

In addition, Arabic calligraphy has been used ingeniously to create the outlines of birds and animals, as well as crescents, mosques, minarets, and other forms to the present day.

INTERACTION AND ADAPTATION

Islam and Modernity

Throughout the history of Islam, many individuals and groups have taken it on themselves to reform the rest of the Muslim community. An external impetus for reform has been Muslim interaction with Western Christendom. The first major Western challenges to Muslim power and Islam's capacity to rally its people in a universal struggle to defend the integrity of its domains were the crusades. Fired by a spirit of Christian holy war to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim domination, the armies of the first crusade captured the Holy City in 1099 after massacring its Jewish and Muslim inhabitants. For nearly two centuries, Frankish Christian kingdoms existed side by side with Muslim states along the eastern Mediterranean shores, sometimes peacefully, but most of the time at war.

In the end the crusaders returned home, and those who remained were assimilated. But the spirit of the crusades lived on, as did the distorted images of Islam and its followers that the crusaders took back with them. The equally distorted images of Christianity and Western Christendom that the crusades left in Muslim lands have also lived on, and have been reinforced and embellished in response to Western imperialism and its aftermath.

Premodern Reform Movements

We shall examine Islam in the modern era from two perspectives: internal reform and the challenge of the West.

Common to all reform movements has been the call to return to pristine *islam*, the *islam* of the Prophet's society and the normative period of his 'rightly guided' successors. Among those who championed this cause was the Egyptian religious scholar Ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328), a jurist who fought relentlessly against Shi'i beliefs and practices, Sufi excesses, and the blind imitation of established legal traditions, while fighting to revive the practice of *ijihad*. He exerted a powerful and long-lasting influence on subsequent reform movements.

Some four centuries later, Ibn Taymiyah's ideas became the basis of the reform program advocated by the Wahhabi movement, named for its founder Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92). Significantly, this uncompromising and influential revivalist movement began in the highlands of Arabia, the birthplace of Islam. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's long life allowed him to establish his movement on a firm foundation. He allied himself with Muhammad 'Al Sa'ud, a local tribal prince, on the understanding that the prince would exercise political power and protect the nascent movement, which would hold religious authority. This agreement remains operative today: the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a Wahhabi state, ruled by the descendants of 'Al Sa'ud.

The Wahhabis preached a strictly egalitarian Islam based solely on a direct relationship between the worshipper and God. They repudiated the widely cherished hope that the Prophet and other divinely favoured individuals would intercede with God for the pious to grant them blessing and succour in this life and salvation in the next. The Wahhabis regarded the veneration of saints, including the Prophet, as a form of idolatry. They even advocated the destruction of the sacred black stone of the Ka'ba, on the grounds that it stood as an idol between faithful Muslims and their Lord.

The Wahhabis held all those who did not share their convictions to be in error. They waged a violent campaign aimed at purging Muslim society of what they considered to be its un-Islamic beliefs

and practices. They destroyed the Prophet's tomb in Medina and levelled the graves of his Companions. They attacked the Shi'i sacred cities of Najaf and Karbala, massacred their inhabitants, and demolished the shrines of 'Ali and his son Husayn. They also went on a rampage in Arab cities, desecrating the tombs of Sufi saints and destroying their shrines.

The basic ideals of Wahhabism have appealed to many revivalists and played an especially significant role in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sufi reforms. In the present day, however, a number of extremist groups influenced by Wahhabi ideology, including Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, have transformed the internal struggle to 'purify' Islam into an external war against all perceived enemies, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Nineteenth-Century Revivalism

Jihad—Arabic for 'struggle'—has two components. Inner *jihad* is the struggle to make oneself more Islamic; outer *jihad* is the struggle to make one's society more Islamic.

A number of Sufi *jihad* movements arose in the nineteenth century, partly in response to Wahhabi reforms and partly in reaction against European colonial encroachment on Muslim domains. Several of these movements were able to establish short-lived states, among them those led by Usman ('Uthman) dan Fodio (the Sokoto caliphate, 1809–1903) in Nigeria, Muhammad al-Sanusi (the Sanusi movement, 1837–1969) in Libya, and Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (the Mahdi rebellion, 1881–9) in Sudan. Common to all these movements was an activist ideology of militant struggle against external colonialism and internal decadence. They also strove for reform and the revival of *ijihad*.

and religious scholars not only helped to preserve their countries' religious, linguistic, and cultural identity but in some cases spearheaded the long and bloody struggles for independence from French and Italian colonial rule. In the nineteenth century, for example, the Sufi *shaykh* Abdelkader (Abd al-Qadir) played an important political role in the long campaign for Algeria's independence. King Muhammad V of Morocco, who negotiated his country's independence from France in 1956, was himself a Sufi *shaykh* and a 'venerable descendant' (*sayyid*) of the Prophet. And the grandson of al-Sanusi, Idris I, ruled Libya as king from independence in 1951 until he was overthrown in a revolution in 1969.

The movement begun by al-Sanusi in Libya promoted reform and Muslim unity across North and West Africa. By contrast, the goal of al-Mahdi's movement in Sudan was more eschatological: its founder saw himself as God's representative on earth and set out to establish a social and political order modelled on that of the Prophet. He regarded the Ottoman–Egyptian occupation of Sudan to be un-Islamic and waged a war of *jihad* against it. In 1885 he triumphed over Egyptian forces and established an Islamic state based on strict application of the *shari'ah* law. Although al-Mahdi himself died within a few months, the regime lasted until 1889, when it was overthrown by British and Egyptian forces.

Ahmadiyyah

The career of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) reflects both the social and the religious diversity of the Punjab in the 1880s, a time of various movements for renewal of Hindu and Muslim identity, as well as a growing emphasis on self-definition among the Sikhs. To this mix Ghulam Ahmad contributed several volumes of

his own views on the Quran and claims of his own

Ahmadis, as they are known, have also revered him as the *mujaddid* (renewer) ushering in the fourteenth century of Islam, as the Mahdi of Shi'i expectation, as the tenth incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu, and as the returning Messiah of Christianity (Ahmadis also maintain that Jesus did not die in Palestine but went to Afghanistan, in search of the ten lost tribes of Israel, and was buried in Srinagar, Kashmir).

Active proselytizers, Ghulam Ahmad and his followers preached in the streets, engaged in debates, and published translations of the Qur'an. The movement has spread widely. Including 4 million in Pakistan, Ahmadis now total at least 10 million, or 1 per cent of the world's Muslims. Leadership since the founder's death in 1908 has been termed *khilafat al-Masih* (succession of the Messiah). Although the successor is chosen by election, since 1914 the title has stayed in Ghulam Ahmad's family, held first by a son and then by two grandsons. Because they identified themselves as Muslims, on the partition of India in 1947 the Ahmadis were displaced from Qadian and relocated their centre across the border in Rabwah, Pakistan, west of Lahore.

Many Muslims, however, have not accepted the Ahmadis as fellow Muslims. As early as 1891, Ghulam Ahmad's claim to prophethood was rejected by orthodox Muslim authorities. In Pakistan Ahmadis have been the target of riots and demonstrations; in 1984 they were declared to be a non-Muslim minority (hence ineligible for opportunities accorded Muslims); and they have been prohibited from calling themselves Muslims or using Islamic vocabulary in their worship and preaching.

Ahmadiyah's future, therefore, may lie in its diaspora. Missions have been notably successful in lands not historically Islamic, such as West Africa,

Modernist Reformers

As the nineteenth century opened, European influence in the Muslim world was growing. Napoleon, who landed on Egyptian shores in 1798, brought with him not only soldiers but also scholars and the printing press; in this way the Middle East discovered Europe. The great Ottoman Empire, which in the early decades of the sixteenth century had threatened Vienna, had by the nineteenth become 'the sick man of Europe'. Meanwhile, the British Empire was extending its rule in India and its control over much of the Muslim world.

Muslim thinkers everywhere were awed by the West and resentful of the political inertia into which the Muslim *ummah* had apparently fallen. Even so, many areas of the Islamic east did experience an intellectual and cultural revival in the nineteenth century. Egypt, for instance, was the home of an Arab intellectual renaissance. Owing to unsettled social and political conditions in the Levant, a number of Western-educated Syrian Lebanese Christians immigrated to Egypt, where they established newspapers and cultural journals and participated actively in the recovery of the Arabo-Islamic heritage.

The Arab renaissance of the nineteenth century was largely stimulated by the cultural and intellectual flowering that was taking place in the West. Undermined first by the Protestant Reformation and then by the Enlightenment, religious faith and institutions were now giving way to secularism and romantic nationalism. These ideas similarly appealed to eastern Mediterranean Muslims, and in the end they led to the rise of Arab nationalism. The same ideas also influenced Muslims in other regions, so that nationalistic identities came to compete with, and in some cases even supersede, Islamic identities.

