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Editor's Introduction

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ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP: TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Jan A. Ali*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been a perennial concern in Muslim communities and societies across the globe for centuries. This is because it has proven, in many instances, to be ineffective; that is, it has failed to produce the “structure-forming effect” (a stable framework of society that positively affects the people or groups through a patterned relationship between them and institutions, such as the economy or politics, and social practices, such as behaviours and values) in the broader socio-cultural, economic and political settings. This has made the *umma* (community of believers) vulnerable to foreign invasion, as witnessed in the widespread colonisation of the Muslim world by European powers who not only exploited the Muslim lands and human labour but manipulated the Muslim elite class into blindly imitating a foreign civilisation, which led to greater and more extensive fragility and decline. Since the European colonisation of the Muslim world, which started in the 15th century and has lasted into the 20th century, Muslim countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East underwent profound transformations, including the replacement of the religious foundation of their societies. This has had an enduring and multiplier effect on Muslims in almost all Muslim countries, who experience despotism, poverty, unemployment, poor education, discrimination, injustice, inequality, restricted social upward mobility, cultural backwardness, political degradation and general human suffering. There are the cultural, economic and technological gaps between North and South, between the advanced industrialised capitalist societies of the West and the underdeveloped countries of the Third World, many of which are Muslim.

While various factors have been involved in the production and maintenance of the afflictions of almost all Muslim societies today, ineffective leadership is the most prominent. The leadership is not only ineffective but is in crisis and this leadership crisis is not only a crisis of political leadership but intellectual leadership too.¹ Combined, these two types of leadership ineffectiveness constitute the leadership crisis in the Muslim world. The Muslim leadership crisis not only affects individual societies internally but also externally in their relationship with other societies. In an ideal Muslim society, the leader Islamically embodies spiritual and political or sacred and worldly authority. This is not the case today. At surface level, there is a puzzling variety of leaderships from young and inexperienced tribal men running a country, such as in the

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¹ Muhammad Al-Munajji, *Interactions of the Greatest Leader: The Prophet's Dealings with Different People* (Riyadh: Zad Publishing, 2014).

case of the Taliban in Afghanistan, to mullahs, military dictators and kings. Overshadowing this are comparatively new Muslim movements such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and a new kind of populist and literalist Muslim leadership such as Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.² The former sees success in a transitional world and the latter pursues the purification of an impure and jahiliyyah-steeped global order.

Islam and Muslims have made very little if any progress since colonialism. The Islamic and Muslim creative and productive dynamism and the achievements of one thousand years suddenly ceased a few centuries back. Exogenously, colonialism is much to be blamed for the destruction of meaningful cultural activities and the wide-ranging economic and political decline in Muslim societies that led to the ultimate collapse of the Muslim world. Endogenously, with few exceptions, Muslim societies are economically backward, politically unstable with endemic infighting, and generally lacking competitiveness in all spheres of life. This is further compounded by social inequality, injustice, sectarian conflict, discrimination, violence, terrorism, poverty and hunger, disease, illiteracy, and leadership deficit, and general absence of development investment, equal opportunities, and healthy education. Considering this and the ever-growing challenges and complexities of modernity, Muslims are lost. Simple material transfers are insufficient and there needs to be a reworking of the principal ideas in Muslim societies. Thus, the questions arise: What is actually happening in the Muslim world? Is the crisis of the Muslim world a crisis of Muslim leadership? Before we address these questions, let us first try to answer what is leadership and more specifically what is Muslim leadership?

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is not an easily defined term because it means different things to different people. It is a highly contested term with experts presenting multiple viewpoints on the concept. Sometimes these contrast between Eastern and Western approaches to leadership as well as within the West between North American and European approaches.³ Apart from the issue of definition, another problem is the multitude of styles or types of leadership. Then, there is the issue of theorisation and many theories of leadership exist in the literature.

Some leadership definitions stress the characteristics or traits of leaders, suggesting that leadership is inherited. In other words, leaders are born and not made. In other definitions, emphasis is placed on learned leadership qualities, where leaders are developed out of social processes within the broader context of socio-cultural, economic and political setting. To put it differently, leadership is a learned behaviour.

When it comes to leadership, people often take it to be an important transformative force of individual, organisational, group or community behaviour. As such, leadership can be a means

² Vedi Hadiz, "Mobilising Islamic Populism for Right-Wing Politics in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48 (2018); Cihan Tugal, "Islamism in Turkey: Beyond Instrument and Meaning," *Economy and Society* 31 (2002).

