

THE NIZARI-ISMAILIS IN MODERNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the challenges and negotiations towards an articulation of important constituent elements, of the personal and community, that shape identity in the space between two “social imaginaries” (Taylor 2004), the Shia-Imami-Nizari-Ismaili Muslim and the “modern”-Western. The dissertation includes the following approaches; autobiographical narration, intermingled with the voices of social theorists Charles Taylor, Selya Benhabib and the Ismaili community leadership (the Ismaili Imamat), towards rendering a historical philosophical lens that provides common ground, for analysis of the tensions and accommodations towards personal and communal identity construction within the Nizari-Ismaili Muslim community, and its evolution of a social imaginary and the role of education. However, the overarching theme of the thesis relates to the challenge that secular society and globalization pose to a traditional religious worldview.

Key Terms: Autobiography, Identity, Islam, Ismaili, Philosophy, Education

Dedication

To my parents

for all you have taught me

and all that you

go through with me and

for all I have put you through

thank you both for always being there....

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis offers a personal voice and those of certain social theorists and the Ismaili Imam (leadership); layered upon history events, in an attempt to explain the “social imaginary” (see page 5) of the Shia-Imami-Nizari-Ismaili-Muslims and the role of education in its past and future construction. It functions as an autobiographical inquiry (read: personal discovery, subjective) as a departure point for an open-ended discussion about personal and community identity construction within the context of the Nizari-Ismaili Muslim¹ (NIM) social imaginary (SI). A historical philosophical lens focuses the dialogue aimed at uncovering constituent elements informed by a “horizons of significance²” (the Ismaili Imam) towards illuminating some aspects of my own identity within the NIM-SI in Canada. It attempts to reveal some tensions and negotiations in the juxtaposition of a ‘Modern’ Secular Western SI and the NIM-SI. It applies voices from within and outside the NIM-SI, to the discussion which is anticipated to be read as a generative dialogue aimed at creating common ground for analysis of the dynamics of a NIM-SI. The paper threads, interjects, describes, weaves and fragments my “self” and the communities construction and deconstruction of identity between the

boundaries of two large social imaginaries; that are seen as juxtaposed spheres with “semi-permeable” membranes which surface from within, competing trajectories.

This paper is meant to be read as a dialogue, sub-sections of chapters are organized as interrelated aporia’s of an existential quest informed by the NIM-SI. My intention has been to ground common contexts through an inter-subjective site upon which to discuss identity formation and reconstruction. One of the tasks I set the reader will be to look at the NIM-SI as being situated within several SI and the greater social imaginary for all of us, while at the same time appreciating that there is always negotiation of competing and contesting social imaginaries from both within and without. Such is the ironic conundrum of social imaginaries — they are not amenable to being essentialized or circumscribed and yet we tend to do so. Paradoxically their homeostatic nature is dynamic and ethereal; social imaginaries are in a state of constant contest, from within and without by forces that are both apparent and elusive; ironically our cognitive heuristics drive us to seek patters and delineate difference as monolithic constituent elements of “the other”. Metaphorically a way out of the conundrum may be to recognize as often as possible the uniqueness of individual trees satiated in the forest – and internalize

that the individual never represents fully the diversity they are only an example of such that exist.

This thesis traces my attempt at synthesizing my perception of the social imaginary of NIM's in Canada, a community to which I belong. It is not meant as a diagnostic. As an autobiography it is admittedly subjective; I am sharing my point of departure, not as a representative nor as an outsider but as an individual embedded in the subject. My analysis further delimits some ground so as to discuss constituent elements of identity within the NIM-SI with the intent that it will be generative for further dialogue.

The first chapter surfaces and problematizes the tendencies of people interacting within large social systems to produce inertias of incommensurable traits which essentialize people within prescribed social imaginaries; and the cognitive dissonances that may result from such politics of identity. The subsections in the chapter will include the construct of social imaginary, essentialists distortions of "the West" and Muslims, multiculturalists dilemma, multiple modern imaginaries, and discussion regarding education for and about Muslims in the western context.

The second chapter articulates, through the light of a historical lens the "complex cultural dialogues" (Benhabib 2004: p. ix) which impact constituent elements of personal and community resulting in

contestations and negotiations and formations of identity within the NIM-SI.

Chapter three intersects the NIM-SI's constituent elements within the backdrop of Charles Taylor's notion of the "Great Disembedding" of the Western modern Social Imaginary. The chapter introduces the Ismaili Imam's contemporary activities in global development and the transformation of the NIM-SI into a philanthropic community impacting the lives of citizens where they live and globally.

Chapter four documents some of the educational enterprises the Nizari-Ismaili Imam is currently undertaking in religious and secular spheres. It describes a Talim (curricula) that aims to precipitate a synthesis of some ephemeral, enchanted essences, that attempt to cultivate a balanced identity along the axis Taylor (2004) calls the "vertical" and "horizontal" axis of being. It traces the development of the new Aga Khan Academies and a Madrasa Pre-school co-funded by the Ismaili Imam.

CHAPTER 1. PERSISTENT INERTIAS ENCOUNTERED EN ROUTE TO MULTIPLE MODERN IMAGINARIES

The Social Imaginary

In "Modern Social Imaginaries" Charles Taylor (2004) sketches out what he calls the "long march" towards the present constitutive practices and self-understandings - that inform and imbibe the contemporary social imaginary of "the West" and ushered in the age of modernity. For the purposes of clarification, this paper will use the consciousness of modernity reasoned by Taylor as,

that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization); of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality); and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution). (Taylor 2004: 1).

What does Taylor mean by the term "Social Imaginary"? By this he refers to a type of consciousness people hold of their social reality – more so than an intellectual acuity – he refers social imaginary as the ways in which ordinary people understand their common social existence. Here Taylor points out a distinction between the social imaginary as a social theory and as a social practice. Social imaginary is not structured or rooted in a particular theory as such (although

informed by it); rather it is the way people have evolved and organized their collective practices. He says,

This understanding is both factual and 'normative'; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what miss-steps would invalidate the practice. (2004: 24).

However, this doesn't presume that the influence of social theories or notions of moral and metaphysical order does not penetrate the social imaginary – because it is a kind of,

collective inarticulate understanding of our whole situation... it can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines, because of its very unlimited and indefinite nature. (25).

The social imaginary then can be conceived of as a sphere of modus operandi; surrounded by a "semi-permeable" membrane that allows from without some practices (with the background and interpretations of the understandings behind them) to enter and inform what goes on inside the sphere. This imaginary enables individuals to have an implicit grasp of the conventions of their social space, and regulates their relationships with each other by enabling a common repertory of actions which in the ideal case should always be carried out against a horizon of significance³ (Taylor 1991: 31).

The context by which the social imaginary is a cohesive dominant sphere is due to a collective understanding or imagining of the moral order. Taylor explains,

I mean by this more than just a grasp on the norms underlying our social practice, which are part of the immediate understanding which makes this practice possible...these norms realizable. (2004: 28).

What makes the norms realizable is the collective understanding of the moral order which penetrates, informs and transforms the social sphere through modification of old practices, improvisation and induction of new practices evolving the social imaginary. At the same time the keystone that sanctions these new actions – a novel understanding of the moral order – remains a conundrum taken for granted and obvious on the one hand; and seemingly evocative, incoherent and ethereal on the other, he notes,

The relation between practices and the background understanding behind them is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice which largely carries the understanding (25).

This process Taylor describes as,

the extension of the understanding of moral order. It couldn't have become the dominant view in our culture without this penetration/transformation of our imaginary... Alternatively in the course of their slow development and ramification a set of practices gradually changed their meaning for people and hence helped to constitute a new profound transformation of the social imaginary (29).

How do Taylor's notions of a "novel moral order", the result of redaction processes of Western social imaginary relate to the NIM-SI in Canada? It is worth noting when configuring its relevance, that it is important to follow Taylor's trajectory when he indicates that it is "a novel understanding of the moral order that allows for the transformation of the social imaginary" and not that the moral order is itself changed radically. Although Taylor is addressing his discussion to the civic sphere – the social imaginary is an expansive term that can be applied to religious communities equally. This is of particular importance to this work as ideally for Muslims the practice of religion is a total cosmology that does not segregate human existence into secular and/or religious spheres..

Conundrum of Time and Space: A Compression of the Vertical along the Horizontal

Time and space are perceptible as important to "modern" human minds only when intersected in the "material". This redaction of space/time creates a type of social imaginary that Charles Taylor has termed "radical secularity" because,

it stands in contrast not only with a divine foundation for society, but with any idea of society as constituted in something that transcends contemporary common action (2004: 93).

Modern secularization processes transpose notions of “higher time” (157) and “sanctified space” (situated metaphorically along a vertical axis) onto an entirely “material” physical human dimension that is expressed along a metaphorically horizontal axis. For the modern western person, time and space are understood as embedded within a “profane framework” that is only perceptible through traditional scientific methods,

In the new perspective, this is what God demands of us, and not any attempts on our part to connect with eternity⁴. That connection is purely God’s affair. Thus the issue whether we live good or bad lives was henceforth situated firmly in ordinary life⁵ and within profane time (102).

Indeed the term “secular” implies a removal of God from the public sphere “away from the enchanted cosmos shaped by higher times” (187) — however observation reveals the enigma that God is not absent altogether “as the American case shows⁶” (187). What has been marginalized though is the “ontic necessity” (187) of God; both as an anchor and reference point of an action-transcendent grounding of authority in higher time creating an implicit order. This has been made incomprehensible and incongruent in the modern western social imaginary leading to disenchanting cosmos. “There is a close connection between disenchantment and the confining of all action to profane time” (186). Disenchantment is that of a society no longer,

structured by its dependence of God or the beyond. It is not the end of personal religion. ... However it is undoubtedly a decisive stage in the development of our modern predicament, in which belief and unbelief can coexist as alternatives (187).

Modernity is secular not in the sense that it designates an absence of religion altogether — but that religion occupies a different “space”. Vertical time-space has flattened and comes to be embedded within the profane where effects of all social action are calculated to begin and end – on the horizontal axis situated intransigently on the material plane producing a tension between materiality and spirituality.

One of the possible implications of such changes was alluded to by Aga Khan IV (1976),

It is my profound conviction that Islamic Society in the years ahead will find that our traditional concept of time, a limitless mirror in which to reflect on the eternal, will become shrinking cage, an invisible trap from which fewer and fewer will escape.

One of the conundrums of such a “radical secularity”, the embedding of time and space in materiality i.e. the loss of a metaphysical foundation, as it relates to Islam, and the social observer of Muslim communities is the cognitive dissonance produced on both sides by misrecognitions of some of the fundamental differences between Western and Muslim cosmology. As noted above the Islamic social imaginary is decidedly not a dualist view; it recognizes the

demarcation of material (dunya) and spiritual (deen) as a false dichotomy; and seeks to strike coherence between the vertical and horizontal axis upon which all human action is framed. The Islamic cosmos remains enchanted and very much grounded in "higher time" where God is altogether an ontic necessity⁷;

The creation according to Islam is not a unique act in a given time but a perpetual and constant event; and God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing, even the things which seem to us absolutely self-evident such as space and time. (Aga Khan III 1954: 175)

How does one negotiate such fundamental differences and the tensions and alienations that result from the rise of multiple possibilities of en-framing an existential quest?⁸ And how to do this without the rejection of the others basic values and traditional views? The example of the dualist dichotomy and the Muslim conjoining of the existential axis in the section above are among the challenges of co-existence negotiated within pluralistic societies. The example in the following section offers a naïve albeit powerful synthesis of another type of negotiation and offers a traditional Islamic position for imagining possibilities for pluralistic inclusive interpretations of Abrahamic imaginings⁹.

A Childhood Lesson on Interiority: Between the Juxtaposition of Two Social Imaginaries

One of the ways that identity politics is focused is when a 'self' becomes aware of itself through comparison with the 'other' — basic polarities that result is the affirmation of the self by rejection of the other, or confirmation of the other and rejection of the self. What does a middle way more substantial than the simplistic pluralistic notion of live-and-let-live look like? Is there a way to coexist without imposing onto but integrating the other such that there are minimal disparities and maximum similarities?

In the personal example below I hope to illustrate a partaking in pluralism, more a kind of "soft-relativism" that Taylor, describes in the "Malaise of Modernity" (1991). This is a notion of participating in the activity of the "other" by acknowledging some common overarching symbolic system, that informs a novel or practical understanding of the self's original orientation. Of course this notion is not new and we see it in practice all the time in pluralistic societies. My intention through the example below of my own development is to show an internalization of a consciousness synthesizing a novel moral order through the consequence of being between two social imaginaries.

When I graduated to grade two, my class was placed in the open area at Lord Roberts Elementary School in Vancouver. This area

contained four different classes, each with their respective teachers. In the mornings we would all gather in the centre of the open area for morning announcements followed by recitation of communal prayer. During the first week of school, I noticed the same three pupils leaving our gathering just before the prayer to later join their class in session. I told my mother that our teachers asked us all to participate in daily prayer and that I didn't want to as we already had our own prayer and that I felt uncomfortable with the Christian prayer we were asked to recite — of course, part of my concern I am sure, was also motivated by my wanting to join the three students out in the hall and have some "freedom-time" with them.

Mother asked me what is the prayer — after a week of saying it aloud I knew it from memory:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,

and the power,
and the glory,
for ever and ever.

Amen.

(The Lords Prayer. Bible: Mathew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4)

She smiled and then asked me if I had gone through the Du'a¹⁰ book with transliterations she had recently given me? No I said. She asked me to recite for her the beginning of the first part of our Du'a. I began:

Bismil-lahir-rahmanir-rahim.
Alhamdu Lil-lahi Rab-bil-amin;
Arrahmanir-rahim;
Maliki Yawmid-deen,
Iy-yaka Nabudu Wa-Iy-yaka Nastain,
Ihdinas-siratal-mustaqim.
Siratal-ladhina Anamta 'Alayhim, Ghayril-Maghdubi
Alayhim Walad-dal-lin
(Quran: al-Hamd – Sura 1)

She asked me then to bring the Du'a book and read aloud the transliteration of the first part which is the following:

In the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful.
All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds
the most Beneficent, the most Merciful.
The Lord of the Day of Judgment.

Thee alone we worship, and Thee alone we seek for help.

Guide us to the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours, not of those cursed ones and nor of those who have gone astray.

What is the difference between the two prayers she asked rhetorically? These are small differences she said, and really don't matter, when they/we say "Our Father" think of "Allah",- this is a splendid prayer the more we think of Allah the better, so don't worry about the details, in the end it is all the same. We are all children of the book. The more we look for differences the more we will find them, what is important is to look for the similarities and the more we look for them the more we will find — what is better she asked? That was my first lesson about "interiority" of faith and cross-cultural dialogue. That the outward forms are secondary, what really counts are the kernels of the truths, in this case, implicit in the Abrahamic axioms of belief – the discernment one carries within their heart need not prevent them from participating in the larger pluralistic social realm, the discernment is interiorized and need not be imposed.

Charles Taylor in "Malaise of Modernity" discusses Rousseau's notion of "le sentiment de la existence" (1991: 21) of paying attention to the voice of nature within ones heart. Such interiority springs from "authenticity", "being true to [our] own originality" (29) but what is important, Taylor says, is recognizing the larger horizon against which

one develops a truly authentic self (40). In the case above the horizon was inclusive of the Judeo-Christian tradition by recognizing that Islam is also part of that tradition. That was a novel understanding of the moral order of my self orientation; a shift in my context to an Abrahamic ethos and of not holding onto an exclusively Islamic horizon. In an Abrahamic ethos both social imaginaries are primarily synchronized and not opposed.

Social imaginary as Taylor conceives it — the way people interiorize and create novel understandings of the moral order, in the case above occurred through attempting a synthesis of multiple horizons that sought to affirm each imaginary. In the rather simplistic juxtaposition of these social imaginaries, my mother acting as a social theoretician of inter-religio-cultural dialogue – impressed upon me that not only do we see ourselves as Ahl al Kitab, (people of the book – see Note. 9) but also that our foundational prayers are interchangeable.

By giving this story of her insistence that I stay with the larger group, and participate fully in worship, I hoped to illustrate how there developed within me a novel moral inclusion without altering the original moral order; it was a new and practical understanding of worship that resulted for me. Within her implicit grasp of her social imaginary there was inclusiveness and a need to teach me to

accommodate, to transform my social imaginary to imbibe a pluralistic outlook and affirm both the "other" and myself and in doing so ameliorated my cognitive dissonance. We shall see this strategy of NIM synthesis and affirmation of "self" through and with the "other" employed again in chapters two and three.

Muslims and Christians alike uphold the Unity of God and the Divine Message of the spiritual and ethical foundations of a social order based on universal brotherhood,

It is one of the paradoxes of history that the West and the Islamic world which have so many beliefs and values in common, should have lived in antagonism for centuries. ... Perhaps the key to it lies in the statecraft of princes, who found in the appeal to religion a force, of tremendous power which could be exploited to serve their ambitions. (Aly Khan 1958).

Trajectories of a Self within the Politics of Identity

The essential vision for peace in the present world, I believe, lies not in any imagined homogeneity of a global social identity, but in the persistence of the plurality of our identities; which we should construct to cut across difference and division to amalgamate and enrich "self" through the "other". Whatever we enjoy in human innovation from another culture we endeavor to assemble into our own expressions regardless of where they originate. This is not to suggest the in consequence of self-identity and choice in our lives, quite the

contrary. Nonetheless we imbibe completely or reformulate the innovations we come across through the lens of our value systems and needs. Few things affect our perceptions, loyalties, reflections, and actions more than the praxis our identity.

Arguably identity is the most important foundation which informs our being but is also the most problematic. Identities form as a result of both osmosis from the situated circumstance of a "self" within shared spaces, and by a *mélange* of personal understandings, and longings towards actualizations. Choices and perceptions about imagined geographies¹¹, choice of religion, language, gender, socio-economic position, occupation, and consumption habits that appear on the surface – are referred in Muslim thought to as the "zahiri" aspect of our lived realities. There is also the aspect of the esoteric, referred to as the "batini" aspect of ones identity, forming the wellspring and points of departure for one's existential quests. The batini is the private reality that is impregnated with shared meanings and symbols from which "self" creates a unique understanding that inform an outward identity. The zahiri and batini are the tangibles and the intangibles respectively, that intertwine and inform a self-identity. The zahiri and batini can also be thought of as respective aspects along the "horizontal" and "vertical" axis that are informed by horizons of significance. Ideally the trajectory of a "self" should have perfect

balance along the zahiri and batini axis during the time of physical existence. In modern times as Taylor (2004) points out we are witnessing an expansion in the direction of the horizontal and a flattening of the vertical axis resulting in the insignificance of that horizon; the three (the horizontal, the vertical and the horizon of significance) are unraveled and induce a state of cognitive dissonance. This feature of modernity Taylor (1991) points to one of the causes of a contemporary malaise of existence – a debased lived ethic of authenticity.

The space between the nodal points of a social imaginary and self-identity is a complex matrix, which conveys its attitudes and aspirations played out as the politics of identity, onto any public sphere. The conundrum of an identity when expressed is that it has several internal arrangements, known and unknown to the observer and even the actor. The observer can never be certain of the motivations of the actor's symbolic display in public, and for that matter even in private spheres, as to which of internal combinations of the reactive/affirmative postures are being played out on the stage of identity politics. The question is to what degree is an identity-expressed based on the zahir/horizontal aspirations; or what degree is the impulse from an individual's existential quest from the batin/vertical aspirations; which are the varying degrees that combine

as the motivating factor? These are near impossibilities for the observer to fathom and an easy recourse is to fall into an essentialist's cognitive dissonance chasm as it reduces cognitive load by circumscribing one or a few overarching motivating factors for the actor's expression of his/her self-identity.

I would argue that four important incommensurability traits that contribute to this cognitive dissonance with respect to the politics of identity are (1) the predicament that the "self" and/or "other" tends to be essentialised that is the hallucination of only one primary identity which overrides all other identities, (2) a belief that identity exists as an epistemically predisposed latency that simply unfolds but is never explicitly chosen by the actor, (3) the idea that the rejection of our claims are made by others who do not share our own identities coupled with the concept that moral inclusion does not transcend the domain of identity – the notion that some Muslims are 'against freedom' and Islam is incompatible with democracy and (4) the imbalance of the zahir/horizontal and batin/vertical axis of the individual against significant horizons.

One of the most important roles of education in a pluralistic society, wherein such contested identities are being formed, the NIM's believe, is to develop a dialogical framework with a significant other who assists in the development of an integrated, authentic self. This

dialogical framework emerges in chapter 4 as a fundamental principle of the NIM educational ethos towards the development of an understanding that Nizari-Ismailis consist of a group with several cultural identities on par, transcendence of moral inclusion among differing cultural groups, and the balance of zahiri/batini axes through the example of the “virtual” and “real” significant other.

Perceptions of Essentialist Distortions: Inertias that Perpetuate an Ignorance of the Other

It is valuable to articulate the generalized¹² contemporary antecedents and understandings of “Islam” and “the West” within the zones of proximity of each of the two social imaginaries — that of “Islam” within the western ethos and of the Muslim social imaginary in response to their interactions with “the West”. Doing so is always in danger of placing us into the essentialists corner but will, I hope, provide an appraisal of how these two social imaginaries have constructed the “other” on the ground; and will also provide a lens to view the juxtaposed realities of the NIM-SI from peripheral perspectives. (Some of the notes of this section temper the essentialization by offering contrasting voices).

Few people actually wear the labels I am designating. However; these conceptualizations will be useful in helping to surface the incommensurability traits above that contribute to the cognitive

dissonance of identity politics through the set of assumptions each person holds about the "other". It demonstrates the actualizations of the implications of a constructed public consensus on essentialist distortions, what Mahmood Mamdani (2004) calls "culture talk" which assumes a simplified and reductive homogeneity, sustaining skewed polarities and exacerbating manufactured tensions; rather than creating bridges of understanding between perceived difference. Such a macro designation of multiple realities of people is precarious and for this reason I follow Arkoun's (1994) use of quotation marks. There isn't a single interpretation of Islam, there are several; just as there are several shades of Western. The terms "Islam" and "the West" are constructs, just as the Orient and the Occident are constructs – they are labels, a symbolic, a generalized representation of the "other", the terms are loaded with power, value, emotion, political and metaphysical orientation.

Much of contemporary western discourse (in the media, public, and academic spheres) regarding Muslims is entrenched in a praxis of a historical polemic, where a tradition of ignorance and a manufactured incompatibility¹³ still continues. Recent fodder to fuel this folly has been added by Leo Strauss,¹⁴ various Churches¹⁵ and the neo-conservative movement, who reinforce the notion that Islam should be scaffolded onto communism¹⁶. This message is invigorated

by slogans such as “Good Muslim / Bad Muslim” “With us or Against us”¹⁷ (US President Bush II, 2001) and the “Clash of Civilizations”.¹⁸ This discourse runs largely unchallenged¹⁹ inside the political, corporate, academic and media spaces where it should balance itself – inside what Charles Taylor, calls the Metatopical Space²⁰. Today, an oppressingly narrow definition of Islam as a pre-modern, fanatical, irrational monolith is constantly perpetuated by a conglomerate corporate monopolizing media²¹.

