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REVIEW ESSAY

## Veiled Truths

The Rise of Political Islam in the West

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This spring, Tariq Ramadan arrived in the United States nearly six years after being denied a visa by administration. The U.S. government had previously refused Ramadan entry on the grounds that he French charity with ties to Hamas. Then, last January, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced was welcome. His appearance in the United States seemed to manifest the White House's changing Muslim world. In June 2009, President Barack Obama spoke in Cairo of reaching out to Muslims with interest and mutual respect." Figures such as Ramadan -- symbols of a nonviolent Islamism long sh of extremism -- may now represent a bridge across previously intractable divides.

Paul Berman will have none of this. His book *The Flight of the Intellectuals*, based on a 28,000-word published three years ago in *The New Republic*, mounts a furious counterattack from the bygone day administration. Too many in the United States and Europe, Berman argues, are confronting the wrong Islamists do not pose the greatest danger; instead, it is their so-called moderate cousins, who are able well-meaning liberals into a poisonous embrace. Their rejection of violence is both partial -- not ext or to U.S. troops in Iraq -- and misleading. In Berman's telling, the Islamist project of societal transf below does profound violence to the individual Muslims who are forced to live in an increasingly cc The only defensible response is to repel the stealth Islamism of putative moderates with a morally p liberalism.

But such a polemic, in fact, poorly serves those concerned about the rise of political Islam in the We flag important debates about Islam's impact on Europe and the world, but he is an exceedingly poor navigating them. His reading of Islamism, based on a narrow selection of sources read in translation

of the vast scholarship on the subject, fails to grasp its political and intellectual context. He is blind to the variation and competition across and within groups -- above all, to the fierce war between the Salafis for a literalistic Islam insulated from modernity and the modernizing pragmatists who seek to adapt Islam to the modern world. This blindness feeds the worst instincts of those hard-liners who are fomenting an aversion between Islam and the West. His obsession with Nazism is distracting, and his dissection of Ramadan is pathological. His caustic rhetoric toward writers such as Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash does not reflect the liberal or tolerant ethos to which he claims allegiance.

This is a pity, for Berman does raise several powerful and troubling questions. Islamists, even nonviolent ones, often challenge Western liberals by advocating social norms and political agendas that run against the tenets of liberalism. What accommodations can be made for religious conviction without betraying core Enlightenment principles? What to make of the popularity and electoral prowess of Islamist movements in the Muslim world? It is impossible to support democracy without being prepared to defend the rights of movements to participate in and win elections. Yet the religious and cultural agendas of many of these movements trouble Western liberals, even if these movements support the peaceful democratic aspirations of the Muslim world. If a culture war against Islam is not the answer, then how should Western liberals respond to popular and nonviolent Islamist movements that are committed to working within democratic institutions to promote values at odds with progressive standards of freedom, equality, and tolerance?

## FATHERS AND SONS

Berman's lodestar for addressing these questions is Ramadan, a Muslim public intellectual born in Saudi Arabia in 1962. Ramadan descends from vaunted Islamic stock: his maternal grandfather was Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, and his father was Said Ramadan, a high-profile figure in the Brotherhood who fled repression in Egypt. Berman searches for the true Ramadan in his biography (*Hasan al-Banna and Said Ramadan*), in his intellectual influences (looking into the Doha-based Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi's (unpublished) dissertation, in his books, in his public exchanges, and in the growing library of criticism about him -- but not, apparently, by speaking to him directly. Nonetheless, after years of effort and a few pages of inspection, Berman finds Ramadan to be an elusive figure. Berman is sure that Ramadan is not engaged in an agenda, although he can never quite produce a smoking gun. He allows that Ramadan is not "engaged in an elaborate conspiracy or . . . acting on a secret plan" and that his ambition, "so far as [he] can judge, is to say what it is." But it is precisely that ambition -- the nonviolent project of Islamic revival in Europe -- that troubles Berman.

