

# UC San Diego

## UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The anthropology of Islam by way of a transnational piety movement

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6zn5s21z>

### Author

Butt, Waqas Hameed

### Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

University of California, San Diego

The Anthropology of Islam by Way of a Transnational Piety Movement

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Waqas Hameed Butt

Committee in charge:

Professor Steven M. Parish, Chair  
Professor Thomas J. Csordas  
Professor Janis H. Jenkins

2011

Copyright

Waqas Hameed Butt, 2011

All rights reserved.

The Thesis of Waqas Hameed Butt is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

---

---

---

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Abstract of the Thesis.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: The Anthropology of Islam.....	6
Chapter II: The Historical Development of The Tablighi Jama'at.....	24
Chapter III: Making Moral Selves.....	38
Chapter IV: Reintroducing Signs.....	54
Conclusion.....	70
References.....	76

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Anthropology of Islam by Way of a Transnational Piety Movement

by

Waqas Hameed Butt

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Steven M. Parish, Chair

This study explores the anthropological study of Islam through an ethnographic analysis of the Tablighi Jama‘at – a transnational piety movement. Recent anthropological writings on Islam have approached Islam as a discursive tradition and, drawing heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, have detailed the ethical formation of the subject. Embedded within these formulations are important notions of power, knowledge, truth, and authority, which are fundamental features of Islamic beliefs and practices. In the ethnographic sections of the study, I will apply this framework in the

analysis of the Tablighi Jama'at. Although the movement is very much the product of a particular moment, which I will demonstrate in my historical overview, the Tablighi Jama'at has been able to expand on a global level. These two aspects will be clarified by demonstrating how the Tablighi Jama'at's formal methodology and creed are put into practice at a mosque in San Diego. In order to do so, I will rely heavily on semiotics, or the process of signification, and I will demonstrate how semiotics forms are vital elements to the success of these types of piety movements. Thus, in the final section of this study, I will revisit the debates about signification surrounding the nature of authorizing discourses, and will aim to show how semiotics allows us to connect the discursive traditions of Islam, with its authorizing and authoritative discourses, with immanent utterances and practices in the world.

## Introduction

In the summer of 2010, I visited the country headquarters of the Tablighi Jama'at, a transnational Islamic piety movement, in Raiwind, Pakistan, approximately 45 minutes outside the city of Lahore. This center is a massive complex in a city comprised of small shops, undeveloped housing schemes, and industrial buildings. Upon entering the headquarters, my guide (my Urdu tutor's son who has been active in this movement) remarked to me that the building to our immediate left housed women who accompanied their husbands or other male relations on preaching tours. Yet, I saw no women throughout my visit. Following a brief survey of the buildings, which ranged from open-air dormitories and areas for assigning destinations to administrative offices and classrooms, he led me to one of the movement's leaders, an older man that spoke softly but with clear focus and assurance. This man vigorously attempted to persuade me to postpone my graduate studies and dedicate the next four months of my life to their efforts of *da'wa* (preaching). He utilized a number of rhetorical techniques: reminding me of my obligations as a Muslim as well as emphasizing the spontaneity of the task and the benefits of traveling in the path of God. After my repeated but polite refusals to join them in their work, he continued to speak about the significance of their *da'wa* activities, and the sad state of Muslims throughout the world: their lack of concern for living in conformity with Islamic norms and obligations. I proceeded with my tutor's son to offer the mid-afternoon prayer in the center's main mosque, and though I was dressed in traditional clothing, I experienced much discomfort with my surroundings.



The continual discomfort, with my physical surroundings, my interaction with the older gentleman, and the members who noticed and surrounded me, stayed with me for quite some time. This uneasiness was confirmed in conversations with others who voiced a visceral discomfort with their activities: their preaching violated the personal space of religion so cherished by secular-minded individuals. Additionally, physical traits constantly came up to identify members of this group: beards, pants that fell above the ankles, and dark marks on the forehead from prostration during ritual prayer. This physical uneasiness and markers of identity were clearly important, but they seemed to result from an approach to piety itself that was problematic for many.

As I thought more and more about this discomfort and came to conduct fieldwork with this movement in San Diego, I realized that any attempt to understand this movement, its members' activities, and its relationship to broader social and political questions would be a complicated task. Not only would it need to take account of how Islamic beliefs and practices are constructed and take form in the world but also, how these beliefs and practices are operating in relation to broader historical and social contexts. The more I studied this movement, its program of faith revival, and the strategies and experiences of its member, I came to understand that to make sense of the movement, and the discomfort with their fervor and activities, was a question of how to approach to Islam as an object of anthropological study.

This paper is thus concerned with the anthropological study of Islam, and provides an ethnographic analysis of the Tablighi Jama'at in San Diego to further develop this field. In doing so, I hope it will further our understanding of piety movements, in particular, and Islam, more generally. Talal Asad (1986) has elaborated an

idea of Islam as a discursive tradition, and Saba Mahmood (2005) has expanded this notion by approaching the Islamic Revival in Egypt through power, desire, and morality. In utilizing these analytics to “translate” movements in the Islamic world, they have created Islam as an object of study. The first chapter of this paper will therefore provide an outline of how the boundaries of such an object have been drawn. It will begin by clarifying Islam as a discursive tradition and then, elaborate that idea by charting out the trajectory by which the work of Michel Foucault has been introduced into the study of Islam, specifically his writings on discursive formations, power, subjectivity, and ethics. This body of writing has been supplemented with an emphasis on authority and authorizing discourses. As this approach is productive in studying Islam and Islamic movements, it is how I frame my own ethnographic analysis.

In the second chapter, I track the historical development of the Tablighi Jama‘at from colonial North India, where it was very much a product of the social, political, economic, and cultural milieu of the period, to having a global presence. In its formative years, it developed a language and practice of faith revival that sought to build and strengthen a moral community through certain obligations, demands, and methodology for their *da’wa* activities. Although this program is highly influenced by its context of development, it has been structured in such a way to seamlessly embed itself in other contexts.

While the decontextualized qualities of this movement are significant, any global movement needs to ground itself through local activity. I will therefore present their activities and practices at a mosque in San Diego, CA in the third chapter. The mosque, in a general sense, is a central locus of faith revival in the language and practices of the

Tablighi Jama'at. I will explore how the space of the mosque is used metaphorically and practically to draw individuals towards being moral, instructing and reminding them of their obligations to themselves, the community, and the mosque itself. While much has been written about the articulation of the body and its substances and capacities in Islamic beliefs and practices, not much has been written on the relationship of the body to space. Additionally, much of their practices are concerned with creating a mindful disposition that involves *consciously working* on the self in order to make it moral. This moral and ethical work will allow me to discuss the effectiveness of this piety movement that relies upon the strength of a moral message that can actively create and shape the moral contexts into which it enters, thereby allowing the past conveyed in tradition to animate the present as well as the interactions of its members. We can then understand how such a movement circulates globally while effecting change locally.

While I also approach Islam as a discursive tradition, which I will shortly explicate, and subject formation in a similar way as others, much of my discussion and analysis will rely upon semiotics and other theories of signification. A clear disavowal of signification in the already existing literature on Islamic movements similar to the Tablighi Jama'at makes simply applying these theories difficult; in chapter four, I will therefore directly clarify this disavowal by applying theories of signification, hoping to demonstrate how an expanded notion of semiotics and signification can bring into relief many of the same concerns found in this anthropological literature on Islam. In particular, I will first introduce the iconic and indexical functioning of signs; the former will help to clarify some of Mahmood's concerns about (re)signification, and the latter, coupled with the metapragmatic function of discourse, will be a useful analytics for clarifying how

discourses authorize practices and other discourses, and in that process, authorize themselves. I will end with a discussion of the relationship among the discursive traditions of Islam, authorized practices and beliefs, and the social, political, and economic conditions in which a tradition and subjects are given form. This last point will help to clarify how consciousness of the subject takes form in light of multiple forces acting upon and through it.

## **Chapter I: The Anthropology of Islam**

The writings of Foucault have been productively applied to the anthropological study of Islam. Even a cursory gloss of his notions of a discursive formation, power, knowledge, truth, and morality and ethics overlap with many of the concerns of Islamic beliefs and practices, such as textual traditions, a search for true and authentic practices, and an ordering of social and individual relations. It would be easy to disregard these connections as an intellectual coincidence, but this overlap itself illuminates certain features of Islamic beliefs and practices. This is the central concern of this section: to demonstrate that the utilization of Foucault is productive in giving form to an object of study such as Islam. Furthermore, it is this same approach that I apply in my analysis of the Tablighi Jama'at and their cultivation of a moral-ethical self. Tracing the development of anthropological writings on Islam and my own ethnographic analysis will allow me to open up a space in which to explore, in the fourth chapter of this paper, how signification can be productively introduced into the anthropological study of Islam.

### From Discursive Formations to a Discursive Tradition

Recent anthropological writing (see Deeb 2005, Hirschkind 2006, and Mahmood 2005) employs the conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition. Not all of these have taken an overtly Foucauldian framework. For example, Lara Deeb takes an interpretive approach in examining the rationalization of principles and practices in contemporary Shi'i piety movements. She argues that the process of authenticating correct Islamic practices constitutes a pious modern in which religious beliefs and

practices animate everyday public and private life. Yet, even in her work, one can discern the productivity of this formulation of Islam as a discursive tradition: the search and authorization of true Islamic beliefs and practices are at the center of this tradition, and the instruction and enactment of these practices defines the relationship of the subject to the tradition. Deeb, through her interpretative work, clarifies how modernity, often assumed to usher in the retreat of religion from public life, is shaped differently as these Muslim women engaged with the discursive traditions of Islam.

Eschewing schemas of social and political structures or typologies of characters and events (e.g. revolutionary, urban bourgeois, or peasant) to explain Islamic beliefs and practices, Talal Asad (1986) contends that Islam must be approached through its own discourses that are themselves ideological representations. Setting aside his notion of discourse for the time being, which is borrowed from Foucault's explication of discursive formations and practices, Asad makes the following recommendation to anthropologists interested in studying and writing on Islam:

[i]f one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition...

What is a tradition? A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history (1986:14).

The traditions of Islam are predicated upon a founding set of texts with which Muslims engage through understanding, interpretation, and argumentation. Practices are established and have a history; and their correct form and purpose can then be taught to Muslims. In this way, Muslims "relate conceptually to a *past*" and "a *future*" "through a

*present*” (ibid 1986:14). This temporal aspect should be stressed: a practice has a history that allows a Muslim to conceptually relate to that history and binds one to a present and future. This approach to practices, as both presupposing a past and present and entailing a future, will be taken up later in my discussion on metapragmatics and authorizing discourses. Additionally, this conceptualization of temporality is implicitly a relationship to historical change. A practice may retain its shape and purpose but at the same time, is subject to historical forces outside the realm of the discursive tradition (e.g. social, political, and economic conditions). However, as this occurs in relation to a discursive tradition, a link for the Muslim subject is retained to the discursive tradition and the traditional practices.

These practices are not simply Islamic because they are practiced by Muslims, but they are Islamic because they are “authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims” (ibid 1986:15). Authorizing discourses employ kinds of reasoning and argumentation that undergird Islamic practices; once a practice is authorized in a particular way, it is taught and taken up by Muslims. This instructional process itself will need to rely on argumentation and reasoning, more so when met with resistance or doubt<sup>1</sup>. The teaching and assimilation of Islamic beliefs and practices can be appreciated as the Muslim subject’s relation to power in the form of orthodoxy: orthodoxy’s domain is “[w]herever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones” (ibid

---

<sup>1</sup> The relevance of reasoning/argumentation, teaching/assimilation, and resistance/doubt should all be kept in mind throughout this paper. However, I will specifically engage these questions when discussing how certain events such as musical gathering or bodily markers such as a beard or turban become contested within social life. These forms of contestation are as much social as they are discursive, relying on an individuals engagement with their community as well as their understanding of Islamic texts and traditions.

1986:15). By authorizing certain discourses and practices while denying others, “(religious) power creates (religious) truth” (Asad 1993:33). Thus, an Islamic practice is truly Islamic not because of a semantic recognition, but it is Islamic because it is connected to truth itself.

In developing his ideas about Islam as a discursive tradition, Asad (2006) has increasingly come to stress the embodied nature of traditional practices. By authorizing a practice with a specific form and purpose, power comes to operate through various actions, with religious practices being the most clearly marked. Importantly, power exercises its authority not solely on a semantic level, that is the reason for or meaning of a practice, but authority binds people to that tradition as it is rooted in a “somatic complex,” attaching “persons to one another,” and to discourse as a “physical process.” This type of encounter is at the center of authorizing discourses, and in this encounter, the subject connects to truth and begins a process of transformation in that “moment—extended through recollection and desire—that subjects her to its authority and alters her, marks a beginning” (Asad 2006:213). Authorizing discourses for Asad operate on three levels: 1) the actual reasoning and arguments that authorize a practice; 2) the embodied recognition of that authority; and 3) the transmission and enactment of those practices. Put differently, this recognition of authority on an embodied level (“the somatic complex”) produces embodied practices that have been discursively constructed and organized. I will further clarify the role of embodiment in the final section of this chapter.



Attached to Islam as a discursive tradition is Foucault's notion of a discursive formation. Though this concept can be thought of as a relation between past and present<sup>2</sup>, Foucault insists that we first recognize that discourses "concern only a population of dispersed events," and "must not be inferred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs" (Foucault 2010[1972]:22). Discourse in this model "is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence" (ibid 2010[1972]:107). The law of this series is what he calls a discursive formation; thus, discourses are statements that "are unified into rule-governed systems," in which there are elements (consisting of objects, enunciative modalities, concepts, and strategies)<sup>3</sup> for the rules to relate to, and in that process relate these elements to each other, and back to a discursive field opened up by that formation.<sup>4</sup>

But discursive formations are not limited to the rules of formation for certain statements; these statements are immanent in actual utterances. By connecting these actual utterances to a discursive formation, Foucault is attempting to make clear that certain statements are removed out of their everyday context, claiming "a relatively

---

<sup>2</sup> Mahmood highlights this position when she states that a discursive formation is "a form of relation between the past and present predicated upon a system of rules that demarcate both the limits and possibility of what is saying, doable, and recognizable as a comprehensible event in all its manifest forms" (Mahmood 2005:114-5). Though I agree with this assessment of a discursive formation, Foucault demonstrates that this link between past and present, and one discourse and another, occurs through the rules-governing the formation of statement, and it is this process that I want to highlight in relation to Islam as a discursive tradition.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of how a concept is discursively organized and then, takes shape in public practices, see Asad's discussion of *nasiha*, a concept in Islamic moral theology, that operates as exhortation, advice, and confrontation on political and moral issues and behavior (1993:214).