Even in educational curricula, this image continues to be substantiated by a particular convention of scholarly endeavour.²² Of course there are exceptions²³ and sympathetic voices from influential non-Muslim thinkers like Karen Armstrong (2000) and John Esposito (1992; 2005) among many – but these have been less noticeable in the open mass debates and discourses. Voices who offer even the most basic critiques of validity and objectivity have been drowned in a pejorative sea of opposing voices which has flooded the public space since the early nineteenth century (Said 1998; Ahmad 2000). As Arkoun (1994) has pointed out, the history and “[t]he links of these polemics to religious and political quarrels dating from the Middle Ages augment their propensity to provoke violence” (6).²⁴ It situates Islam’s civilizational significance outside the preview of worthy knowledge. With the result that it is left up to the market and media

forces to sort out what *is* the 'Muslim Imaginary' while continuing to provide sanction for "the West" to emancipate the Muslims, and civilize them as it were, from themselves.²⁵ As schools are the central site for the legitimating of myths and the construction of social imaginaries; the educational implications of a constricted scholarship and the combination of a skewed media drives the polemical discourse towards the younger generations by informing curriculum theorizing and practice. (Kincheloe 2004)

The sharp and transparent rise of Islamophobia (coupled with the notion of "the enemy within"²⁶) exacerbated after the events of 9/11 exist as a social phenomenon and is ultimately unsustainable for pluralistic societies and makes responsible Islamic education at both foci increasingly urgent. "The challenge is complex because it involves challenging the misconceptions held by many non-Muslims about the nature of Islam, and challenging the different and often conflicting views held by adherents themselves" (van Driel 2004: 114).

Historically the roots of Muslim configurations by "Westerners" has been largely in response to the impact of colonialism and have entrenched three distinctly discernable positions that are reinforced from within and without Muslim societies²⁷.

The first group are those who call for a political theology of liberation from the perceived Western imperial-secularist-materialist-

cultural-intellectual aggression model (also understood as 'westoxication'²⁸) which ascends human sovereignty over and above that of God's. "They argue that, for the West, freedom means freedom to do whatever one wishes, whereas freedom should mean freedom to do the 'right thing' ... Freedom is freedom from the slavery of passions (nafs) and the opportunity to act righteously to create the just order" (Khan 2001) and intend to institute a 'purely' anti-western model. They trace their current standard to the objectives of Jamal al-din al-Afghani, Abul A'la Maududi, Sayyed Qutb, Muhammad Ilyas, and Hasan al-Bana, Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi²⁹. Today these approaches have combined and evolved into a complex critical philosophy of modernity and globalization as presented by "the West", which is seen as a hypocritical culture. They are also equally critical of the secularism and nationalism of their own authoritarian elites, they see as supported by a corrupt Ulema and Muslim polity who are viewed as having adopted a non-Islamic lifestyle, mesmerized by "the West" and have allowed the state to use religion for its own purposes. (Khan 2001) They perceive "the West" as no less of a monolithic arrangement striving (or performing a counter-Jihad perpetuating neo-colonialism and corporate capitalism) towards an absolute Western global hegemony in all spheres of life.

Their critical philosophy is equally hampered with inflexibility of thought and outright rejection and misunderstanding of “the West”. Without proposing an encompassing, viable and pragmatic Muslim reconstitutive or programmatic dimension other than recourse to a naïve and literal Islam. Their conundrum is that this makes them as polarizing and polemical to their own masses and their adversarial fraternal twin, the neo-conservatives, (Mamdani 2004) who counter that Islam is the menace and label them “Bad Muslims” –note that these are quasi-official terms for political alignment, rather than any moral categorization. An enigma of this group is that they face a strong refusal from their own masses in support of their agenda and have sustained a campaign of terror on Muslims in an effort to force their convictions upon them. These so-called “Bad Muslims” are “concerned with power, not with the soul; with the mobilization of people for political purposes rather than with sharing and alleviating their sufferings and aspirations. Theirs is a very limited and time-bound political agenda.” (Ahmad 1999)³⁰

The second group, are often categorized by the Western discourse producers as “Good Muslims” – they trace their perspectives to originators like Rifa’a al-Tahtawi and Kemal Ataturk. Their view of “the West” is represented with envy, admiration and unqualified imitation they are the so called ‘hard modernists’,³¹ who despite

colonial conquests and being Cold War pawns, “believed they could lead Muslim societies along the same historical course “the West” had followed towards a civilization perceived as superior, effective, and liberating” (Arkoun 1994: 11) and for the sake of advancement invoked models that had little grounding in traditional Muslim frames of reference.

The third group are those who have a melancholic mythical nostalgia for the ostensibly ‘golden age of Arab-Islamic’ civilization spurned by the centuries of affects of colonialism. They adopt an apologetic tendency and have projected modern concepts such as individual and human rights, democracy, civil society, emancipation of women and so on as core values already present in the traditional frame of reference of the Quran and within the society founded by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina and Mecca. They have gleaned from “the West” institutions and processes that have “corrupted the historical authenticity of these concepts. Hence, Muslims are required to struggle to revive this authenticity.” (Arkoun 1995)³² Those who choose this path of a cultural re-transformation project are today often labeled as ‘progressive Muslims’³³ and/or the ‘soft modernists’³⁴.

Despite these three oddly contested versions of Islam interacting with the modern world, the NIM (who represent approximately 0.0015% of the global Muslim population) are attempting to strike a

middle-path through consensus aimed at combining Islamic traditions and culture with the cultural streams and traditions of “the West” while still retaining their historical authenticity which is neither corrupted by modernity, nor clings to ancient social imaginaries based on cultural re-transformation. As a percentage they have always been insignificant but their influence has been disproportionately significant historically and continues in the present. I will develop this idea further in the following chapters.

A Multiculturalists Predicament

In negotiating “self” and “other” it is predictably easy to be drawn into cultural confrontation, resulting from the politics of identity (Fraser 2003). Within the Canadian matrix of multiculturalism there has been a functional tendency to ascribe and delineate boundaries of a variety of social imaginaries as fixed pieces of a mosaic that need to be preserved and proliferated, and as such it is inclined to view individuals as being the constitutive representatives of a mass culture (incommensurability trait above number one). Seyla Benhabib points out that the basis of cultural essentialism lack internal validity and share faulty epistemic premises and formulate what she terms,

‘the reductionist sociology of culture’ ... which has grave normative [and] political consequences for how we think injustices among groups should be redressed and how we

think human diversity and pluralism should be furthered (2002: 4-5).

What is crucial for Benhabib, is to distinguish the functional stance of the social observer from the social agent.

The social observer ... is the one who imposes, together with local elites, unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities ... for the purposes of understanding and control. Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions ... through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it (5).

A reductionist sociology of culture then unwittingly conflates the politics of recognition within a diverse society with the identification of an individual identity (see incommensurability trait number two above, the belief that identity exists as a predisposed latency and number three, the concept that moral inclusion does not transcend the domain of identity). As the term recognition flows between the individual and the collective social imaginaries an iniquitous homology is,

facilitated by the ambiguities of the term [recognition] ... which is both theoretically wrong and politically dangerous ... Politically such a move is dangerous because it subordinates moral autonomy to movements of collective identity; I would argue that the right of the modern self to authentic self-expression derives from the moral right of the modern self to the autonomous pursuit of the good life, and not vice versa (53)

The dilemma inherent in the multiculturalism today is that at once an individual represents solely themselves and their culture – this is a cause of constant tension both within the self and within society. When is the individual representing themselves and not their group? How much of an active role does an individual play in choosing their identity or are they simply unwittingly conditioned by their social imaginary? Are those representing the group have the legitimacy to do so, and whose recognitions are they claiming? Indeed as the example of my own experience shows that individuals represent multiple groups and enjoy equal loyalties at the same time. If we replace the concept of “multicultural mosaic” to “inter-cultural inclusion” would we be enhancing pluralism?

Monolithic identity as constructed in a skewed metatopical space and enforced by any educational system based on perceived immutable and inert foundations of tradition, of preconceived past collective memories, soon become fossilized and hollow if scrutinized against the light of reality. Unfortunately the concept of a monolithic identity can be easily manipulated to reproduce cultural essentialism; and easily accentuates irreconcilable differences polarizing moral inclusions and exclusions and forcing a false choice between one or the other. Any education that constructs identity as an ontological monolithic object inevitably resonates with cognitive dissonance

because it can not account for the contradictions and diversity that exists within the definitions of what the “other” is. It does not present a way to constructively challenge and integrate the inconsistencies of the multitude of expressions of identities; but rather reinforces accepted patterns and notions of irreconcilable differences. Viewed in this context the “clash of civilizations” is an inevitable outcome by way of cultural self preservation and of self-superiority through the maintenance of a thin veneer of pure irreconcilable difference. Each tend to essentialize the “other” along personified and unbridgeable adversarial fault lines that aim to ascribe a fixed reality of a stable repetitive pattern of the existence onto the ‘other’. The Canadian and Ismaili educational experiment towards creating a successful pluralistic civil societies in most respects ideally stands in opposition to this model with notions of multiculturalism evolving into a notion of inter-culturalism – an understanding that identity does not correspond as a one-to-one ratio with particular cultures – that identity is a heterogeneous combination of a multitude of individual expressions.

“Unresolved Geographies Embattled Landscapes” (Said 1999) ³⁵

One of the theoreticians who has attempted to deal with these problems is Edward Said. Said (1999), presents two theoretical models that represent an existential dilemma of identity, and it is

between these two poles, wherein exists negotiations, reconciliation and reconstitution in space time continuum. In today's world of unprecedented movement and migration of peoples we observe that identities born of ethnicity, religion and nationality are in a constant state of flux and conflict; at once deconstructed and reconstituted in another space and time. The invention of identity for Said, (1999), is a "burden and inhibitor of thought" something that has "to be gotten over". An individual person's and cultural identities are always in a state of flux, it is precisely this discontinuity that is the complicating factor. Franz Fanon (as quoted by Said 1999) determined this when he suggested for example, that "national consciousness should be converted into social consciousness", and one can add ethnic consciousness should be converted into an inclusive all pervading human consciousness, etc. For Said (1999), the heterogeneity of humanity at large can not be irreducible; it is radically non-identitarian with respect to affiliations of religion, ideology and geography.

These tensions are particularly evident in the 1400 year history of the NIM-SI as it has constantly moved its collective identity between a projected "sphere of totality" and deconstructing and reconstituting its congruency, correspondence and continuity within the flux of space and time. The NIM "modern" collective social imaginaries endeavor to create equitable, morally sustainable, and enabling humane societies

that aim to cut across differences of ethnicity, religion and nationality to highlight shared realities towards the balance of pluralism and normative universalism. This discussion will be continued in Chapter Three and Four.

En Route to Multiple Modern Imaginaries

Aga Khan IV (2003) comments on multiple modern imaginaries in the following way,

The effective world of the future is one of pluralism-that is to say, a world that comprehends and accepts differences. But such a world must be based on a new intellectual and spiritual equality and it must be educated to see in pluralism, opportunities for growth in all areas of human endeavor. History has shown in every part of the world and at every time, that the rejection of pluralism the attempt to normalise the human race has always resulted in factionalism, oppressiveness and economic and social regression..

The Aga Khan's comments are echoed by Taylor (2004), who by terming it "Western modernity", proposes a concept that is not culturally neutral. In acultural theories of modernity, he argues that transformation is not fixed or circumscribed by a specific culture. Rather, any traditional culture could undergo the same paradigm shift and produce similar results due to factors of transition such as the growth of scientific reasoning, development of a secular stance, or the rise of instrumental reasoning among other universal features like industrialization, increased mobility, urbanization and so on. Although

the stressors are similar, different cultures have evolved a unique set of traditions and practices that connote particular,

understandings of personhood, social relations, states of mind/soul, goods and bads, virtues and vices, and the like. These languages are often mutually untranslatable... [and] what gets screened out [with acultural theories] is the possibility that Western Modernity might be sustained by its own original spiritual vision (2004).

By this Taylor discounts the explanations of modernity solely in terms morally-independent materialistic reasoning; or, that the by-products of social transformations alone uprooted people from their traditions and beliefs systems. What acultural views exclude is that the motivation towards modernity is generated by an acceptance, adjustment, amendment, modification and a movement toward novel forms of original moral understandings within the burgeoning social imaginaries – and not a negation or a replacement of them altogether.

The negotiations of meanings and expressions of my “self” identity, occurs as I step in and out of spheres that either relate to Western notions of ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ (I think, therefore I am); where Cartesian rationalism places the individuals’ awareness of their own limited³⁶ self as the highest and sole criterion of existence and reality – in both subjective and objective domains. However, by moving into and out of Islamic spheres that relate to ‘*ana’l-Haqq*’ (I am the Truth/Real). Both have a potentiality of reaching an equitable balance

between the horizontal and vertical axis in the here and now. Although the 'I' in Descartes' assertion is anthropocentric it approaches the vertical when understanding the limits and incapacities of its own will to sustain and give meaning to its own physical existence. The 'I' that Hallaj exclaims, relates the "self" to the Divine – merging with the "supreme identity", both as immanent and transcendent; nonetheless ultimately grapples with the conundrum of the duality of "observer and the observed" as it becomes conscious of its own limits and capabilities in connecting with ultimate reality in both subjective and objective domains.

A crucial question, then, which a modern theology has to take up is how to realize what, following Charles Taylor, an important contemporary philosopher of religion, one can refer to as the question of meaning in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition – the central promise of divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided, while guarding against the suppression, in the name of the divine, of the affirmation of the human spirit, intellect and imagination (Esmail 1992).

Many Muslim scholars, who know their history and value their heritage, are acutely aware of the markedly altered conditions of the modern world; appreciate how erroneous and absurd it is to accept that there is an inevitable and perpetual divide between social imaginaries – between their traditional points of departures and the emergence of multiple modern worlds. Tensions that arise due to the

cacophony of multiple points of departures need to be mitigated within traditional arrays and value coordinates such as not to lose their significance in the modern world (Ramadan 2004).

Towards an Education For and About Muslims

The balancing of the tension between these different notions of the self is a central challenge for modern Islamic education and equally important for education in “the West” about Islam, as expressed by Aga Khan IV during an interview with the Toronto Star,

What we have is not a clash of civilizations but a clash of ignorance. This ignorance is both historic and of our time. ... One of the difficulties is that the Western world does not understand the pluralism of the Islamic world, which is heavily, massively pluralistic, even more so than the West. But the West does not understand it because it has not included the Islamic world in the teaching of what we call ‘general knowledge.’ You can be an educated person in the Judeo-Christian world and know nothing — I mean, nothing — about the Islamic world. (Aga Khan IV 2005)

The critical question for today is, what is meant by a Muslim education in and “for” “the West”? What would be its essential invocation towards the construction of a Muslim personification of “being” in this age and environment. Enlightened emancipation carries with it independence of informed choice and the responsible management of identities. Naturally what follows is the consideration of the subject matter – What should be the form and the content?

When speaking of a Muslim education in “the West” it is important to look primarily at two focal points – education about Islam in public institutions and education for Muslims at Islamic centers. Indeed the issue should not be viewed as separate entities or as discrete points of departure. All learning happens inside and outside institutions, both formally and informally, all the while constructing and maintaining civic imaginaries. Muslims who attend Islamic schools and non-Muslims and Muslims who attend other learning institutions conduct their lives in the public sphere where both groups interact and are infused with yet other groups that constitute society. The primary goal of Muslim education, notwithstanding the question, whose Islam? as twofold, firstly, to facilitate an understanding of what a Muslim is – through surfacing the diversity of understandings and performance that exists within Muslim communities and appreciation of Islam’s universalizing principles which attempt to integrate that diversity within and between Muslims and non-Muslims, secondly, to accentuate and appreciate the differences at a deeper level than the usual song and dance, food and fashion parades of standard multicultural units. The point being that cognitive benefits deriving from an engagement with diverse vantage points, when properly processed, offers an informed analysis and perspective on the everyday world, “such a perspective allows individuals access to tacit modes of racism, cultural

bias, and religious intolerance that operate to structure worldviews”
(Kincheloe 2004: 3)

Thus the central issue for a Muslim education is how and what to retrieve of the inspiration of Islam and communicate that to students who live “in environments that no longer refer to God and in educational systems that have little to say about religion?” (Ramadan 2004: 126).

If it is agreed that the message of Islam is a timeless and universal construct its education above all should be dynamic in providing its students the necessary tools needed to face the challenges and realities of their present contexts. While speaking to their souls and their hearts, challenging their minds, and engendering a sense of autonomy in personalizing their faith and their understanding of the “others” faith. The minds of pupils require critical and vibrant configurations of what it is to be a Muslim in their actual environments, societies and communities in their present situations. Current educational enterprises should not perpetuate “taqlid”³⁷ of those processes that have been developed for past times and mindscapes. Islamic education should be presented as a reasoned message which is enlightened by an intellect that informs and interiorizes the Islamic impulse of an authentic life in the present and future.

One of the critical curricular failings of generic Islamic education in “the West” is that it has become a purely technical exercise void of realizing an authentic spiritual dimension and completely disconnected to the lived realities of North American and European society. Tariq Ramadan’s survey shows that current Islamic education in Muslim communities destructively advocates “a dualistic and Manichean approach based on ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’” (2004: 127). Although the quintessential message of Islam is universal and its impulse for “being” is all-encompassing, Islamic education falls short in providing the cognitive tools required for Muslims to negotiate meaningful lives true to principle; and is incoherent when attempting to engender necessary and meaningful dialogues with the “other” in society at large,

Pedagogically pedantic, what is called ‘education’ is in fact ill-administered ‘instruction’ ... there is no room for discussion, exchange or debate ... while the public school system teaches children to express themselves, give their opinions, and articulate their doubts and hopes, the exact opposite is found in some mosques and Islamic organizations (127).

What results is a kind of educational multiple personality disorder – the product of a pedagogy lacking soul or humanity.

Eventually, the religious and spiritual education that is provided and that should give the young and the not so young the means to confront the challenges of their society pushes them along one of three avenues: to

pretend, to lose themselves in silence, or to reject everything and rebel (128).

In essence what Ramadan proposes in his two fundamental thesis, which will be related to the NIM social and educational imaginary in chapters three and four, are namely, that first, it is

not a question of relativizing the universal principles of Islam in order to give the impression that we are integrating ourselves into the rational order... the issue is to find out how the Islamic universal accepts and respects pluralism and the belief of the Other. [And] second ... the idea that Western Muslims must be intellectually, politically and financially independent. ... By developing a global vision of their points of reference and their objectives, by studying their situation and being reconciled with themselves, they have the responsibility to become engaged in all the areas ... as watchful and participating citizens ... [and] establish real partnerships beyond their own community and what concerns themselves alone (5-7).

The historical roots for this 'new' form of modern education lie in the nineteenth century and carried by the large population shift of Europeans into the colonized parts of the world. This century has seen a corresponding trend of large movements of Muslims migrants into Europe and North America. Education about Islamic culture and Muslims in public institutions remains infinitesimal, often distorted, oversimplified and pejorative, guided by an inevitable cultural conflict model (Kincheloe 2004). A mature curriculum in pluralistic civilizations within the backdrop of globalization, is enthusiastic about learning from difference, underscores the politics and power dynamics of

knowledge production and distribution, and highlights the perspectives of the “other”; in an effort to engender an understanding that public spaces and institutions are shared contested spaces of difference shaped by diverse forces and power dynamics.

The Aga Khan forecasts the movement towards inclusiveness in the following way,

As globalization unfolds, the Islamic world will be there in myriad ways. Multitudinous encounters are inevitable. It is time for all of us to ask: How can we ensure that these innumerable contacts will result in a more peaceful world and a better life? We should be seeking out and welcoming these encounters and not fearing them. We should be energizing them with knowledge, wisdom and shared hope. But this will be enormously difficult to achieve unless the civilizations and faith of the Islamic world are part of the mainstream of world culture and knowledge, and fully understood by its dominant force which is yours in the West. (Aga Khan IV 1996).

On the basis of such a pronouncement the form that education should take is one that meets the challenge of globalization; in chapter four educational initiatives of the Ismaili Imamat will be further investigated.

Chapter 2. Identity Veils and Layers

This chapter intends to convey the contradictions and consensus of multiplicity and elasticity of identity (as a result of constant negotiation and compromise) within the spheres of the personal and the discursive/religio-cultural situated within several social imaginaries. It will provide the reader with a context for the location of a "self" within an inherited legacy of a history of indeterminate language, culture, and borders lacking a galvanizing geographic centre. The problematic of synthesizing a self-identity within a diverse transnational community coalescing in the West will be framed through several perspectives and multiple layers – the theoretical lens of Seyla Benhabib, and Charles Taylor, selected personal accounts of the author interspersed with poetic exposé centred on the evolution of a personal and communal identity in response to changing contexts of space and time. It renders an insiders point of departure from having been embedded within subject and not as an abstract academic analysis. My story illustrates the issues of identity on an individual basis but also provides a glimpse of the more general challenge faced by "Muslims" in "the West".

Only Breath

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu

Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen. Not any religion
or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up
from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all. I do not exist,
am not an entity in this world or in the next,
did not descend from Adam and Eve or any
origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
of the traceless. Neither body or soul.
I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know,
first, last, outer, inner, only that
breath breathing human being. (Rumi 1995).

Rumi, who the NIM's consider a co-religionist (Daftary 1990) conceived the lines above some 800 years ago and even today they are refreshingly insightful. They echo notions of the conundrum of competing multiple "selves" in modern societies. They advance a novel intellectual analysis of meaning and spiritual aspiration, of symbolic faith and not imitation of any closed ideological dogmatic practice "Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not from the East or the West".

My most personal existential identity dilemma is as universal as most every human person, who believes in the existence of a higher

purpose of life – how to reach there? How does one construct and conduct a life that leads to the expression and fulfilment of their highest purpose – indeed what *is my* highest purpose, my authentic identity – What is the Right Path for me? A pressing issue in modern societies today is, how does one find authentic meaning in their lives without being exceedingly individualistic, or trivializing tradition and time honoured practices, or intransigently impeding the cross fertilization of religio-cultural experiences? How does one synthesize the often conflicting varieties of sacred traditions that are available in a pluralistic society whilst maintaining an authentic spiritual quest that renders transparent the universal enigmas of the meaning of human existence? For Rumi it is being in that “placeless place” where in the breath belonging and beloved are in union. As an Ismaili can I break free of religion and my cultural system? If I acknowledge and internalize that I belong to the beloved then I believe I can.

An Interpretative Community of Muslims

Ismailism constitutes one interpretation of Islam amongst several. Ismailism like all Shia affirm that the Prophet Muhammad, before his death, designated³⁸ his cousin and son-in-law Ali, as his successor. Ali is regarded as Imam³⁹. Two primary vectors of the Shia interpretation are *`ilm* (divine knowledge) and *nass* (explicit designation of the successor under divine command). The resultant

vector is a vital conviction in the permanency of a divinely guided Imam for humankind – designated among the descendants of Ali and Fatimah (the Prophet’s daughter). The Imam is the authoritative teacher/guide. His role is to contextualize, for the present, the faith in matters of spiritual and temporal through his perfect knowledge (‘ilm) of the revealed (tanzil) and the hermeneutic analysis (ta’wil) of the Quran. In essence it is the Imam is the one who brings the “horizon of significance” to the community of believers.

Over the course of history divergence arose over the issue of the succession. The Shia Ismaili Muslim community differentiated from the larger Shia community by their identification of Ismail, son of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (d.765 c.e.) as the legitimate successor to the Imam and in later history their identification of Nizar (son of Mustansir Billah (d.1094c.e.)) as the rightful successor to the Imamat. Nizari-Ismaillis are distinguished from other communities of Muslims in that they have a hereditary Hazir-Imam (living, present divinely appointed/inspired Imam) as the head of the community. Consistent throughout their 1400 year history has been the lineage of guidance, leadership and authority of the Imamat – starting with Ali at the death of the Prophet in 632 c.e., and continuing presently with H.H. Karim Aga Khan IV⁴⁰. The Noor (or divine light) of the Hazir-Imam Ismaillis believe is the same as that of Ali and all previous historical Ismaili Imams.

