

Challenging Unpeaceful Metaphors in Our Discourses on Islam as a Strategy to Combat Extremism

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Introduction

In his op-ed titled “Muslims Must Combat the Extremist Cancer,” which appears in the *Wall Street Journal* of August 27, 2015 (i.e. less than three months before the recent terrorist attack in Paris on November 13, 2015), Fethullah Gülen, the founder and president of Hizmet, called upon Muslims to combat the extremist members of Islam by denouncing terrorism, defending human rights and promoting education. He also made the poignant point that “Terrorism is a multifaceted problem, so the solutions should address the political, economic, social and religious layers” (Gülen, 2015). This presentation is an affirmative response to Gülen’s clarion call by suggesting that one strategy to combat extremism is by challenging the *unpeaceful metaphors*—i.e. the use of disturbing words in an expressive and figurative way to suggest illuminating comparisons and resemblances based on a perceived similarity between distinct objects or certain actions (Bangura, 2002:1) in our discourses on Islam.

That religion (the word is used here in its Western sense, as Islam is more than just a religion; it is a way of life) is a major political and human fault line in our world is hardly a matter of dispute. The nation state is the typical arena of religious conflicts. State governments often try to ignore and suppress the aspirations of individual religions, or impose the values of the dominant elite. In response, religious groups mobilize and place demands upon the state ranging from representation and participation to protection of human rights and autonomy. Religious mobilization takes a variety of forms ranging from political parties to violent action.

International relations continue to change from the historic predominance of nation states toward the more complex order where ethnic and religious groups compete for influence. The contemporary global system is simultaneously more parochial and more cosmopolitan than the international system of nation states we are leaving behind. For example, while in Western Europe culturally diverse people are uniting, in many Third World regions bonds of culture, religion and language are clashing with territorial state lines (for more on this, see Said and Bangura, 1991-1992).

Given the contestations on Islam, a metaphorical linguistic analysis of the topic is therefore essential because, as I demonstrate elsewhere, metaphors are not just “more picturesque speech” (Bangura, 2007:61; 2002:202). The power of metaphors, as Anita Wenden observes, hinges upon their ability to assimilate new experiences so as to allow the newer and abstract domain of experience to be understood in terms of the former and more concrete, and to serve as a basis and justification for policy making (1999:223). Also, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson put it,

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (1980:3).

In light of the preceding excerpt, we should be horrified by the metaphors that have become the currency in our discourses on Islam. We hear again and again how our relations mirror Darwinian survivalism. If we are to accept this characterization, we would be quite properly justified in outlawing all human relations as brutal and uncivilized behavior that no society should have to tolerate. Indeed, human rights advocates have effectively used just such descriptions to push their approach.

We must therefore reject those metaphors that cast our relations in a bad light and encourage such hostile, uncaring and, ultimately, selfish behavior. Some of these are quite crude and explode as soon as they are seen for what they are, but others are much more sophisticated and built into every fabric of our current thought processes. Some can be summarized in a slogan; others do not even have names. Some seem not to be metaphors at all, notably the uncompromising emphasis on the importance of greed, and some seem to lie at the very basis of our conception as individuals, as if any alternative concept would have to be anti-individualistic, or worse.

The major question probed here is therefore quite straightforward: What types of metaphors are prevalent in our discourses on Islam? Before answering this question, however, it makes sense to present a brief discussion of the metaphorical linguistic approach, since it is the method through which the analysis to follow will be grounded.

The Metaphorical Linguistic Approach

As I state in our book titled *Unpeaceful Metaphors*, metaphors are figures of speech: i.e. the use of words in an expressive and figurative way to suggest illuminating comparisons and resemblances based on a perceived similarity between distinct objects or certain actions (Bangura, 2002:1). According to David Crystal, the following four kinds of metaphors have been recognized (1992:249):

- (1) *Conventional metaphors* are those which form a part of our everyday understanding of experience, and are processed without effort, such as “to lose the thread of an argument.”
- (2) *Poetic metaphors* extend or combine everyday metaphors, especially for literary purposes—and this is how the term is traditionally understood, in the context of poetry.
- (3) *Conceptual metaphors* are those functions in speakers’ minds which implicitly condition their thought processes—for example, the notion that “Argument is war” underlies such expressed metaphors as “I attacked his views.”
- (4) *Mixed metaphors* are used for a combination of unrelated or incompatible metaphors in a single sentence, such as “This is a virgin field pregnant with possibilities.”

While Crystal’s categorization is very useful from a linguistic semantics standpoint (the focus on a triadic relation among conventionality, language, and to what it refers), from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics (the focus on a polyadic relation among conventionality, speaker, situation, and hearer), however, Stephen Levinson suggests the following “tripartite classification of metaphors” (1983:152-153):

- (1) *Nominal metaphors* are those that have the form BE(x, y) such as “Togo is an eel.” To understand them, the hearer/reader must be able to construct a corresponding simile.

