to a normative understanding of a modern secular state and capitalist economy freed from the clergy's control. He identifies this binary of public and private as originating with the ancient Greek division of the city into *oikos* and *polis*. This dualistic perception of social reality, he maintains, fails to capture one of modernity's most significant characteristics, that of the social sphere or civil society that lies

between public and private proper, yet has expansionist tendencies aiming to penetrate and absorb both. The actual empirical boundaries between the three spheres, moreover, are highly porous and constantly shifting... Indeed, each of the three spheres may be said to have both private and public dimensions.<sup>17</sup>

Jurgen Habermas, in a presentation of his views on post-secularism or the perceived resurgence of religion, which is, in reality, a continued sustained relevance of religion in the public sphere, echoes Casanova's argument that "the loss of function and the trend towards individualization do not necessarily imply that religion loses influence and relevance either in the political arena and the culture of a society or in the personal conduct of life."<sup>18</sup> He refers to three phenomenon as being the primary reasons for the perceived religious resurgence after a supposed dormancy: increased global Christian missionary activity, particularly in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia; a radicalization among fundamentalist groups; and the innate potential for violence in many religions being increasingly exploited by political actors such as the clerics of Iran, the Hindu nationalists of India, and the Christian American religious right leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

When mentioning those once-secularized societies that are now undergoing desecularization, the United States is conspicuously absent. On the other hand, Habermas does refer to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the affluent European countries. He also correctly points out that the harmony found between modernization and religiosity in the United States cannot be considered an exception to the rule, as described by secularization theory, but ought to be viewed as the norm that disproves the secularization theorists' primary assumptions.

The Task Force on International Religious Freedom of the conservative Witherspoon Institute think tank summarized philosopher William P. Alston's account of religion as follows:

(1) a belief in a supernatural being (or beings); (2) prayers or communication with that or those beings; (3) transcendent realities, including "heaven,"

“paradise,” or “enlightenment”; (4) a distinction between the sacred and the profane and between ritual acts and sacred objects; (5) a view that explains both the world as a whole and humanity’s proper relation to it; (6) a code of conduct in line with that worldview; and (7) a temporal community bound by its adherence to these elements. Though not every religion includes all of these elements, all religions include most of them, such that we understand that religion involves a combination of beliefs, behavior, and belonging in a community.<sup>19</sup>

This task force, comprised of political scientists Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, after paraphrasing Alston, distills four core characteristics defining religion<sup>20</sup>: (1) an unseen order, as described by William James in his 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, or ultimate reality, whether understood as transcendent or immanent; (2) the adjustment of people’s lives to harmonize with the unseen order; (3) the human being’s ability to connect with this ultimate reality, either through reason or revelation, or a combination of the two; and (4) religion as community practices that are, citing Riesebrodt, “in the context of an institutionalized social and cultural meaning.”<sup>21</sup> This aligns with what the task force regarded as the four major dimensions of religious freedom: (1) the religious freedom of intellectual and spiritual inquiry, (2) the religious freedom of practical reason, (3) the religious freedom of human sociality, and (4) the religious freedom of political and legal expression.<sup>22</sup> Religion is thus defined as

the effort of individuals and communities to understand, to express, and to seek harmony with a transcendent reality of such importance that they feel compelled to organize their lives around their understanding of it, to be guided by it in their moral conduct, and to communicate their devotions to others.<sup>23</sup>

## Modern Definitions of *Dīn*

Popular works relevant to this discussion, according to Muslim intellectuals, include Ali Shariati’s *Religion vs. Religion*, the title of which in the original Persian is *Madhhab ‘alayhi Madhhab*.<sup>24</sup> Shariati makes no semantic distinction between *dīn* and *madhhab*, which, when used in the context of Islamic jurisprudence, denotes a school of law. However, when used in other contexts and in many non-Arabic languages such as Urdu and Persian, it means a religious or sectarian community. On the other hand, Ghulam Ahmad Parvez’s *Islam: A Challenge to Religion* posits Islam as a *dīn* in opposition to religion, which he refers to as *madhhab*. The late Ismail al-Faruqi correctly pointed out that this terminological juxtaposition contradicts how *dīn* is used in the Qur’an to refer to Islam as well as other religions, including that of the *kāfirūn*.<sup>25</sup>

### *Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-79): Dīn as State*

In his 1941 discussion of the linguistic definition of *dīn*, Mawdudi identifies four core concepts: (1) the dominance of an authority in relation to (2) the obedience of the one upon whom authority is imposed, (3) the regulations imposed by the authority and the required observance of these regulations, and (4) the calling to account by the authority for the observance or non-observance of the authority's dominance and regulations. He follows this with his conceptualization of the *shar'ī* (Islamic) meaning of *dīn*, which he considers one of the most important Qur'anic terms: an entire way of life.<sup>26</sup>

