

significance of modern instrumentalities. The influence of his movement has been extended beyond the Punjab, and even beyond Pakistan, through a well organized distribution of publications, in English as well as Urdu, most in pamphlet form, and also the skilfull use of both radio and television programs.

Much more could be said about Dr. Israr Ahmad. Perhaps some day his movement will be adequately studied. But at the least who he is and what he has done allow us to pinpoint an expression of Islamic fundamentalism in contemporary Pakistan. At the same time, it must be noted that his larger appeal, beyond the ideology he espouses or the target groups he opposes, is made possible because of the coincidence of his method with that of modern media agents, whether journalists, radio commentators or TV program planners. He relies on what he claims is a simple, straightforward agenda, making the Qur'an standard of Truth against the falsehood of modern life. The anti-intellectualist as well as anti-clerical tone of his writings is evident, yet his strongest covert allies are Pakistani media personnel who, like their American counterparts, prefer to reduce complex issues to easily recognized stereotypes. There is no explicitly sinister plot here; it is a logical, if unfortunate, development of the newsmaking business. Modern technology requires what it makes possible: quick communication of packagable images. On this crucial strategy Islamic fundamentalism, again like its American counterpart, resonates with that branch of the modern world which it embraces, the media, but the resulting marriage of convenience raises a host of problems for others, whether they be excluded as producers from this realm of discourse or whether they be condemned unwittingly to become its consumers.



Muslim world (considered within but distinct from the so-called Third world).

The last feature is especially notable. Islamic fundamentalists, seizing upon modernization as an instrumentality that can be wrenched from its Western power at all levels by using modern jobs, modern media, as also modern weapons and tactics, on behalf of their own causes. They are so ill—understood both by their fellow Muslims and by non-Muslim outsiders precisely because they actualize a contradiction with few precedents: they are, so to speak, modernized reactionaries, recidivists intent on recreating the past through the gifts of modern technology.

By such a set of criteria Dr. Israr Ahmad may be aptly profiled as an Islamic fundamentalist within the context of contemporary Pakistan. He claims credibility as a modern because he is a trained medical doctor. A layman NOT an *alim*, he resembles his mentor, Mawudi, whose movement, Jamaat-i-Islami, he earlier supported. He conforms to the pattern noted elsewhere, that "Islamic fundamentalism represents the revitalizing synthesis not of the Ulama but of Moslem laymen" (Arjomand, P. 229). His ideology, too, is explicitly oppositional to the state in the person of president Zia but also to the clergy who cooperate with Zia and try to implement his programs. The specific target of his opposition has been all forms of Westernization, especially the presence of women in the public work force. Dr. Israr's quasi-mystical appeal is to an elite which is Pakistani (NOT Arab). Their goal is to oppose all doctrines and lifestyles alien to the Qur'an. Grasping the existential import of faith (*hal over qal*), these "few dedicated and selfless preachers -- will bear witness to the truth of a poetic line: not merely a reader of the Qur'an a true Muslim is the Qur'an personified". Above all, Dr. Israr understands the

had become too popular, the government had been forced to take steps to limit his use of radio and television, others (especially the APWA Ki begmat) were calling into question his extreme views, and even the national newspapers were not granting him the coverage he had once enjoyed. By now, October 1984, it may be that the Israrization of Pakistan has aborted; it may be that such a national movement was never as imminent as my USIA informant supposed. Yet the very existence of someone like Dr. Israr Ahmad raises questions about Pakistani Islam that are worthy of brief exploration.

