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Editorial

The Future of Islamic Liberation Theology

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This Special Issue is devoted to Islamic Liberation Theology (hitherto ILT).¹ As a working definition, I view ILT as a broad and diverse cluster of theologies that seek to reinterpret Islamic texts—including, but not limited to, the Qur'an, the hadith (the reported sayings of Prophet Muhammad), and the legal tradition—in the light of oppression and resistance to it. ILT is built on a deep-seated belief in the infinite justice of God (Allah), who is described in the Qur'an as a compassionate and loving deity in solidarity with the downtrodden (Q. 4:75; 28:5-6). Indeed, social justice is a major theme running through Muslim scripture (45:22; 49:9; 90:12-18; 107:1-7). Wrestling theological understanding away from the privileged centre of society, ILT shifts the interlocutor, the conversation partner of theology, to the neglected margins. This shift of the interlocutor lies at the very heart of liberation theology, irrespective of which faith tradition it is operating within. The Peruvian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez has argued that the atheist or “the non-believer” has become the primary conversation partner of Christian theology in the post-Enlightenment era (Gutiérrez 2007, p. 28). But, he asks which theologians are we talking about and where are they located? Stripping this conversation of its neutrality and qualifying it as a distinctively European conversation situated in the privileged North, Gutiérrez reframes the parameters of theological discussion within a truly global context:

...in a continent like Latin America and the Caribbean, the challenge comes not in the first instance from the non-believer, but from “the non-persons”, those who are not recognized as people by the existing social order: the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings... (Gutiérrez 2007, p. 28)

This is what distinguishes discourses and practices of liberation from those of charity. In liberation theology, the oppressed (“the non-persons”) are not passive objects that are acted upon, such as through benevolent acts of assistance and philanthropy—basically, being given scraps from the table—but the oppressed are the resistive agents, the *subjects* of history, taking an equal seat at the table. And, taking an equal seat, as subjects, also means partaking fully in the process of knowledge production and meaning making. Thus, to shift the interlocutor of theology is to allow the marginalised to speak for themselves, drawing on their own lived experiences to produce theologies *for* the oppressed *by* the oppressed. This stands in sharp contrast to a well-intentioned “liberal” theology of the centre that attempts to speak on behalf of absentee others. This is not to imply that ally-ship and solidarity are not important. They are, and questions of complicity, as we will see in this Special Issue, are critical to grapple with. Let us not forget that positionalities are complex, at times even contradictory. Thinking intersectionally across categories of gender, sexuality, race, class, language, and citizenship, amongst others, we all occupy multiple subject positions simultaneously across the messy web of power relations. So, rather than setting up sweeping, static binaries of oppressed “versus” oppressor, especially when the latter is framed in terms of individuals rather than engrained social structures and institutions, liberation theology calls on progressive theologians who may not come from marginalised backgrounds to be part of the wider liberation struggle, entering a humble, constructive, but also critical conversation *with* the oppressed—including theologians from marginalised backgrounds—and learning from neglected perspectives, experiences, and histories.



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Let us return to the working definition of ILT that I provided. Notice how fluid and holistic the framing is: “a broad and diverse cluster of theologies that seek to reinterpret Islamic texts in the light of oppression and resistance to it”. I am not of the opinion that an individual or social movement needs to explicitly deploy the language, the formal grammar of liberation theology to be *doing* liberation theology, let alone having to cite a specific author or “canon” of liberationist texts. Doing so would turn very quickly into an exclusive and provincial discussion about ILT. Casting ILT instead as a cluster of theologies allows us to think (and to mobilise) more inclusively, more globally, and, therefore, more transformatively. What is important, for me, is an attempt to think from/with the margins; to be engaged in a progressive praxis of speaking truth to power; and to converse with Islamic texts and traditions in the thick of that praxis. This is not to say that Muslim scholars have not used the term liberation theology. They certainly have, and I, like most contributors to this Special Issue, proudly do. But, failing to have a fluid, holistic understanding of ILT can lead to exclusion and even erasure, with various thinkers and movements (anti-colonial? feminist? queer?) being ignored or categorised apart as dealing with fundamentally “different” issues and concerns, on the basis that they do not formally self-identify as liberation theologians or do not do *proper* liberation theology. Furthermore, thinking in terms of multi-faith perspectives and the constant slippage that seems to take place between liberation theology and Christianity—viewing liberation theology *as* Christian—by taking the name too seriously, we can also fall into a problematic narrative trap of portraying Islamic (or Hindu or Jewish or Buddhist) liberation theologies as derivative phenomena, as “exports” of Christian liberation theology, rather than having longer histories organically embedded within their own contextual milieus and sites of contestation.