Islamic reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East arose in a context of widespread cultural and intellectual ferment.

The Indian Subcontinent

The Mughal dynasty was founded in India by Babur in 1526. It reached its peak during the reign (1556–1605) of Akbar, who was Babur's grandson. With the decline of the Mughal Empire in the seventeenth century, calls for reform along traditional lines intensified. One of the strongest voices for reform was that of Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), who called for a return to the *shari'ah*, regarded Sufis as deviants, and condemned Ibn 'Arabi in particular as an infidel.

The most important movement of Islamic reform on the Indian subcontinent in modern times

was begun by Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702–62). Although he was a disciple of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, he was a Sufi himself, and instead of rejecting Sufism he sought to reform it. Shah Wali Allah was a moderate reformer with encyclopedic learning. He also attempted to reconcile Shi'i–Sunni differences, which had been (and sometimes are still) a source of great friction on the Indian subcontinent in particular.

Shah Wali Allah's grandson Ahmad Barelwi transformed his program into a *jihad* movement against British rule and the Sikhs. In 1826 he established an Islamic state based on the *shari'ah* and adopted the old caliphal title 'commander of the faithful'. Although he was killed in battle in 1831, his *jihad* movement lived on. For Barelwi, India ceased to be an Islamic domain after the end of Mughal rule, and therefore Muslims should wage a *jihad* to liberate it. If independence from infidel



sovereignty was not possible, Muslims should undertake a religious migration (*hijrah*) to an area where Muslims did rule.

The shock that Indian Muslims suffered with the consolidation of British rule was intensified by the fact that the British tampered with Islamic law itself. The result was a mixture of Islamic law and Western humanistic rulings known as Anglo-Muhammadian law.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of reaction to British rule from *jihad* movements like Barelwi's was the approach of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98). Like all reformers, Khan called for modern *jihad* or rethinking of the Islamic heritage, but unlike most of them he rejected *hadith* tradition as a legitimate basis for modern Islamic living. He founded the Aligarh Muhammadan College (later Aligarh Muslim University), where he attempted to apply his ideas in a modern Western-style program of education.

Muhammad Iqbal

The ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his fellows culminated in the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938), the greatest Muslim thinker of modern India. Central to Iqbal's work is the idea of an inner spirit that moves human civilization.

Iqbal argued that Western science and philosophy were rightfully part of the Islamic heritage and should be integrated into a fresh *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (the title of his only major work in English, published in the 1930s). A poet as well as a philosopher, Iqbal frequently repeated this call for a dynamic rethinking of Islamic faith and civilization in his verse.

Twentieth-Century Secularism

Many of the early Muslim reformers were at once

disappeared by the 1920s. Thereafter, Islamic reform meant either revivalism, apologetics, or secularism.

Following the Ottoman defeat in the First World War, a young army officer named Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) launched a movement for national liberation. After gaining power, he abolished the caliphate in 1924, transforming the Turkish state from a traditional Islamic domain into a modern secular republic, of which he became the first president. Although for centuries the caliphate had been a shadowy office without any power, it had nevertheless embodied the only hope for a viable pan-Islamic state. Its disappearance therefore had far-reaching consequences for Islamic political thought.

Atatürk banned Sufi orders, dissolved Islamic religious institutions, replaced the Arabic alphabet (in which Turkish had traditionally been written) with the Latin, and mounted a nationwide campaign for literacy in the new script. His express aim was to westernize the Turkish republic and cut it off from its Islamic past. He encouraged the adoption of Western-style clothing and even went so far as to ban the fez—the brimless conical red hat that, like all traditional Muslim headgear, allowed the faithful to touch their foreheads to the ground during prayer.

Though Atatürk's ideology has remained the official state policy in Turkey, his program largely failed, for the people's Islamic roots were not easily destroyed. Islamic faith and practice remain strong among the people of Turkey, and the country has its own powerful revivalist movements.

Twentieth-Century Islamic Revivalism

Islamic reform movements generally seem to have

of progress. The premature stifling of that spirit may have reflected the lack of a coherent program of reform that post-colonialist Muslim thinkers could implement or build upon. In any event, the liberal reform movements of the nineteenth century were transformed in the twentieth into traditional revivalist movements.

On the eve of Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate in 1924, Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) published an important treatise on the Imamate, or Supreme Caliphate, in which he argued for the establishment of an Islamic state that would be ruled by a council of jurists or religious scholars. Such a state would recognize nationalistic sentiments and aspirations, but would subordinate them to the religio-political interests of the larger community. Rida's Islamic revivalism and Arab nationalism came to represent a major trend in twentieth-century Muslim thinking, and his political plan for a council of jurists would be implemented in Iran following the revolution of 1978–9.

Contemporary Revivalist Movements

It remains the ideal of Islamic reform to establish a transnational Islamic caliphate. The reality, however, has been a proliferation of local movements reflecting local needs and ideas.

Common to most revivalist movements in the second half of the twentieth century was the ideal of an all-inclusive and self-sufficient Islamic order. This ideal had its roots in the Society of Muslim Brothers (Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin), founded in 1928 by an Egyptian schoolteacher named Hasan al-Banna. The aim of this society was to establish a network of Islamic social, economic, and political institutions through which the total

The political and militaristic aspects of revivalism also had their beginnings in the Muslim Brothers, particularly after the assassination of the populist and generally peaceful al-Banna in 1949. He was succeeded by hard-line leaders who advocated active *jihad* against the Egyptian state system, which they regarded as un-Islamic. Among the products of the Muslim Brothers' ideology were the young officers, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, behind the 1952 socialist revolution that abolished monarchical rule in Egypt.

A charismatic proponent of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, Nasser nevertheless clashed with the Muslim Brothers, and in the mid-1960s he imprisoned, exiled, or executed most of their leaders. One of those leaders was Sayyid Qutb, who is important as a link to modern Islamist groups. As a theoretician he influenced Islamist ideology, and as an activist whose defiance of the state led to his execution he provided younger militants with a model of martyrdom to emulate. Following the Arab defeat in the six-day Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 and the death of Nasser three years later, the Muslim Brothers were driven underground and superseded by more powerful revivalist movements under Anwar Sadat and his successor Hosni Mubarak, some of which advocated the use of violence to achieve their goals. Although suppressed in Egypt, the Brotherhood has spread in other Arab countries; but in exile, without its social infrastructure, it has been more influential on the level of ideology than of social action. A similar organization, the Jama'at-i Islami (Islamic Society), was established in 1941 by Mawlana Sayyid Abu al-A'la Mawdudi. Like Hasan al-Banna, Mawdudi was committed to pan-Islamic unity. But also like al-Banna, he concentrated his efforts on his own community—in this case the Muslims of India and (after 1947) Pakistan. The

technology, they have rejected many Western values and practices—including capitalist democracy, women's liberation, and the free mixing of the sexes—as decadent. Therefore, unlike the nineteenth-century reformers who looked to the West for ideas and models, contemporary revivalist reformers have insisted on finding Islamic alternatives. Mawdudi, for example, wishing to distinguish his Islamic state model from Western democracies, described it as a 'theodemocracy' based on the broad Qur'anic principle of consultation (*shura*) and the *shari'ah* law.

State Islam and the Islamic Revolution

Following a coup in 1969, Gaafar Mohamed el-Nimeiri made *shari'ah* the law in Sudan. The result was a bloody conflict between the Muslim north and the generally Christian south that has continued for decades, reducing a formerly rich agricultural country to famine. Likewise in Pakistan, which for three decades had been a constitutionally Islamic but modern state. The introduction of *shari'ah* by General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq following a coup in 1977 led to violent social and political conflict.

In Egypt and Algeria, revivalist movements continue to resort to violent means in their quest to establish Islamic states. Again, the results are social strife and instability.

In almost every Muslim country there is at least one revivalist movement advocating some form of Islamic state. In countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, the governments themselves espouse Islamic national policies in order to silence extremist demands for radical reform. Nevertheless, in most Muslim countries feelings continue to run high between Islamic movements made up of educated middle-class men and women and despotic regimes determined to hold on to power at any cost. In such highly charged social and political con-

and spiritual expression of discontent—not only for Islamic activists, but for a broad spectrum of the community as well. It was on precisely such mass discontent that Imam Ruhollah Khomeini (1901–89) and his fellow Shi'i *mullahs* (religious legal functionaries) built the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which social, political, economic, and religious life are all under the control of a religious hierarchy headed by a supreme Ayatollah (*ayat Allah*, 'sign of God').