According to Mawdudi, the Islamic definition of *dīn* has four components, all of which correspond respectively to the four core concepts identified above. His wording varies only slightly from that used for the components of the linguistic meaning: (1) sovereignty (*al-ḥakīmīyah* as opposed to *al-qahr* in the linguistic meaning), (2) obedience (*al-iṭā'ah*), (3) a system of thought and action as opposed to laws or rules (*nizām fikrī wa 'amalī* instead of *ḥudūd wa qawānīn*), and (4) the system of reward and punishment meted out for one's obedience or disobedience (*al-mukāfāt* as opposed to *al-muḥasibah wa al-quḍā'*).<sup>27</sup> He presents several Qur'anic verses as examples of the term being used in each of these meanings and argues that certain verses present instances where *dīn* stands for the entire way of life (*nizām al-ḥayāt al-kāmil*) and encompasses all four component meanings (*al-mustalah al-jāmi' al-shāmil*), such as "Lo! Religion [*al-dīn*] with Allah (is) the Surrender (to His Will and Guidance) (Q. 3:19)."<sup>28</sup>

What is most relevant to our discussion here is his argument that no other language has a word with such a comprehensive meaning. In his opinion, the term that comes closest, but which ultimately fails to completely capture this Arabic word's far wider significance, is *state*. However, he never explains how he reached this conclusion. Mawdudi excludes *religion* from meaning the same as *dīn*.<sup>29</sup> While analyzing the verse "And Pharaoh said: Suffer me to kill Moses, and let him cry unto his Lord. Lo! I fear that he will alter your religion [*dīn*] or that he will cause confusion in the land," (Q. 40:26)," he argues that when looking at the story of Moses and Pharaoh in its entirety, it becomes clear that *dīn* in this verse cannot refer merely to religion (*al-naḥlah wa al-diyānah* [creed and faith]), but also includes the the civil order or sociopolitical system (*nizām al-madanīyah*) as well.

He cites several other verses that, according to him, use *dīn* in its comprehensive sense as a complete way of life (*nizām al-ḥayāt al-kāmil al-shāmil*) doctrinally (*'aqadīyah*), intellectually (*fikrīyah*), morally (*khuluqīyah*), and



practically (*‘amalīyah*). For Mawdudi, *religion*, which corresponds to *nahlah and diyānah*, does not include that which is *madanī*, defined as that which relates to human society; is civil or sociocultural; or what can be termed *secular* (e.g., civil rights or civil liberties [*huqūq madanīyah*]) or civil disobedience (*‘asyān madanī*). This conception of religion as something wholly privatized corresponds to certain scholarly views on religion that were prevalent, yet by no means universally accepted, in the West at the time, as will be discussed further in the following sections.

### *Muhammad Abdallah Draz (1894-1958): Religiosity and Doctrine*

Muhammad Abdallah Draz dedicated an entire book to *dīn* and its meaning.<sup>30</sup> Draz was born in Kufr el-Shaikh, the son of Abdallah Draz (1874-1932), an Azhari scholar and student of Muhammad Abduh (1850-1905) known for his critical edition of al-Shatibi’s work on the objectives of Islamic law, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī‘ah*, which he co-edited with his son Muhammad. Following in his father’s footsteps, Draz graduated from al-Azhar in 1916 while at the same time studying French privately. By 1930 he had become a professor in the college of *uṣūl al-dīn* at al-Azhar. In 1936 he traveled to France, and in 1947 obtained a doctorate with honors from the Sorbonne. His dissertation on morality in the Qur’an was published in 1950 by al-Azhar. It was translated into Arabic only in 1973 by Abd al-Sabur Shahin, and into English in 2009.<sup>31</sup>

His other major work translated into English is *Nabā’ al-‘Azīm (The Quran: An Eternal Challenge)*. He returned to Egypt and taught at the University of Cairo as well as the Azhar affiliate Dar al-Ulum. In 1949 he was made a member of Egypt’s Council of Senior Scholars. He passed away in 1958 while attending a conference in Pakistan, where he spoke on Islam’s view of other religions. During his lifetime he maintained links with such reformist luminaries as Abd al-Hamid b. Badis (1889-1940) in Algeria and the Egyptian judge Ahmad Shakir (1892-1958), the elder brother of Mahmud Shakir, whose definition of *dīn* I will also be examining.<sup>32</sup>