- (2) *Predicative metaphors* are those that have the conceptual form $G(x)$ or $G(x, y)$ such as “Mwalimu Mazrui steamed ahead.” To understand them, the hearer/reader must form a corresponding complex simile.
- (3) *Sentential metaphors* are those that have the conceptual form $G(y)$ identified by being *irrelevant* to the surrounding discourse when literally construed.

A metaphorical change then is usually manifested by a word with a concrete meaning taking on a more abstract sense. For example, as Brian Weinstein points out,

By creating a sudden similarity between what is known and understood, like an automobile or a machine, and what is complicated and perplexing, like American society, listeners are surprised, forced to make the transfer, and perhaps convinced. They also gain a mnemonic device—a catch phrase that explains complicated problems (1983:8).

Indeed, by manipulating metaphors, leaders and elites can create opinions and feelings, particularly when people are distressed about the contradictions and problems in the world. In such times, as exemplified immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC on September 11, 2001, the masses crave for simple explanations and directions: for example, “the attackers of September 11, 2001 hate America because of its wealth, since Americans are good people, and that America should bomb terrorists wherever they are back into the prehistoric age” (Bangura, 2002:2).

In the words of Murray Edelman “internal and external passions catalyze attachment to a selected range of myths and metaphors which shape perceptions of the political world” (1971:67). On the one hand, observes Edelman, metaphors are used to screen out undesirable facts of war by calling it a “struggle for democracy” or by referring to aggression and neocolonialism as a “presence.” On the other hand, adds Edelman, metaphors are used to alarm and enrage people by referring to members of a political movement as “terrorists” (1971:65-74).

Indeed, the relationship between language and peaceful or un-peaceful behavior is so obvious that we hardly think about it. Everyone agrees, according to Brian Weinstein, that language is at the core of human society and interpersonal relations—that it forms the basis of civilization. Without this method of communication, Weinstein argues, no leaders could command the resources that are needed to form a political system extending beyond family and neighborhood. He further notes that, while we admit that the ability to manipulate words in order to persuade the voters is one approach people employ to gain and hold on to power, and that we admire oratorical and writing skills as gifts, we, nevertheless, do not perceive language as a separate factor, like taxation, which is subject to conscious choices by leaders in power or by women and men who desire to win or influence power. He adds that we do not see language in the form of capital yielding measurable benefits to those who possess it (Weinstein 1983:3). Another critical aspect about language and peaceful behavior is that, following Weinstein,

The process of making decisions in order to satisfy group interests, shape society in accordance with an ideal, solve problems, and cooperate with other societies in a dynamic world is at the heart of politics. Accumulating and investing capital are normally part of the economic process, but when those who own capital use it to exercise influence and power over others, it enters the political arena. Thus, if it is possible to show that language is the subject of policy decisions as well as a possession conferring advantages, a case can be made

for the study of language as one of the variables pushing open or closed the door to power, wealth, and prestige within the societies and contributing to war and peace between societies (1983:3).

Since people employ metaphors as a conscious choice between varieties of language forms that have significant cultural, economic, political, psychological and social consequences, particularly when language skills are unevenly distributed, the major purpose of the data analysis section that follows then is to demonstrate that the metaphors that have been employed in our discourses on faith and ethnicity entail different purposes. The ultimate question then is the following: How can the metaphors be systematically identified in the discourses? For an answer to this question, Levinson's treatise on tools used to analyze metaphors in the field of linguistic pragmatics is quite profitable.

Levinson discusses three theories that have undergirded the analysis of metaphors in the field of linguistic pragmatics. The first theory is the *Comparison Theory* which, according to Levinson, states that "Metaphors are similes with suppressed or deleted predications of similarities" (1983:148). The second theory is the *Interaction Theory* which, following Levinson, proposes that "Metaphors are special uses of linguistic expressions where one 'metaphorical' expression (or *focus*) is embedded in another 'literal' expression (or *frame*), such that the meaning of the focus interacts with and *changes* the meaning of the *frame*, and vice versa" (1983:148). The third theory is the *Correspondence Theory* which, as Levinson states, involves "the mapping of one whole cognitive domain into another, allowing the tracing out of multiple correspondences" (1983:159). Of these three postulates, Levinson finds the *Correspondence Theory* to be the most useful because it "has the virtue of accounting for various well-known properties of metaphors: the 'non-prepositional' nature, or relative indeterminacy of a metaphor's import, the tendency for the substitution of concrete for abstract terms, and the different degrees to which metaphors can be successful" (1983:160). Levinson then goes on to suggest the use of the following three steps to identify metaphors in a text: (1) "account for how any trope or non-literal use of the language is recognized"; (2) "know how metaphors are distinguished from other tropes;" (3) "once recognized, the interpretation of metaphors must rely on features of our general ability to reason analogically" (1983:161).