Berman's unease lies in the very different notions found in the democratic societies of the West and the authoritarian systems of Muslim-majority countries of how Muslims should understand their identity, their faith, and engage in politics. Ramadan is a pragmatist, seeking a way for European Muslims to be both

European and fully Muslim. His 2003 book, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, which Berman conceals the truth beneath "a veil of euphemism," in fact lays out a sophisticated argument for how full citizens of their countries while retaining their religious identity. In *What I Believe*, Ramadan is "I state firmly that we have multiple, moving identities and that there is no reason -- religious, legal, woman or a man cannot be both American or European and Muslim." This is a positive obligation, left up to Muslim individuals to be and become committed citizens, aware of their responsibilities and rights.

But this is an option from which Berman recoils. He prefers Muslims to be secular and does not want to bridge Ramadan is constructing. His truncated understanding of the diversity of Islamic politics completely miss the significance of Ramadan's exhortations to European Muslims to participate in politics as full and equal citizens. Berman similarly underplays Ramadan's doctrinal rejection not only of terrorism but also of Salafi jurisprudence. Ramadan has little use for the puritanical versions of Islam that have taken root in Muslim communities and crowded out other forms of piety -- a process that Khaled Abou El Fadl, a professor of law at UCLA, has called "the great theft."

Berman gets Ramadan's struggle backward. Ramadan's primary adversaries are not liberals in the West but literalistic Salafists whose ideas are ascendant in Muslim communities from Egypt and the Persian Gulf to Europe. For Salafists, a movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood is too political, too accepting of modernity and insufficiently attentive to the formalistic and public rituals of Islam. They urge Muslims to separate their societies in favor of their own allegedly pure Islamic enclaves. The Muslim Brotherhood has encouraged women to wear the veil, but only so that they can demonstrate virtue while in universities and the workplace. True liberals, meanwhile, want women at home and strictly segregated from men. True liberals should prefer Ramadan's offer a model for Muslims of integration as full citizens at a time when powerful forces are instead pushing for isolation and literalism.

Ramadan has not couched his challenge to the Salafists in abstract language or kept it from public view. When Salafi opponents have confronted him with Koranic verses dictating that women receive only half the inheritance of men, Ramadan has argued that these passages should be reinterpreted given the modern family structure and the fact that many women today raise children alone. Therefore, Ramadan argues that Muslims should "try to keep the justice instead of literally implementing verses, pretending faithfulness to the text while in fact creating injustices on the ground." This is a sharp challenge to the Salafists, the significance of which Berman does not recognize. Similarly, Ramadan's call in 2005 for a moratorium on the implementation of *hudud* laws, including the stoning of adulterers -- is mocked relentlessly by Berman as too little, but in fact it poses a controversial challenge to the heart of Salafi political agendas and jurisprudence.

Ultimately, Ramadan disappoints his liberal interlocutors because they are not his most important political allies. He has made a strategic calculation that embracing the political passions of the Muslim mainstream

for his reformist agenda to gain any sort of credibility or traction with the Muslim audiences that reach him. Although his vision may not be a classically liberal one, it is a fully legitimate guide for how Muslim persons of faith -- can participate in a liberal and democratic system. As Andrew March, a political science professor at Yale University, has argued, the cultures of political liberalism in the West should be able to accommodate peaceful, law-abiding citizens who are motivated by explicit religious faith. The United States, which boasts its own powerful religious communities and fundamentalist political forces, should of all places understand how this works.

This does not mean that liberals should not have misgivings about Ramadan's project. He defines sharia as a personal moral code, sustained by the belief of the Muslim jurist -- not as the law of the land but as a personal moral code, sustained by the belief of the believer. Why should such a belief be alarming? After all, this is how many people of faith have reconciled themselves to civic states. But in practice, this evangelical project of societal transformation through non-violence -- changing the world "one soul at a time" -- is more deeply radical than what violent Islamists envision. Anyone can seize state power through violence and then impose his will by force. True power is the ability to mobilize consent so that people willingly embrace ideas without coercion -- so that they want, not simply do what you want. Nonviolent Islamists excel at this level of soft power and, in doing so, have succeeded in transforming public culture across the Muslim world. Walking the streets of Cairo today is hard to believe that only a couple decades ago, few women covered their hair.

