Love mysticism, long viewed as the finest expression of religious experience in Islam, has been displaced in the past two decades with ‘frontline/hate mysticism’. This militarized spirituality that emerged in the aftermath of World War I by redefining the East as spiritual.

By claiming to represent the ‘pure Muhammadan Islam’ (Islam-i nab-i Muhammadi), this modality of piety neglected the most cherished aspect of Islamic religious experience the ‘eternal afterlife’. Within themselves, the religiously inspired activists of time are informed by a globalized vision of martyrdom. During that period, ‘martydom-seeking’ was promoted as a path to spiritual improvement. During the war, it was indeed a displacement of the patri- otic willingness to die and to kill for one’s own homeland. This ‘martyrdom’ for well being in the afterlife of the martyrs was also deployed by the Afghan Mu- hammad, the Pakistani Sipah-i Sahaba, the Egyptian Iqbal, the Lebanese Hizb Allah, and the Palestinian Hamas militants. Thus ‘martyrdom’ and ‘ascendancy’ became the most important components of nationalist and rhi- natic rhetoric.

The spiritual East

Contrary to conventional Islam, here the spiritual quest was experienced as a vertical journey towards the divine. ‘In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate’ (vasl

The spiritual quest was experienced as a vertical journey towards the divine. ‘In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate’, the concept of ‘justicication and naturalizing jihad and martyrdom. During that period, critical approaches publicly propagate their will through the discourses attributed the backwardness of the Muslim Orient to Islam.’ But this as- sumption was refigured in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988, Khumayni and other Iranian theologues established a distinctive paradigm of ‘artists’ as those ‘wise’ individuals who shed light on the self and its relationship with the divine. Turning to the convention-

The first part of the following retrospective essay examines the particularity of hate mysticism, the second identifies the founder-
secular political culture in the Middle East and South Asia. Viewed as the guardians of fatalism and expectationalism, the early proponents of clerical modernity and spiritual revolution were intensely anti-clerical. In their formative phase, these calls were for the transformation of a sedimented notion of religion into a dynamic modern ideology and culture. For instance Kasravi, whose contribution to the emergence of Iranian Islamism has been effectively suppressed, viewed religion as ‘humanism’ (adamigari) and as ‘the source of worldly prosperity’.

To establish Islam as a counter-Europist ‘guide for life’, he called for ‘the returning of Islam to its foundation by purging it of the irrationalities of Sufi predestanarianism and Shi'i expectationalism’. As a rational humanist project, Islam was thus set to provide both the content of Eastern spirituality and the perimeters of a modern and progressive political culture. Overburdened by these modern requirements, religiosity and spirituality were increasingly politicized and religious sodalities assumed the role of political parties and civil institutions. Early examples of such associations that contributed to the formation of Islamic public sphere are the Egyptian Ikhwan al-Muslimun, the Indian-Pakistani Jama-i Islami, and the Iranian Hay'ats, an extensive network of neighborhood associations that emerged all over Iran between the 1940s and the 1970s.

By claiming authenticity, morality, and spirituality as their own exclusive domain, these and other Islamist formations constituted their secular counterparts as replicas of the materialistic, immoral, inhumane, and decadent West. Consequently Islamist formations, instead of contributing to the invigoration of ethical, humanist, and civil values, have predominantly fostered violence, intolerance, incivility, and religious bigotry. As the Western claim of superiority espoused colonialism and imperialist domination, the Eastern claim of spirituality has likewise produced shameful manifestations that are contrary to basic norms of human decency. The events of September 11 are the latest expression of this degenerated and vengeful spirituality. As postcolonial scholars have critiqued the claims of Western exceptionalism, it is now urgent that the foundational assumptions of Eastern spirituality are likewise deconstructed.

Notes
2. For the text of Khumayni’s letter, see ibid.: 7.
10. Ibid., 52.

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