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Editorial Address

Religious studies is a notoriously diverse discipline. This diversity does not just include the complexity of the world's religions and the multifarious phenomena contained within them, but more broadly encompasses the manifold sets of methods employed to study these phenomena. This diversity both produces and includes second-order reflections, especially those focused on comprehending religion as a phenomenon and religious studies as a discipline adequate to its study. While this diversity is most prominently seen in the range of topics covered between religions and their practices and beliefs, it can also be seen within singular religions or religious phenomena themselves. It is probably simpler to say what religious studies is not than to enumerate all that is included within it. This gives religious studies a unique character within the academy, if only for its constant preoccupation for self-understanding as a field of study. In this spirit, *Arc* is proud to present the following series of articles, as they both embrace and reflect the diverse character of religious studies as it is known and practiced in the academy today.

First is Daniel Salas from McGill University, whose article, "Discontinuities in the Vision of Islam Between Medieval France and Castile: A Comparison Between *Les Chétifs* and its Castilian Translation," through two translations of a single text, *Les Chétifs*, examines the diverse views of Islam that existed in a single cultural milieu during the Crusades. This is followed by Hiruni Nathasha Fernando's "Who Infected Whom? – Religio-Political Discourse Surrounding Sri Lanka's Pandemic Governance," which tracks the role that religious rhetoric played in the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. Then we have Ellen Dobrowolski's article, "Honouring All of Our Relations: Centering Relationality in the Study of Indigenous

Religious Traditions," which uses Sara Riel – sister of Louis Riel – to interrogate misapplied Western categories used in the study of religion and propose new ones rooted in Indigenous concepts and histories. Though originally slated to appear in Volume 51, Dobrowolski's piece has found a fitting home here: its careful questioning of the categories we bring to the study of religion speaks directly to the theme of this volume, and we are delighted to be able to feature such a strong contribution. The last article, "Qur'anic Phenomenology: How Can the Researcher Reach the Real Topic?," by Dr. Seyed Mohammad Houshisadat uses and re-works phenomenology to offer a uniquely Islamic answer to the fundamental problem of identifying and working with a research topic. As an Assistant Professor in Middle East & Islamic Studies at the University of Tehran and a Post-Doctoral Visiting Professor in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, Dr. Houshisadat is well-situated to work with materials from both Islamic and Western thought.

Following the articles, this volume also features a selection of book reviews, curated by our Book Review Editor, Ana de Souza. As ever, the reviews survey recent scholarship from across the study of religion, spanning a range of traditions, periods, and methodological approaches. In this sense, they extend the volume's broader theme: taken together, they offer a snapshot of the many ways in which religion is currently being studied, and of the conversations presently shaping the field. We are grateful to our reviewers for their careful and generous engagement with these works, and to the authors and publishers who made them available for review.

We trust you will find the articles and book reviews valuable contributions. The editorial team also wants to thank Elyse MacLeod for her advice, skills, and patience in getting us up to speed in all the aspects of editing and publishing. We also want to thank her and Dr. Amanda Rosini for their guidance and stewardship as they grew *Arc*. As the faculty advisor, we would also like to thank Prof. Gerbern Oegema for

his guidance. We of course would like to enthusiastically and gratefully thank the School of Religious Studies for their continued institutional support of *Arc*.

We thank you for your continued interest in *Arc*,

– Isabelle Lindsay, Adam Smith & Ana de Souza

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Discontinuities in the Vision of Islam Between Medieval France and Castile: A Comparison Between *Les Chétifs* and its Castilian Translation

Daniel Salas, *McGill University*

Classical historiography defines the Crusades as the military campaigns launched by Western Christians powers to conquer Muslim territory between the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The historical term, though, is still entangled to its current semantical connotations: namely, as a confrontation of two distinct blocs, a joined and often zealous effort towards a common enemy, and ultimately a clash of civilisations.[1] When examined closely, the events and evidence of the period demand nuanced approaches on the monolithic and unchanging perception of Christianity or Islam.

The following article examines the differing perspectives and understandings of Islam held by two related texts, each representing specific layers of French and Castilian societies in the times of Crusades. A careful and detailed comparison of the twelfth century French epic *Les Chétifs* and its late thirteenth-century Castilian version reveals significant interpolations and glosses that upset the notion of a faithful medieval translation. The textual variations here identified and discussed highlight problematic differences in the understanding of certain aspects of Islamic worship and theology from the perspective of late medieval French and Castilian texts, making clear that the alleged common enemy

1. Gary Dickson, Thomas F. Madden. "Crusade as Metaphor" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 9, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/event/Crusades/Crusade-as-metaphor

of both Christian societies is not identical. After a thorough social context of the production of the Castillian manuscript, this paper approaches this problem with a word-for-word comparison of certain excerpts from both texts, and then proceeds to interpret their differences within the literary and historical background of production. This paper is strongly inclined towards the study of the Hispanic text, as it focuses on the variations found in the unedited and oldest copy of the Castilian version.[2] However, these variations are examined before a scrupulous reading of the French text and are solely dedicated to Islamic references.

Texts and Contexts: *Les Chétifs* in Castilian

Around the twelfth century, the French epic genre was limited to poems that sang the deeds of the First Crusade and depicted the relations between Christians and Muslims, both historical and imaginary.[3] The manuscript copies we have today mostly date to the following century, and consequently, we only know them through latter, heavily interpolated, versions. The main text of this article, *Les Chétifs,* is a *chanson de geste* – a song of heroic deeds – positioned between two epic narratives that recount the besiege and capture of Seljuk Antioch in 1098 and the conquest of Jerusalem the next year.[4] As opposed to these two mostly historical accounts, *Les Chétifs* is inspired by historical events but it is

2. The manuscript at the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (BNE) with the reference mss/1920, dating from the late 14th or early 15th centuries, is the oldest copy we have of the Castilian translation of *Les Chétifs*. It remains unedited and it is digitized. http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000045755

3. Jean Subrenat, "*Les Chétifs et l'idée de croisade" in Plaist vos oïr bone cançon vallant? Mélanges offerts à François Suard* ed. Dominique Boutet, Marie-Madeleine Castellani, Françoise Ferrand and Aimé Petit, (Lille: Université Charles de Gaulle-Lille 3, 1999), 2:879-91; Alexandre Winkler, *"La «* littérature des croisades » existe-t-elle ?", *Le Moyen Age* 114, no. 3 (2009), 603–18. https://doi.org/10.3917/rma.143.0603

4. All copies of the poem are found between two other epic titles: *La Chanson d'Antioche* and the *Conquête de Jérusalem*. Keith Busby, *Codex et Contexte : Lire la littérature médiévale française dans les manuscrits* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022), 228.

composed of entirely fictional actions and geography.[5] It follows a group of pilgrims supposedly taken prisoner during the Battle of Civetot in 1096, led by Peter the Hermit. Three of these captives (*chétifs*) each appear in an episode where they assist the Muslim King of Oliferne, Corbaran, who captures and later releases them thanks to their accomplishments in duels, fighting a dragon and liberating a toddler from a furious ape.[6] Why, then, was the Castilian version of this fanciful text sponsored by the king Sancho IV in the late 13th century? And why was it included in the compilation and translation of prose historical materials on the Crusades today known under the title of *Gran Conquista de Ultramar* (henceforth *GCU*)?[7]

The period immediately prior to Sancho IV marks a turning point in the production of Castilian and, to a significant extent, European historiography. The cultural blossoming under the reign of his father and political rival, Alfonso X – called "The Learned" for his resolute practice of science, poetry, and especially history – is exceptionally erudite and represents a huge effort in the collection of manuscript sources intended to put together new historic material.[8] This cultural production should be considered as both a necessary framework for the intellectual pursuits of Sancho, the new king, and as a point of inflection in order to distinguish his own achievements from his father's legacy. Sancho's historical project, thus, becomes the banner of an independent political enterprise that opposed his father's works, but it is also indebted to Alphonso's

5. "*Les Chétifs* is set against an oriental background in which geographical reality shares a common frontier with poetic imagination, and in many cases it is hard to decide on which side of that frontier the action takes place." Geoffrey Myers, *Les Chétifs,* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981), xxii.

6. *Chétif* means captive, prisoner in old French.

7. It can be translated as *Great Conquest Overseas*. Other materials include the translation of *La Chanson d'Antioche*, the *Conquête de Jérusalem,* the *Eracles* (a vernacular version and continuation of William of Tyre's *Historia*), a Castilian version of the Swan Knight legend, and other Carolingian narratives. Franciso Bautista, "La composición de la *Gran Conquista de Ultramar*", *Revista de literatura medieval* 17, (2005): 34.

8. Kirstin Kennedy, *Alfonso X of Castile-León: Royal Patronage, Self-Promotion and Manuscripts in Thirteenth-Century Spain* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 15; Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980), 110.

models and methods for writing history. I propose that these convergences and divergences with the immediately preceding tradition will shape the translation of *Les Chétifs* and introduce potential discontinuities with its French source, particularly concerning its representation of Islam.

Sancho's tumultuous relationship with his father emerged in the wake of a disagreement over the right to the crown. He rebelled in 1282, his father disinherited him, and the two men would remain permanently estranged. Furthermore, Sancho viewed with disdain the failure of his father's legal and fiscal reforms, as well as the general disappointment that had accompanied a costly and fruitless aspiration to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. During this period, the failures of the Crusaders in the Holy Land intertwined with Spanish offensives against the Marinid dynasty and the Nasrids of Granada, but the latter experienced a slowdown under Alfonso, who preferred a stable border equivalent to a truce rather than the significant expenses of war against the Muslim kingdoms. Ultimately, Sancho antagonized his father on matters of political ambition and favoured a continuation of the southern conquests of the peninsula.[9]

In this line of thought, several authors support the idea that two key elements clearly distinguish Sancho's historical project from that of his predecessor.[10] First, the questioning of the enterprise of scientific renewal (i.e. astrology) promoted by Alfonso through Arab knowledge, prompted Sancho to pursue an opposite direction and develop a pronounced

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9. Daniel Baloup, "Granada and Castile: A Long Conflict," in *The Nasrid Kingdom of Granada between East and West*, ed. Adela Fábregas (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), 444.
10. Olga Pisnitchenko, "Molinismo - modelo cultural na corte de Sancho IV (1284-1295). Em busca de uma nova representação social" *Roda da Fortuna* 8, no. 2 (2019): 110; Robert, Sylvie. "La translation du *Libro del Tesoro de Brunet Latin au cœur des enjeux culturels et politiques sous Sanche IV.» e-Spania. Revue interdisciplinaire d'études hispaniques médiévales et modernes 36 (2020).* https://doi.org/104000/e-spania.35596; Enrico Boccaccini, *Reflecting Mirrors, East and West: Transcultural Comparisons of Advice Literature for Rulers (8th-13th Century),* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 244; Carlos Alvar, Traducciones y traductores: materiales para una historia de la traducción en Castilla durante la Edad Media. (Alcalá de Henares: Centro Estudios Cervantinos, 2010), 38.

inclination toward French sources.[11] Secondly, a turn towards an orthodox religious discourse that subordinated knowledge to piety, which brought political discourse closer to preaching, and which claimed religious war against Islam as praiseworthy.[12] Thus, the main sources used by Sancho in his historical enterprise had a trans-Pyrenean origin and were imbued with a crusading spirit of military mobilization to the Holy Land. This spirit is displayed by already legendary figures like Godfrey of Bouillon – central to the deep structure of the *GCU* – and Louis IX, who was on the verge of canonization.[13]

At the same time, from a practical standpoint, it was more than understandable that Sancho would have used the rich materials gathered throughout the Learned King's reign, as well as the methods used for translation and book composition by his scholars, either to continue his works, with his own stamp, or to undertake new projects. What were these methods and materials? In the Iberian thirteenth century, the norm was that chronicles and histories had a universal and moralizing vocation.[14] They were also constructed through legendary and saintly figures as constitutive elements of the heritage of ancient knowledge and power.[15] Moreover, the

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11. French manuscripts in the 13th century, mostly produced in universities, were models of authority and circulated vigorously with students from the Iberian Peninsula who studied in Paris and had, often, important connections with local courts. William J. Courtenay, "Spanish and Portuguese Scholars at the University of Paris in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: The Exchange of Ideas and Texts," in *Medieval Iberia: Changing Societies and Cultures in Contact and Transition*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Ray Harris-Northall, (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007), 110–19; Chiara Ruzzier, "Les manuscrits de la Bible au XIIIe siècle: quelques aspects de la réception du modèle parisien dans l'Europe méridionale," in *Medieval Europe in Motion: The Circulation of Artists, ed. M.A. Bilotta, (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2018), 288.* It must be acknowledged that Alphonse also used French sources, specially those related to the Ancient world.

12. The influence of the ecclesiastical discourse and the figure of Bernard Clarivaux was a major reason for the opposing relation towards Islamic culture and knowledge. Alvar, *Traducciones y traductores,* 38.

13. Bautista, "La composición," 51.

14. Juan Carlos Conde, "Para una teoría de la historiografía de ámbito universal en la Edad Media" in *Teoría y práctica de la historiografía hispánica medieval,* ed. Aengus Ward (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2000), 167.

15. Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 26, 63.

sources from which these stories were drawn, whether Latin or vernacular, were essentially written,[16] diverse in origin and content, and subject to changes and interpolations with clear political biases.[17] Regarding the state of translation practices, the time was imbued with an encyclopaedic atmosphere influenced by the revival of vernacular languages from the previous century, which created a blurred boundary between the task of the translator, author, glossator, and interpreter. This was not only regarding the translation of religious material, as was customary, but also to the translation of historiography.[18]

This historical and intellectual overview allows me to explain why an epic poem like *Les Chétifs* could be considered a reliable source and part of the compilation of historical materials for Sancho IV. Even if it was an authoritative source, the manuscript transmission context of the time does not exclude politically motivated interventions on the part of the translator due to the complex political panorama of the Crusades. Interestingly enough, although *Les Chétifs* can be considered as an intermediate narrative between two historically inspired poems, in political terms, there is nothing at stake for Sancho's ambitions within the poem's imaginary events and characters. Yet, the glosses and interpolations by Castilian hands intervene at points where there are differences regarding Islamic religion. This situation further motivates the study of the variations between the French *Les Chétifs* and its Castilian version.

Les Chétifs and its Translation Face-to-Face

The comparison between *Les Chétifs* and its Castilian translation is not unprecedented. As early as 1940, Suzanne Duparc-Quioc noted that

16. The relation of most medieval historians to historical reality was solely textual. Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique,* 115; Conde, "Para una teoría", 185.

17. Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, "Variación en el modelo historiográfico alfonsí en el siglo XIII : Las versiones de la Estoria de España," in *La historia alfonsí: el modelo y sus destinos (siglos xiii-xv)*, ed. Georges Martin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2000), 44. https://doi.org/104000/books.cvz.2175.

18. Alvar, *Traducciones y traductores,* 27-39.

many of the sources of the GCU, including *Les Chétifs*, "were reproduced with scrupulous fidelity" and that, in general, "we can be sure of the compiler's fidelity"[19]. Later, Geoffrey Myers did not hesitate to consult the translation of the poem for his own critical edition of *Les Chétifs*, he estimated that "it is nearly a straight translation of the French verse, although the redactor does add, alter, and comment now and again,"[20] but no significant explanations are further developed. Finally, Carol Sweetenham, the English translator of *Les Chétifs*, considers that the *GCU* "translates the B.n. fr 12558 version virtually word for word"[21]. In all cases, scholars focus on the French tradition and relegate the Spanish text to a secondary position, thus overlooking its variants.

Francisco Bautista is the only scholar who, focusing on the Castilian testimonies of the *Les Chétifs* translation, makes a partial comparison between the manuscript, the printed version of 1503[22], and the French poem. He asserts that although there are some additions, comments, and notable differences[23]– which are not systematically studied – "it is a translation very close to the original French"[24]. Bautista transcribes the last three folios of the manuscript in parallel with the printed version and the critical edition of the poem. The present article introduces unprecedented variations of the last 20 folios of the Castilian unedited manuscript in parallel to its correspondent source.

As mentioned, the narrative of *Les chétifs* begins where the account of the capture of Antioch ends. After losing the battle, Corbaran, the king of Oliferne, retreats to Sormasane, the capital of his lord, the Sultan of Persia, to report that the Sultan's son, Brohadas, who was killed in the battle, has been brought back for burial. Upon Corbaran's arrival in the

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19. Suzanne Duparc Quioc, "La Chanson de Jérusalem et la *Gran Conquista de Ultramar*," Romania 66, no. 261 (1940): 323.
20. Myers, *Les Chétifs*, xiv.
21. Carol Sweetenham, *The Chanson des Chétifs and Chanson de Jérusalem: Completing the Central Trilogy of the Old French Crusade cycle* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 22.
22. Louis Cooper, *La gran conquista de Ultramar* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1979)
23. Bautista, "La composición", 41.
24. Bautista, "La composición", 35.

kingdom, the Muslims are celebrating the feast of John the Baptist. The French poem reads: "all the Turks of Coroscane had assembled there to celebrate in style the feast of st John, whom they held in great honour."[25]

In contrast, the Castilian version reads: "They gathered there [in Sormasane] with many people from all parts to honour the feast of Saint John the Baptist, which they call *alhanzara*, which they make very rich and with very great devotion, because the Moors [were] very happy with the feast of Saint John the Baptist, and they praised it a lot."[26]

What is the relevance of the Castilian gloss here? Both the poem and its translation refer to the festivities associated with the summer solstice. With respect to feast of Saint John itself, although originally pagan, it was celebrated around the solstice and was established in both the Eastern and Western Christian worlds as early as the fourth century. It is difficult to determine exactly to what oriental scenario does the anonymous author of *Les chétifs* refer. It could be a transposition of Saint John's feast into the Muslim world that are here represented (in this case, the Seljuks of the eleventh century), which would not be surprising within the context of epic poetry, as we will see. Or perhaps it is an indication of solstice celebrations carried out by Muslims (or Eastern Christians) during the time of the First Crusade. Paradoxically, in comparison to the reference in *Les Chétifs*, the Spanish gloss can be traced and explained more easily. Indeed, the mention of *alhanzara* in the context of the thirteenth or fourteenth century in the Iberian Peninsula is quite understandable:

Since the ninth century, in the Islamic-dominated Peninsula, the popular Mozarabic feast of the solstice and the courtly traditions

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25. Sweetenham, *Chanson des Chétifs, 68.* Cf. the original verses 58-60 *: "De Corocane i furent tot li Turc assanblé / Por une rice feste que il ont celebré. / Del baron saint Jehan, qu'il ont molt honeré."* (Myers, *Les Chétifs*, 4).

26. All transcriptions and translations from the Castilian manuscript are my own. I opted for a literal translation in order to conduct a close reading. "Se ayuntaron y con muchas gentes de todas partes para onrrar la fiesta de Sant Johan Bautista a que ellos dizen alhanzara, que la fazen ellos muy rrica et con muy grant devoçion, ca los moros mucho sse alegran estonçes con la fiesta de Sant Johan Bautista et mucho la onrravan." (BNE 1920 fol. Fol. 185 va) The manuscript reads "albacantara", most probably a copy mistake for "Alhanzara" found in the printed version of 1503. Cf. Cooper, *La gran conquista,* 2:299.

brought from the East were assimilated into the feast of al-ʿ*anṣara*[27] or al-*mahraǧān* in Al-Andalus.[28] Several Arabic and Spanish sources testify to the traditions and festivities in honour of John the Baptist shared by members of the three religions that, for centuries, took place in Al-Andalus during the month of June. [29] However, what is notable is that, even at the time of the translation of *Les Chétifs*, the addition of the word *alhanzara* is still the subject of a gloss of encyclopaedic nature. The author thus needed to clarify a well-established fact that might have caused confusion among the Castilian noble circles of the thirteenth century to whom this translation was intended: the feast of the day of Saint John is well and truly the *al-*ʿ*anṣara*. This confirms not only that Muslim festivities were not strange to readers as they were celebrated in the name of John the Baptist with "the greatest devotion," but also, that Islamic references in the original French are to be taken with great care in the Castilian version.

Later in the narration, a Muslim character preaches during the burial ceremony of the Sultan's son: "The apostolic Caliph began a sermon: — Let anyone who already has ten wives give some thought to procreating, that is how we will increase our numbers to fight the Christians. The children who result will be a redoubtable force."[30] The Castilian version, on the other hand, prefers the following reading: "An *alfaje*, so they call their clergymen, and [indeed] he was one of their most important clergymen as well as a bishop of their law, preached to them and told them that those

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27. I follow *Arabica*'s transliteration norms of Arabic.

28. The Mozarabs were the Arabic speaking Christians of Al-Andalus (Muslim ruled Iberia).

29. S. G. Armistead, J. H. Silverman, "La Sanjuanada: ¿huellas de Una Ḫar a Mozárabe En La Tradición Actual*?" Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 18, no. 3 (1965): 436–43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40297770; Villagra, Mabel. "Celebrar San Juan En Al-Andalus: De La 'Ansara a Los Moriscos." *Historia y arabismo*, June 24, 2015. https://historiayarabismo.wixsite.com/recreahistoria/single-post/2015/06/24/CELEBRAR-SAN-JUAN-EN-ALANDALUS-DE-LA-ANSARA-A-LOS-MORISCOS

30. Sweetenham, *Chanson des Chétifs,* 70. Original verses 149-154 read "L'apostoiles Califes conmence a sermoner: / 'Cil qui a or .X. femes, si penst de l'engenrer, / Si croistera nos pules por crestïens mater; / Li enfant qui venront feront molt a douter, / Des Frans nos vengeront, nel vos quier a celer, / De le gent maleoite qui no loi velt fauser.'" (Myers, *Les Chétifs*, 6)

who had wives should work hard to have many children to avenge their dead."[31]

The religious figure in question is referred to as the "apostolic caliph" in the French poem; an amalgam of Muslim (caliph) and Christian (apostolic) terms intended to designate a high-level priest. While even in the early centuries of Islam's history, the responsibility for guiding the religious community fell, in theory, to the caliph, the association in the poem of a caliph with a high-ranking priest is rather linked to a poetic practice of the French epic, which consisted in describing a strange and exotic Muslim world in terms of a local and known reality that will repeat in further examples.[32]

This is not the case with the Castilian version. The translator decides to use *alfaje*, a rare term and an old version of *faqīh*[33] (a scholar of Islamic law) which corresponds to the translator's subsequent gloss: identifying *alfaje* as a clergyman and a "bishop of their law." This gesture does not only reject definitively the term caliph in the poem, and its uncanny association with "apostolic," but interprets the role of the preacher character, reframing it in a more credible Islamic context for a Castilian reader.

Finally, the omission of the exaggerated number of wives of the Muslim audience corresponds both to a discrepancy between the generic decorum of Castilian historiography and the minstrel hyperbole and

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31. "Estonçe un alfaje que dizen por su clérigo ellos et era uno de los sus clérigos mayores así como obispo de la su ley et predicóles et díxoles desta guisa que aquellos que avíen mujeres que se trabajasen de fazer muchos fijos que vengasen los sus muertos." (BNE 1920 fol. Fol. 187ra)

32. Gerald Herman, "Some functions of Saracen names in Old French Epic Poetry." *Romance Notes* 11, no. 2 (1969): 430-3. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43800568; William Wistar Comfort, "The Literary Rôle of the Saracens in the French Epic." *PMLA* 55, no. 3 (1940): 628. https://doi.org/10.2307/458731.

33. *Diccionario histórico de la Lengua Española* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1933) 1:420,2. Note that the word "al-faqui" is registered in 16th century spanish as "clergyman or scholar, clergyman of ecclesiastical order", see Fray Pedro de Alcalá, *Vocabulista arávigo en letra castellana. En Arte para ligeramente saber la lengua aráviga*. (Granada: Juan Varela, 1505), 101.

comedy. [34] Indeed, in the French *chanson de geste* the Muslim character was most of the times represented as a lustful caricature that could have dozens of wives, and was a usual protagonists of comic relief.[35] In contrast, the Castilian version must be understood as a truthful account and transmitted in all seriousness as a historical account commissioned by the king.

Like the example of the *alhanzara* festival, and others we'll mention later, the variation in the translation of a French opting for "apostolic Caliph" (accompanied by a gloss) shows that the translator is systematically on his guard when faced with a word linked to the Muslim world. The reason for this? At the time of the translation, between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula had already had contacts of all kinds with the various Muslim powers that had succeeded one another for half a millennium.[36] In the time of Sancho IV, as mentioned above, although there was an intentional dismissal of Arab sources and sciences, the knowledge and rapport that the Spaniards had of Muslim society was far more tangible and had a firmer basis than that of the French, especially in the context of an epic crusade cycle tradition.

Nonetheless, is worth to note that the translator's work follows broadly the narration of the poem despite the contradictions with the factual Iberian reality. Variations and glosses, in this case, do not seek to resolve these disagreements; they indicate hesitation and manifest the translator's effort to present a text and context that are comprehensible to the trans-Pyrenean audience.

The best example proving this is found in one of the major discrepancies in the Castilian translation of *Les Chétifs*. It involves the confrontation with the literary pantheon of fictional gods inherited from the earliest French epic cycle of the late eleventh century. The *Chanson*

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34. See, for instance, the erasure of insults of verses 203,1534 and 3781 and sexual remarks of verse 649.
35. Comfort, "The Literary Rôle", 636; Herman, "Some functions", 428.
36. Baloup, "Granada and Castile", 441.

de Roland, the eldest and most prominent vernacular *chanson de geste* in France, inaugurates a curious *topos* among the epic tradition according to which the Muslim enemy worships a series of deities who, alongside Muhammad (treated as a pagan god) constitute a polytheistic pantheon that includes names such as: Tervagant, Apollin, Cahu, Jupin, Baraton, Lucifer, Fabur, Tartarin, and many others.[37] Often of disputed origin and etymology, these pagan deities are invoked by Muslim characters or mentioned by narrators in relation to the worship of their enemies which, according to the poetic logic, must be diametrically opposed to Christian faith, as if it were the reversed and distorted image of a mirror.

In *Les Chétifs*, the first four names from the list mentioned above, including Muhammad, are scattered among the interventions and curses of the antagonistic characters. Given the strange and unprecedented nature of this topos in the Castilian context of the thirteenth century, the translator is clearly confused and unsettled by this fictitious pantheon. Indeed, medieval Iberian Christian societies had coexisted with Islam for a long time, which was not the case of the French society. By the time of the translation in the court of Sancho IV, as stated before, at least four centuries of battles, truces, and population movements had occurred in the Iberian Peninsula between Christians and Muslims. This is not comparable with the legendary memories of the battle of Tours between the Umayyad and Frankish troops in 732, or even with the far events of the first Crusade that inspired those of the respective epic cycle. Indeed, the "Saracen" was a distant and eerie character for the public of the *chanson de geste*, but a rivalling neighbour for the historical readers of the Castilian court.

When faced with the poem, the translator finds that this epic and foreign view of Islam casts doubt on a more immediate experience of Iberian society with Muslim powers and populations. Regarding the plot

37. Marcel Françon, " Tervagant," *Revue Internationale d'Onomastique* 5, no. 2, juin (1953) :156. https://www.persee.fr/doc/rio_0048-8151_1953_num_5_2_1336; Francesco Montorsi, *Mémoire des anciens. Traces littéraires de l'Antiquité aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Genève : Droz, 2022), 70-1.

of *Les Chétifs*, the fictional god "Tervagant" appears several times in the first stanzas of the poem. The Castilian version utterly omits the name of the deity when translating the verses 33 and 195 (cf. fol. 184 vb and 187 va, respectively) out of puzzlement or convenience. Between these omissions, the translator encounters again with the obscure name twice and interprets it in two different ways. The first iteration comes up during the burial of the son of the Sultan of Persia, where there is a detailed description of the ceremony, the embalming and the grief of the circumstance: "They had the body anointed with very rich unguent and wrapped up in a golden shroud; then they had it carried to the place right in front of Tervagant. Had you been there you could have seen how the incense-burners smoked [...] They had the body laid to rest in front of Tervagant and had a superbly rich tomb cast for it in gold and silver."[38]

The Castilian version reads: "They carried him and anointed him with an anointing which they called balsam [...] They took him to a very honoured mosque which was in a place they called Corravava [sic] and they lit many censers and candles, and held a service according to the law of Muhammad and gave great offerings for his soul in display of their wealth."[39]

The more prominent elements of the narrative are present in the Castilian version: the sadness of the occasion, the singular embalming, the offerings, and the candles. However, there is an interpretation of the unknown elements from the context of the plot. Firstly, the French word *dïaspre* (golden shroud) is mistaken for a balm; secondly and most importantly, the allusion to Tervagant, translated here as "Corravava,"

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38. Sweetenham, *Chanson des Chétifs,* 69. Cf. verses 138-48 "De molt rice ongement fisent le cors laver, / En .I. dïaspre a or l'ont fait enbausemer; / Tres devant Tervagan ont fait le cors porter. / La peüssiés veïr encensiers enbraser, / Candelabres et cierges et lanpes alumer [...] Tres devant Tervagan font le cors enterrer, [147] Molt rice sepulture d'or et d'argent fonder." (Myers, *Les Chétifs*, 5-6)

39. "Et desí tomaronle et levaronle muy unçiado con la unción que dizen bálsamo [...] et levaronle a una su mezquita muy onrada que era en un logar a que ellos llamavan Corrvava (sic) et fizieron muchos ensensarios et candelarios [...] et fizieron por el sus ofiçios segunt la su ley de Mahomat et dieron grandes ofrendas por su alma tantas que mostraron un grant aver..." (BNE 1920 fol. Fol. 186 vb)

suddenly becomes a toponym ("in a place they called…"). The translator, based on the ritual context, deduces that the scene takes place in a mosque, which is nowhere to be found in the poem. As a result of the reiteration of the strange term the translator is compelled to gloss the text of his source to explain his public about an unknown and disturbing element.

Further in the poem, a Muslim character, Calabre the mother of Corbaran, swears by Tervagant when referring to the state of the war prisoners (i.e. the characters on whom the narration is built): "—That is of no concern to me, said Calabra. In the name of my god Tervagant, bring them over there for me in front of Corbaran. He wants to talk to them and tell them what he wants."[40] However, the translation reads: "For the sake of the god Çervagan [sic], I do not care if they cry. And here the story calls Çervangan [sic] to a highly venerated temple of a god they worshipped and believed to be holy and powerful. Then the queen commanded the warden to take the captives and bring them to the palace so his son could speak with them."[41]

The gloss here is clear, the name of the divinity, now closer to the original name, becomes the name of a temple that shelters a god. Although the previous semantic similarity to a toponym is maintained to preserve narrative continuity, the translator's confusion is evident in the textual variations with the French poem and, ultimately, does not offer a logical or uniform solution. One can only emphasize the hesitation of the translator when confronted to this pantheon of epic tradition. Like the translator himself, the Castilian readers would likely be disoriented by these deities and the context of their apparition.