## LUMPERS AND SPLITTERS

In trying to understand Islamism, two approaches are possible. The first sees Islamism as essentially pluralistic, with multiple variants, in which the similarities are more important than the differences. In this view, the Muslim Brotherhood and al Qaeda represent two points on a common spectrum, divided by tactics rather than ideology. This understanding makes it possible -- if not unavoidable -- to see Osama bin Laden lurking in the figure of the Brotherhood.

The second approach sees consequential distinctions in the ideology and behavior of various Islamist groups. In the years since 9/11, the United States has moved from the former camp to the latter. The United States' strategy of cooperating with nationalist Iraqi insurgents against al Qaeda in Iraq has led many U.S. policymakers to adopt a strategy that identifies differences among Islamists and uses them to accelerate al Qaeda's marginalization. Many observers in the United States and elsewhere adopted a similar tack after watching the Muslim Brotherhood win elections and defend democracy in countries such as Egypt, even as the Brotherhood opposed U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Berman proudly takes the first approach, of lumping Islamist groups together. For him, the faces of Islamism range from the wild-eyed assassin of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh to the anonymous bearded radical in the streets of their communities, and from the "monstrous" Qaradawi to the smooth Ramadan. Yes, Ramadan has been accused of supporting Laden and condemned terrorism -- but Berman is unmoved, since he sees violence only as a manifestation of the same underlying ideology.

deeper intellectual problem of the Islamist project. Liberals, Berman argues, should not be fooled by or democratic inclinations of nonviolent Islamists or think that engaging with them does Muslims ar "Muslim liberals take umbrage . . . at well-meaning observers from outside the world of Islam who, effort to sympathize with the oppressed and stigmatized Muslims, agree to regard the heritage of Ha the authentic and respectable voice of Islam," he writes. He is right about the suspicion of Islamists : Muslim liberals and secularists. But these groups -- however much Berman and I both might wish o represent only a small slice of Muslim societies. By focusing on them, Berman disregards the more : that occupy the Muslim mainstream.

The evolution of these struggles can be seen in the experience of Qaradawi, who plays a decisive rol book. Ramadan's "reverence" for Qaradawi, a preacher and television host linked to the Muslim Bro as Berman's coup de grâce. Qaradawi has achieved infamy for his fatwas in support of Palestinian at Israeli civilians. If Ramadan reveres such a "monstrous" figure -- and does not understand him to be then surely Ramadan's worldview must be fundamentally flawed. But Berman renders Qaradawi so Muslims would recognize him in the caricature.

In fact, Qaradawi is a pivotal figure who straddles the divides within today's Islamist world. He is a democratic participation and a critic of al Qaeda, which makes him an icon to mainstream nonviolence an object of outrage among Salafi jihadists. He is best known for his doctrine of *wasatiyya*, or "cent out a middle ground between secularism and fundamentalism. He rejects the doctrinal extremism of the violent extremism of al Qaeda -- in a recent book, he dismissed al Qaeda's efforts as a "mad decl upon the world." At the same time, he often takes issue with U.S. foreign policy and is certainly hos not to mention being a highly successful proselytizer of the Islamist worldview. This potent mixture troubling, but it largely defines the mainstream Muslim position. Indeed, one of the keys to Qaradaw his ability to anticipate Arab and Muslim views; like Ramadan, Qaradawi is a barometer of Muslim as a cause of it.

Berman argues that Ramadan's respect for Qaradawi prevents him from making the breaks with Isla necessary to becoming a truly reformist figure. But Berman fails to notice that Ramadan has already breaks, at some personal cost to himself. Ramadan and Qaradawi have clashed several times in rece Ramadan has rejected Qaradawi's suggestion that Muslims in Europe should relocate to Muslim-ma has also criticized Qaradawi's defense of Palestinian violence against Israel, insisting that Palestinian should take the form of nonviolent civil disobedience.