Throughout the long period of Shi'i secular rule in Iran (1501–1979), the authority of the religious '*ulama*' operated in more or less continuous tension with the secular authorities. This tension was greatly increased during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who sought to westernize the country and obscure its Islamic identity by emphasizing Iran's pre-Islamic cultural past. In 1963, during the Muharram observances of Husayn's martyrdom, matters came to a head when the Shah's dreaded secret police ruthlessly put down mass demonstrations led by the '*ulama*'. Khomeini, already a prominent religious leader, was sent into exile, where he elaborated his religio-political theory, according to which the jurist should have all-embracing authority in the community. In 1979 Khomeini returned to Iran at the head of the Islamic revolution. The Islamic republic he founded has had a turbulent history, including an eight-year war with Iraq (1980–8), out of which it emerged greatly weakened but still intact. Pro-democracy protests and challenges to the authority of the '*ulama*' came to international attention with the controversy that surrounded the 2009 election.

Islam in Western Europe

The Islamic presence in western Europe began with the establishment of Umayyad rule in southern Spain in 711. Commercial, political, and cultural relations were initiated with both Latin and Byzantine states, but medieval Europe would

its soil. The campaign to drive the Muslims out of Spain succeeded in 1492 with the conquest of Granada. As a result, the Muslim communities in western Europe today are a relatively recent phenomenon.

In the twentieth century some Muslims migrated to Europe from various colonies as students, visitors, and merchants. Many also went as menial labourers and factory workers, especially after the Second World War. The majority of these post-war immigrants were men ranging in age from their teens to their forties.

The ethnic makeup of the Muslim communities in Europe was largely determined by colonial ties. Muslims from the French colonies in North Africa, for example, went to France. Indian and, later, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims tended to go to Britain. Those from Turkey and the former Soviet Turkic republics went to Germany and the Netherlands, while Bosnians went to Austria. These patterns were established in the early decades of the twentieth century and continued in spite of many restrictions.

Muslim communities in Europe tend to reflect ethnic and linguistic rather than sectarian affiliations. In recent years hundreds of mosques and cultural centres have been established in European cities, and Muslim communities have become a dynamic religious and intellectual force in European society. France and Britain no longer confine Muslims to the status of 'guest workers', as most other European countries do. Yet even there, the long histories of European racism, ethnocentrism, and colonialism have ensured that many Muslims continue to be treated as second-class citizens. This has created serious problems.

After the Islamic revolution of 1978-9, many Iranians immigrated to Europe, adding yet another layer of ethnic and religious diversity to European

have infused new blood into the Muslim community in the Western world.

Many Muslims born in Europe to foreign-born parents are assimilating into European society and culture. On the other hand, most European countries have taken legal measures to limit immigration, and since the mid-1980s a number of them have repatriated some of their Muslim immigrants. Such actions may have been prompted in part by economic considerations, but also perhaps by nationalistic fears that Muslim immigrants might alter the social and ethnic character of these countries. At the end of 2009, for example, Swiss citizens voted into their constitution a ban on minarets for new mosques—even though, of the approximately 150 mosques and Islamic centres in Switzerland, only four have minarets. At the same time, European discrimination against ethnic minorities and the Islamic awakening precipitated by the Iranian revolution have made Muslims more aware of their own religious and cultural identity.

Islam in North America

When the first Muslims arrived on American shores is a matter of conjecture. Suggestions that Muslims from Spain and West Africa may have sailed to America long before Columbus should not be discounted, but they are far from conclusive. It is very likely that the fall of Granada in 1492 and the harsh treatment imposed on Muslims and Jews by the Inquisition led many to flee to America soon after Columbus's historic voyage. Scattered records point to the presence of Muslims in Spanish America before 1550.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hundreds of thousands of Africans were taken as slaves to the Spanish, Portuguese, and British colonies in the Americas. Although the majority were

were able to preserve their faith and heritage, and some tried to maintain contact with Muslims in their home areas, but many others were quickly absorbed into American society, adopting their masters' religion and even family names.

Islamic customs and ideas can still be traced in the African-American community, and today efforts are underway to reconstruct the story behind them from slave narratives, oral history, and other archival materials, including observations of Islamic activities by white travellers in the mid-1800s.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, African-Americans made conscious efforts to recover their Islamic heritage. In the early 1930s, Elijah Muhammad (born Elijah Poole, 1897-1975) became a follower of Wallace D. Fard and founded the Nation of Islam in America. He saw Islam as a religion of Black people only, misrepresenting the universalistic and non-racial nature of Islam. But his sons and successors, after travelling in the Muslim world and observing the international and multiracial character of the *hajj* pilgrimage, have drawn closer to classical Islam. African-American Muslims often refer to themselves as Bilalians, after Bilal, an African Companion of the Prophet's time and community. Islam continues to be the fastest-growing religion in America, particularly among African-Americans.

Before the revival of Islam in the African-American community early in the twentieth century, small numbers of Muslims travelled to Canada and the United States, mainly from Syria and Lebanon. These early immigrants were uneducated men who intended only to work in North America for a few years and then return home. Instead, many married Canadian or American women and were soon completely assimilated.

The first Muslim missionary in America was

a periodical entitled *The Muslim World* (not to be confused with the academic journal of the same name). He travelled widely to spread the new faith and established Islamic study circles or Muslim brotherhoods in many northeastern and midwestern American cities. With his death in 1916, however, his movement died as well.

The numbers of Muslim immigrants coming to Canada and the United States increased markedly during the twentieth century. Most were of South Asian origin. Many were students who later chose to stay, or well-educated professionals who came in search of better opportunities. But others came to escape persecution in their homelands on account of their religious or political activities. Interestingly, many recent newcomers have arrived as staunch anti-Western revivalists but have soon forgotten their hostility and taken up life as peaceful, responsible, and law-abiding citizens.

Although these and other religiously committed Muslim immigrants may have moderated their political convictions, they retained a high degree of religious zeal, which they put to good use in the service both of their own community and of the society at large. They have played a crucial role in preserving the Islamic identity of fellow immigrants and promoting a better understanding of Islam through media activities and academic meetings.

The first mosque in the United States was built in 1915 in Maine by Albanian Muslims; another followed in Connecticut in 1919. Other mosques were established in the 1920s and 1930s in South Dakota and Iowa. In 1928, Polish Tatars built a mosque in Brooklyn, New York, which is still in use. The first Canadian mosque was built in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1938, and a number of smaller towns in Alberta also have Muslim communities.

In Toronto, the first Muslim organization was the

wives however much you try' (Q. 4: 3 and 129). As a result, the vast majority of Muslim marriages are monogamous.

Even more significantly, the Qur'an changes the nature of polygyny from an entitlement to a social responsibility. The verses dealing with this subject open with the proviso, 'If you [men] are afraid that you would not act justly towards the orphans [in your care], then marry what seems good to you of women: two, three, or four' (Q. 4: 3). This statement may be interpreted in two ways. It may mean that a man could marry the widowed mother of orphans in order to provide a family for them. It may also mean that a man could marry two, three, or four orphan girls after they have attained marriageable age, again to provide a home and family for them. In either case, marriage to more than one wife was explicitly allowed as a way of providing for female orphans and widows in a traditional society beset with continuous warfare, where a woman could find the love and security she needed only in her own home.

In addition the Qur'an allows women to own property and dispose of it as they please. Women may acquire property through bequest, inheritance, and bride dowry. Judged by today's social and economic needs and circumstances, these rights may seem inadequate. Yet the Qur'an undeniably recognizes in women a human dignity and a social and emotional personality that were denied until recently in many societies.

Islamic law and social custom have been not been so generous and forward-looking, however. In general, they have tended either to restrict the rights laid out in the Qur'an or to render them virtually inoperative. Of all the social and political issues that are currently being debated within the Muslim community, one of the most important is the age-old question of women's rights, with all its

The exact numbers of Muslims in Canada and the United States are a matter of debate. The 2001 Canadian census counted almost 600,000 Muslims, making Islam the second-largest religion in the country. The United States has not had a religious census since 1936, but the current Muslim population there is estimated to be between 6 and 7 million. Whatever the numbers may be, Islam in North America is no longer an exotic rarity: it is the faith of many people's co-workers and neighbours.

Women and the Family

Islam strictly forbade the practice of female infanticide, and it required that those who had killed their daughters in pre-Islamic times (often by burying them alive) make expiation for their crime. The Qur'an states that on the Day of Resurrection, it will be asked of the child who was buried alive, 'For what sin was she slain?' (Q. 81: 8-9). Victims are to be vindicated and recompensed on the Day of Judgment for the wrong done them in this life.

Marriage under Islam is essentially a contractual relationship negotiated between the prospective husband and the woman's father or guardian. But the Qur'an emphasizes that the true contract is between the husband and the wife, based on mutual consent: the woman's father or guardian, 'he in whose hand is the tie of marriage' (Q. 2: 237), is expected to act on her behalf and, ideally, in her interest. Divorce is allowed, but only as a last resort, to be used only after every effort has been made to save the marriage.