Objectively the effect of this *topos* discredits the Muslim religion

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40. Sweetenham, *Chanson des Chétifs*, 74. Verses 337-40 read : "Ne m'en caut! dist Calabre, Par mon deu Tervagant, / Menés les [moi] lasus, tres devant Corbarant, / K'il velt parler a eus et dire son sanblant." (Myers, *Les Chétifs*, 10).

41. "Por el Dios Çervagan non me ynchal de su llorar pues así es. Et Çervangan llama aquí la estoria a un su templo que preçiavan ellos muncho de un su dios que adoraban ellos a quien teníen ellos por muy santo et muy poderoso, et después d'esto mandó la reina al carçelero que tomase los cativos et que los levase suso al palacio a su fijo que quiere fablar con ellos." (BNE 1920 fol. Fol. 190 ra-b)

validly and effectively both in the French and Castilian contexts. That is to say, hostility toward Islamic civilization was a common theme in the literary context of the *Chétifs'* epic cycle, as well as in the context of the Castilian translation within Sancho's court.[42] However, the translator resorts to omissions, deliberately creates glosses, and adaptations, which are signs of the tension between fidelity to the source and the clarity of the translated text; tension which can be extrapolated to the prestige of the literary French heritage and the social Iberian reality that distrusts it.

Conclusion

These examples demonstrate that in the Castilian translation of *Les Chétifs*, there is also a certain appropriation of the original text. Initially, it is undeniable that a narrative poem of fictional nature can, consistent with the textual transmission context of the time, become a reliable historical source. However, alongside the linguistic translation process, there is an effort by the translator to clarify and update the content of this source according to the reality of the contemporary audience.

In the case of the portrayal of certain elements of Muslim civilization by the French epic tradition transmitted in *Les Chétifs*, it is clear that there is a discontinuity between the experiences and knowledge of Iberian societies, specifically Castilian society of the thirteenth century. Such discontinuity is expressed in the variations, glosses, interpolations, and hesitations observed when comparing both texts in the light of social context.

The examples provided do not represent, as one might initially think, a theological reaction between the source and the translator, who as we saw functions as both glossator and interpreter. Rather, these variations

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42. The main driving force of the 13th century rivalry with Granada of several European powers was the control of Gibraltar, see Baloup, "Granada and Castile", 444. Although Sancho places himself in the mythology of the first Crusade by means of Godefroi de Bouillon's legendary ancestor: the Knight of the Swan (cf. note 12), his main military objective is the predominance of maritime commerce by controlling the strait.

reflect a tension between the authority of the written source within the context of medieval European historiography (where encyclopedism, glosses, and compilation techniques are fundamental); and the social reality context of thirteenth century Castile, characterized by turbulent politics and a conflicted and ambiguous relationship with the Muslim enemy.

On a broader spectrum, the inherent tension in the translation task and the variations it exemplifies are textual evidence of the discontinuity between France and Castile when it comes to the understanding of Muslim civilization during the time of Crusades. Although the political ambitions of both societies converged in the idea of an armed uprising against the Muslim rival, this does not mean they had the same vision or regard for Muslim society, and specifically for Islam. This Muslim *other* cannot be understood as a singular entity in contrast to a European, Western, and even less Christian antagonist. In the context of the Crusades, this *other* must be understood as changing, situational, and constructed in tension between an authoritative manuscript culture and a given social reality.

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Who Infected Whom? - Religio-Political Discourse Surrounding Sri Lanka's Pandemic Governance

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Sri Lanka's response to the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during a period of security challenges, political instability, and economic turmoil. The first case of COVID-19 in the country was contracted by a Chinese female national and was reported on January 27, 2020.[1] The individual was treated at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases in Angoda, Sri Lanka; this made local and global headlines, as the Health Minister (Pavithradevi Wanniarachchi) at the time sent her back to China with a kiss. Soon after, the same Health Minister made headlines for promoting a 'syrup' for treating COVID-19 and subsequently contracted the virus herself.[2] According to media reports, the syrup promoted by the Health Minister was a concoction of honey, nutmeg, spices, and ginger juice: a home remedy with no scientific basis as an effective countermeasure against COVID-19.[3] From the outset, it was clear that the government's response to COVID-19 included a mix of what claimed to be

1. Meera Srinivasan, "Chinese Tourist in Sri Lanka Tests Positive for Coronavirus," *The Hindu*, January 28, 2020, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/chinese-tourist-in-sri-lanka-tests-positive-for-coronavirus/article30670031.ece.
2. BBC, "Sri Lanka Minister Who Promoted 'Covid Syrup' Tests Positive," January 23, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55780425.
3. , "Sri Lanka Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi, Who Drank Sorcerer's Virus Syrup, Tests Positive," *The Standard*, January 23, 2021, https://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/6/164081/Sri-Lanka-minister-Pavithra-Wanniarachchi,-who-drank-sorcerer's-syrup-for-virus-positive.

scientifically grounded measures and unverified, non-scientific remedies.

Following the report of the first local case, the government took swift action to control the spread of the virus utilizing the police and the military. Between 2020 and 2021, the military operated 233 quarantine facilities island-wide and put in place a vaccination process once the vaccines were introduced to Sri Lanka. The military's involvement in operating quarantine centers in Sri Lanka allowed the Ministry of Health to reallocate resources to other preventive measures, leveraging the military's strengths in manpower surges, routine operations, facility security, and logistics.[4] The response to the first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka was therefore highly successful and was commended by a number of international organizations including the World Health Organization (WHO):

> The statistics reflect the success of the country's ability to respond to an epidemic, saving lives and protecting its population. The proactive and rapid preventive strategies that were implemented and the combined public health approach with strong leadership and whole of society approach have helped Sri Lanka to be in the position it is today.[5]

However, the third wave of COVID-19 in May 2020 led to a mass outbreak of infections which prompted the government to implement an island-wide lockdown. During the pandemic period, Muslims in Sri Lanka were accused of spreading the virus; they were stigmatized and systematically discriminated against. The government denied burial rites of Muslims on a "scientific basis," claiming that burials of infected persons could contaminate ground water resources. While the government promoted this "scientific claim," Muslims in Sri Lanka were marginalized and persecuted as they watched their kin being cremated without being able to perform

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4. Rathindra Kuruwita, "Military Involvement in Pandemic Control in Sri Lanka." *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2023. https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/military-involvement-in-pandemic-control-in-sri-lanka/.

5. Asanka Gunasekara, Pradeepa Dahanayake, Chulanee Attanayake, and Santina Bertone, "Paternalistic Leadership as a Double-Edged Sword: Analysis of the Sri Lankan President's Response to the COVID-19 Crisis," *Leadership* 18, no. 4 (2022): 501.

burial rites that conform with their religious beliefs.

Prior to the presentation of Sri Lanka's detailed COVID-19 plan, three main discursive events set the precedent for the analysis of the religio-political discourse surrounding Sri Lanka's COVID-19 response:

1. The claim of responsibility by the Islamic Levant for the Easter Sunday Attacks of April 2, 2019 (public discourse surrounding security, identity and religious extremism).

2. The presidential elections of November 2019 (a shift in political discourse on the themes of governance, security and national identity).

3. The parliamentary elections in August 2020 (discourses surrounding governance structures and state-society relations in the context of the pandemic).

The Easter Sunday Attacks on the 21st of April 2019 were the first major terror attacks on the island after the end of the civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE). The attacks were perpetrated by two local radical organizations—the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) and Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim (JMI)—and took place during the term of the 'Yahapalanaya' government headed by President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe between 2015 and 2019. This government was already fractured by October 2018, when the President Sirisena sacked the prime minister and unconstitutionally appointed the former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, as the prime minister. This coup, which lasted for 52 days, led to a cabinet reshuffle and ultimately eroded public trust in the government. When Gotabhaya Rajapaksa entered the presidential elections in November 2019, he won with a thumping majority, convincing his voters that he was the sole guarantor of security for the nation. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa served as the former secretary to the ministry of defense in Sri Lanka during the civil war, taking credit for the victory over the Tamil Tigers. His reputation as

a military man and as a 'guarantor' of national security, coupled with the failures of Sirisena as a statesman, culminated in his electoral victory.

Soon after his election, an interim cabinet was appointed. It was this interim cabinet that handled the first and second phases of the pandemic until the parliamentary elections in August 2020. Despite the pandemic spreading in Sri Lanka, parliamentary elections were held in August for Rajapaksa to consolidate power. As prime minister and head of the cabinet Gotabhaya's brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, established a newly elected government.[6] It is amidst this backdrop that I ask the question: how did the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks contribute to the construction of the "other" particularly in terms of religious othering in Sri Lanka during the period of 2019-2021?

In this essay the 'other' constitute Muslims of Sri Lanka who are ethnic and religious minorities. I argue that the pandemic period served as a major 'site of symbolic contestations' for the religio-political construction of the 'other' marked by practices such as denying religious burial rites for Muslims. I use Jonathan Smith's third model in 'Differential equations on constructing the other' to explain Buddhist and Islamic alterities analyzing the discursive shift in the island's political and social landscape, the shift in political discourse in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks, and the discursive dynamics which underscore tensions between democratic norms, authoritarian tendencies, and public health imperatives in the context of the pandemic. In addition, I construe the COVID-19 pandemic as a 'site of symbolic contestations' between different religious and political groups as conceptualized by Talal Asad in "Genealogies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam". The first part of the essay explains the methodology and theoretical framework which provides the definitions for the main terms used in the analysis; the second part applies Smith's 'linguistic and intellectual other' model to the Sri Lankan context; finally, the third part draws conclusions regarding the

6. Shemara Wettimuny, "Sri Lanka 2019-2020: Extremism, elections and economic uncertainty at the time of COVID-19," *Asia Maior* 31 (2020): 407.

consequences of religious othering of the Muslim population of Sri Lanka and the broader cultural and societal impact which follows from it.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In a world with a multiplicity of religions and cultures, "othering" is a phenomenon with an inherently ethnocentric or ethnoreligious bias. In Sri Lanka, for example, a nation with a Sinhalese-Buddhist majority where Buddhism is constitutionally protected, it is common to refer to Muslims as "Thambiya" pejoratively, Tamils as "Koti", and the Burgher minority as "Thuppahi."[7] The significance of these terms will be explained in the next section of the paper. For now, it is sufficient to say that these terms refer to out-groups and are thus used to distinguish the in-group from the out-group and establish the social superiority of the former. Smith argues that when such differences are amplified by negative stereotyping, this social differentiation can escalate to the level of violence. In other words,

> It emphasizes the communalities of one's own group and exaggerates the differences of others. Particularly when it endorses violence, it can portray the religious other not as a tolerable alternative, but as a hostile force that can threaten one's own community.[8]

In this essay, I utilize Smith's third model (linguistics model) in "Differential Equations on constructing the other" to analyze the religio-political landscape of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks. The three models of the 'other' according to Smith are:

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7. Shemara Wettimuny, "The Colonial History of Islamophobic Slurs in Sri Lanka," *History Workshop*, 2020, https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/empire-decolonisation/colonial-history-islamophobia/; Michael Roberts, "Why Thuppahi," *Thuppahi's Blog*, n.d., https://thuppahis.com/why-thuppahi/.

8. Mark Juergensmeyer, "Othering in ISIS." In *Religious Othering Global Dimensions,* eds. Mark Juergensmeyer, Kathleen Moore, and Dominic Sachsenmaier (New York: Routledge, 2023), 5.

> (i) The 'other' represented metonymically in terms of the presence or absence of one or more cultural traits.
>
> (ii) The 'other' represented topographically in terms of center and periphery.
>
> (iii) The 'other' represented linguistically and/or intellectually in terms of intelligibility.

In the Linguistic and Intellectual model, the other is represented in terms of intellectual capabilities and intelligibility; that is to say, they are presented as deficient in linguistic and cognitive skills in order to justify their marginalization. By doing this, the in-group asserts their intellectual and linguistic superiority by portraying the out-group as the inferior 'other' in the social hierarchy. This third model explains 'othering' as particularly pernicious, as it dehumanizes the 'other' by diminishing the moral significance of their suffering or mistreatment, allowing the in-group to justify violence and discrimination towards the out-group. Smith also uses the model to highlight complacency or indifference to the sufferings of 'others':

> Difference becomes insignificant, in the strict sense of the term and, therefore, requires no decipherment, no exegetical labor, no hermeneutic projects. It is for the vocal opposite, for 'us'', to speak for 'them'. Difference has become in-difference.[9]

Smith uses the example of the indifference that colonial powers evinced towards the suffering of indigenous populations whose lands they colonized when they prioritized their own interests over the well-being and rights of the native inhabitants. Such indifference could also be seen in the Nazis' persecution of the Jews during the Second World War. Both of these instances provide examples of marginalization of ethnic alterities.

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9. Jonathan Smith, "Differential Equations on Constructing the Other," In *Relating Religion : Essays in the Study of Religion,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 238–39.

In the Sri Lankan context, which is the focus of this article, I discuss Buddhist and Muslim alterities for which Smith has not provided scholarly definitions. However, Michael Jerryson explores Buddhist othering of Muslims by studying the discursive practices within Buddhist texts and contemporary narratives which constructs Muslims as the 'other'. He cites examples from the Kālacakra Tantra where Buddhist authors identify Muslims as uncivilized barbarians who observe a demonic dharma, cook meat with blood, and consume food in a primitive manner. Muslims are also labelled or linguistically referred to as 'mleccha' meaning outsider.[10] These examples demonstrate the different perceptions that in-groups have towards the out-groups.

Smith's model is also applied by Jerryson and Frydenlund to analyze the ways in which Theravada Buddhists make Muslims the 'other' through Buddhist traditions which construct and maintain boundaries between the self and the other, perpetuating notions of superiority and legitimizing violence against perceived outsiders.[11] Similarly, Juergensmeyer highlights the Islamic State's othering of the Western world. ISIS ideologues use derogatory terms like "dahri" (atheist), "mulhid" (nonbeliever), "eilmani" (worldly), "jahil" (ignorant), "aljahil" (clumsy oaf), "iblis" (devils), and "khanazeer" (pigs) to denigrate Westerners, particularly those who are secular or non-religious, in order to portray them as ignorant, morally corrupt, and worthy of disdain or hostility.[12]

In this study, a qualitative approach using concepts borrowed from Asad (1993), Smith (2004) and the Copenhagen School's approach to securitization (2012) is adopted to analyze religio-political discourse. The focus is on social media discourse and speech acts of the president and government. The Copenhagen school of security studies defines a speech act in the context of securitization as one that contains three main

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10. Michael Jerryson, 2023. "Buddhist Constructions of the Muslim Other." In *Religious Othering Global Dimensions,* eds. Mark Juergensmeyer, Kathleen Moore, and Dominic Sachsenmaier (New York: Routledge, 2023), 41–52.
11. Michael Jerryson and Iselin Frydenlund, "Buddhists, Muslims and the Construction of Difference," in *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World,* 292.
12. Juergensmeyer, "Othering in ISIS," 118.

rhetorical criteria: the first is that there is an existential threat, secondly an authority can take exceptional measures to address that threat, and thirdly this authority may deviate from norms and rules to counter the threat.[13] Religio-political discourse is the study of debates and narratives in the complex interplay of religion and politics. Although religio-political discourse is not defined by scholars, Talal Asad explains this interplay of religion and politics by asserting that there are power dynamics in the construction and interpretation of religious meanings.

Asad argues that religious discourses have been shaped by political, economic, and social forces in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Furthermore, he defines genealogies as non-static or objective narratives that are dynamic and contingent on the power relations that shape them. Genealogies are employed to legitimize certain forms of authority, identity and knowledge while marginalizing certain elements of society. Asad also introduces the concept of a 'site of symbolic contestation' in which conflicting interpretations of religious identity, cultural legitimacy, and political authority come into direct confrontation. He uses the example of the protests and violence in the aftermath of the publication of Salman Rushdie's book 'The Satanic Verses' in England as a site of symbolic contestation. The novel's controversial depiction of Islam culminated in hostile debates around identity, freedom of expression, censorship, and religious violence, particularly following Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Rushdie. Asad highlights the narrativizations of the Muslim-liberal clash in the UK following the Rushdie affair as a polarization of values among western ideals of free expression, secularism and the convictions of some Muslims who viewed any critique of Islam or the Prophet as justifying violent responses.[14]

Important parallels can be drawn between the controversies and debates surrounding the burning of satanic verses in the United Kingdon and the controversies and debates surrounding the COVID-19 cremations

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13. Rens van Munster, "Securitization," *Oxford Bibliographies* (2012).
14. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 301 - 303.

in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government's decision to cremate the corpses of all those who died from the virus was seen as religious and ethnic discrimination of Muslim minorities in Sri Lanka who were already feeling targeted and marginalized after the Easter Sunday Attacks. Their assertion of identity in demanding religious burial rights in this polarized climate was viewed negatively by those pushing forward the government's agenda. Asad points to a similar polarization when he quotes Sebastian Poulter: "They do not simply ask to be included in the wider political society, they make detailed demands of the state to enable them to live out their lives in a culturally distinctive manner. They want to bury their dead in their own way, to have special times and places set aside for worship."[15] What Asad and Poulter refer to here are how identity assertion of Muslims in secular Britain on religious lines become more prominent and contentious following incidents such as the public burning of Rushdie's book in Bradford in 1998 triggered by its 'blasphemous content'. Similarly in Sri Lanka the debate around COVID-19 cremations which targeted Muslims led to polarized debates on science, religion, limitations of minority rights and the vilification of the Muslim other in Sri Lanka. Social media in particular became a polarized space where the notion of a "site of symbolic contestation" serves as a mode of analysis.

Smith's third model of differential equations provides the analytical framework to trace the shifting narratives and tensions within these online discourses. Smith's third model of differential equations where the 'other' is represented linguistically or intellectually in terms of intelligibility provides a framework to trace how certain actors (radical elements of the Buddhist clergy and Sinhala Buddhist nationalist actors) portrayed Muslims as cognitively deficient in the context of COVID-19 cremation policies by construing Muslims pushing for burial rites as incapable of rational or scientific reasoning, thereby delegitimizing their claims and cultural practices as dangerous. Presidential/governmental speech acts and social media discourses demonstrate the polarizations that public

15. Asad, 272.

discourse blurred the lines between science and religion - not simply as a clash of ideas but as a strategy to reinforce hierarchies of identity and religious authority. In this way, Smith's linguistic model helps expose how the symbolic contestation over burial rites was embedded in deeper structures of epistemic and political exclusion.

The media sources used in this analysis have been selected with the help of the Colombo-based think tank Verité Research's Media Ownership Monitor.[16] This monitor provides a comprehensive overview of media outlets used by Sri Lankans daily, ranging from those with clearly identifiable ownership and those without. For example, Independent Television Network Limited (ITN) is a state governed television and radio broadcaster, Ada Derana is a privately owned, trilingual news outlet under Derana Macro Entertainment, News First is a privately owned multi-platform service under the Capital Maharaja Organisation Limited, and Lanka C News, whose ownership is less transparent, is widely reported to be affiliated with National Freedom Front leader Wimal Weerawansa. Data on LankaWeb News Forum is not available. Despite some of these sources such as Lanka C News and LankaWeb having faced government blockage in 2015 over concerns of publishing incorrect information and damaging the President's reputation, they remain influential platforms where public discourse is actively shared and engaged with. Unlike in countries such as Canada, where the Online News Act has restricted news from being shared on Meta platforms, Sri Lanka has no such mechanism.[17] Therefore, both authentic actors and bots could be used to share content to

16. Verité Research, "Independent Television Network (ITN)?" *Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka,* 2018, https://sri-lanka.mom-gmr.org/en/media/detail/outlet/independent-television-network-itn/.; "Ada Derana?" Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka, 2018, https://sri-lanka.mom-gmr.org/en/media/detail/outlet/ada-derana/ ; "Lanka C News?" Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka, 2018, https://sri-lanka.mom-gmr.org/en/media/detail/outlet/lanka-c-news/ ; "News First?" Media Ownership Monitor Sri Lanka, 2018, https://sri-lanka.mom-gmr.org/en/media/detail/outlet/news-1st/.

17. Jessica Mundie, "Canadians Will No Longer Have Access to News Content on Facebook and Instagram, Meta Says," *CBC,* June 22, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/online-news-act-meta-facebook-1.6885634.

the 15 million Facebook users across the country.[18]

The Facebook posts in the analysis were manually selected after a systematic data cleaning process to ensure that the data used in the study accurately reflects genuine public perceptions (Andreotta et al. 2019).[19] Social media, particularly Facebook, is a rich source of unmediated public discourse where individuals express their interpretations, emotions, and judgments about events as they unfold. When assessing the process of othering, these posts are critical because they reveal how users both propagate and contest narratives that construct in-groups and out-groups. The manually curated sample, therefore, allows for an in-depth analysis of the specific language, and sentiment used in articulating 'othering' in relation to the pandemic governance and its religious-political implications. Content generated by duplicate posts, spam, and bots have been filtered to reflect only genuine human interactions using filtering techniques based on language and thematic relevance in Sinhala and English. This ensures that the analysis focuses on content that is contextually and semantically relevant to the research question. The posts have also been selected using certain engagement techniques such as likes, shares and comments to reduce the impact of certain narratives which may indicate a significant level of public resonance. Finally, videos, speeches and reports of officials such as presidential addresses have been collated through official sources from the President's Media Division and Ministry of External Affairs. Other sources of discourse analysis include video footage of a hate preaching monk from People's Rights Group Sri Lanka, a UK-based advocacy and lobbying organization addressing human rights violations including hate speech.[20]

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18. Harshi Alwis, "Facebook Reaches 15 Million Users in Sri Lanka," *Daily Mirror,* February 3, 2025, https://www.dailymirror.lk/infographics/Facebook-reaches-15-million-users-in-Sri-Lanka/193301513.

19. Matthew Andreotta, Robertus Nugroho, Mark J. Hurlstone, Fabio Boschetti, Simon Farrell, Iain Walker, and Cecile Paris. "Analyzing Social Media Data: A Mixed-Methods Framework Combining Computational and Qualitative Text Analysis." *Behavior Research Methods* 51, n. 4 (2019): 1766–81.

20. "People's Rights Group," 2025, https://www.prgsrilanka.org/.

Analysis : religio-political discourse surrounding the COVID-19 crisis

The defeat of the LTTE in 2009 marked the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka and ushered in a new brand of politics, giving rise to a Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalism perpetuated by the Rajapaksa political dynasty. The victory over the LTTE gained Mahinda Rajapaksa (the executive president at the time) immense popularity among the masses. During the war, his younger brother Gotabhaya Rajapaksa served as the defense secretary and was hailed by Rajapaksa as his right-hand man. The Rajapaksas' popular appeal dwindled by 2012 when Mahinda Rajapaksa leadership was electorally challenged by the former commander of the army, General Sarath Fonseka. During Rajapaksa's second term as president, his popularity was already challenged due to high levels of corruption and nepotism in his government. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa was allegedly involved in enforced disappearances and stifling of dissent in the country.[21] The Rajapaksa family's politics were based on patronage and promotion national unity. The separatist movement and the recognition of the political power of the Tamil minority were thus excluded from consideration. The Rajapaksa's promoted the idea that, so long as they are in power, the country would be free of terrorism and threats to national security. When the Easter Sunday Attacks occurred in Sri Lanka in 2019, it was an opportune moment for the Rajapaksas to make a comeback into politics by promoting their brand. Three of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa's speeches exemplify this meta-narrative.

The first example is the swearing-in speech of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa as the eighth president of Sri Lanka on November 18, 2019 (translated from Sinhala): "I pledge to uphold the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and ensure that there will be no support, whether direct or indirect, for the creation of a separate state within Sri Lanka or

21. Salimah Shivji, "'We Must Not Lose Hope': Activists, Victims Seek War Crimes Charges against Ex-Sri Lankan President," *CBC*, August 26, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/sri-lanka-gotabaya-rajapaksa-war-crimes-1.6561580.

abroad through funding, sponsorship, or encouragement."[22]

The second example is drawn from the President's speech at the 73rd Independence Day celebrations in Sri Lanka on February 4th 2021:

> More than 6.9 million people elected me as President to provide the leadership needed to reestablish national security... I am a Sinhala Buddhist leader and I will never hesitate to state so. I govern this country in accordance with Buddhist teachings. Within the Buddhist philosophic tradition of peaceful coexistence which gives due respect to all religions and ethnicities, every person in this country irrespective of his or her ethnic or religious identification has the right to enjoy the freedom as equals under the nation's legal framework. Traitorous elements always band together and seek to marshal domestic and foreign forces against the leadership that upholds indigenous way of life and country's sovereignty.[23]

The third example is an excerpt from the President's address at the at 76th UN General Assembly – New York, September 22, 2021:

> The democratic tradition is an integral part of our way of life, my election in 2019 and the parliamentary elections of 2020 saw Sri Lankan voters grant an emphatic mandate to my government to build a prosperous and stable country and uphold national security and sovereignty. In 2019, Sri Lanka experienced the devastation brought by extremist religious terrorists in the Easter Sunday Attacks. Before that, until 2009, it had suffered from a separatist terrorist war for 30 years. Terrorism is a global challenge that requires international cooperation especially intelligence sharing if it is to be overcome...my government is committed to ensure that such violence never takes place in Sri Lanka ever again.[24]

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22. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa (Ada Derana), "Gotabhaya Rajapaksa takes oaths as President,", *Youtube*, November 18, 2019, https://wwwyoutube.com/watch?v=T4eHQ_ChW7o. Translated by author.

23. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, "Full Text of the Speech Made by His Excellency President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on 73rd Independence Day – February 4, 2021," Presented at the Presidential Secretariat, Colombo, https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2021/02/04/full-text-of-the-speech-made-by-his-excellency-president-gotabaya-rajapaksa-on-73rd-independence-day-february-4-2021/.

24. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, "Speech of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at 76th UN General Assembly – New York, September 22, 2021," Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Sri Lanka, New York, February 4, 2021, https://wwwyoutube.com/watch?v=0yttqpTMkvQ&t=1s.

In the above speeches, a prominent meta-narrative emerges that emphasizes Sri Lanka's identity as a Sinhala Buddhist nation and that advocates for the necessity of a Sinhalese Buddhist leader to safeguard this status. Gotabhaya's self-identification as a Sinhala-Buddhist leader during his swearing-in speech and his pledge to use Buddhist teachings to govern the country positions Buddhism as a central pillar of national identity and governance. Moreover, the rhetoric of the victory over the war, references made to democracy, and the allusion to a public mandate to guarantee national security is emphasized in all three speeches. This could be interpreted as a discursive strategy to mobilize support among segments of the population who strongly identify with Sinhala Buddhist identity.[25] He refers to 'traitorous elements' both foreign and local that band together against his leadership in order to pinpoint those who seek to prosecute him for alleged war crimes that occurred during the civil war – this includes an exhaustive list political dissenters. While the president does not explicitly discriminate against any one religion or go on to specify who these traitorous elements are, he emphasizes the superiority of Buddhism which, by default, relegates other religions to the margins. Notably, at the UN General Assembly, he mentions that the Easter Sunday Attacks were perpetrated by "extremist religious terrorists." He does not mention that the suicide bombers involved in the attacks were Muslims but colors the religious undertones of the event.

During the period in which he gave these three speeches, Muslims were facing backlash, stigmatization and acute marginalization in Sri Lanka. Firstly, Muslims were accused of being non-compliant to COVID-19 mobility restrictions; secondly, they were blamed for spreading the virus; thirdly, as a consequence, discrimination against Muslims culminated in the enforced cremations of all victims of the virus. Traditional Islamic funeral rites for the dead could not be observed for victims of the Corona Virus. Prior to COVID-19, Sri Lanka's ethnic relations, particularly those

25. Sinhala-Buddhists constitute roughly 70 percent of Sri Lanka's population.

among the Sinhala-Buddhists and Muslims were already fractured. Before the Easter Sunday Attacks perpetrated by radical Muslims, there were numerous incidents of religious violence involving different groups and chiefly among them were the extremist Sinhala-Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS).[26] This Buddhist mob of militant monks are headed by radical monk Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero. Weerawardhana points out that prominent politicians in Sri Lanka had alleged that the BBS was supported financially by a secret national defense budget allocation under the Mahinda Rajapaksa government.[27]

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26. Following the end of the civil war in 2009, there were sporadic instances of violence of varying intensity. In 2013 the Grandpass incident marked an acute episode characterized by widespread physical assaults and significant property destruction, which was followed in 2014 by the Aluthgama riots. Despite the democratic transition in January 2015, which saw a reduction in such high-intensity outbreaks, a persistent pattern of chronic violence has continued, defined by low-intensity attacks such as hate campaigns, threats, intimidation, and minor property damage against Muslim communities (Gehan Gunatillake, *The Chronic and the Acute: Post-War Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies & Equitas, 2015, 3334 ; Gunatillake, *The Chronic and the Entrenched: Ethno-Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies & Equitas, 2018): 28–29. Some of the instigating actors for a variety of these violences were the Bodu Bala Sena and Ravana Balakaya. The anti-muslim riots of 2018 were of a high intensity. Authors writing on the topic of Buddhist radicals, particularly using the example of the BBS including Hertzberg (2018), Orjuela (2019) and Weerawardhana (2017) are in agreement that the BBS have actively targeted Muslim minorities in Sri Lanka with their campaign against halal certifications, inter-faith marriages, and contestations over sacred sites especially drawing on the issue of Kuragala. The Kuragala sacred site, in close proximity to Balangoda town, holds historical and religious significance for both Muslims and Buddhists in Sri Lanka. While Buddhists view it as a sacred Buddhist monastic site, Muslims claim it as important to the Islamic faith, citing archaeological evidence of a Sufi saint's meditation there. The issue gained political traction when Bodu Bala Sena leader Gnanasara Thero invoked communal tensions by urging Buddhists to "celebrate Vesak" at Kuragala, referencing the 1915 Gampola religious riots. The riots of 1915 originated in the town of Gampola in the Central Province of Sri Lanka when a Muslim provocation during a Buddhist procession on Vesak Day turned violent - spreading to 116 other locations in Sri Lanka. During the riots, around 25 Muslims were murdered, and 412 persons were arrested by the British authorities (Michael Hertzberg, "The Audience and the Spectacle: Bodu Bala Sena and the Controversy of Buddhist Political Activism in Sri Lanka," In *Rhetorical Audience Studies and Reception of Rhetoric - Exploring Audiences Empirically* (Bergen: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 248.