Viewed through this more elastic frame, liberation theology is not a “newcomer” to Islam but actually has a long and illustrious legacy, especially over the past two centuries. During this turbulent period, Muslim-majority societies were occupied by competing European powers, including the British (South Asia and the Middle East), the French (North Africa and the Middle East), the Italians (North Africa), and the Dutch (Southeast Asia). Muslims never passively accepted foreign control of their lands and natural resources, of course, and have continuously mobilised anti-colonial resistance. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) is just one example of many. An Islamic scholar (*‘alim*; pl: *‘ulama*) originally from Iran,² Afghani famously travelled to different parts of the Middle East and South Asia preaching “pan-Islamic unity,” from India, where he supported Muslim opposition to the British Raj, to British-controlled Egypt, building an intellectual following amongst reformist *‘ulama* in Cairo (Keddie 1994, p. 11). The problem of the colonial West, then, has been a driving, global factor in shaping contemporary Islam. To put it another way: anti-colonial language and political praxis have not been at the edges, but at the very centre of modern Islamic thought, and recent articulations of ILT must be situated (read) within this longer genealogy of resistance while, at the same time, transitioning to different areas of social inequality. This is where, I think, the historical trajectory of ILT departs from Gutiérrez’s understanding of the liberationist turn in contemporary Christianity, with the interlocutor of theology shifting from the post-Enlightenment sceptic—the “non-believer”—to “the non-person”. According to Gutiérrez, this hermeneutical shift away from the European middle-class sceptic to the non-European poor is central to Latin American liberation theology and to Christian liberation theology in general. But, in terms of Islam and Muslim experience, the modern sceptic or atheist has never been the central, or, for that matter, even an influential interlocutor. Rather, I would argue, over the past two centuries, Western Empire has been the principal, contextual concern of Islamic theological discourse, alongside (and to a lesser extent) its main system of economic domination: capitalism.³ Thus, what we are witnessing in more current articulations of ILT are pivots and expansions towards other areas of human experience and suffering whilst also, as we will see in this Special Issue, revisiting the complex legacy of Western empire in fresh, decolonial ways.

Over the past several decades, a rich and sophisticated body of ILT literature has emerged that has hermeneutically grappled with a variety of categories, most notably

gender and pluralism.⁴ Gender egalitarian readings of the Qur'an have made a significant and lasting intervention in the field. A number of pioneering women, such as the Pakistani scholars Riff'at Hassan and Asma Barlas and the African American scholar Amina Wadud (Hassan 1990; Wadud 1999; Barlas 2002), have re-read the Qur'an with an eye to gendered issues, from the representation of woman in the Creation Story and the so-called Fall to questions of marriage, sex, divorce, domestic violence, inheritance, leadership, and religious authority. Critiquing the androcentrism of the Qur'anic commentarial tradition (*tafsir*), gender egalitarian readers have called for the entry of women into the exegetical circle, bringing their own lived experiences, problems, and perspectives to the Qur'anic text. Commenting on Wadud's hermeneutics, the Sudanese Islamic scholar Hibba Abugideiri writes:

It is not enough for modern Qur'anic commentators to simply 'add women and stir,' or integrate the subject of woman into the interpretive process while ignoring her agency. Wadud shows that a hermeneutical approach to interpreting woman in the Qur'an must include women as active agents. (Abugideiri 2001, p. 92).