Metaphors on Islam

As a student of the Abrahamic connections, it behooves me to begin this section with what the Revelations in the Holy Torah, the Holy Bible, and the Holy Qur'an say about the tongue. Indeed, one can point to several counter-examples in the Revelations, but that is not my interest here. Also, the fact that I will not discuss tenets on this aspect from other faiths hinges upon the reality that I am not schooled enough on them, even though I am now reading texts on Buddhism that seem to echo some of the tenets of the Abrahamic faiths. The following are examples, one from each Abrahamic branch, among the many tenets in the Revelations:

The Holy Torah, Psalm 34: 14: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceitfully."

The Holy Bible, Proverbs 18:21: "Death and life (are) in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."

The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Nur 24:24: "On the Day their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them as to their actions."

From the preceding tenets, it is evident that the tongue can be a culprit whereby one word or more can wound the dignity of highly sensitive individuals, groups, or societies. Indeed, throughout the ages, holding one's tongue, staying above petty insults, exercising patience and magnanimity have deterred devastations.

I must first state here that most of the discussion in the rest of this section is based on George S. Kun's chapter titled "Religion and Spirituality" in our book, *Unpeaceful Metaphors* (2002), in which he states that when Martin Luther King, Jr. launched his civil rights struggle in the early 1960s, he used religious metaphors and phrases, including his famous "I have a dream" speech delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC on August 28, 1963, to encourage Blacks to remain hopeful about a racially blind America. At the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Blacks often held hands and sang, "We shall overcome," a religious metaphor that united them throughout their struggle for freedom. Mahatma Gandhi used "Satyagraha" or "holding onto truth," and "civil disobedience" to mobilize Indians in opposing British rule. Against incredible odds and often at great risks, many activists in modern freedom struggles have resorted to religious phrases and language to rally support (Kun, 2002:121).

Extremists have also used metaphors and phrases to advance their personal agendas. Osama bin Laden established himself as an important figure in contemporary Islamic history, cutting into the Western psyche, not to mention the Muslim one, using rhetoric and religious metaphors. This is how bin Laden once used his rhetoric to admonish his followers in the October-November, 1996 issues of the *Nida'ul Islam* ("The Call of Islam"), a militant-Islamic magazine published in Australia:

What bear [sic] no doubt in this fierce Judeo-Christian campaign against the Muslim world, the likes of which has never been seen before, is that the Muslims must prepare all possible might to repel the enemy, militarily, economically, through missionary activity, and all other areas.... (Kun, 2002:122).

Bin Laden's words appeared simple but became difficult to deal with spiritually and intellectually a few years later. Through these words, bin Laden and his followers destroyed lives and properties. For the so-called "holy warriors," who live to die, these are inspiring achievements (Kun, 2002:122).

Americans have also tried to comprehend phrases and religious metaphors. Some struggle to use metaphors during peaceful and non-peaceful times. When Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was asked at a September 20, 2001 news conference to come up with words that describe the kind of war the United States was facing, he fumbled over words and phrases. But the President of the United States, George W. Bush, came up with rhetorical phrases and religious metaphors to console and to empower Americans after the attacks in 2001 (Kun, 2002:122).

Religious metaphors have played a crucial role in the past as well as today's intellectual discourse. Religious metaphors assist in understanding the unfamiliar and extend language far beyond its conventional limits. They proffer rhetorical justifications that are more cogent than more accurately chosen arguments. Nonetheless, without accurate usage and appropriate timing, religious metaphors may invoke previously misunderstood phenomena, or use them as conduit to further delusion. Religious metaphors such as "crusade," "jihad," and "good versus evil," used by President George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden to describe each other's actions during the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States prompted individuals, religious groups and societies to take sides (Kun, 2002:122).

Skillful metaphorical constructions, rich in religious allusions, have enormous power to penetrate the hearts and minds of both Muslims and Christians and will outlive those who coined them (Kun, 2002:122). The mystical tradition often claims that religious metaphors have no descriptive power at all (Kun, 2002:123). Indeed, these critics and traditions have now realized just how far-reaching language can go in destroying societies and pitting one religion against the other (Kun, 2002:123).

The September 11, 2001 cataclysmic attacks on the United States opened many new avenues for the understanding of metaphors; but it surely was not the first time society has grappled to understand the power of unpeaceful religious metaphors. For example, Americans have yet to understand how the chanting of words or metaphors such as Mujahidin or “holy warriors,” Jihad or “holy war” helped usher the Taliban to power. Such metaphors enabled Osama bin Laden to make his anti-Western passion and plans several decades before gaining prominence through a frontal assault on the United States. Individuals have used these religious metaphors as a catalyst to unite religious extremists for the purpose of instigating violence (Kun, 2002:123).

As the Iranian President Mohammed Khatami admonished, “the world is witnessing an active form of nihilism in social and political realms, threatening the very fabric of human existence. This new form of active nihilism assumes various names, and is so tragic and unfortunate that some of those names have resemblance to religiosity and self-proclaimed spirituality” (Kun, 2002:123). Since the September 11, 2001 catastrophic events many people have wondered about these questions (Kun, 2002:123):

- (1) What religious language could be so cogent and powerful to sway a person to sacrifice his life to destroy others?
- (2) Have these metaphors really influenced and programmed young religious adherents into killers?
- (3) Can these unpeaceful metaphors also be passive or constructive?