<sup>4</sup> Foucault's definition of a discursive formation has been described as resembling structuralism in multiple regards, and in fact, directly dealing with "the idea of a decomposition of a whole into its parts and their systematic relations" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:53-7)

autonomous realm” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:47-8)<sup>5</sup>. The autonomy of such a discourse relies upon that “rule-governed system” and reaches this autonomy through further discursive practices:

...by passing some sort of institutional test, such as the rules of dialectical argument, inquisitional interrogation, or empirical confirmation...By passing the appropriate tests statements can be understood by an informed hearer to be true in a way that need make no reference to the everyday context in which the statement was uttered...in any such speech act an authorized subject asserts (writes, paints, says) what—on the basis of an accepted method—is a serious truth claim (ibid 1982:48).

It must be stressed that this process occurs in contexts where truth and falsity have serious repercussions – a situation conducive to Islamic movement that produce discourses on true beliefs and practices. Passing through institutional tests grants a discourse its authority, autonomy, and truth, but these tests do not simply occur through the rules given by the system. They concurrently rely upon a community of experts to validate a discourse as true or false, and through this method of justification and refutation “confers on these serious speech acts their claim to be knowledge (*savoir*), and makes of them objects to be studied, repeated, and passed on to others” (ibid 1982:48).<sup>6</sup> Discursive formations thus refer to the rules of formation that connect statements that are dispersed events, and since this is done through certain institutional or formal methodologies, it authorizes a certain discourse as authoritative and true, which can then be passed to the subject of knowledge. Though institutional and formal methods for authorizing true discourses are highly relevant in a piety movement such as the Tablighi

---

<sup>5</sup> Foucault’s work on discursive formation and speech acts is connected to the speech act theory of John Austin and John Searle, though they differ in the latter’s interest in everyday speech acts and “the rules which govern the production of each type of speech act” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:47-8).

<sup>6</sup> Knowledge as in *savoir* in Foucault refers to the conditions of existence for an object to be given over to *connaissance*, which defines the relation of the subject to the object, the formal rules that govern it, or also, a body of systematized knowledge (cf. see Foucault 2010[1972]:15, ff. 2).

Jama‘at, the ability to engage with Islamic discursive traditions has been greatly expanded to include Muslims not trained as scholars, jurists, or theologians. Yet, members of this movement rely upon the autonomy of the discursive traditions of Islam, engaging with its foundational texts as well as exegetical and didactic materials. The expanded engagement of non-specialists with these traditions has, in fact, led to a diffusion of truthful discourses on Islamic beliefs and practices, whereby Muslims of distinct background have sought to structure their everyday lives in line with Islamic norms and obligations. As this process is a product of the relationship between the subject to the discursive traditions of Islam, it will be helpful now to explicate how power, truth, and knowledge come together in forming subjectivities.

#### Power, Knowledge, and Truth

Recalling the relationship to orthodoxy as a relationship to power, it would be helpful to review the contours and workings of power in the Foucauldian model. First, by opting a juridical conception of power, we connect power to the law and the force of prohibition, which is negative, narrow, and does not take into account why and how people give into relations of power. An expanded conceptions of power takes it as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization,” and as “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1990[1978]:92-93). Power is importantly interior to a relationship (e.g. economic, knowledge, and sexual), productive of knowledges, desires, and discourses, and intentional and non-subjective (actions are calculated with aims and objectives) (Foucault 1980:119-123). The point of intentionality is of significance because intentionality involves an awareness of the aim of an action,

and accomplishing such an aim involves intelligibility of those actions and aims. Thus, the subject acts with both intention and intelligibility. Subsequent practices by which the subject disciplines and forms himself contain a logic and are aimed at achieving an objective. Equipping the subject with those practices are the technologies of power.

Power also has an immanent connection with desire, so that they operate through each other. Foucault explicitly states, “where there is desire, the power relation is already present” (1990[1978]:81). Once again, instead of assuming that power represses desire, we should approach the law as a form of power that produces desires as well as further discourses regarding true desires. It is this reciprocity between power and desire that Mahmood utilizes in providing an outline of how desires are discursively organized, developed, and maintained, and then, are cultivated through submitting to recognized authority and performing specific practices with the aim of disciplining and honing one’s desire for piety. Cultivating the necessary desires that allow submission to recognized authority and performance of specific practices was also relevant to members of the Tablighi Jama‘at: they actively discussed and worked to produce desires in themselves for ritual prayer, acts of remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and a diffused urge to strengthen piety (*taqwa*).

While power produces the subject through the enactment of practices and the production of desires, discursive formations produce subjects of knowledge through a will to knowledge, or the will to know oneself as a subject of knowledge. Subjectivity emerges out of the subject’s engagement with a system of knowledge, or a discursive formation; these “discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the

setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence, each of them presupposes a play of prescription that govern exclusions and selections” (Foucault 1997a:11).

Discursive practices establish the principles of exclusion and selection within a discursive formation/tradition. Certain objects (e.g. practices and desires) are subject to formation, articulation, and regulation, or put in slightly different terms, these objects are discursively organized by that formation. The subject of knowledge is then allowed to take “a legitimate perspective” within this discursive field by consulting the norms that elaborate objects, concepts, and theories. This will to knowledge, or to know one’s self, is itself dependent upon a will to truth, or to know the truth about one’s self.<sup>7</sup>

Examining the connection between the subject and truth, Foucault identifies two distinct typologies. The first technique “arm[s] the subject with a truth it did not know, one that did not reside in it; what is wanted is to make this learned, memorized truth, progressively put into practice, a quasi subject that reigns supreme in us” (Foucault 1997b:102). The subject comes to know the truth about himself and the world through training himself through a series of bodily, affective, and mental exercises. While the form of the practices is essential in forming the substance of the subject, these practices are made possible by a correspondence between the truth of things and truthful discourses.<sup>8</sup> The other typology of connecting the subject to truth is embodied in the practice of confession: the subject searches the self, speaking the truth about himself and

---

<sup>7</sup> “For the moment, one can indicate in a very general way the directions in which it will need to advance, involving the distinction between knowledge [*savoir*] and learning [*connaissance*]; the difference between the will to knowledge [*savoir*] and the will to truth [*vérité*]; the position of the subject, or subjects, with respect to that will” (Foucault 1997a:12).

<sup>8</sup> This correspondence between the truth of things and a truthful discourse is also the site of origins, or as he states, “The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things correspond to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost” (Foucault 2010[1984]a:80).

his desires to the presence (real or virtual) of another, who requires it and “intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile,” and this ritual practice of producing truth, regardless of external consequences, has the objective of producing an “intrinsic modification in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, purifies him” (Foucault 1990[1978]:62). The will to truth thus has two characteristics in these instances: one is that it connect the subject to truth through truthful discourses that put into place a set of practices that allow the subject to know that truth, and the other connects the subject to truthful discourses by an inward turn to discover the truth about himself and his desires.

A similar will to truth is in operation within the discursive tradition of Islam. Religious power creates truth through authorizing certain discourses and practices, and by assimilating these discourses and practices, the subject connects to that truth, and is able to work on forming himself into the desired subject. The relevance of truth will be elaborated further when *da‘wa* makes a claim to truth, or the truth as it is connected to Islam and divine revelation. Additionally, through their program of moral and ethical reform and engagement with the discursive traditions of Islam, members of the Tablighi Jama‘at seek to produce and affirm truthful discourses and practices. Lastly, I would like to emphasize that this engagement with the discursive traditions, which results in the production and internalization of truthful discourses about Islamic beliefs and practices, is distinct from confession were the truth about the self is sought out through contemplation and decipherment of the self and its constant stirring. The truth of a discourse or practice is established through not only the discursive traditions of Islam but also, through the structure of authority within those traditions.

### Authority and the Formation of the Subject

Within the model of Islam as a discursive tradition, power and truth are intimately connected with authority. Religious power creates religious truth, but the creation of truth is done through authorizing true discourses and practices. In other words, the operation of power and truth rests on certain mechanisms for establishing authority. The first are the textual traditions of the Qur'an itself that is revealed by God to the Prophet and supporting texts (hadith) that provide exemplary and imitative models for practices and behavior. These textual sources grant an authority to a discourse or practice. The second mechanism for establishing authority is engaging with the discursive field opened up by Islamic traditions. This includes, but is not limited to, the central texts of the Qur'an and hadith, and can come to include instructive materials, exegetical texts, and conceptual, interpretive, and argumentative strategies for engaging these materials. This last mechanism of establishing authority is resembles Foucault's rules of formation for discursive formations, their objects, enunciative modalities, concepts, and strategies.

Lastly, recalling that a discursive tradition is a conceptual relationship to the past, present, and future, these traditional practices are passed down from previous generations to present ones, and the mechanism of transmission (teaching, clarification, and contestation) are important in authorizing the discourses and practices of the tradition. This entire process connects Muslims with a past, out of which a present is formed, and opens up the possibility of a future. Traditional practices have a history, and that history grants them an authority; however, at the same time, the authority of a practice or discourse relies upon a discursive engagement with the tradition of Islam. The effects of such an engagement are "the creation of sensibilities and embodied capacities (of reason,

affect, and volition) that in turn are the conditions for the tradition's reproduction" (Asad 2006:115). These latter aspects of embodied capacities are the physical and bodily means by which subjects are formed. These empirical practices are the specific points at which power is exercised and forms the subject. Before proceeding to how morality and ethics come to be crucial to the formation of the subject, this connection to a past within the present is central to my later argument of how the Tablighi Jama'at creates moral contexts within the present out of their relationship to the past. It is the power of morality and ethics that will be of utmost concern in my ethnographic analysis of the Tablighi Jama'at's activities in San Diego, and therefore, I want to move to clarify how I approach morality and ethics in this case.

#### Morality, Ethics, and the Embodied Subject

Many anthropologists have recently argued for a greater integration of morality and ethics into anthropological work (see Laidlaw 2001, Lambek 2000, Faubion 2001). Reintroducing morality and ethics, especially virtue ethics as spelled out by Aristotle, supplements contemporary concerns about power and the political (Lambek 2000:310). Morality and ethics also take into account the "practical activity," "judgment," and "deliberation" of living one's life as well as the pedagogy involved – a constituent component of ethics (Lambek 2000:311-12, Faubion 2001:96-7). A discussion of morality and ethics in an Islamic context must, to certain extent, examine individuals engagement with the discursive traditions of Islam to see how moralities and ethics are organized through beliefs and practices, and attempt to understand how individuals form themselves in line with models provided by the tradition, most specifically those of the



Prophet and his companions<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the relevance of practical activity, judgment, and pedagogy should not be ignored as this moral and ethical work occurs in relation to the demands of everyday life and requires the teaching and learning of correct practices and behaviors.

Much recent anthropological writing on morality and ethics has taken Foucault's writing as their starting point. Interestingly, morality was less of an interest to Foucault than ethics because the former was thought to be generally shared and stable with greater variation and differentiation across ethical systems. Morality here refers specifically to "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth" (Foucault 1990[1985]:25). Moral values and actions should be approached as a shared prescriptive code of behavior. Importantly, these values and rules are not monolithic and uniform but are interrelated sets that supplement, contradict, and oppose one another, which offer symmetries as well as loopholes. While Foucault sought subject formation in ethics because it involves working on the self through the body's substance and form, which I will also make clear in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Gingrich (1997) observes that modern selfhood is saturated with relations of power because each individual moral frame is placed into a larger, transcendental framework. To look for resistance, resignification, or creative manipulation to systems of power often reflects an anthropologist's attitudes rather than the informant or group's own approaches to their social and political engagement (ibid 1997:153). Such situations are apparent in what Gingrich calls non-secular, scriptural societies such as tribal rural Yemen, supposedly indicative of the "Muslim world." Although such a representation of "non-secular" and "scriptural" societies overlooks the complexity of modern life throughout the Muslim world, his observation that fulfilling one's moral obligations and forming a moral self is patently a process of giving into relations of power, specifically to orthodoxy or the discursive traditions of Islam, is a helpful one. Gingrich does make clear that a cultural concept such as "honor" or "shame" is related to the notion of "haram", which has a scriptural basis and is arrived at through discursive practices. Furthermore, he demonstrates how scriptural moralities become inscribed into local moralities (Gingrich 1997:157). This ethnographic example, though not invested in any Foucauldian approach, makes clear the relation of morality to both Islam as a discursive tradition and orthodoxy as a power relation.

case of the Tablighi Jama‘at, I would like emphasize the importance of morality in this case as well: it is the force of practices such as ritual prayer, models of behaviors of the Prophet and his companions, and the obligations to the self and others that constitutes the realm of morality, which then opens itself up to ethical practices and formation of certain virtues. I simply stress that the law-like obligations of morality structure the ethical system by which subjects are formed (Laidlaw 2001:317).

Ethics in Foucault’s model consists of four distinct components. First is the determination of the ethical substance, and this refers to the part of the self that is subject to ethical judgment and practices. For example, in the case of medieval Christianity, the ethical substance was the flesh and desire. These substances were essential to learning the truth about the self, and (re)forming the self through moral and ethical practices. Next is called the “mode of subjectivation,” and is the process by which the individual recognizes himself as subject to moral obligations and the relation he has to those rules. Third is the elaboration of the ethical work that brings one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, and in this process, transforms the subject, equipping him with a truth that he did not previously know as well as dispositions, sensibilities, and skills. This third component is also termed technologies of the self, which Foucault explicates throughout his writings.<sup>10</sup> The last component of his model is a *telos*, or the mode of being that one seeks to achieve through moral and ethical actions. This moral and ethical activity is a form of self-activity, and therefore, concentrates upon “the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he

---

<sup>10</sup> For a clarification and examples of technologies of the self, see Foucault’s writing on this topic and its development in Greek and early Christian writing (1997c). For analysis of the conflicting schemas of two moral and ethical systems utilizing this model of ethics-oriented morality, see Robbins (2004:216-219).

makes of himself as an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his own mode of being” which he calls “ethics-oriented” moralities (Foucault 1990[1985]:30).