In view of the problems of cross-cultural communication cited above, the most interesting question about Dr. Israr Ahmad may be his identity on the spectrum of Islamic loyalty. Is he a Muslim activist, fanatic, extremist, militant, etc? Or is he an Islamic fundamentalist? I would argue that it makes sense to understand him as a fundamentalist and to minimize or exclude other blatantly pejorative labels. He accords well with criteria for defining Islamic fundamentalism which I have developed elsewhere. Within Sunni Muslim communities they are four: (1) Islamic fundamentalism is always oppositional—to the West, to the government in power, and also to the clerical class, the *ulama*, (2) Islamic fundamentalism always advocates a minority viewpoint, based on vague scriptural ideals, against the dominant group whose members are perceived as corrupt and hence are accused of having compromised both the independence and the integrity of Islam. (3) Islamic fundamentalism always requires activism and elicits the commitment of an elite to tangible programmatic goals, often in defiance of reason, common sense or even long-range group self-interest and (4) Islamic fundamentalism is a VERY RECENT phenomenon, having developed only during the past decade in response to the radically altered social, economic, political, and military climate of the

wrong to suggest that the typology of our discourse is framed solely by a bad press, malevolent novelists, inadvertent scholars on one side of the docket to whom we then counterpose innocent but aggrieved Muslims resident in the so-called Third world. Precisely because the revolution in communications is world-wide, there are also Muslim actors who participate in the process of information distortion. Numerous Muslims want to relate to the Western media and gain the attention of a Western audience. In writing his defamatory essays, Naipaul had little trouble finding Muslim subjects. Many of them were and are among the leading journalists of their respective countries. They could not control what Naipaul said about them, but they also seldom tried to avoid being engaged by him. Examples could be multiplied but the evident outcome is that Muslims themselves are drawn into the vortex of international newsmaking; their lives, their actions, their futures are projected in accordance with preconceived notions of who they are and what they ought to be about.

It is just such a process—at once obvious yet seldom recognized which in my view explains the recent, remarkable ascent to prominence of Dr. Israr Ahmad. Until two years ago I had never heard of this Punjabi doctor turned Muslim publicist. I was introduced to his name on my arrival in Karachi in summer 1982. The leading Foreign National at USIA, in briefing me, simply noted, "You will witness the Israrization of Pakistani Islam during your stay here". I did, in fact, read much in both the English language and Urdu press about Dr. Israr Ahmad I also arranged to meet his while in Lahore, and he granted me a 2-hour interview in the offices of Markazi Anjuman Khuddam al-Qur'an. Yet the next summer, when I returned to Pakistan for another visit, the same foreign National at USIA announced on my arrival that "Dr. Israr Ahmad was now in eclipse." His movement

themselves and interpreting the structures of their lives according to the canon of objective analysis. Despite their 'good' intent the outcome is often as demeaning and perverting as the stereotype slanders of myopic travelogues. Examples abound but two which cover the present period of American obsession with Iran are (1) R. H. Dekmejian. *The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and search for Islamic Alternatives* (*The Middle East Journal* 34/1, 1980), which never defines basic terms while claiming to set forth a comprehensive EXPLANATION of the latest events in the Muslim world, and (2) Said A. Arjomand, *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (SUNY, 1984). Arjomand's is an edited work but neither he nor any of his contributors bothers to cite which features of Islamic loyalty characterize the groups involved in recent publicized events and distinguish them from either their predecessors or other contemporary Muslims not involved in such events. Like Dekmejian and Arjomand, few social scientific investigators of Islam seem to care about which term is used to describe the firebrands out there, in other parts of the world, operating from cultural as well as religious presuppositions alien to our own. Fanatic, militant, radical, revivalist, extremist, fundamentalist -- all carry similar freightage in the minds of political scientists, sociologists and also anthropologists focusing on Islam. Even when attempts at distinctions do appear (e.g., in F. Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 1981), they are often so bizarre and ill-founded that they confuse rather than illumine the reader/enquirer.

Much more could be said (I have already written two articles and am now preparing a book on the subject), but this much is perhaps adequate to inform our brief examination of Pakistani fundamentalism and the case of Dr. Israr Ahmad, with one further qualification. It would be

structure of knowledge production' (p 145) that moves from the press to government to business to university and back to the press but minimizes the role of ancillary producers. Two groups in particular support the media analysis of Islam (1) covert allies in other branches of the information industry; (2) social scientists intent on theory but careless about language, especially technical language.