Ismaili history has been recorded as an ebb and flow of a colourful complex webs of intrigue and rumour, intermittent repression, persecution and obscurity exacerbated by taqiyya (precautionary dissimulating practices – at the risk of losing their identity) on one hand, to the flourishing of two states the Fatimid (909-1171) and the Nizari-Ismaili (1094-1256), openly vying for power against the contemporary Muslim dynasties of the time. From early in their history Ismaili have been a dispersed minority community of believers with scattered islands of centers of learning. From there Ismaili Da'is⁴¹ traveled carrying out prositization activities until roughly the eighteenth century when these activities stopped. At times under the direct central authority of the Imam and at times in isolation they have incorporated⁴² and elaborated an array of intellectual traditions and rational discourses, through a committed synthesis of religio-cultural elements from the Mediterranean and North Africa to Central Asia to the Indian Sub-Continent and South East Asia.

Imam Hasan Ali Shah (1800-1881), the first Imam conferred the title of Aga Khan from the Persian Emperor, emigrated from Iran to the Bombay due to political developments in Iran in 1848, where he established himself. This period also marked a significant increase of contact between the Hazir-Imam and his global community as he

received deputations to Bombay from Kashgar in China , Bokhara in Central Asia and the Middle East.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries significant migrations of Ismailis occurred from the Indian subcontinent to East Africa and smaller numbers to South-East Asia. Today the Nizari-Ismailis represent the second largest Shia Muslim community worldwide and continue to exist as a translational community of approx 15 million dispersed over 25 countries. From the 1960's onwards there has been a second wave of migration of Ismailis from all over the world to Europe and North America – contact between Ismailis of such a large number of diverse ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds has likely never occurred before in their history. Ismailis have,

emerged in modern times as a prosperous and progressive community with a distinct identity attests to the strength of their heritage, especially the institution of the Imam, and their adaptability to changing circumstances, as well as the foresight and leadership of their recent modernizing and charismatic imams (Daftary 2001).

The accent on the autonomous authority of the present Imam (Aga Khan IV) and his self-regulated teachings, enable the Imams to initiate original and innovative temporal policies in response to the changing times and circumstances while maintaining the essence and relevancy of their faith and practice.

Khoja-Ismaili Precipitate from a Macronarrative Cultural Interlocution: The Inter-Indian Encounter

Philosophically, I do not believe in the purity of cultures, or even in the possibility of identifying them as meaningfully discrete wholes. I think of cultures as complex human practices of signification and representation, of organization and attribution, which are internally riven by conflicting narratives. Cultures are formed through complex dialogues with other cultures. (Benhabib 2002: ix).

My ancestors were most likely Hindu converts from the Lohana caste into the "Sat Panth"⁴³ (the True Path) by Ismaili Dawat⁴⁴ who sent Pirs/Da'is, as early as the 10th century, to the Indian sub-continent settling in the regions of Sind, Punjab, and Rajasthan to undertake prosalizations activities. It is traditionally accepted that the title "Khoja" was used to replace the original Lohana title Thakur by Pir Sadr al-Din (14th Century) to distinguish the new converts (Asani 2002).

The Pirs reformulated the Lohana Hindu cosmology by articulating a relational parody with Sat Panth⁴⁵ cosmology – based on the acceptance and recognition of the Imam as the Avatara⁴⁶. Over time one cosmology was interchanged with another formulating a novel moral order but not replacing the original altogether. This process relates to what Taylor (2004) has described as being both

“factual and normative”. The Imam was an anticipation realized and which made an all-inclusive logical consonance and acquiescence within the Lohana/Khoja social imaginary and thus shifted their orientation from one belief structure to incorporate another; without affecting the hierarchical structure of their primordial moral order.

As a result of the complex dialogues by the incorporation of an innovative moral order into their existing cosmology the Khojas considered themselves concurrently Hindu and Muslim (adapting Hindu, Shia and Sunni customs and beliefs⁴⁷); although orthodox members of either faiths would not consider the Khojas as belonging to either group. Due to the Khojas participation and integration of several social identities and customs simultaneously, along with their syncretic religious practices their transformation of the moral order was not radically altered the old practices underwent a redaction but carried within them the same understanding of the moral order. What distinguished the Khojas from other Indian social imaginaries within which they stepped in and out of with fluidity, was their acceptance and attribution of the Hazir-Imam who at that time was living in Persia.

Through this brief venture into history we begin to see how an Ismaili Khoja identity emerges as Benhabib (2002) suggests, through

the attribution and amalgamation of conflicting narratives and complex dialogues with several cultures at once. At the foundation of all Ismaili identity is the acceptance and recognition of the Hazir-Imam as the present authority; this is the central galvanizing principle and point of departure, the axis upon which all movement is facilitated.

This belief for the Ismaili Khoja can be seen as facilitated through negotiating an inter Ismaili Khoja identity. The intellectual/social hegemony of an emergent class the Ismaili Khoja identity was mediated (acquired, deconstructed-reconstituted) in another spatial location by way of fragmenting and restructuring a culture (such that it is concurrently Hindu and Shia/Sunni); and by its resolution and continuity through temporality of two seemingly contradictory cosmologies (Hindu and Muslim), such that for the Ismaili Khoja the Imam as the Avatara constitutes a synthesis a "sphere of totality" that is a summation process of differing sequences and contradictions in time.

Intra-Muslim Distinction

The social observer ... is the one who imposes, together with local elites, unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities. Any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and

control. Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions ... through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it (Benhabib 2002: 5)

By the mid-nineteenth century British Raj, two significant occurrences obliged the Khoja community to redefine its identity and facilitated for the Imam a consolidation of his authority. The resultant tensions were externally and internally motivated; i.e. on the one hand due to outsider pressure as a result of "the social observer ... to generate coherence for the purposes of understanding and control"; and due to internally "contested and contestable narrative accounts" of their own Khoja tradition. In both cases external (i.e. the British courts) and internal (i.e. the Imams edicts) apparatus were employed to resolve the issues. These tensions between outsider and insider pressure for transformation continues to shape Ismaili Muslim identity to the present day and both pedagogical and performative strategies are continually employed in their resolution.

Since "questions of religious identity became increasingly important in nineteenth and twentieth-century British-India, groups perceived as inhabiting the halfway house between Islam and Hinduism came under heavy attack" (Asani 1987: 31-32), what kind of

religious group were the Khojas exactly? – with their pluralistic and oft contradictory integration of Hindu and Muslim social customs, doctrinal and theological indulgence and credence that did not conform to preconfigured boundaries? Indeterminate groups were “confusing to British officials ... Communities like the Khojas ... would have to align their conception of Islam in terms of the fundamental concepts of the majority community and the exercise of their faith would have to conform to orthopraxy” (Asani 2001). With the Imam now present in the Subcontinent there were direct challenges to his authority by some Khojas who claimed that they had been converted by Pir Sadr al-Din into the Sunni interpretation of Islam and were not Shia, therefore had no allegiance to the Imam. (Howard 1906)⁴⁸ On October 20, 1861, when the dissenting Khojas publicly joined the Sunni fold, Aga Khan I issued a decree in which he expressed his desire to bring the Khojas to conform to the practices of the Shia Imami Ismaili creed of his holy ancestors, regarding marriage ceremonies, ablutions, funeral rites etc. The decree ended thus, “He who may be willing to obey my orders shall write his name in this book that I may know him.” (<http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/main.html>). This inaugurates a process of the Ismaili Imam to differentiate Ismaili from the varieties of Khoja identity as well as Sunni and the main body of Shia Muslims

by affirming a distinctive Ismaili identity, the foundation of which is allegiance to the Imam of the time.

This is clearly expressed in the verses below,

Bagair hubb-e-Ali muddaa nahin milta
Ibadaton ka bhi hargiz sila nahin milta
Khuda ke bandon suno ghaur se Khuda ki qasam
jise Ali nahin milte use Khuda nahin milta
Basad talash na ab kuch wus'at-e-nazar se milaa
nishaan-e-manzil-e-maqsood raahbar se milaa
Ali mile to mile khaana-e-Khuda sa hamein
Khuda ko dhoodha to wo bhi Ali ke ghar se milaa

Without the love of Ali, desire is not fulfilled

Not even the returns for the prayers

O slaves of God listen carefully, by God !!

one who does not realize Ali fails to realize God

Don't search for anything now, match the eternal search

match the footprints of the desired destination with guide

to get Ali is like getting a house of God

searching for God too, we found Him in Ali's house!!

(Qwali. Ali Mawla Ali)

The lines of the qwali above would resonate in every Ismaili heart; the highest meaning of an Ismaili's life, and the central pivot of their identity is to imbibe these sentiments – to realize (acknowledge)

that Ali (is the Hazir-Imam) is the route to the desired destination, that God resides in Ali's house.

Construction of a "Euro-Afric" Ismaili Identity

There have been settlements of Ismailis in East Africa since the sixteenth century (Kanji 1990). My grandfather was born in Gujarat and like many of his contemporaries emigrated to East Africa on the advise of Aga Khan III in the early part of the twentieth century. At that time there were mass migrations of Ismailis in search for better economic opportunities to escape famine and under-employment (Walji 1974). For Ismaili settlers their migration to East Africa was linked to colonial political economies where they positioned themselves as a "corporate community" and occupied a middle position between the European colonialists and the indigenous population (Morris 1968). In order for his community to play the role of the middle position most successfully Aga Khan III encouraged economic and social reforms which included a shift of cultural identity that discouraged emphasis on maintaining an "Asiatic outlook" (South Asian) and encouraged further alignment of the Ismaili interpretation of Islam expressed a distinctive hybridized Euro-African outlook on living.

In Africa, however my followers faced a much more acute problem. They arrived there with Asiatic habits and an Asiatic pattern

of existence, but they have encountered a society in process of development which is if anything European-African. To have retained an Asiatic outlook on matters of language, habits, and clothing would have been for them a complication and socially a dead weight of archaism in the Africa of the future. (Aga Khan III 1954: 190)

These reforms along with an emphasis on women's education and involvement to civic and community life contributed towards the positioning of India as a "backward" homeland not as a place of identification or return, and postured the Westernization movement as "advancement" to be emulated. This crucially positioned the Ismaili interpretation of Islam as progressive and compatible with the changes a European outlook (Asani 2001).

Several enigmas and trade-offs are produced by the synthesis of an Ismaili-Euro-African identity. How is the new tri-polar identity negotiated along with their Khoja identity? Is there a hierarchy in these multiple identities? What elements then of Euro-African constitute the new identity? How easy is it to leave behind the South Asian "baggage" – how much Khoja is still left in the Euro-African Ismaili? What is salvaged of cultural authenticity? With the downplaying of heritage language and Indic cultural mores there begins a process of a de-centering and reconstituting consciousness from a physical spatial-temporal geography. A greater emphasis on an

“Ismaili interpretation of Islam” circumscribes a sphere of totality onto a translational temporal Ismaili identity. Once again the enigmas produce a tension between essentialist and pluralistic poles; one of the results was a further refinement of the Ismaili religious identity and an additional incorporation of diverse cultural mores.

The early 1960’s ushered a second wave of migration for East African Ismailis. Exacerbated by the Ugandan Asian expulsion of 1972 and the general post independence political uncertainty in the East Africa the community search for better social and economic conditions moved many of them out of the region. Having processed and synthesized ‘Westernization’ to an extent the community was drawn minimally to migrate back to South Asia and pursued opportunities in North America and Europe. The majority of Euro-African Ismailis being welcomed and facilitated easy access to Canada on the strength of the personal friendship of the Aga Khan IV and then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. My family moved to Vancouver Canada in 1972. The Euro-Afric identity for us now transforms into a global-Ismaili identity.

Dilemma of Diaspora

Is the term “diaspora” adequate to describe the Ismaili community? Not entirely. To describe the Ismaili community as a diaspora is problematic.

By definition diaspora is:

- a. A dispersion of a people from their original homeland.
- b. The community formed by such a people.
- c. A dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity, such as a language or culture. (<http://www.answers.com/Diaspora>)

The Nizari Ismaili Muslims are a religio, heterogeneous multiracial, multicultural, transnational-migratory group centred in several geographic locations with a living hereditary Imam. This description does not fit with the definition of diaspora above – there is no “original homeland” i.e. they have no specific national orientation and no desire to create one. Ismailis do not consist as a homogeneous entity in the traditional sense. To label this movement of people as a diaspora can be simplistic and misleading. As we have seen Ismaili multiple identities are fluid with respect to language and culture and what is important with respect to diaspora is that there is no active desire as a collective imagination to a “return” like the prototypical Jewish teleology of origin/return to the “homeland” due to exile (Safran 1991). There is no integrating mythical symbol of a displaced homeland, whether physical or psychic which Ismailis have allegiances and yearning. (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1996). Nor is the “homeland” always seen as a site of authenticity and tradition (Brah 1996.). What we have seen in the East African Ismaili community is a diminished even negative association with their

ancestral homeland, their site of authenticity centres around their concept of Hazir-Imam. Paul Gilroy's (1993) notion of the "Black Atlantic"⁴⁹ in the re-thinking of traditional diaspora is partly congruous with the NIM community, which has no single physical space, dominant physical religious centre and has complex histories of displacement and migration.

Intersecting The Pedagogical and Performative⁵⁰: Culmination of a Reconstituted Global Ismaili Social Imaginary – A Pan-Ismaili Identity Projected from the Western Lands

Thus far the historical discussion has centred on Khoja-Ismailis – a group that has benefited over the past two centuries due to direct contacts with the Hizir-Imam and thus has taken a pre-eminent position in global communal affairs. Over the past 50 years however, there have been increasing contacts between the Syrian and Central Asian communities directly with the Imam and the Imamatus institutions. Patterns of migration are also bridging the three religio-cultural traditions of the NIM (North-African, Central-Asian, and Indian Subcontinental) into increasing proximity of each other and the diverse gathering of Muslims in the West. This stress necessitates a process of consolidating a global NIM-SI from within – through intra-Ismaili religio-cultural discourses, and from without, with inter-Muslim and

inter-Western appraisals of the Ismaili tariqa. The change of context and times require different pedagogical and performative processes.

The global intra-Ismaili religio-cultural discourse between the three disparate cultural and historical traditions can be seen to be facilitated by two basic premises first, the esoteric nature of the faith (the understanding that the forms are malleable but the essence remains), and second the centrality and absolute authority accorded to the Imams to facilitate novel moral orientations within the social imaginary by contemporizing the practices.

Culture presents itself through narratively contested accounts for two principle reasons. First, human actions and relations are formed through a double hermeneutic: We identify **what** we do through an **account** of what we do ... through the accounts the agents and others give of that doing. ... Second ... is that not only are human actions and interactions constituted through narratives that together form a "web of narratives" (Arendt [1958] 1973), but they are also constituted through the actors' evaluative stances toward their doings. (Benhabib 2002: 6-7 emphasis original)

Intra-Ismaili religio-cultural discourse has existed for centuries through direct communication with the Imam or through his emissaries. The formation of a global Ismaili Muslim identity is not a recent phenomena albeit of late the process has intensified due to the processes of "globalization".

One example of the flexibility of Ismaili thought as an illustration of Benhabib's "double hermeneutic", is how different religio-cultural pedagogy and performance penetrates the social imaginary through accounts and evaluative stances towards actions that carry within them constitutive understandings; this can be seen in the variation of the recitation of hymns⁵¹ through the recent confluence of the Khoja and the Central Asian communities that is occurring in the West. The Khoja-Ismailis have the tradition of Ginan (sung in a variety of Indic Languages) and the Central Asian Ismailis have the tradition of Qasida (sung in Pharsi). In Jamat Khana (Jamat Khana is the term Ismailis use for the place of congregational worship. Like all Mosques it is the hub of religious and social life) especially in the West it is not uncommon for the mixed congregation to hear Khoja-Ismailis reciting Qasida's and Central Asians Ismailis reciting Ginans. The practices of recitation of these hymns carries with them the familiarity of consciousness and essentially serve the same purpose; the veneration of the Imams and moral teachings and orientations. Due to the fact that for many language has lost its import and it is the emotive poignancy of the ritual that remains and affects the congregation – this is one example of a pedagogical/performative strategy (see Note 53), that of a familiar idiosyncratic practice becoming generalized and globalized. This plasticity enables Ismailis to approach questions of

community based education in a manner that allows for pedagogical change.

Does this example of altering a practice serve to articulate a new collective understanding or imagining of the moral order as Taylor indicates can happen? The answer is no and yes. Certainly this is the case in the sphere of ritual (zahiri) practice; it can be said that new and profound transformations of the social imaginary have led to a novel understanding of the moral order that the community of believers extends to include a more global Ismaili Muslim identity. The confluence of heterogeneous Ismaili Muslims worshipping in the same Jamat Khana necessitated inclusion of the rituals of Ginan and Qasida recitation thereby creating a collective appreciation of diverse Ismaili traditions. However; with respect to the institution of the Imam, there is no new profound transformation of the social imaginary – at the core of the essence of Ismaili Muslim belief remains unchanged, whatever the façade of practicalities of inclusion or of a language that veils the ritual, belief in the Imam and his authority remains paramount in the global NIM-SI.

What in essence represents the Nizari Ismaili Muslim ethos has been described in the fact that “Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook” (Aga Khan III 1954: 185). The Imam thus encourages for

Ismailis a constant transformation of their social imaginary to modify their traditions and their cultural identity in the changing circumstances.

In order to understand the role the Imam plays in this process of balance of vertical and horizontal it is necessary to review aspects of Muslim history. With respect to the Intra-Muslim appraisals the problem of succession of Prophet Muhammad and the delineation between hierarchy and "merit based" authority in both spiritual and political spheres, "approaches one of the most fundamental, most searing, most debated, and as a result most embroiled issues in Islamic thought ... and lead to the break-up of the Umma" (Arkoun 1994: 68).

Shia believe that Ali's role was not to traditionalize or rationalize (Weber 1978: 246) Muhammad's charismatic legacy, but was to imbibe the embodiment of Muhammad's charisma as the recipient of his divine authority (see Note 40). Ali's role was to institute the Islamic ideals from the framework of the new societal and political culture the Prophet instituted.⁵² With his office Ali manifests all the charismatic characteristics and qualities, he is the wasi (legatee) of Muhammad as proclaimed by the Prophet at Ghadir Kumb (see Note 40).

In the sufi tradition the Prophets words at Ghadir Kumb are expressed beautifully in the Qwali (devotional hymns)

man kuntu mawlahu fa-'Alimawlahu
He of whom I (Muhammad) am the patron,
of him Ali is also the patron.

The Shia objection to the election of a successor of the Prophet during the time of Ali lead the ummah to differentiate the basis of authority⁵³. The Caliphate represented the social-political administrative office while the Imamat represented the sole and comprehensive authority of all spheres religious and secular. The predicament of leadership is particularly poignant within the NIM-SI, due to the fact that the Imam is Hazir, and not a historical entity based upon rigid tradition. This polemic which has ensued for the past 1400 years seems bound to continue for some time to come.

Would Four 'Halfie's' / Divided = a Whole ME?

This liminalitiy and necessitated negotiation is a feature of many immigrant lives, especially the youth; but in the case of an Ismaili it is qualitatively more complex due to the already marginalized role that they have played within Islam. My own life is a case in point. Coincidentally, the year my family received Canadian citizenship in 1975 was the second time that I concretely remember comprehending the contradictions of my identity. During a conversation, with an older

friend while we were playing at English Bay, I recall telling him that I had just received my citizenship card. "What is that", he asked? "You know the card", I said. "Well I don't have one", he replied. "Aren't you a citizen", I asked? "Sure", he said, "I am born here". "I'm not but I am a citizen now and I have a card", I said with pride. "Where were you born", he asked? "Tanzania", I replied. "Where is that?" "East Africa under Mount Kilimanjaro", I said. "Africa? Africa?" He repeated. "Come on – tell the truth!" "I am telling the truth", I told him. "But you are not black! You are brown!"

Between 1975-80 it seemed that I was constantly narrating who I was and who my ancestors were – that they took a boat and crossed the Indian ocean to Zanzibar and then to the Tanzanian mainland. That my parents were born in Tanzania, as was I. Tanzania is full of people of all colors. That I am not Hindu I am an Ismaili. An Ismaili is a Muslim. Differences in geography and skin color produced cognitive dissonance in who I was explaining my roots to and I found myself often repeating that I am not black because my grandfather was from India, but I was born in Tanzania. And no I don't worship cows. No I don't carry a kirpan cause I am not Sikh. No I never met Tarzan, in fact didn't know him until we came to Canada.

In 1988 I used to frequent my local library down the street from my home in Toronto. In the winters I liked to drape myself in a woolen

Indian shawl that I had permanently borrowed from my Mother instead of wearing my big thick parka for the short journey. Invariably the woman behind the counter would strike up a conversation with me. In her thick South Asian accent and uncontained beaming smile she once said, that is a very nice shawl you have. Thank you I replied. She chuckled you know it's a ladies shawl. Next time you go home you should get yourself a men's shawl. I have never been to India, I said. Oh you are born here? No I was born in Tanzania, East Africa. Never mind, no matter she said; "India is your mother".

How do I primarily identify myself? Do I identify myself on the basis of my present Canadian nationality? Or rather on the basis of my skin tone and family ancestry, heritage, culture and language? Or by virtue of the location of where I was born? Or the religion I was born into? Is it too simplistic or convoluted if I chose to identify myself primarily as a human being who happens to be an Ismaili Muslim of Canadian nationality and Indic origin born and spent the first six years of life in East Africa? And if I do that – then, what parts constitute my identity? How and what do I pick and choose to express? And what do I leave behind? Who or what is a Canadian Ismaili Muslim of Indic descent, and what do the first six years I spent in Africa have to do with me? Invariably there is a tendency of slipping into the conundrum of a "bi or tri or quadra-polar identity". But does it have to be?

This hyphenated identity a friend describes as being "the slash" between "self" and "other". Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) represents the hyphenated or slash position as "halfie" – the insider/outsider – of divided loyalties and beliefs – the notion suggests a pull between cultures – it implies that cultures are static and separate and authentic in themselves. It suggests that one can conceive of adding up their halves into a whole self.

The hyphen or slash is the space in between; the space that I occupy? Is it a dis-juncture? Or an intersection of a Venn Diagram? Does the space in-between not embody both "self" and "other"? Why does it represent a separation a demarcation? I don't think it should be seen as an "or"; I think it is an "and"; it is a union of all possibilities and in any present it can be any one of them at all times, not a simple binary but a multitude. The hyphenated slash allows me to be this self, that self and the other self; all my-selves, all the time. A bundle of contradictions who refuses to be essentialized and placed in the space in-between. I don't need to add any of my halves or quarters to be whole person. It is after all through the "contra" that one understands the "diction"; we do not always operate through binary opposites, it is through my contestation of identities that I produce my authenticity – the identity that rings true for me. And what is my most

basic contestation? It is to imbibe myself as a Murid (disciple) of my Murshid (Guide).