In the case of the Tablighi Jama‘at, the ethical substance is similar the one spelled out by Mahmood:

it is the various movements of the body that comprise the material substance of the ethical domain...women learn to analyze the movements of the body and soul in order to establish coordination between inner states (intentions, movements of desire and thought, etc.) and outer conduct (gestures, actions, speech, etc.) (2005:31).

The relationship between inner states of consciousness, desire, and thought to outward behavior of gesture, action, and speech will be clarified in my own ethnographic analysis in the third chapter. The mode of subjectivation is the recognition and submission to the authority of Islam as a divinely revealed truth and the resulting tradition. The ethical work that goes into bringing one’s conduct in line with these given rules will be explicated in my ethnographic analysis, but at this point, it mainly consists of practices such as ritual worship, the effort that goes into *da’wa*, and a cultivation of a pious disposition that includes a concern and reflection on the state of the piety within the self and the community. Finally, the *telos* or mode of being consists of the example provided by the Prophet, his companions, and other significant figures in Islamic literature. This *telos* is an important aspect because, as I argue in the upcoming chapters, it is through

these models that have been passed down and elaborated that a moral context is produced within in the present.

The formation of a moral subjectivity is indebted to the discursive traditions of Islam as well as the belief and practices that structure moral and ethical practices. The elaboration of such a paradigm however cannot stand alone to explain and understand Islamic movements such as the Tablighi Jama'at. My discussion thus far has already relied upon desire and consciousness, and Charles Hirschkind (2006) in particular has examined how the sensorium itself is organized, developed, and cultivated through listening to Islamic cassette sermons. Clearly, some elaboration of the body is required if we want to appreciate how individuals submit to recognized authority and form themselves in line with authoritative models of being Muslim.

Thomas J. Csordas outlines an approach to anthropology that considers the body “as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture” (1990:5, emphasis in original). Elaborating embodiment in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as a problematic of perception, and Pierre Bourdieu, as a product of practice, Csordas provides ethnographic material from the Charismatic Catholic movement, specifically dealing with ritual healing, glossolalia, and others ritual practices, and while much of this material is important and requires thoughtful consideration, I want to bring forth the following two points from his analysis. First, he makes clear that by beginning with “the lived world of perceptual phenomena, our bodies are not objects to us,” but “they [our bodies] are an integral part of the perceiving subject,” such an approach makes the mind-body distinction “much more uncertain” (1990:36). And this is the exactly the type of subject into which Islamic beliefs and practices enter, and in doing so, develop and form

the subjectivity of the perceiving subject, a truly embodied figure. Second, Csordas recognizes the “indeterminacy of objective reality” that allows “religious practice [to exploit] the preobjective to produce new, sacred objectifications, and [to exploit] the habitus in order to transform the very dispositions of which it is constituted” (1990:39). It is important to distinguish between Csordas’s ethnographic example, out of which his paradigm for embodiment is constructed, and an Islamic movement such as the Tablighi Jama‘at, which is resistant to producing “new, sacred objectification.” Rather, I want to stress that the indeterminacy of objective reality allows us to think about how individual moral subjectivities emerge out the interplay of the body with its experiences of the world and its disciplining and cultivation through various practices. Even though the Tablighi Jama‘at deploys a program of moral and ethical reform that is resistant to elaboration and improvisation, this program must and does congeal in individuals as embodied subjects.

This model of morality, borrowing the ethics orientation provided by Foucault but also, taking seriously the moral demands and obligations of a tradition as well as the development of embodied subjects, is the way in which I approach the Tablighi Jama‘at and its *da’wa* activities. Furthermore, this movement also is continually engaging with the discursive traditions of Islam. A discursive tradition allows us to see how beliefs and practices are interpreted, argued, and ultimately, authorized, and in doing so, we can see how these beliefs and practices are given from in the world and individuals’ lives. The meaning of a practice thus is not simply what a practice *means to a person*, but how it has been *developed and authorized* by the engagement of a subject to the discursive traditions of Islam. Since it is authorized by those traditions, it equips the subject with a truth by internalizing discourses and practices. Throughout this entire process, we can

come to understand how an individual forms himself as a proper subject (e.g. pious Muslim), and through *da'wa* activities, makes others recognize themselves as and desire after being this type of subject. With this framework, I now want to more closely discuss the Tablighi Jama'at, providing a historical overview of its development in South Asia and abroad as well as an ethnographic analysis of its activities in San Diego.

## Chapter II: The Historical Development of the Tablighi Jama‘at

The Tablighi Jama‘at was founded in Mewat, India during the first half of the twentieth century. Setting aside the exact date of its founding<sup>1</sup>, I want to stress the social, cultural, and political milieu of this period. Before doing so, it will be necessary to clarify this movement’s terminology in order to more fully understand its program of faith revival. This section should make clear its objectives, historical development, structure, and methodology, and the sense of community upon which their work is dependent.

### The Historical Development of a Transnational Piety Movement

The Tablighi Jama‘at is part of a broader Islamic revival that took place in South Asia and throughout the Muslim world. Metcalf (1982) identifies the following characteristics that unite these movements: first, problems in the world and their explanations are interpreted as religious; second these problems are interpreted as the product of individual moral corruption; third, avoiding traditionalist practices, they have tended to return to more scriptural approaches to the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet, and lastly, they are lead by religious leaders who symbolize the aspirations of the community (1982:5-6). While this model is helpful in understanding these movements for the social scientists, this revival occurs through the practices, behaviors, and qualities of individuals.

As these movements return to scriptural sources, this faith revival is very much invested in the discursive traditions of Islam: “An example of this *hadith* usage is the following saying of the Prophet: ‘Whoever revives my *Sunna* (practice) revives me. And

---

<sup>1</sup> Some argue that it was founded by Muhammad Ilyas on his first preaching tour in 1926 while others favor the date August 2, 1934 when Ilyas presented his fifteen points of action.

whoever revives me he will be with me in Paradise” (Masud 2000a:xviii)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, to revive the faith is to revive the Prophet himself. Furthermore, the term *ihya* (revive) “was often prompted when there was a threat of deviation from the tradition due to either foreign or local influences” (Masud 2000a:xix). Although foreign or local influences are difficult to trace exactly, the Islamic term *bidah* should clarify these “deviations:” “Any modification of accepted religious belief or practice. Based on the hadith ‘Any manner or way which someone invents in this religion such that manner or way is not part of this religion is to be rejected’” (Esposito 2003:138). Preventing deviation or unwarranted developments is thus connected to reviving these qualities in Muslims. They combine true and correct Islamic practice with the embodiment of qualities through those same practices.

*Tabligh* itself has a complex etymology.<sup>2</sup> Though the word *tabligh* is absent from the Qur’an, the word *balagh* does occur throughout Qur’anic passages, and refers to the communication of a message (Masud 2000a:xx). In contemporary Urdu usage, *tabligh* has come to mean a mission or proselytization, a meaning arising out of developments in the twentieth century (ibid 2000a:xxi). When combined with the term *da’wa*, *tabligh* signifies “communication of call”. I would like to “emphasize a very significant aspect of the Islamic concept of *tabligh*, that the duty of a preacher ends with the communication of the message” (ibid 2000a:xxi). This approach to *tabligh* is reflected in the language of

---

<sup>1</sup> One may also recall al-Ghazaali’s magnum opus *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* that also sought to clarify a vision of human and religious fulfillment within the parameters of Islamic devotion and mysticism.

<sup>2</sup> “Balagha (b-l-gh), the root verbal form of *tabligh*, connotes the following meanings: to reach one’s destination, to arrive, to achieve one’s objective, to come to hear, and to come of age. The verbal form *ballagha*, from which the noun *tabligh* is derived, means to cause something to reach, to communicate, and to report” (Masud 2000a:xx).



mosque participants who also see themselves as fulfilling their obligation to communicate a message, but the decision to act upon that message is left to the recipient.

*Da'wa* movements are active throughout the world, both in Muslim majority societies and others where Muslims constitute a minority population. Though each movement exhibits much internal diversity, they share a concern for making Muslims (themselves and others) more observant about Islamic obligations, norms, virtues, and dress. *Da'wa* combines the act of calling/inviting and making a claim to truth: "When someone invites another to God he also claims the truth of his mission. His duty is complete with the call, because truth and falsehood are clear to the human mind, which is free to choose between them. The person who denies this invitation denies also the claim to the truth. It is then for God to take action; the preacher has no further charge" (Masud 2000a:xxii). This point was further clarified in my discussion with Hassan, a Moroccan engineer who has performed several *tabligh* tours with the Tabligh Jama'at and often attended prayers and other activities at the mosque:

*Da'wa* in the concept of the *din* of Islam is to make *da'wa* to call, to invite people to Allah and to His messenger. Not to us [the person who is inviting others] ... the *da'iyat* (the one calling), he is hidden, anonymous, he just says, "oh, this is the One who creates, who is, and His messenger and who brought the religion." And he [the *da'iyat*] leads people to their Creator and the Prophet and messenger of their Creator. This is the word, this is what it means in the *dini* (religious) meaning.

The effacement of the individual rests on the communicated message not being connected to the truth of the preacher but to the truth produced through the discursive traditions of Islam. This encounter with truth, about the world and the self, is central to the work and success of *da'wa*; it is a recognition of one's duty and obligations as subject to that

tradition. This recognition will be taken up in the final chapter of this paper when I discuss the architecture of authority embedded in signs.

*Tabligh* and *da'wa* take on further moral overtones as they are intertwined with the Islamic concept of “enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.”<sup>3</sup> The activity of *tabligh* and *da'wa* is very much structured by this moral bifurcation of good and evil. This process occurs within the self as one engages in acts of worship, structures their everyday lives to align with the obligations and requirements of Islamic norms, and more generally, creates the requisite pious disposition to be a proper subject of the tradition. While there is no compulsion in these acts, *tabligh* and *da'wa* make clear that such moral and ethical activity is not solely a concern for an individual but concern for an entire community. In such a case, looking at the communal context of this historical movement will help to frame the dynamics of how such a movement operates locally while being a transnational movement.

As previously mentioned, the Tablighi Jama‘at was founded in the town of Mewat during British colonialism. Early on, Tabligh activity concentrated on non-Islamic practices among the Meos such as infanticide and idol worship, and advocated the observance of Muslim dress and other Islamic obligations (Masud 2000:xli). Advocating for ending such practices was articulated through the language of revival (*ihya*) and they used the methodology of *tabligh* and *da'wa*, specifically making rounds to invite people to the mosque and educate them on correct Islamic practices. During this colonial period, Hindu and Christian missionary activities had also increased in the area. These activities,

---

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of this concept in Islamic thought, from the classical to modern period, see Cook (2002). The relevance of “enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil” is especially significant in the context of modern piety movements. This obligation to ensure the moral integrity of the self and community exerts a powerful influence over the actions and commitment of these mosque participants.

in particular those of Arya Samaj and other Hindu organizations, are closely connected with the rise of communal incidents. Mewat, in particular, also witnessed the influx of several *tabligh* organizations that were seeking to strengthen the position of Muslims in the area, who were economically and socially underprivileged within the caste system.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, I want to bring attention to the *types* of practices that index the *types* of persons whose faith needs to be revived. For example, infanticide, idol worship, dresses, and other obligations are taken to be signs of a Muslim who is either ignorant of his obligations and commitments or is incorrectly practicing the religion. Of course, the discursive and historical traditions of Islam demonstrate why these practices become problematized, but signification enable these practices to tell someone something about another person and the type of interaction required (e.g. an invitation or call). However, their activities, though they were very much invested in the milieu of colonial North India during the early part of the twentieth century, have moved beyond the borders of South Asia, and the movement has become a transnational force.

Prior to its formal development of a transnational program, its founder and members carried along this message on pilgrimages and other trips to other parts of the Muslim world – mainly Iran and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> The formal decision to spread the movement outside of South Asia was taken in January of 1945 when a general meeting

---

<sup>4</sup> Despite being concerned with the social, political, and economic fall of Muslims in the subcontinent, they have a strongly apolitical record. This is reflected in their position during partition to avoid and criticize communal violence as well as militaristic posturing of India and Pakistan. At the same time, they dispatched groups to bring back Muslims who had been converted, and “rehabilitated” them at Muslim centers in Northern and Central India. On the other hand, they have had fraught relationships with political parties such as Jamaat-i-Islami. In 1967 they were also conspicuously quiet on questions facing the Muslim world, specifically the Israeli-Palestinian war (cf. Masud 2000c). For a comparison of the Tablighi Jama‘at and the Islamist political party and movement Jamaat-i-Islami, see Ahmad (1991).

<sup>5</sup> Preaching to non-Muslims was, at first, not part of their program because of the constraints placed on conversion and preaching in the colonial context; later, the movement adopted preaching to and conversion of non-Muslims into their formal program (Gaborieau 2000:126).

was held at Muradabad, U.P. (Gaborieau 2000:126). It was in the period just prior to partition that the Tablighi Jama‘at’s transnational apparatus first came into existence, beginning in different parts of India and Pakistan and then, moving to other parts of the world. In order to strengthen the movement on the international level, Tablighi leaders from other countries were invited for consultation and guidance. It was after this period that the Jama‘at started to find centers throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> This marks the formal development of a transnational structure and program to the Tablighi Jama‘at, and by 1962, “a worldwide network had been established stretching from Tokyo to Chicago” (ibid 2000:130). This was made possible by the work of South Asians, especially those with a working knowledge of Arabic, diaspora South Asian communities, and creating strategic relationships with local authorities and populations (e.g. religious scholars, lay intellectuals, merchants, and general population).<sup>7</sup> The ability of this movement to be locally active and globally circulating depends upon structures of community, and although this community is often of South Asian background, I will later make clear that this sense of community binds people to themselves and each other through moral obligations and demands. The case of this mosque in San Diego makes clear that non-South Asians are central to ensuring this moral community, and they do so by a specific methodology.

---

<sup>6</sup> “The following statistics concerning *jama‘at* groups dispatched from Raiwind attest to the scope of the Jama‘at’s activities in a single country, Pakistan:

1996: 4,008 jama‘ats

1997: 3,287 jama‘ats

1998: 4,173 jama‘ats” (Masud 2000b:20).

<sup>7</sup> The formal presence of the Tablighi Jama‘at in the United States occurred in 1952 (Gaborieau 2000:138).