Notwithstanding their manifestly different contexts, the parallels between Abugideiri's words on Islam and gender on the one hand and Guitérrez's words on Christianity and class on the other are striking. What unites them is a pointed departure in theology's interlocutor, from the privileged centre—(straight) men in the case of the former, the economically affluent in terms of the latter—to the ignored margins of society. Careful reflection on hermeneutical method, on how Islamic knowledge is produced and authorised, has been a core component of gender egalitarian exegesis; women's entry into the exegetical circle must also entail critical approaches to how scripture is "read". Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999) and Barlas' *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (2002) deployed innovative reading strategies to produce more inclusive understandings of Muslim scripture, most notably, historical criticism, contextualising the Qur'an in its seventh-century Arabian milieu, and holistic intra-textual analysis, exploring the distinctive semantics and overarching themes of the Qur'anic text (Rahemtulla 2018). While gender egalitarian reading strategies have been largely "academic" in character—historical criticism and intra-textual analysis, after all, require some level of scholarly training—it is important to note the praxis-based research of the South African scholar Sa'diyya Shaikh. In "A *Tafsir* of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence, and Resistance in a South African Community" (Shaikh 2007), Shaikh undertook in-depth interviews with battered women in Cape Town to show how they theologically grappled with and resisted patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, in the light of their own lived experiences of abuse and without any background in Islamic studies.⁵ Over the past two decades, gender egalitarian readers have shifted from Muslim scripture as the primary textual source to other Islamic texts and traditions, such as the *hadith* (Shaikh 2004; Abdul Kodir 2022), the Islamic legal tradition (Ali 2006; Mir-Hosseini et al. 2022),⁶ and have also reread the Qur'an, *hadith*, and legal tradition in the light of homosexuality and queer experience (Kugle 2010). This willingness to revisit and constructively engage extra-Qur'anic texts and traditions is a recurring theme, as we will see, in this Special Issue.

Religious pluralism, more specifically the question of alterity (the Other), has been another driving theme, particularly in literature that explicitly identifies as "ILT", namely, the works of the late Asghar Ali Engineer (d. 2013) in India, Farid Esack in South Africa, and Hamid Dabashi in the US (Engineer 1990; Esack 1997; Dabashi 2008). As these three geographies suggest, alterity is a recurring theme perhaps because these scholars themselves are based in Muslim-minority contexts. For example, Esack's *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (1997) emerged in the midst of the South African anti-apartheid movement, which was characterised by interreligious solidarity (Esack 1997, p. 8). Esack was a leading Muslim voice in the movement, and this is the praxis, the political commitment that shaped his exegesis of the Qur'an. Indeed, integrating praxis as a method—as the first, self-conscious step in a liberating hermeneutic (Esack 1997, p. 257)—is a key contribution that he makes to Islamic

thought.⁷ This book not only articulated a Qur'anic theology of liberation, but sought to carve out a pluralistic space within that theology, which acknowledges the intrinsic humanity of the non-Muslim Other. Alterity is also a prevailing concern in Dabashi's challenging text, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (2008). Dabashi argues that while there is a rich legacy of Islamic revolutionary movements against the colonial West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these have since transformed (in his opinion) into a dogmatic, insular, and absolutist Islamist ideology (Dabashi 2008). Moving beyond a restrictive, Islamist binary that sees the world in terms of "Islam" and "the West", Dabashi calls for a global and cosmopolitan Islamic liberation *theodicy* that is in solidarity with an ideological spectrum of anti-colonial movements, including secular worldviews—in effect, embracing its Others. Hence, Dabashi does not use theodicy in the conventional sense of the term. A liberation theodicy is not about "accounting for the existence of any "evil" in the world, but [acknowledging] the presence of diversity, alterity, shades and shadows of truth" (Dabashi 2008, p. 22)⁸ within a shared political praxis of resisting empire.

And this brings us to this volume. The purpose of this Special Issue is to chart out new directions in ILT. What is the current state of the field? Hitherto, what are the principal contexts, problems, and thematic areas that ILT has focused on and why? How has the establishment of religion and its hierarchies of power and authority been deconstructed, and, in turn, how have liberationist re-readings of religious texts been produced? That is, how has ILT challenged dominant hermeneutical approaches and offered more inclusive reading methods? To what extent are these alternative methods themselves problematic, carrying contestable assumptions? Which areas of human experience have received less attention, or have even been ignored altogether? Looking toward the future, how can ILT begin to grapple with such thematic areas, unexplored intersectional realities, and changing global contexts and, speaking concretely, what exactly would critical theological scholarship in these new research areas look like? With regard to method, how can fresh interdisciplinary interpretive strategies be cultivated that can offer readings that are liberationist and transformative but also critically reflexive and unapologetic? Finally, in a field that has been deeply shaped by textual hermeneutics (however contextually sensitive), what is the place of social research methods, and of the social sciences in general, within ILT? A disclaimer is in order here: this is not meant to be an exhaustive listing of questions, and by no means do the rich array of articles in this Special Issue address all the questions listed above. If anything, by exploring new dimensions and approaches to ILT, they raise more questions for future research and analysis than provide definitive "final" answers.