If metaphors can help bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, individuals, commentators, as well as political leaders, we must use them in such a way as to avert tension and communicate understanding. Failure to bear in mind the possibility of misinterpretations by the unknown audience, religious metaphors can lead to unanticipated consequences. The initial metaphors used in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington DC, such as “crusade,” made many Arabs feel uncomfortable. The use of such unpeaceful religious metaphors to frame the events was clumsy and inappropriate. The word “crusade” has its religious roots in the first European Christian effort to dislodge the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from the Holy Land in the 11th Century. This term had the potential to revamp the centuries-old revulsion Muslims felt against Christians for their campaign in the Holy Land. As Steven Runciman notes in the conclusion to his history of the crusades, the crusade was a “tragic and destructive episode” and “the Holy War itself was nothing more than a longer act of intolerance in the name of God, which is against the Holy Ghost.” The word crusade has been endowed with positive construct by both politicians and individuals due to their ignorance of history and to enhance their political objectives (Kun, 2002:124).

The use of metaphors for communicative purposes clearly has an important integrative function. They also provide the implicit bridge between the disparate tools of redesigning public policy. But it is the time during which such metaphors are used that is of prime importance to the audience. The various metaphors discussed in this section of the Islamic faith are not, in themselves, intrinsically unpeaceful, but the time during which they were used provoked tensions and misinterpretations.

These metaphors are also sensitive because their roots can be traced to the conflict between Christianity and Islam centuries ago. Relying on such metaphors to win public support for a particular policy or action by a government unreflectively risks primarily misconstruing the classical meanings and contexts of the metaphors (Kun, 2002:135).

The unpeaceful religious metaphors used by President Bush and bin Laden to portray each other's actions in 2001 have created a relatively rigid situation in both the Western and Muslim worlds. Certainly, most Americans believed that the Bush Administration was acting in good faith and pursuing the nation's best interest to crush an "evil enemy" that intends to destabilize America's freedom. By the same token, some Muslims in various countries believed that bin Laden's terrorist acts against the United States were justifiable, because the United States is biased against Islam. The question is whether Americans with other Westerners and Muslims fully comprehended the ramifications of the picture they were painting and the rationalizations of both sides' actions (Kun, 2002:135).

Regardless, the metaphorical descriptions of the September 11, 2001 events by the United States government encouraged an American audience to take the rhetoric seriously and support an aggressive military action in Afghanistan. The inappropriate use of religious metaphors also motivated some disgruntled Americans to assault Middle Easterners and East Asians. Law enforcement officials engaged in racial profiling of people from Arab and Eastern Asian nations. Some in the Muslim world were also supporting more terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies because of how the term "jihad" was being abused. By describing the United States' actions to bring those who carried out the attacks on Washington, DC and New York to justice as a "crusade," the concept created an imagery that was shaped by the arrogant use of the metaphor (Kun, 2002:136). To President Bush's credit, he later reversed his statements on Islam, visited the Islamic Center in Washington, DC and several Muslim nations for discussions on how to combat terrorism, funded and supported numerous interfaith and international dialogues between Muslims and Westerners.

In the aftermath of the shootings of employees at *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris by Said and Cherif Kouachi on January 7, 2015, after condemning both the folk at *Charlie Hebdo* for their protracted racism and disrespect of other people and cultures camouflaged as "free speech" and the two brothers who responded violently to the provocation camouflaged as a "defense of Islam" in my article titled "Charlie Hebdo: Insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Is an Affront to Africans and People of African Descent Everywhere," which appeared in both *The Black Commentator* and the *CODESRIA E-newsletter*, I was concerned that the unbalanced response to those who provoked the incident and their supporters and those who admonished the newspaper could lead to a backlash. Now less than one year after that incident, it is reported by many Western media that during the November 13, 2015 terrorist attack in Paris, the attackers evoked the "God is Good," France's "crusader campaign" in reference to France's role in air strikes against the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), Islam as the "religion of the sword and not pacifism," Isa (Jesus) kills the Dajjal (the Antichrist) so that "Islam and its justice" will prevail on the entire earth, "*takfir* doctrine" as the commitment to purify the world by killing mass numbers of people, and "genocide of the Yazidis who ISIS calls "devil worshippers" metaphors. Fortunately, Muslims around the world spoke out and continue to speak out against the terrorist attack by evoking the "terrorism has no religion" metaphor, albeit it is also unfortunate that Muslims are the only ones in the world who must apologize when a Muslim commits a terrorist act. Also, French President François Hollande has been very careful not to characterize the attack as "Islamic terrorism" and instead labels it as "horror." In addition, he announced that France will take in 30,000 Syrian refugees (Tharoor, 2015).