Of the two groups, the closest cohorts of media reporters on Islam are quasi-journalists, either ex-journalists who have turned to writing books on Islam, such as G.H. Jansen and E.Mortimer, or touted litterateurs who journey to parts of the Muslim world allegedly in search of truth but actually to find a salable plot narrative, such as J. Rabin and V.S. Naipaul. Naipaul is the worst offender, both because he is taken so seriously as a literary figure and because his distortions of Islam are so enormous. Whether one leafs through *Among the Believers* or the more recent, *Finding the Center: Tow Narratives*, the outcome is the same. Islam is a drug of the spirit and Muslims pray by "Kneeling and bending forward in a private stupor". About that 'observation' set forth in *Finding the Center*, one reviewer wrote :

Moslem—but never Christian or Jewish—prayer is by its nature a 'stupor'. This sort of slur has made (Naipaul) popular with sectors of the American intellectual community who do not ordinarily pay much attention to contemporary novelists brilliant local portraiture (is) touted for purposes of disparagement as an accurate picture of a whole continent that readers, it can be assumed, will never visit.

What Naipaul and others do, whether out of viscera or profit-seeking, social scientists unwittingly do on the presumption that they are depicting Muslims as they see

These questions go to the heart of historical efforts at EXPLANATION. Yet the fact that both dissidents and those whom they oppose are ascriptively Muslim, the fact that Islam is a continuous personal as well as corporate challenge to all those who embrace its ideals, the fact that the regimes attacked may appear to be acting on behalf of a minority, and often a less rigorously Islamic minority, of all those whom they claim to govern in the name of Islam—none of these facts enters into the ledger of instant analysis, called newsmaking, the sole norm of productivity and excellence for modernday journalists.

In the stereotype-prone perception of most Americans, at once reflected and shaped by the media, Iran has become the classic case of a mysterious return to power of Islam. All other motives for Khomeini and his supporters have been reduced to the 'religious' and labeled as 'fundamentalist'. Data from the public sphere activities of other Muslim countries are implicitly and or explicitly approximated to the Iranian model and interpreted as parallel with it, though less broad in scope success: the Mecca mosque incident in Saudi Arabia (late 1979), Sadat's assassination in Cairo (late 1981), and several episodes of the Lebanese Shi'ite revulsion against American military support of the minority, non-Muslim Gemayel regime, including 3 suicide car truck-bomb explosions (April and October 1983; September 1984) and the assassination of the president of AUB (January 1984). All these events have been uniformly labeled as 'terrorist' in inspiration, and their perpetrator, Islamic fundamentalists.

The press, however, could not succeed if it acted alone. The major problem with Edward Said's *Covering Islam* (1981) is his failure to explore fully the more subtle yet no less real connections between knowledge and power in the treatment of Islam: following Foucault, he alludes to 'a

revolution. Compared to the communications revolution just cited, it is questionable whether revolution aptly translates what has happened recently in Iran. To proceed further and label this most recent chapter of Iranian history an Islamic revolution requires a hermeneutical leap beyond the factual realm. We can DESCRIBE the dramatic reappearance from long-term exile of a dissident religious leader. We can INTERPRET how his assumption of political power triggered a process of frantic introspection along a wide spectrum of western/American public opinion, and also amid segments of neighboring Muslim states. But we cannot yet EXPLAIN with confidence what the facts described or the process interpreted means on a broader scale of historical valuation.