Nor does this volume claim to be comprehensive or even representative: the contributions do not cover all themes, areas, and problems. An open Call for Papers (CFP) was advertised and circulated, and I, as the guest editor, received proposals on certain topics and not others. As is often the case with any edited project, some contributors (working on timely themes such as ecological justice and neurodiversity) had to pull out at the last minute due to other work and life commitments—such is the nature of our profession and indeed of *work* in general, as we all try to negotiate multiple demands on our labour and time. Over the course of the writing process, I was in a dialogical conversation with each contributor, offering a supportive but critical soundboard as their separate papers developed. The frequency of our Zoom meetings depended on the personal preferences of each contributor: some asked for regular editorial feedback, whereas others were happy to meet once or twice. The contributors to this Special Issue are based in, and/or come from, different parts of the world, including Egypt, Iran, South Africa, India, Canada, and the UK, and comprise scholars at diverse stages in their careers, including senior scholars, mid-career scholars, early career fellows, and PhD candidates. As the guest editor, I feel privileged to introduce their articles below, which, alongside our conversations, I have learnt from immensely. These articles creatively chart out future vistas for ILT, engaging a number of themes, from theological paradigms, social class, and incarceration to gender, queer sexualities, and decolonisation.

The first two articles are devoted to theological paradigms. In “The Tawhid Paradigm and an Inclusive Concept of Liberative Struggle,” Siavash Saffari explores how Muslim thinkers have recast *tawhid*—the central Islamic doctrine of the absolute unity of God—as a “distinctly Islamic framework for liberative praxis”. Focusing on the pioneering Iranian thinker Ali Shari’ati (d. 1977), Saffari examines the interplay between the universal and the particular in Shari’ati’s tawhidic writings. Saffari then draws hermeneutical linkages with contemporary exegetes of *tawhid*, namely, the African American scholar Amina Wadud and the Iranian American scholar Hamid Dabashi, the former focusing on gender equality and the latter on alterity and the non-Muslim Other. Central to Saffari’s argument is that the *tawhid* paradigm has always been in conversation with “non-Islamic liberative paradigms,” such as revolutionary Marxism and the Non-Aligned Movement of Shari’ati’s era, and this has not worked to undermine Islamic monotheism but, on the contrary, has made it more intersectional, inclusive, and socially robust. This suggests that the future of the *tawhid* paradigm lies in further syncretic dialogue and reflexive engagement with non-Islamic progressive discourses and traditions. The next article engages *qist*, which roughly translates as fairness and equity. In “The Egalitarian Principle of Qist as Lived Ethic: Towards a Liberational Tafsir”, Omaima Abou-Bakr undertakes a discourse analysis of this concept in the Qur’an. This itself is a contribution to ILT, as the focus is usually on ‘*adl* or ‘*adala* (literally “justice”). Highlighting *qist*’s core meaning in its verb form—to distribute (*qassata*)—she argues that this concept, in particular its grounded accent on the equal and rightful distribution of resources, “directs attention to the practical ways of applying the overarching, comprehensive value of *shari’ah*, *al-’adl* (justice)”. Alongside the Qur’an, she engages classical and contemporary commentary (*tafsir*). In ILT, particularly in early gender egalitarian scholarship on the Qur’an, the *tafsir* tradition has often been approached with suspicion, even dismissed altogether. That Abou-Bakr constructively dialogues with *tafsir* texts reflects a methodological tendency within later ILT literature to engage the Islamic tradition as a whole (Shaikh 2004; Ali 2006; Abdul Kodir 2022; Mir-Hosseini et al. 2022). This methodological tendency will, no doubt, continue into the future.