The essential Ismaili Muslim dilemma for me is what I term “person at odds with self” – as a modern person living in the industrialized west – the dilemma for me is how to maintain a horizon of belief that a metaphysical divinely inspired transcendent being who has been provided by Allah as guide to steer me through my struggle to find my source and higher purpose while at the same time living in a modern world. It is the obligation to negate my personal ego and offer subservience to the Hazir Avatara⁵⁴ by the actualization of my Bayyat (oath of allegiance) to the Imam of the time (Imam-e-zaman⁵⁵). Ismaili Muslim doctrine fundamentally is about accepting the authority of the manifest Imam.⁵⁶ Modern western society is not fervent on the practice of subservience to a higher order, or the aspect of “locating” oneself within a cosmological hierarchy, what Taylor calls the Great Disembedding (2004). This is also a difficult horizon to uphold both within the broader Muslim social imaginary and equally within the western ethos, because each society “has a set of materialistic and religious standards which are often at variance with ours”. (Aga Khan IV 1965)⁵⁷ By virtue of where I live I have had limited personal contact with the bona fide traditions and languages of my religio-civilizational ethos. I have accepted and incorporated into

my expression of being a semi-permeable membrane (consciously and by diffusion) many of the notions and traditions of my adopted western society along with their underlying values and world-views; some of which are inconsistent with my Ismaili tradition. How then do I locate and express my identity within the society I find myself in? How do I interpret my Imam's guidance as I build the road that leads me to express an 'authentic identity'? How do I do that within the core of the cultural stream of my adopted society, without losing both, or being relegated to the margins of Muslim and Western society? How do I negotiate that guidance's which seem contrary to my intellectual capacity? How do I parley an intellectual tradition on the basis of first 'blindly' accepting the authority of the Imam?

The dilemma for young Ismailis today and in the future then, I believe, is about how to maintain an anchorage in a type of cosmic moral order that has undergone a redaction and has morphed itself out of in the west (Taylor 2004). In other words the articulation of Imamat – the Ismaili construction of belonging to the beloved, will be one of the most urgent issues for the Nizari-Ismaili community in the future.

Chapter 3.

Towards Synthesizing a Contemporary Nizari-Ismaili Muslim Tariqa

A Non-Literalist Vista upon Creation and Being

The spirit of any religion is not situated in a “fixed” doctrine but in an approach to living. It is not merely contained in a system of beliefs but all pervading through the process of living; not in any religious prescriptions but in the embodiment of principles and practices through personal engagement and awareness in one’s daily life activities. This is how I understand Islam as “a way of life” – that faith is performative and primarily a dynamic of intellectual⁵⁸ / spiritual aspiration and not a straight-jacketed telos dominated by a static religio-cultural product. The crux of the conundrum revolves on the perceived religious attitude upon the human intellect – in how it seeks to support or stagnate its evolution during an individual’s existential quest. Aziz Esmail (1992) notes, “to disregard it is to concentrate, instead, on fixity and timelessness. Intellectual creativity is a motor that compels forward movement. Where the intellect is not supreme, the mind has a tendency to operate under the impetus of nostalgia, harking back to a pristine, supposedly perfect era”.

(http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/life_long_learning/iis_intellectual_issues/iis_intellectual_issues.htm)

Islam is not fixed to one culture; its essence is a timeless, placeless, formless, religious ethos – to speak of Islam is to speak of a body of principles upon which faith, spirituality, practice and ethics are founded. It is this core which has informed Islamic civilizations “as a result of this singular ability to express its universal and fundamental principles across the spread of history and geography while integrating the diversity and taking on the customs, tastes, and styles that belong to the various cultural contexts” (Ramadan 2004: 214). With the existence of tens of millions of Muslims in the West from various parts of the world there is a process underway of distinguishing their Islamic identity from their culture of origin and simultaneously reconciling and integrating their Islamic principles to the lived realities within their new environment. It is in this manner that successive generations of Pakistani, Algerian, Indonesian Muslims (to mention but a few) are assembling for themselves what it means to be a Muslim in Britain, France, Canada, etc. Just as there is no monolithic Islam in the east, Muslims in the west would necessarily take on a range of cultural features. Traditions evolve against an ever-changing context, thus necessitating a practical and novel insight of essential principles as applied to contemporary conditions. And it is here that the conundrum of the intellect is most pronounced, in the distinction of what is “permissible” and “forbidden”, for it is easy to fall into the Manichean

trap that what Muslims have produced is Islamic and what derives from “the west” is fundamentally perverted and un-Islamic.

The intellect is appreciated as a Divine gift and its role is central in the Shia tradition, rooted in the teachings of Imam Ali and Jaffer as-Sadiq. The Imams have “expounded the doctrine that the Quran addresses different levels of meaning: the literal, the alluded esoteric purport, the limit as to what is permitted and what is forbidden, and the ethical vision which God intends to realize through man, with Divine support, for an integral moral society. The Quran thus offers the believers the possibility, in accordance with their own inner capacities, to derive newer insights to address the needs of time.”

(<http://www.akdn.org/imamat/intellect>). In the NIM-SI the quest for harmony between the zahir and batin requires a nurturing of and humble engagement with the gift of intellect. The intellect is therefore not seen as contradictory or subordinate to revelation but as a complementary indispensable (ethereal) faculty with which to reflect upon the Divine message. To investigate upon the mysteries of creation, to expand the frontiers of knowledge through a variety of means: scientific, philosophic, artistic but to always operate within a humble consciousness that it is the creator who opens new vistas and the individuals moral responsibility is to enjoin in the good and uphold the nobility of being human.

The Ismaili personal compass of righteous “living” their understanding of the ethic of Islam, is orientated along a significant horizon imbibed by their Imam’s authoritative guidance. The Imam is the source that both supports and grounds the scaffold upon which an individual’s search for significance and solutions to life problems coalesce. The Imam is integrated in the Ismaili life as the significant other, the primary dialogical role-model who informs their cultural, ethical and social viewpoints as they formulate engagement strategies to manage the effects of the modern context. With the Aga Khan’s authority being central to the Ismaili identity, he is the sole foundation and exemplar who articulates an authentic Ismaili identity for those who take him as such.

The Aga Khan himself explained these ideas in a speech at the Opening Session of ‘Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions’ An International Colloquium organised by The Institute of Ismaili Studies in 2003,

[T]he discourse of the Qur’an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Qur’an confers upon all believers, uniting them in the conviction that All-Merciful Allah will forgive them if they err in their sincere attempts to understand His word. Happily, as a result, the Holy Book continues to guide and illuminate the thought and conduct of Muslims belonging to different communities of interpretation and spiritual affiliation, from century to

century, in diverse cultural environments. The Noble Qur'an extends its principle of pluralism also to adherents of other faiths. It affirms that each has a direction and path to which they turn so that all should strive for good works, in the belief that, wheresoever they may be, Allah will bring them together.(Aga Khan IV 2003)

Constituent Cosmic Imaginaries

Here I would like to extend the conversation instantiated in Chapter One in the section Conundrum of Time and Space. I want to juxtapose what Taylor (2004) calls the Great Disembedding with the modern Ismaili social imaginary of living and being.

How did the Western social imaginary formulate itself to produce the age of modernity? According to Taylor (2004) the modern social order progressed from a "postaxial"⁵⁹ society operating within the notion of a hierarchical complementary in the sphere of an enchanted cosmos; toward an ethos of disenchantment, "a change in the understanding of the cosmos as the work of God's providence" (2004: 69) – what Taylor calls the Great Disembedding,

a break in all three dimensions of embeddedness: [of] social order [towards a rejection of the notion of hierarchy. The modern cosmic order gives no ontological status to hierarchy – we] learn to be an individual, have our own opinions, attain our own relation to God (65), [of an] embedding in the cosmos ... for in early religion, the spirits and forces with whom we are dealing are in numerous ways intricated in the world ... (55) [where the individuals 'sense of self' was an extension of membership in hierarchical complementary that primarily related to God as a society through collective ritualistic actions and] an inability to imagine the self outside of a particular context

extended to membership of that society in its essential order (55); [of] human good... what makes modern humanism unprecedented, of course, is the idea that this flourishing involves no relation to anything higher (57) whil[st] purging it of its connection to an enchanted cosmos and removing all vestiges of the old complementarities – between spiritual and temporal, between life devoted to God and life in the world (61).

By contrast to the modern western world-view the Islamic world-view does not separate the deen (faith) from the dunya (the world); but sees both as two inextricably linked dimensions of the same reality, and as such Islam pays equal weight to both. It is through the deen-dunya integration that human moral responsibility invokes the transcendent in the ordinary life. The NIM-SI is firmly embedded in a social-cosmos that relates to God as an ontological hierarchical complementary through the personage of the Imamat. In John Locke's Second Treatise on Government he "defines the state of Nature as a condition `wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another ... unless the Lord and Master of them all, should by any manifest Declaration of his Will set one above another, and confer on him by evident and clear appointment an undoubted Right to Dominion and Sovereignty" (as quoted in Taylor 2004: Note #1). The fulcrum that represents the constant transformation of the NIM-SI is leveraged upon the following two Quranic ayyats,

O ye, who believe, obey Allah and obey the Apostle
and holders of authority from amongst you (4:59).

And we have vested the knowledge and authority
of everything in the manifest Imam (36:12).

In Ismaili thought this is interpreted as follows,

In a world of flux, the Imam gives leadership in the maintenance of balance between the spiritual and the material in the harmonious context of the ethics of the faith, of which he is the guardian.

(http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/life_long_learning/akdn_ethical_framework/akdn_ethical_framework.htm)

Ismailism encourages the advancement of spiritual life and cultivation of intellect as a perspectival lens through which to unwrap the continuum of knowledge and appreciate its comprehension as a gift and not an entitlement, to use it for the greater good and not as a symbol in the service of power. Spiritual lens illuminates the ethical framework in the advancement and uses of the sciences, technology, the arts, economics, and philosophy; it endows meanings to human relationships that go beyond instrumentality, or cognitive understandings and endeavours to establish equity in domestic and social affairs. It enables the individual to conduct their responses to challenges of life from a deeper more profound location, one that invokes the intellect – a telos with a mixture of ethereal pragmatism.

In the Aga Khan's words,

remember that in this life there are two parts, neither of which must be forsaken.... you must ask yourselves the question 'Have I fulfilled during my life-time my physical

and material responsibilities as well as my spiritual responsibilities?’ And remember you will be judged on both. If you fail in one or in the other, you will be judged accordingly. ... I do not want imbalance ... he or she who forsakes either of the two responsibilities which are placed on you the day you are born – the responsibilities to fulfill your material and spiritual lives – is making a mistake. And I feel it important to remind you today of this duality of life in which we live. ... It is only the spiritual life which is eternal not the material life ... so long as you are alive, everyday is a day that must be lived, and in that day you must fulfil your responsibilities to the best of your ability. So do not let time pass without being aware that once it has passed, it is gone forever. (Aga Khan IV 1973).

Intersection of the Horizontal and Vertical within an Ismaili Cosmological Imaginary

It is said that we live, move, and have our being in God
(Aga Khan III 1954).

The lens of tradition and modernity breach at the level of orientation, engagement and apparatus of vision attempting to pierce through the veil that occludes reality. The veil is the same for both on the quest, it is the apparatus of the vision of the interpreter that is divergent. The lens is born of a denial or integration of faith. Modernity avows the centrality of man, of the primacy of physical observation, of irreverent reason, and the denial of the transcendent. In the pursuit to quantify and compartmentalize the Infinite and the Unknown, the lens of modernity forces the contingency of physical observation upon a receding horizon of knowledge; one never leaves the anthropomorphic as centre continually retreats. Muslim Tradition,

on the other hand, avows God's axiomatic centrality as both the Origin and the destination. Reason, logic, and sense perception are viewed as competent but limited capacities subordinated by the higher faculty of the Intellect. Vision is tempered with love and reverence, reality is construed as integrated; located simultaneously at the periphery and the centre. Knowledge is grace derived by the transcendent illuminating the Intellect.

The human condition is situated essentially as a correspondence of circumstances between contextuality and contingency. To define human existence in any given context necessitates two indispensable outlooks of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of reality. These axes from the view of modernity are often parallel and mutually exclusive often fragmentary and discontinuous; from a traditional metaphysical orientation they are continually intersecting integrated and coexisting. The project for the NIM-SI in the age of modernity is to translate the conviction of the vertical horizontal integration into the design of their daily existence, and by their participation of "being" in the two worlds simultaneously.

The Ismaili Imam's Engagement in Global Affairs – Synthesizing the Pedagogical and Performative

Sultan Mohammad Shah Aga Khan III, the forty-eighth Imam of the Ismailis during his 72 years of Imamate from 1885 to 1957 changed

the course of his communities outlook – morally, socially and economically. He played a leading role in Muslim affairs in the Indian sub-continent founding the All-India Muslim league in 1906 whose President he remained for six years. The original mandate of the League was to safeguard the political rights of Muslims in India. By 1930 it evolved to articulating the establishment of a Muslim State namely Pakistan. In 1931-32, he served as chairman of the British Indian delegation to the Round Table conference in London to discuss the future of India and the British Empire. In 1932, he represented India in the Geneva Disarmament Conference. In 1937, he was elected President of the General Assembly of the League of Nations⁶⁰.

For the interested reader, Appendix is a detailed first person account of Aga Khan III's own reflections, on his early education, his first sojourn into Europe in the summer of 1898, his thoughts as a Muslim leader intent on "modernizing" the Ummah by revitalizing education, advise on pragmatic development of Muslim states, emancipation of women, and philosophy of happiness. This will contextualize for the reader the Imam's consolidated worldview; the conjoining of knowledge from east-west inaugurating convivial exchanges – a very different world view provoke by Jamal al-din al-Afghani⁶¹. The personal accounts of the Imam portrays a person who is integrating western "culture and performances" as the significant

horizon for the NIM-SI his rational and lifestyle and is emulated.

Appendix I also contains a selection of speeches of Aga Khan IV to demonstrate a continuation of the Imamatus consciousness. The result upon the Ismaili social imaginary is to make easily acquiescent towards 'the West', politically, materially, scientifically – since the present Aga Khan maintains cultural capital in both societies he is not advocating a replacement of one for the other, but a coming together. In an interview the Aga Khan explains a common ground to cultivate,

Here we can, myself, the Ismailis and all Muslims, play a role through what I may call "humanistic infiltration" of the industrial society ... They [Muslims] will then have to integrate one way or the other with the cultural stream and with the humanistic tradition that remains in this industrial society: they will have to penetrate its core and not remain in the margin. ... There remains the more important question: how can we manage to make these traditions an essential part of the industrial society? ... However, such success will depend on Muslims in the West and Muslims outside the Western world. Both categories should present our traditions, cultures, philosophy and virtues in a way that would enable people to understand them and interact with them - in a way that would make people not only appreciate them but also seek to know more about them. ... Yet, frankly, it all depends on us, on our ability to present our case in a just and correct manner. ... The wind of change has blown and our duty is to help change to move forward. (Aga Khan IV 1986)

Ismaili Communal Imaginary Transformation into a Global-Philanthropic Network

When they emigrated in larger numbers in the early part of the 20th century to East Africa the Imamatus of Aga Khan III undertook the

challenge of modernizing his community. The communal preference and direction was to participate in local economies through the retail sector and as industrialists. As the community grew in size and importance he reinvested the tribute to the Imam and funds collected at the jubilee celebrations back into the local communities by deciding to create a number of organizations and boards responsible to support religious, societal, health, and educational aspirations and economic development further. A set of council hierarchies (Supreme, National, Regional) and administrative systems tailored for each countries proficiency and situation continue to serve the needs of the local community and advise on matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children and other legal questions; funds for widows and scholarship committees, on sound methods for business and industrial management. The internal capacities of the Ismaili community were drawn upon to organize, develop and administer their community organizations almost exclusively on a voluntary basis. Through these reforms Aga Khan III transformed the Imammat into a responsive multifaceted organization that directed and facilitated the development of a modern Nizari-Ismaili community (Daftary 1990).

A large number of organizations mainly in health, education and industrial promotion, apart from the community institutions were created in countries for use by Ismailis and non-Ismailis. Partly

financed by the Imam, the communities own banks and insurance companies and with government grants; institutions such as industrial promotion services, nurseries, primary and secondary schools, libraries, maternity homes, dispensaries, clinics and hospitals, and other charitable organizations such as The East Africa Muslim Welfare Society were developed and interfaced with other communities and government structures to serve the life of the nation as a whole and advance national cultures, economic and health development (Aga Khan 1960)⁶². Often leading members of the Ismaili community worked themselves into positions of affluence and influence within the governmental organizations bringing with them their commercial and administrative qualities, international connections, expertise in policy and economic development, and provided moderation and stability in the post-independent Africa of the early 1960's

Aga Khan IV has extended the modernization policies of his community extending and building capacity of the councils and communal organizational structure beyond matters of faith. Building on the tradition of Aga Khan III he has widened the capacity and geographic reach of social, economic and cultural development to improving living environments and economic potential in poor regions of the developing world and promoting a better understanding of civil society through a grassroots engagement with the stresses of

globalization on the ground within a framework of an ethic of Islam. An example of this engagement is the creation by the Imamat of one of the largest non governmental organization the AKDN, focusing on development of “enabling environments” encompassing economic, social and cultural creativity with activities oriented towards the common upliftment of all peoples. Its field of service includes education, health, rural development, conservation and infrastructure development, urban planning and rehabilitation, revitalization of cultural heritage, macro/micro financing, water and energy management and environmental control. AKDN’s commitment features a long-term dedication with development that allows local organizations to become self-reliant. See Appendix II for ethical foundations of AKDN institutions, Global Centre for Pluralism, the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamate Imamat in Ottawa. The group of development agencies that constitute the AKDN are :

- Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM)
- Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)
- Aga Khan Education Services (AKES)
- Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED)
- Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS)
- Aga Khan Planning and Building Services (AKPBS)
- Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC)
- Aga Khan University (AKU)
- University of Central Asia (UCA)

Chapter 4. Contemporary Ismaili Imamats Religious and Secular Educational Enterprises.

Two Kinds of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

(Rumi 2004)

The genesis of great civilizations was leveraged upon the fulcrum of the sacred. The social order was organized and governed upon the wisdom attributed to the divine element, transcending from the infinite

into the present space/time continuum via portals – the oracles, the sages, the prophets the Imams. Who conferred upon the individual and society an elaboration of a symbolic universe a horizon of significance - a conjoining of matter and spirit, from which to connect and draw a sense of meaning and purpose; an appreciation of the infinite distance and proximity of the divine, within which to circumscribe the quest for the annihilation of the batin and the zahir of their own being.

The genesis of “modernity” is leveraged upon a negation of the transcendent; a loss of its meaning and place in human society. The malaise generally suffered in society is a result of the interactions of (1) a misunderstood individualism with a hyper focus on the self that flattens and narrows the contexts which give meaning to self fulfilment and significance to life. The new social contract is: what matters most is my life, my beliefs, my codes, my attitudes and aspirations, and I have a right to carry them out hassle free; I do my thing and let you do yours, make no value judgments on me and I don’t judge you – different strokes for different folks. This kind of relativism (Taylor 1991) is a false consciousness and leads to a false authenticity. Moral relativity bereft and uninformed of dialogue with significant others leads ultimately to a narcissistic culture of individuals detached from any horizon of significance, veiled and obfuscated by insignificant

choices and trivialized sense of belonging, (2) An over dependence on instrumental reason as the underlying prescription of the logic and justification for our actions. Ostensibly ignoring other modes of reasoning when taking action; such as those that factor considerations and credibility to the questions of 'the right' thing to do - instead of giving primacy to the inflexibly of efficiency models (the primacy of maximizing) that easily utilize and then dispose of human solidarity our duties and responsibilities to each other to nature the moment they no longer serve our short term purpose or interests or convenience, (3) a loss of freedom arising from a soft despotism where members of society have given up an active participation in the ordering of that society – a tacit consent, and political apathy to let things happen and remain self-captive in the "iron cage" (Weber 1978).

The prescription Taylor suggests is to overcome the malaise is through a process of "retrieval": (1) Heed the internal voice - contact the transcendent within and let it guide actions towards an original and genuine way of being. Follow the moral sentiment of the voice of nature within as legitimating the "right thing to do", not to be understood as negative freedom. This is the work he calls recovering the "ethic of authenticity", by making moral contact with "the self" each individual finds his or her own unique way of being human. (2)

recognize and integrate the “the horizons of significance as the background of intelligibility” against which our lives make sense. Apply the horizons through dialogue with “significant others” as a counter-points that inform our choices. Abandon the soft relativism and anthropocentrism; instead find the higher ideal that informs choice through a process of dialogical participation. What horizons are significant are not of our own choosing – they continue to exist since time immemorial. But retrieval is not a return. It is a commitment to personal reconstitution along old horizons in the light of present realities. The infinite variety of idiosyncratic identities that surface through the process of retrieval are intelligible because they encompass a meaningful bases of comparison. This Taylor says is authenticity properly understood (1991).

The horizons of significance are the scaffolding which have transcend through the inspirations of individual ‘portals’ articulated within their societies. This articulation over millennia is perceived as a collective distributed cognition an artifact of conscious experience. It has been passed on by collective inherited narratives of moral points of departures, and ways of negotiating the past and future of tradition in the present.

An active tradition “is an historically extended, socially embedded argument, and an argument precisely about the goods

which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations.” (MacIntyre 1981: 254-255). For the Ismaili community the Hazir-Imam is the significant other who brings the horizon. He is both the system (the virtual) and the real (the manifestation): the one with whom a murid (devotee) maintains in the here and now a dialogical conversation with the past and charts an applied orientation towards an Islamic teleological movement in the here and now.

The following sections of this chapter will describe three initiatives of the Aga Khan Educational Services that attempt to integrate modern educational approaches, a Tal'im (Religious and General Islamic-oriented Educational Programme for Ismailis), The Aga Khan Academies (a planned network of 18 secular residential schools), and the East African Madrasa Project (a network of over 160 pre-schools).

Islamic-oriented Education Program for Nizari-Ismaili Muslims

In chapter One, Tariq Ramadan's (2004), Islamic educational survey raised a number of questions such as what kind of knowledge and planned educational experiences are required for young Muslims in a world of diminishing horizons of significance, of rampant individuality and instrumentalism? What kind of intellectual development would

enhance both material and cultural productivity and satiate the soul? How to amalgamate the two kinds of intelligences that Rumi identifies above – not to simply intersect the horizontal with the vertical but to integrate them in a world that constantly aims to pull the two apart? How to articulate the essence of Islam and the position of the Ismaili tariqa which is ostensibly and foremost enlivening the concept of Imamah, in a language the youth will understand? How to actualize the ethic of Islam amongst the young such that it is not only an intended aspiration?

The Ismaili engagement with these issues has resulted in a Ta'lim, an international curriculum with parent/teacher guides for religious education of Ismaili Muslim Students at the pre-school and primary levels, with a secondary level curriculum nearly completed. The program has been developed by the Department of Education, The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London and is implemented in formal educational settings at the Jamat Khana (through volunteer teachers), and at home. Its objective is to educate children in the fundamental concepts, practices and values of Islam; the faith, history, and cultures of Muslim peoples and of the Ismaili Muslim community in particular. It endeavors to promote self-development, learning, and moral engagement with society. Ta'lim is a planned curriculum embedded within modern educational principles, designed to meet the needs of

students, parents and teachers living in different countries and cultures and has been translated into several languages including Arabic, English, French, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Urdu (for an over view of the Primary Ta'lim curriculum see:

(http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/curriculum_materials/curriculum_materials.htm)

The pre-school and primary Ta'lim is a spiral design where each educational level consists of a three-year cycle (levels) of developmentally appropriate pedagogy and learning experiences and educational goals. Although each level is comprehensive it extends and relates the core concepts deeper as students understanding advance from one level to the next. The core content covers two broad areas in an effort to balance and integrate an understanding of Islam and of the Ismaili Muslim Tariqa: the fundamental beliefs and principles of the faith; and the historical, cultural and humanistic aspects of Islam. The primary aim is to have Islam understood as both a religion and a culture, as a system of beliefs as well as a way of life. Religious education is made meaningful and relevant to the lives of students through the interconnection of the religious in the secular via stories and examples drawn from the daily lives of children at their secular schools, at play, exploring in nature, and in the home; with the

premise of encouraging balance between spiritual and material aspects of life.