### A Methodology for Reforming the Self

The Tablighi Jama‘at has a very specific methodology and structure to effect the type of moral change in Muslims that they desire. This organization is a movement in a very physical sense: its members are encouraged to travel out of their places of residence. This movement, however, easily aligns with their transnational activities, but at the same time, a very localized practice such as *gasht* requires them to go out in their communities twice a week to invite others to the mosque. Additionally, for three days each month, members are encouraged to go out to mosques in the general area, engage in *da‘wa* by inviting others to the mosque, but also, work on learning and teaching about the merits and rewards of Islamic practices. Members are also encouraged to perform these *tabligh* tours for forty days each year and for four months in a lifetime, if not more. This valued practice is an opportunity for members to fully immerse themselves in a religious environment, strengthening their faith and convictions, and increasing their knowledge of the rewards and merits of practices and deeds. Strengthening these aspects of themselves is also a reaffirmation of the program and message of the Tablighi Jama‘at as a movement.

Additionally, they stress five daily deeds (*amals*) that members should perform in order to strengthen their own piety but also, work toward building communal piety. The first expectedly is propagation and revival of Islam. Next is learning (*ta‘lim*) sessions where “The subjects...are *fada’il* Qur’an (merits of reading the Qur’an), *tilawat* (recitation) and *tajwid* (correct pronunciation of the Qur’anic verses)...In *ta‘lim* there should be no speeches; only the *fada’il* books are read...” (Masud 2000:27). Third is *dhikr*, or the practice of reminding oneself of God. The fourth deed is worship and acts of

devotion (*ibadat*). Lastly, *khidmat* is the physical service and labor required for maintaining the mosque and worship. This *khidmat* is the physical and logistical effort that goes into ensuring the livelihood of the mosque as a central place of worship for both the individual and community. This last point touches upon the importance of *mashwara* (consultation) where people are consulted on the work that needs to be done, and resolve outstanding issues facing the congregation. Throughout my fieldwork, they would stress that one should dedicate at least two and a half hours a day to these five deeds (*'amals*).

The last methodological aspect of this movement that I want to highlight is their weekly program on Thursday evenings. This involves a *bayan* (address/speech), the topic of which is often announced as faith (*iman*) and conviction (*yaqeen*), and at the end of the speech, individuals make intention to go out on *tabligh* as well as forming outgoing groups, which is referred to as *tashkil*. These *bayans* are rich in discursive material about the movement's program of faith revival, the importance and reasons for their continual efforts, and recounting experiences of their *da'wa* activities. Additionally, after *bayan* smaller sessions are held where hadith are read concerning a variety of topics, and many individuals consistently stay to perform *i'tikaf* (a one-night retreat into the mosque for purposes of worship and learning). This methodology is important to understand how an individual attempts to remake himself in line with an authoritative model of being Muslim. Before I turn to the individual who consciously works on himself in order to become a moral and ethical person, I want to identify the components that bind individuals together, which will reveal the boundaries of a moral community. Such a clarification helps to make sense of how such a movement operates so effectively across socio-historical contexts.

### A Moral Community

In studying a community, it is tempting to draw boundaries along the lines of language, space, ethnicity, or other shared features. Yet, in the case of the Tablighi Jama'at, they are differentiated and dispersed along many of these lines. In this section, I want to argue that members of this movement participate in a moral community, which helps to foster piety on the individual and communal level. The other starting point for this discussion of community is the work of Nancy Munn (1986) who approached community through the transformative actions that create those values thought to be necessary for the community's viability, and as consisting of members that "are engaged in an effort to construct and control themselves and their own social world. By means of this process *taken as a whole*, a community may be said to act 'as an agent of its own self-production'" (Munn 1986:3, quoting Tourain 1997:4). By employing this approach to community in the study of an Islamic community, I aim to ground Islamic practices and beliefs in the formation and disciplining of individuals and the community, which then constitutes their social and political worlds.

The Qur'anic term most often cited as referring to the Muslims constituting community is *ummah*. This notion of Muslim community has also been employed in the development and formation of religiously informed ethnic and national identities (see Jalal 2000). Though I will retain the notion of *ummah* as a worldwide Muslim community, I am more interested in tracing the utilization of this term, and how it comes to infer a moral community, which need not exclude the *ummah* as a political community.

Simply stating that *ummah* means community or nation does not tell us much about it or how to begin conceptualizing it. The *ummah* comes to describe a human

collectivity, specifically as it relates to God, scriptures, prophets and the commands of God<sup>8</sup> (Denny 1975:48). As a specified and bounded religious community, the *ummah* is under God's judgment, connected to special rites and everyday ritual practices, and subject to disciplines that produce inward dispositions and outward expressions (ibid 1975:60-4). Additionally, the Muslim community is differentiated from other prophetic tradition by being *shahid* to the rest of mankind as Muhammad was witness to Muslims of God's will (ibid 1975:54). To be a witness to mankind entails speaking the truth to mankind – an essential aspect of *da'wa* activities. This witnessing will also be further elaborated when I discuss Islamic notion of faith as a testament.

The Qur'an also uses the term *umma muslimah* to refer to that which Abraham prayed for, and there is a clear connection made between the religion of Abraham and Muhammad's community.<sup>9</sup> "A true *ummah* in the posterity of Abraham is an *ummah muslimah*, that is, one which is 'submissive' to God" (ibid 1975:68). Submitting and being witness to God's will and orders begins to approach the *ummah* as a fully formed moral community, with clear boundaries and demands placed upon it. At this point, I would like to provide two quotations taken from the Qur'an:

---

<sup>8</sup> Within the Qur'an and Islamic discourse, this relationship of a religious community to God through scripture, its commandments and the prophetic tradition has been severed by non-Muslim religious communities by moving away from the commandments of God, perverting the scriptures, or disobeying the teachings of prophets (Denny 1975:48). *Ummah* should also be contrasted with the notion of *ummah wahida*, which is the potential unity of mankind that was split through the introduction of scriptures, prophetic traditions, and ethno-national divisions (Denny n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> Abraham is described as Hanif: "A believer who is neither a polytheist (*mushrik*) nor a Jew or a Christian...The Arabic root *h-n-f* initially means "to incline," so that *hanif* (pl. *hunafa'*) is most probably understood in the Qur'an as one who has abandoned the prevailing religions and has inclined to a religion of his own. It occurs once as a synonym of *muslim* ( Q 3:67) and also in juxtaposition with the verb *aslama* ( Q 4:125). The Qur'anic prototype of the ideal *hanif* is Abraham (q.v.; q 3:67; 16:120), and being a *hanif* *nifies belonging to the religion (milla) of Abraham* (q 2:135, 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123)" (Rubi n.d.).



Let there be one community of you...calling to good, and commanding right and forbidding wrong...; those are the prosperous (Cook 2000:13)

You [Muslims] are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and you believe in Allah (Qur'an 3:110).

As previously mentioned, this notion of enjoining good and forbidding wrong (evil) is intertwined with the practice of *da'wa*. In both passages, this practice of enjoining good and forbidding evil is connected first to "one community of you" and Muslims "as the best community." This approach to the Muslim community as (ideally) the best community, and the formation of a community to call (themselves and others) to good and forbid (themselves and others) from evil, which binds subjects to each other, is how I conceptualize a moral community. Tracing the defining elements of the *ummah* provides me with an analytics to locate it as a moral community.

In a *bayan* (speech), Mawalana Muhammad Yusuf, one of the early leaders of the Tablighi Jama'at, voices a particular vision for the organization and the Muslim community, more generally. Mawalana Yusuf finds fault with the worldwide Muslim community because it has been divided by affiliations of nation, territory, and clan; it is such an *ummah*, once a unified Muslim community, both politically and morally, that he seeks to restore. Throughout this text, he speaks about the work, effort, and sacrifice that went into creating the original *ummah*. This speech is invested in the Tablighi Jama'at worldview through this use of language. This speech is an excellent example of voicing, where the frame of reference (the *ummah* created by the Prophet) is brought into

alignment with the frame of narration (the contemporary context) in order to contrast the two moments. Additionally, the author inhabits words that come down to him through history, and each of these seemingly mundane words (work, effort, sacrifice) is pregnant with intentions and accents.<sup>10</sup>

In light of an *ummah* split internally by various factional interests and externally by economic and political forces, he demands,

There should be a group in the *Umma* whose only task and goal should be to invite others toward faith and all kinds of good, who continue working hard for faith and paving the way for good, who strive for prayers and remembrance for God. They should strive to achieve knowledge brought forth by the Prophet, peace be on him, and to save people from evils and affiliations. All this effort will keep the *Umma* as *Umma* (Masud 2000b:35).

To keep that *ummah* as *ummah* requires keeping the Muslim as Muslim. The goal of this organization is to revive the faith of individual Muslims, and through that the entire Muslim community. Furthermore, he continues to argue:

Today, when the whole world is making efforts to disrupt the state of the *Umma*, the only antidote and solution is that you should dedicate yourselves to the efforts that the Prophet, peace be on him, taught. Bring Muslims to the mosque, where they should talk about faith. There should be circles for education and *dhikr* (remembrance) and consultations about undertakings for religion...Only then will the state of *Umma* obtain (Masud 2000b:36).

I want to highlight the type of activity required to achieve piety on the individual and communal levels, specifically bringing people to a communal space (the mosque). The community being spoken about is connected to the mosque and must hone a pious disposition and sensibility through specific practices (e.g. *dhikr*).

---

<sup>10</sup> I will more fully elaborate concepts of voicing and the intentions and accents of words in the fourth chapter of the paper.

This notion of the *ummah* and their method of *tabligh* have both been authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam (Masud 2000c:79). With this notion of a moral community, in which Muslims are the best community because they enjoin good and forbid evil, the Tablighi Jama‘at crafts their program of reviving the faith of Muslims on an individual and communal level. This voicing of the *ummah* as a moral community is linked to the Tablighi Jama‘at’s program to revive the faith of Muslims. In order to achieve the integrity of this moral community, groups (*jama‘ats*) must be formed to call and invite Muslims to the mosque and the religion.

Returning to Munn’s analysis, the transformative actions are explicitly moral and ethical activity, which are both the means and end of creating a pious disposition. In this regard, it is an open community in that anyone who is willing can submit to that tradition; by transforming himself into a certain subject and engaging in da’wa, they work toward ensuring the longevity and strength of that moral community. Before I turn to how the members of this movement work to transform themselves, I want to mention that this sense of community, similar to recognition and submission to truth and authority, occurs through a somatic or bodily awareness. This kind of awareness is most clearly stated in the utilization of the word *fikr*<sup>11</sup>. This word is often translated as “concern,” which is one element of its meaning. However, it also entails connotations of thoughtfulness, anxiety, pensiveness, and consideration, combining clear aspects of embodied thought. This concern is not simply an individual worry but a worry about the state of an entire

---

<sup>11</sup> Cultivating and engaging in *fikr* has a past in Islamic belief and practice: “In the Sufi tradition, al-Hasan al-Basri is represented as the paragon of asceticism, as we have already mentioned, and of total reconciliation of the human and divine wills. The method he proposed consisted of reflection (*fikr*), self-examination and total submission to God, resulting ultimately in a state of inner contentment or joy (*rida*)” (Fakhry 1991:153).

community and at times, all of humanity. It is something that animates the individual from within and binds him to the community. It is the physical substance of the body that is developed and brought into relation to another, creating and reaffirming an awareness of community. This binding, as the individuals in this mosque stated, is a lifelong binding to the religion and this community. I will now move onto the type of moral change that this movement seeks to achieve in a specific ethnographic case.

### Chapter III: Making Moral Selves

I want to briefly outline the six qualities or points that structure the Tablighi Jama‘at’s program of religious revival<sup>1</sup>:

(1) The Muslim declaration of Faith (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger”) is understandably the beginning point of the Jama‘at’s program. This point is central to Islamic beliefs and practices, and for that reason, is the statement through which the rest of their program is structured. In other words, all of the other qualities are meant to increase the faith and conviction in this declaration.

(2) *Salaat* (ritual worship) – These five obligatory prayers are highly elaborated and cherished in Islamic beliefs and practices. Similar to other Islamic movements, the Tablighi Jama‘at stresses their performance in congregation at the mosque.

(3) *‘Ilm* (knowledge) and *Dhikr* (remembrance): As already mentioned, learning sessions are central part of their program, and this point of *‘ilm* enshrines those

---

<sup>1</sup> These were originally referred to as six points (*Chhe Batein* or *Chhe Nambar*) but are now often called “qualities,” or *sifat* (Metcalf 1994:724, ff. 6). I heard both six points and qualities used in this mosque.

- (3) sessions. Additionally, *dhikr* (or the remembrance of Allah) is meant to give life to rituals and faith.<sup>1</sup>
- (4) *Ikram-i-Muslim* (respect for a Muslim) – This is a general attitude of good will, respect, trust, and affection toward other Muslims, though I certainly heard negative portrayals of other Muslim sects.
- (5) *Ikhlas-i-Niyyat* (sincerity of purpose) or *Tashih-i-Niyyat* (emendation of intention) – This point is seemingly straightforward about making sure that one has the correct purpose or intention when performing any act (whether it is one of worship or not). However, I will make clear that the Tablighi Jama‘at offer a novel interpretation of sincerity and intention that is one of active creation.
- (6) *Tafirgh-i-Waqt* (sparing time) – This is essential to the work of the Tablighi Jama‘at. They define “sparing time” as setting aside worldly and domestic occupations, and spending time “in the path of Allah” (a term that I often heard). Sparing time was often spoken of as a sacrifice and opportunity to immerse one’s self in a religious environment, thereby gaining knowledge about the religion as well as spreading that message.

---

<sup>1</sup> “This conjunction also symbolizes Tablighi Jama‘at’s efforts to reduce the polarization between the ‘ulama and the Sufis” (Masud 2000a:22). Their form of *dhikr* is more in line with the Ulema than the Sufis, and concentrates on the scriptural basis of the practices.

As I have provided a brief outline of the six qualities that this movement seeks to revive, I would like to concentrate on my ethnographic material for the rest of this chapter.