After an introductory section on the history of religions, in which he discussed ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Christian and Islamic eras, and finally post-Enlightenment Europe, Draz divides his book *Al-Dīn* into four parts: (1) “On Determining the Meaning of *Dīn*,” which is most relevant to the present discussion; (2) the relationship between *dīn* and aspects of culture and civilization (*al-thaqāfah wa al-tahdhīb*), such as ethics and moral behavior (*al-akhlāq*),

philosophy, and other fields of knowledge, (3) humanity's natural inclination toward religion and its role in society, and (4) the origins of religious belief according to numerous schools of thought. In the latter Draz includes those of Descartes and Henri Bergson as well as what he refers to as the "school/doctrine of revelation" (*al-madhab al-ta'limi aw madhab al-wahīy*) to which he obviously belongs. The book ends with a section entitled "The Position of Islam Regarding Other Religions and Its Relationship to Them," which was also the title of his final lecture given at the conference in Pakistan.

The first part of the book is further divided into four sections: linguistic meaning, customary meaning, substantive elements, and psychological elements. He begins by taking it as a given that Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, idol worship, and other religions all fall under the term *dīn*. That being the case, its meaning must encompass all of the elements shared by these traditions. Next, he comments on some of the difficulties related to ascertaining the meaning of terms through dictionary definitions. For example, the average Arabic dictionary defines *dīn* as *milla* that, as one quickly learns upon locating the latter term, is defined as *dīn*. Classical etymological dictionaries may not simplify matters. For example, in such works as *Al-Qamūs al-Muḥīṭ* or *Lisān al-'Arab*, a word has historically meant one thing as well as its opposite. Therefore, *dīn* means both rulership and servitude, glory and abasement, coercion and beneficence, obedience and disobedience, along with both Islamic monotheism and anything one believes.

Draz identifies three formulations of *dīn* that signify three distinct meanings: *dāna/yadīnu*, *dāna lahu*, and *dāna bihi*. The first form means to possess or own, to rule over (*malakahu*, *ḥakamahu*, and *sāsahu*) as well as to conquer, call to account, judge, and reward or punish. One example comes from the Qur'an's first chapter, "*mālikī yawm al-dīn*," meaning "king or master of the Day of Judgment." The second form, *dāna lahu*, means obedience and servitude, whereas the third verbal construction, *dāna bihi*, signifies belief in something or way of practice (*'aqīdah wa madhhab*). According to Draz, the creed and opinion that one sticks to would be referred to as *madhhab nazarī*, whereas that which is taken as one's custom and way of living or lifestyle, way of life, lifeway, and so on is referred to as *madhhab 'amalī*.

To put it succinctly, Draz states that *dīn* signifies the relationship between two parties, one of which is glorified and mightier than the other. All meanings included here have to do with this relationship's governing order (*al-dustūr al-munāẓim*). This binding obligation (*ilzām*) at the core of the meaning of *dīn* is further divided into that which is financial (*dayn*) and that which is behavioral (*dīn*) by changing the first short vowel. Draz takes a moment to crit-

icize some of the Orientalists who claimed that this word, in all of its uses, was taken from either Hebrew or Persian. In fact, he argues that perhaps this claim originates from some tendencies toward *shu'ūbiyyah*, which in the context of mid-twentieth century Orientalism, specifically the entry of the *Encyclopedia of Islam First Edition*, can only be translated as racism, for it “seeks to divest the Arabs from any virtue, including linguistic.”<sup>33</sup>

Returning to the subject at hand, he identifies the third usage of *dīn*, adopting a specific belief and practice as one’s way of being, as the usage that most succinctly captures the meaning of *religion* as it is used in the study of religion. It is ultimately divisible into (1) the subjective state that one refers to as religiosity (*tadayyun*) and (2) the objective fact of a religious doctrine, comprised of principles, customs and rituals, artifacts and scriptures, taken by a given community as its members’ belief system and social praxis. One should note that Riesebrodt was adamant that *religiousness* and *religious tradition*, two terms that seem to correlate with *tadayyun* and the phrase used for doctrine (*al-mabādī’ i’tiqādan aw ‘amalan*), be clearly differentiated. While he distinguishes between interventionist, discursive, and behavior-regulating practices, Draz locates all of these practices under religious doctrine.