The Ta'lim curriculum is further supported through the IIS with additional materials and services in the areas of educational planning, teacher-training, and evaluation. These resources aim to facilitate implementation and maintain a high standard of delivery. They are available through the IIS at the local Jamat Khana through the Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Educational Boards, and directly from the IIS website on-line teaching support services, see:

http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/teaching_resources/teaching_resources.htm.

http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/pte_prog/pte_prog.htm .

Core Structural and Fundamental Features of the Ta'lim Approach Outlined in the Pre-school and Primary Guide for Parents and Teachers

Each cycle of the Ta'lim curriculum contains a series of children's readers, an activity book to reinforce, extend and respond to the learning through practical work, and a parent/teacher guidebook as a reference source for implementing the curriculum.

Foundational – seeks to provide a basic understanding of the Islamic Faith through child-centered (related to their needs, abilities

and interests) and experience based developmentally appropriate learning activities.

Integrated – builds on students ever growing experience of their own identity, their interaction with members of their own families and community as well as their encounter with the natural environment.

Child-Centered – encourages the student to think intelligently with feeling towards their religion. Encourages them to ask questions and share thoughts and feelings with parents and teachers.

Activity-Based – encouraged to learn about religion by exercising their creativity and imagination to the full through drawing, painting, singing, role-playing and craftwork.

Text and Illustrations help children to understand the universality and diversity of the Islamic tradition and culture – always within the context of unity and spirit of brotherhood that Islam fosters among Muslims.

Parent/Teacher and Activity Booklets are meant to extend enrich and supplement each booklet of the curriculum highlighting the key concepts and provide additional (deeper) information for parent and teacher of the particular concept with examples of learning activities and approach, along with sample questions aimed at: exploring their

own experiences, understanding the text, expressing their thoughts and feelings, and exploring further.

Fundamental Concepts

Tawhid of Allah and continuity of Divine Guidance – continuity of guidance in the here and now is a concept particular to the Nizari-Ismailis.

Table 1: Pre-School Activities that Bridge the Virtual and Real

Virtual	Real	Activity
<p>Allah says in the Quran: "O people, obey Allah, obey the Prophet and obey the Ulul Amr amongst you".</p> <p>The Ulul Amr is Mawlana Hazir Imam. We give bayat to Mawlana Hazir Imam. When we give bayat, we promise to obey Mawlana Hazir Imam.</p>	<p>Imamat Day is special because Shah Karim became our forty-ninth Imam on that day.</p> <p>Mawlana Hazir Imam has built big hospitals and dispensaries in some countries. Dispensaries are small hospitals where doctors and nurses take care of sick people and give them medicine.</p> <p>Mawlana Hazir Imam helps all people.</p> <p>The firmans of Mawlana Hazir Imam teach us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to say our prayers regularly -to go to school regularly -to speak the truth -to respect our parents and elders -to be kind to other people -to help other people 	<p>The activity in this unit is questioning:</p> <p>Do you remember last years Imamat Day? Why is it a special day for us?</p> <p>Which school do you go to?</p> <p>What do you learn at school?</p> <p>What has Mawlana Hazir Imam built?</p> <p>Who are these schools and hospitals for?</p> <p>Why is Mawlana Hazir Imam happy if we go to school regularly?</p> <p>How can we help people?</p>

Practice of Prayer as a Fundamental Pillar of Islam – Allah listens to our prayers, Allah loves and cares for us. Why do we pray? To thank and praise Allah, to seek His help and protection, to remember Him, to seek his protection. How do we pray? The special postures and actions in prayer, having a pure heart when praying. Praying for others.

Fundamental Values: Throughout the series values of honesty, kindness, forgiveness, helping one another and respect for elders, importance of humility and awareness that Allah is ever-present and that all success is due to Allah’s grace are interweaved

Lower Primary (Grade One)

Theme One, Allah the Creator: Al-Khaliq (Allah the Creator), Ar-Rahman (The Most Kind), Al-Ahad (The One).

Theme Two, Prophet Muhammad: The Guidance of Allah, The Example of the Prophet, The Messenger of Allah.

Theme Three, Our Imams: Our First Imam, The Line of Imamat, Helping People Everywhere.

Table 2: Primary Activities that Bridge the Virtual and Real

Virtual	Real	Activities
Our Imams in the past: Prophet Muhammad said to Muslims at Ghadir	Our present Imam is Mawlana Shah Karim al-Husayni. He is our forty-ninth Imam. Mawlana	Crossword puzzle. Matching Farman to illustrations.

Virtual	Real	Activities
<p>Khumm: "Ali is the Mawla of those people whose Mawla I am. O Allah, be the friend of those who are the friends of Ali and be the enemy of those who are enemies of Ali"</p> <p>Mawlana Jafar as-Sadiq was our fifth Imam famous for his deep knowledge of Islam.</p> <p>Mawlana al-Muizz was our fourteenth Imam he founded the city of Cairo and Al-Azhar University in Egypt.</p> <p>Mawlana Aala Muhammad was our twenty-fourth Imam he lived in a fort called Alamut in Iran.</p> <p>Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah was our forty-ninth Imam, he worked hard to help Muslims all over the world.</p>	<p>Shah Karim comes from the family of Prophet Muhammad. He is our Imam az-Zaman, the Imam of our time. He guides us to think about what is right from wrong (in accordance with the conditions of our time). We are his murids. A murid is one who loves and obeys the Imam of the time. Our Imam guides us through his farmans – he tells us: "I want you to always be regular in your prayers and religious duties", "I would like those of you who are attending school to work extremely hard (and) become the best student in the school", "All children should exercise for at least two hours in the fresh air everyday".</p>	<p>Completing picture of a busy hospital ward.</p> <p>Matching activity words to a busy illustrated classroom scenario.</p> <p>Matching words to an illustrated village activity centered around growing food.</p> <p>Role play following farmans: praying, helping people, exercising, studying hard, working together etc.</p>
<p>Islam teaches us to be kind and caring, and to help people everywhere. Allah wishes us to care for the poor, the sick, the hungry and the homeless. Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali helped such people whenever they could.</p>	<p>Mawlana Hazir Imam guides us to follow Allah's command to help the poor and the needy. Our Imam shows us how we can help all over the world. No matter who they are and where they live, it is our duty as Muslims to help them. We can help people to be healthy, educated and to grow food. Mawlana Hazir Imam wants everyone to work together and help each other. He has said to us, "I would like you ... to come together, work together, help each other</p>	

Virtual	Real	Activities
	and join hands in your work, as it is only by working together ... that we will succeed”	

Continued Aspirations of the Aga Khan Development Networks International Educational Institutions

Riches diminish by expenditure, while knowledge is increased by dissemination. (Imam Ali)

The oldest institution of higher learning in the world is generally considered to be Al-Azhar⁶³ University created shortly after the city of Cairo⁶⁴ itself was founded by the Fatimid Imam Al-Muez (d. 996 c.e.). Nearly a thousand years later Al-Azhar continues to function as a preeminent Muslim university attracting scholars and students of both secular education and theology; and the Aga Khan’s have continued their family legacy as patrons without regard to ethnicity, gender, race or religion.

In its essence ethnocentricity refers to the tendency to view one’s own group as more superior and objectifying the normative evaluative means by which other societies are scrutinized, considered and appraised. Cultural ethnocentrism then is the surfacing of latent individual idiosyncratic biases and assumptions that frame the lay persons or scholars hypothesis and interpretation of evidence.

Epistemological ethnocentrism are those biases which are common to the entire field of study which give rise to the various paradigms and circumscribe the parameters of acceptable discourse (Reagan 2005).

The praxis of modernity is the realization that a particular groups culture and tradition is but one among numerous valid others. Within the cultural diffusions of a globalized collective consciousness, the challenge is which tradition to maintain and why? The role of education then is not to insulate or perpetuate a cultural hegemony but to allow the individual to construct a loom upon which they will weave the multiplicity of diverse traditions that impact them into a fabric that is tailored to the expression of their own identity.

The Aga Khan Educational Services (AKES), started by Aga Khan III over a hundred years ago, today totals over 300 schools (from pre-school to higher secondary) in seven countries with a student body of over 54, 000. In colonial Africa and Asia, ethnic communities were responsible for their own education; the AKES grew out of this response to serve the Ismaili community. After independence governments consolidated many private and community schools into a national system of education. The AKES lived through this process private-national-private as governments realized they could not completely carry the cost of providing education to all their citizens. The AKES were among the first to open their doors to other

communities, had retained English as the medium of instruction, and had built strong relationships within their own network and national school systems. Initiatives to enhance educational quality, services and processes have been incorporated into the AKES infrastructure since the early 1980's. These include continued administrator and teacher professionalisation services and improved subject content knowledge enhancement, school improvement research, through national service companies and the Institute for Educational Development of the Aga Khan University in Karachi Pakistan.

The Aga Khan Academies: Logic of the Concept

The effective world of the future is one of pluralism-that is to say, a world that comprehends and accepts differences. But such a world must be based on a new intellectual and spiritual equality and it must be educated to see in pluralism, opportunities for growth in all areas of human endeavour. History has shown in every part of the world and at every time, that the rejection of pluralism and the attempt to normalise the human race has always resulted in factionalism, oppressiveness and economic and social regression.

(Aga Khan IV 2003)

The newest endeavor of the AKES is the planned network of 18 residential (primary through higher secondary) Aga Khan Academies (AKA) over the next 10 years to provide access to education of an international caliber and the highest standard of excellence in selected countries⁶⁵ of the Middle East, South and Central Asia and Sub-

Saharan Africa. Education development partners⁶⁶ will contribute to the quality and innovation of the global curriculum and professional development programs – through the International Academic Partnership⁶⁷ (IAP). Each Academy will incorporate a Professional Development Centre expected to outreach to the surrounding community for teacher training, curricular innovation and mentoring as such it will benefit teachers from schools other than operated by the AKES.

The common core curriculum adopted from the International Baccalaureate includes: history, literature, general physical sciences, information technology, philosophy and ethics, mastery of at least two languages and English, cultural studies, comparative religion, art history theory and criticism, sociology, political science, government and global economics, and athletics. The curriculum aims to create an intellectual community of graduates, all of whom may not continue to higher studies but will, bring a progressive world view and superior habits of learning to their professional lives and the societies they establish themselves in.

(<http://www.akdn.org/akes/Brochureinternational.pdf>)

Practices and Values that Inform the Intentioned Outcomes of the AKA

Socio-economic status will not be a limiting factor: admissions will be needs blind and open, selection will be based on merit, scholarships will be granted to exceptional candidates. Students and teachers will have the opportunity for exchanges between AKA and allied schools in Europe and North America, including the 1300 International Baccalaureate schools. Exchanges will also be encouraged for students from industrialized countries as their "Year Abroad" program, to experience and learn first hand about the developing world. As the AKA looks towards the future and envisions a better world it is anticipated that these exchanges, will foster a pluralistic experiential worldview in a variety of multicultural settings. Graduates of the AKA will be part of an international cluster who have studied a common curriculum accepted and recognized by universities around the world. It is projected that graduates will be members of a new generation driven by knowledge and inspiration to change their societies. They will be secure in their own identities and have a pluralistic outlook respecting the culture and traditions of others, will be self aware and have a social conscience and develop the capacity to make ethical decisions, will gain leadership skills and commitment to the development of their communities, nation and global civil society, they will view themselves as citizens of the world, as such will have

the ability to value and negotiate complex cultural settings.

(<http://www.akdn.org/akes/Brochureinternational.pdf>)

The Aga Khan's goal for education is to,

stimulate students to consider a variety of perspectives on some of the fundamental questions posed by the human condition: "What is truth?" "What is reality?" and "What are my duties to my fellow man, to my country and to God?" At the same time, education must reinforce the foundations of identity in such a way as to reinvigorate and strengthen them so they can withstand the shock of change.

(Aga Khan IV)

<http://www.akdn.org/akes/Brochureinternational.pdf>)

Lofty and admirable goals. Will they be realized? Time will tell.

One Size-Fits-All Approach to Education

The worry of using the curricula as shown above modeled on the International Baccalaureate syllabi is the grounding of it in an epistemology of western humanist tradition leading to the designed curricula of liberal education, with its emphasis on the productive processes of education, (Martin 1982) and on the short-sighted detachment of self (student) and object (subject). The ideal of a liberally educated person is an acquisition of the "cognitive perspectives they are supposed to have ... [through] their subject matter, their conceptual apparatus, their standards of proof and adequate evidence, their way of looking at things that must be acquired if the ideal is to be realized. (Martin 1982). The inculcation of

such cognitive perspectives tends towards universalism than pluralism. An suitable ideal of an educated person, I would argue, must also mirror a rational understanding of the limits and biases of the existing disciplines of knowledge on the one hand and an equal validation of counter methodologies and comprehensions.

A Recommendation of Rethinking Curricula for Sustainable Society

The notions of pluralism thus far have focused on inter-cultural harmony and a dialogue of civilizations, a necessary precondition for a peaceful globalized world. A missing component equally urgent is the ethic of environmental consciousness, as articulated by David Orr in his article, "What is education for?" He makes a convincing case for an educational intervention for planetary ecological sustainable development, a mandate just as important as the nurturing of civil societies,

By the year 2000 perhaps as much as 20% of the life forms extant on the planet in the year 1900 will be extinct. ... The truth is that many things on which our future health and prosperity depend are in dire jeopardy: climate sustainability, the resilience and productivity of natural systems, the beauty of the natural world, and biological diversity. It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. Rather, it is largely the results of work by people with BAs, BScs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs. ... My point is simply that education is no guarantee of decency, prudence or wisdom. (Orr 1991).

Orr suggests six broad principles upon which to rethink

education:

- First, all education is environmental education: integrate all subjects with the awareness of their ecological impact.
- Second, the goal of education is not mastery of subject but mastery of one's person.
- Third, knowledge carries with it the responsibility to see that it is well used in the world.
- Fourth, we cannot say we know something until we understand the effects of this knowledge on real people and their communities.
- Fifth, the power of examples over words, global responsibility starts locally in the institutions where one is educated and the community where one lives.
- Six, learning should occur out in the real world, through 'live' projects and not simulated experiments confined in classrooms.

For the students and faculty of the Aga Khan Academies to further impact their societies in the present their curricular objectives must facilitate them to engage in learning and solving 'real world' problems that real people in their communities are facing. Students should more often than not step out of their classrooms and residences to interface with local, regional, and national governments and NGOs to assist and contribute creative solutions towards their development. This would be real hands-on learning. The successes and failures would provide a far richer educational experience, sense of utility of knowledge, and fostered commitment to personal and community development.

Role of Madrasa Pre-School in Facilitating Primary School Admissions

The Madrasa or indigenous Islamic school system exists in tandem with adapted/adopted formal western school systems in a number of countries. The two systems derive from different traditions and have radically different philosophies and methods, curricula, cultures and expressions. Madrasas are primarily community based religious institutions that may or may not develop overtly political agendas. The subject matter consists of the Quran and Islamic teachings, philosophies, sciences, jurisprudence and histories written by masters over a period of fourteen hundred years. The idiom is a combination of Arabic and local languages. Traditional modes of teaching are employed by the Waalims (a generic term for a person trained and qualified in Islamic law and outlook). The environment is strictly patriarchal and authoritarian. Teaching methods include memorization, emotional appeals and rhetoric. Madrasas educate and outreach to more of the global Muslim population than the Western School System. Madrasas exist wherever there are communities of Muslims desiring such an institution including Canada.

There is a successful model of Madrasa that takes an approach to integrate Early Childhood Education methodology operating in East Africa over the past twenty years, the official grantee of the project is

the Aga Khan Educational Services, with additional support by CIDA and the Bernard Lewis Foundation. Through the initiatives of Swafia Said, a school teacher in Mombassa Kenya, over a hundred Madrasas are now educating preschool boys and girls while drawing on current knowledge about active developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant early childhood practice, within traditional Muslim communities. The curriculum is highly responsive to parental expectations that children be socialized into the cultural mores of the community. As such it introduces children to indigenous stories, songs and dance, art activities that incorporate Islamic motifs and patterns, narratives from the Quran as well as adab (rules of etiquette); in addition children learn Arabic, English and Kiswahili, simple reading and numeric skills (prerequisite for entry into formal school system). There is training for ECD (Early Childhood Development) teachers and the establishment of several Madrasa resource centres. (Aga Khan Foundation Annual Report 2004)

The replicability and success of this model to countries of East Africa makes it probable that it can be extended to other suitable environments outside East Africa. The model described above demonstrates that the boundaries between the Madrasa system and formal secular education systems are not immutable, rather there exists a permeable membrane which I believe is worthy of further

study to identify those salient features with regards to curriculum, instruction and community participation with the aim to generalize this model in the developing and industrialized worlds, including Canada. I believe that there is enormous potential in this endeavor and there would be certain support from CIDA and UNESCO through the World Education Forum's commitment to achieving education for all by the year 2015 to which Canada has made commitments.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the way in which the Nizari Ismaili religious tradition has historically, theologically, ethically and personally adapted to meet the challenge of modernity.

One of the strengths of the Nizari-Ismaili Muslim social imaginary is that the tensions of identity negotiations and creations do not necessarily fall out of Taylor's (2004) notion of the Great Disembedding. Whereas for Taylor, the flaw is that the vertical axis is a tenuous somewhat obfuscated connection to the greater cosmological existence, for the Ismaili, the vertical is ever-present. For Muslims we are always and already in the domain of God as opposed to just communicating to it occasionally. With the Hazir-Imam, the connection to God is immediate both virtual and real and not just something one occasionally remembers to practice. So if the Ismaili social identity is already founded in the transcendental, then the idea of grappling with modernity is really a moot question. Since all consciousness and material actions is rooted in the cosmological, then the only grappling would be picking amongst personal choices, against an ever-present horizon. Individual choices in the social imaginaries are thus made important and meaningful because they exist within an inescapable cosmological order "Islam forbids the

separation between the way you deal with people in society and that in which you discharge your religious duties. The meanings of life, its aims and ethics are part and parcel of the integrated unity of the Muslim environment.” (Aga Khan VI 1986)

Appendices

Appendix I

Reflections on an Early Education

"It may seem strange that my family turned to the Jesuits for my education in Western matters ... The schooling they gave me was not in the least narrow or restricted. They lifted my mind to wide horizons, they opened my eyes to the outside world ... Most important of all perhaps, they encouraged me to read for myself, and from the time I was ten or thereabouts, I burrowed freely into our vast library of books in English, French, Persian, and Arabic. My three tutors gave me the key to knowledge, and for that I have always been profoundly grateful ... But alas, of the man responsible for my education in Arabic and Persian and in all matters Islamic I have nothing but bad to say. He was extremely learned, a profound scholar, with a deep and extensive knowledge of Arabic literature and Islamic history, but all his learning had not widened his mind or warmed his heart. He was a bigoted sectarian, and in spite of his vast reading his mind was one of the darkest and narrowest that I have ever encountered. If Islam had indeed been the thing he taught then surely God had sent Mohammad not to be a blessing for mankind but a curse. It was saddening and in a sense frightening to hear him talk. He gave one the feeling that God has created men solely to send them to hell and eternal damnation.

However deep and precise his knowledge ... it had withered into bitterness and hate. In later years he returned to Tehran ... and acquired the reputation of being one of the most learned scholars of Islamic lore in all Iran, yet to the end, I think, he must have remained the bigoted mullah whom I knew. ... Perhaps it was this early experience which for the rest of my life has given me a certain prejudice against professional men of religion – be they mullahs or maulvis, curates, vicars, or bishops. Many of them I admit are exemplary people. ... I have known, admired, and revered. ... I am aware of a tranquil sense of mental and spiritual communion with them, for our mutual respect for each others beliefs. ... The vast majority of Muslim believers all over the world are charitable and gently disposed to those who hold other faiths, and they pray for divine forgiveness and compassion for all. There developed, however, in Iran and Iraq a school of doctors of religious law whose outlook and temper – intolerance, bigotry, and spiritual aggressiveness – resembled my old teachers and in my travels about the world I have met too many of their kind – Christian, Muslim, and Jew – who ardently and ostensibly sing the praises of the Lord, and yet are eager to send to hell and eternal damnation all except those who hold precisely their own set of opinions. For many years I must confess,

this sort of person I have sought to avoid.” (Aga Khan III 1954: 15-18)

The above quote gives (I hope) in a sense a position point along coordinates of a social imaginary – open minded in seeking knowledge, being aware and reflective when integrating that into oneself, being critical of those who claim a monolithic view, and cultivating tolerance and a pluralistic worldview.