Meanwhile in the United States, many state governors and congressmen, mostly Republicans, are using fiery rhetoric to conjure up "Clash of Civilizations" (which we had thought died with Samuel

Huntington), “Us (good Westerners) versus Them (bad Muslims),” “All Muslims are Terrorists” and “Muslims are Bad and Christians are Good” metaphors in their desperate attempts to block, or permit only Christians, of the planned resettlement of 10,000 Syrian refugees into the United States by President Barack Obama’s Administration, even though refugees from Muslim countries undergo the highest level of security screening than anyone else entering the United States. Of course, the states have no legal authority to block the refugees because of the Refugee Act of 1980. The law funds a refugee coordinator in each state who is responsible for coordinating resettlement efforts with agencies and directing federal funds for refugees in a state. Previous legal challenges to the law by a few states failed because the federal government had distributed refugees being settled among the states equally (Karoub and Caldwell, 2015). President Obama is therefore quite correct to assert that what the Republicans’ rhetorical metaphors will end up doing is to provide a “potent recruitment tool” for ISIS (Nakamura and Eilpirin, 2015). In fact, such anti-Muslim/Islam metaphors have prompted xenophobic attacks against Muslims in Florida, Ontario, Scotland, and likely elsewhere. While overall the number of hate crimes across the United States has decreased, those against Muslims have increased by 14 percent (Knefel, 2015), even though, as *The Economist* points out, of the “750,000 refugees that have been resettled in America since 9/11 [September 11, 2001], not one has been arrested on domestic terrorism charges” (*The Economist*, 2015).

Nonetheless, on November 19, 2015, the United States House of Representatives passed a bill to block Syrian refugees and require more vetting by a vote of 289 in favor and 137 against. President Obama has threatened to veto the bill (Kelly, 2015).

As a side note, lest we forget, the biological father of Steven Paul “Steve” Jobs was a Syrian refugee (Baig, 2015). Jobs became best known as the co-founder, chairman, and chief executive officer (CEO) of Apple Inc.; CEO and largest shareholder of Pixar Animation Studios; a member of The Walt Disney Company’s board of directors following its acquisition of Pixar; and founder, chairman, and CEO of NeXT Inc. He is widely recognized as a pioneer of the 1970s’ microcomputer revolution (*Wikipedia*, 2015). Also, Dr. Abdul Aziz Said—emeritus professor of International Relations, founder of the fields of International Peace and Conflict Resolution and Islamic Peace Studies, Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace, founder and director of the Center for Global Peace, among the early founders of the field of African Studies in the United States, among the early pioneers of the field of Basic Human Needs and International Development, founder of the first Jewish fraternity organization in the United States, prolific author, public intellectual, US States Department consultant, and respected all around the world for promoting peace—came to the United States as a Syrian refugee.

There is no dispute that the acts of September 11, 2001 and the recent Parris terrorist attacks were morally and legally wrong, according to Islamic Sharia law; however, if metaphors are not used appropriately, they can evoke negative images and memories. These images are then exploited by extremists to carry out more clandestine activities. Looking at the classical meanings and views of metaphors such as “crusade” and “jihad,” one would notice that they have been taken out of context; most of these metaphors are being used at a time when individuals both in the Western and the Muslim worlds were faced with a torrent of injustices. Certainly, individuals have used crises to manipulate and persuade their audiences for their own political gains. In the event of a national crisis individual leaders must bear in mind that any inappropriate use of religious metaphors for political gains has immense consequences in society (Kun, 2002:136).

Conclusion

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that our discourses on Islam appear as muddled and combative landscapes. And since the beginnings of international relations, the battle lines have been indiscriminately multiplying into the intersecting web of the strife we have today. Indeed, the debates over Islam have been divided by interests and convictions. Within our vessels, passions swell, making heads throb, vision hazy, and reason confounded. Swept in the current of antagonism, minds have conspired, tongues have cut, and hands have maimed for the sake of principles and grievances (see also Bangura, 2011).

Democracy is supposed to harness antagonism and conflict, much like an efficient engine harnesses violent explosions into work. Evidently, there is plenty of conflict and antagonism to go around. In fact the grievances held by non-Westerners, Westerners, women, men, rich and poor, however ancient and some unsubstantiated, define our relationships to one another. What is “African” without hundreds of years of European and American oppression, repression, depression, and suppression? What is “poor” without the apathy, revile and elitism of the rich? Each group owes its position and essence to the indifference and indulgences of its antagonist.

The global economic system does much to harness our penchant for antagonism and competition into trillions of dollars of national wealth. But economic success notwithstanding, the byproducts of our economic engine are too disturbing and dangerous to ignore. Our economic system seems to literally swallow up vast social contradictions as Karl Marx would say class antagonisms with the actual or aspirant’s possession of material wealth. At the root of our problem is the fact that the fragile sense of association we do possess for one another has self-interest as its antecedent. The basis of our social organization and our great civilization is self-interest, where the means available to each of us is inadequate to the task of obtaining optimum self-interest. To ensure societal harmony, the inference to be taken from this truth is that all of us should strive to need one another. But many of us would rather downplay our interdependence on one another’s talents, energy, and creativity, and rather incite the volatile embers of our varied perspectives.