It is at least possible that the preoccupation with religion may be a dodge or a diversion in attempting to chart the long-range future of either Iran or its Muslim adversaries. But one consequence of Khomeini's ascent to political power and international prominence is certain: except for the Iranian reversal, there would not have been a panel titled 'Islamic Reform in Pakistan' included within the present conference. It was the case of Iran which launched the obsessive search for motives behind the apparently baffling and liminally frightening quest of some Muslim groups for authenticity in the modern world. Yet the public pacesetters in the western quest for explanation have been the media and their agents. It is they who have focused on political opposition, often resulting in armed conflict and episodic violence (read: terrorism), as the natural consequence of Islamic loyalty. Out of power Muslim dissidents (our resolute enemies), it is suggested, have opted to oppose legitimate secular polities (our would-be friends). But why these Muslims and not others? And why now and not at some other point of crisis in the contemporary world?

note of it only through a dramatic attempt at corporate self-reflection. While international air travel has produced ready access to the most remote areas of the world, it is telecommunications—the teletype, the telephone, the television and now satellite monitors—which have made possible instant reporting from these same remote areas on the most complex subjects. Journalism has surpassed even the grandiloquent claims of its early, 19th century originators. At that time, noted Owen Chadwick (*Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, p. 44), public opinion required symbols. Symbols too abstract for ordinary folk, became reduced to stereotypes, "easily identifiable names or persons or pictures or issues". These stereotypes then became a substitute for understanding, bearing small relation to what really is or what actually happens. In our time journalism not only has reduced reality to packagable stereotypes, it has perpetuated stereotypes as commonsense explanations or, worse, durative insights rather than as makeshift masks of more subtle complexities. The polysemic valence of language has been reduced to the univocal expression of puzzling notions or papable fears.

What has happened at home has also happened abroad. The lens of critical enquiry into linguistic barriers and distorted perceptions could as easily be turned to South America or to East Asia but if we turn it to the Muslim world, then the nature of the problem comes into focus with an immediate temporal and spatial coloration.


Since 1979 academics have been dragged, along with other concerned groups—business, defense, diplomatic—into consideration of uniquely Islamic event that has dwarfed all other events of the past 5 years. That is, of course, the change of government in Iran, heralded by nearly all as a revolution and by many as an Islamic

Arabicity *shari'a* and hence the core of Islamic identity—escapes the probing analytical attempts of even the most sensitive English speakers and writers on Islam.

How can we make sense of Islamic fundamentalism when we cannot even translate Islam into terms that are congruent with the religious experience of Americans? The problem of religion is more than language, but it begins with language and often, with nagging insistence, comes back to language. We are perpetually confronted with the untidy problem of linguistic barriers, verbal isolates latent with manifold realms of interior meaning. We must recognize them before we can try to surmount them in forging a genuine hermeneutics of cross-cultural communication. The problem is similar to the delineation of Universalist vs monadist perspectives in comparative philology (see G. Steiner, *After Babel* pp. 73 - 74). The choices are as similar as they are fraught with consequence : we can either opt for universalism, risking misjudgment and overgeneralization but at least trying to make connections, or else retreat to nomadism, embracing relativism by eschewing all comparisons as false liaisons predoomed to failure and perversion.

When we survey contemporary Islam, the problem of speaking even one word of unassailable truth in English is compounded by the fact that the realm of discourse is no longer limited to university scholars or foreign service officers, however imperfect they have been and continue to be as cross-cultural interpreters. Islam today shares with every other domain of public enquiry the burden of overexposure. It, like others, has been invaded by the legions of 'instant' experts, themselves products and purveyors of the global communications revolution of the past 50 years. So pervasive and accepted is the revolution that we can take