Early Progressive Leadership in the Real-politik

The following piece aims to demonstrate the formulation of the young Aga Khan’s collaborative leadership style under the back drop of the 1897 bubonic plague outbreak in Bombay,

“The plague had its ugly, traditional effect on public morals. Respect for law and order slipped ominously. There were outbreaks of looting and violence. ... Now it happened that ... there [was] ...Professor Haffkine, a Russian Jew, who had come to work on problems connected with cholera ... He was convinced that inoculation offered a method of combating bubonic plague. He pressed his views on official quarters in Bombay without a great deal of success. Controversy seethed around him; but he had little chance to put his views into practise. Meanwhile people were dying like flies – among them many of my own followers. I knew something must be done, and I knew I

must take the initiative. I was not, as I have already recounted, entirely without scientific knowledge; I knew something of Pasture's work in France. I was convinced that the Surgeon-General's Department was working along the wrong lines. I passed it and addressed myself direct to Professor Haffkine. He and I formed an immediate alliance and a friendship ... I freely put at his disposal one of my biggest houses ... here he established himself and here he remained about two years until the Government of India, convinced of the success of his methods, took over the whole research project and put it on a proper, adequate, and official footing. Meanwhile I had to act swiftly and drastically. The impact of the plague amongst my own people was alarming. It was in my power to set an example. I had myself publicly inoculated, and I took care to see that the news of why I had done was spread as far as possible as quickly as possible. My followers could see for themselves that I, their Imam, having full view of many witnesses submitted myself to this mysterious and dreaded process, had not thereby suffered. I was twenty years old. I ranged myself against orthodox medical opinion of the time ... At any rate it worked. Among my own followers the news circulated swiftly, as I had intended it to do, that their Imam had been inoculated, and that they had to follow his example. Deliberately I put my leadership to the test. It survived and vindicated itself in a new and perhaps dramatic

fashion. My followers allowed themselves to be inoculated, not in few isolated instances but as a group. Within a short time statistics were firmly on my side; the death rate from the plague was demonstrably far, far lower among Ismailis than in any other section of the community; the number of new cases ... was sharply reduced; and finally the incidence of recovery was far higher. A man's first battle in life is always important. Mine had taught me much, about myself and about other people. I had fought official apathy and conservatism, fear, and ignorance. My past foretold my future, for they were foes that were to confront me again and again throughout my life. By the time the crises was passed ... I possessed an inner self-confidence and strength that temporary and transient twists of fortune henceforth could not easily shake. A by-product of the influence and the authority which I had exerted was that others than my own Ismaili followers looked to me for leadership." (Aga Khan 1954:.37-39)

A Summer with New Friends (1898) Creating a Foundation for Cultural Capital in Two Societies

"I set out to discover the Europe of which I had read and heard so much, which beckoned with so insistent and imperious an attraction. ... I set out from Bombay early in February. ... It was the height of the Riviera winter season ... a considerable proportion of the Royalty, nobility and gentry of Europe was concentrated along this

strip of coastline. Queen Victoria was at Cimiez, ... the Emperor Franz Joseph at Cap Martin, a score or so Russian Grand Dukes and Austrian Archdukes in their villas and palaces, half the English peerage with a generous sprinkling of millionaires from industry and finance; and most of the Almanach de Gotha from Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Balkan countries lately 'emancipated' from Ottoman rule, and Tsarist Russia. The young man from Bombay was dazzled and awed. I knew nobody. ... But I enjoyed myself enormously – looking and listening. ... I had ten memorable days on the Riviera, and then off I set for Paris. ... I had steeped myself in French literature and French history, of the whole nineteenth century and earlier. I knew the names of the streets, I knew the way Parisians lived, acted and thought. ... Where did I stay but at the famous Hotel Bristol? What did I do on my first morning in Paris but pay my call at the British Embassy? ... [then] to the Carnavalet Museum I went, to the Louvre, to the Bibliotheque National. There I was shown around by the curator of Oriental books and manuscripts ... He was astonished, he said, that a young man who spoke English and French so fluently could read with ease ancient classical Persian and Arabic manuscripts. I was astonished in my turn (although I did not say so) that such a distinguished savant should forget that Persian and Arabic were, after all, my native languages, the languages which my forbearers had

spoken for hundreds of years. ... In the evenings I sallied forth to the theatre and opera. ... I saw Madame Bartet ... and thought her the most enchanting and accomplished actress I had ever seen – and now, with a lifetime in between, that is a verdict which I see no reason to alter. ... I went several times to the opera, and except for Faust, every opera that I saw was by Meyerbeer. Who ever hears an opera by Meyerbeer nowadays? His reputation suddenly dropped like a plummet, and yet I think he has been unfairly treated, with a fierce contempt which he does not merit. I know he is no Wagner; I know that he cannot compare with the best of Mozart or Verdi, but I have a hankering belief that a Meyerbeer revival might prove quite a success. ... The private, incognito status in which I had hitherto travelled was no longer possible. I had reached the capital and centre of the Empire. At the station to meet me when I arrived was an equerry from Buckingham Palace, representing Her Majesty; and from the India Office, representing the Secretary of State ... Soon after I reached the hotel the Duke of Connaught, who had known me in my childhood and boyhood at home, paid a call and stayed for a long time. The British Royal Family's watchful and friendly interest in me had not abated. ... Real power, political and economic, was in the hands of a few. The rulers of England and the Empire consisted of a small closed circle of aristocracy, and of those members of the rising plutocracy

who has attached themselves to, and got themselves accepted by, the aristocracy. To that circle my own rank and then august connections which I possessed gave me a direct and immediate entry. I who have lived to see the demagogue and the dictator in power in a large part of what was once civilized Europe, saw in my young manhood, at very close quarters, the oligarchy that controlled Victorian England and the Empire. ... All doors in society were open to me. I took my place in a glittering, superbly organized round and ritual: ... In due course I was summoned to [my first] audience with Her Majesty at Windsor Castle. ... The only other person in the room ... was the Duke of Connaught, in whose presence I did not feel shy or overawed. ... I kissed the hand which she held out to me. ... I was knighted by the Queen at this meeting but she observed that, since I was a prince myself and the descendant of many kings, she would not ask me to kneel, or to receive the accolade and the touch of the sword upon my shoulder, but she would simply hand the order to me. I was greatly touched by her consideration and courtesy. ... For the last decade of his life I was honoured with the warm, personal friendship of King Edward VII. ... but I must not give the impression that I spent all my time frivolously. ... [I met] Lord Lister, the great surgeon. ... I also met Lord Kelvin, then the doyen of English scientists, who assured me that flying in heavier than air machines was a physical impossibility. I was often the

guest of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts at whose house I met several of the leading spiritualists of the period. I called, too, on Miss Florence Nightingale. She and the Baroness, next to Queen Victoria herself, were the most eminent women of the time. ... Miss Nightingale retained a formidable interest in affairs. One of the topics on which she kept herself most closely and fully informed was the British administration of India – especially so far as it concerned matters of health and hygiene. ... No newly-appointed Viceroy would have dared, before he left England to take up his appointment, to omit a call on Miss Nightingale, and for all of them a profitable and helpful experience it proved to be. She laid out the plans for the system of military cantonments established for the British garrison all over India, she devised a medical administrative system, and systems of pay and allowances which subsisted almost without change in detail, certainly without change in principle, until the end of British rule in India. It was perfectly natural that I should call on her. ... I ventured, however, on more general topics. ... and I asked Miss Nightingale whether she thought that there had been any real improvement in human affairs since her youth, whether faith in God had extended and deepened. ... [she] discussed it with the gravity with which I had propounded it. After all there occurred in [her] lifetime (and in mine it has been redoubled) a vast and rapid increase in man's power to exploit his

natural resources – from steam propulsion to the internal combustion engine and thence to atomic fission – whose relation to or divorce from faith and God and all that such faith means in action, is a topic of some importance. ... Lord Spencer, who had been a close colleague of Gladstone's and a member of his cabinet ... talked freely if sombrely about that perennially critical issue in British politics in the Victorian Age, the Irish Question. ... Within a quarter of a century every detail of the prophecy [Lord Spencer's] to which I listened that summer night in 1898 was to be meticulously fulfilled. And in India there were those who watched the working out of Ireland's destiny and were fully cognizant of the lessons it taught, the message it signalled across the world. I saw the season through to the end ... During this otherwise pleasant summer I was greatly shocked and saddened by a grievous piece of news from India. A near kinsman, Hashim Shah ... was murdered by a steward in my house in Poona. Mercifully this was not ... prompted by motives of religious fanaticism, but the outcome of personal resentment and some personal grudge. However, its warning could not be discounted; there was an element of lawlessness and violence in my own close surroundings which would, sooner or later, have to be dealt with firmly, if it were not to become a running sore in the line of Bombay and Poona." (Aga Khan 1954: 40-56)

'Message to the World of Islam – Aga Khan III' (1977)

True Islamic Charity in Thought -

A Prayer for the Brotherhood of Believers

Aga Khan III. Cairo, 1955

“Though Ismailis have been always staunch and firm believers in the truth of their own faith in the Imamate Holy Succession, they have never, like some other sects, gone to the other extreme of condemning brother Muslims who have other interpretations of the Divine Message of our Holy Prophet (S.A.S.).

Ismailis have always believed and have been taught in each generation by their Imams that they hold the rightful interpretation of the succession to the Holy Prophet but that is no reason why other Muslims, who believe differently, should not be accepted as brothers in Islam and dear in person and prayed for and never publicly or privately condemned, leave alone abused.

I hope that in these days when the Muslims have to hold together in view of all the dangers, external and internal, from all quarters, I hope and believe and pray that Ismailis may show their true Islamic charity in thought and prayer for the benefit and happiness of all Muslims, men, women and children of all sects.”

Muslims Awake...!

“Formalism and verbal interpretation of the teachings of the Prophet are in absolute contradiction with his whole life history.

[We must keep within] our highest moral emotional and spiritual self in our own historical development.

In a case like India, in countries like Java, like Morocco and like North Africa we can learn from our European fellow-subjects, or rulers if you prefer so to call them, those secrets of power over nature, of scientific, economic, and industrial development which has made Europe so powerful.”

Pan-Islamism

“This natural and worthy spiritual movement makes not only the Master and his teaching but also his children of all climes an object of affection to the Turk or the Afghan, to the Pakistani or the Egyptian. A famine or a desolating fire in the Moslem quarters of Kashgar or Sarajevo would immediately draw the sympathy and material assistance of the Muslims of Karachi or Cairo. The real spiritual and cultural unity of Islam must ever grow, for to the follower of the Prophet it is the foundation of the life of the soul.

The spread of this spiritual and cultural Pan-Islamism, this true religion of brotherhood and affection, in our time has been promoted

by the facilities of modern civilization, by the growth of the spirit of liberty and by the general awakening of the East which began late in the nineteenth century.”

Future Development of Muslim States

Aga Khan III addressed the members of the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi, on 1st February, 1952.

“Without a proper spiritual motive power, a great nation is never built. For that reason I was entirely absorbed [in my address to you two years ago] with what should be the spirit of Islam ... Today I will place before you, for your consideration, some observations, as to Pakistan particularly and other Muslim nations generally, for their material development.

The earth is getting smaller and smaller and its countries and people more and more dependent on each other. Today changes in scientific discoveries, in methods of production, in the use of such primary materials, say, as iron or oil, in one country can very seriously and very soon affect even the life of the individual in another part of the world. ... The fundamental fact is that the only two really independent and master nations in the world the United States and Russia – have one and the same objective though the methods are totally different. The national effort of the time as well as the national

effort of the other has one objective capital investment with its inevitable consequences constantly increasing proportionate in production. The end is the same. The method is incredibly different.

By different methods, the race is being run to attain the highest replacement of paltry human material creative capacity by the use of the forces of nature, under man's intelligence. Once this race has been started, for those who have not prepared to follow this example, whether in Europe or Asia, there are only two alternatives, of colonialism or communism. Colonialism is not a political process. It is the absence of production proportionate to population, by the absence of capital investment in the past present or future. Nobody dreams of changing the political conditions of certain European countries but if present methods there are continued, they are already on the brink of colonialism, in fact, though not in name.

What about us here? What about the Muslim world? If real independence for Pakistan is desired or for that matter in any Muslim country, then the present generation must be ready to reduce welfarism and consumerism to the very limit and replace it by capital investment. If the whole effort of the nation is conscientiously, as in Russia, brought to the understanding to reduce consumption and to put all its effort on capital investment, you may, in say 20 years, build up the elements, of free system, independent alike of communism and

colonialism. Imperialism and colonialism are not brought about by the desire of dominance of one and the sufferance of the other. When the so called imperialist but productively dominating power produces so much and the colonial power produces so little and it has to be ready to receive from the abundance of the one what it cannot produce itself, that day colonialism has come to stay, whether it be in Europe or Asia. Every year that we have peace, there is a profitable balance somewhere in each nation and if and when that profitable balance is constantly used for capital investment and no other, while by sacrifice the amount of that is constantly increased, it will be possible for this country and for the countries of the Middle East to get a new lease of life.

We know that vast plans are being made by Government for development. But unless every man is ready to realize the importance of investment, howsoever small and on the other hand the guidance from the authorities by which such investments are diverted to the production of capital goods either directly or by use of such materials as air and water-power for the production of the essentials of life like food, then only you can build a healthy independent national state. Science must come into industry; industry in which, of course, I include the biggest of all industry, agriculture, must have behind it the conscientious and willing effort of the people. If this willing and

conscientious effort is neglected, this higher education of the nation is left to go-as-you-please methods, then the time may come when in very self defense, some form of compulsory investment such as in Russia, may have to be tried, or total economic dependence on either one or the other of the two capital investment countries viz., America or Russia. It is for this reason that the leaders of public opinion, the leaders of our religious life, statesmen and the Ulemas, who as true Muslims, must realize that soul and body are interdependent and they are one in life, may use their influence with the masses to bring about a general awakening to the necessity of constant investment. With the standard of life low and precarious, it is difficult to forego the immediate advantage even though it may mean a future loss. But the choice must be made now. People should be educated not merely to read and write but to realize that howsoever hard it may be, yet power production must be bought by machinery and machinery can only be had by investment."

What Have We Forgotten in Islam?

Aga Khan III's diagnosis in a letter dated 4th April, 1952 to H.E. Dr. Zahid Husain President, Arabiyyah Jamiyyat, Karachi.

"Of late in Pakistan various people have said that the downfall of the Muslim states during the last 200 or 300 years has been due to forgetting Islamic principles and this is a warning for the people of the

new God-given state of Pakistan. Certainly I agree that we forgot Islamic principles in these three hundred years, but here great care must be taken to understand what Islamic principles we forgot and what Islamic principles we did not forget, for, it may be, that the stress is being hid in the popular mind on what we had not forgotten.

Islam is fundamentally in its very nature a natural religion. Throughout the Quran God's signs (Ayats) are referred to as the natural phenomenon, the law and order of the universe, the exactitudes and consequences of the relations between natural phenomenon in cause and effect. Over and over, the stars, sun, moon, earthquakes, fruits of the earth and trees are mentioned as the signs of divine power, divine law and divine order. Even in the Ayeh of Noor, divine is referred to as the natural phenomenon of light and even references are made to the fruit of the earth. During the great period of Islam, Muslims did not forget these principles of their religion.

But at the end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th, the European Renaissance rapidly advanced in knowledge of nature, namely all those very Ayats of God to which the Quran refers when Muslims forgot the Ayats, namely natural phenomenon, its law and order which are the proofs of divine guidance used in the Quran, but we stuck to our rites and ceremonies, to our prayers and fast alone, forgetting the other half of our faith. Thus during those 200/300 years,

Europe and the West got an advance out of all proportion to the Muslim world and we found everywhere in Islam (inspite of our humble prayer, our moral standard, our kindness and gentleness towards the poor) constant denotation of one form or another and the Muslim world went down. Why? Because we forgot the law and order of nature to which the Quran refers as proof of God's existence and we went against God's natural laws. This and this alone has led to the disastrous consequences we have seen.

You, gentlemen, have a great responsibility. The only practical hope I see is that all your universities in Pakistan should have a faculty of Islamic religious and philosophical studies attached to ordinary curriculum for post-graduate students, who alone could be recognized as Ulemas. Something of the kind I know is being prepared in Egypt. A great Muslim divine, alas dead far too soon, the late Sheikh al-Maraghi, insisted in Azhar that natural laws should be taught according to the latest discoveries; but if we turn to Iran, Pakistan, North Africa, outside Egypt, we find that the Ulemas are being still brought up on the same old lines and the modern students on a totally different line. There is no unity of soul without which there can be no greatness.

Remember that in the great first century they knew more about sea and wind than Europe ever did for hundreds of years to come. Today where are you? Unless our universities have the keen graduated

Ulema school for men brought up in the same atmosphere as the science students, realizing the fundamental truth that Islam is a natural religion of which the Ayats are the universe in which we live and move and have our being, the same causes will lead to the same disastrous results.”

The Status of Women

Aga Khan III message to Ismailia Women's Association, March 1953.

“The Prophet of Islam (who has been so cruelly libeled in the Western world, by ignorance or malice) was wont to say that men can but follow in the footsteps of their mothers towards Paradise. And it was not for nothing, according to Muslim belief that his first convert was a woman.

Biologically the female is more important to the race than the male. While average women are capable of earning their own livelihood like men, they are the guardians of the life of the race, and only through their natural constitution are they able to bear the double burden. Experience shows the strong probability that the active influence of women on society, under free and equal conditions, is calculated not only to bring about practical improvement in the domestic realm, but also a higher and nobler idealism into the life of

the state. Those who know Moslem society from within readily admit that its higher spiritual life owes a great debt to the example and influence of women. Today, as in the lifetime of the Prophet, probably the majority of devout and reverent followers of his teaching are women.

No progressive thinker of today will challenge the claim that the social advancement and general well-being of communities are greatest where women are least debarred, by artificial barriers and narrow prejudice, from taking their full position as citizens.

The progressive modernization which depends on co-operation and understanding will be impossible unless women are permitted to play their legitimate part in the great work of national regeneration on a basis of political equality."

Patriotism and Loyalty

Aga Khan III Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of his Imamatus at Karachi on 3rd February 1954.

"You Ismailis know perfectly well that it is a fundamental point in your religion that wherever you be whatever the state where life and honor are protected, you must give your entire loyalty and devotion to the welfare and service of that country. You who have the honor of being citizens of Pakistan, to you, I give this advice: do not interpret

your citizenship purely in a passive form but patriotism and loyalty must be active and productive. I realize fully that the overwhelming majority of the population have to look after their means of livelihood and the up-bringing of your children, but work if carried out intensively, is service to God and Fatherland. Make your daily labor, a labor of love howsoever difficult and hard it may be. Do remember that in democracy, voting and the rights of citizenship should be used with care and attention with serious thought howsoever humble with the full realization to the best of your ability that not personal, parochial or provincial interests are to be served but the greater good and the welfare of the population as a whole and the security of the state as such. If the people of a nation are united and self-sacrificing, any amount of difficulties and overwhelming misfortunes can be overcome. We have seen how Turkey has come out stronger than ever after a hundred years of misfortunes and disasters. There are two other cases which should be an example and should not discourage anyone in the face of difficulties. Germany and Japan after the greatest defeats known to history have by hard work and devotion raised themselves to be honored, respected and powerful members of the comity of nations. If every Ismaili living in Pakistan remembers and interprets his citizenship, howsoever humble his contributions may be, with the spirit of courage and devotion, then indeed I am happy to

think that after many years of surgical operations and illnesses, I am still alive to give you this fatherly advice.”

My Philosophy of Happiness - His Will

“I should, first of all, advise my heirs to learn to desire the thing that happens, and not try to mould events to their desires. It was silly of the poet Omar to write:

Ah love, could you and I with Him conspire, to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire. Would we not shatter it to bits, and then remold it nearer to the heart's desire?

That way lies unhappiness, destruction. It is not sorry scheme of things, and the business, the duty of man, is to get himself into harmony with it.

I would counsel my heirs to seek satisfaction, not in the flux of circumstances, but within themselves; I would have them resolute, self-controlled, independent but not rebellious. Let them seek communion with that Eternal Reality which I call Allah and you call God! For that is the twin problem of existence...to be at once entirely yourself and altogether at one with the Eternal.”

From the Last will and testament of Aga Khan III, 1957

“Ever since the time of my ancestor Ali, the first Imam, that is to say over a period of thirteen hundred years, it has always been the

tradition of our family that each Imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants, whether they be sons or remote male issue and in these circumstances and in view of the fundamentally altered conditions in the world in very recent years due to the great changes which have taken place including the discoveries of atomic science, I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shia Muslim Ismailia Community that I should be succeeded by a young man who has been brought up and developed during recent years and in the midst of the new age and who brings a new outlook on life to his office as Imam. For these reasons, I appoint my grandson Karim, the son of my own son, Aly Salomone Khan to succeed to the title of Aga Khan and to the Imam and Pir of all Shia Ismailian followers.”

A New Imam for a New Age – The Expansion of an Ismaili Social Imaginary in the Support of Pluralism and Civil Society
Aga Khan IV. Convocation Address Peshawar University, 1967.

“Material progress apart, I do not think it should ever be assumed that only the smaller, poorer nations are faced by apparently insoluble problems. Western Europe and North America possess much that can be envied. They also face social and moral conflicts which are far more daunting than any thing known in Asia or Africa. Increasingly, I believe, thinking people both in Europe and America are asking:

Where is this all prosperity leading us? Are we any happier? Do we get as much satisfaction out of living as did our fathers and fore-fathers?

These indeed are relevant, urgent questions. There has been a fundamental challenge to the traditional and in this case, mainly Christian religious values. The younger generation has almost completely forsaken its churches. The pressure of an acquisitive society has made quite frightening demands on family life. Mothers with younger children go out to work in the millions. The juvenile crime rate soars upwards, homes are broken, and the family unit itself is undermined at its source.

The working family in the West can earn all the money it needs in four or five days a week and then with only five or six hours work a day. Its capacity for leisure is growing every year. But what does the family do with it? Look at television? Perhaps. But what will be seen on television? Are they any nearer the complete and contented man of all our dreams?

Few would risk an affirmative answer to this questions. What has been called the permissive society, where anything goes, nothing matters, nothing is sacred or private any more, is not a promising foundation for a brave and upright new world. This fearful chase after material ease must surely be tempered by peace of mind, by conscience, by moral values, which must be resuscitated. If not, man

will simply have converted the animal instinct of feeding himself before others and even at the expense of others, into perhaps a more barbaric instinct of feeding himself and then hoarding all he can at the cost of the poor, the sick and the hungry.

It would be wrong and very foolish not to recognize that the developed industrial countries also have much from which the new nations can learn. The picture is not all dark but it might well deteriorate.

The West has achieved, on the whole, a degree of political stability and administrative efficiency which other parts of the world cannot but envy. The West has won the freedom to enjoy, and at times often slips into the license of abusing, the pursuits of leisure and culture. They have won this freedom, not for a privileged few, but for the great mass of their people.

Two questions arise. First, do we wish for the developing nations of the world similar freedom to enjoy a more prosperous life? There can be no doubt that the answer is "yes". The second question is more delicate. If the developing nations succeed in raising the standards of living to such an extent that there is far greater freedom and privilege to enjoy leisure, how is this leisure to be used, and what values will govern its use?

It is here that the East, that Asia, nay that this very University can contribute something of primordial and everlasting value. It is my deepest conviction that if Islamic society is to avoid following blindly the course of Western society without taking the trouble to raise guards against the latter's weaknesses and deficiencies, a thorough rediscovery, revitalization and reintegration of our traditional values must be achieved.

They must be drawn forth from under the decades of foreign rule which have accumulated like thick sets of paper that have rested for generations on top of the finest oriental painting making the edges turn yellow, but the center piece remaining as colourful and lively, for us to discover, as when it was originally completed. In all forms of art, painting, calligraphy, architecture, city planning; in all forms of science, medicine, astronomy, engineering; in all expressions of thought, philosophy, ritualism, spiritualism, it is of fundamental importance that our own traditional values and attitudes should permeate our new society.

It would be dramatic if those pillars of the Islamic way of life, social justice, equality, humility and generosity, enjoined upon us all, were to lose their force or wide application in our young society. It must never be said generations hence that in our greed for the

material goods of the rich West we have forsaken our responsibilities to the poor, to the orphans, to the traveler, to the single woman.

The day we no longer know how, nor have the time nor the faith, to bow in prayer to Allah because the human soul that He has told us is eternal, is no longer of sufficient importance to us to be worthy of an hour of our daily working, profit seeking time, will be a sunless day of despair.”

Aga Khan IV. Convocation Address Brown University, 1996.

“President Gregorian tells me that I am the first Muslim ever to give the Baccalaureate address at Brown Commencement in the school's illustrious two hundred and thirty two year history. This makes the occasion a very special honour for me. It also carries the considerable, even intimidating responsibility to speak about the place of Islam and of Muslims in the world today, about their hopes and aspirations, and about the challenges that they face. It is also my responsibility, and indeed a pleasure for me to speak about what might be done, and some things that are being done, to respond to these challenges. My position, since 1957 as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims bears no political mandate, it is an independent one from which I can speak to you openly.

Today in the Occident, the Muslim world is deeply misunderstood by most. The West knows little about its diversity, about the religion or the principles which unite it, about its brilliant past or its recent trajectory through history. The Muslim world is noted in the West, North America and Europe, more for the violence of certain minorities than for the peacefulness of its faith and the vast majority of its people. The words Muslim and Islam have themselves come to conjure the image of anger and lawlessness in the collective consciousness of most western cultures. And the Muslim world has, consequently become something that the West may not want to think about, does not understand, and will associate with only when it is inevitable.

Not only is this image wrong, but there are powerful reasons that we cannot overlook, for which the West and the Muslim world must seek a better mutual understanding. The first of those reasons is that with the Eastern bloc weakened militarily, financially and politically, the Muslim world is one of only two potential geopolitical forces vis-a-vis the West on the world stage; the other being the East Asian Tigers. There are large Muslim minorities living in, and impacting many European countries. The Muslim world controls most of the remaining fossil fuel reserves. There is a resurgence of Islam in countries of strategic importance to the West such as Turkey. Several Muslim states have nuclear ambitions. The Gulf War proved that

events in the Muslim world do have a direct impact on global economics and security. The West should ignore neither the evolution of the Muslim Central Asian Republics nor their interplay on the future of Russia. Much of Sub-Saharan Africa, is Muslim, and none of us can turn our backs on this continent in need.