History has repeatedly shown that we would rather not allow human interdependence to breach our various distinctions and bind us together as a human family. Rather than acknowledge our interdependencies, some of us have opted to coerce others into thankless submission. Long ago, enslaved Africans worked tirelessly to sow and harvest the bounty of the earth for European and American slave masters. From the needs and wants of slave owners, supported by the compelling laws, taboos, beliefs, and religion, a socioeconomic system evolved out of antagonism and oppression rather than out of a sense that people need one another.

It is only natural that a deep chasm has emerged between us, spawned by our inability to deal with one another as indispensable pieces of an organic whole. Flowing between the precipices of this chasm is a river of grievances. Perhaps not inherently powerful, but the furious tremors of fiery rhetoric and cruel denials have transformed our grievances into rushing rapids. Now a violent current drags us kicking and screaming toward a great fall.

Unable to assess the failures in our cultural and ideological antagonism, liberals, conservatives, and extremists of every dimension and quality have forced even the most peaceable and disinterested of us to take sides. Dismayed at the sheer scope and intensity of the battles erupting everywhere, even the most reasonable and composed among us find that there is no neutral ground upon which to stand. Even the clergies among us must take sides, as every citizen is coerced and conscripted into participating in the conflict. I therefore end this essay with two letters—one to the Muslim extremist and the other to the anti-Muslim/anti-Islamist—concerning their wrongful use of metaphors in their discourses on Islam.

Letters to the Muslim Extremist and the Anti-Muslim/Anti-Islamist Concerning Their Wrongful Use of Metaphors in Their Discourses on Islam

Dear Muslim Extremist:

Your wrongful use of metaphors is misrepresenting Islam. It also will not help you to achieve any meaningful goal because (a) the overwhelming majority of Muslims all around the world live peaceful lives and believe and teach correctly that Islam is a peaceful *din* (“way of life”); (b) you are helping to increase the number of anti-Muslim/anti-Islamists who are ready to fight you and innocent Muslims; and (c) you are jeopardizing the lives of Muslims who have seen the number of hate crimes against them increase—in the United States, for example, while the total number of hate crimes has gone down, hate crimes against Muslims have increased by 14 percent.

Your *Allahu Akbar* (“God is The Greatest”) metaphor is wrongly used. *Allahu Akbar* (*Takbir*) is not a battle cry for a war that indiscriminately targets everyone, including innocent victims. It represents the 99 Most Beautiful Names of Allah (SWT) that describe His power, kindness, forgiveness, and justice; none denotes indiscriminate killing.

Your use of the *Jihadist* metaphor as a pretext to “defend Islam” is bogus. May you be reminded that there are three types of Jihad?: (1) Personal Jihad, or in Arabic *Jihadun-Nafs* is considered the most important and refers to the intimate struggle to purify one’s soul of evil influences and to cleanse one’s spirit of sin; (2) Verbal Jihad refers to striving for justice through words and non-violent means and actions; and (3) Physical Jihad refers to the use of physical means to defend Muslims against oppression and transgression as a last resort only after all peaceful means fail. Besides, Allah (SWT) never asked you to defend Islam; please allow Allah (SWT) to defend His *din*.

Your metaphor of *Islam as the Religion of the Sword and not Pacifism* as a means to promote your *Takfir Doctrine* as the commitment to purify the world by killing mass numbers of people is wrong. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers won the Battle of Badr and the followers were rejoicing, didn’t he warn them that the toughest battle ahead of them is that of *Jihadun-Nafs* (“Personal Jihad”)—i.e., as stated earlier, the most important Jihad of the intimate struggle to purify one’s soul of evil influences and to cleanse one’s spirit of sin? When the Prophet (PBUH) and 1,400 Muslims from Medina set out to perform *umrah*, the minor pilgrimage, but were refused entry into Mecca by the Quraysh, didn’t he reach a peace agreement, the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, with them to postpone the pilgrimage that year in exchange for ten years of peace? When the Prophet (PBUH) finally conquered Mecca after 13 years of the Muslims suffering oppression, didn’t he lay down his sword and forgive all of the oppressors? How do explain the fact that the word peace appears in the Holy Qur’an 52 times? And how do you explain the fact that everywhere in the world today you will hear the greeting *Asalamu Alaykum* (“peace be upon you”) everyday? Contrary to your belief, Islam was spread in most parts of Africa, like in other parts of the world, and enslaved Africans did similarly in the New World, not by the sword but by teaching. Why do you think that Islam is the fastest growing faith in the world today?