27. Chamindra Weerawardhana, "Paradigms of [In]Tolerance? On Sri Lanka's Bodu Bala Sena, #prezpollsl2015, and Transformative Dynamics of Lived Religion," in *Lived*

Immediately after the election of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa as the president of Sri Lanka, Gnanasara in a speech stated (translated from Sinhala):

> With the main Sinhala majority, by highlighting this patriotic voice and using at least a little of the minority votes, this election victory is a happy reason for us. Next, we must be ready to build trust with those minorities who fill our heads with myths. Now it is like the father came home. In the past years, the nation was like orphaned children without a father... Now we need to clear the parliament, we will work until the general elections, and we are planning to disperse the BBS after the elections.[28]

Gnanasara's speech above highlights the capacity of the BBS to persuade the Sinhala-Buddhist majority that the election of the Rajapaksas was the right and legitimate decision of the people. His speech also insinuates that the BBS has no 'work' to do after the general elections of 2020, implying that their main work was to guarantee Gotabhaya's victory. Furthermore, Gnanasara's references to 'myths' and the minorities of Sri Lanka is an example of a chronic form of 'othering' and the entrenchment of Buddhism within patronage and statesmanship.

The hate-mongering monk Ampitiye Sumana Thero is another example of othering of ethnic minorities. In a viral video, he accuses a Tamil man of working for the LTTE and of obtaining funds from the Tamil diaspora (the so-called traitorous elements in Gotabhaya's terms) using pejorative terms such as 'Kotiya'.[29] In this video, the monk verbally harasses Tamil Catholics for distributing leaflets to celebrate Christmas in Batticaloa, a multiethnic and multireligious district comrpising Tamils, Buddhists and Muslims. He accuses the Catholic priest of proselytizing in Buddhist areas. The use of pejorative terms such as 'Thambiya', a

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Religion and the Politics of (In)Tolerance (Bergen: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 26.

28. Gala Goda Aththe Gnanasara, මහ මැතිවරණයනේ පසු බොදු බල සේනා සංවිධානය විසුරුවා හැරේ. *ITN News- Sri Lanka,* 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY3HShhznf4. Translated by author.

29. Kotiya' means 'tiger' and is discriminatory term for Tamil minorities. PRG Sri Lanka, "The Hate Monk Harsassing a Catholic Group in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka," December 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhfSBlWnaYY.

slur against Muslim minorities meaning brother in Tamil, or Thuppahi, used against Sri Lankans of Portuguese mixed descent, are not new in Sri Lanka and are commonly used during arguments or skirmishes. The example of Ampitiye Sumana Thero highlights that incidents of Buddhist discrimination towards religious minorities have continued after the Easter Sunday Attacks. This incident, which took place in the Batticaloa district where a suicide bomber killed 28 people at the Zion Church, demonstrates that vitriolic attacks in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday Attacks re-animated existing prejudices against minorities- including Tamils. This incident is significant because it conflates Tamil Catholics with terrorism reinforcing longstanding prejudices under the pretext of protecting national security.

The support of Buddhist clergy was also mobilized to legitimize and enforce the Sri Lankan government's decision to mandate the cremation of COVID-19 victims. To provide a context to this policy, the government had taken the decision to cremate based on recommendations from a technical committee. According to professor Meththika Vithanage, the burial of dead bodies could contaminate groundwater with the COVID-19 virus. The technical committee's basis for claiming that corpses could contaminate groundwater has not been made public, leaving the rationale unclear. The Muslims were directly affected by this policy, as they could not observe essential Islamic funeral rites: washing the corpse, shrouding, prayer and burial.[30] In response to growing concerns from civil society organizations, Muslim communities, and international organizations, a new expert committee led by Professor Jennifer Perera, was appointed, recommending a revised policy which allowed both cremation and burial with appropriate safety measures. Their findings indicated that the risk of waterborne transmission from burial is minimal and manageable with proper precautions, such as using non-biodegradable body bags which could minimize water contamination.[31]

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30. Althaf Marsoof, "The Disposal of COVID-19 Dead Bodies: Impact of Sri Lanka's Response on Fundamental Rights," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 13, no.3 (2021): 673.
31. Marsoof, 682.

Buddhist monks affiliated with the Inter-Religious Subcommittee of the Sri Lanka Amarapura and Ramanna Samagri Maha Sangha Sabha actively opposed the relaxation of the cremation policy. The monks petitioned the president and staged a protest outside the Presidential Secretariat, arguing that allowing religious burials endangered public health. During the protest, in media interviews, they condemned Justice Minister Ali Sabry (the sole Muslim cabinet member) labeling him "an extremist in disguise" and insisted that the president should govern in line with the majority that voted him into power.[32] According to the monks, permission for burials, framed as a concession to "other groups," betrayed the nation's commitment to public health and safety. This rhetoric implicitly stigmatized the minority by casting their religious practices as a public health threat. Such rhetoric coming from the Buddhist clergy exemplifies the influence of Buddhist religious institutions and their role in shaping public policy.

The Sri Lankan government's management of the burial regulations during the pandemic can be productively analyzed through the prism of Smith's third model of othering. According to this model, a religious group coming forward to denounce the religious practices of another religious group also shows their complacency and indifference. This was especially the case when government officials, despite failing to legally acquire the parents' consent, pushed for the cremation of a 20-day old baby who had died of the virus. The hospital failed to notify the parents of the baby's death, and when they sought a PCR test at a private hospital, they were refused and coerced into signing a waiver for cremation. Despite questioning the rush to cremate, the hospital provided no explanation, leaving the parents distressed and feeling disregarded.[33]

Such 'indifference' was also widely propagated on social media

32. Newsfirst Sri Lanka, "Monks protest against allowing burials in Sri Lanka," December 28, 2020, https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/12/28/protest-in-colombo-against-burial-of-covid-dead.

33. Muhammad Saekul Mujahidin, "Extremism and Islamophobia Against the Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, no. 1–2 (July 3, 2023), 230–31.

during the pandemic. A Facebook post in Sinhala deliberately promoted the 'scientific basis' for the cremations, stating that 'scientific evidence' must be prioritized over religious beliefs and emotions; it garnered over 600 likes, 300+ shares and 500+ comments.[34] Another post shared by a Muslim woman presented an emotional and logical appeal that Muslims do not keep their corpses for long periods and are immediately buried, thus non-threatening to health security.[35] She poses the question: "what have we done wrong to be burnt?" These posts exemplify the pandemic cremation policy as a site of symbolic contestations in Asad's terms. While Muslims attempt to appeal to common sense and shared understandings, stating that religious burial rites should take precedence over unsubstantiated scientific claims, other factions in society, such as radical Buddhists, argue otherwise. Muslims actively cautioned their own community to observe the quarantine and restricted movement rules in place to prevent the spread of the virus. The post is on the guidelines issued by the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU) regarding congressional prayers at Masjids posted on their official website.[36]

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34. Chameen Jayamal Mirisse, 'නැවත වතාවක් කතිකාවක් ඇති වී තිබනෙවා, කොවිඩ් 19 න් මියයන මුස්ලිම් ජානිකයන්ගේ භූමදාන අයිතිය පිළිගන්නලූ,' Facebook, December 22, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/groups/804276106323782/permalink/3627165367368161/. Translated by the author. (See appendix figure 1). This is a post from a genuine user and was shared in a Facebook group titled "Genuis Club." This group has 153.2K members with a diverse and active audience that engages with a wide range of opinions and current events. Content is shared daily generating conversations around the posts from active users. This is an example of an online forum where everyday discourses are openly expressed and shared. This type of platform demonstrates popular narratives and the dynamics of online engagement to understand how perceptions are constructed and disseminated among the public.

35. Naleefa Abdul Wadood, 'කොවිඩ් 19,' Facebook, December 13, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/naleefa.abdulwadood/posts/2816045592048762. Translated by the author. (See appendix figure 2). This is a post from an authentic user, verified by the author as a senior lecturer in sociology at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. She had made this post public. As a prominent Muslim figure in her locality, those who engaged with her from her own Facebook account were in agreement with her sentiments, and the engagements were respectful.

36. All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama, 'Statement on COVID-19,' Facebook, March 16, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ACJU.Official/posts/1294691024063005. (See appendix figure 3)

Another pernicious issue regarding the treatment of Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic was the dissemination of misinformation that claimed that Muslims in the country were spreading COVID-19. The Hindustan Times reports that four Sri Lankans participated in the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin, Delhi between March 13-15 in 2020.[37] LankaWeb reports that 34 Sri Lankans participated in the same congregation.[38] The discourse surrounding the Tablighi Jamaat spreading the virus in South Asia, Southeast Asia, India and Sri Lanka was pejoratively circulated on social media. Take, for example, this excerpt from the LankaC news website posted by an anonymous Facebook account under the name "truth is bitter and bitter is the truth":

> Tablighi Jamaat spreads corona in bulk from Malaysia to Thailand and Thailand to Pakistan and now India...Tablighi Jamaat, a non-political global Sunni Islamic evangelical movement of Indian origin, has emerged as the "main virus carrier" of the spread of the coronavirus in South Asia and is said to have been the source of hundreds of coronavirus cases in the region through its membership.[39]

The same anonymous account in another post states:

> An investigation conducted by the intelligence agencies revealed that the 10 patients found in Puttalam who contracted the Covid virus had attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious conference held in Indonesia and had returned to Sri Lanka on the 17th. It has been confirmed that three groups have gone to Indonesia and returned to Sri Lanka to

37. Leena Dhankhar, "Coronavirus: Four from Sri Lanka Who Attended Tablighi Jamat Gathering Test Positive in Haryana's Nuh," *The Hindustan Times*, April 6, 2020, https://www.hindustantimes.com/gurugram/coronavirus-four-from-sri-lanka-who-attended-tablighi-jamat-gathering-test-positive-in-haryana-s-nuh/story-wP89qPQiiO4aLlWQZeV5SJ.html.

38. Dilrook Kannangara, "Tablighi Jamaat Linked to One Third of Indian and a Number of Sri Lankan COVID-19 Cases," *LankaWeb*, April 5, 2020, https://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2020/04/05/tablighi-jamaat-linked-to-one-third-of-indian-and-a-number-of-sri-lankan-covid-19-cases/comment-page-1/.

39. ඇත්ත තිත්තයි තිත්තයි ඇත්ත, 'තබ්ලික් ජමාත් තොග වශයෙන් කොරෝනා පතුරුවයි,' Facebook, April 2, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=140874197564387&id=100049254215035. Translated by author. (See appendix figure 4).

> participate in this religious conference and 36 people who came with them are missing as of now (02.04.2020).[40]

Another post from the same public group further amplifies narrative.[41] Although it is difficult to determine the exact reach of these posts in the group and whether the followers are bots or not, the engagement with the posts reflect the genuine sentiments of members of the Sri Lankan population. These Facebook posts exemplify the effect of such unverified information on the perception of people who experienced these events in real-time. This Facebook group hosts 8000 accounts under the name of the Sri Lanka People's Front. The group carries the following description:

> After the brutal war, the Rajapaksa regime led the country forward on the path of development through a systematic long-term program under the Mahinda Chintana program and Mahinda Chintana vision to build the country. The opinion of the people was that with the harmony of Mahinda's power, Basil's brain and Gotabaya's discipline, our country is moving towards the highest position in the world. Despite the so-called good governance Ranil-Chandrika-Sirisena seizing power through a conspiracy that used foreign money to destroy it, the country has been devastated by destruction in these two and a half years. Therefore, the opportunity has come to topple this current so-called disorganized regime of good governance. Accordingly, it is the duty of all of us to restore Rajapaksa harmony to power.[42]

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40. ඇත්ත නිත්තයි නිත්තයි ඇත්ත, 'ඊයේ දිල්ලියේ වාර්තා වූ රෝගීන් 356 දනොගනේ 325 ක් තබ්ලික් ජමාත් සාමාජිකයින් බව ඉන්දීය රජය නිවේදනය කරයි,' Facebook, April 14, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=122367156081758&id=100049254215035. Translated by author. (See appendix figure 5)

41. Jayantha Wickramasuriya, 'මැලේෂියාවේ සිට තායිලන්තයටත් තායිලනන්යේ සිට පකිස්තානයටත් දැන් ඉන්දියාවටත් තබ්ලිත් ජමාත් ඒකතු වීම හරහා කොරෝනා වරෙසය පතුරුවා ඇත,' Facebook, April 1, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/groups/101657643787677/permalink/558152131471557/. Translated by author. (See appendix figure 6) This post is an example of a group administrator sharing unverified information from online news sources in a deliberate attempt to create conversation around this subject.

42. podujana peramune apy 2030 France, 'About this group,' Facebook, June 17, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/groups/101657643787677/about. Translated by author. (See appendix figure 7). In this Facebook group, it is difficult to determine whether certain accounts are operated by authentic Facebook users or bots.

The analysis of the social media posts and the news articles through the lens of Smith's third model suggests that 'the othering' of Muslims have indeed been discursively constructed as intellectually inferior - meaning that they are unable to understand and comply with health guidelines. The discourse surrounding the Tablighi Jamaat congregation and its alleged role in spreading the virus may contain some truth at the level of the facts invoked, but it also promulgated misinformation. For example, there are contradictory reports on the number of Sri Lankans that participated in the congregations in India, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The narratives about the Tablighi Jamaat spreading the virus in Sri Lanka itself is confounding and fear mongering. It is vitriolic rhetoric that suggests the virus could spread among Muslims in Sri Lanka who could in turn infect 'others'. Such forms of misinformation exacerbate societal biases that exist within Sri Lanka; they look to scapegoat specific religious or ethnic groups in order to achieve political objectives. Abayasekara explains this as "name blaming" and "a conflation of race and disease" and cites the example of Muslims who were quarantined for COVID-19 from the Beruwela town of the Kalutara district in Sri Lanka.[43] They were labelled as 'Beruwela people', and a popular TV presenter from Sri Lanka mentioned that these people have deprived Sri Lanka of enjoying the Sinhala New Year.[44] The social media group that spread the Tablighi Jamaat narrative posed as supporters of the ruling party, further underscoring the presence of political undercurrents within this conflict. The post from the anonymous account does not only portray Muslims as carriers of the virus but as a major security threat being investigated by the intelligence services.

The involvement of the military intelligence in the COVID-19

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43. Shalini Abayasekara, "Dead Matter: COVID-19 and the Banning of Burials in Sri Lanka," in *Envisioning Embodiment in the Health Humanities: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literature, Culture, and Media,* eds. Jodi Cressman, Lisa DeTora, Jeannie Ludlow, and Nora Martin Peterson (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 186-87.
44. Abayasekara, 186-87.

pandemic therefore also warrants nuanced scrutiny. With the third wave of COVID-19 and the rapid rise of cases, the president declared an island wide curfew from 20-23 March 2020.[45] At the same time, the Gazette Extraordinary declared COVID-19 a quarantinable disease.[46] Sri Lanka utilized an intelligence driven detection, isolation and tracing system with the involvement of Public Health Officials, State Intelligence Service, Directorate of Military Intelligence and Police Special Branch. The COVID-19 National Task Force appointed by the president in Sri Lanka was headed by the commander of the army along with other senior military officials and members of the Epidemiology Unit in Sri Lanka. The role of the military in contract tracing, running quarantine facilities, and even conducting media briefings amplified the image of the president domestically. All health-related public warnings and advisories were issued by the President's Media division. Such activities were not out of the ordinary for Sri Lanka, as the type of emergency that was created with curfews, emergency regulations, police check points, and the omnipresence of uniformed men were similar to the manner in which Sri Lankans lived at the height of the civil war. These were symbolic of the kind of highly securitized and military-focused climate, with the military taking credit for saving the nation under the leadership of Rajapaksa.

Gotabhaya's utilization of the military also stems from his own background as a military man and a former secretary of defense. Under his administration, the military's involvement in public policy matters labeled as 'national security' became inevitable; the backlash it provoked was also predictable. Alan Keenan of the International Crisis Group points out that the government of Sri Lanka during the initial phase of the

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45. President's Media Division, "Island-Wide Curfew Imposed," *Presidential Secretariat,* 2020, https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/index.php/2020/03/20/island-wide-curfew-imposed/.

46. "Q and A on Regulations Issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance & How This Impacts the COVID-19 Response in Sri Lanka," *Centre for Policy Alternatives,* 2020, https://www.cpalanka.org/q-and-a-on-regulations-issued-under-the-quarantine-and-prevention-of-diseases-ordinance-how-this-impacts-the-covid-19-response-in-sri-lanka/.

pandemic was ruling without parliamentary oversight and with "serious legal anomalies."[47] The legal validity of the emergency measures such as curfews and appointment of ad hoc task forces were considered extra-judicial. One of the major concerns was the large policy role granted to the military through regulations.[48] For example, on March 25, 2020, the Gazette Extraordinary designated the director general of Health Services as the 'proper authority' in respect of pandemic governance in the whole country. However, this regulation did not state that such powers could be delegated to the acting Inspector General of Police (IGP) (who gave orders to conduct contact tracing alongside the military intelligence). Other questions arose as to whether the quarantine process fell under the military's purview.

The above discussion does not downplay or discredit the role of the military and intelligence services in pandemic governance. Intelligence agencies have played a major role in pandemic preparedness and policy such as in the US and Israel. In the US for example, there is a US biological defense program with different analytical and protection units including the Department of Homeland Security's Chemical and Biological Defense Division, Office of Preparedness and Response of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Disease Intelligence Program of the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Directorate of Science and Technology. They help monitor and forecast outbreaks and provide disease intelligence data for policymakers.[49] In Israel, the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID), the Israeli Security Agency (ISA), and Mossad were involved in the pandemic management. Prime Minister Netanyahu also declared a state of emergency in Israel in the fight against COVID-19. This does raise questions about military encroachment into

47. Alan Keenan, "Sri Lanka's Other COVID-19 Crisis: Is Parliamentary Democracy at Risk?" *International Crisis Group*, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/sri-lankas-other-covid-19-crisis-parliamentary-democracy-risk.
48. Keenan, "Sri Lanka's Other COVID-19 Crisis."
49. Ana Maria Lankford, Derrick Storzieri, and Joseph Fitsanakis. "Spies and the Virus: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Intelligence Communication in the United States." *Frontiers in Communication* 5 (2020): 3.

civilian life and non-security related national threats and interrogates the balance between civil and military matters.[50] In Sri Lanka, neither the intelligence community nor the government actively partook in correcting public perceptions regarding the narratives about the Tablighi Jamaat and Muslims spreading the virus. Such narratives circulated unchecked by the very authorities that could have intervened to prevent further deterioration of societal relations. The government's indifference to the negative perception of Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic representative of their plight the aftermath of the Easter Attacks – a time when the whole world was facing the threat of the virus.

Conclusion

The politicization of religious identity and nationalism by the Rajapaksa administration and the stigmatization and marginalization of Muslims coupled with the militarization of pandemic governance were sites of symbolic contestations that illustrate the complexity of religio-political discourse surrounding the COVID-19 crisis in Sri Lanka. The meta-narrative constructed by the Rajapaksa regime emphasizes Sri Lanka's identity as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation and promotes the necessity of a Sinhala Buddhist leader to safeguard this status. Through the analysis of political speeches and social media discourse, it can be seen that figures like Gotabhaya Rajapaksa position themselves as defenders of national security and sovereignty, framing their leadership as indispensable for maintaining stability in the face of perceived security threats. In the process of dispersing this meta-narrative, the Rajapaksa-led government also tended to marginalize and scapegoat religious minorities, particularly Muslims, who are portrayed as a threat to the Sinhala-Buddhist identity and the security of the nation. The stigmatization of Muslims is evident in the discourse surrounding the Tablighi Jamaat congregation and the

50. Ephraime Kahana, "Intelligence Against COVID-19: Israeli Case Study." *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 34, no.2 (2020): 259–266.

subsequent accusation of Muslims spreading the COVID-19, virus. This stigmatization culminated in the policy of mandatory cremation for virus victims, in direct violation of Islamic burial practices. The COVID-19 pandemic thus becomes a site of symbolic contestation, where religious and political actors vie for control over narratives and policies that shape public perceptions and responses. Muslims are constructed as the "other"; Muslims are depicted as intellectually inferior and blamed for the spread of the virus, thus perpetuating harmful stereotypes and exacerbating existing tensions within Sri Lankan society. Furthermore, the involvement of the military and intelligence services in pandemic governance raises concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and civil liberties, as emergency measures are implemented without proper oversight and transparency. The militarization of public health responses reinforces the dominance of the ruling regime and exacerbates the marginalization of religious minorities who are disproportionately affected by discriminatory policies and practices. In the post war era, after the defeat of the LTTE, a pattern of marginalization and scapegoating of Muslims as a new threat against national security has emerged. The Easter Sunday Attacks were therefore an opportune moment to entrench Muslims as the 'new security threat' of Sri Lanka. Such constructions serve to reinforce the hegemony of the ruling regime (particularly the Rajapaksas) and perpetuate divisions within Sri Lanka – certainly a dangerous trend.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Chameen Jayamal Mirisse's Post

Genius club දිනියස් එකතුව මෙතාවි කළුකම්
Chameen Jayamal Mirisse · December 22, 2020 ·

නැවත වතාවක් කතිකාවක් ඇති වී තිබෙනවා, කොවිඩ් 19 න් මියයන මුස්ලිම් ජානිකයන්ගේ භූමදාන අයිතිය පිළිගන්නලු..

මේ රූප සටහනේ පැහැදිලිව පෙන්වලා තියෙනනේ බැක්ටීරියා සහ වෛරසවල ප්‍රමාණයන් සංසන්දනය කිරීමක්..

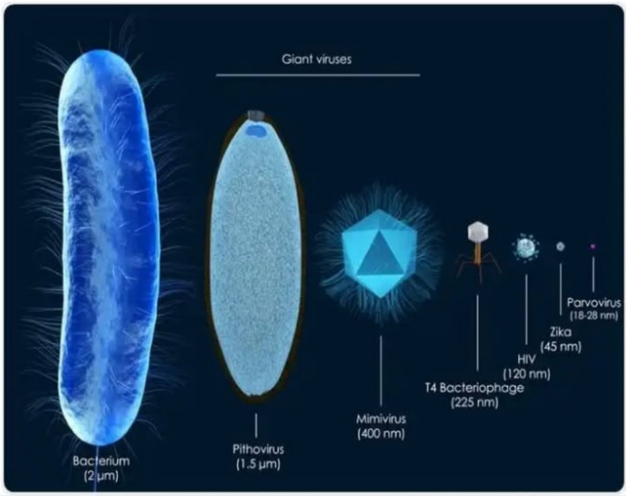
සාමාන්‍යයෙන් නව නිවසක් ඉදිකිරීමේදී, සැලසුම් අනුමත කිරීමකදි, නගරසභා හෝ ප්‍රාදේශීය සභා මගින් වැසිකිලි වලක් සහ ලිඳක් අතර අවම දුර ප්‍රමාණයන් තීරණය කරලා දෙනවා, නැතිනම් නල ජලය පමණයි අනුමත කරන්නෙ. සරල හේතුව පස හරහා අහිතාකර බැක්ටීරියා ජලයට එකතු වීම.

බැක්ටීරියා සතුවන්නෙ මයික්‍රොමීටර් පරිමාණයේ දේහයන්, වෛරස සතුවන්නේ ඊට වඩා කුඩා නැනොමීටර් පරිමාණයේ දේහයන්. සාමාන්‍යයෙන් කොවිඩ් වෛරසය 60nm - 140nm (nm - නැනෝ මීටර්) පරාසයක පවතිනවා. ඉතින් තේරුම් ගන්න පුළුවන් දෙය තමයි, බැක්ටීරියාවකට වඩා වෛරසයකට පහසුවෙන් ගමන් කල හැකි බව. එම නිසා කොවිඩ් මෘත ශරීර වැලලීම අතිශයින්ම අධි අවදානමි..

තවද පස තුලදී කොවිඩ් වෛරසයේ ආයු කාලය තවමත් නිශ්චිතව හඳුනා ගෙන නැහැ, එසේම මෙය විපරිනාකරණයකට ලක් වෙමින් නව ප්‍රභේද බවට පරිවර්තනය වෙනවා., එම නිසා අනතුර දික් කර ගන්න හේතු කාරනා සකස් කරන්නෙත් ඒ වෙනුවෙන් පෙනි සිටින්නෙත් සැබෑම අඥානයින්..

මේ වෙලාවේ ආගමික විශ්වාස, හැඟීම් අන්සියල්ලටම වඩා විද්‍යානුකූල ක්‍රමවේදයන් තුල තහවුරු වන නිරීක්ෂණ සහ නිගමනවලට මුල් තැන දිය යුතුයි.
මිත්‍රයාව කියන්නෙ ඉතා බැරෑරුම් දෙයක්...

See Translation



614 539 comments 317 shares

Figure 2


Naleefa Abdul Wadood's Post
Naleefa Abdul Wadood
December 13, 2020 ·
කොවිඩ් 19,
මුස්ලිම් සමාජය වගේම ආසාදනයෙන් මියගිය තම ඥාතීන් භූමිදානය කිරීමට ඉල්ලා සිටින අරගලයෙ වැදගත් වන්නේ අවසන් කටයුතු කිරීමට නොහැකි වීම පමණක් නොව, ඊට වඩා වැඩි දෙයක් අවධෝඩ කරගත යුතුය. මුස්ලිම් අය විතරක් නොව, ඛෙදීඩ, හින්දු හා කතොලික යන හැම ජාතීන්ම තමන්ගෙ අවසන් කටයුතු කිරීමෙ අයිතිය අහිමි වී ඇත. නමුත් මුස්ලිම් අයගෙ ඉල්ලීම දෙස වෙනත් දෘෂ්ටි කෝණයෙකින් බැලිය යුතු යි. මෙ නම් හිතන්නේ ඉතා කුඩා ප්‍රමාණයෙක් අය හැර මුස්ලිම් අය මිනී පුවිවන නැත්නම් ආදාහනය කිරීම පිටවී ඇයිත් දැනලවත් නැතිවි ඇති කියලා. ඊට අමතරව තවත් වැදගත් වන්නේ, මෙම මුස්ලිම් සමාජය ඇයි මේ තරම් බරපතල ලෙස භූමිදානය කිරීමට ඉල්ලා සිටින්නෙ කියන එක. සමාජ විද්‍යාත්මක දෘෂ්ටිකෝණයෙකින් මෙය බැලීම ඉතා වැදගත් වේ. අපි සමාජානුයෝජනය වෙලා තියෙන්නේ සූදුස්සා එක පාපයක් ලෙස ය. මිනී නාවේවි, සාමාන්‍ය සහෙකු ව පවා ගින්දරෙන් පුවිවන එක පාපයක් ලෙස. අපිට අයිතියක් නැහැ කෘමීන් ව පවා ගින්දරෙන් පුවිවන්න. දෙවියන් ට පමනයි ඒ අයිතිය ඇත්තෙ. අපිට හානියක් සිදු කරන හින්දා, ඒ සතාව මරන්න හොඳ වෙනත් ක්‍රමයකින් විනාස කරන්න පුළුවන්. නමුත් ගින්දර පාවිච්චි කර මරන්න අපට අයිතියක් නැහැ කියලා අපි සමාජානුයෝජනය වෙලා තියෙන්නේ. තවිදුරටත් මරණය කියන්නේ ඉතා සංවේගී එකක් හෙ. එතන තමයි ආගම මිනිසුන් අකුරට පිලිපදින්නෙ. එතන මුස්ලිම් අය ගින්දර සසඳන්නෙ පාපයක් සමඟ, දඩුවමක් ලෙස සහ නරකාදිය සමඟ. මෙන්න මෙතන තමයි කතුඩල වෙන්න. මගෙ අම්මා, මගෙ තාත්තා මගෙ අය කර්පූ වැරදිද කුමක්ද? පුවිවන්න තරම්. මෙයේ මුස්ලිම් අයගෙ ප්‍රශ්නය. මෙහිදී තවත් වැදගත් කරුණක් ඇත. මුස්ලිම් අයගෙ අවසන් කටයුතු අනිත් ජාතීන් තුනට වඩා වෙනස්නෙ නැද්ද. ඒගොල්ලෝ සමාජානුයෝජනය වෙලා තියෙන්නේ මෙහෙමයි. මැරිණු කෙනෙකුට පණ නොතිබුනත් ඒ අයට වෙදකාව දැනෙනවා, අපිව ඇහැනවා නමුත් අපිත් එක්ක සම්බන්ධ වෙන්න බැහැ, මොකද ඒගොල්ලන්ට පණ නැති නිසා. ඒ හන්දා තමයි, මුස්ලිම් අය එම්බාම් කරන්නෙ නැහැ, ඒ අය නරක් වන්නට ප්‍රථම හැකි ඉක්මනින් අන්ත්‍යවේය ආගමික කටයුතු අවසන් කරල භූමිදානය කරන්නෙ. මෙම විදියට හැදුනු කෙනෙකුට පණ වගේ ආදරේ කරපු තමන්ගෙ අයව, තදින් ඇල්ලුවත් මගෙ අම්මට රිදෙයි නෙ කියා පරිස්සම්න් ස්නානය කරවලා, සුදු රෙද්දෙන් ඔතලා භූමි දානය කරන අයට, මගෙම මැරිණු කෙනෙක්ව පුවිවන්න දෙන්නේ කොහොමද?ඒක තමයි මුස්ලිම් සමාජයට ගැටලුව වී ඇත්තෙ.
මෙය අපේ පොලිටිශන්ලා හිතට ගනිහොත් මෙම ගැටලුව නිරාකරණය කිරීම ඉතා පහසු කටයුත්තක් වේ. මගෙ මතය අනුව නම් මෙම ඉල්ලීම පිටුපස කිසිදු අන්තවාදී අදහස් නොමැත.
මෙයට
ඒ. ඩබ්. එන්. නලීෆා
ශ්‍රේෂ්ඨ කථිකාචාර්ය
සමාජ විද්‍යා අධ්‍යයන අංශය
අග්නිදිග විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය
See Translation
VICTIMS IN SRI LANKA STAND AGAINST FORCED CREMATION OF COVID-19
58
22 comments 25 shares

Figure 3


All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama - ACJU's Post
All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama - ACJU
March 16, 2020 ·
https://acju.lk/.../1858-guidelines-given-by-acju...
#ACJU_Media #lka #corona_virus
An extract from the statement issued by ACJU on 15.03.2020 with regard to
COVID -19
Refrain from all gatherings including performing Jumu'ah, 05 times congregational prayers at Masjid and public locations.
Azan should be called out at the prescribed times at the Masjid. At the end of Azan the following should be pronounced "Sallu Fee Rihaalikum" (Offer prayers at your respective premises) (Sahih Muslim – 697).
The Imam and the Muazzin of the Masjid shall offer their prayers congregationally at their respective Masjids.
Obligatory prayers should be offered at the residences. Special attention should be given to the offering of Sunnah prayers, Tahajjud, Dhuha, charity, voluntary fasts and other voluntary acts of worship. Extra effort should be made to abstain from sins.
FOR FATWA RELATED QUERIES
64
30 shares

Figure 4

ඇත්ත තිත්තයි. තිත්තයි ඇත්ත.'s Post

ඇත්ත තිත්තයි. තිත්තයි ඇත්ත.
May 27, 2020 ·

තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් තොග වශයෙන් කොරෝනා පතුරුවයි..