The second reason why the Islamic world and the West should seek increased mutual understanding is that in the wake of the Cold War, it has become obvious that violence and cruelty of all are a plague gaining ground around the globe. It can be military or paramilitary and brutal, or it can be structural and inconspicuous, and no less brutal. It ranges from suicide bombings to ethnic cleansing to the forgetting and abandoning of large segments of society, even by industrialised nations such as this one.

Against this worrying global background it must be made utterly clear that in so far as Islam is concerned, this violence is not a function of the Faith itself, as much as the media would have you believe. This is a misperception which has become rampant, but which should not be endowed with any validity, nor should it be accepted and given credibility. It is wrong and damaging. The myth that Islam is responsible for all the wrong doing of certain Muslim may well stem from the truism that for all Muslims the concepts of Din and Duniya, Faith and World, are inextricably linked more so than in any other

monotheistic religion of the world. The corollary is that in a perfect world, all political and social action on the part of Muslims would always be pursued within the ethical framework of the Faith. But this is not yet a perfect world. The West, nonetheless, must no longer confuse the link in Islam, between spiritual and temporal, with that between state and church.

With the deaths of King Charles the First, and Louis the Sixteenth, Western culture initiated a process of secularisation which grew into present day democratic institutions, and lay cultures. Islam, on the other hand, never endorsed any political dogma. So the historical process of secularisation which occurred in the West, never took place in Muslim societies. What we are witnessing today in certain Islamic countries, is exactly the opposite evolution, the theocratisation of the political process. There is no unanimity in the Islamic world on the desirability of this trend but it would certainly be less threatening if the humanistic ethics of the faith were the driving force behind the processes of change.

The news-capturing power of this trend contributes to the Western tendency to perceive all Muslims, or their societies, as a homogenous mass of people living in some undefined theocratic space, a single "other" evolving elsewhere. And yet with a Muslim majority in some 44 countries and nearly a quarter of the globe's population, it

should be evident that our world cannot be made up of identical people, sharing identical goals, motivations or interpretations of the Faith. It is a world in itself, vast and varied in its aspirations and in its concerns. Is there not something intellectually uncouth about those who choose to perceive one billion people of any faith as a standardised mass?"

Aga Khan IV Address Leadership and Diversity Conference, Canada, May 19, 2004

"Canada has an experience of governance of which much of the world stands in dire need. It is a world of increasing dissension and conflict in which a significant contribution is the failure of different ethnic, tribal, religious, or social groups to search for, and agree upon, a common space for harmonious co-existence.

Much of the world's attention is periodically focused on the phenomenon of so-called failed states. But of the global threats that face us today, apart from nuclear war or HIV/AIDS, the most preoccupying is not failed states. It is the failure of democracy. The global picture at the beginning of the 21st century is a story of failed democracies in the Muslim world, in Latin America, in Eastern Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa.

A startling fact today is that nearly forty percent of UN member nations are failed democracies. The greatest risk to the West itself,

and to its values, is therefore the accumulation of failed democracies. That in turn will cause deep under-currents of stress, if not conflict, among societies. It is essential, in the West's own interest, to admit to itself that democracy is as fragile as any other form of human governance.

It is essential that the question be asked, in every national situation and within each society, "if democracy is failing, why is this the case?" Every effort needs to be made to help correct the situation, rather than referring dismissively to failed states. To my knowledge, democracy can fail anywhere, at any time, in any society—as it has in several well-known and well-documented situations in Europe, as recently as the last 50 years. For it is self-evident, in Europe and across the globe, that the existence of political parties and elections do not alone produce stable governments or competent leadership.

Three concepts seem to me to be essential in creating, stabilizing and strengthening democracy around the world, including among the people of Africa and Asia with whom I have worked in the past. These concepts are meritocracy, pluralism and civil society. In particular, I will ask, what role can Canada play, drawing upon her national genius, in creating or enhancing these great underpinnings of democracy in the developing world?

A recent UN audit of democracy covering 18 Latin American countries reemphasizes the virtues of democracy in advancing human development; but it also warns that stagnant per capita incomes and growing inequality, in access to civil rights as well as income, are producing doubt, impatience and civil unrest. Thus, the report underlines a key concept that you will all know instinctively, and which my experience working in the developing world has illustrated, decade after decade: the primary, daily concern of peoples everywhere is their quality of life, which is intimately connected to their value systems. When it turns toward solutions, the report recognizes a crucial fact: "An important relationship exists between citizenship and organizations of civil society, which are major actors in the strengthening of democracy, in the oversight of government stewardship and in the development of pluralism."

My interest in these themes of development and governance arises from my role as the hereditary spiritual leader—Imam—of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community. Culturally very diverse, the Ismailis are spread across the globe, mostly as a minority, in more than twenty-five countries, in South and Central Asia, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. In recent decades they have also established a substantial presence in Canada, the USA and Western Europe. Since succeeding to this office as the 49th Imam in 1957, I have been

concerned with the development of the Ismailis and the broader societies in which they live. The engagement of the Imamatus in development is guided by Islamic ethics, which bridge faith and society. It is on this premise that I established the Aga Khan Development Network. This network of agencies, known as the AKDN, has long been active in many areas of Asia and Africa to improve the quality of life of all who live there. These areas are home to some of the poorest and most diverse populations in the world.

Our long presence on the ground gives us an insight that confirms the UN's detailed assessment in Latin America, which is that a democracy cannot function reasonably without two preconditions.

The first is a healthy, civil society. It is an essential bulwark that provides citizens with multiple channels through which to exercise effectively both their rights and duties of citizenship. Even at a very basic level, only a strong civil society can assure isolated rural populations, and the marginalized urban poor of a reasonable prospect of humane treatment, personal security, equity, the absence of discrimination, and access to opportunity.

The second precondition is pluralism. Pluralism means peoples of diverse backgrounds and interests, coming together in organizations of varying types and goals, for different kinds and forms of creative

expression, which are valuable and deserving of support by government and society as a whole.

The rejection of pluralism is pervasive across the globe and plays a significant role in breeding destructive conflicts. Examples are scattered across the world's map: in Asia, in the Middle East, in Africa, in Europe, in the Americas. No continent has been spared from the tragedies of death, of misery and of the persecution of minorities. Are such high-risk situations predictable? If the answer is, "Yes", then what can be done about them, to pre-empt the risk that the rejection of pluralism will become the spark that sets human conflict aflame? Is the onus not on leadership, in all parts of the world, to build a knowledge base about such situations and consider strategies for preventing them? For, I deeply believe that our collective conscience must accept that pluralism is no less important than human rights for ensuring peace, successful democracy and a better quality of life.

I am optimistic that much constructive work can be done, and I would cite one example—only one from the perspective of forty years of experience of agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network—in which the careful, patient development of institutions of civil society helped to create the capacity to manage and legitimize pluralism.

In Northern Pakistan, once one of the poorest areas on earth, our Network has been working for over twenty years, with CIDA as our

lead partner. Isolated and bypassed rural communities of different ethnic and religious backgrounds—Shia, Sunni and non-Muslim—struggled to eke out a meager living, farming small holdings in the harsh environment of this mountain desert ecosystem. Relations among the communities were often hostile. The challenge for the Network was to create sustainable, inclusive processes of development in which diverse communities could participate together and seek joint solutions to common problems.

To summarize two decades of work in Northern Pakistan: over 3,900 village based organizations, comprising a mix of broad-based representations and interest-specific groups in such fields as women's initiatives, water usage, and savings and credit were established. The quality of life of 1.3 million people living in a rural environment, representative of the majority of the population of Asia and Africa, has been dramatically improved. Per capita income has increased by 300%, savings have soared, and there have been marked improvements in male and female education, primary health, housing, sanitation and cultural awareness. Former antagonists have debated and worked together to create new programs and social structures in Northern Pakistan, and more recently in Tajikistan. Consensus around hope in the future has replaced conflict born of despair and memories of the past.

This micro experiment with grass roots democracy, civil society and pluralism has also underlined for everyone involved the enormous importance of competence and advancement by merit. Inherent in the notion of merit is the idea of equality of access to opportunities. Citizens who possess potential, whatever the community to which they belong, can only realize their potential if they have access to good education, good health and prospects to advance through enterprise. Without this equity, merit does not develop.

A secure pluralistic society requires communities that are educated and confident both in the identity and depth of their own traditions and in those of their neighbors. Democracies must be educated if they are to express themselves competently, and their electorates are to reach informed opinions about the great issues at stake. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to pluralism and democracy, however, is the lacuna in the general education of the populations involved.

A dramatic illustration is the uninformed speculation about conflict between the Muslim world and others. The clash, if there is such a broad civilizational collision, is not of cultures but of ignorance. How many leaders even in the West, whether in politics, the media or other professions which in their own ways shape public opinion, grow up aware that the historic root cause of the conflict in the Middle East

was an outcome of the First World War? Or that the tragedy that is Kashmir is an unresolved colonial legacy, and that neither had anything to do with the faith of Islam? To what extent is the public aware that the deployment of Afghanistan as a proxy by both sides in the Cold War, is a major factor in her recent history of tragic woes? These matters, which now touch the lives of all world citizens, are simply not addressed at any level of general education in most Western countries.

Humanities curricula in many educational institutions in the West, rarely feature great Muslim philosophers, scientists, astronomers and writers of the classical age of Islam, such as Avicenna, Farabi and al-Kindi, Nasir Khusraw and Tusi. This lack of knowledge and appreciation of the civilizations of the Muslim world is a major factor that colors media stereotypes, by concentrating on political hotspots in the Muslim world, and referring to organisations as terrorist and Islamic first, and only obliquely, if at all, to their national origins or political goals.

No wonder that the bogey of Islam as a monolith, irreconcilable to the values of the West or, worse, as a seedbed of violence, lurks behind its depiction as being both opposed to, and incapable of, pluralism. This image flies directly in the face of the respect that Islam's cherished scripture confers upon believers in monotheistic

traditions, calling upon Muslims to engage with them in the finest manner, and with wisdom. History is replete with illustrations where Muslims have entrusted their most treasured possessions, even members of their families, to the care of Christians. Muslim willingness to learn from Jewish erudition in medicine, statecraft and other realms of knowledge, is well exemplified by the place of honour accorded Jewish scholars at the court of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs of Egypt.

Intellectual honesty and greater knowledge are essential if current explosive situations are to be understood as inherited conflicts and—rather than being specific to the Muslim world—driven by ethnic and demographic difference, economic inequity and unresolved political situations. An excellent example of what is needed, to shape national sentiments as well as guide foreign policy in this perilous time, is the recent Parliamentary committee report entitled, “Exploring Canada’s Relations with the Countries of the Muslim World”. I wish there were time to comment on a number of the observations of the report, but in its very opening sentence, which begins, “The dynamic complexity and diversity of the Muslim world....” the report sets the tone of balance and wisdom that suffuse its recommendations. It emphasizes history, education, and the urgent need for communication and general knowledge in observing that, “Understanding Islamic influences on government and state policies, on social and economic

relations, cultural norms, individual and group rights and the like, necessarily goes far beyond the question of the extreme, violent-minority edges of Islamist activity". I warmly hope that the resources can be found to bring to life the constructive recommendations of this fine report, as the need for such rational voices is great.

It is urgent that the West gain a better understanding of the Islamic world, which, as the Parliamentary report notes, is a hugely diverse collectivity of civilizations that has developed, and continues to evolve, in response to multiple societal influences—agricultural and rural, commercial and urban, scientific and philosophical, literary and political. Just like other great traditions, the Islamic world cannot be understood only by its faith, but as a total picture whose history is closely tied to that of the Judeo-Christian world.

In this situation of a conflict of ignorance between the Muslim world and the West, an example of Canada's bridging is the support given by CIDA and McMaster to the Aga Khan University School of Nursing. Not only did this partnership transform nursing education, and the nursing profession, in Pakistan, but is also now having a significant impact in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Afghanistan and Syria by offering women in these countries new and respected professional opportunities.

Canada is, in an almost unique position to broaden the scope of her engagement with the developing world by sharing very widely her experience in humane governance to support pluralism, the development of civil society, and meritocratic premises for action. For instance, incipient, home-grown civil society institutions in developing countries need expert assistance to strengthen their capacities for management, programme design and implementation, fund raising, self-study and evaluation. They require help in such other areas as defining answerability and the criteria that measure success, as well as in identifying how a sector can be financed and sustained. I am happy to note that this is the declared intention of your Government. In the words of Prime Minister Paul Martin speaking in the House of Commons: "One of the distinct ways in which Canada can help developing nations is to provide the expertise and experience of Canadians in justice, in federalism, in pluralist democracy".

In living through her history and confronting its challenges, Canada has established strong institutions to sustain her democracy, the cornerstone of which is your multi-faceted, robust civil society. Canada offers the world an example of meshing, and thereby fortifying, civil society with merit from all segments of its population. You are, hence, able to harness the best from different groups because

your civil society is not bound by a specific language or race or religion.

My intention is not to embarrass you with too rosy a picture of the Canadian mosaic as if it were free of all tension. But you have the experience, an infrastructure grounded in wisdom, and the moral wherewithal to be able to handle challenges to your social and political fabric.

The Ismaili Imamatus strives to ensure that people live in countries where threat to democracy is minimal and seeks to draw on the experience of established democracies, which have a vibrant civil society, are sensitive to cultural difference and are effective in improving the quality of life of their citizenry. Canada is a prime example of such a country. It is for this reason that the Aga Khan Development Network is establishing, in Ottawa, what is to be known as The Global Centre for Pluralism.

This secular, non-denominational Centre will engage in education and research and will also examine the experience of pluralism in practice. Drawing on Canadian expertise, and working closely with governments, academia and civil society, the Centre will seek to foster enabling legislative and policy environments. Its particular emphasis will be on strengthening indigenous capacity for research and policy

analysis on pluralism, while also offering educational, professional development and public awareness programmes.”

Appendix II:

The Aga Khan Development Network

“Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programmes that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa. AKDN is a contemporary endeavour of the Ismaili Imamat to realise the social conscience of Islam through institutional action. AKDN agencies conduct their programmes without regard to the faith, origin or gender”

(<http://www.akdn.org/index.html>)

“Ethical Foundations of AKDN Institutions

Notionally, the AKDN seeks the ideal of social action, of communitarian strategy, to realise the social vision of Islam. Although the outcome of its action is pragmatic, the motivation for it is spiritual, a universal ethic whose purpose is to elicit the noble that inheres in each man and woman. The abiding traits which define this ethic, inform the principles and philosophies of AKDN institutions: their collective focus on respect for human dignity and relief to humanity; the reach of their mandates beyond boundaries of creed, colour, race and nationality; their combined endeavour towards empowering individuals, male and female, to become self-reliant and able to help

those weaker than themselves; their policy of nurturing and harnessing a culture of philanthropy and voluntary sharing of time and talent; the transparency of their governance based on the values of trust, probity, equity and accountability; and their overall aim generally to seek to engender, or contribute to other efforts which seek to engender, a fraternal ethos of enlightenment, peace, "large-hearted toleration", mutual aid and understanding.

(http://www.iis.ac.uk/learning/life_long_learning/akdn_ethical_framework/akdn_ethical_framework.htm)

Global Centre for Pluralism

"The mission of the Global Centre for Pluralism will be to promote pluralist values and practices in culturally diverse societies worldwide to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential as a citizen, irrespective of cultural, ethnic or religious differences. The Global Centre for Pluralism will undertake research, deliver programs, facilitate dialogue, develop pedagogical materials and work with partners worldwide to build the capacity of individuals, groups, educational institutions and governments to promote indigenous approaches to pluralism in their own countries and communities."

(<http://www.akdn.org/news/2005April18.htm>)

The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat

“The Delegation will serve a representational role for the Imamat and its non-denominational, philanthropic and development agencies which constitute the Aga Khan Development Network – the AKDN. An open, secular facility, the Delegation will be a sanctuary for peaceful, quiet diplomacy, informed by the Imamat’s outlook of global convergence and the development of civil society. It will be an enabling venue for fruitful public engagements, information services and educational programmes, all backed up by high quality research, to sustain a vibrant intellectual centre, and a key policy-informing institution. The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in the federal capital, [Ottawa] the new Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre to be built in Toronto, are symbols of this seriousness and respect that Canada, leading the West generally, accords to the world of Islam, of which the Ismaili Community, though a diverse minority itself, is fully representative. May this mutual understanding, so important to the future stability and progress of our world, flourish many fold. An epitome of friendship to one and all, it will radiate Islam’s precepts of one humanity, the dignity of man, and the nobility of joint striving in deeds of goodness.”

(<http://www.akdn.org/speeches/2005June6.html>)

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End Notes:

¹ The term Nizari-Ismaili Muslim connotes an interpretative community of Shia Muslims. The Islamic community has two fundamental interpretations Sunni and Shia. For more information see: <http://www.answers.com/topic/sunni>
<http://www.answers.com/topic/shiite>
In this paper the Shia-Nizari-Ismaili-Muslims will also be refer to as Nizari-Ismailis, NIM and Ismailis. Note there are Ismailis who are not Nizari.
For more information see: <http://www.answers.com/ismaili>

² Significant Horizon is a term employed by Charles Taylor (2004) see note #3.

³ The horizon of significance is the inescapable common background of intelligibility against which our aspirations and actions make sense to ourselves and to others. We draw meanings of the moral order via the dialogical character of human life, by the languages of human expression: art, culture, love etc we comprehend and appreciate our existence through dialogue with "significant others" who advocate the horizon of significance as a check against our propensity for individualism. The antagonism of the anthropomorphic view prevalent in the modern outlook is that it contributes to abolish a common referential point along the horizon by fragmenting them into a disingenuous and meaningless plethora of individual choice against a debased understanding of what the significant horizon is by creating overly "individual horizons"– bereft of dialogue with significant others we often miscalculate which horizon is significant. Charles Taylor 1991 "Malaise of Modernity".

⁴ "A purely secular time-understanding allows us to imagine society horizontally, unrelated to any "high points," where the ordinary sequence of events touches higher time, and therefore without recognizing any privileged persons or agencies, such as kings or priests, who stand and mediate at such alleged points" (Taylor, 2004, 157). As we shall see this notion is an anathema to the NIM-SI.

⁵ Ordinary Life, is circumscribed as the life of "production and reproduction, that is labour, the making of things needed for life, and our life as sexual beings, including marriage and the family" (Taylor, 1989. 211) as situated in the mundane, as the very centre of an agents moral commitments towards the "good life" beyond any reference to hierarchy or transcendence. The idea that moral commitments of a good life grounded in a pedestrian understanding of production and reproduction, drown the important questions and larger mysteries of existence into a trite diminution of the station of a "person" to a life of Birth, Shopping, Death.

Also see: "Consumer Angst":
<http://www.arachnoid.com/lutusp/consumerangst.html>

Also see: "Shopper, Repent!"
<http://www.somareview.com/revbilly.cfm>

⁶ One can see the significant role and influence of God readily in American society with its increasing influence in politics forcing an entrenched public debate and confusion on issues such as a woman's right to choose abortion vs. the pro-lifers, proliferation or curtailment of stem cell research, and inclusion of intelligent design in

the school curricula among others; culminating in the bewildering faith based Presidency of Bush II with his direct conversations with God. see "Faith Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush" by Ron Suskind. The New York Times Magazine. October 17, 2004 / Section 6. page 44.

See also: Transcript CNN Larry King Live "Creation or Evolution" aired August 23, 2005 <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/mac-1k19.htm>

And a viewers response to the debate below:

http://www.stcynic.com/blog/archives/2005/08/larry_king_live.php

"Barbara Forrest was on Larry King Live tonight in one of the most absurd discussions of evolution and intelligent design imaginable. For some reason, they had a huge list of guests - a young earth creationist, Jay Richards of the Discovery Institute, Barbara, two senators (one on each side) and - bizarrely - Deepok Chopra. What the hell Chopra was doing there is beyond me. And just to give you a perfect example of why the media is the last place to look for accurate information on this subject, Larry King introduced Barbara with the question, "How can you reject creationism completely because if evolution is true, why are there still monkeys?" Holy crap, Larry, here's a quarter. Go buy a clue. The young earther declared that the earth was no older than 10,000 years, Deepok Chopra said it was 3.8 billion years old - both are wrong. The young earther also said that before we discovered DNA, there was a lot of belief in evolution but DNA is the "silver bullet" that kills evolution. Wow. Chopra babbled incoherently about "consciousness", as usual, along with his usual blather about quantum indeterminacy. It was like Crossfire meets a Fellini film."

See also: "American most religious amongst its allies"

<http://www.christianpost.com/article/society/1622/section/poll.america.most.religious.among.its.allies/1.htm>

See also: "The rise of fundamentalism"

<http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/fundam.htm>

See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_fundamentalist

See also: "The Christian Paradox"

<http://www.harpers.org/ExcerptTheChristianParadox.html>

See also: a sampling news items illustrating the spectrum of convictions regarding prayer in America from April 2001 – November 2004:

<http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:XXA-bAnEMEKJ:goforthlabs.com/news/prayer.htm+muslim+prayer+for+someone+when+going+into+harms+way&hl=en>

⁷ As a manifestation of the ontic necessity of God in Muslim societies is the significant use of expressions like Bismillah (in the name of Allah), Inshallah (by the will of Allah), and Alhumduallah (all praise is due to Allah) – although these expressions become part of the colloquialism as Taylor points out the moral understanding behind them penetrate into the social imaginary.

⁸ As another example of root differences is the Augustinian and Roman Catholic concept of an innate Original Sin which differs within Christian theology itself and with Islam. If not apparent ostensibly then subliminally root differences influence the moral orientation of individuals coexisting within diverse social imaginaries.

⁹ Islam affirms Judaism and Christianity and refers to the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic triad as Ahl al Kitab "people of the book".

¹⁰ Du'a is an Arabic prayer recited by Nizari-Ismaili Muslims.

¹¹ Edwards Said's term – the fabrication of partitions between other people and other places/spaces. The other is inverted and negative in relation to 'our' which is always privileged, the positive, the normative, the rational, progressive, and modern. These imaginings take on real proportions, become an archive and repertoire from which people draw their affects which influences their interactions with the "other".

¹² For a discussion on the quandary of labelling and generalizations, see "Rethinking Islam". Mohammed Arkoun. 1994. p.10.

See also: Islam and the West are Inadequate Banners. Edward Said. Observer. September 16, 2001

Also note: As Mahmoud Mamdani wrote when discussing the Darfur crisis in Sudan "Does the label 'worst humanitarian crisis' tell us more about Darfur or about those labelling and the politics of labelling?"
<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=2&ItemID=6682>

¹³ See: Edward Said, "Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified," *Harper's*, July 2002

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/crisis/said.htm>

"The history of trying to come to terms with this somewhat fictionalized (or at least constructed) Islam in Europe and later in the United States has always been marked by crisis and conflict, rather than by calm, mutual exchange. There is the added factor now of commercial publishing, ever on the lookout for a quick bestseller by some adept expert that will tell us all we need to know about Islam, its problems, dangers, and prospects. In my book *Orientalism*, I argued that the original reason for European attempts to deal with Islam as if it were one giant entity was polemical—that is, Islam was considered a threat to Christian Europe and had to be fixed ideologically, the way Dante fixes Muhammad in one of the lower circles of hell. Later, as the European empires developed over time, knowledge of Islam was associated with control, with power, with the need to understand the "mind" and ultimate nature of a rebellious and somehow resistant culture as a way of dealing administratively with an alien being at the heart of the expanding empires, especially those of Britain and France".

Also: Edward Said originally published on 27 March 1999 in the *International Herald Tribune* is *Roots of the West's Fear of Islam*.