Indeed, while Islam, nor any other major faith, is completely pacifistic, are there not aspects in Islamic history that are pacifistic? For example, during the first 13 of the 23 years that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was receiving the Revelations and Muslims were being harassed, abused, tortured, murdered, and their homes and possessions plundered, didn’t they continue to live their lives without resorting to any violence and always called pagans to peace, and only started defending themselves after the Prophet (PBUH) received the Revelation in Surat al-Hajj: 39-40 to do so?

Besides, does the Qur'an not teach that war represents an "unwanted obligation" which must be carried out only when it is inevitable and with the strictest observance of particular humane and moral values?

I pray that you will seek the true path to Allah (SWT), so that He can forgive your sins.

In Peace Always,
Abdul Karim Bangura

Dear Anti-Muslim/Anti-Islamist:

Your wrongful use of metaphors does not only fuel the hate among those who already dislike Muslims and Islam and potential converts to your ideology, it also serves as a potent recruiting tool for the extremist Muslim.

Your *Clash of Civilizations* metaphor is a misnomer that many of us had hoped would have died with Samuel Huntington. Without Muslims, Western civilization as we know it today would not have made certain significant gains. Similarly, without adherents of other civilizations, Islamic civilization would also not have made certain significant gains. Is it not interesting that after the recent terrorist attack in Paris that the algorithms Mark Zuckerberg used to create the temporary Facebook profile of the French flag overlay, while he failed to do the same for the terrorist attacks in Beirut, Nigeria and Mali, were made possible by the invention of the Persian Muslim mathematician, astronomer and geographer Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, from whom the Latinized name Algoritmi and the English variation Algorithm were derived?

Your use of the *Crusade* metaphor is misguided because it has its religious roots in the first European Christian effort to dislodge the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from the Holy Land in the 11th Century. This term had the potential to revamp the centuries-old revulsion Muslims felt against Christians for their campaign in the Holy Land. As Steven Runciman notes in the conclusion to his history of the crusades, the crusade was a "tragic and destructive episode" and "the Holy War itself was nothing more than a longer act of intolerance in the name of God, which is against the Holy Ghost" (quoted by Kun, 2001:124). In addition, you may want to learn that four centuries after Muslims conquered Jerusalem and the Crusaders invaded and massacred all of the Muslims in 1099, when the Muslim general Saladin recaptured Jerusalem in 1187 he did not allow even one of his soldiers to plunder or touch a civilian and he permitted the invading Christians to take all of their possessions and leave the city in security.

Your use of the *Islamic Terrorism* metaphor is oxymoronic. If in Arabic, *islām* means "submission," from *ʿaslama*, "to surrender," "resign oneself"; from Syriac *ʾašlem*, "to make peace," "surrender," derived stem *šlem*, "to be complete"; from its Semitic roots *šlm* "to be whole," "sound"; and common Semitic noun *šalām* "well-being," "welfare," "peace"; and terrorism is generally defined as the use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims, how do you reconcile the two? Therefore, just as former Governor of Arkansas, Christian minister, author, commentator and now Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee says that it is "disingenuous" for the Planned Parenthood to blame the terrorist attack against its personnel in Colorado Springs on all anti-abortion activists and rhetoric and the Western media have refused to label the terrorist act Christian Terrorism, even though the terrorist Robert Lewis' hate for Planned Parenthood is undergirded by

his brand of conservative Christian ideology, it is equally disingenuous for you to label the terrorist of a Muslim “Islamic Terrorism.”

Your use of the *Jihad/Jihadist* metaphor to connote “Holy War/Warrior” is erroneous. To begin with, the word for war in Arabic is *lilarb*. Next, is it not oxymoronic for something to be a “war” and be “holy” at the same time, since “holy” means God-like—love, compassion, benevolence and empathy, and “war” means to act aggressively against a sworn enemy? Please learn that the word *Jihad*, from its Arabic derivative *Jahd*, means to use one’s abilities extensively and to put one’s efforts exhaustively in the way directed by Allah (SWT).

Your *Us/Christians/Westerners Are Good versus Them/Muslims Are Bad* metaphor is wrong, and using it to bar Syrian refugees (especially when Muslim refugees undergo the highest level of security screening than anyone else entering the United States), or allow only Syrian Christians, to migrate to the United States is a xenophobic, mean-spirited and divide-and-rule strategy. There are Muslims who do bad things and those who do good things, just as there are Christians and followers of other faiths who do bad things and those who do good things. Lest we forget, the biological father of the Christian Steven Paul “Steve” Jobs was a Syrian refugee (Baig, 2015). Jobs became best known as the co-founder, chairman, and chief executive officer (CEO) of Apple Inc.; CEO and largest shareholder of Pixar Animation Studios; a member of The Walt Disney Company’s board of directors following its acquisition of Pixar; and founder, chairman, and CEO of NeXT Inc. He is widely recognized as a pioneer of the 1970s’ microcomputer revolution (*Wikipedia*, 2015). Also, the Muslim Dr. Abdul Aziz Said—emeritus professor of International Relations, founder of the fields of International Peace and Conflict Resolution and Islamic Peace Studies, Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace, founder and director of the Center for Global Peace, among the early founders of the field of African Studies in the United States, among the early pioneers of the field of Basic Human Needs and International Development, founder of the first Jewish fraternity organization in the United States, prolific author, public intellectual, US States Department consultant, and respected all around the world for promoting peace—came to the United States as a Syrian refugee.