### A Space for Reviving Morality

My ethnographic material draws on research at a mosque located in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego. This area, with its high Southeast Asian, East African, and Hispanic populations, is noticeably more diverse than other neighborhoods that surround it. The block immediately preceding the mosque is populated with businesses owned by East Africans, large numbers of mostly Somali and Ethiopian men regularly congregate outside these shops and engage in banter and discussions. African immigrants live in the apartment complexes surrounding the mosque itself – many of the students who study in the *madrassah* live in these apartments. Throughout my time at the mosque, I saw women dressed in line with Islamic standards of female modesty walking in and out of their apartments, and regularly going out to shops and taking care of errands. This is in clear contrast to inside of this mosque, which is entirely male.

This mosque is, in some ways, unremarkable from any other mosque: collective prayers are offered five times a day, and it is open to the local community. However, there are certain aspects of this mosque that are worth mentioning. First are the one-room *madrassah* (Islamic school) and its students who spend their mornings working on secular subjects and the afternoons on religious material (Qur'anic recitations, listening to talks about religious beliefs and practice, and studying hadith and other literature). Dormitories are also present to house those coming through on *tabligh* tours. Though *tablighis* (those who are out on *tabligh* tours) do pass through this mosque at regular intervals, the students are very involved with the life of this mosque: they arrange talks

about religious matters, discuss the various features of God, and congregate to read about the life of the Prophet. This activity within the mosque is part of their program of faith revival: by ensuring that the mosque is animated with activity, one ensures that the faith itself is being revived and activated.

A concern for the self and others is also cultivated through the material space of the mosque. Many of the mosque participants stated that simply by making sure that you and others come to the mosque to pray retains connections to the religion and community. This was made clear by Nasir, an African-American gentleman who converted over thirty years ago, has travelled through America and India with this movement, and was the primary teacher in the *madrassah*:

This [a family and home] is all from Allah. You don't have to do nothing. You just keep living. These things will automatically happen, but when this does happen, you have to keep that connection with that mosque. You see Somali elders coming, and you see the same ones. You *know* whose going to be here. They're keeping that connection. They know. You see. And you have to keep that connection throughout your whole entire life. Because if you get away from that environment, then eventually you gonna go and start to plummet down. You start to, we call it, descend – go down. Sometimes fast, sometimes slow.

This passage makes clear the importance of this connection to the mosque in achieving a pious disposition. This connection, similar to the concern for the self and others, is a lifelong commitment that needs to be nourished and maintained.

Furthermore, throughout the topography of the mosque, there are several signs that instruct people on the proper, correct, and most favored form of practice. One sign entitled “Sanctity of the Masjid” elaborates that the mosque is the most venerated of places, meant to be kept clean, pure, and at an appropriate noise level, and stresses that the mosque is a community space, though children or mentally handicapped should be



brought only if they can respect its sanctity. Another sign supplements this point by quoting a hadith that states that keeping the mosque clean fulfills a right of Allah by keeping his place of worship clean and attending “to the right of other worshipers by preventing their garments or bodies from becoming dirty whilst performing *sajdah* [prostration].” Others signs make clear that it is prohibited to sleep in the mosque if you are not part of a *tabligh* group, or recommend the types of attire (turbans, kufis, or kurta) to be worn, which are supplemented by *hadiths* references on the benefits and rewards of wearing these items. The details of these signs are meant to show two clear aspects of the mosque. First, the mosque is a place to immerse the self in religious matters and learn about the proper form of practice as well its benefits and rewards. Second, even for those who may already have this knowledge, these signs seek to remind the individual about these obligations or desired behaviors.

This description of the mosque as a space for collective worship is not meant to devalue the importance of actual practices of ritual prayer or *dhikr*, but to highlight that the mosque participants, through the space of the mosque, often collectivize these individual practices. The training and effort that they engage in are individual but occur in groups and often in connection to a mosque, which itself is a space for communal life. This point was reiterated to me when many of the people I spent time with would say that building those six qualities “becomes easy when you’re in the mosque.” This occurs in very concrete terms. The two and a half hours mentioned earlier is one example. Moreover, the structuring of everyday time in relation to ritual prayer as well as administration and maintenance is part of the work that goes into becoming pious. The signs that both instruct and remind individuals about practice, comportment, dress, and

sensibilities are also directed at developing a moral self. The significance of this point can be discerned in the use of the following metaphor. When Nasir was speaking to the students, he stated that similar to the scuba diver who takes oxygen with him underwater, a Muslim needs to take religion (*din*) with him when he goes into the world, and in order to make sure that he does not run out of faith/conviction (oxygen in this metaphor), he must return to the mosque to replenish that faith and conviction. As I have clarified how the mosque is an essential component of their program to create a moral self and community, I now want to turn to the effort on the self that is required.

#### The Effort of Making Moral Selves

As already mentioned, concern (*fikr*) is the trope through which much of their activities and work is organized. This concern for the self and others is intimately connected to *iman* (faith). Being concerned about and putting effort on the self and others results from and in *iman*. This may seem somewhat unclear, so it will be helpful to clarify *iman* itself as a concept in Islamic thought.

*Iman* “is something that people do more than it is something that people ‘have,’” or in other words, faith is in a reciprocal relationship to practice (Smith 1979:39). Faith should lead to practices (of ritual worship, *dhikr*, etc.), but as practice is the means of increasing and strengthening faith, it produces and reaffirms one’s faith. Faith is also connected to truth, “a recognizing of it, appropriating it to one’s self, and resolving to live in accord with it” and the testament to faith, which involves Muslims bearing witness to

those facts (i.e. There is only one God and Muhammad is his Prophet) (ibid 1997:43).<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the mosque participants would connect their concern and effort<sup>3</sup> to *iman*:

So, once we have that concern in our heart, the first and root concern of every human being is how he can be pleasing to Allah. How he can be a means of the pleasure of Allah (SWT). Then, he will be able to be a well-wisher for the people. The people will want to be like him...So, the true freedom is to follow the teachings of Islam. To follow and put ourselves under the obedience of Allah (SWT) – worship only him. We don't worship, we don't ask from no one else. This is *iman*.

Setting aside the mention of the heart for now, it is noteworthy that this passage begins with the question of concern and then, comes back to the general topic of this speech (faith) by connecting it to effort (submitting to recognize authority).

Additionally, effort is important in *iman* because there is resistance to faith from one's self and others, and so, additional emphasis is placed upon effort in the face of resistance. Thus, *iman* (faith) has two features: first is submission to God, his orders, and the model of the Prophet, but second is an effort that one exerts in bringing this *iman* to life through practices such as ritual prayer, *dhikr*, acquiring knowledge, or committing blocks of time. An example of the disposition that is sought is brought into relief in the following instance: Nasir narrated the story of when the order was revealed that alcohol was no longer permitted, those who were drinking at that moment immediately broke the bottles, spit out the alcohol, and even, vomited out what they had just ingested. It is this sort of immediate submission that is at the center of faith and conviction for these

---

<sup>2</sup> “His regarding them as facts, not theories, as realities in the universe not beliefs in his mind, is, as we have else urged, of quite basic significance. The witness formula affirms that he is relating himself in a certain way—of recognition, obedience, service—to a situation that already, and independently, and objectively, exists” (Smith 1997:43).

<sup>3</sup> The language of effort is also noticeable in other contexts involving the Tablighi Jama‘at. In one instance, the language of *jihad* (struggle) is employed (see Metcalf 2009). Though there are differences between a struggle and effort, both involve a degree of exertion against an opposing force. In other words, both involve a conscious work on the self and community.

individuals, and as this submission is not easily attained, it requires a concern about and an effort on the part of the self.

Across sociocultural contexts, ritual prayer is treated “as a moral practice and as a tactic for self-improvement,” performing “certain moral and ethical expectations, reasonings, or practices” (Zignon 2008:57). In the case of Islamic ritual worship, *salaat* emerges as arguably the most important means and end of forming a moral self. This ritual practice is difficult to apply to many theories of ritual in anthropological literature (cf. see Mahmood 2001 and Bowen 1989). In her work on the women’s piety movement in Cairo, Mahmood elaborates Aristotelian virtue ethics that stress the specific form of moral action within the practical context of one’s everyday life, and additionally employs Aristotle’s notion of *habitus* that takes account of acquisition, training, and conscious reflection (2005:316). Aristotelian *habitus* is also distinguished from habits, which are unconsciously acquired, or below the level of self-reflection. This *habitus*<sup>4</sup> is formed with consciousness and reflection until it becomes an embodied disposition and can be performed without direct reflection. This model of *habitus* was clearly operative in this ethnographic case, as well. *Salaat*, which is performed at least five times a day and can increase if one decides to perform supererogatory prayer, is meant to become a habit, wherein qualities such as faith, piety, submissiveness, and humility become part of an individual’s character, further directing and guiding an individuals’ behavior. Cultivating

---

<sup>4</sup> Ira Lapidus (1984), in discussing philosopher Ibn Khaldun, brings forth the concept “*malaka*,” which “bears the meaning of the Latin, *habitus* – an acquired faculty, rooted in the soul. Each activity of the individual ‘gives the soul a special coloring that forms it’” (1984:53). These are not superficial markers of an identity, but qualitative markers of the individual who cultivates these virtues through habituation. Additionally, through “repeated *tasdiq* – affirmation of belief – and by acts of worship and repeated good deeds (‘*amal*),” actions become sedimented in habits that in turn become rooted and embodied in the character of the person (ibid 1984:55).

a desire to prayer, putting forth the effort to perform prayers, and then, having this desire and effort become part of one's *habitus* gives the individual an embodied knowledge about himself and the truth of Islamic beliefs and practices.

On multiple occasions, a distinction was made between scholarly knowledge and knowledge of the heart. The distinction between these two is somewhat arbitrary. However, the knowledge of the heart is very much connected to an embodied awareness and sensibility that needs to be cultivated through something like ritual prayer. It involves working on one's desires, as well, which are thought to emerge within the heart. *Nafs* (the inner self) was analogous to a fire: the more material you give it, the greater it will become. The proper approach to the inner self is to reorient your desires in submission to God, and creating desires for what he desired for you (e.g. *salaat* or learning). In line with some of their ascetic tendencies, member of the movement often stressed that true freedom is to have one's desires in line with God, as the one who created the world, and not the creation. Knowledge of the heart, then, is knowledge of creating the correct desires in the heart: desiring as God wants you to desire<sup>5</sup>. It is an embodied knowledge of the truth as revealed and passed down through the discursive traditions of Islam.

I earlier mentioned the relevance of *dhikr* (remembrance) for this movement. This was originally appropriated from Sufi practices, which often occur in collective settings, involve loud chanting, and possibly, music. I have not observed members of this mosque perform *dhikr* in this way. The most clearly marked forms of remembrance are the

---

<sup>5</sup> This discussion of desire should recall my earlier discussion of Foucault's writings on desire and power. As I mentioned, where there is talk of desire, a power relation is already present. In this case, the power relationship is to orthodoxy, which comes to direct, elaborate, and articulate discourses on desires that are internalized by individual Muslims. This point is central to Mahmood's analysis of the women's mosque movement in Cairo.

repetition of certain phrases alone (e.g. “God is Great”) and daily talks organized to discuss the qualities and greatness of God. These explicit acts of remembrance seek to cultivate fear, love, awe, and a number of pious emotions in the individual. This can be treated as a technology of the self, where the subject, by speaking and thinking about God, reminds himself about God and His law, increasing and strengthening his faith and piety (*taqwa*). However, this remembrance can occur through non-marked actions, separate from ritual worship, and this is done through their novel insights into intention.

Due to its juridical connotation, intention is crucial in understanding the meaning and purpose of an action; however, I would like to provide some material from the ethnographic case that will expand notions of intention as something one actively creates, produces, or works on forming. One individual made this clear by stating that “the intention that we should make, sometimes it will become the reality. So, we always have to make good intentions...” First, it should be clear that intention is something that one actively makes because it can, and ideally should, become reality through performing the intended action. Thus, when making an intention to go out for *da’wa*, the names that they gather are not registration, but the taking of intentions. So, at some point in the future, one can make that intention a reality by going out to perform *da’wa*. Second, the making of the correct intention is connected to sincerity: if one is performing each act with the correct intention (to please Allah), they will be sincere in their actions, as well. Thus, remembrance (*dhikr*) is not limited to something like ritual prayer or discussing the qualities of God, but since intention is something consciously made to ensure a sincere state (every action is meant to please Allah), each action should *ideally* remind the

individual of God<sup>6</sup>. This broadening of remembrance to mundane aspects of life occurs through an active approach to intention and sincerity. A moral self is formed through a creating a moral consciousness<sup>7</sup>: being able to discern the propriety of an action, determine whether or not it is pleasing to God, and performing it with the correct intention. This is part of a broader conscious engagement with and effort of living in accordance with the obligations and demands of Islamic traditions. It is through such a conscious engagement that a moral context is created within individuals and communities, and I will now turn to the relevance of contextualization of morality in the next section.

### Analyzing Contexts

Creating a moral and ethical self is formed in the model of the Prophet. The act of *da'wa* itself is best exemplified in the Prophet and his companions who were able to spread the faith over such a great distance in such a short period of time. This concern for a distant past should not indicate a lack of concern for the present. This relation to the past is simultaneously a relation to the present. It is the present *context* in which this past material is put into practice, guides their form of sociability, and directs their work and effort. In this section, I want to examine how moral contexts are actively shaped in the present out of the discursive traditions of Islam, which relies heavily upon theories of

---

<sup>6</sup> Remembrance and correct intention comes to operate on the level of everyday life, such as making supplications (*du'a*) before eating, driving, using the restroom, stepping into the mosque, and a number of mundane acts.

<sup>7</sup> Parish (1994) discusses among Newars religio-cultural concept of the knowing heart, emotions that sensitize people to moral behavior and relations, and other conscious processes of self-monitoring allow the Newar to create themselves as moral agents, on individual and social levels. While Parish stresses the inner life of moral consciousness, it is intimately and repeatedly connected to external actions and practices (e.g. ritual); the moral consciousness created through linking intention, sincerity, and remembrance is similarly connected to practices and behavior, and is fundamental to creating a moral self that is able to consciously engage in ethical behavior.

semiotics and linguistic anthropology. This will allow me to continue to the final section of my paper: how semiotics and linguistic anthropology can be productively integrated into the anthropological study of Islam.