### *Mahmud Muhammad Shakir (1909-97): Dīn as Culture*

Scholars and intellectuals have made numerous attempts to discern the true meaning of culture and its relationship to religion. Two examples are Riesebrodt’s theory of religion and its being distinguished from religious tradition, and Marshall Hodgson’s Islamic/Islamicate distinction. The Egyptian intellectual Mahmud Muhammad Shakir presented his own definition of culture, which must be considered in order to understand “the positions of present-day Islamic orthodoxy, should any idea of a ‘dialogue’ be contemplated” by western scholars of the Arab and Muslim-majority countries and scholars from within the Arab intellectual tradition.<sup>34</sup> Other than Majdi Wahba’s 1989 article and the 2009 work by Ahmad Atif Ahmad, very little has been written about Shakir in English-language scholarship.<sup>35</sup> His two most important works on culture are his 1964 *Abāfīl wa Aṣmār (Lies and Fabrications)*<sup>36</sup> and his 1987 *Risālah fī al-Ṭarīq iā Thaqāfatīnā*<sup>37</sup> (*A Treatise on the Way to Our Culture*). Here I will examine his definitions of culture, civilization, and religion.

In his *Abāfīl wa Aṣmār*, Shakir argued that there is a struggle between political forces representing western civilization and the people of the Arab and Muslim-majority countries. The most dangerous arena for this battle is that

of culture, which takes place in literature and ideological writings. While this struggle occurs primarily within what Bourdieu would call the fields of cultural production, Shakir argues that this is, in reality, a political conflict<sup>38</sup> because, according to him, culture is an essentially comprehensive term and refers to two core concepts, one building from the other.<sup>39</sup> The first core concept is the set of acquired values and behaviors implanted in the very self of a person. This idea corresponds to Bourdieu's notion of the habitus.<sup>40</sup> The second core concept is comprised of the fruits of this habitus in terms of intellectual production. As the creation and transmission of this habitus is done within a specific language, the importance of linguistic groups to the delineation of a culture is paramount. A culture's primary components are its language and *dīn*, typically translated as *religion*, according to Shakir.<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between religion and culture in Shakir's thought is quite similar to the way in which poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot imagines it.<sup>42</sup> Eliot writes that culture is the intellectual and material embodiment of a people's religion. However, the meaning of religion that has become normative in the Judeo-Christian tradition is not as comprehensive as *dīn*, according to Shakir, who examines its usage in pre-Islamic literature and in the Qur'an and Hadith texts before delineating its full meaning.<sup>43</sup> Shakir states that for Muslims, *dīn*, in terms of its use in the Qur'an and clarification in the Prophetic teachings (Sunnah),<sup>44</sup> can be divided into four issues: (1) law (Shari'ah), (2) morals (*adab*), (3) worship and creed (*'ibādah* and *tawhīd*), and (4) principles of discernment and deduction (*istinbāt* and *istidlāl*). This last issue is closest to what is called formal logic and reason,<sup>45</sup> and is where the disagreement between the *ahl al-qiyās* (the legal analogists) and the *ahl al-zāhir* (the legal anti-analogists) was born.<sup>46</sup>

Shakir points out that interpreting terms and qualifying and modifying some expressions in intellectual discourse is an old problem within the Arabo-Islamic intellectual fields. This is, he maintains, especially important in contemporary times. He therefore argues that Muslim intellectuals must consistently state that the meaning of *religion* in the Judeo-Christian tradition is not the same as *dīn* for the Muslims.<sup>47</sup> Looking at the Makkan revelations, Shakir claims that Islam was not referred to as a *dīn* in this comprehensive four-part meaning, and that this full meaning was delayed in its explication.<sup>48</sup> At this point, religion was called *milla* (faith community).<sup>49</sup>

In the Madinan revelations, *dīn* is used to refer to reckoning, like the Day of Judgment, or to obedience and subjugation and singling God out in divinity. All of these fall under theology and ritual acts of worship, and then laws, ethics, justice, and fairness within reason, as further elaborated in the Sunnah.<sup>50</sup>

Thus one cannot use *dīn* for *milla*, except the *milla* of Ibrahim, which the Qur'an explicitly states is Islam.<sup>51</sup> He completes this portion of his argument by reminding Muslim intellectuals of their obligation to correct the principles that they use when deducing and discerning, the fourth aspect of *dīn*, as much and as soon as they can.<sup>52</sup>

With religion and language being the primary components of culture, Shakir categorically rejects the idea of a global culture that connects, or is shared by, all of the separate and distinct cultures (identified by their religions, sects, languages, and races). The apparent cultural borrowings are found only in those superficial matters that do not touch the culture's core. If that core is affected, then the culture has changed. Shakir, who admits that the issue is complex and complicated, does not claim to have given an exhaustive description.<sup>53</sup> His focus is, unsurprisingly, on two cultures, namely, the Arabo-Islamic and Northern Christian European, and the impossibility of their being harmonized or amalgamated. He claims that Machiavelli's notion of the ends justifying the means has entered into the sphere of *dīn* for the agents of the northern Christians' intellectual and religious fields,<sup>54</sup> represented by the Orientalists and missionaries.