We then pivot to the role of praxis. In his article—“Towards a Theology of Class Struggle: A Critical Analysis of British Muslims’ Praxis against Class Inequality”—Sharaiz Chaudhry laments the lack of attention that class and economic exploitation have received in (contemporary) ILT and in the study of religion in general. As a case study, Chaudhry documents the anti-gentrification activism of Nijor Manush—a Bengali organisation based in the London borough of Tower Hamlets—and how they deploy Islamic discourses as “a liberative tool to combat class oppression”. Departing from strictly textual and hermeneutical analysis, his methodology is based on qualitative social research, entailing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The future of ILT, therefore, should (re)centre questions of class but also, methodologically speaking, prioritise social research approaches in order to document praxis, i.e., concrete struggles on the ground waged by ordinary people. Shifting to the context of prisons and political incarceration, Walaa Quisay’s article—“Locating the ‘Praxis’ in Islamic Liberation Theology: God, Scripture, and the Problem of Suffering in Egyptian Prisons”—also employs qualitative social research methods. She undertakes in-depth interviews with former political prisoners who were jailed and tortured after the military coup of General ‘Abd al-Fattah Sisi in 2013. Quisay explores their religious lives in the prison context, their “devotional contemplation” (*tadabbur*) of the Qur’an, and how they grappled with unsettling questions of theodicy and human suffering. Quisay not only contributes to existing scholarship on Muslims in prisons and Islamic carceral theology but, like Chaudhry, offers a provocative challenge to more text-based, hermeneutically driven approaches to ILT and to liberation theology as a whole. For instead of exegetically “reading liberation into the Qur’an”, she argues that the Egyptian prisoners’ *tadabbur* was an ongoing, conflicted struggle that “allowed for emancipatory *embodiments* of scripture”.⁹ Haroon Bashir also engages prison contexts but through a juristic discussion of slavery. In “Islam and the Emancipatory Ethic: Islamic Law, Liberation Theology, and Prison Abolition”, he catalogues the ways in which classical Muslim jurists, while not calling into

question the system of slavery itself, nonetheless tried to privilege *'itq* (emancipation) in various rulings between master and slave. Building on this “emancipatory spirit”, Bashir shows how the Egyptian reformist Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905)—who, I should add, was Afghani’s student in Cairo—made an Islamic case for abolitionism. But, does the discussion end there? Given that ‘Abduh’s anti-slavery position is now the norm amongst Muslims (it certainly was not during his own time), is slavery a resolved issue? Bashir argues that the theological problem of slavery is as relevant and pressing today due to the widespread presence of “slavery-adjacent conditions”, in particular the (highly racialised) prison–industrial complex. He concludes that supporting contemporary calls for prison abolition is not only an ethical imperative, but it is actually “more representative of the classical emancipatory ethos” that runs through the legal tradition than a rupture with that tradition.

The next two articles engage gender and sexuality. In “Friendships, Fidelities and Sufi Imaginaries: Theorising Islamic Feminism”, Sa’diyya Shaikh (re)casts Islamic feminism’s relationship to the Islamic tradition as a form of friendship (*walaya*) characterised by “radical, critical fidelity”. This entails “commitments and loyalties to tradition while simultaneously engaging critically with sexism, patriarchy, and homophobia”. While Abou-Bakr and Bashir explore the commentarial and legal tradition, respectively, Shaikh’s main interest is the mystical tradition (*tasawwuf*), which she has written on extensively. Central to her argument is the need for a more nuanced engagement with hierarchies as a “serious analytical category,” focusing on the shaykh–murid (guide–seeker) relationship. Instead of dismissing hierarchies categorically, she asks how more responsible, transparent, and accountable hierarchal practices can be cultivated through critical fidelity to the tradition. Her perceptive reading of hierarchies is significant not only for ethical approaches to Islamic mysticism but for progressive politics in general, which has often dismissed hierarchy as simply being a “problem” (as if all hierarchies are one and the same, and never volitional or reciprocal) rather than fluid social practices that can be remoulded in the interests of justice and accountability. The next essay by Mujahid Osman—entitled “Queering Jihad in South Africa: Islam, Queerness, and Liberative Praxis”—explores Muslim queer community in the context of Cape Town. Like Chaudhry and Quisay, Osman shifts from strictly textual hermeneutical analysis to qualitative social research methods, namely, an “auto-ethnographic” approach based on participant observation. Queer Muslims in Cape Town, he argues, “dis-identify” with multiple discourses of exclusion and estrangement, namely, heteronormativity embedded in the Islamic tradition; heteronormativity embedded in liberative traditions; and also homonormativity, i.e., “the regulatory nature of hegemonic forms of queerness which emerged in the Global North”, shaped by Western secularity and neoliberal market capitalism. Queer Muslim embodiments of *jihad* (“struggle and praxis”) thus seek to navigate these various discourses to arrive at an alternative space based on their own diverse sexualities and fluid gender identities, and in which “reimagining” the Islamic tradition, as people of faith, is a central component. This includes the Qur’an, early Islamic history, and a fascinating *hadith* text that privileges the estranged: “Islam started as a strange thing, and it will return to a strange thing. So, give glad tidings to the strangers (*al-ghuraba*)”.