April 2, 2020 at 3:02 am | lanka C news

තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් තොග වශයෙන් කොරෝනා පතුරුවයි..
මැලේසියාවේ සිට තායිලන්තයටත් තායිලන්තයේ සිට පකිස්තානයටත් දැන් ඉන්දියාවටත් තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් ඒකතු වීම හරහා කොරෝනා වෛරසය පතුරුවා ඇත.

ඉන්දියානු සම්භවයක් ඇති දේශපාලන නොවන ගෝලීය සුන්නි ඉස්ලාමීය එවැන්ජලිස්ත වි යාපාරයක් වන තබ්ලිගි ජමාත් දකුණු ආසියාවේ කොරෝනා වයිරස් පතුරුවා හැරීමේ ප්‍රධානතම වෛරස් වාහකයා"ලෙස ඉස්මතු වී ඇති බවත් එහි සාමාජිකයින්ගේ එකතු වීම හරහා කලාපයේ සිය ගණනක් වූ කොරෝනා ආසාදිතයින් බිහි කිරීමට මූලාශ්‍රය වී ඇතැ බවත් කියනු ලැබේ.

ඉන්දියාවේ ස්වදේශ කටයුතු අමාත්‍යංශය විවිධ ප්‍රාන්ත සමග සම්බන්ධවී ආසාධිත පුද්ගලයින් 3000කට අධික පිරිසක් හඳුනාගෙන ඇති අතර ඔවුන් අතර දකුණු ආසියාවේ අනෙකුත් රටවල සිට පැමිණි විදේශිකයින් ද තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් සංවිධානය මාර්තු මුළ නිසාමුඩින් ප්‍රදේශයේ පැවැත්වූ එකමුතුවට සහභාගී වූ කොවිඩ් 19 හොට්ස්පොට් ලෙස හදුන්වන මැලේසියානුවන්ද ඇති බව වාර්තාවේ.

ආරංචි මාර්ග සඳහාන් කරන පරිදි මොවුන්ගේන් බොහෝ අය හඳුනාගෙන ඇති අතර ඔවුන් පරීක්ෂා කර නිරෝධායනයට යොමු කිරීමට පියවර ගනිමින් සිටී.

ඉන්දිය ආගමන විගමන කාර්යාංශ ආරංචි මාර්ග පවසන පරිදි විදේශන් හි සිට පැමිණි සියලු දෙනාගේ ලැයිස්තුවක් ලිපිනයන් සමග මේ වන විටත් ප්‍රාන්ත ආණ්ඩුවෙත් යැවීමට කටයුතු කර ඇත.

ඔවුන් වැඩි දුරටත් පවසන්නේ මෙම ලැයිස්තුව සමස්තයක් ලෙස සකස් කළ බවත් මිෂනාරි වීසා මගින් ඉන්දියාවට ඇතුළු නොවුන තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් සමාජිකයින් හදුනා ගැනීමට අපහසු බවත්ය.

මැලේසියාවේ පැවැති එකමුතුවට සහභාගී වූ තබ්ලිග් ජමාත් කාශ්මීර ප්‍රධානියා ඇතුළු අවම වශයෙන් ඉන්දියානුවන් 10 දෙනකුවිත් වෛරසය ආසාදනයට ලක්ව ඇතැයි සැක කරයි.

මේ වනවිටත් තෙලන්ගානා ප්‍රාන්තයේ එවැනි මරණ 6ක් රජය හදුනා ගෙන ඇත.

පෙබරවාරි මාසයේ දී මැලේසියාවේ මුස්ලිම් පල්ලියකට කලාපය පුරා සිටින තබ්ලිගිස්වරු 16,000 ක් පමණ රැස් වී ඇත.

ලොව විශාලතම ඉස්ලාමීය මිෂනාරි වියාපාරයේ 16,000 ක් එකට රැස් වී කොරොනා වයිරසය රටවල් දුසිම් භාගයක් දක්වා වියාප්ත කර "අග්නිදිග ආසියාවේ විශාලතම හදුනාගත් කොරෝනා වෛරස් දෙයිකය" නිර්මාණය කළ බව නිවියෝක් ටයිම්ස් පුවත් පත වාර්තා කර තිබුණි

– webgossip
උපුටා ගැනීමකි.

See Translation



38 4 comments 13 shares

Figure 5


ඇන්න තිත්තයි. තිත්තයි ඇන්න.'s Post
ඇන්න තිත්තයි. තිත්තයි ඇන්න.
April 14, 2020
ThePrint
emerged as the 'largest known' Covid-19 source in South Asia
From Malaysia to Thailand, Pakistan and now India, Tablighi Jamaat has spread the coronavirus further from its large congregations.
New Delhi: Tablighi Jamaat, a non-political global Sunni Islamic evangelical movement of Indian origin, has emerged as the "largest known viral vector" of the novel
40
1 comment 18 shares

Figure 6


Jayantha Wickramasuriya's post
X
podujana peramune ayy 2030 France
Jayantha Wickramasuriya · Admin · 1 April 2020
Jayantha Wickramasuriya
1 April 2020
1 comment 4 shares

Figure 7


ඔබට සුභපැතුම්!
Group by Jayantha Wickramasuriya
podujana peramune apy 2030 France
Public group · 7.8K members
Join Group
Share
Discussion
Featured
People
Events
Media
Files
About this group
රාජපක්ෂ රෙජීමය කුරිරු යුද්ධය නිමිවා, රට ගොඩ නැඟීමට මහින්ද චින්තන වැඩපිළිවෙළ සහ මහින්ද චින්තන ඉදිරි දැක්ම යටතේ ක්‍රමානුකූල දීර්ඝකාලීන වැඩපිළිවෙළක... See more
Public
Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.
Visible
Anyone can find this group.
History
Group created on 17 June 2017. Name last changed on 8 December 2021. See more
Members · 7.8K
Ven Pilapitiye and 9 other members are admins. Moditha and 2 other members are moderators.

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Qur'anic Phenomenology: How Can the Researcher Reach the Real Topic?

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The cornerstone of research (*taḥqīq*) is topic identification, which emerges from the primary research question. Qur'anic phenomenology provides criteria for selecting a perceivable and describable research topic and delineates conditions for the researcher (*moḥaqīq*) to approach and uncover the truth (*ḥaqīqah*) of the topic under investigation. Accordingly, the primary question of this paper is: How does Qur'anic phenomenology facilitate the identification of an authentic research topic and guide the researcher toward uncovering its epistemological and ontological dimension? The proposed hypothesis claims that the Islamic, and particularly Qur'anic, phenomenology provides an epistemological framework that facilitates the identification of authentic research topics through the dynamic interaction between the researcher (subject) and the empirical world (object), integrating both ontological (*sharīʿah*) and epistemological (*ṭarīqah*) dimensions. This approach emphasizes experiential engagement, intellectual reflection, and heartfelt intuition with the material and immaterial aspects of phenomena or topic, aiming to uncover deeper truths (*ḥaqīqah*) beyond the limits of sensory perception. This study employs a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach rooted in Qur'anic phenomenology, which integrates ontological (*sharīʿah*) and

epistemological (*ṭarīqah*) dimensions in the pursuit of truth (*ḥaqīqah*). The methodology emphasizes interpretive engagement with both textual and experiential phenomena, drawing on Qur'anic instructions to observe, reflect, and intuit. Primary data were derived from Qur'anic verses and classical commentaries, complemented by relevant philosophical and scientific literature. Qur'anic phenomenology offers an epistemological and ontological model that may inform both the selection of authentic research topics and the methodological uncovering of their deeper realities. Yet, its specific contributions to these processes remain largely unexplored. This article aims to address this gap and is anticipated to contribute to prevailing research paradigms, especially those pertaining to phenomenology.

The Concept of Research

The term *research* is etymologically derived from the fusion of re-, signifying repetition, and search, embodying a quest for knowledge (*al-'ilm*). Linguistically, the term research finds its Arabic as well as classical and modern Persian equivalents in *taḥqīq*, deriving from the root *ḥaqq*, while in Arabic, it is referred to as *al-baḥth*. *Taḥqīq* connotes the discovery of truth (*ḥaqīqah*) and the apprehension of the essence of a phenomenon or object, as it is and as it should be, necessitating the separation of realities from illusions. Raghib Isfahānī (d. 502 AH/1109 CE), in his book, entitled *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān* defines the essence of the word *ḥaqq* as meaning conformity with reality.[1] From a historical vantage point, research traces back to the dawn of human civilization on Earth. In the history of Islamic thought and civilization, *taḥqīq* is recognized as an epistemological approach rooted in rational and genuine inquiry. It is often contrasted with imitation (*taqlīd*), which

1. See Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān* [*Dictionary of Qurânic Terms*], ed. Ṣafwān Adnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2009).

signifies uncritical adherence to established authority or tradition. Similarly, in English research is defined as the creation of true knowledge and facts through systematic methods and methodologies. It is composed of two syllables, a prefix *re* (again) and a verb *search*. Search means to examine and investigate closely and carefully to find the truth of a phenomenon or topic. As such, research involves the repeated pursuit of true (*ḥaqīqah*) knowledge, It is the careful study of a topic, particularly aimed at discovering new facts or principles. Research therefore comprises two fundamental components: Firstly, the individual researcher (in Arabic as well as classical and modern Persian: *moḥaqīq*) or the subject who actively participates in the *taḥqīq* process. Secondly, the *taḥqīq* topic assumes the role of the object. Muslim hakīms (a very wise men or the so-called 'the wise') refer to object as *nafs al-amr*.

Throughout the Qur'an life is described as a journey and knowledge. The word *saiyr*, which means travel or move with all its variations, appears in the Qur'an total 27 times. The Qur'an promotes travel as a potential pilgrimage and confrontation with those real topics and phenomena in the world. Based on various verses in Qur'an, such as verse 20 of Surah Ankabut (Q.29: 20) and verse 46 of Surah Hajj (Q.22:46), traveling, studying the nature, and purposeful excursion is a duty and value. This verse and the other verses in the Holy Qur'an invite people to travel on the earth in order to observe kinds of living creatures, and phenomena. Accordingly, the experimental and scientific voyages are some worthy things which lead to the way of development of knowledge. In the relevant scientific field, the researcher, in addition to observing, confrontation, and reflecting on the surrounding phenomena, or through a general and critical review of the research literature in this area, reaches a level of knowledge and understanding where he identifies a scientific gap as a research question. This process sparks a new idea and thought in the researcher's mind, which can serve as the topic (object or noumenon) and be considered the beginning of new research. In other words, the initial practical step in the scientific research is *topic*

identification that originates from a question and a scientific spark in the researcher's mind.[2]

Literature Review

A review of the literature on the Islamic approach to research reveals that although researchers have addressed various aspects and characteristics of research, there has been no focused study on religious phenomenology in the selection of research topics. Some Muslim scholars provide a definition of research or *taḥqīq* within the context of Islam. F. M. Faridi defines Islamic research as a method of scientific research based on the Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah.[3] Alternatively, Fazlur Rahman offers an different perspective, contending that knowledge remains neutral and devoid of inherent values.[4] Several Muslim scholars have presented different procedures and work plans in the light of Islamic principles to cultivate an Islamic-oriented research approach. Isma'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī (1921 - 1986) and Seyed Muhammad Naqub al-Attās (b. 1931) stand as pivotal figures in this endeavor. Fārūq's main focus was on Islamization of Knowledge.[5] Al-Attās discusses the process and framework of Islamizing the self in detail, unlike Fazlur Rahman who advocates the

2. Ahmad Pākatchī, Majmū'ah-ye Dars-Gūftārhāyī Darbāreh-ye Ravish-e Taḥqīq-e 'Umūmī bā Rūykard-e 'Ulūm-e Insānī-ye Islāmī [A Collection of Lectures on General Research Method with an Approach of Islamic Human Science] (Tehran: Dānishgāh-e Imām Ṣādiq, 1388 [2009 or 2010]), 30–43.
3. For his four characteristics of what defines research based on the Qur'an, see F. M. Faridi, "Islamic Research Methodology: Some Reflections," in *Research Methodology in Islamic Perspective*, ed. Mohammad Muqim (Lahore, Pakistan: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1994), 29–41.
4. Fazlur Rahman, "Islamization of Knowledge: A Response," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 5, no. 1 (1988): 3–11.
5. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*, Islamization of Knowledge Series, no. 1 (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989).

idea of Islamizing the human mind.[6] Louay Safī emphasized the pivotal role of revelation as a major source for constructing both social and scientific theories.[7] Ibrahim Ragab, in particular, should be noted for his contribution to this project.[8] Those interested in this field are encouraged to explore an array of scholarly contributions.[9]

The Qur'an and the Sunnah serve as the primary sources of Islamic belief and practice. Muslims regard the Qur'an as the literal word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. The Sunnah, on the other hand, comprises the sayings, deeds, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. From a Sunni perspective, the Sunnah is limited to the Prophet's own actions, whereas in Twelver Shia' Islam, it also includes the actions and teachings of his daughter Fatima

6. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Singapore: Islamic Academy, 1980).
7. Louay M. Safi, *The Foundation of Knowledge: A Comparative Study in Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998).
8. Ibrahim Ragab, "Islamic Da'wah: A Framework for a Qurànic Hermeneutics," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006): 1–17.
9. Ziaul Haque, *The Prophet and the Miracles: The Traditional and the Qurànic Conceptions of Prophecy* (Lahore: Pakistan National Council of the Arts, 1976); Abdul Rashid Moten, *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Fathi Hasan Malkawi, *The Problem of Methodology in Islamic Studies* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2014); Mughal Junaid, "Epistemology in Islam: A Qurànic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 45–56; Khairul Firdaus Khairuldin, "Epistemological Foundation of Islamic Science: An Analysis of the Views of al-Ghazali and Sayyed Hossein Nasr," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 14, no. 1 (2017): 165–82; Shahir Akram Hassan, "Exploring the Epistemological Foundations of Islamic Sciences: The Philosophical Legacy of Ibn Sīnā," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 14, no. 1 (2017): 183–200; Waseem Gul, "Qurànic Epistemology of Knowledge: An Analytical Study," *Al-Basirah* 8, no. 2 (December 2019): 1–15; Iffat Masood Javed, "Epistemology of Revelation: A Qurànic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 19–35; Marina Abu Bakar et al., "Qurànic Hermeneutics and the Epistemology of Islamic Scientific Inquiry," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 19, no. 1 (2022): 215–3.

and the Twelve Imams, collectively known as the Fourteen Infallibles (*ma'sūmīn*). Phenomenology is not only a diverse branch of philosophy, but also an analytical method employed in the study of subjects and objects across the humanities.[10] This article seeks to bring them into conversation. In order to most effectively facilitate this, author places greater emphasis on the Qur'an rather than the Sunnah. Consequently, Qur'anic phenomenology is adopted as the preferred approach within the framework of Islamic phenomenology.

Despite the significance of the topic, the existing literature on Islamic and Qur'anic phenomenology and research topic remains sparse, indicating a clear gap that this study aims to address. The main question that may arise is: How does Qur'anic phenomenology facilitate the identification of an authentic research topic and guide the researcher toward uncovering its epistemological and ontological dimension? It should be noted that the secular phenomenology, which currently dominates the paradigm of research methods and methodologies, leads researchers to approach the research topic from a secular and materialistic perspective, focusing exclusively on its material and physical dimensions. In contrast, religious and specifically Qur'anic phenomenology encourages researchers to explore both the material and immaterial aspects of the topic. Moreover, it directs attention not only to the outward and physical dimensions but also to the inner and metaphysical realms. Theoretically, Edmund Husserl [11] and Martin Heidegger's phenomenology[12] sought to describe the phenomena as they manifest in the external world, emphasizing their physical characteristics. In line with their original endeavours, Henry Corbin's

10. Valerie Gonzalez, "Phenomenology of Qur'anic Corporeality and Affect: A Concrete Sense of Being Muslim in the World," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (July 2023): 827, 2.
11. Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), XIII-XVI.
12. Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 5254.

Islamic phenomenological approach integrates both the physical and metaphysical dimensions. In Corbin's new settings, physical and metaphysical phenomenology function to both replace and complement the physical phenomenology advanced by Husserl and Heidegger.[13]

Every human action has two dimensions: *the sharīʿah*, or external practice, which is rooted in belief; and the *ṭrīqah*, or internal intention. Similarly, research encompasses these same aspects: the *sharīʿah* of research, including elements such as the topic, research questions, and data collection, and the *ṭrīqah* of research, which involves topic identification, reasoning, and data analysis. The alignment of the *sharīʿah* and *ṭrīqah* of research is crucial for applying the Qur'anic indicators in identifying a genuine research topic and the criteria that guide the researcher toward the truth (*ḥaqīqah*) of the subject or phenomenon under investigation. In other words, the researcher's genuine belief and certainty in the Qur'anic criteria and indicators can transform the research process into a practical and actionable endeavor throughout the course of the investigation.[14]

The methodology of Qur'anic phenomenology is capable of bringing the researcher closer to the truth of a phenomenon. This approach is consistent with the fundamental purpose of research or *taḥqīq*, wherein the researcher or *moḥaqīq*, through the application of a sound and appropriate methodology, can uncover the true nature of the research topic. Addressing the issue of the contribution of Qur'anic phenomenology to the process of topic selection in research, this paper is expected to make a significant contribution to the modern academic literature on research methods and methodologies, thereby complementing modern phenomenology.

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13. Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Phenomenology through the Eyes of an Iranologist: Henry Corbin (1903–1978)," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3–4 (1995): 55- 56; 66-67.

14. Seyed Mohammad Hūshī Sādāt, *Moqaddameh-ī bar Ravish va Metodūlūzhī-ye Taḥqīq-e Islāmī* [An Introduction to Islamic Research Method and Methodology] (Tehran: Intishārāt-e Mīzān, 1401 [2022]), 654–55, 740–67.

Topic Identification: Characteristics

Conducting research, or taḥqīq, mandates a proper confrontation and dialectic between subject and object. Its primary objective is to elucidate an unknown real object or phenomenon (the research topic). The *moḥaqīq*, as the seeker of *ḥaqq* or truth, serves as intermediary linking the natural world, as the object, with the world of intellect (*ʿaql*) and a priori knowledge (*naql*), as the subject. The two pillars of *taḥqīq* are articulated in verse (āyah) 53 of Surah Fuṣṣilat: "God shall show them Divine Signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your God witnesses everything."[15] This verse, or *āyah*, interprets the external world to humans as *āfāq* (object) and the internal world of humans as *anfus* (subject) or selves, aiming to elucidate the truth and *ḥaqīqah* of that object's reality for the selves (*moḥaqīq*) through their genuine dialectical relationship.[16]

The researcher endeavors to navigate the *taḥqīq* process in pursuit of or approximation to the truth (*ḥaqīqah*) concerning the phenomenon or topic. The objective is to comprehend the current state and subsequently identify a pathway toward the desired or ideal state by addressing and resolving the problem or research question. Reviewing existing literature and prior research is one method through which a researcher can identify a new research topic, thereby building upon the work of others. The second method involves the researcher's observation and attentiveness to the phenomena of the world. The insights gained from these sensory experiences, when combined with reflection and contemplation, lead to the formulation of a problem in the researcher's mind and the emergence of an original research topic. Consequently,

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15. Qur'an 41:53. (سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ)

16. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (New York: Omega Publications, 1994), 123–32.

proposing a research topic in problem-based research is a posteriori rather than a priori. In contrast, a topic-oriented research approach involves a predetermined topic, typically suggested to the researcher by others. Consequently, problem-based research takes precedence over topic-based research, as it involves directly addressing and resolving a real-world issue, rather than merely building upon the values and prior knowledge of other researchers. Therefore, the cornerstone of research is identifying the true topic, which arises from a need within the surrounding environment that the researcher seeks to address. By resolving this need, the researcher aims to transition from the current state to an improved state by the end of the research.[17]

The research topic chosen by the researcher must initially be of personal interest. This criterion is considered the first for selecting a research topic. The second criterion, from the perspective of original religious sources such as the Qur'an, is that the reality and the actual phenomenon, or the research topic, exist independently of the human mind. According to both the Qur'an and Islamic traditions, the world outside the human mind is real, as indicated in verses 20 and 21 of Surah al-Dhāriyāt: "And on the earth are signs for those who have faith with certitude (21) And also in [the creation of] your ownselves [are Signs of Divine Omnipotence, Grandeur, and Wisdom]. Will you not then see [with your inward sight]?"[18]

The term 'āyāt' in these verses refers to clear and evident signs both on earth and within the human body. The Qur'an encourages individuals to seek knowledge and to reflect upon the universe and the signs of Allah within it. Consequently, research and *taḥqīq* have always been integral aspects of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an considers a prepared heart and mind as prerequisites for receiving guidance and achieving certainty through the real signs of nature. Numerous verses in

17. Mohammad-Taqī Ja'farī, *Falsafah-ye 'Ilm* [Philosophy of Science] (Tehran: Muʾassasah-i Tadwīn va Nashr-i Āthār-i Allāmah Jaʿfarī, 1393 [2014]), 117–18.
18. Qur'an 51:20–21. (وَ فِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ ۝ وَ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلا تُبْصِرُونَ)

the Holy Qur'an invite individuals to observe and reflect on the phenomena and objects in the universe, indicating that realities exist independently of the human mind. If human mental images do not align with the external realities of phenomena or objects, these mental images are merely illusions and do not lead the researcher to the truth (*ḥaqīqah*) of the research topic or object. The belief in the existence of a real world independent of the human mind underpins all natural and social sciences.[19] From the Qur'anic phenomenological perspective, a key feature of a research topic is adherence to the principle of reality recognition. This implies that the phenomenon and research topic, or object, must have an external existence. Without this condition, an illusory matter may replace a real one in the researcher's mind, leading to scientific deviation in the research process. The reality of a phenomenon and its existence is confirmed by affirmatively answering the *is* question. Once this is established, the researcher can proceed to the what-oriented question so as to describe the phenomenon or object. Therefore, phenomenology involves describing phenomena as they actually exist and appear. One of the ontological pillars of a phenomenon in original Islamic sources, especially the Holy Qur'an, is the acknowledgment of its existence as an independent, external reality.

The affirmation of external realities in the universe is axiomatic in the Qur'an and accepting reality from both a religious methodological and phenomenological perspective is imperative. The term *waqiʿah* in the Qur'an, as illustrated in the first and second verses of Surah al-Wāqiʿah, is derived from the term reality and signifies an embodiment of reality: "When the Great Event [Resurrection] befalls (2) There can be no denial of its befalling."[20] Thus, the prerequisite for any event or occurrence is the existence of reality. By employing this approach, phenomena that genuinely exist are distinguished from illusory notions

19. Mehdi Golshani, *The Holy Qur'an and the Sciences of Nature* (Fairfield, IA: Maharishi International University Press, 2021), 127.
20. Qur'an 56:1–2. (إِذا وَقَعَتِ الْواقِعَةُ ۞ لَيْسَ لِوَقْعَتِها كاذِبَةٌ)

and phenomena that are merely perceived to have external existence. The principle of reality recognition in the Qur'anic phenomenology is so crucial that, for instance, when the prophet ʿUzayr (Ezra) passed by a ruined village and asked God to show him the reality of the resurrection on the Day of Judgment, God caused him and his donkey to remain in a state of death for a hundred years. After this period, the Prophet ʿUzayr was revived, and Allah also resurrected the donkey accompanying him, thereby demonstrating the reality of resurrection to His prophet. This story is narrated in verse 259 of Surah al-Baqarah, illustrating that the pursuit of knowledge and the attainment of truth are so valuable that a prophet would endure a century of death to witness something in its true form: "Or like him (Ezra) who passed by a town and it had fallen on its roofs, he said: 'How shall Allah bring this to life again after its death?' So Allah made him die a hundred years, then He raised him up and said: 'How long have you tarried?' He said, '(Perhaps) I have tarried a day or a part of a day.' He said: 'Nay, you have tarried (thus) a hundred years. But look at your food and your drink-they show no effect of age; and look at your ass; and that We may make of you a sign for people; and look at the bones, how We assembled them together and then clothed them with flesh! So, when it became clear to him, he said: 'I know that Allah is All-Powerful over all things.'"[21]

In the second article of the first volume of '*Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* (in Persian: *Usul-i falsafeh va ravesh-i ri'alism*) titled 'Philosophy and Sophistry or Realism and Idealism', allāmeh Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabātabāī (AH 1321-1402 / AD 1903–1981) indicates that accepting external reality or waqi'ah by humans is considered a rational and innate proposition. Allāmeh Tabātabāī identifies external reality as the 'known.' He

21. Qur'an 2:259. (أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ لَبِثْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانْظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانْظُرْ إِلَى حِمَارِكَ وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَانْظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنْشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ)

highlights that humans are continually seeking to reach the knowledge, which resides in the mind, seeks to align itself with the known as external reality. The five senses, along with subsequent thought and reasoning, aim to lead humans to the true nature or ḥaqīqah of objects and phenomena.

The second aspect of the principle of reality recognition is that the research topic must be aligned with reality and an actual phenomenon, avoiding baseless speculation and conjecture (*zann*). In other words, both the Qur'an and Sunnah present reasoning as a tool and source for recognition of reality, as exemplified in verses 170 and 171 of Surah al-Baqarah: "And when it is said to them: "Follow what Allah has revealed," they say: 'Nay! we follow what we found our fathers upon.' What! and though their fathers had no sense at all, nor did they follow the right way (170). And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out to that which hears no more than a call and cry; deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they do not understand."[22] The third aspect of the objectivity of the research topic pertains to the researcher. The researcher must possess the necessary pragmatic or realistic approach and not deny reality, which requires the exercise of philosophical thinking, or *hikmī* reasoning, according to the Qur'an.

The experiential dimension of the universe's phenomena and the reality of the research topic is a crucial issue for the researcher and constitutes the third criterion. Experience addresses the question beginning with *is*, specifically the question regarding whether this phenomenon or research topic is real and existent? The answer to this question is revealed through the researcher's direct confrontation with that real topic and the experience derived from it. Therefore, the researcher's experience results from his engagement with the actual environment. The researcher is expected to establish a genuine

22. Qur'an 2:170–71. (وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾ وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُمٌّ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ)

relationship with the relevant phenomenon using tools and sources of knowledge based on sensory, rational, and heartfelt experiences, in order to attain true knowledge and understanding. The story of the Prophet ʿUzayr (Ezra) in verse 259 of Surah Baqarah, as previously mentioned, illustrates the importance of experiential learning for a researcher as emphasized in the Qur'an. Similarly, verse 260 of the same Surah, al-Baqarah, highlights the experiential learning of Prophet Abraham regarding the resurrection: "And when Abraham said: 'My Lord! Show me how you give life to the dead,' He said: 'Do you not believe?' 'Yes,' said Abraham, 'but to make my heart at ease.' He said: 'Take four of the birds. Then make them to incline unto you and (cutting them into pieces) place a part of them on each mountain, and thereafter, call them. They will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is the Mighty, the Wise."[23] Fourteen verses in the Qur'an encourage people to travel the earth and gain knowledge through experiential learning. Examples of such verses include Surah Al-i-ʿImrān (Q.3:137), Surah Naḥl (Q.16:36), Surah Naml (Q.27:69), Surah Fatir (35:45), Surah Yusuf (Q.12:109), Surah ʿAnkabut (Q.29:20), and Surah Muhammad (47:10). Additionally, verses 82 to 98 of Surah Kahf (Q.18:82-98) describe the travels of Dhul-Qarnayn and the experiences he acquired during his journeys.