These arguments demonstrate not only that Ramadan is flexible but also how Qaradawi has changed few years, his rulings have become more conservative, literalistic, and orthodox. Arguably, this is be of Islamism have been changing. Salafists are gaining in influence everywhere, driven largely by the

Muslim Brotherhood's model of political participation and the continued flow of Gulf oil money to its institutions and individuals. The purity of Salafism offers simple answers to Muslims in Europe, many facing profound crises of identity and alienation. Qaradawi senses these changes but has struggled to spring, he lost control over his own creation, the popular Islamist Web site Islam Online, when Salaf took editorial control and forced out a number of staff members sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. When he tried to intervene, he was dismissed from the editorial leadership by the site's owners in Qatar -- a site, one of the pillars of Islamist activism over the last three decades.

Those, such as Berman, who see Islamism as flat and uniform claim that Islamists of all varieties -- and their differences over the use of violence or the value of democratic participation -- ultimately share a common goal: achieving an Islamic state. But this is misleading. There is a vast and important gap between the Salafist vision of enforced social uniformity and the moderate Islamist vision of a democratic state, with civil institutions, rule of law, populated by devout Muslims. The gap is so great as to render meaningless the notion that all Islamists share a common strategic objective. Ramadan stands on the correct side of this gap, and by extension, he stands on the right side of the most important battle within Islamism today: he is a defender of pragmatism and democratic participation in society, and of Muslims' becoming full citizens within liberal societies.

Ramadan's defense of participation places him opposite the literalists and radicals with whom Berman links him. The hard core of the Salafi jihadists view all existing Muslim societies as fundamentally, historically -- part of a *jahiliyya*, which means "age of ignorance," from which true Muslims must retreat and isolate themselves. Ramadan, by contrast, calls for change from within. Groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood offer community centers, schools, and other services, while pursuing the *dawa*, or "spiritual outreach." Their approach would be to engage anyone who has engaged with American evangelicals -- the polite conversation, the pamphlets and the self-presentation as honest and incorruptible. There is an obvious difference between a woman who wears a veil for fear of acid being thrown in her face and one who does so to show respect for God. Different forms of coercion -- peer pressure, societal norms, and economic need -- that can be difficult to detect from the outside. These are topics for serious study.

But Berman does not even try. He sees only a radical mob of fanatics, not individuals who find meaning in life given particular contexts and specific challenges. As Berman sees it, blank-faced cyphers impose a global agenda on passive communities that are unable to resist (presumably because their will has been weakened by the globalist essay). It does not occur to him that Islamism might offer meaning to those who are confined to global ghettos or that Islamist groups might be the only ones working on the ground to improve certain people's lives. For many Muslims around the world, Islamism may offer a better life in the here and now -- and not just a better life -- than do many of the alternatives.

This point should not be misunderstood. Although the Muslim Brotherhood is clearly distinct from a

the uniformly "moderate" organization that its supporters often say it is. The organization's character vary from community to community, and its rhetoric sometimes betrays a number of worrisome "gr words of a 2006 study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Its members generally a clear statements on contentious issues, such as the place of non-Muslims in the Islamic state, the tol Muslims, or where the authority to interpret Islamic law should reside. And the Muslim Brotherhood violence at home does not extend to areas where Muslims live under occupation, such as the Palesti Iraq. Such positions may not please many Americans, but they do -- like it or not -- represent the ma much of the Muslim world.

## DESERT FOXES

Many of the valuable debates that *The Flight of the Intellectuals* could have sparked are drowned ou ludicrous efforts to construct an intellectual and organizational genealogy linking Nazi Germany and Islamism. His insistence on the usefulness of the concept of "Islamic fascism" -- despite the fact that Muslims consider it a profound insult to their faith and identity -- is one of the surest clues to his ind Muslim reality in favor of intellectual gamesmanship.

