

Osama bin Laden and Liberation

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Abstract:

US foreign policy is justified as a security measure. We go to elsewhere to maintain safety at home. In October of 2004 Osama bin Laden released a short video outlining the motives for the attacks on 9/11. Ironically, his justification is like that of US government. He claims a moral high ground and reasons, “that security is an indispensable pillar of human life and that free men do not forfeit their security...” If both parties claim to be securing freedom, what *exactly* is freedom? Through an examination of Sherman A. Jackson’s book “Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering” I will attempt to draw connections about the possibilities of liberation.

The Traditionalists (bin Laden’s own school) practice a concept that explains the function of evil. “Evil is produced *only* as recompense for disobedience.” That is, if one is not obedient to God, God will punish you with evil. This idea aligns with bin Laden’s righteous stance toward liberation. Another Sunni school, the Maturidites, presents a counter to this justification. The Maturidites practice *hikman*. This, roughly, means that all things in existence are necessarily sponsored by God. Therefore, US violence *must* have been allowed by God, and bin Laden’s response would be *bida*—a form of innovative thinking banned in Sunni Islam—when he claims jihad.

There is another Maturidite concept that trumps that of God’s teleological wisdom. “Nonexistence of knowledge is not the same as knowledge of nonexistence” (Jackson 114).

Oppression is maintained by this dialectic. The violence that the US has and continues to commit cannot be reasoned away. People are dying in West Bank, in Gaza, in Yemen, in Afghanistan right *now*. The thousands of American lives that were stolen on September 11th, 2001 will never be forgotten. These hard realities will not be changed by theological reason, so what can be done to remedy the weight of oppression?

In Jackson's book he pits each Sunni tradition against the scholar William R. Jones who argues for the need of a "humanocentric theism." That is, he demands a religious practice that's ultimate end is to eliminate human suffering, but he demands that the method of achieving liberation is not contingent on the "universe of values and meanings that sustain... the status quo" (Jackson 121). Jones argues, "the oppressed will not regard their suffering as oppressive and will not be motivated to attack it" if one does not accept that oppression is "neither the will of God nor the way of nature" (Jackson 120), because in the acceptance of God's ontological goodness lies a deceit that is rooted in Western methods of thought.

This deceit is the need to cultivate the values of the oppressors themselves. To become relevant in the modern world one must wash their hands of difference and embody the values of those that maintain global hegemony. Therefore, the only path to liberation lies in the cultivation of a psychology of the oppressed themselves, because in the psychology of the oppressed lies an *acceptance* of difference.

Works Cited

"Full Transcript of Bin Ladin's Speech." Al Jazeera, 01 Nov. 2004. Web. 2 Dec. 2016.

Jackson, Sherman A. *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.