Needs assessment and usefulness of the research topic constitute the fourth criterion in the research process. When selecting a research topic, the researcher must focus on a specific need or problem and aim to address it, with the goal of transitioning from the current state to an improved state. The foundation of research lies in recognizing a real and tangible need or challenge, which the researcher must address. This involves collecting data using appropriate methods and developing a robust framework for data analysis and final inference. From this perspective, the researcher engages in a scientific field driven by a sense

23. Qur'an 2:260. (وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن قَالَ بَلَى وَلَكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَى كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ)

of responsibility.[24] Thus, the primary factor in selecting a research topic and framing the research problem is the consideration of tangible needs and issues within society, driven by the researcher's sense of responsibility. These needs are assessed based on the researcher's interests in various dimensions, including religious, political, cultural, ethnic, or personal aspects.[25]

A researcher must offer a precise and realistic definition and description of the topic, ensuring a clear understanding of what is being sought and the potential positive impacts of resolving this issue on the surrounding environment. Therefore, the researcher should aim to frame the research topic as a statement derived from the main research question. This approach helps to clarify the main focus of the research question. Consequently, both the research topic and question should be beneficial and practical, addressing a real and substantial need. To distinguish this real need from a false one, the reverse thinking technique' can be employed. Accordingly, the researcher should answer these two questions precisely and transparently: "What will happen if this problem is not resolved, and why is there a need for such research?"[26] The Qur'an, in Surah Al-Kahf (Q.18:22), underscores the importance of needs assessment and beneficial knowledge. It advises researchers to look beyond the number of the Companions of the Cave and instead seek the underlying truth behind their actions: "Soon they will say: '(They were) three, the fourth of them was their dog;' and (some) say: 'Five, the sixth of them was their dog,' guessing at the unseen, and (yet the others) say: 'Seven, and the eighth of them was their dog.' Say: 'My Lord knows best their number, none knows them but a few.' So do not dispute with

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24. Mohammad Dashtī, *Ravishhā va Abzārhā-ye Pazhūhish: Barrasī-ye Ravish va Guzīnish dar 'Ulūm-e Islāmī* [Methods and Tools of Research: A Study of Method and Selection in Islamic Sciences] (Qom: Muʾassasah-i Taḥqīqāt-i Amīr al-Muʾminīn, 1382 [2003]), 46.
25. Ja'farī, *Falsafah-ye 'Ilm*, 117-118
26. Amīr Mas'ūd Hājī Ebrāhīmī, *Rāhnamā-ye Sādeh-ye Pazhūhish* [A Simple Guide to Research] (Mashhad: Muʾassasah-i Muṭālaʿāt-i Rāhburdī-yi 'Ulūm va Ma'ārif-i Islāmī, 1391 [2012]), 71.

them, except in outward disputation, and do not ask any one for a pronouncement about them."[27]

The principle of limitation or niche, as the fifth criterion of a research topic, must be observed to avoid excessive generalization. Instead, the topic should be articulated in a specific and detailed manner, enabling the researcher to concentrate on addressing a genuine need with the resources available.[28] The research topic should also avoid broad generalizations, utilizing clear and precise terminology to delineate the scope and direction of the research. The Qur'an highlights the importance of details, with approximately 750 verses addressing natural phenomena in the world. On this basis, research topics and phenomena can be categorized into four groups based on perception. The first category consists of matters that are 'neither perceivable nor describable (*lā yudrīk wa lā yusaf*)'. This category includes the essence of the divine nature, as understood from various verses of the Holy Qur'an, including verse 180 of Surah al-Ṣāffāt: "Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Honour, far above that which they ascribe (unto Him)."[29]

The second category encompasses matters that are perceivable and describable (*yudrīk wa yusaf*), meaning they can both be perceived and described by a subject. Sensory perceptions and empirical findings predominantly fall into this category. For example, the characteristics of autumn can be both perceived and described. There are more than 750 verses in the Holy Qur'an that are related to nature and natural phenomena in the world. Fourteen chapters of the Qur'an are named after certain animals and natural incidents, such as: the Cow, the Cattle, the Thunder, the Bee, the Ant, the Daybreak, the Sun, the Night, the Fig and the Elephant. Moreover, there are many cases in which Allah takes an

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27. Qur'an 18:22. (سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلاَثَةٌ رَابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْماً بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُل رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعِدَّتِهِم مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلاَّ قَلِيلٌ فَلاَ تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلاَّ مِرَاءً ظَاهِراً وَلاَ تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِم مِنْهُمْ أَحَداً)

28. Hājī Ebrāhīmī, *A Simple Guide*, 71.

29. Qur'an 37:180. (سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ)

oath by some natural phenomena like: the dawn in first verse of Surah Fajr (Q.89:1), the sun, moon, day, night, sky, and earth in verses 1 to 6 of Surah Shams (Q.91:1-6), and the fig and olive at the beginning of Surah Tin (Q.95:1).

The third category includes matters that are perceivable but not describable (*yudrīk wa lā yusaf*), meaning they can be perceived by an individual but cannot be adequately described. This category encompasses prophetic revelations, mystical experiences, and heartfelt intuitions. For example, Allah mentions in verse 74 of Surah al-Anʿām: "And thus did we show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth and that he might be of those who are sure."[30]As such, whoever recognizes the truth, Allah bestows upon him a heavenly light, like Prophet Abraham, whom the above verse referred to.[31] However, these mystical and revelatory matters can only be incorporated into scientific research if they are transformed into rational concept (*mafhum*) and argument (*burhān*) within the intellectual domain. Indeed, understanding observations and transforming these perceptions into concepts through rational methods can elevate Intuitive knowledge from a personal experience. For instance, Mullā Sadrā's philosophy in Shi'a Islam attempts to bridge the gap between heartfelt insights and rational arguments, thereby addressing this challenge.[32]

The fourth category includes matters that are not perceivable but describable (*lā yudrīk wa yusaf*). Such matters can lead to distortions in research, as it is impossible to accurately describe something without understanding it, the so-called illusion (*wham*). The Holy Qur'an, in verse 116 of Surah al-Anʿām, warns against following baseless

30. Qur'an 6:74. (وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ)

31. Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabātabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, vol. 13, trans. Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (Sydney, Australia: Towheed Institute Australia Ltd., 2023), 187–89.

32. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Mutaʿāliyah fī al-Asfār al-ʿAqliyah al-Arbaʿah* [The Transcendent Philosophy in the Four Intellectual Journeys], ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Muẓaffar, 3rd ed., 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1981).

conjectures and unfounded prejudices or asumptions: "And if you obey most of those in the earth, they will lead you astray from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture; and they do nothing but surmise." Verse 36 of Surah Yūnus emphasizes that baseless conjectures never suffice for the truth and do not lead humans to the *ḥaqīqah*: "And most of them follow nothing but conjecture: truly, conjecture can be of no avail against the Truth. Verily Allah is well aware of what they do."[33] Therefore, a notable example of deviation from true research is the avoidance of reality, the pursuit of conjecture, and superficial engagement with developments and phenomena. Verse 28 of Surah al-Najm regards reliance on conjecture, or *ẓann*, as a deviation from the truth or *ḥaqīqah*: "But they have no knowledge thereof."[34]

Therefore, a researcher should not describe a phenomenon without understanding it, as this could lead to a cycle of illusion, pseudo-science, or even anti-science. In the research process, a researcher concentrates on matters and phenomena that are both perceivable and describable, as outlined in the second category.

Truth of the Topic: Conditions

Given the characteristics of a research topic in Islamic and Qur'anic phenomenology outlined in response to the first question of this article, the second question can address the conditions under which, according to the Qur'an, a researcher, can approach or even attain the truth of the research topic or phenomenon under investigation. The first condition of objects and phenomena in Qur'anic phenomenology highlights that the real phenomena in the universe are continuously created by God and are also evolving, as mentioned in verse 5 of Surah al-Ḥajj: "O, people! if

33. Qur'an 6:116. (وَإِنْ تُطِعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ)
Qur'an 10:36. (وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلَّا ظَنًّا إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ)
34. Qur'an 53:28. (وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا)

you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then (consider that) verily We created you from dust, then from sperm, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, that We may manifest (Our power) to you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, then We bring you out as babes, then that you may attain your maturity, and some of you are called to die, and some of you are kept back to the worst part of life so that they know nothing after having known (much), and you see the earth dried, dead, but when We send down the water on it, it stirs and swells and brings forth every kind of attractive herbage (in pairs)."[35]

Moreover, the phenomena of the universe are signs (*āyāt*) of God and manifestations of His attributes and names, as discussed in various verses of the Qur'an, including verses 20 and 21 of Surah al-Dhāriyāt: "And on the earth are signs for those who have faith with certitude۞And also in [the creation of] your ownselves [are Signs of Divine Omnipotence, Grandeur, and Wisdom]. Will you not then see [with your inward sight]?"[36]

From the perspective of a religious worldview, the essence and nature of this reality can be understood through the eternal will and tradition of God, which is referred to as sunnat Allah. God expounds *sunnat Allah*, the principles governing the order of creation and existence, being enshrined in the divine law or *Lawḥ-i Maḥfūẓ* (the Heavenly Guarded Tablet),[37] as mentioned in verses 21 and 22 of Surah al-Burūj: "Nay! it is a glorious Qur'an ۞ in a Preserved Tablet [*Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ*]."[38] Verse 38 of Surah al-Aḥzāb refers to *Sunnat Allah* that have persisted across all epochs and locations: "There is no difficulty to the Prophet (in doing)

35. Qur'an 22:5. (يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْناكُمْ مِنْ تُرابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ مُضْغَةٍ مُخَلَّقَةٍ وَ غَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَ نُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحامِ ما نَشاءُ إِلى أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ وَ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُتَوَفَّى وَ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلى أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلا يَعْلَمَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئاً وَ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ هامِدَةً فَإِذا أَنْزَلْنا عَلَيْهَا الْماءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَ رَبَتْ وَ أَنْبَتَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ)

36. Qur'an 51:20–21. (وَ فِي الْأَرْضِ آياتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ۞وَ فِي أَنفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ)

37. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2000), 72.

38. Qur'an 85:21–22. (بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ ۞ فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ)

that which Allah has ordained for him, and such has been the way of Allah with those who have passed before, and the command of Allah is a decree determined."[39] Similarly, verse 137 of Surah Āl-i-'Imrān also addresses this matter: "Indeed, there have been institutions before you, therefore travel in the earth and see what has been the end of the rejecters."[40] According to the Qur'an, the phenomena of the universe possess two aspects: the physical (*mulk* or *ālam al-shahādah*) and the metaphysical or spiritual (*malakut* or *ālam al-ghayb*). These aspects operate within a networked system where all components and phenomena are interconnected and move towards a specific goal under divine will or Sunnat Allah, constituting the second condition. The phenomenological language of the Qur'an aims to reveal truths beyond the observable phenomena in nature. A researcher with a divine and religious worldview does not separate the realm of the physical from the metaphysical realm.[41] This concept is articulated in verse 22 of Surah al-Ḥashr: "He is Allah, beside Whom none has the right to be worshipped but He, the Omniscient of the unseen [*Ālam al-Ghayb*] and the seen [*Ālam al-Shahādah*]. He is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."[42] Additionally, it is mentioned in Surah al-Tawbah, *āyah* 105: "And say: 'Act you (as you will)! Allah will see your work and (so will) His Messenger and the believers, then soon you will be returned to the Knower of the Unseen [*Ālam al-Ghayb*] and the visible [*Ālam al-Shahādah*], and He will inform you of what you used to do."[43] Therefore, understanding the truth of an object requires moving from the apparent

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39. Qur'an 33:38. (مَا كَانَ عَلَى النَّبِي مِنْ حَرَجٍ فِيمَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَهُ سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَقْدُورًا)

40. Qur'an 3:137. (قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ سُنَنٌ فَسِيرُوا فِي الأَرْضِ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ)

41. Iffat Masood Javed, "Guiding Principles in Islamic Research Methodology: Need of New Elements," *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* 6, no. 2 (June 2019): 211-212.

42. Qur'an 59:22. (هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ)

43. Qur'an 9:105. (وَقُلِ اعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَسَتُرَدُّونَ إِلَى عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ)

sensory perceptions (*maḥsusāt*) to rational concepts (*ma'qulat),* and from details or particulars (*masādīq*) to true meanings and concepts (m*afāhīm*). Through recognizing these processes, one can grasp the divine tradition or Sunnat Allah. A researcher must not merely stop at the apparent aspects of a phenomenon or research topic but should also explore its multiple dimensions. By examining various facets of an object or topic, the researcher can approach or even reach the truth of that topic.[44]

As such, a phenomenological researcher moves from the natural or physical realm (*māfi al-tabi'ah*) to the supernatural or metaphysical realm (*māba'd al-tabi'ah*) and vice versa, in order to understand the essence and the ḥaqīqah of the research topic or object. Qur'anic phenomenology entails the genuine understanding of the realities of the phenomena, such that the researcher, endowed with a degree of revelation of the hidden (*kashf al-maḥjub*), aims to transcend the veils towards reaching the truth of objects, which the Holy Qur'an refers to as interpretation (*ta'wīl*).[45] Consequently, it returns the meaning of every subject and phenomenon to its original essence. In verse 14 of Surah al-Muṭaffifīn, Allah states: "Nay, Rather what they used to do has put rust upon their hearts. "[46] Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabātabā'ī in his *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* comments on this verse, stating that human sins hinder the perception of truth of the real world.[47] In other words, the more one distances oneself from sin and worldly desires, and while purifying oneself, both physically and spiritually, one gains a deeper understanding of the phenomena of the world and perceives reality and *ḥaqīqah* as it truly is. [48] Therefore, Qur'anic phenomenology addresses the

44. Henry Corbin, The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism, 36.
45. Marcotte, "Phenomenology," 59-60.
46. Qur'an 83:14. (كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ)
47. See Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabātabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, vol. 40, trans. Tawus Raja and Amina Inloes (Sydney, Australia: Towheed Institute Australia Ltd., 2021).
48. Seyyed Muhammad Hussein Tabātabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, vol. 40, trans. Tawus Raja and Amina Inloes (Sydney, Australia: Towheed Institute Australia Ltd., 2021), 122–27.

multidimensional nature of a phenomenon or the research topic. As such, every researcher may observe a phenomenon or event from a different aspect. Each phenomenon has multiple aspects, and the more facets and angles of the topic a researcher examines, the closer he gets to the *ḥaqīqah* of that phenomenon.

It is essential for the researcher to use philosophical or *ḥikmī* reasoning to examine the various dimensions and parts of a topic within a networked perspective to approach or reach the truth, which is the third condition in Qur'anic phenomenology. Accordingly, the researcher seeks to investigate and discover the genuine (*ḥaqīqī*) relationships between the phenomenon in question and other phenomena in the universe, referred to as a network approach within a cohesive structure. The Qur'anic verses refers to those researchers, or *moḥaqīqs*, who engage in true contemplation and possess *ʿaql*-i hikmī, as *ulul-albab* (men of understanding), a term reiterates 16 times. Among these verses, one can refer to verses 17 and 18 of Surah al-Zumar: "Those who avoid false deities [powers antithetical to God] by not worshipping them and turn to Allah, for them are glad tidings; so announce the good news to My servants ۞ Those who listen to the Word and follow the best thereof, those are [the ones] whom Allah has guided and those are men of understanding [*Ulul-Albab*]."[49] The fourth condition of the research topic from the perspective of Qur'anic phenomenology is that the objective phenomena possess varying degrees of consciousness. In numerous verses, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes the continuous glorification of creation, reflecting the love and devotion of all creatures to their Creator. Several verses from the Noble Qur'an, including verse 44 of Surah al-Isrāʾ, highlight that the seven heavens, the earth, and everything within them are engaged in the praise and glorification of Allah: "The seven heavens and the earth, and every being therein, celebrate His glory, and there is not single thing but glorifies Him with His Praise, but you do not

49. Qur'an 39:17–18. (وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَى فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ ۞ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ)

understand their glorification; verily He is Forbearing, Forgiving."[50] Additionally, the first verse of Surah al-Jumuʿah underscores the glorification by all entities: "Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth glorifies Allah, the Sovereign, the Holy, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise."[51] Moreover, Surahs Hadid (Q.57:1), Hashr (Q.59:1) and Saff (Q.61: 1) commence with the word *'sabbaha'* (glorify), Surah Taghābun (Q.64:1) with the word *Yusabbihu* (glorify), Surah Isra (Q.17:1) with the word s*ubhan* (glory), and Surah A'lā (Q.87:1) with the command *'Sabbih isma rabbika'* (praise the name of your Lord). The fifth condition in Qur'anic phenomenology is the recognition of the hierarchical nature of phenomena. In terms of ontology and the study of the phenomena of the universe, there are cognitive tools available that humans can employ to gain a true understanding of real objects and phenomena in their environment. These tools include the five senses and experience, reason (ʿ*aql*), and the heart (*qalb*). These tools do not conflict with one another; instead, they complement each other to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a topic or phenomenon. According to Qur'anic verses, individuals are bestowed by God with these tools, which enable them to progressively recognize and become aware of the real phenomena of the universe. One such verse is Surah al-Naḥl, *āyah* 78: "And Allah has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers (while) you knew nothing, and He appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts; that perhaps you may give thanks."[52] From this perspective, sensory, rational, or intellectual (ʿ*aqlī*), and spiritual or heartfelt (*qalbī*) intuitions work together to achieve a more genuine understanding of the phenomena of the universe or the research topic, operating in a hierarchical and interrelated manner. From birth, individuals gradually develop their understanding through reflection and contemplation on the phenomena

50. Qur'an 17:44. (تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَٰكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيماً غَفُوراً)

51. Qur'an 62:1. (يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ الْمَلِكِ الْقُدُّوسِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ)

52. Qur'an 16:78. (وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ)

of the world. By employing inductive (from instance to concept), deductive (from concept to instance), and comparative methods, individuals strive to acquire knowledge and awareness of the truth of surrounding objects and phenomena.

Through contemplation and the application of appropriate methodologies, researchers are capable of uncovering the truth of a topic or phenomenon, commensurate with their level of rationality (*ʿaqlānīyyah*) and the effort invested in the investigative process. Although the entire reality of a topic may not be fully comprehensible, a substantial understanding of this reality can be achieved by utilizing epistemic sources, including sensory, rational (*ʿaqlī*), and spiritual (*qalbī*) intuitions, as well as the Qur'an and sunnah (*naql*). Moreover, with the correct application of these sources and tools, researchers have the potential to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the truth of the research topic.

The sixth condition in Qur'anic phenomenology is adherence to the principle commonly known in modern times as *epoché*, as outlined by Husserl. Accurate knowledge and understanding of a genuine phenomenon are attained when the researcher, in the initial stages of investigation, refrains from introducing prejudices and preconceived values, whether correct assumptions or misassumptions, into the research process. Instead, the researcher should bracket these biases and conduct the research by describing the phenomenon as it truly exists. In this stage, known as reflection, previously accepted facts related to the research topic and the phenomenon under investigation are re-examined and critically questioned. Facts that had been overlooked resurface and are subjected to meticulous scrutiny. Consequently, the researcher must demonstrate open-mindedness, particularly during the phases of topic identification and data collection, to attain a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon. During the data analysis phase, the researcher must differentiate between genuine and false data. The Holy Qur'an, in verse 39 of Surah Yūnus, critiques individuals who dismiss and reject

statements or texts without first listening to and reflecting upon them thoroughly: "Nay, they belied that which they comprehended not with the knowledge of it, which whose interpretation has not yet come to them. Even thus did belie those before them, see then what was the end of the unjust ones."[53]This verse explicitly admonishes those who, despite lacking a complete understanding of a topic, prematurely label it as false. Similarly, verses 151 to 153 of Surah An'am (Q.6:151-153) advocate for a fresh and open-minded approach, emphasizing the importance of abandoning preconceived notions and biases when engaging with the Prophet's message.

Conclusion

Islamic and Qur'anic phenomenology offers an epistemological framework that not only aids in identifying meaningful research questions but also guides the researcher toward experiential and ontological engagement with the topic matter. By integrating the dimensions of *sharīʿah* (ontological aspect) and ṭarīqah (epistemological aspect) of a topic, this approach fosters a deeper understanding of the wholistic truth (*ḥaqīqah*) of phenomena or topic. The Qur'an illustrates this methodology through narratives that require empirical engagement with metaphysical concepts, for example, the stories of ʿUzayr and Ibrahim's encounters with resurrection underscore the necessity of empirical experience even in theological investigation (Q.2:259-260). Moreover, Qur'anic phenomenology emphasizes the generation of research questions through interaction and dialectics of the researcher (subject) with the external world (object). Commands to observe and reflect on historical outcomes, travel the earth (*sīrū fī al-arḍ*), and contemplate the fate of past civilizations exemplify how engagement

53. Qur'an 10:39. (بَلْ كَذَّبُوا بِمَا لَمْ يُحِيطُوا بِعِلْمِهِ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِهِمْ تَأْوِيلُهُ كَذَٰلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الظَّالِمِينَ)

with the real environment leads to the emergence of research-worthy topic. The narrative of Dhul-Qarnayn in Surah Al-Kahf (Q.18:83-98) illustrates a dynamic interaction between the researcher (subject) and the empirical world (object) through his three distinct journeys. As such, the religious phenomenology presents an integrative model for scholarly research topic that seeks both empirical grounding and spiritual depth. Additionally, research topics must emphasize specificity and avoid vague generalizations, an approach consistently reflected in the Qur'an's attention to concrete phenomena within creation. The fig, the olive, the date palm, the honeybee, and even the spider's web are all presented not merely as metaphors, but as distinct subjects of reflection, underscoring the importance of focused, detail-oriented topic.

Qur'anic phenomenology not only offers criteria for selecting a research topic, but also provides a methodological pathway toward uncovering the truth of that, a process referred to as the epistemological aspect of topic (*ṭarīqah)*. A real and experiential research topic, from this perspective, must be both describable and perceivable. Qur'anic phenomenology offers an epistemological framework that unites empirical observation with spiritual cognition. It emphasizes examining both the material (*ʿālam al-shahādah*) and immaterial (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) dimensions of a phenomenon, recognizing it as a creation and a sign (*āyah*) of Allah. A key contribution of this method lies in its emphasis on intellect or *ʿaql-i ḥikmī* (*fu'ād*) and a spiritually sound heart (*qalb-i salīm*) as necessary tools for uncovering truth beyond what the five senses alone can access. Thus, Qur'anic phenomenology is not only a tool for describing phenomena, but also a methodology for discovering their divinely embedded significance. This approach contributes to a more integrative research paradigm, one in which reason (*ʿaql*), revelation (*waḥy*), and perception (*ḥiss*) are harmonized in the pursuit of knowledge.

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Honouring All of Our Relations: Centering Relationality in the Study of Indigenous Religious Traditions

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Western studies of Indigenous religious traditions have historically been rooted in colonial systems of knowledge, dominated by Eurocentric understandings of both "religion" and "civilization." The application of these categories in studies of Indigenous religious traditions has resulted in major misrepresentations or misinterpretations of Indigenous religions. The resulting studies have also often been used to police the "authenticity" of Indigenous traditions, falsely identifying any "modern" aspects of Indigenous traditions (including engagements with Christianity) as evidence of the deterioration of Indigenous religious and cultural practices. These misrepresentations of Indigenous religious traditions demonstrate the need in religious studies to de-center settler colonial categories of religion. The following paper presents a case study of misrepresentations of Métis religion through an examination of works on Métis historical and religious figure, Sœur Marguerite-Marie, née Sara Riel, who was one of the first Métis Grey Nuns, the first Métis missionary in the Northwest, and sister of famed Métis leader, Louis Riel. The ways in which Riel's religious affiliations have been analyzed and misrepresented is illustrative and symptomatic of deep-seated

conventions within Western scholarship on mixed-heritage Indigenous peoples and syncretic Indigenous religions specifically, and of all Indigenous religions more generally. Examining the misinterpretations of Riel's religiosity provides a concentrated look into how the employment of Western categories of religion can result in the overlooking, and simultaneous undermining, of Indigenous expressions of both religious and national identity.

The Métis are a particularly useful group to study in investigating the foundations of the settler colonial gaze in the study of Indigenous religions, for, as a post-contact Indigenous people with Christianities as part of our ancestral religious traditions, the Métis are doubly affected by the settler gaze towards, and white possessiveness of, our religious traditions.[1] Historically, and even contemporarily, Métis indigeneity has been (mis)represented as inherently compromised due to the racial mixedness that serves as a foundation of the ethnogenesis of the Métis Nation,[2] and because of our historic engagement with and

1. Kim TallBear, drawing on Aileen Moreton-Robinson's The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty, examines how white possessiveness of Indigenous identity is an inherent element of settler colonialism that asserts the validity of settler presence on Indigenous land through both the dispossession and erasure of Indigenous peoples, and the reclaiming of Indigenous identity for settlers through the appropriation of Indigenous lands, religious beliefs, and material culture. TallBear argues that "[n]on-Indigenous Americans build on the trope of the vanishing Indian, thus establishing us as a historical resource to own, distort, and exploit for their own well-being. They claim our metaphorical skins as their heritage." See Kim TallBear, "Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming," *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 27.

2. While the maternal ancestors of the first generation of Métis families came from Indigenous nations (in particular, but not limited to, Cree, Saulteaux, Nakoda, and other Anishinaabe and Assiniboine peoples), the paternal ancestors of that

practice of various forms of Christianity, largely considered by settlers to be an inherently colonial settler religion. [3] These attitudes towards Métis religion and religiosity come from missionary sources, recorded by clergy in the age of westward colonial expansion. As part of the civilizing project, these missionaries (mis)interpreted and (mis)represented Indigenous religions in their records as so primitive as to be relatively non-existent or morally non-recognizable. This "lack" of recognizable religion, and the subsequent labeling of Indigenous people as souls ripe for Christian harvest, served as justification for the continuation of Christian missionary work, the "ideological arm" and necessary tool of Christian European conquest and colonialism in the Americas.[4] While very little effort was made to meaningfully represent Indigenous religious/spiritual practices in missionary logs, so too were Indigenous engagements with Christianity

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generation were largely made up of immigrants from European countries (primarily France, Scotland, England, and Ireland) as well as migrants from Upper and Lower Canada, particularly French-Canadian men.

3. Métis scholar of religion Chantal Fiola has investigated the prevalence of these stereotypes towards and among contemporary Métis communities in present-day Manitoba. She highlights how many community members have come to internalize the following beliefs: (1) that all Métis people are Christian (especially Roman Catholic); (2) that Métis people only go to church and First Nations people only go to ceremonies; and (3) that Métis people do not smudge, use hand drums, or participate in sweat lodges of other any ceremonies. See Chantal Fiola, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015) and Chantal Fiola, *Returning to Ceremony: Spirituality in Manitoba Métis Communities* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021).

4. Pablo Richard, "Hemenéutica bíblica india: Revelaciòn de Dios en las religiones indígenas y en la Biblia (Después de 500 años de dominación)," in Sentido histórico del V Centenario (1492-1992), ed. Guillermo Meléndez (San José: CEHILA-DEI, 1992), 47. Quoted in Elsa Tamez, "The Bible and Five Hundred Years of Conquest," in Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, ed. S. Sugirharah Rasiah (United States: Obris Books, 2015), 38.

(incorporation of Christian beliefs, rituals, elements, etc. into traditional religious practices) misrepresented by missionaries who, viewing these engagements through a lens of Christian superiority, recorded any interest in Christianity by Indigenous people(s) as evidence that Christianity was a powerful tool for "civilizing" Indigenous peoples, effectively turning them from heathens to Christians. These sources were then used, often uncritically in many cases, by scholars who were invested in examining the "natural" progression of Indigenous societies' social evolution from "primitive" to "civilized" via Christianization and exposure to Western social and political structures and epistemology.[5] Then, having formed the bedrock of this field of study, subsequent analyses of Métis religion reinforced these stereotypes. Gareau, in his chapter "Mary and Métis: Religion as a Site for New Insight in Métis Studies," explores the stereotype of ambivalence that has been continuously deployed in studies of Métis religion from the early colonial era to present day scholarship. He highlights the longevity of Oblate sources that continue to inform conventions of the field via "reified categories of European religion and Indigenous spirituality, which are projected onto the Métis and valued above the Métis' own religious

5. Famous examples of this type of research include *The Métis in the Canadian West* by Marcel Giraud and *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* by George Stanley whose analysis of Metis cultural, social, and political systems were based on ideas of Social Darwinism, reinforced binaries of settler/Indigenous identity, and ultimately conceived of the Métis as a hybridized "race" and not as a distinct people and nation. See Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*. 2 Vols, trans. George Woodcock. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986) and George Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

perspectives."[6] The supposed ambivalence of the Métis, so believed by missionaries due to the perceived incongruity of Métis devotion and veneration to Catholic saints paired with their persistent defiance of the moral authority of the missionaries, continues to shape contemporary investigations of both Métis religiosity and cultures, and of Métis identity more generally.[7] Thus, a discourse of ambivalence, rooted in colonial categories of religion, and focused on deploying settler colonial values, continues to undermine assertions of sovereignty and self-determination contained within Indigenous expressions of religion.

Sœur Marguerite-Marie, née Sara Riel: Missionary and Métisse

Sara Riel was born October 11, 1848 in St. Boniface, Red River colony located on territory that is now recognized as the province of Manitoba. The Red River settlement was a polyethnic settlement first founded by the families of Indigenous women and their husbands, retired fur traders of European/Euro-American ancestry. At its peak, Red River was home to diverse populations including

6. Paul L. Gareau, "Mary and the Métis," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47, no. 2 (2018): 191.

7. Gareau notes how Oblates were puzzled by the persistence of "bad behaviours" in the Métis, such as "cavorting, dancing, drinking, and engaging in loud and obstinate behaviour" paired with their pious Catholic devotion evidenced by their "dominical obligation, dutiful reception of the sacraments, burial in consecrated ground, and veneration of the Sacred Heart." Fiola similarly highlights Oblate disapproval of the continued existence and influence of "'heathen sorcerers' (medicine people)" whom he believed were a bad influence on the Métis, capable of coercing the people to backslide into their "savage" ways. Gareau notes how Oblates often recorded their fears that the Métis would eventually succumb "to the call of the 'Indian' blood, negating the 'white' way." See Gareau, "Mary and the Métis," 188-193 and Fiola, "Returning to Ceremony," 31-35.

diverse Métis groups[8] often categorized as "French-speaking, Roman Catholic Métis and English-speaking, Protestant 'mixed-bloods' or 'country-born'"[9] in addition to other Indigenous people

8. The diversity of these populations was not just limited to their ethnic heritage and ancestry, but also to their economic activities with residents of Red River taking part in diverse economies of trade, agriculture, and buffalo hunting. See Irene M. Spry, "The Métis and Mixed-Bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870," in The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America, ed. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985).