The belief in the sufficiency of following pure reason, which Shakir defines as *ahwā'* (inclinations/desires), along with what he construed as post-Enlightenment Europe's self-aggrandizement, cause its people to present their civilization as a global one, something that Shakir believes no society has ever claimed before. His explanation of western culture's development in line with a pessimistic interpretation of Machiavelli's thought echoes critiques made by Rashid Rida (1865-1935), one of Shakir's intellectual mentors and the teacher of his elder brother Ahmad, of post-World War I European social science represented by Herbert Spencer and his theory of social Darwinism.<sup>55</sup> Through colonialism, these ideas affected Muslim political, cultural, intellectual, and religious fields.<sup>56</sup>

### *Muhammad Hamidullah (1909-2002): Creed, Worship, and Perfect Religiosity*

The works of Muhammad Hamidullah, who translated the Qur'an, edited early Islamic texts, and in his capacity as a teacher and research scholar impacted Islamic studies in South Asia, Turkey and Western Europe, have been grossly understudied. He had a tremendous influence on Islamic studies in Turkish academia from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, a time when religious knowledge was being transferred from traditional modes of transmission to modern

university-style modes of knowledge production, intellectual exchange between western scholars of the region (e.g., European and American Orientalists), and scholars working from within the tradition. All of them were seeking to synthesize classical Islamic studies and modern principles of the social sciences and the historical-critical method.<sup>57</sup>

The State of Hyderabad, where Hamidullah was born, was a liberal Islamic state with a history similar to that of al-Andalus in that, upon its downfall, its intellectual elites were forced to disperse and thus graced many other societies with their genius.<sup>58</sup> At its height, this state had Yemeni and African army divisions; a population of Yemenis still lives there. The first documented recording of the Hamidullah family in India appears in the 1490s as judges in the city of Madras (Chennai). All generations up until the time of the British Raj are documented as judges and experts in Islamic law working throughout western and southern India, moving every few generations to different cities in Hyderabad, Gujurat, and elsewhere.

Muhammad belongs to the twenty-fourth generation. His father was a mufti and exegete who directed Hyderabad's interest-free banking system, and his grandfather Muhammad Sibghatullah Madrasi (d. 1872) was Madras' chief judge and a collector and copyist of early Islamic manuscripts. Many of these can be found in the special collections of leading American university libraries. When the Nizam of Hyderabad lost control of the financial, educational, and legal systems to the British, the Sibghatullah family lost its social position. Although Sibghatullah signed a fatwa calling for boycotting the British in India, he did permit those of his children whom he considered to be the brightest to receive both a traditional Islamic education and a British education in Latin, astronomy, modern sciences, and other subjects.

From the 1870s until the state's annexation by India in 1948, family members traveled to Damascus, Cairo, Yemen, and other Muslim regions to either buy or copy manuscripts and have them sent to their family homes in Madras or Hyderabad. These people, who included his two uncles Husayn Athaullah and the judge Sayyid Athaullah, were ordered to make copies of any new manuscript on the market if they could not buy it outright.

Hamidullah attended Osmanlia University, founded in 1918 as India's first Urdu-medium university and named after the last *nizām*, Osman Ali Khan (1886-1967). There, he studied under the Sufi theologian, exegete, and dean of theology Muhammad Abd al-Qadir al-Siddiqi (1871-1962), who also taught the Yemeni Abd al-Rahman al-Mu'allimi (1894-1966), an editor of classical works<sup>59</sup> whose grave is currently a shrine visited by people from Yemen and elsewhere. He then continued his studies in Europe. His first article

was published in 1926, in the journal *Islamic Culture*, edited by his teachers Muhammad Asad (1900-92) and Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936). One of his professors at the University of Bonn was famed German Orientalist Carl Brockelmann (1868-1956). He graduated in 1935 with a doctorate, and obtained another one from the Sorbonne the following year.

In 1946, as the independent Nizamate of Hyderabad was being embargoed by the Indian military (it was annexed in 1948), Hamidullah went into self-imposed exile in Europe. In 1947, he participated in the first Pakistani Constitutional Assembly with Mawdudi and Sulayman Nadwi (1884-1953), two important Muslim scholars and activists. He corresponded with Mawdudi, as well as with the philosopher and poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the German scholar of Sufism Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), and Said Ramadan (1926-95), the son-in-law of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna (1906-49) and father of the Swiss Muslim philosopher Tariq Ramadan.