The Qur'an allows polygyny (simultaneous marriage to more than one wife). But it places two significant restrictions on such marriages. First, it limits to four the number of wives that a man can have at one time, whereas before Islam the num-

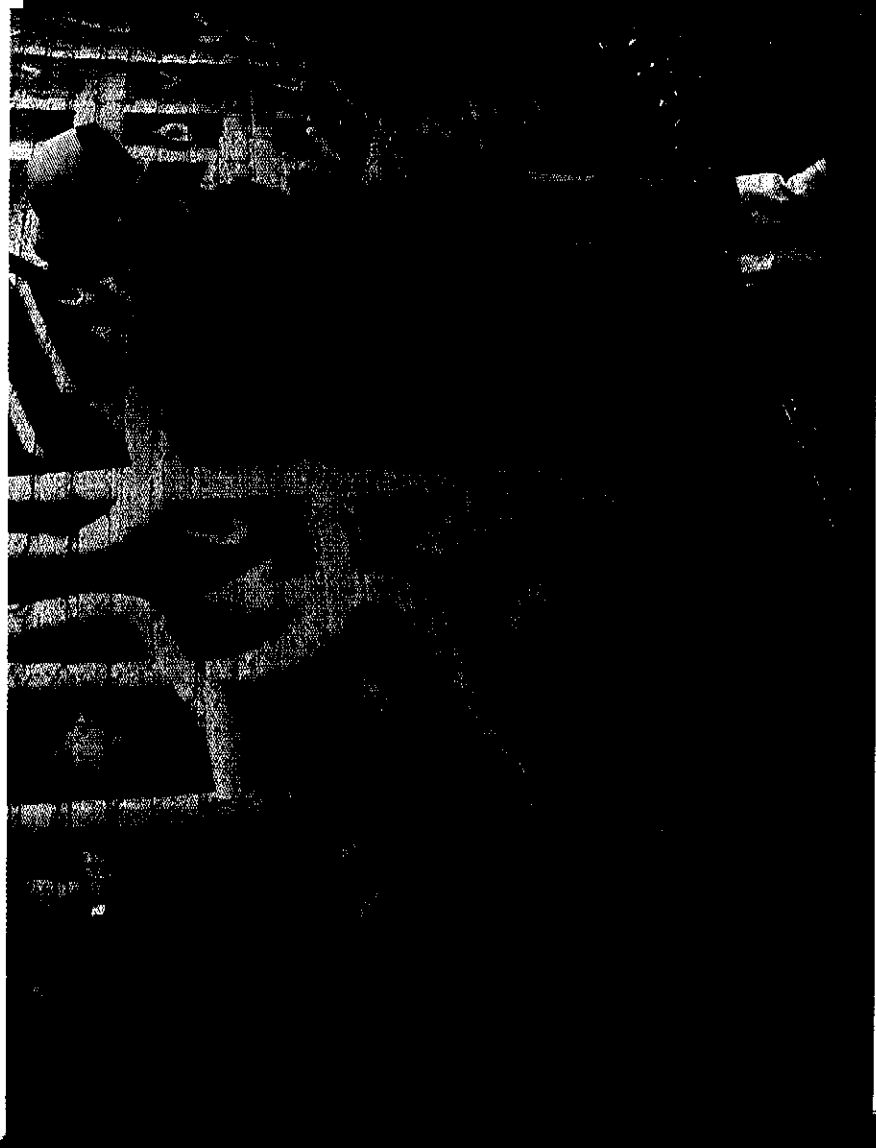
verse it also demands modesty of males. The *haddith* tradition indicates that Muslim communities adopted the practice of veiling during the time of the caliphate, probably under the influence of Eastern Christian and ancient Greek customs. An extreme extension of the practice, which may also be attributable to non-Arab influences, is the seclusion of women. Under the South Asian system of *purdah*, for instance, women are not only veiled but isolated from men. And seclusion became a hallmark of Turkish life under the *harim* system of the Ottoman aristocracy. In Afghanistan, the *burqa* covers the entire body; even the woman's eyes (and her vision) are obscured by a screen.

In the twenty-first century, the *hijab* has become a powerful—and powerfully ambiguous—symbol, widely condemned (especially by non-Muslims)

as a limitation on women's rights, but often defended by Muslim women themselves as a freely chosen affirmation of their Islamic identity. The question at issue is to what extent women can be excluded from public life. A closely related issue, of course, is access to education for both women and men. Increasingly, social and economic conditions throughout the world call for equal participation and equal rights for women and men alike.

Sexual Diversity

Issues of gender equality and sexual diversity are rarely discussed within the largest of the Muslim political and religious organizations in North America (such as the Islamic Society of North America), partly because those groups tend to



Umar, a Pakistani-American college student and DJ, at the Inner-city Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Chicago. The mural was an interfaith community project involving Christian and Jewish as well as Muslim youth.

emphasize traditional interpretations of Islam, and partly because they have been preoccupied with matters such as community-building, immigration policy, discrimination, and (to some extent) foreign policy. But as the size of their constituencies has grown, and the range of perspectives within those constituencies has increased, there has been growing pressure to address matters involving gender and sexuality.

Diasporic communities in large urban centres tend to become more open to questions about traditional religious and cultural ideas as they become more deeply rooted (or 'assimilated') in their new societies. As contact with the 'host' community intensifies, those who question traditional ideas are likely to have much easier access to information and networks of like-minded people than their counterparts in their countries of origin. Some will 'exit' their communities of origin and seek full assimilation to the dominant society; but in large communities particularly, some will remain connected and mobilize their challenges to traditionalism from within.

In general, Muslims born and raised in North America are more open to diversity than those born abroad, especially if their communities are not sufficiently homogeneous to support their own separate social institutions (such as schools). The likelihood of dissent is further amplified in the Muslim communities of North America by relatively high levels of education. In general, high education increases openness to diversity, as well as to equity claims by women and sexual minorities. The fact that Muslim minorities in North America are less economically marginalized than those in Europe also reduces the likelihood of strict adherence to religious belief.

On the other hand, the great majority of Muslims in Canada and the United States are still rela-

developing, as we shall see in Chapter 8, but homosexual Muslims in particular continue to face condemnation from mainstream Muslim society.

Islam and the Future

A major development in the history of Islam is now underway in the West. Muslims who, through migration, have moved from majority to minority status are being spurred to define the priorities of their faith. Their decisions about what to pass on to their Western-born children will shape the contours of Islam in the twenty-first century and beyond. At the same time, the Western emphasis on open discussion calls on Muslims from different cultural and regional backgrounds to think clearly about what they do and do not share. Perhaps Muslims living in the West will use Western technology and democratic institutions to revitalize the Muslim communities in their countries of origin, as well as the rest of the Muslim *ummah*. The speed of modern travel and communications may contribute to this process.

For a time it seemed that political developments might contribute to it as well. Many hoped that the end of the cold war in 1989 and the moves made in the 1990s towards ending the long and bitter conflict between Israelis and Palestinians might allow for better relations between the Western and Muslim worlds in general. But the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has only deepened, and new conflicts have emerged in recent years.

One major political development was the Iranian revolution of 1979. Three decades later, the prospect of an Iran with nuclear weapons has only increased the tensions between the Islamic regime and the West. A second development can also be traced to 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Muslims from around the

world, including the American president, Ronald Reagan.

Among the other contributors to Afghanistan's 'holy war' was Osama bin Laden, the son of a wealthy Saudi Arabian family, who created Al-Qaeda ('the base') to help fund and train *mujahidin*. The Soviet troops were withdrawn in 1988. But Al-Qaeda was not disbanded. In 1996 bin Laden issued a *fatwa* (religious legal opinion) calling for the overthrow of the Saudi government and the removal of US forces in Arabia, and in 1998 he declared war against Americans generally. A series of terrorist actions followed, culminating in the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001. In response, the United States and its allies went to war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq.

Muslims around the world have repeatedly condemned terrorist activity. Muslim leaders

have pointed out that the use of suicide bombers violates mainstream Islamic teachings that prohibit both suicide and the killing of civilians during war, and in March 2005, on the first anniversary of the 2004 Al-Qaeda train bombing in Madrid, Spanish clerics issued a *fatwa* against bin Laden himself. Unfortunately, extremists seem impervious to mainstream Muslim opinion.

Muslims can accomplish much in the West if they work with their non-Muslim neighbours to promote justice and moral consciousness. But many non-Muslims see 'Islam' and 'the West' as mutually exclusive realities, and do not recognize their shared heritage. If future generations of Muslims are to remain active as Muslims in pluralistic Western societies, it is more important than ever to change old images and ideas.

Sites

Mecca Home to the Ka'ba, the first place of monotheistic worship. Also the place where Muhammad was born and received his first revelations.

Medina The home of the first Muslim community and the place where Muhammad was buried.