9. These categories of Métis populations, which have dominated research on Métis history and identity, have been challenged by Métis people and scholars who question the accuracy and usefulness of these distinctions. Scholar Irene M. Spry describes the limited utility of these categories stating that they serve to overemphasize distinctions within the broader Red River community, which largely did not cause any significant or lasting divisions within the community. The prevalence of these categories can be seen as a remnant of non-Métis scholars projecting categories of religion, nationality, and race onto the Métis, attempting in vain to fit a polyethnic, multilingual community into prefabricated categories of European national and religious identity. Similarly, this obsessive focus on the national identities of paternal ancestry results in artificial distinctions, sometimes even within families, and erases and undermines the importance of maternal ancestry and the roles of Indigenous women in building these communities. These categories are also not fully accurate as most "French-speaking" or "English-speaking" Métis were, in fact, multilingual, speaking both French and English and, perhaps most importantly, sharing maternal ancestral Indigenous languages. For example, Sara and Louis Riel both spoke four languages fluently (Cree, Michif, French, and English), and famous Métis leader Gabriel Dumont spoke up to six languages (Michif, Blackfoot, Sioux, Cree, Crow, French). As such, it is disingenuous to categorize these figures as solely "French-speaking" when the myriad of other languages they spoke permitted them to make and maintain relations with other Métis both within Red River and in the many other Métis settlements across the Métis homeland. Métis scholars stress the importance of those kinship connections, facilitated through Métis multiculturalism and multilingualism, as the foundation of Métis national identity - not the former national and religious identities of their paternal ancestors. See Spry, "The Métis and Mixed-Bloods"; and Brenda Macdougall, "How We Know Who We Are: Historical Literacy, Kinscapes, and Defining a People," in *Daniels v. Canada: In*

and more recent settlers from Europe, the British Isles, and Upper and Lower Canada. Over time, these families intermarried and formed complex kinship connections, which solidified a new national Métis identity defined by "an Indigenous title to Land, extended kinship relations, and a broad sense of mobility"[10] that connected Métis communities and families across the Métis homeland.

Riel, like other Roman Catholic girls of the settlement, was educated at the Catholic school operated by the Catholic missionary congregation the Sisters of Charity of Montréal,[11] known commonly as *les Sœurs Grises* or the Grey Nuns. Upon completing her education, Riel continued her tutelage under the Grey Nuns, joining the novitiate in 1866 and becoming a fully ordained member of the congregation in 1868. She began working as a teacher at the Grey Nuns' day school in St. Norbert, but was made to change parishes several times within the next few years. Lesley Erickson reports that these changes were attempts by the Grey Nuns to protect Sara Riel, whose close association with her brother, Louis Riel, made her a target of Louis' enemies and opponents of the Métis resistance.[12] In 1871, Sara Riel was selected to join the mission being established by the Oblates of

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and Beyond the Courts, ed. Nathalie Kermoal and Chris Andersen (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021).

10. Paul L. Gareau and Jeanine Leblanc, "Pilgrimage as Peoplehood: Indigenous Relations and Self-Determination at Places of Catholic Pilgrimage in Mi'kma'ki and the Métis Homeland," *Material Religion* 18, no. 1 (2022): 35.

11. The congregation's official name is les sœurs de la charité de Montréal, though it is now more commonly referred to in French as *les Sœurs Grises (de Montréal)* and, in English, as the Grey Nuns (of Montreal).

12. See Lesley Erickson, "At the Cultural and Religious Crossroads: Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns in the Canadian Northwest, 1848–1883" (MA diss., University of Calgary, 1997).

Mary Immaculate at Île-à-la-Crosse, located in what is now known as northern Saskatchewan. At the mission, her roles included teaching at the school, working in the hospital, tending to the grounds and gardens, working on the farm, and preparing meals for the Oblates and her fellow Grey Nuns. As the only missionary at Île-à-la-Crosse fluent in multiple Indigenous languages, French, and English, Riel also served as a cultural liaison between the mission, the Hudson Bay Company, the Métis, and other Indigenous peoples (predominantly Cree and Dené) who lived and/or wintered near the mission. Riel identified herself as "the first Métis missionary in the North"[13] and frequently wrote about her joy in serving the community at Île-à-la-Crosse. In November 1872, Riel suffered through a severe case of pneumonia. Believed to be dying, she was administered her last rites and commanded by her confessor to pray to the Blessed Marguerite-Marie of Alacoque, known for her visions of and devotion to Jesus' Sacred Heart, for intercession. Upon Riel's recovery, believed by her order to have been miraculous,[14] Riel took on the devotional name of Sœur Marguerite-Marie - the name she would be known as for the rest of her life. Riel again fell ill in winter of 1883 and died of tuberculosis at the age of 35 on December 27th, 1883.

Despite her important position as an Indigenous missionary and educator working within a Catholic religious congregation in

13. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 112.

14. Thomas Flanagan notes how Sara Riel's recovery was accepted as a miracle by her fellow Grey Nuns and by Bishop Grandin who "wrote to Rome to pass on the information to Association for the Propagation of Faith, to be used as evidence in future canonization proceedings" for the Blessed Marguerite-Marie. See Thomas Flanagan, *Louis "David" Riel: Prophet of the New World* (Halifax, NS: Goodread Biographies, 1983), 35.

an important location and at a particularly charged moment in North American history, not much has been written about Sara Riel. She is barely and/or rarely mentioned in accounts of Métis history, and even within biographies of her famous and influential brother, Riel is referred to only in passing if not ignored completely. This erasure of Sara Riel is especially egregious considering that approximately one hundred examples of her writing, contained within letters to friends, family members, and religious superiors, have been preserved by the Saint Boniface Historical Society (La société historique de Saint-Boniface). To date, only one book has been written specifically about Sara Riel. The volume, titled *De Ta Sœur*, also focuses exclusively on Sara's relationship with her brother Louis as the book is an edited compilation of the letters written between the two siblings.

The invisibilizing of Sara Riel within the historical record mirrors a general pattern in scholarship of ignoring and undermining the specificity of Métis religious traditions and beliefs. Where Sara is overlooked as not being an integral or even interesting element of the story of the Métis nation, so too has Métis religion been overlooked as an expression of Métis peoplehood and nationhood.[15] There has recently been a slightly increased interest in Sara Riel as a historical figure in her own right, with scholars calling for more attention to be paid to her and her writings as important resources in examining intersecting issues of race, gender, class, religion, and politics during that

15. For further discussion regarding the terms "nationhood" and "peoplehood" in critical Métis studies and their relationship to the peoplehood matrix developed by Holm, Pearson, and Chavis, see Chris Andersen, "Peoplehood and the Nation Form: Core Concepts for a Critical Métis Studies," in *A People and a Nation: New Directions in Contemporary Métis Studies*, ed. Jennifer Adese and Chris Andersen (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 18–39.

particularly explosive moment in North American history. This interest has led to Riel's position at Île-à-la-Crosse being mentioned in several recent works on Métis history and religious and ethnic identity.[16] However, the majority of works produced on Sara Riel have, unfortunately, remained steeped in stereotypes of Métis "ambivalence"[17] that are rooted in Western categories of ethnicity and religion. For example, scholar Lesley Erickson produced three works on Sara Riel from 1997 to 2011,[18] and while Erickson's scholarship does great work in asserting the significance of Sara Riel as an important figure in her own right,

16. See Timothy P. Foran, *Defining Métis: Catholic Missionaries and the Idea of Civilization in Northwestern Saskatchewan 1845-1898* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017) and Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwest Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
17. Métis scholar Brenda Macdougall unpacks the prevalence of this colonial stereotype of "mixed-race ambivalence" and how it has been historically (and contemporarily) projected onto the Métis. Her work demonstrates how the inflexibility of colonial categories of "race" and "nation" cannot allow for or reconcile the reality of collectivities made up of mixed-heritage populations, and how those same colonial categories are deployed to undermine the group identity of those nations by policing their "authentic" expressions of their racial, ethnic, and national identities. This work is particularly relevant for my analysis of representations of Sara Riel as most non-Métis scholars subscribe to and replicate this myth of cultural ambivalence in their investigation of Riel's ethnic and religious identities. See Brenda Macdougall, "The Myth of Metis Cultural Ambivalence," in *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History*, eds. Nicole St-Onge et. al (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 422–464.
18. See Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads"; Lesley Erickson, "'Bury our Sorrows in the Sacred Heart': Gender and the Métis Response to Colonialism—The Case of Sara and Louis Riel, 1848–1883," in *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women's History*, ed. Sarah Carter et. al. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); and Lesley Erickson, "Repositioning the Missionary: Sara Riel, the Grey Nuns, and Aboriginal Women in Catholic Missions of the Northwest," in *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*, ed. Sarah Carter and Patricia A. McCormack (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2011).

using Riel as an example of how women's histories are erased from popular narratives of national history, Erickson's work also, unfortunately, fails to meaningfully critique or unpack the racist colonial logics that frame Riel as being ambivalent about her ethnic, national, and religious identities. Instead, Erickson's works continue to affirm the idea of Métis ambivalence, suggesting repeatedly that Riel's identity was, at best, "a mystery clouded by contradictions"[19] and, at worst, a cause of torture for Riel that lead her to abandon completely her ties to Red River and her identity as a *métisse*. Mirroring statements about the impermanence of Métis identity and the inherent confusion of Métis religiosity found in missionary sources, Erickson states that "[b]y the time Sara Riel left for Île-à-la-Crosse, she identified more with her French-Canadian companions in the Grey Nuns' order than she did with the Métis."[20]

Erickson finds evidence of Riel's ambivalence towards her Métis identity in a number of surprising places. She suggests that Riel's decision to leave Red River and her excitement at relocating to a new community far away from her home implies that Riel was eager to distance herself from Red River and, therefore, from her Métis identity. Erickson also posits that Sara likely became disillusioned by the Métis political project for national liberation due to the violence of the movement, and so made the choice to assimilate into Canadian society by allying with colonial institutions like the Grey Nuns. The idea that Riel's religious devotion and participation in Catholic missionizing distances Riel from other Métis is based on Erickson's analysis that other Métis

19. Erickson, "Repositioning the Missionary," 134.
20. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 146.

who practiced Roman Catholicism were "only nominally Catholic,"[21] as they chose to maintain some traditional teachings and ceremonies inherited from their maternal ancestors, and because they chose to organize their lives around seasonal hunts and engaged in social activities like drinking and dancing, which went against the explicit orders of the Catholic clergy. This analysis resembles the sermon delivered by Oblate missionary Jean-Marie Pénard at Île-à-la-Crosse in 1899, wherein he berated the Métis for their continued disobedience and degenerate activities and "threaten[ed] the vengeance of God if things did not change."[22] Erickson echoes Pénard in her analysis of the Catholicism of the Métis at Île-à-la-Crosse, arguing that their rejection of church authority is enough to render their Catholicism inauthentic, and positions them in square opposition to the devotion of Riel and her allegiance to her religious congregation. To Erickson, the most telling piece of evidence that Riel no longer identified as Métis was Riel's decision to change her name to the devotional name of Sœur Marguerite-Marie. Erickson reads this decision as evidence that Riel felt that "God required her to choose between the family and her faith,"[23] and that Sara readily chose her faith over her family, and even over her own identity.

By using a framework that positions the Catholic Church and its orders and congregations as a solely colonizing force, Erickson reads all of Riel's decisions as efforts to solidify her identity as Catholic rather than Métis – an argument based on colonial logics wherein it is impossible to hold multiple religious,

21. Erickson, "'Bury Our Sorrows in the Sacred Heart,'" 22.
22. Foran, "Defining Métis," 112.
23. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 122.

cultural, or national identities simultaneously. It is no wonder that, within this framework, Erickson suggests that, by choosing to align herself with the coloniality of the Catholic church, Sara Riel "stood for everything her brother was fighting against."[24] Part of Erickson's analysis of Riel's "contradictory" identity is based on the assumption that Christianity, Catholicism in particular, acted uncomplicatedly and exclusively as a colonizing force in the settlement of the Northwest and the creation of Canada. While it is, of course, true that Christianization was certainly used as a powerful tool of colonialism, Erickson's analysis assumes that no Indigenous individuals or communities could have possibly engaged with Christianity without having first been forced or coerced. As such, Erickson believes that there is inherent tension in the beliefs of all Indigenous Christians, a tension that manifests as a profound ambivalence towards one's identities as Indigenous and Christian. This belief, again, comes from colonial categories of religion and spirituality which necessarily position Indigenous "spirituality" in opposition to colonial religions like Christianity, framing them as fundamentally different and inherently incompatible with each other. Also embedded in this assumption is a belief in the totalizing power of Christianity, and the idea that any and all Indigenous traditions that come into contact with Christianity will be inherently compromised and irreparably damaged, thus precipitating an eventual and inevitable slide into cultural extinction. While posing a critique of the colonial power and use of Christianity as a tool of the civilizing project, this view also necessarily centers Christianity, and settler understandings of

24. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 8.

Christianity, over Indigenous religions and Indigenous engagements with and experiences of Christianity.

The unquestioned centering of and belief in the totalizing destructive power of Christianity constitutes what Eve Tuck identifies as a "damage-centered"[25] paradigm–a paradigm that produces research characterizing Indigenous communities as "spaces saturated in fantasies of outsiders" wherein Indigenous spaces are "sites of disinvestment and dispossession."[26] Again, while it is true that Christianization has left a devastating impact on Indigenous communities, dispossession does not make up the entire story of Indigenous religion, and centering the damage done to Indigenous people(s) is a way to continue centering colonialism as the single most important and defining event in the lives of Indigenous nations. Tuck, therefore, proposes a movement away from viewing Indigenous communities and cultures through this lens of damage, suggesting instead the utilization of a research paradigm which centers desire. Desire-based frameworks, Tuck claims, "are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives,"[27] thus making room for a fuller imagining of Indigenous agency and futurity. Māori Scholar Brendan Hokowhitu similarly addresses the overreliance on paradigms of Indigenous "damage," and even "resistance," in describing the complex realities of Indigenous lived experience. Employing an existentialist lens, Hokowhitu argues that this tethering of Indigenous identities to a

25. Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 79, nov. 3, (2009): 409-427.
26. Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 410.
27. Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 414.

"colonized/colonizer dialectic"[28] ensures that Indigenous existentialism is not able to find expression through Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, but is instead eternally bound by its relationship to an oppressive Other. In order to allow for Indigenous existentialism that lives beyond the bounds of colonialism, it is essential to build research through desire-based paradigms in order to investigate the agency and existentialism of our ancestors, to allow for the fullness of their lived experiences in our explorations of the past, and to create the space to highlight our communities' onto-epistemologies that have always served as the foundations for how we understand our own religious beliefs and traditions.

The Many Relations of Sara Riel

Utilizing desire-based research paradigms rooted in Indigenous onto-epistemologies is essential to counter widespread misrepresentations of Indigenous religions across Western academic disciplines. The religiosity of Sara Riel needs to be situated and understood via culturally specific frameworks of religion practiced by the Métis in order to both achieve a more accurate understanding of Riel specifically, and also to push back against colonial paradigms that distort and misrepresent Indigenous religions more generally. The application of Western categories of institutional religion and damage-centered paradigms does not accurately reflect how Sara Riel understood herself and her role as a Métisse and a missionary who, throughout her entire

28. Brendan Hokowhitu, "A Genealogy of Indigenous Resistance," in *Indigenous Identity and Resistance: Researching the Diversity of Knowledge*, eds. Chris Andersen et. al. (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2010), 210.

life, identified herself in ways that were unequivocally not ambivalent.

Exploring Riel through the lens of relationality, and specifically the Cree and Métis concept of *wahkôtowin*,[29] allows us to understand how, to Riel, her Catholicism did not negate her relations to her Métis family and communities, but served as a tool to strengthen them. Métis scholar, Brenda Macdougall writes about the Métis at Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan in the 19th century, and the role that Roman Catholicism played in reifying relational structures within and across Métis communities in her book *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan*.[30] It is important to note that, despite Erickson's hypothesis that Riel relocated to Île-a-la-Crosse in order to distance herself from both her Métis family and identity, Île-à-la-Crosse was, in fact, another Métis settlement and the birthplace of Riel's father, Jean-Louis Riel,[31] and, at the time of her missionary work, much of his family still resided in the area. Similarly, while Erickson claims that Sara Riel's devout Catholicism put her at odds with the Métis at Île-à-la-Crosse, Macdougall shows that there is ample historical evidence that Christianity was being practiced in

29. See Matt Wildcat and Daniel Voth, "Indigenous Relationality: Definitions and Methods," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, (2023): 1-9; Derrick, Nault, "Louis Riel, Wahkohtowin, and the First act of Resistance at Red River*," Prairie History*, issue 8 (Summer 2022): 5–16; O'Reilly-Scanlon et. al., "Pathways to Understanding: 'Wâhkôhtowin' as a Research Methodology," *McGill Journal of Education / Revue Des Sciences De l'education de McGill*, vol. 39 (Winter 2004): 29–44.

30. See Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwest Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

31. Jean-Louis Riel was also known as Louis Riel Sr.. See Macdougall, *One of the Family*.

the Northwest by the Métis well before the establishment of missions in the 1840s. Historians John Foster and Keith Widder indicate that a form of "folk Catholicism"[32] had developed within Métis communities prior to the missionizing of Rupert's Land and the Great Lakes region. This "folk" or "lived"[33] form of Catholicism included practices like infant baptism in local bodies of water and the holding of prayer services, even though none of the Métis in that area had ever previously attended a Catholic mass. Likewise, Mary V. Jordan, in her book *De Ta Sœur*, emphasizes that Christianity, like Indigenous religions, was a heritage religion of the Métis, with Christian beliefs and practices having been inherited from their European Christian kin. She states that "evangelism began before the appearance of the Blackrobes and that a deep religious spirit was handed down from the father to the son."[34] Erickson argues that Sara Riel's devout Catholicism is evidence of an attempt to abandon her Métis identity, suggesting that First Nations religious traditions and ceremonies are more "authentic" expressions of Métis religiosity. That argument fails to take into account how the paternal ancestors of the Métis also shared their beliefs and practices with their offspring, eventually forming communities with distinct religious practices that held

32. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 131.
33. Many scholars, communities, and activists take issue with the term "folk Catholicism" as the term can be understood as reifying structures of moral and civilizational hierarchy. In order to counter the assumptions, conventions, and structures reified by replicating that language, a more appropriate term may be drawn from the work of Robert Orsi, his work on lived religion, and the accompanying assertion that all religion is handcrafted by the people who practice it. See Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
34. Mary V. Jordan, *De Ta sœur, Sara Riel* (Toronto: Griffin Press Ltd., 1990), 58.

together belief systems from both their First Nations and European ancestors.

Until recently, both missionary accounts and the dominant historical record have been uninterested in investigating how the Métis conceived of and understood their own practices of Christianity. As Macdougall points out in her work, upon their arrival at Île-à-la-Crosse, "Catholic missionaries quickly recognized that there was enough understanding to attempt to perform the appropriate rituals, though they were unable to attempt to assess the full extent of Métis knowledge about the faith."[35] Missionaries could have tried to discern how Catholic rituals and practices were being understood by the Métis, but they elected not to as that was hardly the focus of their missionary work, which instead aimed to deliver teachings and achieve baptisms in order to expand Christian European influence. The ways in which the Métis transposed Christian teachings upon existing religious frameworks was not of particular interest to missionaries and were thus not investigated nor recorded.

Macdougall finds, however, that after missions were established, the Métis were able to maintain their own approaches to practicing Christianity that reflected their unique ways of doing, being, and knowing. Macdougall identifies *wahkôhtowin* as the framework through which the Métis practiced and understood Catholicism, stating how the Catholic privileging of family, both natural and spiritual, was easily and completely compatible with the worldview of the Métis. Thus, the early "successes" of missionaries in "converting" the Métis needs to be reconsidered,

35. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 131.

along with the belief in Christianity as an inherently dominant belief system. The reality is that Christianity was already present in the area, and that Christianity itself is flexible, with missionaries being made to adapt their message in ways that Indigenous peoples "found appealing and did not clash with their existing values."[36]

There are many elements of Catholic belief and practice that were easily integrated into pre-existing Métis kinscapes.[37] The use of familial terms by the clergy (Father, Brother, Mother, and Sister) reflected the ways in which the Métis formed intimate familial connections with members of their extended families, including non-biologically related kin, referred to often in anthropological records as "fictive kin."[38] Similarly, the services

36. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 134.

37. Sami Lakomäki identifies a kinscape as "a terrain of social and geographic space in which several overlapping networks of kinship radiated out from each community and connected it to dozens of others, both near and far." Lakomäki described this phenomenon in their exploration of Shawnee social organization, highlighting in particular how the mobility and connectedness of the Shawnee across their territory allowed for both social dispersion and reconsolidation as a response to threats to the nation. This concept is particularly relevant to discussions of Métis identity and nationhood, given that the Métis are also a people based on extensive kinship networks and mobility. Métis scholars Nicole St-Onge and Brenda Macdougall have also applied Lakomäki's kinscape model in their investigations of Métis kinscapes which served as the foundation of Métis buffalo-hunting brigades. See Sami Lakomäki, "Conclusion: A Living Nation," in *Gathering Together: The Shawnee People through Diaspora and Nationhood, 1600-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale Scholarship Online, 2014), 229-230; Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility: Metis Buffalo-Hunting Brigades," *Manitoba History*, no. 71 (2013): 21–32; Nicole St-Onge and Brenda Macdougall, "Kinscapes and the Buffalo Chase: The Genesis of Nineteenth-Century Plains Métis Hunting Brigades," in *The Greater Plains: Rethinking a Region's Environmental Histories*, ed. Brian Frehner and Kathleen A. Brosnan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 89–113.

38. Macdougall critiques the use of the term "fictive kin" in describing Métis kinship and family designations. She notes that, while what anthropologists were acknowledging was the propensity of the Métis to create relationships "style as siblings, parents, or other types of close family" between individuals with no

provided by missionaries to Métis communities (such as their work in schools, orphanages, and hospitals), based on Catholic principles of caretaking and reciprocity,[39] also enabled the development of deep bonds between certain missionaries and Métis families and communities. The buildings erected by the Oblates and Grey Nuns also served as sites of community connection, as family milestones such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals were hosted in those spaces. Those buildings also provided dedicated spaces for prayer wherein the Métis could engage in religio-spiritual intercession and popular devotions to Mary, Saint Anne, and the cult of saints—Catholic practices that easily mapped onto Métis kinship systems that already allowed for intimate, tangible relationships with ancestors, spirits, and other more-than-human relatives.

Perhaps the most material way that clergy became integrated into Métis kinscapes was by becoming godparents to

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biological or marital connections, she also states that the term "fictive kin" implies an unreality which obscures the reality of those relationships and their validity and veracity in Métis communities. Brenda Macdougall, "Speaking of Métis: Reading Family Life into Colonial Records," in *Ethnohistory* 61:1 (Winter 2014): 31.

39. Macdougall critiques how mainstream historians have viewed the Grey Nuns establishment of schools, orphanages, and hospitals as evidence that the Grey Nuns were strictly a colonizing force in the Northwest. Instead, Macdougall highlights that the establishment of these institutions could also be seen as acts of community reciprocity. She explains that because "the Church was both the symbolic embodiment of family and was consecrated within a social relationship with the community, what families expected from one another they now expected from the clergy." She also states that, from the community's perspective, the Grey Nuns helped fulfill "important components central to the ideal of 'Homeness'" by filling the roles of havens of education and health and that, ultimately, "wahkôhtowin was not undermined by the operation of the hospital, orphanage, or the school. On the contrary, these institutions - evidence of Homeness - became avenues for Métis families to access both new resources and another family system by which they extended their connections to others." (Macdougall, One of the Family, 142–3)

Métis congregants. The notion of spiritual guardians, Macdougall argues, was a concept that was also readily adapted to *wahkôhtowin*. She states that while godparents had a clearly defined and somewhat strict role within the Catholic church as spiritual mentors but not daily caregivers, "the niche they filled in the traditional family structures of *wahkôhtowin* also reinforced traditional Indigenous values by providing children with multiple parents upon whom they could rely."[40] More than providing Métis children with another parental figure within their kinship networks, the spiritual role of godparents also reflected a pre-existing role in Cree/Métis socio-political and religious beliefs—that of *pawaganak*[41], benevolent guardian spirits who, through dream revelations, "helped human beings to accomplish things they could never do without assistance"[42] such as hunt extraordinarily well, attain gifts as a healer, and communicate with spiritual beings. Thus, the spiritual guardianship of a godparent was not dissimilar to the parental roles of "fictive" kin in Métis kinscapes and likewise provided similar spiritual guidance offered by *pawaganak* who were also conceived as being part of a "holistic notion of family that involved the spirit world."[43]

It is especially important, then, to recognize that Sara Riel served as a godparent four times between 1876 and 1880 to local Métis and/or Hudson Bay Company families at Île-à-la-Crosse.

40. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 152.
41. *Pawaganak* are a part of many First Nations' religious practices, including the Cree, Ojibwe, and Saulteaux. These are home nations of many of the maternal ancestors of the first generation of the Métis nation.
42. Susan Elaine Gray, "Pakwâciskwew: A Reacquaintance with Wilderness Woman," in *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*, ed. Sarah Carter and Patricia A. McCormack (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 245-259.
43. Macdougall, *One of the Family*, 152.

One of her godchildren was even a blood relative, Marguerite Marie, daughter of Charles Lafleur and Josette Lagimodière. Macdougall notes how it was atypical for clergy to serve as godparents generally, and so for Sara Riel to have performed this role four times shows a level of integration into the community, its families, and its cultural practices that was likely not accessible, or even possible, for non-Métis clergy. It seems likely that Riel held unique positions both at the mission and within the community at Île-à-la-Crosse, acting as both a community member through kinship ties and as a spiritual guardian through her affiliation with the Grey Nuns. She also provided specific religious services at Île-à-la-Crosse by fashioning hand-painted devotional images for Métis families who took part in veneration of the sacred heart. According to missionary accounts, veneration of this kind seemed to be practiced seemingly only or primarily by Métis families–not First Nations, nor settler families–and so Riel's creation of these images helped the religious orders understand which Île-à-la-Crosse families belonged to each specific ethnic and national group.[44]

The active role that Sara Riel played in both her position as a Grey Nun missionary and as a community member of Île-à-la-Crosse calls into question all previous analysis of Riel, which, having been based on colonial categories of religion, asserted that her Catholic identity somehow undermined or caused her to forfeit any claim to indigeneity. In Riel's personal letters, she unambiguously refers to herself as both a missionary and a *métisse* and seems to find no conflict in those identities. In a letter to Louis

44. Foran, *Defining Métis*, 103-107.

Riel following his exile in 1870, rather than distancing herself from the liberatory project of the Red River Resistance, Sara comforts her brother with the following passage: "'Louis, let us Bury our Sorrows in the Wound of His Sacred Heart.... [T]o love and pray, these are the arms with which we must fight to vanquish the conqueror.'"[45] Near the end of her life, Riel attempted to found an orphanage at Île-à-la-Crosse, using the lands that were owed to her as a Métis person under the Manitoba Act. In a letter to her superiors, she asserts the importance of her Métisness in carrying out this project, stating: "I have always counted on my right as a Métis child in order to found our orphanage."[46] Riel's lifelong assertion of herself as a Catholic Métis demonstrates how colonial categories of religion that place Indigenous religiosity in diametric opposition to institutional Christianity are not useful in investigating the ways that Indigenous peoples understand their own religious practices and experiences, especially when those practices adapt and incorporate elements of outsider and/or new heritage religions into their belief systems.

Macdougall's examination of the role of *wahkôhtowin* in translating and making sense of Métis Catholicism reframes the "easy success" of Catholic colonial projects in the Northwest and challenges the myth of colonial Catholic inflexibility. Rather than taking for granted Christianization as a hegemonic force[47] that is both an inevitable and unstoppable element of colonialism and cultural assimilation, viewing these processes through a

45. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 18.
46. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 135-136.
47. Hokowhitu calls for a "post-hegemonic" understanding of how Indigenous peoples navigate their realities which does not aim to ceaselessly bind Indigenous peoples to the trauma of colonialism. See Brendan Hokowhitu, "Indigenous Existentialism and the Body," *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009): 101–18.

framework of relationality shows how new traditions were, 1) co-constituted by the European paternal ancestors and the Indigenous maternal ancestors of the first generation of the Métis nation, 2) reified by Christian missionaries providing religious and social services to Métis communities, and 3) recreated by generations of Métis families continuing these practices to the present day. While members of religious orders participated in the creation of new traditions—they developed and altered missionary practices to fulfill the unique spiritual needs of these communities, such as holding services in Indigenous languages, integrating Indigenous material cultures in worship, and allowing clergy to participate in bison brigades,[48] etc.—they themselves were not the sole architects of this process, as missionaries often viewed these new constructions as temporary measures to bring Indigenous people into the fold of the institutional church.[49] The recreation, replication, and further adaptation of these new Christianities was thus spearheaded by the Métis themselves who crafted practices and understandings of Christianity to suit the unique religious needs of their nation.

Furthermore, *wahkôhtowin* as a core philosophical value had existed on these lands long before the first missionaries entered

48. See Brenda Macdougall with Nicole St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility: Metis Buffalo Hunting Brigades," *Manitoba History* 71 (2013): 21-32 and Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny, "The Mobile Village: Metis Women, Bison Brigades, and Social Order on the Nineteenth-Century Plains," in *Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America*, 1749-1876, eds. Elizabeth Mancke, et. al., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 236-263.

49. Foran examines the efforts of Oblates such as Jean-Marie Pénard and Father Albert Lacombe who tried to walk back the authority of the Métis in developing their own approaches to practicing Roman Catholicism. See Foran, "La civilisation moderne: The World Came Seeping In", in *Defining Métis*, 115–118.

the territory. Examining Métis Catholicism through the framework of *wahkôhtowin* relocates Sara Riel within the web of relations that defined her as both a Catholic and as a Métisse. It not only provides a more fulsome and accurate picture of Sara Riel's roles, responsibilities, and relations both at Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse, but it also helps to undo the prevalent stereotype of Métis ambivalence[50] and demonstrates how Métis religious practices were open to and capable of honouring all their relations—their lands, spirits and saints, and both their Indigenous and European ancestors. This centering of relationality also honours the ways in which Riel's many relatives connected with her. It embraces the ways in which both her fellow Grey Nuns and her relatives at Île-à-la-Crosse and Red River related to her, and provides context for her greater connection to the Métis nation and her own identity as a Métis missionary – an identity emphatically stated by Riel in her own writings and re-affirmed by those close to her. After Riel's death in 1883, her superior at the mission, Sister Agnès, wrote to Sara's mother, Julie Riel, with news of Riel's funeral stating that "people from everywhere came to pray by her body. She was loved and respected as Métisse."[51]

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50. Brenda Macdougall in her chapter "The Myth of Culture Ambivalence" in *Contours of a People: Métis Family, Mobility, and History* illustrates how prominent, mainstream works on the Métis, including Marcel Giraud's monograph The Métis in the Canadian West (1986), often frame these conflicts as a "conflict between civilization and savagery" with the Métis representing an in-between point on that axis. Macdougall also describes how this "ambivalence" perpetuates in mainstream scholarship stating that the: "colonial era's ambivalence about people who did not fit fixed racial categories was recreated within the academic arena, where scholars ascribed meanings to events and categorized Métis people as either more Indian or more white, which is to say more authentically or inauthentically aboriginal." See Macdougall, "The Myth of Cultural Ambivalence," 433–450.
51. Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads," 145.