In Turkey, Hamidullah lived in the same small hotel room throughout his time as a visiting professor (1954-79) while simultaneously holding a post in the French National Center for Scientific Research (1954-78). Counted among his Turkish students are Fuat Sezgin and Yusuf Kavakci, the father of Turkish politician Merve Kavakci, whose father-in-law was interested in Hamidullah upon his arrival in Istanbul. In fact, this man used to take Dr. Kavakci and his wife to attend Hamidullah initial talks in Turkey. Hamidullah did not return to Pakistan until the late 1970s, when President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1924-88) started writing letters to him, referring to him as his “big brother” and inviting him to become a citizen. Although he refused this request, he did visit and give a series of lectures, compiled into *Khitab Bahawalpur* and translated by Afzal Iqbal as *The Emergence of Islam*. A few years later Islamabad conferred the Hilal Imtiaz award upon him – 10 million Pakistani rupees, which he donated to the International Islamic University in Islamabad. A wing of its library was subsequently named after him.

His European education and ties to India’s scholarly class of India is representative of a group of intellectuals, including both Shakir and Draz, whose families had historically belonged to their societies’ religious and political elites and served as judges and administrators. With the advent of modernization, they became academics in the newly established modern secular universities and helped usher in an era of scholarship marked by publishing critical scholarly editions of classical works from pre-modern Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. In 1997, after suffering a stroke, Hamidullah became concerned about outsiders expressing interest in handling and publishing his works. His subsequent moves from Paris to Pennsylvania and then to Jacksonville, FL, were kept secret.

He was especially concerned about Saudi publishers, whom he felt had ruined his French translation of the Qur'an in 1996, just as they had ruined the English translation of his friend Abdallah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953) just four years earlier. They then glutted the French market, and many companies that had relied upon publishing his French translation were forced to close their doors. Before 1979, Islamabad's Dawa Academy published his books. Habib and Co., which was dedicated to publishing his works, was bought by a Saudi company and destroyed. The entirety of his personal library, gathered from 1946 to 2002, is held in the United States; his pre-1946 collection remains in the family's ancestral home in Hyderabad.

Hamidullah's discussion of *dīn* is part six of his above-mentioned lecture series given in Pakistan during the late 1970s. He begins by defining a prophet as someone whose primary characteristic is a teacher of *dīn*. His description of *dīn* starts with the Hadith of Gabriel, found *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, as well as other Hadith collections. This hadith provides a complete summary of the term, and Hamidullah suggests that the event described therein occurred during the last year of the Prophet's life. The version narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (d. 681) and found in *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī* is as follows:

One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, (The angel) Gabriel came and asked, "What is faith?" Allah's Apostle replied, "Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection." Then he further asked, "What is Islam?" Allah's Apostle replied, "To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly, to pay the compulsory charity (Zakat), and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan." Then he further asked, "What is *Ihsan* (perfection)?" Allah's Apostle replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He sees you." Then he further asked, "When will the Hour be established?" Allah's Apostle replied, "The answerer has no better knowledge than the questioner. But I will inform you about its portents.

1. When a slave (lady) gives birth to her master.
2. When the shepherds of black camels start boasting and competing with others in the construction of higher buildings. And the Hour is one of five things which nobody knows except Allah.

The Prophet then recited: "Verily, with Allah (Alone) is the knowledge of the Hour –." (31. 34) Then that man (Gabriel) left and the Prophet asked his companions to call him back, but they could not see him. Then the Prophet said, "That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion."<sup>60</sup>



Hamidullah's definition of *religion* conforms to this tripartite division of *īmān*, *islām*, and *ihsān*. In the Hadith collections, *īmān* (faith) is comprised of the Sunnis' six pillars of belief and *islām* comprises the five pillars of practice. He identifies *ihsān* (perfection) as *taṣawwuf*. The terms he uses to refer to these three aspects of *dīn* are '*aqā'id* (doctrinal beliefs), '*ṭbādāt* (devotional practices), and *taṣawwuf*, respectively.<sup>61</sup>

In the ensuing comparative analysis of Islamic conceptions of belief, worship, and spirituality with those of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, the discussion is primarily polemical as regards the superiority of Islamic conceptions of monotheism, revelation, the nature of prophecy, heaven and hell, good and evil, free will and determinism, prayer and fasting, pilgrimage and charity, and so on. It includes a critique of the Austrian Orientalist Aloys Sprenger (1813-93) and his view that the Prophet suffered from epilepsy.<sup>62</sup>

In his description of *taṣawwuf*, Hamidullah provides the literal definition of *ihsān*: "to lend beauty to an object; to beautify or to carry out a task in a beautiful way." The *shar'ī* (religious) definition is "true acceptance of God's commands and worshipping Him with utter sincerity."<sup>63</sup> He then identifies *sulūk* and *ṭarīqah*, both of which have the literal definition of treading a path, as describing sincerity in performing religious acts or treading the Path of God. But the main word he uses for this aspect of *dīn* is *taṣawwuf*, which, as he states later, took on the same meaning as *sulūk* and *ṭarīqah*. He then returns to the Hadith of Gabriel and its description of *ihsān* as a type of constant awareness of God's presence.