Jerusalem The area of the ancient city called Haram al-Sharif (the 'Noble Sanctuary'; also known to Jews and Christians as the Temple Mount) contains two sacred buildings: the Masjid al-Aqsa—the 'farthest mosque', from a passage in the Qur'an (17: 1) referring to Muhammad's miraculous journey—and the Dome of the Rock, a sanctuary built on the spot from which tradition says Muhammad made his ascent to heaven.

Karbala' The city in Iraq where Imam Husayn (the third Imam and the grandson of Muhammad) was martyred; of special importance to Shi'i Muslims.

Cairo Home of Al-Azhar University, the oldest university in the Western world and an important centre of Sunni learning.

Glossary

caliph From the Arabic *khalifah* ('one who represents or acts on behalf of another'). The caliph was the Prophet's successor as the head of the Muslim community; the position became institutionalized in the form of the caliphate, which lasted from 632 to 1924.

dhikr 'Remembering' God's name; chanted in Sufi devotional exercises, sometimes while devotees dance in a circle.

dhimmi 'Protected people': non-Muslim religious minorities (specifically Jews and Christians, as 'People of the Book') accorded tolerated status in Islamic society.

faqir A Sufi ascetic, from the Arabic word for 'poor'; the corresponding Persian word is *darvish*.

Fatihah The short opening surah of the Qur'an, recited at least 17 times every day.

fatwa A ruling issued by a traditional religio-legal authority.

fiqh Jurisprudence, or the theoretical principles underpinning the specific regulations contained in the *shari'ah*.

hadith The body of texts reporting Muhammad's words and example, taken by Muslims as a foundation for conduct and doctrine; a *hadith* is an individual unit of the literature.

hajj The annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

halal Ritually acceptable; most often used in the context of the slaughter of animals for meat; also refers generally to Muslim dietary regulations.

hanifs 'Pious ones'; a group of pre-Islamic Arabs who shared the ethical

hijab A woman's veil or head covering.

hijrah The Prophet's migration from Mecca to establish a community in Medina in 622 CE. In dates, the abbreviation AH stands for 'year of the *hijrah*' (the starting-point of the Islamic dating system).

'Id al-Fitr The holiday celebrating the end of the Ramadan fast; the festival traditionally begins following the sighting of the new moon.

ijma' The consensus of religio-legal scholars; one of the two secondary principles used in jurisprudence; some legal schools give it more weight than others.

ijtihad Personal reasoning applied to the development of legal opinions.

Imamis ('Twelvers') Shi'is who recognize twelve imams as legitimate heirs to the Prophet's authority; the last, in occultation since 874, is expected to return some day as the *Mahdi*.

Isma'ilis ('Sevens') Shi'is who recognize only seven imams; named after the last of them, Isma'il, whose lineage continues to the present in the Agha Khan.

isnad The pedigree or chain of transmission of a *hadith*, with which the individual unit begins.

jihad Struggle in defence of the faith; some *jihads* are military, waged in response to threats to the community's security or welfare; others are spiritual, waged to improve moral conduct in society.

jinn Spirits or demons (the singular is *jinni*).

kufi Rejecting belief; implies lack of

some unspecified future date to restore righteousness and order to the world.

mir'aj The Prophet's miraculous journey to heaven.

mu'adhdhin The person who calls people to prayer.

qiblah The direction of prayer, marked in mosques by a niche inside the wall nearest Mecca.

Ramadan The month throughout which Muslims fast during daylight hours.

sadaqah Alms given voluntarily, in addition to the required *zakat*.

salat The prescribed daily prayers, said five times during the day.

shahadah The Muslim profession of faith in God as the only god, and in Muhammad as God's prophet.

shari'ah The specific regulations of Islamic law (jurisprudence, or theoretical discussion of the law, is *fiqh*).

shaykh The Arabic term for a senior master, especially in the context of Sufism.

Shi'is Muslims who trace succession to the Prophet's authority through imams in the lineage of 'Ali; the smaller of the two main divisions of Islam, accounting for about one-sixth of all Muslims today.

sunnah The 'life-example' of Muhammad's words and deeds, based mainly on the Hadith literature; the primary source of guidance for Muslims.

zakat The prescribed welfare tax; 2.5 per cent of each Muslim's accumulated wealth, collected by central treasuries in earlier times but now donated to charities independently of state governments; see also *sadaqaqah*.

tafsir Commentary on the Qur'an.

taqlid Following the *ijtihad* or legal opinion of a particular jurist.

ummah The Muslim community.

sions of Islam, accounting for about sixths of all Muslims today.

ah A chapter of the Qur'an; there are in all, arranged mainly in decreasing order of length except for the first (*Fatihah*).

Further Reading

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Recommended Websites

www.uga.edu/islam/

The best academic site for the study of Islam, presented by Professor Alan Godlas of the University of Georgia.

www.cie.org/index.aspx

The Council on Islamic Education offers useful resources for teachers.

<http://acommonword.com/>

An interfaith initiative supported by a wide range of Muslim scholars and leaders.

www.msawest.net/islam/

An excellent selection of resources on Islam, including searchable translations of both the Qur'an and the Hadith literature, presented by the Muslim Students Association.

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So.

In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water. Coyote was there, but Coyote was asleep. That Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen.

I can tell you that.

—Thomas King (1993: 1), *Cherokee/Greek*

Anything can happen. The possibilities, the complexities, of religions seem to be endless. This is particularly true of Indigenous traditions, which constitute the majority of the world's religions. They are interwoven with the entire history of humanity, they encompass the whole earth. And they are almost unimaginably diverse. So where to begin?

Perhaps it is best to start with ourselves. Let us approach the task of generalizing about Indigenous traditions with humility, and with the understanding that there are exceptions to every rule. We should also keep in mind that many past interpretations of these traditions have proven to be deeply mistaken. Looking through the lenses of their own assumptions and cultural biases, scholars can easily be tricked into seeing things that are not there, or missing what is right in front of them.

Coyote would not be surprised.

‘INDIGENOUS RELIGION’

Definitions

There is a shared sense of Aboriginality nationally (and internationally with other Indigenous peoples), regardless of the geographical location or socio-economic experience of the individual.

are open to debate; some have even questioned whether they mean anything at all. You might think that trying to define a term made up of two elements that may be meaningless is doomed to failure. But we are going to try anyway.

‘Religion’

Many of the difficulties surrounding the word ‘religion’ stem from the effort to find common patterns in such a variety of human practices. Are religions always about gods? (No.) Do all religions have a sacred text, believe in life after death, or promote the same basic values? (No again.) So what exactly are we talking about when we refer to ‘religion’? Although scholars generally concede that we are unlikely to develop a single definition on which all can agree, they also point out that all definitions are themselves constructs. In other words, often what is most important is simply to be clear about which construct we are using.

The view of religion underlying this chapter is one that focuses on the beliefs, experiences, and practices of specific communities with respect to non-falsifiable realities (Cox 2007: 88). A proposition that is falsifiable is one that can be scientifically proven untrue. Religious propositions are of a different kind. It may not be possible to prove them true, but it is equally impossible to prove them false. Rather, religious propositions traffic in the unseeable, the untouchable, the un-

Timeline

Although most of the dates below relate to developments in Indigenous traditions since contact with non-Indigenous people, the histories of those traditions began many millennia earlier. Archaeological evidence can at least identify the presence of *Homo sapiens* communities, but dates remain approximate at best. Also note that the events listed here relate only to the cultures discussed in this chapter—a tiny fraction of the thousands that have existed.

c. 190,000 BCE	Earliest evidence of Indigenous people in Africa
c. 70,000 BCE	Earliest evidence of Indigenous people in Australia, Europe, and Asia
c. 12,500 BCE	Earliest evidence of Indigenous people in the Americas
616 CE	First Muslims arrive in Africa (Ethiopia)
c. 1250	First contact between the Ainu and the Japanese
c. 1300	First Indigenous settlers arrive in New Zealand (from Polynesia)
1444	Portuguese exploration of sub-Saharan Africa begins
c. 1480	Atlantic slave trade begins
1492	Christopher Columbus (Italian) arrives in the West Indies, initiating Spanish colonization of the Americas
1642	Dutch explorer Abel Janszoon Tasman arrives in New Zealand
1788	British First Fleet arrives in Sydney, Australia
1799	Handsome Lake experiences his first vision
1819	British and Xhosa (led by Nxele) fight Battle of Grahamstown
c. 1840	Canada establishes residential school system
1856–7	Nongqawuse's vision leads to Xhosa cattle massacre
1869	Australia begins taking Aboriginal children from their families, producing the first of many 'Stolen Generations'
1883	Pauline Johnson (Mohawk) publishes first poems; US bans Sun Dance
1884	Canada bans potlatch
1885	European powers partition Africa at Congress of Berlin; intensive Christian missionary efforts begin in non-Muslim areas of Africa; earliest recorded 'cargo cult' begins in Fiji
1889	Wovoka revives the Ghost Dance
1890	US Cavalry massacres more than 300 Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee, North Dakota

- 1958** Chinua Achebe (Igbo) publishes *Things Fall Apart*
- 1969** Kiowa novelist N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* wins Pulitzer Prize for Fiction
- 1970** US returns 194 km² of land to Taos Pueblo
- 1985** Maori novelist Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* wins the Booker Prize for Fiction
- 1990** Oka Crisis in Quebec, Canada
- 1992** Australian High Court overturns *terra nullius* ruling
- 1994** Nelson Mandela (Xhosa) elected president of South Africa
- 2007** United Nations adopts Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 2008** Australia apologizes for 'Stolen Generations'; Canada apologizes for residential school system; Japan formally recognizes Ainu as an Indigenous group

between religion and science—as if religion had no scientific components, or science could not function as a religion for some people. This is not a reasonable distinction, in my opinion: religion and science may often overlap. Nor do I mean to imply that scientific knowledge supersedes other forms of knowledge or ways of knowing. Scientists have been proven wrong about aspects of our world that some Indigenous cultures have long been right about.