A man of Hispanic background who regularly goes out on *tabligh* tours narrated the interaction that occurred when they were out visiting the home of a local Muslim. Upon first entering he saw a dog inside, which he took as a sign that this man was “a non-Muslim” (keeping dogs in the home is generally discouraged). Seeing this allows him to index something about this person and home, which is affirmed by the mother not being Muslim. Indexing of this person and home occurs against metapragmatic models<sup>8</sup> of Muslim and non-Muslim. They continue to interact with the man in the expected manner: inviting him to the mosque. Yet, his response to their calls is “You know, what does logic have to do with religion [*din*]?” This statement casts him as a person lacking faith (*iman*) and in fact, an atheist. Setting aside whether or not a statement such as his qualifies him as an atheist or not, it should be noted how certain types of person are defined by certain ways of thinking and behaving. Yet, speech itself is another place to index types of persons: “At the end of the talk, he [the man who lives in the home] decided, ‘OK, *insha'Allah* now. Like, *hopefully*, that you know, maybe, one day, the light switch might turn in my head and I might come to your masjid” (italics added). The importance of the

---

<sup>8</sup> “[A] sign – any utterance or object that people find culturally meaningful – has meaning only with respect to a ‘metapragmatic’ or ‘metacultural’ model of it. A metapragmatic model is a model of recognizable kinds of people...participating in a recognizable kind of interaction. These models are “meta”-pragmatic because they frame the “pragmatic” or indexical signs of identity. That is, participants and analysts understand the meaning of a sign only as a relevant model constrains the possible meanings... Such models make available the types of people that can be enacted in a given social context. Without them, we could not identify who people are or what they are signaling about themselves and others” (Wortham 2006:32-33, in Rosa 2010:127). This type of model can tell us much about *da'wa* as a form of interaction between different types of people: pious Muslims and nominal, non-practicing, or lapsed Muslims. These models frame those indexical markers of a person’s identity. These markers then allow both actors to interact with each other.



switch from “insha’Allah” to “hopefully” makes clear how languages are connected to types of persons. I want to make clear that the meaning of “insh’Allah” is “God-willing” and is meant to reaffirm the power and beneficence of God. At the same time, the fact that he made this switch indicated how a person’s speech patterns are indexical icons about that person. A mundane word such as “hopefully” takes on a highly charged meaning and value in this context. The switching to and use of this word makes clear how signification can tell us much about *da’wa* as a form of social interaction, and contribute to the anthropological study of Islam.

At the end of this narration, he states that “this is only one condition that we saw. Imagine all the other Muslims out there who have forgot about Allah (SWT). Who will remind them about Allah (SWT)?” This specific Muslim is taken to be an iteration of a general form of lapsed or nominal Muslim. This instantiation is a token for all the other similarly lapsed Muslims that are ubiquitous in their *da’wa* experiences. He continued that the people who will remind these types of people are the ones with concern. This concern was in the Prophet, who passed it down to the companions, and it continued to be passed until it reached the contemporary generations. By making effort, one passes along this concern to others. The work that they are doing was the same type of work that was done during the time of the Prophet and his companions. In making this effort and passing along this concern, the past comes to animate the present. While I agree that this movement is a cultural critique that engages with a past conveyed in a tradition and describes a present that has deviated from the example, it also creates a context in which that past can be lived in the present, and working to create the present in the model of that past (Metcalf 1993). Critique of the present is thus grounded in how to live in the present

through an exemplary model. This can be illustrated in the narration of the following hadith.

Hassan was speaking about the importance of sacrificing time and money in order to perform *da'wa*. He was criticizing those Muslims who are concerned with their economic well-being and argue that this wealth will allow them to go out on *da'wa* and give to charity. Hassan clearly states that, “once you get involved, you are busy, you don't get in the path of Allah, you don't come into the masjid to do prayer.” This is a clear instance of cultural critique and taking an ideological position. Hassan continues to elaborate his position recounting the story about a companion of the Prophet, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. He was standing in a rank of soldiers near Constantinople, when suddenly one of the soldiers broke rank and took off by himself to fight the “non-believers.” Others in the rank initially interpreted this as self-destruction, which referenced a Qur'anic verse: “Spend generously for the cause of Allah, and do not cast yourselves into destruction by your own hands” (Qur'an 2:195). I want to quote directly from Hassan's narration:

“Oh,” Abu Ayyub al-Ansari said, “I know better than you the meaning of this verse. [It d]oesn't mean what this man did. This man, actually, he is brave. This is what you should all do. This is what is revealed on us. We were in a situation of faith [*iman*], we were given assistance [*nusra*]... All the time... in the path of Allah. But it crossed our mind that we get involved, a little bit, in the world [*duniya*]. Allah said, “Don't do that. You will degrade from your rank. You will destroy yourself. Don't put yourself in that situation.” Don't ask Allah, “Oh Allah! Oh Allah, give me all, give me some business that I can be busy in this world that I can go in the path of Allah.” You will get busy, never you will go in the path of Allah. Say, “Oh Allah, take me in the path of Allah.”

This passage is noteworthy as he continually provides examples of reported speech. In inhabiting the speech of Ayyub al-Ansari and even, God, he takes on those intentions and accents. He makes the intention of Ayyub al-Ansari as well as God's intentions his own –

very much part of the movement's program. As he inhabits these intentions, the past is animating the present. At the same time, he is critiquing other positions that instruct people to first ensure their own economic stability and prosperity, and once doing so, then going out in the path of God. The context of this Qur'anic passage is elaborated in the hadith literature. After experiencing victory and increasing their numbers, a group of Muslims were privately discussing how their economic stature had been reduced, so they decided to concentrate on increasing their wealth. It is during this time when this passage was revealed to advise Muslims to spend their wealth in the cause of God, and by not spending wealth in the cause of God, one cast themselves into destruction. This is the history of this narration and verse that Hassan is employing. Hassan is criticizing those who place their material wealth ahead of fulfilling their religious obligations, and advises people to spend their time and money in going out on *da'wa*.

This discursive event comments on itself as well as its context of occurrence. It brings these two frames (the event and the narration) into alignment to demonstrate similarities, parallels, and differences. By bringing the past into line with the present, this narrated event shapes the contextual frame in which it is narrated. Furthermore, quoting the Qur'an and hadith employs the metapragmatic function of signs. It presupposes (indexes) something about the context in which it occurs, and entails (creates and indexes) something about that same context. This metapragmatic function of authoritative discourses and texts demonstrate the ability of power (e.g. religious orthodoxy) to operate in actual utterances, as opposed to the discourse as outside or external to any actual utterance that is characteristic of Asad's formulation, which I will elaborate in the following chapter. While this discursive analysis clarifies much about their program of

making a moral self and community, this analysis is not limited to speech, but is reflected in the behavior and practices by which they conduct their everyday affairs. Voicing and inhabiting another's speech is part of one's ideological becoming, which I take to be part of their religious and moral becoming. These are the processes by which discourses are internalized. Embodying those intentions, desires, and actions occurs through the medium of the body in performing rituals and practices, but it also occurs through embodying the speech of the tradition, as it is passed down through the discursive traditions of Islam. This discursive analysis aimed to show how they inhabit those dispositions and sensibilities thought to be essential to the reproduction of the tradition and community. As I have made multiple references to the relevance of signs (icons and indexes) and other discursive interactions involving voicing, I will now directly engage this body of literature, and as I explicate these concepts and frameworks, I will attempt to integrate their use into the anthropology of Islam.

## Chapter IV: Reintroducing Signs

Throughout my ethnographic analysis, I have emphasized how processes of signification are operating in the activities of the Tablighi Jama'at. From the ways in which types of persons are recognizable by signs to assimilating the discourses of a tradition and their immanence in actual utterances, the relevance of semiotics and signification is apparent. However, in existing anthropological writings on Islam, there is a clear disavowal of signification within specific ethnographic cases and more generally, Islamic beliefs and practices. In her synthesis of Foucault's conception of ethics-oriented moralities with Aristotelian virtue ethics and *habitus*, Mahmood makes clear that these practices are not simply signs or expressions of some interior condition, but in fact constitute the work that individual exert on themselves in order to attain ethical and moral capacities (2005:148). Put differently, these practices do not reside in the meaning they signify to their practitioners, but "in the *work they do* in constituting the individual; similarly, the body is not a medium of signification but the substance and the necessary tool through which the embodied subject is formed" (ibid 2005:29, emphasis in original). This moral and ethical program is largely structured through the discursive tradition of Islam, and is produced through authorized discourses, traditional practices, and knowledge about the self, which all come together in forming a certain type of subject (e.g. pious Muslim woman). As I have clarified the utilization and productivity of Foucault's approach to subject formation in the anthropological study of Islam, I now want to clarify the ground on which Mahmood refuses the functioning of signs, and how, in doing so, she ignores the relevance of signification in her own ethnographic material.

In her discussion of agency, Mahmood states that "...it is important ask whether a theory of embodied performativity that assumes a theory of linguistic signification (as necessary to its articulation) is adequate for analyzing formulations of the body that insist on the inadequacy of the body to function as a sign?" (2005:166). This theory of embodied performativity approaches resignification through the iterability of performance as the site of subversion or resistance of norms. It must be kept in mind that Mahmood is making the point that individuals give into power relations and thus, inhabit and embody prescriptive norms. In part, her disavowal of signification rests upon the aim of her project: to demonstrate that power is not resisted or subverted, but given into and productive of subjectivity. Additionally, that these "formulations of the body insist on the inadequacy of the body to function as a sign" does not mean that others' bodies do not function as signs, or one's disciplined body does not function as a sign to others and one's own self. I want to first clarify this point by engaging closely with Mahmood's ethnographic material.

In discussing the aims and objectives of the mosque movement, Mahmood quotes a *da'iyat* (preacher) from a mosque that she regularly attended:

Look around in our society and ask yourselves: who do we emulate? We emulate the Westerners..., the secularists..., and the Christians: we smoke like they do, we eat like they do, our books and media are full of pictures that are obscene... When you enter the homes of Muslims, you are surprised: you can't tell whether it is the house of a Christian or a Muslim. We are Muslims in name, but our acts are not those of Muslims. Our sight, dress, drink, and food should also be for God and out of love for Him... They will tell you that this way of life [the one she is recommending] is uncivilized...: don't listen to them because you know that real civilization...for we Muslims is closeness to God (ibid 2005:44-45).

Avoiding interpretations that stress a discourse of cultural identity, Mahmood provides an alternative reading:

...[these] comments can be understood as critiquing a prevalent form of religiosity that treats Islam as a system of abstract values that is to be cherished but that, nonetheless, remains inessential to the practical organization of day-to-day life. In [the *da'iyat's*] eyes, this is demonstrated by the fact that one cannot tell Muslims apart from either Christians or non-believers, since the way Muslims organize their daily affairs gives little indication of their religious commitments (ibid 2005:45).

Thus, this woman and other attendees cultivate virtues, habits, and desires through practices of everyday life, thereby grounding Islamic principles in their lives. Mahmood's reading of this passage is largely accurate, but it misses how practices, bodies, and any number of other objects are functioning as signs within that narrative. I would first argue that the ability of this woman to connect certain forms of behavior or actions with types of persons and worldviews (Westerner, secularist, Christian) is dependent upon the function of signs. Taking the example of entering a home, there are certain objects or practices that signify the other person is a certain type of person (a Muslim who is lacking in their commitment and piety or indistinguishable from a Westerner or Christian). This recognition of signs and persons should recall my earlier discussion of the Tablighi Jama'at and their own history and narratives of *da'wa*. In the course of social interaction and everyday existence in secular life, bodies that have been cultivated in certain ways allow individuals to index others as well as communal life against models of behavior. Mahmood obliquely admits to this point when she states "In [the *da'iyat's*] eyes, this is demonstrated by the fact that one cannot tell Muslims apart from either Christians or non-believers." The process of telling people apart, in fact, rests upon recognizing signs. I will argue that Mahmood's concern, which is how the body is the

developable, somatic means of creating, crafting, and honing piety, is amenable to a broader idea of semiotics that I will spell out throughout the rest of this paper.

I now want to clarify the sign relation in semiotic theories, specifically bringing out its iconicity and indexicality, in order in order to explain how this body of literature can positively contribute to her discussion of the *work* that goes into cultivating piety and the tension between this type of religiosity with secular-liberal sociability and politics. I will then introduce metapragmatic function of signs that will clarify the workings of authority and authorizing discourses within the discursive tradition of Islam. I will finish the paper with the relevance of the subject's consciousness to those external circumstances that are active in its constitution.

#### Sign Relations, Veiling, and the Virtue of Modesty

Signs, as elaborated in the Peircian model of icons, indexes and symbols, are differentiated by the quality of the relation between a sign and its object. It will be helpful to review the sign relation as a general phenomenon and then, bring the iconic and indexical sign relations into conversation with Mahmood's discussion of veiling and female modesty.

The following components constitute Peirce's triadic relation of the sign: the sign or sign-vehicle (representamen), the object, and the interpretant. The representamen is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce 1955:99). The "something" for which it stands is the Object: this can be a physical object or knowledge about something in a cognitive or historical moment. Lastly, the "somebody" for whom the representamen stands for an object is the interpretant, or "the translation, explanation, meaning, or conceptualization of the sign-object relation in a



subsequent sign representing the same object” (Parmentier 1994:5). It must also be noted that the relationship between sign and object has a ground. This ground is the quality of the relation (respect, character or reason) between representamen and object, which will determine whether the sign is an icon, index, or symbol. Within this model, an icon is a sign that refers to its object by containing features or qualities of likeness with the object, and an index is a sign that refers to its object in a dynamic (spatiotemporal) connection, through blind compulsion, or senses or memories of a person.

This sign relation can be utilized to understand the practice of veiling within Mahmood’s account and open up discussions of how such a practice and material object becomes of central importance in the politics of secularism. Mahmood states, “for the women I worked with, this relationship between interiority and exteriority was almost reversed: a modest bodily form (the veiled body) did not simply express the self’s interiority but was the means by which it was acquired” (2005:161). In this situation, veiling (exteriority) does not signify modesty (interiority), but it actively produces it within the subject. But what if one were to ask, how does the practice of veiling signify modesty? Veiling is in fact the representamen for the object of modesty, and the ground of this relation is an indexical icon. There is a relationship of iconicity because veiling (having certain parts and features of the body covered) is the physical quality of modesty for these women, and it is through this same modality (the act of covering) that veiling produces modesty within the subject. Simultaneously, the practice of veiling creates a dynamic link between that practice and something about this subject. Depending upon the logical, affective, or energetic interpretant, this link can be about her piety, docility, repression, or fanaticism. An affective or energetic interpretant is of most interest because

it could be a visceral discomfort with veiling, and this sort of response tells us much about how veiling “continues to assert a kind of religiosity that is incommensurable with, and inimical to, those forms of public sociability that a secular-liberal polity seeks to make normative.” (Mahmood 2005:74-75). A semiotic interpretation and analysis demonstrates how such practices, when put into effect on the body of the subject, can produce a specific kind of inner state, but then, how this religiosity occupies a conflictual space in social and political life.