Undoing the God Trick: Relationality in the Study of Religion

As illustrated by the case study of Sara Riel, the unquestioned and uncritical adherence to Western categories of religion lead to gross misrepresentations of Métis religion generally, and of Sara Riel's personal religiosity specifically. Taking for granted the perspective of Christianity solely as a colonizing force that dominates and erases Indigenous religions perpetuates reifying a damaged-centered view of Métis religion as being irreparably damaged and inherently compromised by its engagement with Christianity. In addition to these theoretical and methodological issues, there is another foundational flaw in Erickson's examination of Sara Riel – the same flaw present in many scholars' fascination with her brother, Louis Riel. Far too often, studies of the Métis and other Indigenous peoples are centered solely on individuals whom settler society finds to be exceptional. This focus on the exceptionalism of the Riels necessarily emphasizes how they differ from the perceived "average" Métis person, a positioning of excellence as being attainable only through removal or distance from Métis collective identity.[52] Erickson identifies this issue in biographies

52. This proclivity to exceptionalize Indigenous individuals can also be seen in Catholic master narratives of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. See Michelle M. Jacob, "The Ecstasy of Saint Kateri: Native Feminism in the Catholic Church," in *Indian Pilgrims: Indigenous Journeys of Activism and Healing with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha* wherein Saint Kateri's "difference" from other Indigenous people is the main takeaway of her story. Her story of transformation, from Indigenous woman to Christian woman, is explicitly racialized in the biography of Saint Kateri written by French Jesuit Pierre Cholenec in 1696 in which he states: "This face, so marked and swarthy, suddenly changed about a quarter of an hour after her death and became in a moment so beautiful and so white that I observed it immediately." The holy whiteness of Kateri is also emphasized in the famous portrait of her, painted in 1696, by French Jesuit Father Claude Chauchetière, which shows Kateri

of Louis Riel and calls attention to the Western reliance on the "Great Man" theory of history in which history is analyzed through the feats of so-called "great men."[53] Erickson points out the sexism and misogyny intrinsic in this patriarchal ordering of history, but falls short of highlighting the racist and ethnocentric implications of its use in biographies of Louis Riel. These biographies valorize Riel as an individual set apart from the nation into which he was born, with the fact of his excellence demonstrating that he is an exception to the rule of the Métis. Many historians also specifically highlight Louis Riel's proximity to whiteness, both in his education in Québec, but also, and especially, in his heritage, as the foundation of his exceptionalism. Stanley George, author of one of the most influential books on Louis Riel, titled simply *Louis Riel*, makes this connection explicit in his description of Louis Riel's parental heritage: "His mother, Julie Lagimodière, was the

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with pale skin and wrapped in a shawl, reminiscient of a nun's habit. See Jacob, Michelle M. "The Ecstasy of Saint Kateri: Native Feminism in the Catholic Church." In *Indian Pilgrims: Indigenous Journeys of Activism and Healing with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha,* 112–142. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2016: 13..

53. The Great Man theory, while obviously influenced more generally by patriarchal systems and institutions in Western societies, is primarily attributed to Scottish philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle who, in his book On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, wrote:

> Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is [...] the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.

See Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (London: James Fraser, 1841), 1-2.

daughter of the first white woman in the North-West, and his father, one of the leaders of the free trade in furs movements of the 'forties, was a French Canadian with a dash of Indian blood in his veins."[54]

The idea that Louis Riel could and should be considered less Métis than his compatriots due to the degree of his racial mixedness and/or his ability to navigate settler educational and political systems is a continuation of the racist paradigms on which both missionary accounts and early anthropological and historical texts on the Métis were based. This fixation on racial mixedness and the scrutiny of Métis performances of whiteness and Indigeneity undermines the Métis as a people and a nation, and imagines them instead as a racialized identity, floating impermanently between two legitimate identities, before reaching the inevitable assimilation into whiteness or backsliding into "Otherness." This racialized exceptionalism has similarly been applied to Sara Riel, as evidenced by Erickson's argument that

54. George Stanley, has *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 67. A related and inverted version of the Great Man theory of history is the One Man to Blame theory, as described by Jean Teillet in her book *The North-West is Our Mother: the Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation* (359). Teillet describes the relationship between these two perspectives of Louis Riel, both informed by racialized understandings of the Métis, wherein Riel is conceived of as brilliant when performing whiteness in the political arena, and then instantly racialized by missionaries as a corrupting force, encouraging the Métis to backslide into "savagery," once he is executed as a traitor. Raymond J. Huel similarly highlights this reversal of Riel's racialization, stating that the Oblates, upon Riel's death, felt the need to frame Riel as an insane person who duped the Métis into the Rebellion in order to justify their continued presence as missionaries in the Northwest. See Raymond J. Huel*, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 212.

Riel's religiosity had fundamentally altered her ethnic identity. The racialization of Sara Riel's religiosity is achieved through the individualization of Riel; individualizing Riel's faith also individualizes her from her people and nation, and precludes any investigation into how her Métisness influenced her personal religiosity and the choices she made in expressing it.

This uncritical application of individualism as the universal foundation and driving force of social organization is not something unique to studies of the Métis but is prevalent in many studies of Indigenous religion and identity. Scholars Robin Kimmerer (Potawatomi) and Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate/Cheyenne/Arapaho) have both produced scholarship on forms of Indigenous citizenship that are not based on an individualized allegiance to a nation-state, itself based on settler understandings of property and borders, but instead are founded on relational connections between lands, water, humans, and other-than-human relations, and the responsibilities and obligations we have to each other.[55] Similarly, Delgado Shorter, in his article chapter "Spirituality" in *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, discusses the entrenchment of individualism in studies of Indigenous religions, and describes how this "interpretive method relies on a primary and false binary between objectivity and subjectivity"[56] rooted in the conflation of science and objectivist thought as demonstrated by Cartesian objectivism, most concisely

55. See TallBear, "Caretaking Relations," 24–41; and Robin Kimmerer, "Maple Nation: A Citizenship Guide," in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 167–174.
56. David Delgado Shorter, "Spirituality," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 435.

expressed through Descartes' famous declaration, "I think, therefore I am." Delgado Shorter argues that the accentuation of separated individuality as a prerequisite for rationality fails to make sense of Indigenous peoples "whose lives are typically organized around the existence of relations with other humans and other-than-human persons,"[57] making their primary mode of social organization dividual rather than individual, and with identity being produced through intersubjective co-constitution with other beings. qcknowleding that Indigenous identity is often produced through intersubjective co-consitution with other beings, Delgado shorter cites the work of Morrison and Bird-David who suggest that Descartes' famous statement be re-imagined in a dividual, relational, and intersubjective context to better represent Indigenous religion and relationality: "We relate, therefore we are."[58] The disharmony between logocentric individualism and relational dividualism and intersubjectivity demonstrates the shortcomings in spotlighting Louis and Sara Riel as exceptional Métis–by accentuating their actions, identities, and belief systems as individuals, we obscure the ways in which the Métis (including the "exceptional" Louis and Sara Riel) come to know and identify themselves through relations.[59]

This critical analysis of logocentric individualism demonstrates how engaging relationality in the study of religion helps to elucidate the inherited metaphysical principles upon which Western categories of religion and standards of research, are based. Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul) explains

57. Delgado Shorter, "Spirituality," 445.
58. Delgado Shorter, "Spirituality," 436.
59. See Macdougall, "How We Know Who We Are," 233–67.

how frameworks of relationality and related Indigenous research methodologies are often criticized on the grounds that they are "metaphysical and, by implication, lacking rationality."[60] Arguing for the importance of recognizing the metaphysical origins of all methodologies in order to deflect assumptions of the universality of Western methodologies, she highlights how Western methodologies also have "metaphysical origins in Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian beliefs, which privilege human hierarchical centredness and disconnection through otherworldliness,"[61] and are expressed most saliently in Western conventions of classification. Moreton-Robinson suggests that classification, long taken to be an essential element of scientific methodology and the absolute model of rationality, easily evolved into an apparatus for measuring and adjudicating levels of "hummanness," which, in turn, produced a hierarchy of "races." This system of racial ordering has been used to both further produce categories of human behaviours and social structures (including religion), and to consolidate the authority of adjudicating the rationality and validity of said behaviours and structures. Anti-colonial philosopher and essayist Sylvia Wynter, in her essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation - An Argument," similarly examines changing definitions of "humanness" and the religious logics of the 16th century that determined what kinds of peoples and knowledges

60. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality: A Key Presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm," in *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, ed. Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien (London: Routledge, 2017), 74.
61. Morteon-Robinson, "Relationality," 74.

counted as "human."[62] Wynter examines how Christian Europe's first forays into colonizing "new" lands first relied upon updating a classic element of the politics of Christendom – the identification of the Untrue Other, the Heretic, the Enemies-of-Christ in opposition to the True Christian Self. Wynter identifies Jews as the prototypical "infidel" to the Christian Self, the boundary-transgressive figure being expanded to include the Muslim populations of the Maghreb, al-Andalus/Iberian Peninsula, Sicily, and Malta during the Middle Ages. It was in the advent of the West's reinvention of the True Self from a Christian Self to a Rational Self of Man than the Untrue Other, defined previously as an Enemy-of-Christ, had to be reimagined in terms that placed it in opposition to the new Rational Man. As such, "it was the to be the peoples of the militarily expropriated New World territories (i.e., Indians), as well as the enslaved peoples of Black Africa (i.e., Negroes), that were made to reoccupy the matrix slot of Otherness - to be made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other."[63] Wynter highlights the 1550 Debate at Valladolid, which she characterizes as "a dispute...between the theocentric conception of the human, Christian, and the new humanist and ratiocentric conception of the human,"[64] as the turning point of this ideology, wherein Las Casas argued for the humanity of "Indians" based on the religious idea of "wilderness" and the innate potential of each human to exit the

62. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation - An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003).
63. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 265-266.
64. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 269.

wilderness and move into Christian salvation (which, he also argued, was the function of the Spanish evangelizing mission), and with Sepúlveda arguing that Spain's mission was instead a function of the imperial expansion of the state, which promised no such salvation for the subhuman "Indians". While it is impossible to determine which party "won" this debate, it is the fact of the debate itself that shows how categories of humanity were emerging in this era, and how a function of classifying these new categories of humanity based on rationality was still, naturally and unquestioningly, the purview of Christian European nations.

Adjacent to and paired with this process of classification is the principle of possession, which is part and parcel of the process of classifying. Moreton-Robinson explains how the process of identifying produces "epistemological possessions by bringing into consciousness and naming the previously unknown" and that this "racialized knowledge operates discursively within disciplines, moderating what can be known, who can know, and what constitutes value knowledge enabled by claims to objectivity."[65] Moreton-Robinson identifies this process of identifying, classifying, and moderating objectivity as the "God trick," wherein this way of knowing disguises itself as universal and natural. She states that "it is simultaneously the view from everywhere and nowhere and is the arbiter of everything," and clarifies how "the distinct metaphysical origins embedded within Western social research paradigms predispose Western researchers to particular ways of understanding and interpreting the world."[66] These particular ways of understanding the world are so embedded

65. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 75.
66. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 75.

in Western discursive practices that even research which seeks to critique it often necessarily, albeit unintentionally, reaffirms it.[67] Wynter too identifies how the emergence of secular rationality can best be described as a process of "de-godding" Christian theology into "Western knowledge" and how this change is effectively obscured through the process of producing it. Citing Godelier, Wynter argues that:

> as human beings who live in society, and who must also produce society in order to live, we have hitherto always done so by producing, at the same time, the mechanisms by means of which we have been able to invert cause and effect, allowing us to repress the recognition of our collective production of our modes of social reality.... Central to these mechanisms was the one by which we projected our own authorship of our societies onto the ostensible extra-human agency of supernatural Imaginary Beings (Godelier 1999). This imperative has been total in the case of all human orders, even where in the case of our now purely secular order, the extra-human agency on which our authorship is now projected is no longer supernatural, but rather that of Evolution/Natural Selection together with its imagined entity of "Race."[68]

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67. Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *The Indigenous Experience: Global Perspectives*, ed. Roger Maaka and Chris Andersen (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006), 165–73; and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Colonizing Knowledges," in *The Indigenous Experience: Global Perspectives*, ed. Roger Maaka and Chris Andersen (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2006), 91–110."
68. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 273.

This process of producing Others has resulted in those once deemed "sinful by nature" being transmuted into Others now considered "irrational by nature" and, thus, subhuman. It goes without saying that the onto-epistemologies of these irrational subhuman Others are similarly framed as inherently inferior to the previously Christian, now secular, rationality. This production of "rationality" as the principal measurement of human subjectivity, achieved via employment of the God trick, ensures a naturalized and normalized distance between and separation from "the authentic, essentialist, deeply spiritual 'Other[s],'" of the "New World," the "Orient,"[69] and the European-imagined Africa, and the rational, objective self – in short, between the West and the Rest.[70]

Relationality can serve as a necessary balance to the deployment of the "God trick" in Western methodologies. By accentuating the intersubjective and dividual nature of Indigenous societies, and highlighting the ways in which relations with other human and non-human beings inform both our understandings of ourselves and our understanding of the world, relational research paradigms can counter Western assertions of disconnectedness as integral to achieving objectivity and rationality. Indigenous and feminist research paradigms demonstrate that relational modes of existence that emphasize connectedness are important elements of research and knowledge production, and that "[i]t is as valid and appropriate to approach the world on this basis as it is to make a metaphysical argument that one is disconnected from the living earth."[71] Centering relationality in the study of Indigenous

69. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, NY: Vintage Books/Random House, 2003.
70. See footnote 12.
71. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 75.

religions is vital, as is using socio-political and culturally specific frameworks to explore situated knowledges within their appropriate contexts; and, as all knowledge is partial and situated, it reasons that relationality can be a useful paradigm in examining the study of religion itself. Relationality can provide the tools necessary to identify how religion and relations form the conventions that inform both Indigenous and Western research methodologies, and through highlighting the ways in which meaning is co-constituted through relations, relationality can also help scholars to de-apotheosize the "God trick" in their own work.

Conclusion

This article engages a case study of Métis missionary, Sœur Marguerite-Marie, née Sara Riel, in order to demonstrate that the uncritical application of Western categories of nationality and religion resulted in egregious misrepresentations of both Riel's individual religiosity, and of the religious/spiritual practices and beliefs of the Métis more generally. Taking for granted the belief in a rigid, inflexible, and monolithic form of institutional Catholicism, various non-Métis scholars who have tried to analyze the lives and practices of key Métis historical figures (namely Louis and Sara Riel) have failed to identify the unique ways in which the Métis relate to and practice Christianity. Métis Christianities have largely been invisibilized in scholarship, with scholars instead misidentifying all Métis religious practices as reproduced forms of French-Canadian Catholicism.[72] This

72. See Flanagan, *Prophet of the New World*.

assertion also posits an inauthenticity of Métis indigeneity by implying that, while Métis material culture may borrow from their Indigenous relatives, Métis epistemologies are largely or exclusively French-Canadian, i.e. not Indigenous. In the case of Sara Riel, analyses of her religious identity are also used to make claims about her national and ethnic identities, with scholar Lesley Erickson arguing that Riel's role as a Catholic missionary permanently changed Riel's ethnic and national loyalities, causing Riel to feel ambivalent about her own Métis identity.[73] The stereotype of "cultural ambivalence"[74] being used by these authors runs counter to how these Métis figures and communities identified their religious and ethnic identities—like Sara Riel who frequently and unambiguously asserted her identity as both a missionary and a *métisse*.

To counteract these discourses of inauthenticity and cultural ambivalence that have long shaped scholarship on the Métis, it is imperative to utilize a framework and research paradigm that accurately represents how relationality served as the foundational element of both Métis religiosity and national identity. The use of *wahkôhtowin*, a specific form of prairie Indigenous relationality, as a theoretical perspective allows a more fulsome understanding of both Métis religious traditions generally, and Riel's personal religiosity more specifically. Brenda Macdougall's analysis of kinscape[75] building through family acculturation and Roman Catholicism at Île-à-la-Crosse elucidates the culturally specific ways in which the Métis, in this settlement,

73. See Erickson, "At the Cultural Crossroads"; Erickson, "'Bury our Sorrows in the Sacred Heart'"; and Erickson, "Repositioning the Missionary."
74. See Macdougall, "Cultural Ambivalence," 422–464.
75. See Lakomäki, "Conclusion: A Living Nation," 224-234.

understood their form of Catholicism: from Catholic godparents extending the role of *pawaganak* (guardian spirits), to the integration of Catholic saints into kinship networks, and to the creation of new religious traditions that stitched together beliefs and practices from both their European and Indigenous ancestors. This analysis of Métis Christianity through the lens of *wahkôhtowin* highlights the shortcomings of solely utilizing Western perspectives and methods in analyzing Indigenous religions, and, importantly, embraces a post-hegemonic[76] perspective in analyzing how and why the Métis claimed Christianity as a heritage religion. This case study heeds the call of Indigenous scholars like Eve Tuck and Brendan Hokowhitu who urge scholars to move away from damage-centered research paradigms that continue to frame Indigenous experience as being eternally bound to and defined by oppression. To borrow Tuck's language, employing relationality as a research paradigm moves us away from damage-centered narratives of Indigenous suffering towards paradigms of desire[77] – paradigms which allow for the fullness of Indigenous experience, acknowledging both the lasting effects and impacts of colonialism while simultaneously holding space for a recognition of Indigenous joy and futurity.

Lastly, relationality, while stemming from global, particular, and inter-Indigenous onto-epistemologies[78], is not only limited to studies of Indigenous peoples but can, and should, be applied to studies of other religious traditions as well. As Moreton-Robinson argues, relationality as a theoretical framework and

76. See Hokowhitu, "A Genealogy of Indigenous Resistance," 207–225.
77. See Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 409–427.
78. See Wildcat and Voth, "Indigenous Relationality," 2.

research paradigm has the potential to critically examine and unsettle conventions of knowledge and research that have been normalized and invisibilized within our field. While Indigenous research methods are all too often criticized for their explicit "metaphysical origins,"[79] Moreton-Robinson argues that Western methodologies have similarly been developed from mythological and religious sources, particularly Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian beliefs. She argues that these belief systems serve as the basis for contemporary research conventions of scientific classification, researcher objectivity, and separation of fields of study. If relationality is grounded in metaphysicality, so too are Western methods a "faith-based, inherited, and institutionalized pursuit of a metaphysical ideal"[80] of "human hierarchical centredness and disconnection through otherworldliness."[81] While metaphysical throughline which connects contemporary research to its roots in Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian beliefs is as obvious and important as the intersubjectivity and interconnectedness that informs Indigenous relationality, only the metaphysical origins of Western research paradigms has been obscured through deployment of the "God trick,"[82] which positions Western paradigms as natural and/or universal in opposition to the onto-epistemologies of the, to borrow from Smith, essentialist and deeply spiritual Others. The recognition of these metaphysical principles that undergird all forms of inquiry is not a weakness of research, but a strength, as the acknowledgement and exploration

79. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 74.
80. Clayton W. Dumont Jr., *The Promise of Poststructuralist Sociology: Marginalized Peoples and the Problem of Knowledge* (Albany: State of New York Press, 200): 52 quoted in Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 75.
81. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 74.
82. Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality," 75.

of these metaphysical influences can help to counter the continual reification of Eurocentrism within the field of religious studies and create space for scholarship that investigates Indigenous religiosity through culturally appropriate relational paradigms.

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Weathering the Reformation: Climate and Religion in Early Sixteenth-Century Strasbourg. Linnéa Rowlatt. New York: Routledge, 2024. Pp. 220.

Inspired by ecological questions that emerged while she was running a biodynamic farm in Ottawa's Greenbelt, Linnéa Rowlatt embarks on a historical investigation in her book *Weathering the Reformation*. She undertakes a historical journey to Strasbourg between 1509 and 1541, driven by a desire to understand the cultural roots of Western society's self-destructive relationship with the natural environment. Rowlatt examines how the Little Ice Age influenced early modern Christian culture and investigates climate as a contributing factor in the Protestant Reformation. Central to her analysis is a detailed exploration of the concept of nature as reflected in three competing religious traditions in Strasbourg and Alsace during this period: Roman Catholicism, radicals, and Reform. Through focused case studies, she reveals how each tradition fragmented Christian views of the natural environment, particularly in how nature was defined, how it functioned, and how it was to be approached according to confessional lines.

To frame this inquiry, Rowlatt employs a hybrid, interactive model of socio-economic metabolism, a framework that emphasizes both the autonomous activity of the natural world and the cultural systems that shape human biophysical experience. This model enables her to trace the interplay between nature and human society, not as separate domains, but as mutually influential forces. Crucially, she foregrounds Christian representations of nature as pivotal to understanding these dynamics. Situating her work in dialogue with Max Weber's thesis on the "disenchantment" of the natural world through Protestant rationalism, and Lynn White Jr.'s assertion that Western Christianity bears responsibility

for the contemporary ecological crisis, Rowlatt organizes her study into four substantive chapters.

In Chapter One, Rowlatt reconstructs the physical environment and climate of Strasbourg and Alsace in the early sixteenth century, establishing a foundation for understanding the religious perspectives examined in the book. She outlines the region's ecological conditions, including mining, agriculture, and human interaction with the natural world, while drawing on historical climatology methods and sources for weather reconstruction. Woven throughout this analysis is a portrayal of Alsatian society, especially its late medieval institutional structures, social tensions, and the role of preaching in public life, particularly through James Geiler von Kaysersberg. By approximating Geiler's audience and situating him within Strasbourg's welfare system, Rowlatt contextualizes how religious views of nature were shaped by and addressed to specific communities. The chapter also sketches the dominant social, economic, and religious forces of the period, providing a comparative baseline to assess how Roman Catholic, radical, and Reformed theological perspectives on nature evolved following the onset of the Protestant Reformation after 1517.

In Chapter Two, Rowlatt examines pre-Reformation Catholic views of nature through the sermons of James Geiler. Geiler, preaching from what Rowlatt calls "the table of nature," used familiar natural elements (e.g., trees, lions, sheep) as moral and theological metaphors. His sermons, later collected in *Die Emeis* and widely circulated in Strasbourg, reflect a worldview shaped by Aristotelian natural philosophy, Catholic orthodoxy, and widespread beliefs in demons and apotropaic rituals. Nature, for Geiler, was infused with divine presence, evident in its design, animation, and inherent wisdom. He envisioned the natural world as a hierarchical society mirroring divine and human orders, with God at the top. Nature, in this view, could be understood through human reason, which was both God-given and culturally affirmed.

Though grounded in rationality, Geiler's worldview also accounted for spiritual forces active in the natural world. Rowlatt highlights how this vision reinforced a structured, sacred cosmology which was foundational to the Alsatian Catholic worldview and practice.

In addition to analyzing weather patterns from 1509 to 1525 and their social consequences in Strasbourg, Chapter Three is where Rowlatt turns to representations of nature among Alsatian peasants, focusing on Clemens Zyegler's *Ein Schön Büchlin* and the *XII Artikels* composed by the Memmingen peasants. Zyegler rejected social hierarchies, preaching economic justice, sacramental reform, and a radical egalitarianism rooted in divine sovereignty. He argued that Christ would have stood with the *Bundschuher*, aligning the Gospel with peasant rebellion. Furthermore, the *XII Artikels* of the peasants, in contrast to Geiler's hierarchical view, reflect an agricultural theology in which nature (i.e., streams, forests, and fields) is central to a godly life. To them, farming is a means of grace, and peasant labour a legitimate site of theological reflection. The harsh weather, famine (1511–17), coupled with ineffective Catholic rituals, intensified social unrest, contributing to the reception of Martin Luther's message, especially among peasants and the urban poor. Rowlatt contends that by the 1520s, a new religious understanding of nature had emerged, one that viewed agricultural order as divinely sanctioned. Though the peasants in the end failed to restructure society, their theology of farming as holy work endured, privileging the cultivated world over wild nature and significantly reshaping Alsatian culture while paving the way for Protestant reform.

Chapter Four turns to the reform of nature in Strasbourg, where Rowlatt examines how evangelical reformers pursued a middle ground between radical and conservative visions by addressing social problems through cultural transformation. Her analysis centres on Wolfgang Capito, particularly his *Hexaëmeron Dei Opus*, situating his work within broader evangelical currents, including the thought of Philip

Melanchthon and John Calvin. While Melanchthon sought to reconcile reform theology with natural philosophy, Calvin's *Institutes* (1539) offer limited reflection on the natural world. Capito, a leading figure in the Rhine school of exegesis, articulates a deeply anthropocentric theology. He emphasizes creation as the sole work of God, brought into being ex nihilo for human use, and interprets Genesis 1:28 through a framework of divine power and hierarchy. According to Rowlatt, Capito regarded extractive labour, such as mining, fishing, ploughing, and logging, not as ecologically harmful, but as faithful obedience to divine command. In contrast to Catholic practices such as rogations and Geiler's theology of demonic causality, evangelical theology portrayed all natural phenomena as direct manifestations of God's will. For Capito, therefore, human transformation of the environment was not only permissible but an expression of divine favour and providential purpose.

Throughout her analysis of climate and weather in sixteenth-century Strasbourg and Alsace, Rowlatt demonstrates how unpredictable weather, combined with rigid social hierarchies and mounting economic stress, created fertile conditions for the Protestant Reformation. She argues that this environmental turmoil not only intensified social unrest but also catalyzed the emergence of a new Christian representation of nature that stripped the natural world of inherent value and justified its exploitation as divinely sanctioned. Rowlatt aligns with Lynn White Jr.'s thesis that Western Christianity laid the ideological groundwork for the current ecological crisis, particularly in the works of Ziegler and Capito, where cultivated land is elevated over wilderness and little value is ascribed to nature per se. However, she challenges Max Weber's claim that Protestantism, as a rational religion, dispelled the "irrational, magic-filled miasma of late medieval Catholicism." Drawing on J. Agassi and I.C. Jarvie, she argues that Geiler exhibited a "weak form of rationality", a coherent, structured engagement with nature, even while holding seemingly irrational beliefs.

It is in Rowlatt's analysis and adoption of the "weak/strong rationality" framework to explain Geiler's late medieval Catholic theology, featuring the mysterious, incalculable forces and magic, that I find less convincing (104). While her critique of Weber is valuable, the use of a rationality hierarchy risks reinforcing a hierarchy not only of rational modes of thought but of knowledge systems more broadly. Rather than challenging the foundational assumption that rationality is the ideal framework for interpreting the natural world, Rowlatt introduces an internal distinction between forms of rationality to account for beliefs and practices such as demonic causality, rogations, or weather-related magic. However, practices like magic and witchcraft, particularly in premodern contexts, are themselves rational responses to uncertainty. Furthermore, the more compelling question is not whether these beliefs align with a modern rationality (hence hierarchization), but what they reveal about how people in that period understood agency, causality, and meaning in the natural world. Instead of explaining these practices away, we might do better to ask what they meant and how they functioned within their own epistemological frameworks.

Nevertheless, Rowlatt persuasively demonstrates that the people of Strasbourg and Alsace during this period conceptualized nature through a narrow, anthropocentric lens. Even the doctrine of salvation excluded the natural world. In the logic of late medieval European cosmology, as she notes, ants and demons shared a crucial feature: "they were not members of the Roman Catholic church" (101). By elevating extraction and cultivation as forms of holy labour, reformers and their contemporaries failed to recognize any link between environmentally harmful practices, such as deforestation or mining, and long-term climatic change. Weathering the Reformation is rich in historical detail, illuminating a cultural world distant in time yet strikingly relevant to contemporary ecological debates. Anyone interested in the intersection of history, religion, and climate, particularly the historical

roots of today's ecological crisis, will find this book both insightful and thought-provoking. The structure of the book, progressing logically from historical background to case studies of Catholic, radical, and evangelical perspectives, makes complex theological and historical concepts accessible. Its engaging narrative, clear organization, and wealth of well-documented sources offer valuable material for scholars, students, and general readers alike. The diversity of perspectives deepens the analysis and affirms Rowlatt's contribution as an important and timely work in environmental history, climate studies, and religious studies.

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The Zurich Origins of Reformed Covenant Theology. Pierrick Hildebrand. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. Pp. 427.

The origins and distinctiveness of Reformed covenant theology have long been debated by scholars of the Reformation and post-Reformation period. In *The Zurich Origins of Reformed Covenant Theology*, Pierrick Hildebrand offers a corrective to narratives that place too much emphasis on the influence of Philipp Melanchthon or John Calvin. Hildebrand's thesis is modest. Rather than completely dispensing with previous theories of influence, he seeks to demonstrate that Heinrich Bullinger should be counted among (not instead of) the influences on Heidelberg and later Reformed covenant theologians.

To make his point, Hildebrand's work is split into three parts. The first, "Zwingli as Initiator," highlights the role of Zwingli and the Zurich church of the 1520s. It is made up of two chapters demonstrating the seed of later Reformed covenant theology in the thought of Zwingli. Hildebrand notes the gradual change in Zwingli, arguing persuasively for a "covenantal turn" in his thought around 1525. Hildebrand argues that this turn can be dated to Zwingli's *Subsidium*. The *Subsidium* has not, hitherto, been the subject of serious scholarly attention. Given that the *Subsidium* is a polemic treatise against Roman Catholicism, rather than against Anabaptists, Hildebrand challenges the common thesis that Zwingli's covenant theology developed in his campaign against Anabaptism.

The bulk of the book is taken up in Part II, on Heinrich Bullinger. It was Bullinger who crystallized two important concepts that would be influential upon later Reformed theologians. These are (1) a prelapsarian covenant and (2) covenantal terminology that combines historical-legal and organic-mystical aspects of salvation. It is in these two areas that previous scholarship has sought to demonstrate later

Reformed deviance from Zurich. Yet, "Consideration of historical-legal and organic-mystical aspects of his covenantal thought is one way to leave false alternatives behind" (112). Hildebrand challenges the established view that Bullinger's covenantalism is first seen in *Von Dem Touff* (Nov/Dec 1525). Rather, he notes Bullinger's covenantal theology is displayed in an earlier, unpublished treatise *Vom Einigen Gott* (dated 20 October 1525). Hildebrand demonstrates that from late 1525 until the end of his career, Bullinger's theology contained a prelapsarian covenant, as well as covenant terminology which would later be appropriated by Heidelberg divines.