Your evoking of the *Muslims Hate Us for Our Freedom of Speech* metaphor is bogus because it assumes that freedom of speech is without any constraints. While our United States has its own challenges on the issue, many of us Americans at least try very hard to draw the line between free speech and hate speech, especially when camouflaged as racist humor or culture war. Our following three mantras support my contention: (1) “Your freedom of speech does not permit you to yell fire in a crowded movie theater,” (2) “Your freedom stops where another person’s freedom begins,” and (3) “Your liberty to swing your fist ends just where my nose begins.”

Your metaphor of *Democracy and Islam are Incompatible* is ill-informed. It is obvious that you do not know about how Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an and Islam helped to shape the views of the American Founding Fathers on religion and the consistency of Islam with democracy and, therefore, the American Constitution. As Denise A. Spellberg, a professor of Islamic History and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, using impeccable empirical evidence based on groundbreaking research, reveals in her highly regarded book titled *Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an: Islam and the Founders* (2014), Islam played a crucial role in shaping the American Founding Fathers’ views on religious freedom.

Furthermore, as we demonstrate in six of our several dozens of books on Islam (Bangura, 2003; Bangura, 2004; Bangura, 2005a; Bangura, 2005b; Bangura, 2011; and Bangura and Al-Nouh, 2011), Islamic democracy is consistent with Western democracy, and the concepts of democratic

participation and liberalism, as exemplified by the Rashidun Caliphate, were already present in the medieval Islamic world. For example, in *Islamic Sources of Peace*, we note that the great Muslim philosopher Al-Farabi, born Abu Nasr Ibn al-Farakh al-Farabi (870-980), also known as the “second master” (as Aristotle is often dubbed to be the “first master”), theorized an idealized Islamic state which he compared to Plato’s *The Republic*, albeit he departed from Plato’s view that the ideal state be ruled by the philosopher king and suggested instead the Prophet (PBUH) who is in direct communion with Allah/God (SWT). In the absence of a prophet, Al-Farabi regarded democracy to be the closest to the ideal state, pointing to the Rashidun Caliphate as an example in Islamic history. He identified three basic features of Islamic democracy: (1) a leader elected by the people; (b) *Sharia*, which could be overruled by ruling jurists if necessary based on *najib*—the obligatory, *mandub*—the permissible, *mubah*—the indifferent, *haram*—the forbidden, and *makruh*—the repugnant; and committed to practicing (3) *Shura*, a special form of consultation practiced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). We add that Al-Farabi’s thoughts are evident in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and some Muslim philosophers that followed him (Bangura, 2004:104-124).

We also note in *Islamic Sources of Peace* that the great Muslim jurist and political scientist Abu Al-Hassan ‘Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Habib Al-Mawardi (972-1058) stated three basic principles upon which an Islamic political system is based: (1) *Tawhid*—the belief that Allah (SWT) is the Creator, Sustainer and Master of everything that exists on Earth; (2) *Risala*—the medium in which the law of Allah (SWT) is brought down and received; and (3) *Khilifa* or representation—man is supposed to be the representative of Allah (SWT) here on Earth. He describes the structure of Islamic democracy as follows: (a) the executive branch comprising the *Amir*, (b) the legislative branch or advisory council comprising the *Shura*, and (c) the judicial branch comprising the *Quadi* who interpret the *Sharia*. He also provides the following four guiding principles of the state: (1) the aim of the Islamic state is to create a society as conceived in the Qur’an and the Sunnah; (2) the state shall enforce the *Sharia* as the fundamental law of the state; (3) the sovereignty rests in the people—the people can plan and set up any form of state conforming with the preceding two principles and with the exigencies of time and environment; (4) whatever the form of the state, it must be based on the principle of popular representation, because sovereignty belongs to the people (Bangura, 2004:143-167).

We further point out in *Islamic Sources of Peace* that a thousand years after Al-Farabi, Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) characterized the early Islamic Caliphate as compatible with democracy. Arguing that Islam had the “gems” for an economic and democratic organization of Muslim societies, Iqbal called for the institution of popularly elected legislative assemblies as a re-ushering of Islam’s original purity (Bangura, 2004:201-224).

I also pray that you will seek the true path to Allah/God (SWT), for even Jesus (PBUH) called God Allah, since it is the name for God in his Aramaic language, so that He can forgive your sins.

In Peace Always,
Abdul Karim Bangura

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About the Author/Presenter

Abdul Karim Bangura is a researcher-in-residence of Abrahamic Connections and Islamic Peace Studies at the Center for Global Peace in the School of International Service at American University, the director of The African Institution, and a professor of Research Methodology and Political Science at Howard University. He holds five PhDs in Political Science, Development Economics,

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