Magnus Marsden (2005) in his ethnographic study of religious life in the Chitral region of northwest Pakistan makes a similar point about religiosity. In his ethnographic material, categories such as “bearded-ones” who are “hard” or “strict” on religious issues demonstrate how piety is as much about individual morality and practice as it is about communal, social life. These “bearded-ones” received religious education in other urban centers of Pakistan, delivered sermons that singled out individuals for misdeeds such as drinking, prevented women from entering the markets, and argued against the musical gathering that are part of Chitrali cultural life. Other examples of these “bearded-ones” show them rearranging intimate aspects of personal and domestic life and more generally, attempting to reform those aspects of everyday life that they found to be un-Islamic. Many of Marsden’s informants were critical, ranging from outright condemnation to mockery, of the “bearded-ones” and their strict approaches to religiosity. These conflicts and contestations that occur in social and communal life gesture towards counter-discourses, revealing important divides between different approaches to religiosity. These “bearded-ones” surely rely upon Islamic traditions for much of their conservative attitudes, behaviors, and practices, and it is this strictness that many of Marsden’s

informants find problematic. Yet, their aversion to the “bearded-ones” is not just critique. For example, the musical gatherings are important events where poetry is recited and music is produced, and is an occasion for rich intellectual and cultural production. As these gatherings are not favored by the “bearded-ones,” taking part, enjoying, and promoting such musical events indexes an entire approach to religiosity that runs up against or is in conflict with the more conservative approaches of the “bearded-ones.” This is related but different from the conflict over veiling mentioned by Mahmood: the conflictual space of musical gatherings brings into relief different approaches to religiosity that are present and interacting within everyday social life rather than a divide between Islamic practices and secular-liberal polities. Yet, it is only through signification that certain signs, in the form of physical markers (a veil or beard) or actions (a musical gathering), tell social actors about each other, their respective worldviews, and the type of interaction that is possible or required. This ability of signs to bring our attention (indexicality) to things other than sign-vehicles allows for the operation of authorizing discourses as well, and it is to this topic that I can now pass.

#### Metapragmatic-Pragmatic Dialectic and Narration

The pragmatic function of a sign (or what a sign does) is a product of its indexicality: it brings our attention to an object (or another sign) through the ground of the sign-object relationship. The metapragmatic function of signs have this pragmatic phenomena as “their semiotic objects; they [metapragmatic signs] thus have an inherently ‘framing,’ or ‘regimenting,’ or ‘stipulative’ character” (Silverstein 1993:33). This occurs, in part, because “any indexical sign form...either presupposes (hence, indexes) something about its context-of-occurrence, or ENTAILS [‘CREATES’] (and hence

indexes) something about its context-of-occurrence, these co-present dimensions of indexicality being sometimes seen as essential properties of the sign themselves, ‘appropriateness-to-context-of occurrence’ and ‘effectiveness-in-context-of-occurrence’” (ibid 1993:36)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, if we take pragmatics to consist of indexical sign phenomena (dynamic, compulsive, sensorial connection between sign and object), metapragmatics is the ordering of those indexical signs that are a property of discourse. Although the metapragmatic-pragmatic nexus is in a dialectical relationship, the metapragmatics are exerting greater force because they are ordering the indexicalities that define pragmatics, and furthermore, the stronger the metapragmatics are, the more regimented, calibrated or stipulated the pragmatics will be.

Recalling Voloshinov, language is produced and located in social life. Beginnings in social interactions, where verbal communication and interaction occur, lead to forms of speech, and changes in these forms reflect historical change (Voloshinov 1986:96). Examining changes in language forms can identify other changes in social life, which may not directly correlate to the linguistic forms. Additionally, if language can tell us about social life and its changes, one can also track religious life through language use. For example, “Muslim” as signifier may not change (it is still “Muslim”) but what it signifies could be quite different. Following up on my earlier discussion of metapragmatic models, the qualities that make up “Muslim” (and subsequently, “non-Muslim”) may have been reworked, and thus, a different set of indexicalities are utilized to signify a Muslim, which shifts the metapragmatics itself, demonstrating the

---

<sup>1</sup> The presupposing and entailing something about the context-of-occurrence at the center of indexical sign phenomena clearly parallels my earlier discussion of the Tablighi Jama‘at, and their narration of *da’wa* experiences and hadith literature. Contextualizing morality depends upon this notion of metapragmatics that structures the context-of-occurrence of a narration.

metapragmatics-pragmatics dialectic. As a category such as “Muslim” is importantly linked to Islam as a discursive tradition, one can see how that tradition is a significant source of metapragmatic signs. Yet, since a discursive tradition such as Islam exists in relation to other historical processes (as demonstrate by the historical development of the Tablighi Jama‘at), other non-discursive changes (those of economic, political, and social processes) affect the metapragmatic through the metapragmatic-pragmatic dialectic.

In the course of everyday interaction, speech is an act between self and other, or in slightly different terms, any speech has an addresser and addressee (speaker and listener) (ibid 1986:86). The following distinctions can be made in the act of narration and verbal interaction. First, there is the immediate social situation, in which narration occurs, consisting of speaker(s) and listener(s). The immediate narration is a process of contextualization that contains participants who are actively and reflexively engaging with the discourse (Bauman and Briggs 1960:69). Next is the material that is being narrated, which can be reported speech or any form of discourse. Verbal interaction can be articulated in the following way: the concrete situation in which narration is occurring is brought into relation to that which is being narrated. This alignment of the frame of narration with the frame of narrated is referred to as voicing. This structure of narration is most identifiable in the act of reported speech, but can be operating in all forms of discursive interaction. This voicing occurs because discourse, though spoken by individuals, is always “half someone else’s;” the word itself “tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable

in the word” (Bakhtin 1982:292-3).<sup>2</sup> The words spoken by a person are always coming down to the speaker with a history, and when a person speaks a word, he comes into the position of author and inhabits the intentions and accents of the word. It is the metapragmatic function of language, with its sets of indexicalities, that is structuring this voicing form. Since I already demonstrated how voicing and the intention and accents of words that authors inhabit was operative in my ethnographic case, I now want to concentrate on how the metapragmatic function of discourse is closely connected to authorizing discourses within Islam as a discursive tradition.

### The Metapragmatic Nature of Authorizing Discourses

In attempting to clarify the operation of authorizing discourses, Steven C. Caton (2006) contends that Asad’s notion of an authorizing discourse is closely connected to the notion of the metapragmatic function of signs. A central aspect of Asad’s authorizing discourse is that discourse used in practice is distinct from that discourse used in speaking about practice (Asad 1993:36). This authorizing discourse, which arises out of the engagement with the discursive traditions of Islam, comments on or gives authority to another discourse or practice, and is thus distinct from other religious discourses and the practices about which it speaks it. Those discourses and practices that have been authorized do not have the ability to authorize themselves. Caton finds Asad’s authorizing discourse to be lacking because it insists on keeping “distinct discourse and practice.” In particular, Asad’s authorizing discourse is “prior or anterior to the practice

---

<sup>2</sup> Discourse being half someone else’s is not simply a historical fact but also, occurs in the immediate context of narration: “In point of fact, word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for *whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*...A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and an addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor” (Voloshinov 1986:86).

itself,” and by doing so, one is left “to figure out how a discursively constructed category and its deployment in social action are somehow connected” (Caton 2006:45). Caton thus proposes to reformulate this conception of authorizing discourse through linguistic pragmatics by demonstrating that any discourse functions metadiscursively, that is discourse can comment upon another practice as well as itself, and “its authorizing power is dependent upon both kinds of metapragmatic processes—to a discourse that is ‘other’ than itself and to its own powers of metareferentiality—but especially the latter” (ibid 2006:45).

His ethnographic example is a rain prayer said by Yemenis during a severe drought that was threatening the country. This prayer for rain has no historical precedent in Islamic liturgical texts. He therefore poses the question, how does it authorize itself? It must be recalled that metapragmatics (or instructional discourses) are separate from their instance of occurrence; they in fact regiment or calibrate the pragmatic (or actual) occurrence of a metapragmatic form. At the same time, the rain prayer as a discourse functions metapragmatically and refers “to *itself* in the very same instance of its occurrence or utterance” (ibid 2006:51). He then turns to Bahktin/Voloshinov’s, for whom assimilating another’s words in everyday life constitutes “the ideological becoming of a human being,” and this assimilation performs the operation of an authoritative discourse that is internally persuasive (Bahktin 1982:341). Caton also differentiates between the official ideology and the behavioral (dialogical) ideology, which emerges out of everyday, social interaction. Once again, these ideologies are in a dialectical relationship, allowing the latter (behavioral/dialogical ideology to comment upon the former) (Caton 2006:52). Though this framing most obviously concerns

reported speech, even in “monological” speech (e.g. a supplication for rain or sermon) or a single word, discourse is always half someone else’s, especially authoritative discourses. Since Asad’s notion of authorizing discourse operates prior or anterior to any utterance that it authorizes, Caton argues that this interweaving of authoritative discourses into actual utterances is required if anthropologists are interested in understanding the operation of power through discourse and practices.<sup>3</sup>

Returning to Caton’s ethnographic example, he analyzes the linguistic structure of the rain prayer. And by doing so, he concludes that “the invocation cites Qur’anic discourse in order, metapragmatically, to authorize its own performance or instance of speaking, and it does so in order to call forth a response from God that is material in the form of rain but also spiritual as a sign of forgiveness” (ibid 2006:55). Since the rain prayer has no precedent in the discursive traditions of Islam, which would be a metapragmatic discourse and an authorizing discourse, this dialogical act between man and God must authorize itself “as an event in the world.” And although it relies upon the Qur’an for some of its persuasiveness, it “nonetheless constitutes or creates itself in its own utterance” (ibid 2006:56).

---

<sup>3</sup> Bahktin maintained that a gap is commonly retained between an authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, which meant the authoritative discourses need to be assimilated and thereby, become internally persuasive discourses. On the other hand, in cases where authoritative and internally persuasive discourse are united, “The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it...its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse” (Bahktin 1982:342). This authorizing discourse is internally persuasive, that is “affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own words.’ In everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (ibid 1982:345). Since this discourse is produced through an engagement with the discursive traditions of Islam, it is also externally authoritative, but one still needs to make individual effort to assimilate and internalize that discourse. In my earlier discussion, it should be apparent how the assimilation of an authoritative discourse is operative in the narration of hadith literature.



Asad, in his response to this critique, argues the following about religious authority:

If religious authority were just a matter of hearing/reading something (a message communicated by a sender and interpreted by a receiver), if it required the citation of 'authoritative words' before it could take effect, it would be essentially a matter of the functioning of signs, of what signs meant. I would then agree with Caton that 'discourse authorizes itself by commenting on itself,' and regard this self-reference as an instance of an 'internal' structure. But the conception of internality here is confined to the level of the message artificially isolated; it has nothing to say about the somatic processes that authoritatively bind persons to one another, of discourse as a physical process (2006:213).

I agree with Asad when he brings attention to how authority is "rooted in continuously interacting materialities—the internal and external constitution, and the energies that sustain them—that make for its *compelling character*. It is not signs in themselves that explain people's recognition of authority; it is how people have learned to do, feel, and remember signs that help explain it" (ibid 2006:215). Clearly, a shared concern of Asad about Caton's approach to an authorizing discourse is that it does not take into account the physicality of the relationship to authority, in a bodily binding that occurs between subjects and authority. However, the interpretant in the triadic sign relation is very much part of the functioning of sign. Signs communicate a message, which is important in learning how to perform an authorized practice, but they also elicit responses in us through logical, affective, and energetic interpretants. Thus, the doing, feeling, and remembering of signs is embedded in the functioning of signs, and explains how authority compels subjects to recognize and submit to it. Additionally, the metapragmatics (regimenting, calibrating, and stipulating of pragmatic phenomena, that is indexicalities) helps to make clear how an actual utterance is in a dynamic link to an

authoritative or true discourse (e.g. a line from the Qur'an, a broader notion of divine forgiveness, or supplication as a practice of forgiveness) that has a truth value outside of its everyday occurrence.

Since Caton is dealing with a discursive event that does not have a past in the discursive traditions of Islam, it is quite clear how this discourse can authorize itself in its own utterance. Yet, there are other practices and discourses that come down to subjects already authorized by Islam's discursive traditions. Caton makes the illuminating comment that a tradition authorizes a practice but also, practitioners authorize the tradition and their own practices, creating a dialectical relationship between the discursive tradition that authorizes a practice and the practices that presuppose a tradition (Caton 2006:44).<sup>4</sup> This position is, in a certain way, amenable to Asad's discussion of Islam as a discursive tradition. He states that the power to uphold or exclude a practice within a discursive tradition is subject to its conditions of possibility (political, social and economic constraints), and the limits of a practice have as much to do with the limits of the practice and tradition as to the constraints of those political and economic conditions (Asad 1986:16). Thus, similar to Bakhtin's dialectic relationship between official and behavioral ideology, one must look at the dialectic between the discursive tradition and the traditional practice; as the practices are enacted within practical contexts (social, economic, and political), this interaction in the world will return to the discursive tradition and its authorizing discourse. Mahmood, in her analysis, clarifies this point when she states that these women have been engaging with the discursive traditions of

---

<sup>4</sup> The practices of a discursive tradition should recall Mahmood's earlier statement that "the creation of sensibilities and embodied capacities (of reason, affect, and volition)...are the conditions for the tradition's reproduction" (2005:115).

Islam in light of changes in social and economic realities (e.g. their presence in the workforce that requires interaction with men outside of the home). The interplay of these forces raises important questions about the consciousness of the subject that emerges out of this discursive and non-discursive field.