Part III notes the reception of Bullinger's covenant theology by John Calvin (Chapter 6), and two Heidelberg theologians, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevian (Chapter 7). It is in these chapters that Hildebrand explicitly challenges the overstated case for Melanchthon's influence on later Reformed theology. Hildebrand also demonstrates that Calvin was influenced by Bullinger, and that on numerous theological points, Bullinger and Calvin were in agreement. Thus, rather than paint a picture that neatly emphasizes one figure of influence (either Melanchthon or Calvin or Bullinger), Hildebrand offers a more nuanced picture, one in which each theologian is given his due. Given the hegemony of theses emphasizing the influence of Melanchthon and Calvin, Hildebrand's book offers a helpful corrective.

Finally, the reader is treated to a 103-page appendix of archive material. This material is made up of works by Heinrich Bullinger that are either understudied or recently discovered. While the documents contained in the appendix do not constitute a critical edition, Hildebrand has done significant work in bringing these notable texts to light. Works included among these archived materials include, but are not limited to, *Von Einigen Gott* (1525), *Von Warer Und Faslcher Leer* (1527), and *Predigtskizzen* (1536/1537). For scholars of the Swiss Reformation, the appendix alone constitutes a tremendous contribution.

Hildebrand's work offers a well-researched and persuasive thesis. Rather than imposing a new grand narrative upon the history of Reformed covenant theology, Hildebrand seeks to incorporate Bullinger into the pantheon of its influences. His work is especially helpful in noting the manner in which both Bullinger and Calvin were indebted to, yet different from, Melanchthon. This paves the way to understand how Bullinger and Calvin each exercised independent influence upon Ursinus and Olevian. Thus, overall, I find Hildebrand's argument convincing.

Three particular factors deserve note. First, Hildebrand's thesis relies on sources that have previously been either little read or unexamined. Specifically, he contends that Zwingli's "covenantal turn" can be found in the *Subsidium*, while that of Bullinger is found in *Von Einigen Gott*. The utility of these texts for this discussion will certainly be debated by scholars of the Swiss Reformation because they challenge prevailing assumptions. In particular, they place the emergence of Zurich's covenant theology at an earlier date than is typically accepted, while positing that Zwingli's covenant theology preceded that of Bullinger. The relative obscurity of the *Subsidium* and *Von Einigen Gott* invites future interpretations and contributions. Whether or not one agrees with Hildebrand's conclusions, those studying Bullinger or the history of covenant theology, will be forced to wrestle with his contentions.

Second, this book offers a substantially well-rounded picture of Bullinger's covenant theology. Old dichotomies between a "bilateral" and "unilateral" covenant are overcome by demonstrating that, to Bullinger, the covenant is instituted unilaterally by God yet is carried out by God and humanity. In numerous places, Hildebrand employs the phrase "monopleurically established, dipleurically administered" to describe Bullinger's covenantalism. Hildebrand persuasively demonstrates that this view places him in agreement with later Reformed theology.

Finally, much of Hildebrand's argument rests upon his assertion that there is a burgeoning notion of a prelapsarian covenant in the thought of Zwingli and Bullinger. In the secondary literature, such a covenant is often seen to be an imposition of Melanchthon on later Reformed thought. Hildebrand argues that many scholars have missed Zurich's unique context in understanding this question. Since so much of Zwingli and Bullinger's covenant theology was formed in the midst of polemic disputes with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anabaptists, they spent little time discussing the prelapsarian state of man. Therefore, through his analysis of the sources, Hildebrand argues for an implied prelapsarian covenant in Zwingli and Bullinger.

Ultimately, while Hildebrand makes a fresh case for such a covenant in Zwingli and Bullinger, the sources force him to place numerous qualifiers on his conclusions. This tends to weaken his case. For example, in Zwingli, Hildebrand must state that a prelapsarian covenant is not explicitly stated, yet he claims that the sources "point to" such a covenant (106). Likewise, in Bullinger the prelapsarian relationship is "similar to a covenant" (179) and Bullinger "assumed" certain basic points about the prelapsarian state of man which imply a covenant (182). Finally, Hildebrand notes that Calvin had some idea of a prelapsarian covenant, but that "like Bullinger (and Zwingli) [he] seems, however, not to have been interested in, or to have seen the need for, developing the theological insights of a prelapsarian covenant" (274). Therefore, given the various qualifiers, as well as the similarity between the views of Calvin and the Zurich Reformers, one wonders if this insight serves Hildebrand's thesis as clearly as he argues. It certainly demonstrates an area of similarity between Calvin and Bullinger. Yet, one could argue that Hildebrand has not conclusively proved continuity between later Reformed divines and Zurich on the question of a prelapsarian covenant.

Overall, Pierrick Hildebrand has done the world of Reformation studies a great service with this work. His analysis of primary

source material is excellent. The exposure of little known, or hitherto unexamined, works makes a substantial contribution to Swiss Reformation scholarship. Whether or not one agrees with his analysis of these documents, future scholars will be indebted to his fresh take on the covenantal thought of Zwingli and Bullinger. Hildebrand's work engages with the latest scholarship while being well-written and easy to follow. This work is highly recommended to scholars and students interested in Reformed covenant theology.

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Decoding the Egalitarianism of the Qur'an: Retrieving Lost Voices on Gender. Abla Hasan. Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2021. Pp. 182.

Navid Kermani once asserted that "Arabic is [...] an extreme example of the way sacred languages are intentionally kept static and, although they do not completely stop the natural evolution of language, can slow it considerably."[1] Clifford Geertz when commenting on the nature of the Arabic language went so far as to remark on "the famous linguistic schizophrenia of Arabic-speaking people" which he argued rests on "the existence and continuing validity of the 'classical' (*muḏarī*) or 'pure' (*faṣīh*) Arabic, on the one hand, and the continuous evolution and diversification of the unwritten dialects, called 'vulgar' (*āmmīya*) or 'common' (*dārija*), on the other."[2] However, if we take seriously the assertion that the Qur'an is the divine revelation of God, as delivered by his messenger the Prophet Muhammad, then the text of the Qur'an exhibits timeless qualities of divination as expressed in the "semantic completeness of the Qur'anic language" (3).

The expressed goal of Abla Hasan's monograph, *Decoding the Egalitarianism of the Qur'an: Retrieving Lost Voices on Gender*, is to recognize the perfection of Qur'anic Arabic and the vicissitude of its particular diction within a methodological framework that uses "the Qur'an to interpret the Qur'an" (3). Hasan deploys this methodology throughout her work in order to provide "strong linguistic evidence to support the existence of a lost gender egalitarian voice in the Qur'an ... that has been both deliberately and unintentionally defaced in the history of overt exegetical[ly] biased studies of the Qur'an" (4). In a manner similar to Geertz's assertion that contemporary dialects have tarnished the

1. Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 83.
2. Kermani, *God Is Beautiful*, 83.

perfection of Qur'anic Arabic, Hasan ardently asserts that the "excessive exegetical narrativization" in the commentaries, *tafsīr*, *sīra*, and *ḥādīth*, "fill in details that are absent from the Qur'anic narratives [and] was extended to cover specific issues related to Qur'anic teachings of duties and obligations" (8). Moreover, this "excessive exegetical narrativization undoubtedly formed a departure from th[e] well-established Islamic theological argument that the Qur'an is a universal revelation" (95). In remaining faithful to this approach, Hasan asserts that the focus of her project is to spur "religious reform, not legal reform ... [and she] argue[s] in favor of the advancement of women's status in the context of religious reform, by identifying the gender-egalitarian message in the Qur'an" (95).

With the above in mind, a pressing concern for Hasan, adherents, and Islamic Studies as a field, is the growth of "*tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* (heritage-based interpretation) schools of exegeses and Islamic jurisprudence[,]" aided by the availability of online Islamic influencers, who privilege Islamic source texts (such as the *tafsīr*, *sīra*, and *ḥādīth*) often at the condescension of the Qur'anic text (152). Hasan posits that we should recognize that the "appeal to authority logical fallacy and ignorance of the fact that these scholars' formulations and interpretations must be seen in the sociological perspective of their time" (19). Put differently, generations of Islamic commentators have offered a wide range of scholarly opinions, all of which retain the sociological artifacts of the eras in which they were created. Being aware of these artifacts, biases, and implicit sexist readings of the Qur'an allows for contemporary female scholars to engage in *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in "rethinking [of] the Qur'an as a gender-egalitarian book" (154).

Hasan's text is divided into five chapters, each of which features a range of Qur'anic case studies where past scholars of repute have passed judgments that Hasan feels are at odds with "the clear gender-egalitarian message in the Qur'anic [narratives]" (132). Given Hasan's ardent belief

that "the abstract open-ended textual style of the Qur'an does not allow for narrowly constructed cultural normativity ... [and therefore] [t]he semantic style of the Qur'an is purposefully structured to allow for an open-ended interpretive capacity" (10), each of her case studies is, then, a chance to take to task these detrimental assertions of past scholars. Consequently, the first chapter focuses on decoding the egalitarianism present in the Qur'an by calling into question a range of deficiencies, specifically: excessive exegetical narrativization of the Qur'an, which calls into question the validity of utilizing Qur'anic commentaries, *tafsīr*, *sīra*, and *ḥādīth*, in place of utilizing the Qur'an directly (11).

The second chapter features Qur'anic case studies designed to demonstrate gender egalitarianism in the Qur'an by challenging existing commentaries. An example of this can be found in her critique of *sūrat an-Nisā'* (4:32) which is often cited as a verse that "is addressed to women and commands them not to envy men for their divinely granted superiority" (45). Hasan asserts that reading this verse with the "male addressee fallacy [in mind] is the key to unlocking the semantic mystery of [the verse]" (46). The concept of the "male addressee fallacy" is central to Hasan's work; she argues that the presumption that Qur'anic *sūrat* are addressed to men alone fosters a "misunderstanding of the identity of addressees (an issue that plays an essential role in the interpretation of any verse) [and] fundamentally changes our understanding of the Qur'anic message," which her work is attempting to challenge (92). Hasan uses this case study to argue that this verse is not directed to women exclusively, as both men and women are referenced in this *āya* (verse), which Hasan posits as an "assurance of God's inclusive justice and not God's support of male superiority" (46).

However, Hasan's case study around *sūrat an-Nisā'* (4:34), which is often cited as a justification for domestic violence, is truly ground-breaking. There, she provides clear justification that this *āya* does not refer specifically to marital conflicts, but the breaking of social

mores within the community at large. Hasan even goes so far as to provide an updated translation of the *āya* predicated on her findings and methodology which offers a dramatically different reading of Q4:34:

> Men are financial guardians of women, those men whom God has favoured some of them to others, and those who spend from their money. Righteous women are devout, they guard what God asked to be guarded, even when [they are] unseen. Those women among you [believers] whom you fear high-handedness, admonish them, and place them in house arrest, and strike them. If they obey you seek no more correction. God is most high and great (85).

This *āya* addresses the "community with ways to punish women who violate laws; it is not related to the resolution of marriage conflicts" and therefore the verse has more to do with the maintenance of social cohesion, and not the prescribed method for resolving individual disputes (78). Moreover, this reading of the *āya* is more in line with the tradition of the prophet who "according to all narrations, the Prophet never applied any of these ... correction with any of his wives" and therefore presents an "apparent contradiction between the Prophet's behavior and the criterion that traditional exegetes extrapolate from Q4:34 constitutes another reason to question the traditional understanding of this verse" (80).

This is followed by the third chapter, where careful and deeply personal attention on the part of Hasan is given to how marriage is characterized in the Qur'an as a "solemn pledge" (*mīthāq*) (Q4:21) which supersedes the pre-Islamic conception of marriage that did not recognize the agency of women, and the equality engendered to them within Islam (62). Additionally, there is some interesting attention paid to what Hasan characterizes as clear Qur'anic guidance for foreplay, and the need to equally fulfill both partners' needs in intimate relationships (63–64). The fourth chapter focuses on female body-ownership with a specific discussion concerning the wearing of *hijāb* and the social politics of

modesty. By drawing attention to *sūrat an-Nūr* (24:31), the verse which is often cited as the justification for public modesty, Hasan focuses in on a specific statement "[t]hey should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms" (118). Within this section of the *āya*, Hasan makes an impassioned argument for *hijāb* as an external tool to fight the internal desire for male objectification – specifically by eliciting the male gaze by the stamping of feet, which is an allusion to the pre-Islamic method to gain male attention (76). This is then followed by the fifth chapter which discusses women's agency in the Qur'an, then followed by the conclusion.

Hasan's work is as much a product of her impassioned desire to excavate the lost gender egalitarianism present in the Qur'an, as it is also her range of innovative methodological approaches to reach these ends. Her "holistic hermeneutical approach that reconnects individual verses with the general construction of the Qur'anic text proves more effective, in terms of rethinking" the meaning of these verses, and it is this approach which avoids the mistake of "'exegetical contextomy fallacy' which is commonly seen in many Qur'anic interpretations" (76). At the same time, Hasan's methodology although compelling, does present challenges as her approach is predicated on viewing the Qur'an as both divine, and grammatically perfect, but equally open to interpretation. This approach does not lend itself well to an attempt at objective analysis, and does not offer the reader space to come to their own conclusions as it presumes they share her stance. For Hasan, the Qur'an offers a clear narrative by which all humans are equal under God, regardless of gender, and may be the best way to see that is to ignore the hefty tomes authored by commentators from the past, and instead reach directly for the Qur'an to ask the question, "Is God just? Or is he gender biased?" (154).

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L'islam rationnel de Souleymane Bachir Diagne. Alioune Bah. Paris: Riveneuve, collection « pépites », 2023. Pp. 200.

L'islam rationnel de Souleymane Bachir Diagne peut bien servir « d'introduction » à la pensée du philosophe sur la philosophie de la religion – islamique.[1] Alioune Bah nous y livre une entrée privilégiée dans cette partie de la pensée de Souleymane B. Diagne, qui se déploie autour de questions liées à la tradition intellectuelle et spirituelle de l'islam. Il revient dans ce livre sur les clés de lecture majeures de sa réflexion en philosophie de la religion.

Les chapitres sont reliés entre eux par une articulation maîtresse autour de la centralité de la rationalité dans l'islam. Or celle-ci reste tout de même engagée dans une quête incessante de Dieu n'excluant guère l'accès au « mysticisme » (169). Si une telle idée reste au cœur de la tradition philosophique et spirituelle de l'islam, elle se renouvelle chez Souleymane Bachir Diagne où elle se réaffirme offrant au philosopher en islam un enjeu majeur de réflexions qui réinstitue la dimension éthique et spirituelle du message coranique dans un contexte favorable à des instrumentalisations de toutes sortes de la religion islamique.[2]

Le thème de la raison a la part belle dans le livre. Adossé à celui de l'humain comme projet divin, il justifie toute une réflexion sur ce qu'Alioune Bah décrit comme une « anthropologie coranique » (chap. 1) : de « la place de l'humain dans le projet divin » institué en tant que *lieu-tenant* de Dieu dans le « consentement au divin » (32) qui le constitue dans sa dignité ontologique et qui apparaissent même incompréhensible aux « anges » (27–28), en passant par « l'oubli » (36) de son origine et de

1. Suivant l'édition de Jacques Berque, *Le Coran, Essai de traduction de l'arabe annoté et suivi d'une étude exégétique* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1995).
2. Souleymane B. Diagne, *Comment philosopher en islam ?* (Paris : Philippe Rey/Jimsaan, 2014).

sa destination également ontologique mais où cette fois-ci la foi semble s'éprouver par rapport à l'exigence d'un « consentement primordial » (33) et que renferme cependant la conviction au dessein de Dieu de favoriser la prééminence du sujet humain lorsqu'il prend conscience de sa liberté et de sa responsabilité dans le processus du devenir-personne qui n'accepte ni ne cautionne le simple abandon passif à la « prédestination d'un destin aveugle » (45–46), tout concourt en effet à réaffirmer la place éminente de l'Homme dans l'œuvre de Dieu.

On peut faire ici la remarque que même la foi se découvre dans cette réalité anthropologique où le « don de la rationalité » se trouve mise à l'épreuve dans son « effort de construire sa relation au divin à partir d'une adhésion, c'est-à-dire d'une conviction rationnelle » (34). Soit dit en passant, n'y a-t-il pas là un important enjeu de promotion du dialogue interreligieux étant donné que la question du pluralisme religieux occupe une place considérable dans l'œuvre de Bachir Diagne (139–148) ? Quoi qu'il en soit, en mettant ici en relief cette « conviction rationnelle », selon l'idée de religion comme celle d'un « consentement premier à Dieu » (35), Alioune Bah explique avec Bachir Diagne que le sens des religions statuaires n'est que de rappeler ce moment originel. Mieux, elles contribuent « *à* le réinitialiser dans la démarche individuelle à travers un travail de reprise sur soi, de reconnaissance de sa place dans le monde et de son rôle » (35). En ce sens, le père du monothéisme Abraham reste un bel exemple. Chez ce dernier « le monothéisme est une trouvaille de la raison et de la réflexion. Il est le signe d'une activité consciente, d'un exercice discriminant de la faculté de compréhension. La réflexion clairvoyante apporte la confiance et appuie la foi sur la conviction [...] Par cette réflexion, il se mit à distance des idoles et inaugura le monothéisme tel que nous le connaissons » (137).

D'autre part l'effort de la « personnalité » reste entièrement solidaire à cette « anthropologie coranique » dont le sénégalais postule à l'envi qu'il en constitue même le but, sinon la vocation, selon l'idée

de l'humain comme *lieu-tenant* de Dieu, c'est-à-dire précisément son « co-créateur »[3] dans le processus de parachèvement de la Création. Alioune Bah y voit matière à réflexion sur le « don de la liberté » (42).

Aussi, à travers une analyse minutieuse des « figures de la raison » (50, 53–55) et du rapport qu'elles entretiennent avec la révélation, en particulier dans les monothéismes juif, chrétien et musulman (63–71), Bachir Diagne aborde la problématique des rapports entre religion et raison, révélation et philosophie, qu'il tente de résoudre sans cependant manquer de penser leur caractère foncièrement irréconciliable, sous la forme d'une tension continuellement ouverte (49). En réalité si son statut de la rationalité confère à la raison le droit d'être un vecteur de dévoilement du symbolisme de la révélation dans l'islam, c'est seulement en vertu que, n'étant jamais close, la révélation se « prête à l'interprétation sans cesse renouvelée » (64).

Pourtant, en dépit du statut qu'il reconnait à la rationalité, « au travail de l'intelligence au cœur même de son discours émancipateur » (84), il a toujours existé dans l'islam des manifestations de ce qu'Alioune Bah appelle des « résistances à la raison et à la liberté » (chap. 3). Là, curieusement, la « promotion d'un littéralisme » (92) et le type de « fondamentalisme » (108) que celui draine reposent sur une vision du monde figée qui « hurle à la mort contre le temps » (4). Penser donc le « temps » comme « texture de la religion » (103) implique alors d'énormes enjeux pour l'islam. Selon Bachir Diagne, l'ouverture du texte coranique sur le temps permet de révéler la disponibilité de son contenu et sa capacité de prendre en compte les réalités de chaque époque (103). L'idée de l'*ijtihād* (effort de réflexion personnel) en tant que principe épistémologico-juridique reste en ce sens un

3. Le terme « co-worker » dans sa conceptualisation anglaise est de Mohammed Iqbal. Voir Mohammed Iqbal, *La reconstruction de la pensée religieuse en Islam*, traduit de l'anglais, présenté et annoté par Abdennour Bidar, Préface de Souleymane Bachir Diagne (Paris : Gallimard, 2020).

exemple fort éloquent. Encore faut-il le comprendre non dans sa fonction *exclusivement* législative.[4]

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4. Voir Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Bergson postcolonial : l'élan vital dans la pensée de Léopold Sédar Senghor et de Mohammed Iqbal* (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2011), 121.

The Saving Line: Benjamin, Adorno, and the Caesuras of Hope. Marton Dornbach. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021. Pp. 240.

Marton Dornbach has written an engaging new book titled *The Saving Line, Benjamin, Adorno, and the Caesuras of Hope*. The backstory for his book arises from when the author was preparing to write a book on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and discovered the section "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," which triggered his interest in the present work.[1] *The Saving Line* focuses on the concept of caesura and its various manifestations as an interpretative tool for examining works of literature. The book, however, covers considerably more territory on caesura, including a focus on Adorno's and Benjamin's own philosophical perspectives.

Citing a passage from Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Dornbach defines caesura as follows:

> The pausing of speech is the caesura that allows the events narrated to be transformed into something long past, and causes to flash up a semblance of freedom that civilization has been unable to wholly to extinguish ever since.[2]

It appears that caesura represents a kind of literary device for Dornbach. It acts as a means for the reader to shift from one idea into another. From the above quotation, caesura also appears dedicated to opening our ideas about matters surrounding politics. Caesura has not enjoyed common usage in the history of philosophy. This may in fact be part of what motivates Dornbach's research, for it appears caesura is a useful interpretation tool for literary texts.

1. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).
2. Dornbach, *The Saving Line*, 1.

Adorno and Benjamin, both members of the Frankfurt school, had a long relationship, which is famously documented in their correspondences. Adorno was critical of many of Benjamin's ideas, including aura and the usefulness of cinema. However, as their correspondences can attest, many of their respective ideas, including those about caesura, are the result of collaboration: "[T]he Benjaminian caesura model exerted a pervasive influence on Adorno's thinking about art, and especially on his thinking about music" (73). In his discussion of Benjamin, Dornbach focuses on the essay "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (hereafter "Affinities"), while in his analysis of Adorno, his focus surrounds Adorno's interpretations of the *Odyssey*.

Beginning with Benjamin, Dornbach makes reference to one of Benjamin's earlier essays, where Benjamin discusses Kant. Dornbach makes the link between Benjamin's interest in Kant and the concept of caesura. In other words, Dornbach establishes a link between Benjamin's own philosophical journey and the concept of caesura; the way in which the caesura appears for Benjamin's "Affinities" is as much a story about Benjamin's own philosophical journey:

> The task incumbent on art criticism of the Benjaminian sort, then, is not to derive from the work of art the answer to a particular question but to draw attention to a fundamental questionableness, a semblance engendered by something that constantly withdraws from appearing, which the work of art has in common with the open-ended totality of philosophy.[3]

Dornbach searches for the meaning behind Benjamin's theory of art. As the above passage suggests, there are innumerable problems in identifying the meaning behind a work of art. Dornbach explains that some of the clues about Benjamin's theory of art lie in the interplay between beauty and myth. Ultimately, defining a work of art appears to be as much a problem as the work of art itself. From here the author

3. Dornbach, *The Saving Line*, 33.

delivers an analysis of Benjamin's interpretation of the *expressionless*. The expressionless, according to Dornbach, represents that unnamed part of artistic creation that appears *alive* and *petrified* at the same time.

Turning to the chapter on Adorno, Dornbach focuses on Adorno's interpretation of the *Odyssey*. "To recognize our present in the *Odyssey* is to remember that the Homeric epic is not just a literary document from a remote past but a canonical classic, a work that has become constitutive of who we are and how we understand ourselves" (77). Dornbach also titles one section "Myth versus Homeland."

There is considerable intrigue in both writers' treatment of their respective texts. For example, the concept of hope is central in the analysis of the *Odyssey*; and for Benjamin, a constant tension resides between hope and the saving of semblance. The author notes that Benjamin's preoccupation with hope demonstrates a link between Benjamin's thinking and Kant.

Dornbach presents both Benjamin and Adorno as though their association with caesura can be seen as a philosophical problem related to their respective works. For Adorno, when he tries to identify the caesura, he confronts the problem related to Plato's lie. With Benjamin, the problem revolves around how the narrator relates to problems of messianism. Dornbach stresses that Benjamin remains steadfast with the narrator's perspective. In the case of Adorno, he appears to focus on the more general term of freedom.

Next, the author dedicates two chapters to the notion of the soft caesura. Dornbach appears to shift some of his attention to another one of Adorno's major works, namely *Aesthetic Theory*. Using *Aesthetic Theory* as an interpretative tool to understand the *Odyssey*, Dornbach notes Adorno's belief that "the spiritual dimension of art is inextricably bound up with the sensuous phenomenality of the artwork" (110).

Dornbach cites a passage from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as follows: "The unity of artwork is their caesura from myth" (113). Indeed,

the author appears to make the connection between Adorno's ideas of the work of art found in *Aesthetic Theory*, and its use as a template to interpret the *Odyssey*. Indeed, Dornbach will even say the ideas drawn from Adorno's analysis of the *Odyssey* are useful for interpreting the *Aesthetic Theory*.

The character of Penelope becomes Adorno's focus: "Cunning enabled Odysseus to turn the mythic forces of dispersal against themselves and thereby to constitute himself as an integrated, enduring, and autonomous subject. Penelope's cunning by contrast allegorizes the preservation of a certain heterogeneity on the side of the object" (116). The shift in Adorno's analysis, towards the character of Penelope, indicates a transient character of caesura.

Turning to Benjamin, Dornbach argues that in "Affinities," Benjamin is engaged in showing two caesura models which "complements one another as positive and negative presentations of a utopian dimension" (129). The author argues that Benjamin shifts his inquiry towards the second caesura in the work, of the novella "Strange Neighbors," which is embedded in the work.

From here Dornbach explores the interrelationship between the narrator and the novella. The author notes that the basis of these two distinct voices is cause for further inquiry. The prehistory of the narrator's voice is intermeshed within the novella.

Dornbach says that Benjamin has made a "theoretical commitment" which, in turn, allows the author to ask questions about Benjamin's approach: "that the second caesura in Affinities is not the novella itself as Benjamin's interpretation implies – but the break that follows upon its equivocal ending" (137).

Dornbach states further: "The caesura that separates the novella from the novel signals a failure on the novelistic narrator's part, and indeed on Goethe's part, to clarify the captain's prehistory and thereby to adopt" (138). In identifying caesura's shift, from the narrator's perspective

to the novella, Dornbach succeeds at identifying another level of meaning. However, the fact that a shift of meaning occurs appears to place emphasis on the style of interpretation rather than the outcome. That is, if the interpretation had not happened, the story would be seen as an integral whole, rather than composed of different parts, as it now appears.

In the final section of the book, Dornbach takes inspiration from Hans Jonas's work on logos, myth, and the "Long Pause" of metaphysics (177). Dornbach questions how the question of the double caesura can be applied using Jonas's philosophy. Dornbach states that Jonas, a former student of Heidegger, who has an interest in Gnosticism and the technical age, may be able to explain the double caesura model.

Dornbach has dealt with a lot of complex subject matter. Despite a generous amount of cross-referencing, giving the book an overly academic feeling, it maintains a feeling of paving something new. Any time we are able to uncover new ideas from thinkers like Adorno and Benjamin, the material functions to open ourselves to new concepts. The author therefore succeeds at showing the reader the unyielding utility caesura brings as an interpretative tool.

Adorno does not treat Benjamin's concept of aura kindly in *Aesthetic Theory*. However, on the basis of a discussion surrounding caesura, we can see how their collaboration runs deeper than Adorno's apparent critique.

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Guidelines for Contributors

Scope

Arc is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal published annually by the School of Religious Studies (formerly Faculty of Religious Studies), McGill University. Founded in 1973, the journal was restructured into a formal scholarly journal in 1990. In 2022, *Arc* shifted to a fully open-access format with the support of the McGill library.

We invite innovative and original work that engages with: theology; comparative studies in religion; theoretical or methodological discussions; thoughts, ideologies and philosophies; religion and politics; philosophy of religion; history of religions; sociology of religion; role of religion in culture and society; religious ethics; religion and literature; religion and art; religion and linguistics; religion and health; interreligious studies.

Arc encourages submissions from diverse religious traditions, perspectives, and periods.

Format

Arc considers two kinds of submissions:

1. *Articles*. Article submissions should provide original contributions to any of the areas suggested in the journal's scope/the most recent call for papers. Articles should fall between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length, including footnotes. Longer items may be considered, but these should be discussed with the journal editors prior to submission. We do not accept submissions that have been published in full or in

part elsewhere, and you must affirm that your submission is not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

2. *Book Reviews.* Book review submissions should address recently published works that fall within the interests of the journal's scope or the most recent call for papers. By "recently" we mean within the last two years. Books that fall outside of this two-year window may be considered, but these should be discussed with the book review editors prior to submission, and it must be made clear why the book is relevant to review now (e.g., the book has not yet been reviewed, a new edition provides additions/critical context worth commenting on, etc.). Book review submissions should not exceed 1,500 words.

Manuscript Preparation

1. *Arc* accepts electronic manuscripts submitted in the following document format: Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). Authors are welcome to submit via email, to arc.relgstud@mcgill.ca, or through our website https://arcjournal.library.mcgill.ca/submission/wizard.

2. Submissions should use Canadian spelling (e.g., "favour," "colour," "radicalization," rather than "favor," "color," "radicalisation").

3. Submissions should use gender-inclusive language, with the exception of direct quotations and translations of ancient texts, which should conform to the standards of the original language. 4. All notes should appear as footnotes (not endnotes), numbered consecutively using Arabic numerals.

For first-time citations, a full bibliographic reference should be given in a note: Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority*

of Interpretive Communities (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 123.

- M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jaqueline S. Palmer, "Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to *Global Warming,*" in ed. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown, *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21–45.

- Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis,* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 18.

If a complete bibliographic reference has already been given in a previous footnote, use the following short form: author's last name, abbreviated title, page number.

- Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?,* 124.
- Killingsworth and Palmer, "Millennial Ecology," 34.
- Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 25.

**Please avoid the use of "ibid"* (See: Chicago Manual of Style, 17th ed., 14.34).

4. Commas and periods should fall within quoted material, while colons and semicolons follow closing quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points follow closing quotation marks, unless they belong within the quoted matter (See: Chicago Manual of Style, 17th ed. 6.9–6.11). 5. When using dashes to replace commas, parentheses or colons, use spaced "en" dashes rather than "em" dashes (See: Chicago Manual of Style, 17th ed. 6.83 & 6.85).

6. When citing legal or archival documents, manuscript collections, scripture and other types of classical works, foreign language texts, multimedia mediums, etc. please carefully review the Chicago Manual of Style guidelines, particularly sections 14.221–14.305.

For questions of style, punctuation, and spelling not covered here, please refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style,* 17th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary,* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004).

7. Please include an abstract and 4–6 keywords with your submission.