Another word used to denote this meaning is *taqwā*, often translated as God-consciousness. He identifies one of the conducive means to maintain this constant awareness as the superogatory fasting, prayers, and supplications taught via the Hadith literature. For Hamidullah, this seems to be the extent of *taṣawwuf* because he offers a subtle critique of later developments in Sufism, first and foremost as regards the debates that ensued over the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of existence) advanced by Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240). He does not dwell on this particular matter, as his critique seems to problematize the issue and not to support either side.

## Discussion

There exists an alleged "Transatlantic Network of Hate," which is held to include some academics and politicians, that is actively promoting Islamophobic prejudice and racism throughout the United States and Europe.<sup>64</sup> One of its tac-

tics is to argue that Islam is not a religion due to its supposedly unique relationship to politics and the regulation of behavior in the public sphere. And yet many of the same Christian conservatives who make this claim actively seek to promote their version of Christianity's influence in the political sphere. Further examination reveals that definitions of religion coming from sociology, political science, and religious studies all point to a relation among the religious, the social, the public, and the political.

In addition to the false binaries mentioned by Casanova is the universalist-particularist dichotomy tackled by Riesebrodt, which dilutes the definition of religion to such an extent that the Super Bowl can be considered religious, whereas any practice outside of Western Europe and its colonized derivative territories – even those occurring in the West before the nineteenth century – cannot be considered a religion or religious. The liberal definition of religion formulated in the 1800s, which asserts the complete separation of religion and politics, has continuously been negotiated at every level of western society.<sup>65</sup> Riesebrodt's distinction between religious practice and religious traditions also solves the problem of differentiation between religion and culture presented by Shakir and Eliot, corresponding respectively, in the Islamic Studies context, to that which is Islamic and that which is Islamicate, to use Hodgson's term.

Mawdudi's statement that religion is not *dīn* was clearly influenced by individualist definitions of religion, such as that of William James, as well as modernist liberal definitions of religion typified by the sociologists of knowledge Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. In addition, it was based on secularization theory's predictions of religion's total retreat from the public sphere and the eventual demise of its influence on society, which would come to regard religion "as a separate sphere, distinct from politics and economics."<sup>66</sup> Although Hamidullah's definition of *dīn* does not mention religion's role in politics, his lecture series was dedicated to the concept of the state. Moreover, many of his other works, including his doctoral dissertation, show that he considered religion to play an integral role in governance.<sup>67</sup>

Shakir presents a four-part division of *dīn*: *i 'tiqādāt wa 'ibādāt* (creedal beliefs and acts of worship), *adāb wa akhlāq* (virtues and ethics), *shar'* (the body of laws), and *istinbāt* (epistemology), thereby showing strong parallels with the Witherspoon Institute's four characteristics of religion and religious freedom: (1) the unseen order; (2) life's harmonious adjustment to the unseen order; (3) community action and political and legal expression; and (4) understanding the unseen order through reason, revelation, or some combination of the two. Finally, Draz subsumes all four characteristics under religious doctrine as one aspect of religion, the other aspect being religiosity, which corresponds

to religiousness and which Riesebrodt excludes from his sociological definition of religion.

Moving past terminological differences and focusing on the content of the terms used, one can find four elements used to equally define *dīn* and religion: epistemology (*istinbāt*, the intellectual grasping of the unseen order), faith and worship (*'aqīdah wa 'ibādah*, interventionist practices), law (*shar'*, behavior-regulating practices, as well as legal and political expression), and ethics (*adab, akhlāq, taṣawwuf*, and the harmonization of life with the unseen order).

The order is not necessarily one of importance, for it is partially patterned after the classical manner for Islamic religious knowledge: language and logical reasoning come first and are followed, respectively, by basic creed and ritual worship, law (*ḥalāl wa ḥarām*), and the virtues (*fadā'il*). Of the Witherspoon Institute's four major dimensions of religious freedom, the freedom of intellectual and spiritual inquiry and the freedom of practical reason are represented by (1) and (2), and the freedoms of human sociality and of political and legal expression are represented by (3) and (4). The last two, law and ethics, would fall under Riesebrodt's category of behavior-regulating practices.