never be dispelled or laid to rest. Tersely put, can one speak of religion anywhere apart from Christianity? There is, for instance, no equivalent to religion in Hebrew, and hence if one follows the popular ethnographic canon of self-ascription, there can be no 'religion' for Jews, and Judaism is dismissable as a mere fiction of Western (read : Christian) historians. (For the counter to this argument see Zwi Werblowsky *Beyond Tradition and Modernity*, P. 55 fn.). Nor does Islam comply with lexicial logic and fit the English language definition of religion. It was not Muslims but Western students of religion for whom defining/describing Islam as religion emerged as a significant issue, in fact, a necessary task. W.C. Smith, in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), brilliantly reviewed the past history of Islam as religion but was too little aware of the extent to which the very presuppositions of his enquiry informed its outcome. A conflict between *iman* (faith) and *din* (religion) is framed, to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu (*Esquisse d'une theorie de la pratique*), within a doxa (i.e., a matrix of what it's possible to consider as legitimate discourse pro or con) which itself reflects historically limited, Protestant Christian antecedents. A more salutary but still idealistic approach is represented by M.G.S.Hodgson. His unsurpassed 3 volume *The Venture of Islam* implies that the functional (meaning encyclopaedic rather than dictionary or lexical equivalent) of religion in Islam is shari'a, which translates as 'law' yet extends to all dimensions of public and private life, political, social as well as religious. Once again we are foiled in our attempt to translate Islam: if *din* is less than 'religion' as understood and experienced by Muslims, *shari'a* is so much more that it eludes the parameters of translation and is better voiced for English speakers as a transliteration, which then has to be interpreted through several words each of them less than the sum total of *shari'a*. In its pristine

 The preliminary question is the recurrent question. It is not religious but linguistic. It focuses on words and their usage. Specifically it is the problem of selecting terminology with precise and equivalent meaning in two different languages. How does one speak of something—whether a process, an institution or a movement—with the intent of transferring meaning from another cultural context to one's own? The very act of translation implies a linguistic, structural and/or historical parallel between two cultures, with the presumption that such a parallel ought to exist even though, in fact, it may not.

While the problem is common to every field of knowledge, it raises special perplexities in dealing with religion. Two years ago Columbia University convened a conference on Human Rights and Religion at Seven Oaks under the able leadership of Dr. Irene Bloom. The issue facing all participants still looms large today: how to relate ethical universalism (implicit in the notion of Human Rights) to cultural relativism (the diverse structures of non-Western societies for most of which Human Rights is an imported, even alien concept). The dilemma of Universalist norms was succinctly voiced by King Hussain of Jordan earlier this year. When he told a TIME magazine interviewer, "Someone's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter." The reverse, of course, is also true. For those who didn't read TIME the same point was made with poignant clarity by John LeCarre in his bestselling novel, *The Little Drummer Girl*, and again by Diane Keaton in the movie portrayal of the novel's heroine/victim, Charlie.

Defining universals would seem to be easier for religions than for political movements, and yet the very word/concept 'religion' contains an ambiguity that may

TRANSLATION, THE MEDIA, AND ISLAM PAKISTANI FUNDAMENTALISM AS PROPOUNDED BY DR. ISRAR AHMAD

———— Prof. Bruce Lawrence

The following article by Prof. Bruce Lawrence is a very brief, yet very deep and perceptive, analysis of Dr. Israr Ahmad's views on Islam and its revival in the social milieu of today. The first part of the article contains highly illuminating points regarding cross-cultural transference of concepts. He rightly observes that each civilization and religious tradition tends to revolve around meaningful concepts of a profound nature which give them their distinctive character. Being an integral and intimate part of its particular scripture and life-world, such concepts present members of other civilizations with great difficulties in the way of achieving a correct understanding and appreciation of them. Anything lying outside one's own experience cannot be comprehended in its true dimensions. Verbalization runs up against a powerful barrier. It is impossible to find words in other languages that come close to the fullness of meaning conveyed by the original term. I would nevertheless contend that it should not be altogether impossible to interpret important linguistic phenomena sensibly and without too great a distortion of their conceptual power.

Prof. Bruce Lawrence had a long interview with Dr. Israr Ahmad in 1982 at Quran Academy Lahore and he very correctly records the short spell of media popularity which he enjoyed through his Al-Huda TV programme during Zia's regime. The readers of this article will appreciate as to how deep and intimate knowledge these foreign experts have of our 'domestic' events and socio-political developments. Prof. Bruce Lawrence was at that time associated with Duke University of Durham (North Carolina) and had presented this paper at a seminar at Columbia University (New York)

———— Dr. Absar Ahmad