There is a divide between traditional practices and the discursive tradition with its authorizing discourses. Since there is such a long history of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), exegetical literature, and theological treatises, Asad reminds us that a Muslim does not need to engage with the entire history of a belief or practice, but must be instructed in its performance and purpose. If a practice is met with resistance or needs clarification, there is a discursive field open within Islamic traditions that allows for the practice to be elaborated and rearticulated. Consciousness emerges through these power relations, and Mahmood makes clear how this manifests itself in the *habitus* where these women consciously work on themselves to develop a pious disposition (2005:17). In my discussion of moral consciousness, I have also attempted to make clear how the subject through remembrance, intention, and sincerity *actively* forms consciousness. Yet, I would argue that this consciousness, in regards to the split between traditional practice and discursive traditions, is a partial consciousness<sup>5</sup>. Traditional practices take the shape and form they do because they have already been authorized by the discursive traditions of

---

<sup>5</sup> I borrow this concept from David Graeber (2001) who attempts to clarify the relationship between complex abstract systems and the logic of practices in the world. In discussing Piaget's model of egocentrism, Graeber makes the point that it is almost impossible for the social actors to take into account how their actions reproduce the social system and reflexively shape themselves (2001:64). The difficulty of parsing out the dual nature of actions result in a situation where our actions are constrained or limited by an entity outside of ourselves. Graeber is attempting to create a model of actors who are not fully aware of how their actions reproduce systems and fashion their sense of self. For Graeber, coming out of a Marxist tradition, the commodity fetish rests on confusion between the subjective, partial perspective (consciousness) and the total, objective nature of the situation itself. This situation results in "seeing objects as having human powers and properties" (ibid 2001:65).

Islam, and subjects only need a certain degree of awareness regarding the reasons or justifications of a traditional practice in order to perform it properly. Once the practices or beliefs come into question and must be debated, contested, or reaffirmed, a subject can engage with the discursive field from which those practices and beliefs were authorized, thereby gaining a greater appreciation of practices and beliefs, and participating in their authorizing process. Thus, the gap in partial consciousness between discursive traditions and traditional practices is a potential space in which the subject can engage with those discursive traditions, attain a greater consciousness of the practices and beliefs, form himself as a proper subject of the tradition, and further elaborate the traditional practice and its authorizing discourse within the practical context of his everyday life.

This form of consciousness is structured by the dialectic relationship between the discursive tradition and the enactment of beliefs and practices. However, as Asad argues, the discursive traditions of Islam as well as the traditional practices are as much limited by their own constraints as by political, economic, and social circumstances. For example, the increase in literacy and employment opportunities allow for a situation to emerge in which populations such as women who previously did not engage directly with the discursive tradition of Islam are now doing so, and attempting to bring their lives in line with Islamic norms and obligations (e.g. female modesty for women who work in public spaces such as government or private offices). Partial consciousness captures how subjects must mediate multiple forces that are operating upon them, which they are consciously engaging with, but at the same time, are the forces that give shape and form to the subject in its specificity.

## Conclusion

Writing a study of an Islamic movement demands a framework to approach Islam as an object of anthropological study. The choice to begin with Islam as a discursive tradition implicitly advocates for an emic perspective toward studying Islam: “[i]f one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, *as Muslims do*, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the Hadith,” (Asad 1986:14, italics added). If one chooses to produce knowledge and truth about an object or person in the world, one should understand how knowledge and truth is produced about an object or person in the world within that community. Yet, it is difficult to place the label of community on Islam. The boundaries of the religion, when drawn, seem to outline the shapes and forms of a discursive tradition.

This idea of a discursive tradition is importantly supplemented with notions of power (in the form of orthodoxy) and the importance of truth and knowledge in forming subjectivities. In order to understand piety movement such as the Tablighi Jama‘at and other similar religious movements, I want to clarify that we need to consider how individuals give into power relations, and attempt to transform themselves in line with authoritative models (e.g. a pious Muslim man). This process is facilitated and dependent upon truth as produced through an engagement with the discursive traditions of Islam, which is where these authoritative models come from, specifically the hadith literature. By taking into consideration these two processes, we can then make sense of the *da’wa* activities of this transnational piety movement: they seek to communicate (*tabligh*) a

message of truth, one that should be recognizable by any Muslim who encounters that truth. Yet, if recognizing truth were simply a matter of communicating a message, their activities would end at that communication. Recognizing truth is very much an *encounter* with truth, in which, as Asad rightly points out, the subject is able to transform himself in such a way and work towards making himself into a certain type of person.

This process of making a moral and ethical subject should not be treated as an unchanging or utterly transcendental project, but depends upon historical, social, and political processes occurring in the world. The Tablighi Jama‘at emerges out of a specific milieu in North India during the time of British colonialism, which saw an expansion of Islamic revivalism. While the context of their formative years and their subsequent transnational development clarifies their methodology and activities, it does not necessarily explain how such a movement effects moral and ethical change in individuals and communities.

As I have argued throughout this paper, the ability to effect this type of change itself is dependent upon a moral message that is not contextualized but actively creates moral contexts in the present. This context is very much a physical process: the mosque, its instructive signs and reminders, and as a space for cultivating individual and communal piety. In making a moral self, they use the language of effort: this connotes an active engagement to submit to the obligations and norms of Islamic beliefs and practices. This effort is as much about working on themselves as working on others – getting them to come to the mosque to fulfill their obligations, learn more about the religion, and then, work on themselves, through practices, desires, and consciousness, to make a moral and ethical self. If morality and ethics involve conscious and considered

practices, I would add that this takes effort and work on the part of individuals; they must *actively* exert themselves in certain ways to produce the desired change in themselves and others, which occurs through the very bodily form and substance of individuals. When we take into account this work and effort, we can then fully make sense of how moral change occurs on individual and communal levels.

Finally, to write this study of the Tablighi Jama‘at required me to expand the existing framework for the anthropological study of Islam. The difficulty of simply introducing a body of literature such as semiotics in this study is that there is an explicit disavowal of signification. Mahmood asks “...whether a theory of embodied performativity that assumes a theory of linguistic signification (as necessary to its articulation) is adequate for analyzing formulations of the body that insist on the inadequacy of the body to function as a sign?” (2005:166). Mahmood too has adopted an implicitly emic perspective, and as signification of the body and language itself are rejected by those engaging with this discursive tradition, it is deemed inadequate and rejected.

The inadequacy of signification for Mahmood rests on a misunderstanding of semiotics. An expanded notion of semiotics and signification allows us to understand how practices on the body (such as veiling) produces inward dispositions (modesty), and then, how this body comes to operate as a sign for one’s self and others in social interaction. Interestingly, it is the sociability of these women that is of concern when Mahmood states that this religiosity “is incommensurable with, and inimical to, those forms of public sociability that a secular-liberal polity seeks to make normative” (Mahmood 2005:74-75). In social interactions themselves, the body operates as a

medium of signification: material objects such as clothing but also embodied practices and states such as veiling or modesty signify much about social actors. Semiotics and linguistic signification is able to tell us much about how different types of persons are recognized, and the types of interaction that occur in the course of everyday social life between these persons. It is in the minutiae of everyday social life that religious and secular worldviews play themselves out, and introducing a semiotics is necessary to clarify those processes.

Additionally, signification is occurring within the discursive traditions of Islam itself. The metapragmatic nature of an authorizing discourse demonstrates a dynamic link between an authorizing discourse and an actual discourse and practice in the world. Setting aside the details of metapragmatics, I want to stress that a serious shortcoming of Asad's authorizing discourse is that it created an unexplainable gap between the discursive tradition and the traditional practice. Reintroducing the metapragmatic-pragmatic dialectic helps to connect the discursive tradition and traditional practices by showing how the authorized discourse itself is deployed and immanent in the world. The engagement of Muslims with the discursive traditions of Islam authorizes certain discourses and practices; yet, that authority simultaneously rests upon the enactment of those discourses and practices. Connecting the realm of the tradition with that of discourse and practice is necessary to understand Islam as an object itself in the world.

I would like to conclude this paper by returning to the work of Foucault, whose writings have been so productive in the anthropology of Islam. Foucault mentions four types of "technologies:" technologies of production, sign systems, power, and self. Technologies of power objectivize the subject, that is determine behavior of individuals



and submit them to certain ends or dominations. Technologies of the self are ways in which individuals work on themselves and their bodies in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state. While Foucault distinguishes the technologies of power and self “from relationships of communication which transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium,” he states that these (power, semiosis, and objective capacities) are overlapping, reciprocal, and use each other mutually (Dreyfus 1982:218). They are, what he calls, “blocks in which the adjustment of abilities, the resources of communication, and power relations constitute regulated and concerted systems” (ibid 1982:218). Power relations, symbolic systems, and objective capacities congeal in disciplines such as honing one’s piety. In Foucault’s notions of power, it does not come from above, is not necessarily imposed (though it can be), and emerges from below and within the subject; power may similarly be operating through sign systems. Since power occupies such a central role in the idea of Islam as a discursive tradition, it is necessary that we understand how technologies of power, self, and sign systems use each other mutually. I therefore aimed to demonstrate how power operates in both marked and unmarked ways through signification on multiple occasions. Moreover, I have attempted to make clear how the regular process of signification helps to productively expand our understanding of Islam as a discursive tradition (e.g. linking authorizing discourses to an actual utterance and practices). This effort has not been to demonstrate the value of a theoretical methodology and approach, though this is surely of relevance, but to make the point that this phenomena, as well as others such as a discursive formation or morality, is occurring in the world, much like Islam itself as an

object in the world. This ultimately clarifies and further marks out boundaries of such an object.

## Bibliography

Ahmad, Mumtaz

1991 Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat *In* Fundamentalism Observed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Pp. 457-530. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Asad, Talal

1986 *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies.

1993 *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

2006 Responses *In* *Power of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*. Charles Hirschkind and David Scott, eds. Pp. 208-241. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M.

1982 *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bauman, Richard and Briggs, Charles

1990 Poetic and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19:265-212.

Bowen, John R.

1989 Salat in Indonesia: The Social Meanings of an Islamic Ritual. *Man* 24(4): 600-619.

Caton, Steven C.

2006 What Is an "Authorizing Discourse"? *In* *Power of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and his Interlocutors*. Charles Hirschkind and David Scott, eds. Pp. 31-56. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cook, Michael

2000 *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Csordas, Thomas J.

1990 Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos* 18(1):5-47.

Deeb, Lara

2006 *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Denny, Frederick M.

n.d. "Umma." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2010. *Brill Online*. University of California UC San Diego CDL. 15 November 2010 <[http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-1291](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1291)>.

1975 The Meaning of "Ummah" in the Qur'an. *History of Religions* 15(1):34-80.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rabinow, Paul

1982 *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Esposito, John L.

2003 *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fakhry, Majid

1991 *Ethical Theories in Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Faubion, James D.

2001 Toward an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis. *Representations* 74:83-104.

Foucault, Michael

1980 *Truth and Power In Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Collin Gordon, ed. Pp. 109-133. New York: Pantheon Books.

1990[1978] *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*. New York: Vintage Books.

1990[1985] *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, Vol. 2. New York: Vintage Books.

1997a *The Will to Knowledge In Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 11-16. New York: New Press.

1997b *The Hermeneutics of the Subject In Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 93-106. New York: New Press.

1997c *Technologies of the Self In Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 223-251. New York: New Press.

2010[1972] *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books.

2010[1984]a *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History In The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 76-100. New York: Vintage Books.

2010[1984]b *On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress In The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow, ed. Pp. 340-372. New York: Vintage Books.

Garborieau, Marc

2000 *The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at into a Transnational Movement In Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. Pp. 121-138. Köln: Koninklijke Brill NV.

Gingrich, Andre

1997 *Inside an 'exhausted community': an essay on case-reconstructive research about peripheral and other moralities. In The Ethnography of Moralities*. Signe Howell, ed. Pp. 152-177. London: Routledge.

Graber, David

2001 *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*. New York: Palgrave.

Hermansen, M. K.

1994 *The Muslims of San Diego In Muslim Communities in North America*. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, eds. Pp. 169-194. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Hirschkind, Charles

2006 *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*.  
New York: Columbia University Press.

Jalal, Ayesha

2000 *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*. New York: Routledge.

Laidlaw, James

2002 For An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8(2):311-332.

Lambek, Michael

2000 The Anthropology of Religion and the Quarrel between Poetry and Philosophy. *Current Anthropology* 41(3):309-320.

Lapidus, Ira M.

1984 Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam *In Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed. Pp. 38-61. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mahmood, Saba

2001 Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salāt. *American Ethnologist* 28(4):927-853.

2005 *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Masud, Khalid Muhammad

2000a Introduction *In Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. Pp. xiii-lx. Köln: Koninklijke Brill NV.

2000b The Growth and Development of the Tablighi Jama'at in India *In Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic*

Movement for Faith Renewal. Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. Pp. 4-43. Köln: Koninklijke Brill NV.

2000c Ideology and Legitimacy *In* Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama‘at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal. Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed. Pp. 79-118. Köln: Koninklijke Brill NV.

Marsden, Magnus

2005 Living Islam: Muslims Religious Experience in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Metcalf, Barbara

1982 Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

1993 Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama‘at. *Journal of Asian Studies* 52(3): 584-608.

1994 “Remaking Ourselves”: Islamic Self-Fashioning in a Global Movement of Spiritual Renewal *In* Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dyanmic Character of Movements. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. Pp. 706-725. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

2009 Jihad in the Way of God: A Tablighi Jama‘at Account of a Mission in India *In* Islam in South Asia in Practice. Barbara D. Metcalf, ed. Pp.240-249. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mir, Mustansir

1987 Dictionary of Qur’anic Terms and Concepts. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Munn, Nancy

1986 The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society. Durham: Duke University Press.

Parish, Steven M.

1994 Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City: An Exploration of Mind, Emotion, and Self. New York: Columbia University Press.

Parmentier, Richard

1994 *Signs in Society: Studies in Semiotic Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Robbins, Joel

2004 *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Rosa, Jonathan Daniel

2010 *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race: Making Latin@ Panethnicity and Managing American Anxieties*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.

Rubin, Uri.

n.d. "Hanif." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill, 2010. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_COM-00080). University of California UC San Diego CDL. 15 November 2010 <[http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3\\_COM-00080](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_COM-00080)>.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell

1979 *Faith and Belief*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Silverstein, Michael

1993 Metapragmatic discourse and metapragmatic function *In Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*. John A. Lucy, ed. Pp. 33-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Voloshinov, Valentin N.

1986 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wortham, Stanton

2006. *Learning Identity: The Joint Emergence of Social Identification and Academic Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett

2008 *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*. Oxford: Berg.