Sull, I believe that the focus on 'non-falsifiable realities' as a basis for defining religion can work quite well. In particular—and most relevantly—it is a good fit for the examples of Indigenous religion that this chapter will examine.

'Indigenous'

The term 'Indigenous' is also problematic, for it obliges us to ask which cultures and people are 'Indigenous' and which are not. This is not just an academic question, but one loaded with legal and political implications. It has a direct and severe

Unfortunately, it is usually non-Indigenous governments that impose the definitions, and those definitions themselves tend to change over time. In Canada, for instance, it was for many years the case that a 'status Indian' woman who married a 'non-status' man was no longer legally Indigenous; she automatically forfeited all the rights that the (legally defined) Indigenous people of Canada are entitled to. When this law was reversed after years of protest, not only these women but also their children suddenly 'became' Indigenous, virtually overnight.

Other definitions are also problematic. Almost invariably, 'Indigenous' is understood to mean 'original to the land'. Yet many places in the world, including India and Africa, have very ancient histories of migration and interaction between various groups. How could anyone possibly determine the 'original' inhabitants of such lands?

Furthermore, we again run into the difficulty of finding religious patterns. Some cultures that may be considered Indigenous recognize a sin-

Traditions at a Glance

Numbers

Reliable statistical information on Indigenous religions is virtually impossible to come by. According to the United Nations, there are approximately 370 million Indigenous people in the world; on average perhaps 15 to 20 per cent practise their ancestral traditions, but the figures would be much higher in some communities and much lower in others.

Distribution

Indigenous religious traditions can be found almost everywhere: there are more than 5,000 distinct Indigenous cultures in some 90 countries around the world. By far the largest Indigenous populations are in Asia and Africa; fewer than 10 per cent live in Central and South America, approximately 2 per cent in North America and Oceania, and just a small fraction in Europe.

Recent Historical Periods

Written records of most Indigenous traditions begin only after contact with non-Indigenous people, so the only developments we can trace with any certainty are those that have taken place since then. It's important to keep in mind, however, that Indigenous religions had been changing and adapting for millennia before that time.

600–700

First contact between Muslims and Indigenous Africans

1450–1850

First contact between Europeans and Indigenous people of Africa, North America, and Oceania; development of Atlantic slave trade and other colonial practices that devastated Indigenous populations

1930–1960

Several governments begin to reduce restrictions on Indigenous people and religion

1960–present

Revival of many Indigenous traditions around the world; development of global pan-Indigenous movements

Founders and Leaders

Few pre-contact Indigenous traditions identify a human founder, although most attribute key features of their religious life to superhuman ancestors. Virtually all traditions also contain religious authority figures such as elders, as well as ritual specialists such as diviners and healers who invoke spiritual powers to aid their communities. In response to colonialism, several new movements were founded by specific people, such as Wovoka (Paiute) or Nongqawuse (Xhosa).

Deities

Indigenous traditions vary widely in their conceptions of deities. Some recognize a single, supreme deity as the source of all life and power. Others do not recognize such a being, but attribute creation to a series of gods, spirits, or ancestors. Almost all Indigenous traditions, however, believe that personal deities (or spirits or ancestors) have an active, ongoing impact on the world.

Authoritative Texts

Most pre-contact Indigenous religions passed along their sacred stories orally. These stories often include accounts of the creation of the present world and/or the origins of the community. Many also

recount the ongoing activity of personal spiritual forces in the world. New tales continue to be told (and written), particularly about the trickster figure, and some post-contact movements (such as the Handsome Lake religion of the Iroquois) have their own sacred texts.

Noteworthy Teachings

Indigenous traditions are typically bound to specific places where important spiritual forces have manifested themselves (e.g., where acts of creation occurred). They also tend to be more concerned with what happens during life than after death; therefore they place greater emphasis on behaviour than on belief, and assess actions in terms of whether they benefit the community or cause it harm. Indigenous traditions frequently understand time as rhythmic rather than linear, linking the past to the present in a way that responds to changing circumstances; in this conception, the sacred inter-acts with the world on an ongoing basis, in ways that are both old and new.

who do not. Given the immense diversity of these traditions, how reasonable is it to group them all together?

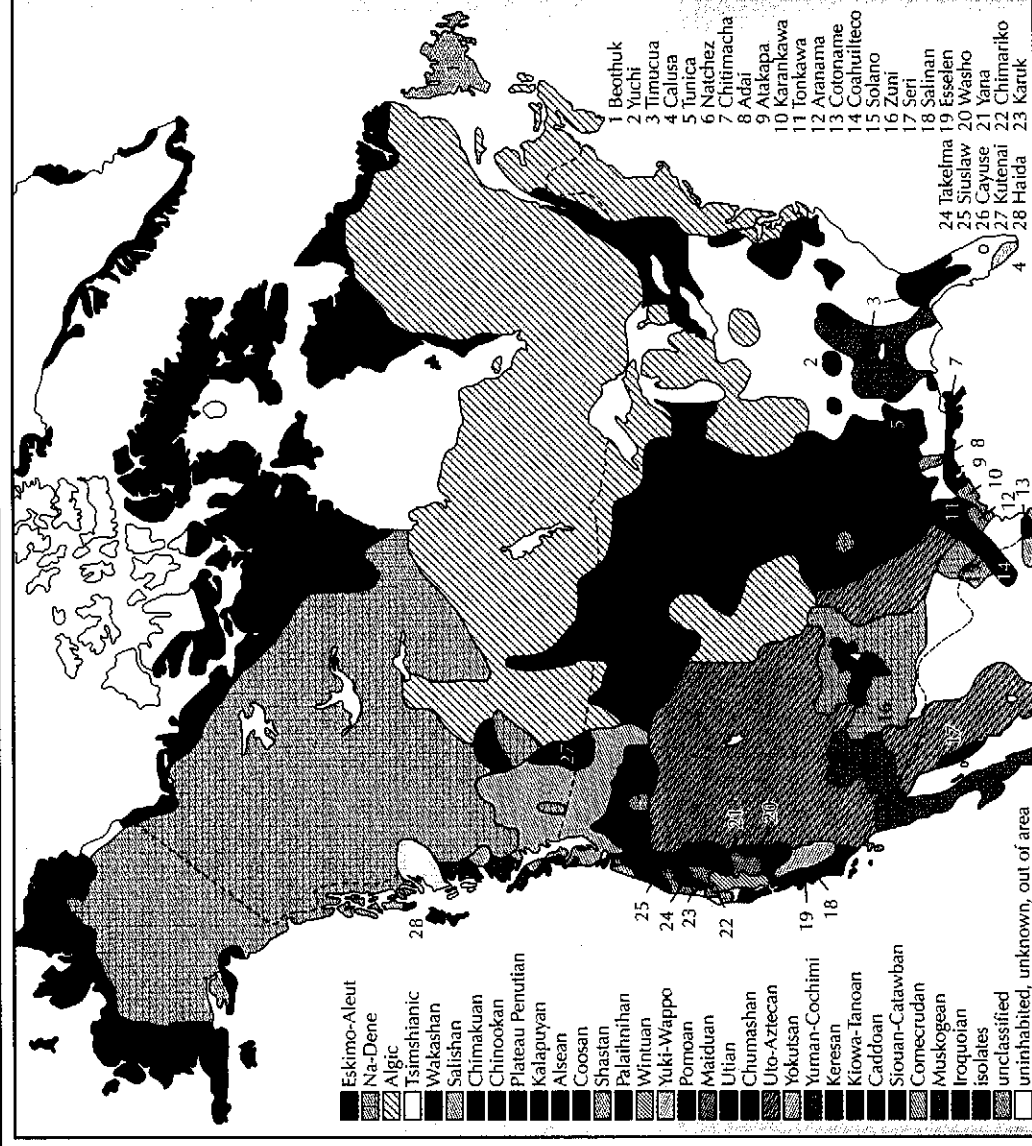
That said, there is at least one definition that avoids some of these problems by focusing on two elements of central importance to cultures that have typically been considered Indigenous both by themselves and by others: kinship and location. To be 'Indigenous' (or its synonym, 'Aboriginal') in this sense is to belong to a community that is defined both by its members' genealogical relations to one another, and by its connection to a particular place. The people who make up this community may or may not be the first or 'original' inhabitants of this place. They may not even inhabit it now. Yet they see themselves as belonging to it in critical ways, and they distinguish themselves from people who do not share this connection.