In a lengthy chapter drawn almost entirely from the recent book *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab Wor* like-minded historian Jeffrey Herf, Berman highlights what he calls the mutual admiration among B al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem; and Nazi leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbe virtually nothing to do with the Holocaust, of course, but Berman attempts to create a trail of implic: long passages to Husseini's connections to the Nazis and Banna's support for Husseini. In the 1930s, Nazi Germany as the most convenient ally in a war against the British mandate and the surging Zion community; he then couched this alliance in Islamic terms in an effort to win over mass support. Bu less titillating to Berman than is the idea that "the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem might have been onto s mufti's case for an Islamic-Nazi alliance stood on reasonably solid theological ground." Berman goe Cohen, a professor at Princeton University and historian of Jews in the Muslim world, who posits (b rejects) the idea that "the mufti was engaged in a fundamentally perverse and unnatural effort to twi direction." Berman dances to the brink and then backs away, leaving readers confident of where he l end up without actually saying where that is.

Berman's cartoonish tale misses far more significant historical developments that shaped today's Isla 1950s, the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, comb of Sayyid Qutb, the radical Islamic intellectual imprisoned and later executed by the Nasser regime, that was pivotal to the evolution of modern Islamism. Whereas Banna contested seats in the legislati maintained an organized armed wing, much as did other political parties at the time, Qutb's generati between fleeing Egypt or suffering the torture of its prisons. Banna hoped to work within the archite

-- he was a proto-Ramadan, truly, in this sense -- but doing so was impossible for Qutb. To Qutb, co-society was populated by hypocrites and apostates who had substituted the rule of man for the rule of God. The Muslim Brotherhood eventually rejected Qutb's views, and by the 1970s, it had turned to enthusiastically embrace the public realm across the Arab world. Qutb's acolytes, meanwhile, retreated toward violence. Yet Berman dismisses this split. In response to the fact that Banna and Qutb never even knew each other, Berman says they "knew" each other in the metaphysical sense. This is indefensible and cause enough to dismiss Berman's enterprise.

Berman's invocation of the Nazis is, of course, meant to validate the controversial concept of Islamic jihad. He demands that Ramadan denounce the roles played in World War II by people such as his grandfather, the Grand Mufti, and he takes Ramadan's dismissal of such demands as evidence of something darker. But Ramadan's exasperation with this line of questioning is easy to understand: the role of the Grand Mufti in World War II is a burning concern to Berman, but it holds little relevance for Ramadan's own thinking or beliefs. It is a truly important question posed by nonviolent Islamist movements in liberal societies are lost amid the noise of the polemics.

#### ACCEPTED AND DISCOVERED TRUTHS

Still, Berman highlights a very real dilemma. Put bluntly, Islamists have shaped the world around them in a way that many liberals in the United States and Europe find distasteful. Even moderate Islamists prioritize religion over other identities and promote its application in law, society, culture, and politics. Their proselytizing, party politics, and organization of parallel civil societies have all helped transform societies from being secular to being Islamic. This frightens and angers secularists, liberals, feminists, non-Muslims, and others who take no comfort in the political success of the Islamists simply reflects the changing views of the majority. The strongest argument against accepting nonviolent Islamists as part of the legitimate spectrum of debate is that they offer a solution while making the long-term problem worse. These Islamists may be democrats, but they are not liberal democrats. Their success will increase the prevalence and impact of illiberal views and help shape a world that is not amenable to U.S. policies and culture.

But this is precisely why Berman's lumping together of different strands of Islamism is so harmful. I am a liberal, but he offers a realistic vision of full participation in public life that counters the rejection of liberalism by the ascendant corps of Salafi extremists. Pragmatists who hope to confront the disturbing trends in the Muslim world do not have the luxury of moral purity.

There are other reasons not to simply shun all Islamists. First, there is the question of democracy and freedom. In many Arab and Muslim-majority countries, the Muslim Brotherhood and similar Islamist groups represent the largest and best-organized political opposition. When there are free and fair elections, these groups are the winners. Their opponents are generally not liberals but authoritarians. The arsenal of repression that these reg

against their Islamist challengers strikes against the democratic and political freedoms that liberals prize. The Muslim Brotherhood may be a force for illiberal values, but its members are found in the prison regimes. Defenders of human rights and democratic freedoms cannot overlook those depredations if they remain credible and effective.