³ James Kouzes, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

to exercise social influence or a set of behaviours employed to align collective direction and maximise the efforts of others towards achieving a goal.

In Islam, leadership is an *amanah* (trust). It represents a contract between a leader and the followers, where the leader provides the best guidance, protection and treatment in spiritual matters and worldly affairs. Their role is to *amr bil ma'ruf wa nahy an al munkar* (enjoin the good and forbid the wrong). Based on this Islamic maxim, leadership in Islam is an embodiment of religious and political authority. Their role is to uphold the vicegerent position and implement Sharia (Divine law) on earth as their essence and prime responsibility. Thus, they must be knowledgeable and qualified, morally upright, diligent and able to communicate well. They must perform religious functions as well as carry out important duties in the community, providing guidance and assistance to individuals and groups and steering them onto *sirat al-mustaqeem* (the straight path).

Leadership in Islam is a role performed for the benefit of all; that is, people from all walks of life and ethno-religious backgrounds. In Islam, Muslims are commanded to dwell in a mutually interdependent manner as a basis of human social organisation and establish a civilised collectivistic society.⁴ Muslim leadership, which evolved from the teachings of the sacred texts – the Qur'ān and *ḥadīths* (the Prophet's traditions) – is said to be generalisable as it can be applied from one culture to another cultural context.⁵ It seems to have a universal character; a universal leadership paradigm that can be applied to any situation and in any context. If so, can it be used, in light of the crisis situation of the *umma*, to bring about a major planetary social transformation and create an organised and civilised society? Can the *umma*'s protracted and complex crisis be solved with a new leadership paradigm?

The Special Issue of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* examines the crisis of Muslim societies in the modern world and probes potential solutions for a new leadership paradigm. It addresses the following potential questions:

1. Is the contemporary Islamic and Muslim crisis one of Islamic leadership?
2. Do Muslims need a new leadership to bring them and their societies out of crisis?
3. Why is a new Islamic leadership paradigm so important in the modern world?
4. Are there any role model Muslim leaders that stand out as an exception to the crisis we are seeing in Islamic leadership?

The Special Issue has been designed to foster and disseminate ongoing and new research about Islamic leadership as a global phenomenon. The term “Islamic” is meant to connote prescription to a unique way of life originating from the Qur'ān and Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle, while the term “leadership” is meant as an organisational framework as well as an established practice or institution.

⁴ Nehaluddin Ahmad, “The Concept of Collectivism in Relation to Islamic and Contemporary Jurisprudence,” *The Open Law Journal* 4 (2011).

⁵ Syed Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010).

The five papers in this edition examine Islamic leadership at varying depths from different disciplinary and perspectival standpoints. The first paper, titled *Altruistic Leadership for the Umma in Crisis*, examines Islamic leadership in the context of the crisis of the *umma* and presents altruistic leadership as a universal model for the eradication of crisis in any situation or context. The second paper, titled “*I Will Make Thee an Imam to the Nations*”: *Lessons for Nigerian Public Leaders in the Story of Prophet Ibrahim*, uses descriptive and qualitative approaches and the characteristics of Prophet Ibrahim as a leadership model to explore the contemporary challenges facing depraved leaders and public leadership in Nigeria. The paper purports that a prophetic public leadership framework based on Prophet Ibrahim’s lifestyle can be applied in Nigeria to bring about meaningful national development. In the third paper, titled *Leadership in Modern Shi’i Thought: Examining the Theory of Imam Khomeini*, the author interrogates Imam Khomeini’s theory of societal leadership and its features in the context of occultation. The fourth paper, titled *Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya’s Himma: Entrepreneurial Leadership as an Expression of Islamic Tradition*, relies on the writings of a Ḥanbali scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya to explore the emergence of entrepreneurial leadership in several Gulf countries as a new paradigm of disseminated leadership. The paper argues that, at a general level, the function of disseminated leadership has little to do with political power and hierarchy and much to do with the shared task of converting vision into reality. The fifth and final paper, titled *Female Leadership in Muslim Societies: Theological and Socio-Cultural Debates in Contemporary Literature*, examines contemporary debates on female leadership in Muslim societies and how social gender perceptions and cultural biases form barriers to women’s leadership. Using a Western feminist perspective, the paper argues that a variety of socio-cultural realities exist that directly impact Muslim women, making it more challenging for them to claim a leadership role.

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