Putting our two terms together, then, 'Indigenous religion' refers to the beliefs, experiences, and practices concerning non-falsifiable realities of peoples who (a) identify themselves as Indigenous and (b) rely (at least in part) on kinship and

longer exist as they did before contact with the 'outside' world. This situation is partly the result of **syncretism**, the merging of elements from different religions. Many Native North American traditions have been deeply influenced by Christianity; some African rituals have incorporated elements of Islam; the sacred oral stories of Japanese Shinto became written texts under the influence of Chinese Buddhism. Does this mean that 'real' Indigenous religions have disappeared?

Definitely not. Change and syncretism have taken place among *all* religions throughout history. It is true that Indigenous religions today are not the same as they were a hundred, or five hundred, or ten thousand years ago. But the traditions as they exist now are no less authentic than they were in the past. The forms of Christianity practised in the contemporary United States have likewise been variously influenced by the religious beliefs and practices of many cultures, including African and Native American. These American forms in turn are quite different from the European Christianity that Martin Luther knew in the sixteenth-century, or

Map 6.1 North American Indigenous Language Families



This map shows the distribution of North American language families north of Mexico at the time of European contact (to the extent that scholars can determine). Language borders are given for the sake of clarity but were in reality much fuzzier than this image suggests. The map points to the tremendous diversity of Native North American cultures, since each language *family* may contain dozens of distinct *languages*. The family of Romance languages, for instance, contains Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Catalan, as well as many regional languages.

These days, Indigenous religious practices can be found anywhere: **Anishinaubae** drumming ceremonies in Toronto, Canada; **Yoruba** funeral rites in London, England; and **Maori** purification rituals at the opera house in Sydney, Australia. Indigenous people and their religions may be connected to history, but they are not bound (or buried) by it.

The 'Patterns' section below will offer a basic overview of some additional features that seem to be common to many, if not all, Indigenous religions, both past and present. Before we can say much more about what Indigenous religions are, however, we first need to briefly consider what they are not. That means breaking down some of

the key misconceptions about these religions that many non-Indigenous people have held, and often continue to hold.

'Us' and 'Them'

The people who have control of your stories, control of your voice, also have control of your destiny, your culture.

—Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, *Anishinaubae* (in Lutz 1991: 81)

Most of what most people know, or think they know, about Indigenous cultures has come from non-Indigenous people. This reality points to one further element common to Indigenous traditions: **colonialism**. The effects of colonialism will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter, but at the moment it is important to say a few words

about one facet of colonialism: namely, academic work on Indigenous people and cultures.

Scholars with Weapons

Over the past few decades, there has been some opposition to the efforts of non-Indigenous scholars to 'explain' Indigenous people. The main concern is that, even though such theories often bear little relation to reality, they tend to have significant social and political influence.

A classic example was outlined by the **Oglala** Sioux lawyer, historian, and activist Vine Deloria, Jr, in his book *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Anthropologists seeking to explain the social ills plaguing the Oglala community ignored the 'real issue, white control of the reservation', and theorized that the people were simply 'warriors without weapons' (Deloria, Jr, 1988 [1969]: 90). In other words, the Oglala were incapable of

From *Custer Died for Your Sins*, by Vine Deloria, Jr (Oglala Sioux)

Looking at a variety of Native American issues including colonialism, religion, and even humour, and appearing in the early days of the American Indian Movement, Custer Died for Your Sins remains one of the most influential works of Indigenous non-fiction ever written.

From lack of roads to unshined shoes, Sioux problems were generated, so the anthros discovered, by the refusal of the white man to recognize the great desire of the Oglala to go to war. Why expect an Oglala to become a small businessman, when he was only waiting for that wagon train to come around the bend?

The very real and human problems of the reservation were considered to be merely by-products of the failure of a warrior people to become domesticated. . . . What use would roads, houses, schools, businesses, and income be to a people who, everyone expected, would soon depart on the hunt or warpath? . . .

The question of the Oglala Sioux is one that plagues every Indian tribe in the nation, if it will closely examine itself. Tribes have been defined as one thing, the definition has been completely explored,

adapting to a market-economy lifestyle because, deep in their souls, they remained violently primitive. Accordingly, attention was diverted away from the pressing needs of the people in this community—credit, employment, housing, medical services—and focused instead on figuring out how to make 'modern Indians' out of them (Deloria, Jr, 1988 [1969]: 92).

Today it is not unusual for concern to be expressed when non-Indigenous scholars speak about Indigenous people. The main objection might seem to be that 'outsiders' lack the 'insider' knowledge and insight required to speak with authority about a particular community, culture, or tradition. As Deloria suggests, however, the real problem is not so much a matter of accuracy as it is one of *power and control*. The fact is that such scholars historically have been in a privileged position of authority to define Indigenous people not only to other non-Natives, but even to Native people themselves.

Unacceptable Terms

Another important problem with academic work about Indigenous people is that it tends to reinforce the idea that 'they' are different from 'us'. Thus the study of Indigenous religions has produced many terms and concepts that typically are applied only to those traditions, and not to world religions more broadly. Such terms include:

- animism
- fetish
- mana
- myth
- shaman
- taboo
- totem

This chapter will rarely use any of the above terms, in part because they are not necessary for an introductory understanding of Indigenous religions—but also because they are not used in reference to the other religions discussed in this book,

even when they might be relevant. For example, the origin stories of Indigenous people are usually labelled 'myth', while the stories recounted in texts like the Hebrew Bible or Buddhist sutras are referred to as 'sacred literature'. Similarly, the rule that prohibits an African mask carver from coming into contact with a woman during his work would normally be called a 'taboo'; yet that term is not applied to the rule that forbids a priest from pouring unused communion wine down the drain. In short, it is important not to perpetuate the notion that Indigenous religions are of a different order from non-Indigenous religions.

'Primitives' and the Problem of History

If I press any anthros in a prolonged discussion on exactly why they study Indians and other tribal peoples and why they study anthropology at all, I am almost always informed that tribal people represent an earlier stage of human accomplishment and that we can learn about our past by studying the way existing tribal peoples live.

—Vine Deloria, Jr (1997: 214), *Oglala Sioux*

The More Things Change

For many years non-Indigenous people assumed that Indigenous people and cultures had changed very little over time—at least until the two groups met and colonization began. Until relatively recently, in fact, only anthropologists studied Aboriginal people: historians (including historians of religion) did not, because they assumed there was no Aboriginal history to look at.

The development of anthropology as an academic field can be traced to the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among other factors that led to this development, the Enlightenment was an age of exploration, during which reports were regularly sent back to Europe describing encounters with

previously unknown cultures—cultures that were primarily oral in nature, for example, and that used simpler technology.

Assuming that such cultures had remained essentially unchanged from their beginnings, the Europeans referred to them as 'primitive' (from the Latin *primus*, meaning 'first'). For those people, history was assumed to have begun only when they first encountered 'modern/civilized' cultures.

This assumption was supported by the fact that the majority of Europeans at the time of contact were Christians who believed both in the (God-given) superiority of their own culture, and in the divine imperative to spread their religion to those who had not yet heard the gospel. Indigenous cultures were seen as ideal recipients of the Word of God, blank slates with no real history—or religion—of their own. This missionary worldview often went hand in hand with academic inquiry, and tended to colour the scholars' interpretation (in some cases, fabrication) of the details of Indigenous lives.

We know now that those long-standing assumptions about Indigenous cultures as static and ahistorical were completely untrue. All the available evidence shows that Indigenous peoples had dynamic, eventful histories long before they were 'discovered'. They have also been quite conscious of their histories, using stories, songs, or physical markings to record all manner of past events and conditions, changes in the culture or the land, family genealogies, remarkable natural phenomena, and so on.

A Persistent Problem

One example of the persistent notion that Indigenous cultures are 'primitive' is the tendency to think of them as non-literate. This notion is deeply problematic in several ways, which will

contact with non-Indigenous people. Third, of course, the simple fact is that the vast majority of contemporary Indigenous cultures are fully literate; to ignore this fact is to continue to think of these cultures only in the past tense.