As we have seen, the problem of empire has been a longstanding theme in ILT. The last set of essays revisit the complex legacy of empire in fresh, decolonial ways, thinking through two very different contexts. In “Islamic Liberation Theology and Decolonial Studies: The Case of Hindutva Extractivism”, Ashraf Kunnummal puts ILT in conversation with the field of decolonial studies, which was developed in radical Latin American and Caribbean Studies circles. As a Muslim liberation theologian, he aims “to locate the limits and potentials of decolonial studies”, emphasising that a genuine commitment to decolonisation entails not only a critique of the coloniality of knowledge—that is, the nexus between European empire and Eurocentric epistemology (“ideas”)—but also a materially driven “political praxis” for social justice. If this dual commitment is absent, Kunnummal warns, the decolonial project risks “becoming merely a decolonial option

(ideas without praxis) without a decolonial turn (praxis with ideas)". As a case study, he turns to his own home context of Hindu-dominated India. Focusing on the writings of Hindutva apologist J. Sai Deepak, Kunnummal scrutinises how Hindu nationalism has appropriated the language of decoloniality—"decolonial Hindutva"—to pursue its own ultra-nationalist objectives, to perpetuate Islamophobia, and to further marginalise India's Muslim minority. Finally, in the closing article of this volume—"Decolonising Islam: Indigenous Peoples, Muslim Communities, and the Canadian Context"—I place ILT in dialogue with settler colonial studies and indigenous rights. While empire has been a recurring trope in ILT, this engagement (however insightful) has assumed a specific colonial configuration in which Muslims are on the receiving "end" of power relations, being occupied and colonised by an external, non-Muslim entity. But, what about the presence of Islam, I ask, *within* settler colonies today? I argue that the case of Canada (and linkages can be drawn with the US and Australia, which also have established Muslim communities) challenges ILT to revisit the category of empire in a more nuanced, layered fashion. For in these contexts, Muslim migrant communities are complicit *as* settlers themselves in the continued disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples, lands, and cultures.¹⁰ Centrally, I ask, how can we decolonise Islam within the settler colony? That is, how can Muslims address their own complicity with the settler colonial project, standing in solidarity with native peoples and rereading their own faith tradition in the light of that solidarity?

As the above summaries demonstrate, the future of ILT is broad ranging and multi-faceted; it cannot be reduced to a singular vision or programmatic "manifesto", and nor should it be. My article at the end of the volume gives a clear sense of where I personally think ILT should be heading, particularly within discussions of empire and its rather complex legacy. But, "the hats" of the contributor and the editor are very different, and, as an editor, I am wary of a single voice overshadowing a plurality of intersecting visions and approaches. I would like to close this introduction, therefore, by simply highlighting four general themes that surface in this Special Issue. Firstly, ILT is a *global* phenomenon that cannot be restricted to a specific geography or region, and its future trajectories will continue, even if grounded in local power relations, to be transnational in scope. The articles in this volume are embedded in national contexts spread across the Global South and Global North, including South Africa (Osman, Shaikh), India (Kunnummal), Egypt (Abou-Bakr, Quisay), Iran (Saffari), Canada (Rahemtulla), and the UK (Chaudhry, Bashir). Secondly, ILT is acutely *intersectional* in its approach to oppression, and the entanglement of power relations across gender, race, class, and other planes of lived experience will (and indeed should) remain on ILT's ethical and intellectual radar. While various scholars in this Special Issue have called for more attention to areas that have been ignored, they have endeavoured to think intersectionally and fluidly. For example, Chaudhry centres questions of class, focusing on the gentrification of Tower Hamlets in London and Nijjor Manush's resistance work. But, at the same time, Chaudhry foregrounds the structural racism of the gentrification process—Tower Hamlets, after all, is a predominantly Bengali borough—and how Nijjor Manush, as a Bengali organisation, is immersed as much in anti-racist praxis, as it is in anti-classist praxis. We also see intersectionality at work in Saffari's critiques of Shari'ati's *tawhidic* writings via Wadud (gender and race) and Dabashi (alterity and the non-Islamic Other).