Also: Al-Tawhid - The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West. J.A. Progler. Asst Professor of Social Studies at CUNY, Brooklyn College Vol XIV No. 4

http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Articles/issues/Unity_of_Islamic_Imagery_in_West.htm

¹⁴ "Leo Strauss: A Neo-Conservative

At the same time Leo Strauss, an American professor of political philosophy, also came to see western liberalism as corrosive to morality and to society. Like Qutb, Strauss believed that individual freedoms threatened to tear apart the values which held society together. He taught his students that politicians should assert powerful and inspiring myths - like religion or the myth of the nation - that everyone could believe in.

A group of young students, including Paul Wolfowitz, Francis Fukuyama and William Kristol studied Strauss' ideas and formed a loose group in Washington which became known as the neo-conservatives. They set out to create a myth of America as a unique nation whose destiny was to battle against evil in the world"

<http://www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/powerofnightmares/one.html>

¹⁵ see: "How Islam bashing got cool"

http://www.beliefnet.com/story/110/story_11074_1.html

¹⁶ see: "Whither Political Islam?" by Mahmood Mamdani (2005)

<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050101fareviewessay84113b/mahmood-mamdani/whither-political-islam.html>

¹⁷ This rhetoric can be traced back to the Crusades: See the Chapter Isreal as a Focus for the Anger of the Muslims, In Islam and the West post 9/11. p.200 "Richard the Lion Heart... suggestion that Richard's sister, Johanna, should marry Saladin's brother Malik al-Adil; they should reign together as king and queen of Jerusalem, and all Palestine should come under Christian rule. Saladin in his reply explained how unthinkable it was for him as a Muslim to surrender Jerusalem to Christian rule: [Saladin] Jersalem is ours as much as yours. Indeed it is even more sacred to us than it is to you, for it is the place from which our Prophet accomplished his nocturnal journey and the place where our community will gather on the Day of Judgment."

Also see: George Bush II – Axis of Evil, Regime Change Iraq "The American people know my position," he said. "And that is that regime change is in the interest of the world." <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/09/30/sproject.irq.regime.change/>

Push is on for regime change in Iran now in Bush's sights

<http://www.sundayherald.com/43461> :

A contrasting interpretation of regime change is provided by the Ismaili Imam:

This is the nature of the true regime change we need, where the civil society of the industrialized world gives wide and encompassing support to that of the developing world. True regime change occurs when liberty is guaranteed by a people free to

create or support institutions of their own choosing.
<http://www.akdn.org/speeches/2004June18.htm>

¹⁸ SamuelHuntington <http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/misc/clash.html>

Also see for rejoinder: Is This a Clash of Civilizations? M Shahid Alam. 2003.
<http://www.counterpunch.org/alam02282003.html>

¹⁹ How is it in a free and open society that such a politics of knowledge construction goes unchallenged? Some insightful analysis can be found:
see Note: 22 "Miseducation of the West" Chapter 1

CounterPunch March 21, 2003 The Nation is Not United The Other America By
EDWARD SAID
<http://www.counterpunch.org/said03222003.html>

This is a crude summary of the American consensus, which in fact politicians exploit and try endlessly to simplify into slogans and sound bites. But what one discovers about this amazingly complex society is how many counter- currents and alternatives run across and around this consensus all the time. The growing resistance to war that the president has been essentially minimising and pretending to ignore, derives from the other less formal America that the mainstream media (newspapers of record such as The New York Times, the main networks, the publishing and magazine industries in large measure) always tries to paper over and keep down.

²⁰ Taylor, Charles. 2004. Modern Social Imaginaries. Durham: Duke University Press.

²¹ See "Manufacturing Consent" Noam Chomsky (1988)
Also see: Why the Media Lie The Corporate Structure Of The Mass Media. NAFEEZ
MOSADDEQ AHMED New Dawn No. 72 (May-June 2002)
http://www.newdawnmagazine.com/articles/why_the_media_lie.html
http://www.newdawnmagazine.com/articles/why_the_media_lie_part_two.htm

Also see: Aga Khan IV Address at The Commonwealth Press Union Conference Cape Town, South Africa, 1996.

<http://www.ismaili.net/speech/s961017.html>

Also see: Aga Khan IV Adress at the Opening Ceremony of the IPI World Congress and 54th General Assembly Nairobi, Kenya, 2005
<http://www.akdn.org/speeches/2005May05.htm>

Also see: "Western media attacked as world executive meeting ends in Kenya"
http://english.people.com.cn/200505/25/eng20050525_186663.html

²² "We must acknowledge the intellectual and cultural poverty of the brief chapters devoted to Islam in high schools courses. As for the universities, rare are those even now with history departments willing to tolerate the intrusion of a historian of Islam. The teaching of history of Islamic cultures is all too often left to the department of so-called Oriental languages, where one exists. This observation, which holds for most universities in the West, demonstrates the extent to which an ideological vision

of the history of the Mediterranean area has been translated administratively and institutionally into the universities themselves. And the field is open for essayists and journalists to construct imagery of Islam and Muslims based on current events and locked into a short-term perspective dominated by Nasserism, Khomeinism, Israel, and the Palestinians." Rethinking Islam. Mohammed Arkoun. 1994. p.10.

Orientalism. Said, Edward. 1978. New York: Pantheon Books

Said, Edward. 1998. Islam through western eyes. The Nation, January 1.
<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=19800426&c=1&s=19800426said>

Ahmad, Eqbal. 2000. Eqbal Ahmad, confronting empire: Interviews with David Barsamian. Cambridge, MA: South End Press

"I became interested in what was happening in the educational world to combat Islamophobia. After visiting several educational conferences, including two of the American Educational Research Association (AREA), probably the largest research-oriented educational conferences in the world, I saw that this phenomenon was a blind spot in educational research. Of the hundreds of presentations at the conferences in 2002 and 2003 (and now in 2004), none directly addressed this topic." Confronting Islamophobia in Educational Practice. Edited Barry van Driel. 2004. p.x.

²³ See "Challenging Ignorance on Islam a Ten-Point Primer for Americans" by Dr. Gary Leupp, Tufts University, available at
<http://www.counterpunch.org/leupp0724.html>

²⁴ "That is, all the political, social, economic, and cultural shortcomings of Muslim societies are hitched together and to Islam with a capital 'I'. Islam then becomes the source and the prime mover of all contemporary history in a world that extends from the Philippines to Morocco and from Scandinavia, if we take account of Muslim minorities in Europe, to South Africa." (p.7) Arkoun, Mohammed. Trans. Lee, Robert. D. (1994). Rethinking Islam. Common questions, uncommon answers. Boulder CO: Westview Press.

²⁵ In Reference to an advertisement poster in the city of Amsterdam in 2003. "[An]other poster showed an image of a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and the text asked: 'how can we liberate them?' This poster was a government public service announcement. The text of the second poster infers that Muslims are strangers in Dutch society – note the word 'them'. It also invokes the symbolic ghost of the 'white man's burden' to bring civilization to the rest of the world. Confronting Islamophobia in Educational Practice. Edited Barry van Driel. 2004. p.ix.

See also: President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East. 2003
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>

²⁶ See "The Enemy Within" Daniel Pipes New York Post 2003.
<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/1009>

²⁷ For a comprehensive and brief history of Muslim perceptions of "the West" see Jacques Waardenburg – Reflections of the West. In Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century. Eds. Suha Taji-Farouki & Basheer M. Nafi

²⁸ For a discussion of the term westoxication see: Vahdat Farzin (2003) "Post-Revolutionary Islamic Discourses on Modernity in Iran: Expansion and contradiction of Human Subjectivity" *International J. Middle East Stud.* 35.
http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:BWAGamE5PF0J:www.dr.soroush.com/PDF/E-CMO-20030000-Post-Revolutionary_Islamic_Discourses_on_Modernity_in_Iran.pdf+westoxication&hl=en

²⁹ See Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838-1897) (<http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/a/afghni.htm>) Hasan al-Bana (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) *Ikhwanul-Muslimin* [expand] and Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (1903-1979) *Jamat-i Islami.* [expand] Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) founded *Tabligh Jama'at*, Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833-77) founded the Deobandi movement.

³⁰ Eqbal Ahmad (1999) "Religion in Politics" *Dawn Newspaper*
http://www.bitsonline.net/eqbal/articles_by_eqbal_view.asp?id=57&cid=8

³¹ "It would help to elaborate the stance of the hard modernists by examining the secularization policies of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey. Turkish secularism had its roots in last days of the Ottoman Empire where a sense of inferiority towards the west developed after defeats at the hands of European powers in 1699 and 1718. One can sense this in the dairies of Yirmisekiz Mehmed Celebi, the first Ottoman of the western civilization after visiting Paris and Vienna. From then on the feeling of admiration for western culture and worldview grew radically replacing all confidence in indigenous ideas and ideals. The majority of Turkey's religious scholars lacked the intellectual acumen and ability to generate new indigenous knowledge or creatively synthesize western science and technology. They reacted by becoming more dogmatic and narrow- and thus increased admiration of the West. Westernisation in Turkey began in the Ottoman palaces with its intellectual justification provided by the Young Ottomans, a group of Turkish intellectuals who came into prominence towards the end of the Ottoman period. They blamed the religious scholars for the decline and decay of the Ottoman Empire. The religious scholars were largely apologists for the Ottoman sultans and in effect Ataturk was a reaction to this. Ataturk presented secularism as a theology of salvation. Coming to terms with the "European miracle" required embracing every component of Europe's ideology: being modern meant being exactly like the Europeans. Imitation was duplicated in minute detail, up to including how one dressed and behaved. He replaced Ottoman history based on a religious community with a "national history" that he hoped would replicate the history of the West. In a real sense Kemalism internalized how the West conventionally represented Islam: As the darker and degenerate opposite of the Christian and secular West. He represented Islam as "the Orient" of the West suffused with all the ills conventionally ascribed to it, from being ignorant and stupid to inferior." (Junaid S. Ahmad – in press)

³² Arkoun, Mohammed. "The State, the Individual, and Human Rights: A Contemporary View of Muslims in a Global Context". *The Muslim Almanac: The Reference Work on History, Faith and Culture, and Peoples of Islam.* Detroit: Gale Research Inc. (1995), pp 453 – 457

³³ See: A Comment on the Formation of the Progressive Muslim Union of North America – Junaid Ahmad – in press

³⁴ "For the soft modernist, modernity is a part of Islamic heritage that must be reclaimed. If parts of it are not a part of the Muslim heritage it is nevertheless an extremely significant intellectual and material current that must be embraced and adequately Islamized. The soft modernist's way of identifying the Islamic roots of modernity begin with tracing the origins of rationality to the Muslim philosophers such as Al- Farabi and Al- Kindi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd who belonged to a group of thinkers called the Mutazalites (lit: the Separatists) who denounced the strict Shariah based faith and worked to transform Islam into a more humanistic religion. The Mutazalites argued that reason was the only way one knew how to act morally. The Mutazalites were opposed by the Asharites who argued the limitations of human reason and the inscrutability of the ways of God. For the soft Modernists the history of Islam from the seventh to the fourteenth century was a struggle between these two schools of thought and it was the victory of the Asharities that sealed the fate of secular humanism in Islam and is responsible for the present state of affairs. The soft modernists believed that there would be no West without Islam, for the foundations of European Enlightenment emerged in the Islamic civilization during the Ottoman Empire. Islam for them taught Europe all it knows about science and civilization when Europe was in its Dark Ages. Whether it was the importance of the experimental model and the empirical method or the mathematical theory that was important for Copernican revolution or medicine and the use of surgical instruments, all of this were bequeathed to Europe by the Muslims. Even the origins of liberal humanism is attributed to the *adab* movement in Islam that is concerned with the etiquette of being human. Those aspects of western modernity that couldn't be traced to Islamic heritage were none the less considered important enough to be Islamized and thereby embraced by Muslims. A typical example of this was the life of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the Muslim educator from India and the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University. According to Sir Sayyid, the cause of England's civilization is in its arts and sciences and accordingly Indians desirous of 'bettering India' should have the whole of the arts and sciences of the European civilization translated into their own language. This according to him was 'the truth that must be written in gigantic letters on the Himalayas'. In the Aligarh Institute Gazette he wrote that "Without flattering the English, I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education and manners and uprightness, are as like them a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man". Sir Sayyid straddled both tradition and modernity attempting to bridge them. He believed that the Qur'an had to be studied in the light of reason if Islam was to retain the educated in its fold. He said 'It does not satisfy the mind of the doubter to simply say that Islam has been taught in this way and has to be accepted. The educated Muslim should have philosophy in his right hand and natural science in his left hand and the *kalimah* crowning his head.'" (Junaid S. Ahmad – in press)

³⁵ Edward Said Lecture in memory of Egbal Amhad "Unresolved Geographies Embattled Landscapes" Amherst Ma. September 17, 1999

³⁶ The principle of Adequation (the *adaequatio* of St. Thomas Aquinas) according to which to know anything there must be an instrument of knowledge adequate and conforming to the nature of that which is to be known. Circumscribed by this the

modern person disparages any principle higher than what the human mind can register.

³⁷ Taqlid – imitation, usually blind imitation of ones predecessors without questioning, assessing, checking, or criticizing. Previous course ware or curriculum. Like all systems of thought that are operating Islam is dynamic and changing – therefore education needs be responsive to changing circumstances and form.

³⁸ The event of Ghadir-e-Kumb is the central Shia evidence of Ali's succession. It was here "the Prophet chose Ali to the 'general guardianship' (walayat-i 'ammah) of the people and made Ali, like himself, their guardian" (Tabataba'i 1975) and the accompanying revelations just prior to the event and after it. Tabataba'i. 1975 *Shi'ite Islam*. State University of New York Press, 1975.

³⁹ For information about the meaning of the term Imam see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam>

⁴⁰ For a biography of Aga Khan IV see: <http://www.akdn.org/hh/highness.html>

⁴¹ Missionary, preacher. See Asani (2002) – The term Ismaili as an identity came later in history for the Khoja – certainly during the time of my grandfathers they were using the term to distinguish themselves

⁴² They represent a fusion of a multiplicity of ethnic and cultural assemblage, combining philosophies of Pythagoras, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Hindu, Judeo-Christian, and Quranic mystical exegesis, formulating a unique and syncretic conception of Shia Islam and doctrine of the Imam.

⁴³ Sat Panth – proto-ismaili in the Sub Continent – see Asani (2001)

⁴⁴ There are three socio-cultural identities of Nizari-Ismailis: Syrian, Central Asian, Indian Subcontinental – the activities of the Dawat permeated these regions with Ismaili propaganda and resulted in different Ismaili socio-cultural imaginaries.

⁴⁵ The Dawa in the Subcontinent did not use the term Ismaili – Sat Panth (True Path) was the term used. Khoja was not a term used to identify Nizari-Ismaili exclusively – Khoja referred to a movement that attached itself to the Pir/Da'is who were sent by Ismaili Imams. Sat Panth was a movement that related to various Bhakti (devotional) and Sufi movements that preached the importance of interiorizing religion (through meditation) and the importance of finding and recognizing the 'right guide' or guru. Identities of the Sat Panth, Bhakti, Sufi devotees were extremely fluid and not narrowly defined utilizing both open and closed texts of poetry, devotional literature sharing metaphor and symbol employing the aesthetics of Indian music.

⁴⁶ Until recently Khoja Ismailis have understood the concept of Imam through the reinterpretation of the concept of Avatara from Vaishnava Hinduism. They identified Imam Ali as the long awaited tenth (Dasa) Avatara (incarnation) of the Hindu Lord Vishnu. See Nanji, Azim. 1978. *The Nizari-Ismaili tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*. Delmar, New York.

⁴⁷ See: Masselos. J.C. 1973. The Khojas of Bombay: The defining of formal membership criteria during the Nineteenth century. In Caste and social stratification among Muslims, eds. I. Ahmad. Delhi.

⁴⁸ as quoted in Asani (2001)

⁴⁹ Gilroy's notion challenges the Afro-centric basis that privilege Africa as a kind of holy homeland and focuses on historical movements of people, labour and knowledge.

⁵⁰ The terms Pedagogical and Performative come from Homi K. Bhabha as cited and explained in Benhabib (2002 p.8-9). "continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical refers to narrative strategies, to the writing, production, and teaching of histories, myths, and other collective tales through which the nation as one represents itself as a continuous unit ... the recursive strategy of the performative by contrast, is the invention by intellectuals and ideologues, artists and politicians of narrative and representational strategies ... the 'pedagogical' and the 'performative' aspects of the national narrative have somehow to hang or fit together. It is precisely this fit that the student of human affairs tries to explain" (p.9)

⁵¹ The tradition of hymns in the Ismaili Jamat is affected by primarily two cultural influences – the Iranian (which includes the Afghani and Central Asian) have 'Qasida' primarily in Farsi and the Khoja's originating in the Indian Sub Continent have 'Ginan' primarily in Gujarati and other Indic languages.

⁵² When charisma is endowed – as it is in the Shia belief from Muhammad to Ali - it need not evolve along the frame work of traditionalization and rationalization only, as Weber (1978) outlined. In Shiasm the endowment of charisma is an ideal combination of person and office that legitimizes authority. Endowment in this sense implies perpetuation and carries with it an impetus for original growth that is as dynamic and unpredictable, non-conforming and anti-traditional as the antecedent. With the endowment of Muhammad's charisma the Imam acquires by the divine grace of God two important qualities 'ismah (infallibility) and walayah (the exclusive knowledge of the hidden meaning of the Qur'an).

⁵³ For a discussion about the two interpretations of the Prophets succession see [Aga Khan Interview with Deutsche Welle](http://hosting.twofourtv.com/linx_news/deutsche_welle/index.asp)
http://hosting.twofourtv.com/linx_news/deutsche_welle/index.asp

Germany, September 2004 - In a 9-minute interview with Deutsche Welle during his visit to Berlin, His Highness the Aga Khan is asked if Islam has two faces, whether there is conflict between Islam and Democracy, and why tolerance and pluralism rank high on the agenda.

Interview courtesy of Deutsche Welle. See also the [transcript of the interview.](#)

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1325811,00.html?mpb=en>

⁵⁴ By this expression I am combining Imam with Krishna

⁵⁵ The concept of Hazir Imam is – the Imam who is present in the hear and now or Imam-i-zaman (Imam of the time) - this is different from the concept of the Madhi, who is the Imam that is in occlusion and will appear sometime in the future.

⁵⁶ Shia add to the Shahada (Muslim profession of faith) amir-ul momenin ali-ul-la. And also taking the Bayyat (Oath of Allegiance) of the Imam.

⁵⁷ THE DILEMMA THAT FACES THE ISMAILIS, Sunday, September, 26, 1965 Source: Daily Standard Source

Those who reject Faith, and die rejecting,- on them is Allah's curse, and the curse of angels, and of all mankind; Al-Baqara (Quran 2:161)

And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will make thee an imam to the Nations." He pleaded: "And also (imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers." Al-Baqara (Quran 2:124)

One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) imams: those who are given their record in their right hand will read it (with pleasure), and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least. Al-Isra (Quran 17:71)

⁵⁸ For an Ismaili point of departure see: Intellect and Faith
"The intellect plays a central role in Shia tradition. Indeed, the principle of submission to the Imam's guidance, explicitly derived from the revelation, is considered essential for nurturing and developing the gift of intellect whose role in Shiism is elevated as an important facet of the faith. Consonant with the role of the intellect is the responsibility of individual conscience, both of which inform the Ismaili tradition of tolerance embedded in the injunction of the Quran: There is no compulsion in religion."
<http://www.akdn.org/imamat/imamat.html#intellect>

⁵⁹ See, e.g., S. N. Eisenstadt. Ed., The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations. Albany State University of New York Press, 1986)

⁶⁰ Presidential Address League of Nations Aga Khan III see:
<http://ismaili.net/sultan/sms03/league4.html>

⁶¹ Afghani, in large circles is considered the founder of Islamic modernism and stood in opposition to the East-West diffusion ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (see note 28 Chapter 1). Afghani established himself in noteworthy presence as a public intellectual and activist in the Parisian academic circles of the early 1880's. Through his journal al-'Urwat al-wuthqa' (published eighteen issues), his famous response to Ernest Renan's legendary lecture at the Sorbonne in 1883, openly attacking Islam as an impediment to the advancement of philosophy and science, and of Muslim Arabs as innately incapable of philosophical thinking. Afghani's response was that all religions are an antithesis of science His book 'The Refutation of the Materialists' (1886), offered an irreverent criticism of the naturalist/materialist position, which he argued was the most vital threat to humanity in general and Islam in particular. Afghani shaped, impacted and inspired an entire generation of nineteenth century Muslim thinkers and anti-imperialists towards a type of Islamic reformation and political movement. By contrast the Ismaili Imams see no contradiction between religion and science.

⁶² We have also seen the advantage of seeking the assistance of Western minds and Western techniques whenever they can help. The Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi is an interesting example of how this policy can benefit not only our own Community, but the whole of East Africa and ultimately, I hope, the Commonwealth as well.

Based on the most up-to-date hospital methods employed in America and Western Europe, it is the first in Kenya to open its doors to all races, the first to start a qualified nurses' training course for girls of all communities, the first to employ a completely multiracial staff and the first to institute an insurance scheme which helps to overcome the crippling cost of modern medical care in countries where Government assistance is desperately restricted by lack of finance.

It will not be long, I hope, before this Hospital also undertakes important research work in tropical and other diseases. You can see, therefore, how easily the example of this hospital can spread to other parts of the Commonwealth. Already it has admitted Ismaili and African patients from as far afield as Somalia and Pakistan. (Aga Khan IV – Speech - Ismaili Contributions to the Commonwealth 1960)

⁶³ "It is worth mentioning, that political and religious role played by Al-Azhar was not available for any other Islamic University all over the world. The famous orientalist historian, K.Vollers, indicated reasons for this high position of the mosque and said that being the center of Islamic world, near Al Hegaz, Egypt's economic importance, its Arabic touch, the extension of Africa and old culture and old culture of the Nile which let good seeds for arts and science grow on, are all the reasons of the high position of Al-Azhar. Whatever the matter was, Al-Azhar role was famous in all incidents and political revolutions which followed each other through ages. Its role in the Islamic world embodied the famous role of Egypt in all Islamic periods from the first Islamic revolution in the time of Osman-Ibn-Affan." And continues to the present

<http://64.233.161.104/search?q=cache:TuI95jXQDn4J:www.touregypt.net/azhar/al%2520azhar1.htm+scientists+fatimid+&hl=en>

⁶⁴ See: http://www.ismaili.net/readknow/cairo_fati.html
Also see: the Ismaili Imamat's recent gift to the city of Cairo:
http://www.akdn.org/agency/aktc_hcsp_cairo.html

⁶⁵ Africa: Mombassa, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Antananarivo, Bamako, Maputo, Dar es Salaam, Kampala

Central Asia: Kabul, Osh, Khorog, Dushanbe

Middle East: Damascus, Salamieh

South Asia: Dhaka, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Karachi

⁶⁶ International Academic Partnerships: Phillips Academy Andover, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Texas, University of Calgary, University of Toronto, Oxford University, Schule Schloss Salem, University of Central Asia, Aga Khan Univerisy

⁶⁷ The International Academic Partnership promotes global education and student-centered teaching at participating schools. The program focuses on professional development for teachers and curricular innovation at all affiliated institutions. Since

its founding in 1993, the IAP has linked schools in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America to create a living laboratory for the study of issues related to developing nations and to provide a forum for the dissemination of methods of cooperative teaching and learning. The members of the IAP are Aga Khan Education Service, Phillips Academy, the Institute for Educational Development of Aga Khan University, and Schule Schloss Salem. <http://www.andover.edu/iap/home.htm>