Another example of the tendency to regard Indigenous people as 'primitive' is the belief that they do not distinguish between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious' aspects of their lives—that they consider everything to be sacred. Sometimes this idea is supported by pointing to practices such as the Navajo enactment of the 'Blessingway' ceremony before a new dwelling is occupied (see p. 357). Commentators claim that for the Navajo, this ceremony transforms the home into a sacred site in a manner that renders every single act of daily life that occurs within it—eating, sleeping, arguing, laughing—equally sacred. This notion is both inaccurate and patronizing. Essentially, Indigenous people are understood to resemble young children, who often believe that everything—trees, stuffed animals, bits of clothing—is alive and sentient.

The fact is that Indigenous cultures are no less able than non-Indigenous ones to form distinctions in relation to the category of religion. Observant Muslims may take their prayer mats wherever they go, but they use the mats only at specific, established times; other times are not for prayer. Similarly, an Australian **Aborigine** knows the difference between a mountain that is sacred and one that is not, and that certain acts are performed only during particular ritual contexts, and not at any other time.

Many non-Indigenous scholars have come to realize that Indigenous cultures were (and are) just as complex and innovative as their own, and that the idea of the 'primitive' says much more about the person who holds it than about the people it is applied to. For example, it typically suggests a

do so as a way of expressing the belief that their own 'civilized' culture has alienated people from themselves, or from the natural world. Again, the concept tells us more about such people—and their culture—than it tells us about the people they imagine to be 'primitive'.

Still, the idea of the 'primitive' is a stubborn one, and it continues to have deeply negative consequences. It is one reason why many world religions courses still ignore Indigenous traditions altogether. It also helps to explain why literary scholars often ignore modern Indigenous writers, while anthropologists continue to pore over transcriptions of ancient tales. As the Anishinaubae author Daniel David Moses has commented: 'This image of traditional Native storytelling places Native people in the museum with all the other extinct species' (Moses and Goldie 1992: xiii).

Patterns

The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies . . .

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is
endless.

—T.S. Eliot (1959: 23–4), Euro-American

Eating and Seeing

Dr Clare Brant, a **Mohawk** from southern Ontario, has recounted an experience from the 1970s when his band invited a group of James Bay **Cree** to a sporting tournament they were hosting (Ross 1992: 2–3). The **Mohawk**—who developed agriculture long before meeting Europeans—had a tradition of always setting out more food than their guests could eat, in order to demonstrate their wealth and generosity. Unfortunately the **Cree** had a very different tradition. Coming from a culture of hunting and gathering they were accustomed to living with scarcity; as a result they would eat all the food offered, thus showing their respect for the skill and generosity of those who provided it.

Of course these two traditions did not mix well. The **Cree** thought the **Mohawk** were deliberately forcing them to overeat to the point of severe discomfort, while the **Mohawk** thought the **Cree** were grossly self-indulgent and bizarre—ly determined to insult their hosts. Thus even though both groups were trying their best to be polite, each was seen by the other as intentionally disrespectful.

This story highlights two important points. First, it tells us that not all Indigenous cultures are alike. Even people who live very close to one another can sometimes think or act in very different ways. Consider that New Guinea and its surrounding islands contain more ethnographic diversity than anywhere else on earth, approximately one-fourth of the world's cultures (and languages and religions). It would be the height of arrogance for us to imagine that these cultures are essentially identical simply because the same label ('Indigenous') has been applied to them. The second point is that anyone attempting to understand another culture is in a position similar to that of the **Mohawk** and the **Cree**. The eyes we see through are the ones we have inherited from our own cultures, and so we must never forget to use them with caution and humility.

Common Elements

With the above points in mind, in the rest of this chapter we will try to identify some patterns and elements common to many (if not necessarily all) Indigenous religions. Among them are the following patterns:

- importance of orality
- connection to specific places
- emphasis on community and relationship
- sense of time as rhythmic
- greater emphasis on what happens during life than after death
- behaviour more important than belief
- authority of elders
- complementary dualism

and men. Although the idea of gender-specific shrines and rituals seems simple enough, most studies of these societies have focused on the male practices only—whether because male scholars were not permitted to study the women's religious practices, or because they assumed that the Indigenous men were the most important members of their communities and that the men's religious practices were the only ones worth investigating. It is only relatively recently that scholars have begun to understand, and correct, this error.

Final Concerns

Most of the examples examined below come from three vast regions of the world—Africa, Oceania, and North America—though a few come from Asia and South America. It is important to emphasize that the very idea of the world as composed of these regions was a European invention: their diverse Indigenous inhabitants thought in much more local terms.

Still, this (mis-)perception of the world as made up of a few large regions, rather than thousands of small communities, can serve a useful political purpose for Indigenous people; for example, it gives them a stronger and more unified voice on issues such as land claims or self-government. These and many other matters of general concern are articulated in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a resolution that would not have been possible without a global understanding of what it means to be Indigenous.

Finally, regarding another kind of boundary, please note that the aspects of Indigenous religious life discussed in the next three sections—'Transmission', 'Practice', and 'Cultural Expressions'—are in reality not as cleanly demarcated as those headings might suggest. As is the

- a view of the sacred as ongoing process rather than static revelation
- meaning and value of gender roles

This last point requires some comment at the outset. Traditionally, everyone in an Indigenous community had clearly defined roles, and often these roles were gendered. In general, hunting and warfare were male occupations, while food preparation and healing were the responsibility of women. Maori carvers were men, and Maori weavers were women. The **Bunu Yoruba** men were responsible for growing cotton, and the women for turning it into cloth. In this way, men and women were dependent on one another, and yet also independent in certain important ways.

A similar balancing can often be seen in regard to political and social power. The heads of most Indigenous societies have typically been male. Yet in many instances women have been inherently involved with any decisions that affect the entire community. And in some instances such decisions are normally made by women, then carried out by men.

It is also important to note that gender classification could be somewhat fluid in many Indigenous societies. Sometimes women might participate in men's work, and vice versa. Sexual roles and orientations could also be fluid. Accounts of men identifying as women, wearing female clothes and taking on women's roles in the community, are not unusual. There are also accounts of Indigenous women identifying as men and becoming hunters or warriors.

There is no definitive gender pattern with respect to kinship. Some Indigenous societies are matrilineal, tracing ancestry primarily through the mother's family, while others are patrilineal, focusing on the father. Similarly, important spirits

that are at the heart of a community's religious tradition.

The last point to keep in mind is that the examples in this chapter represent only a tiny sample of the religious traditions of the world's Indigenous people. As such, they say as much about me as they do about Indigenous religions themselves. They represent what I know and what I think is important, arranged into the patterns that I see. An author with different views, experience, or knowledge would have made different choices, and would perhaps have constructed quite a different picture overall. All this is true of any work on any subject, of course, which is why a good dose of skepticism is always helpful. Nothing should be taken at face value. But this point is especially important in relation to Indigenous people, who have consistently been misrepresented, often with harmful results. I have done my best to avoid grievous errors, and I apologize upfront for any mistakes that appear despite these efforts.

TRANSMISSION

The Power of Speech

When you dig in the earth, you find stone and earthen implements, but not words—not the words of our ancestors. Words aren't buried in the ground. They aren't hanging from the branches of trees. They're only transmitted from one mouth to the next.

—Ainu elder (in Shigeru 1994: 154–5)

Orality may not be a defining characteristic of Indigenous religions, but it remains a vital one for the vast majority of them. Even though some Indigenous cultures in the past did have writing, and virtually all of them have it now, most often the things of critical importance to them—including the values and beliefs that would be classified as religious—were (and are still) passed on

orally. Typically this transmission happens through stories.

Writing versus Speaking

Unfortunately, many people in contemporary non-Indigenous societies continue to think of orality as 'primitive' and writing as a defining characteristic of 'civilization'. To these people, the development of writing represents a key evolutionary advance that allows for philosophical, abstract thought, while oral cultures remain attached to the present, material world, incapable of sophisticated analysis or extended self-reflection. Writing frees humans to develop science, whereas reliance on speaking alone limits us to magic.

Such views are both incorrect and self-interested, and (as mentioned above) they contribute to the construction of Indigenous cultures as primitive. Furthermore, all cultures—including all other world religions—have many crucial oral dimensions. Both the Qur'an and the stories of Jesus in the New Testament gospels were passed along in oral form for many years before they were recorded as texts.

In addition, although in non-Indigenous cultures writing is often assumed to be more important than speaking, things that are *said*, in certain contexts, still have a power that the written word does not. There is a world of difference between words on paper and those same words delivered by a skillful comedian, actor, preacher, or politician. Shakespeare's plays literally come alive when the words are voiced, while the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr. affected the course of history in a way that would have been impossible had they appeared only in print.

There is also the obvious fact that books and newspapers are no longer the standard communications media in many non-Indigenous cultures today. People in these cultures tend to prefer video, film, or television—media that have more in common with Indigenous storytelling than they do with written texts. In keeping with the high