Thirdly, ILT seeks to reclaim the *tradition*, i.e., the Islamic intellectual heritage. Earlier articulations of contemporary ILT focused on the Qur'an as the "Word of God" (*kalamallah*), offering perceptive and often pathbreaking analysis of Muslim scripture, but engagement with extra-Qur'anic texts was less rigorous, ranging between surface-level, selective readings to outright dismissal. Over the past two decades, ILT has shifted to a multidisciplinary conversation with the Islamic tradition in its entirety, and this hermeneutical trend will likely continue into the future. In this volume, we see constructive engagement with the Qur'an and the commentarial tradition (Abou-Bakr, Quisay, Rahemtulla), early Islamic history and hadith (Osman, Chaudhry), the legal tradition (Bashir), and the mystical tradition (Shaikh). Fourthly, ILT seems to be pivoting towards social *practice* as opposed to simply

rereading Islamic texts (even if based on lived experience). Paralleling Shaikh's earlier work on *tafsir* and praxis, there is an emergent, methodological turn from textual hermeneutics alone to social scientific research while acknowledging that the two cannot be neatly disentangled. This is evident in a number of articles, including Osman's "auto-ethnographic" study of queer Muslim community in Cape Town; Chaudhry's analysis of Nijjor Manush in London; and Quisay's harrowing interviews with former political prisoners in Sisi's Egypt. This last theme, I believe, is a fitting point to conclude on, for liberation theology is not interested primarily in ideas (as important as ideas are) but in concrete praxis and resistance, striving to transform oppressive realities on the ground. This is the spirit (*ruh*) of liberation theology, and, wherever ILT may venture in the future, it must stay true to its practical spirit of transformative politics.

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Notes

- ¹ While liberation theology is often associated with radical variants of Latin American Christianity (Gutiérrez [1971] 1973; Boff and Boff [1986] 1999) and, to a lesser extent, African American Christianity (Cone [1970] 2010; Hopkins and Antonio 2012), it is important to note that liberation theologies are not a Christian phenomenon. In addition to Islam, there are liberation theologies spread across a variety of faith traditions, including Hinduism (Rambachan 2015), Judaism (Ellis 1987), and Buddhism (Queen and King 1996).
- ² Despite the name "Afghani", the historical records show that he was born and raised in what is modern-day Iran, attending the Shi'a Islamic seminaries in the shrine cities of Iraq. (Keddie 1994). He may have strategically adopted the name Afghani to hide his Shi'a background in order to gain more legitimacy within Sunni circles.
- ³ I thank Siavash Saffari for reminding me of the influence of 19th-century socialism and its critiques of capitalism on various Muslim thinkers, including Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) and Ubaidullah Sindhi (d. 1944) in South Asia and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev (d. 1940) in the former Soviet Union.
- ⁴ To clarify, gender and pluralism are not the *only* categories that recent liberationists have engaged with. The African American scholar Sherman Jackson, for instance, has written two seminal books on Islamic Black Theology (Jackson 2005, 2009). However, questions of race and ethnicity have largely been underexplored in the literature, which has focused on the aforementioned two categories.
- ⁵ Shaikh has also undertaken critical textual analysis of Islamic texts, especially premodern mystical texts (Shaikh 2012).
- ⁶ See the sections "Islamic Legal Theory and Ethics" and "Law and Practice" in (Mir-Hosseini et al. 2022) for a fascinating series of articles that grapple with *usul al-fiqh* (literally, the "roots of jurisprudence," referring to legal theory) and applied jurisprudence through a feminist lens.
- ⁷ To be sure, social context necessarily acts as the point of departure for *any* theological reflection, but liberation theology consciously draws on that context to produce practical, grounded, and ultimately liberating theological knowledge. It is telling that the first two chapters of Esack's book focus not on the Qur'an itself but the history of the Cape; the apartheid regime and resistance to it; the history and politics of the South African Muslim community; and Esack's own upbringing and formation within these multiple contexts.
- ⁸ My parentheses.
- ⁹ My italics.
- ¹⁰ The case of African Americans in the US, as the descendants of slaves forcibly shipped to the Americas, is more complex, as is the case of asylum seekers and refugees.

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