Second, nonviolent Islamists are among the most effective rivals of al Qaeda and similar organizations. The lessons of Iraq, where the rejection by nationalist jihadist factions of the more extreme, globalist Qaeda's Iraqi franchise helped turn the tide in favor of the United States. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood helped keep al Qaeda from gaining a foothold in the country. In Gaza, meanwhile, Hamas protects its radical Salafi opponents who do not consider the group religiously conservative enough. Disciplined and organized groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood are well positioned to keep Salafi jihadists from dominating mosques. In this sense, moderate Islamic political movements can serve as a firewall against radical Islam. The pious with a disciplined and nonviolent organization and fighting off more extremist challengers.

Third, there is hope that these movements will become more progressive. Within groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood there are real struggles going on between reformists and traditionalists. The struggle within the Brotherhood burst into view a few years ago when, inspired by a political opening, a group of young bloggers pushed for more transparency, more sustained political engagement, increased cooperation with protest movements across ideological lines, and a less austere approach to cultural issues. The mere existence of movements can be influenced in positive directions offers a powerful reason to try and do so. To be sure, currents move in both directions, which suggests the risks of disengagement: in places such as Egypt hard-liners have moved back into the leadership of Islamist movements after sustained campaigns of repression against them. Political conditions clearly affect ideology: when such groups are allowed to flourish they generally become more moderate, and when they are excluded, they become more radical.

Fourth, there is the matter of the bruising battle within the Muslim world. Secular Muslims, such as -- the Somali-born writer and former Dutch politician -- are a sideshow to the real struggles taking place between reformers and traditionalists, Muslim Brothers and Salafists, rulers and oppositionists. The real challenge to the integration of Muslims in the West comes from Salafists who deny the legitimacy of democracy itself and see society around them as mired in *jahiliyya*, and who seek only to enforce a rigid, literalistic version of Islam on whatever insulated enclaves they are able to carve out. The liberals to whom Berman is drawn represent a vanishingly small portion of Muslim-majority societies. They are generally drawn from well-off urban areas that have become ever more detached from their surrounding environments and would not fare well in the elections that the United States claims to want. Meanwhile, granting such prominence to ex-Muslims in Israel and denounce Islam discredits other reformists in the real terrain where figures such as Ramadan matter. Supporting them may offer the warm glow of moral purity -- and they may be more fun at parties -- but it should not be confused with having an impact where it counts.

At the end, Berman offers an impassioned defense of Hirsi Ali, whom he portrays as a classic dissident betrayed by the leading lights of the liberal West. He feigns bewilderment at why these liberal authors devote so many pages, might find her problematic. Berman appears unbothered by the frightening clash of civilizations promoted by al Qaeda and fueled by anti-Islamic culture warriors in the West. He is concerned that expressing extreme anti-Islamic views and embracing only those Muslims who reject help al Qaeda by antagonizing those hewing to the Muslim mainstream and perhaps convincing them is right after all. Berman portrays himself, Hirsi Ali, and a select group of others as the defenders of a world where too many have fallen short. But real moral courage does not come from penning anger without regard for real-world consequences.

The most helpful strategic victory in the struggle against Islamist radicalism would be to undermine the West is at war with Islam. There should be no tolerance for Islamist extremists who threaten women, or support al Qaeda's terrorism. But defending Hirsi Ali from death threats should not necessitate embracing her diagnosis of Islam. Berman's culture war would marginalize the pragmatists and empower extremists. Muslim communities are more likely to reject such extremists when they do not feel that being attacked as fascist or that they can only be accepted if they embrace Israel and the policy preferences of American conservatives.

The Muslims in the West are not going away. It is therefore imperative to find a way for these communities to become full partners in the security and prosperity offered by Western societies. If democracy has any chance of surviving, it must be able to allow Muslims to peacefully pursue their interests and advance their ideas -- even as it defend the right of Muslims to do so are also free to oppose them. Ramadan may not present the only end -- but he does present one. And that is why his liberal proponents in the West, who so infuriate Islamists by promoting Ramadan, emerge as more compelling guides to a productive future.

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