Shakir's removal of ritual worship and ethics from traditional *fiqh* (typically translated as Islamic law) provides a possible solution to Fazlur Rahman's (1919-88) critique of traditional Muslim scholarship for not developing distinct legal and ethical systems. It can also function as a starting point for developing the ethical and legal system in Islam sought for by Rahman.<sup>68</sup> Points 2, 3, and 4 also conform in some ways to a type of categorization attributed to early Hadith scholars who divided the Sunnah into three parts: *sunan* (manner of worship), *ḥalāl wa ḥarām*, and *fadā'il*.<sup>69</sup> Law, defined as those aspects of religious teaching that are directly related to issues involving the illicitness of and punishment for specific crimes (e.g., murder, theft, and fraudulent business practices) and that, I suspect, would be protected under the religious freedom of political and legal expression, would be of a far more limited scope than the entire range of personal, social, private, and public behaviors not necessarily enforced by any governing authority. These would fall under the heading of "ethics" or "virtues."

## Conclusion

From at least as early as William James and his individualized understanding of religion to Peter Berger and the social theorists of the mid-twentieth century mentioned by Habermas, Muslim intellectuals encountered definitions of religion that presented it as something entirely personal and with little to no impact

on social life, something that would slowly disappear from even the personal realm. Muslim critiques of the equation of *dīn* and *religion*, like those of Mawdudi, were developed within the prevailing context of western scholarship of that period's understanding of secularity, conceptualization of the public sphere, and prediction of the inevitable demise of religious belief and practice. This discourse of "Islam as opposed to religion" has now come to influence a number of Islamophobic political actors in the United States.

In arguing that Islam is not a religion but a way of life that encompasses politics, they wish to give the impression that the religious freedom of Christians is under threat. Under the pretext of protecting religious freedom, their actual goal is to curtail religious freedom, particularly for Muslims. More recently, this type of argumentation has come to dominate the rhetoric of leading Republican presidential candidates.<sup>70</sup> When these figures call for closing mosques or banning Muslims from running for president, they feed into the Islamophobic hysteria that finds its bases in such contradictory premises analyzed above. Therefore, according to them, Islam should not be accorded the same rights and freedoms as a true religion, such as Christianity, which is also a way of life that should inform public policies, including laws pertaining to marriage, birth control, and other issues.

I have shown that the most basic definitions of religion, including those of the Christian right to which these American political actors belong, describe religion as a way of life that informs the believer's social and political life. The argument can be laid forth as follows: If Islam is a *dīn* and that term is defined by leading modern scholars of Islam as being identical to that of *religion* as used by leading western scholars, including those with ties to hard-right conservative groups, then those same groups must consider Islam a religion. Islam as a way of life is a religion, just as much as Christianity and all other religions are considered ways of life.

Countless people from all cultures, regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background or level of education, have asked such basic questions as: "How can I avoid pain and misfortune?" "How do I avert crises and attain safety and happiness?" "What happens after we die?" Religions answer that these matters are under the control of superhuman powers that can be contacted, and these answers inform the understanding, worldview, and moral perspective of the person convinced by them. While there may have been a relatively brief moment in human history during which religion's role in the public sphere was seriously in question, the future will in all probability show a greater role for religion in the social and political arenas. In addition, religious discourse will continue to shape and be shaped by the social order.

Even within that moment in history when intellectuals thought that religion was on its way out of the public sphere, Anglicanism remained the state religion of England and such leading Civil Rights activists as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., were also religious leaders. This period of the mid-twentieth century, seen as the height of secularism, saw the birth of Liberation Theology in Latin America and the adding of “under God” to the American pledge of Allegiance. Today in the United States, Christian philosophers like Cornel West are counted among the leaders of anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia activism.<sup>71</sup> The U.S. Department of State now has an Office of Religious and Global Affairs along with the Office of International Religious Freedom, USAID’s Faith-Based and Community Organizations, and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.<sup>72</sup> All of this challenges the various reductionist, essentialist, naïve, and anachronistic theories that continue to exclude religion as a useful category of historical analysis.

## Endnotes

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68. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 256.
69. See Akram Diya’ Umari, Ibn Hazm Ali ibn Ahmad, and Baqi ibn Makhlad, *Baqī ibn Makhlad al-Qurṭubī wa Muqaddimat Musnaduh: ‘Adad mā li Kullī Qāḥid min al-Ṣaḥābah min al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: n.p., 1984).
70. Alan Rappeport, “Donald Trump Says He Would Be Open to Closing U.S. Mosques to Fight ISIS,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/10/22/donald-trump-says-he-would-be-open-to-closing-u-s-mosques-to-fight-isis>.
71. See “Reflections on the Problem of Black Suffering: A Conversation with Professor Sherman Jackson and Professor Cornel West” (Fields Center for Equality and Cultural Understanding, Princeton, March 29, 2010), <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLF688C703231CA03F>.
72. United States, Department of State, Office of Religion and Global Affairs, Religion and Global Affairs, February 27, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/pl/238144.htm>.