

Overhearing the Qur'ān

Gil Anidjar



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For Zahiye

Huwa ūdhūn (He is an ear).

— Q 9:61

What is the nature of the question that has gathered us today? What is it that we are asking ourselves to listen to, to hear or overhear of it, in it?¹ What is it that we name the object of our attention and preoccupation? Under what frame and heading do we demand a hearing, a witnessing and an understanding of the events who themselves feed, and clamor for, our ever divided attention? Is it the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which journalists and politicians maintain high up in the headlines? Is it the Arab-Jewish question, the relations of Jews and Arabs that Shlomo Goitein, for one, documented and which many of us since, students of Ella Shohat, Ammiel Alcalay and others, have been attached or committed to? Or else are we intent on reviving that elusive “Judeo-Muslim tradition,” once evoked by none other than Bernard Lewis himself?² I

¹ I presented versions of this essay — which is at once belated and all-too premature — on two occasions, first at Brown University, at the invitation of Sami Everett and Erica Weiss, and then in Paris, for the event organized by Anoush Ganjipour and Elad Lapidot. My thanks to the hosts and to the audiences attending. I wish to dedicate this publication to my co-presenter in Paris, Zahiye Kundos, a true thinker of maternity, for her inspiring work and in gratitude for her encouragements.

² Shlomo D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages* (New York: 1974 [1955]); Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 2017); Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [1984]).

shall confess to having an increased inclination to favor Albert Swissa's "longings for Ishmael."³ But don't call me Ishmael yet. I have, in any case, too many doubts about history in either the damning (the dhimma) or apologetic (non-lachrymose) mode. And whether it is, finally, the filiation and affiliation of Jews, Muslims and others, that will save us, their shared or warring traditions, that can orient us, an old-new qibla, such as proposed by my friends Anoush Ganjipour and Elad Lapidot, I do not know, but I do want to thank them here for their selfless and courageous efforts in organizing this event.⁴

Allow me to repeat, for it bears repeating, that the very *kampfplatz*, the theater of that war which is not one but many, is not so set or settled with regard to its geolocation, with regard to the very actors it allegedly and somehow transparently — but always historically — involved, and involves still. From the beginning, as it were.⁵ For they too are many, so very many that it will not do to start with one of them, as if we could be secure with regard to the name and place of the emergency. How many emergencies, how many exceptions will have had to be declared by now? Declared or decided? And by what sovereign? We are — the unbearable factuality of this inconceivable "we" —truly far from any beginning, perhaps closer to the end. Our attention divided, I said, and not only because we are, still and increasingly, in *media res*, if hardly midway through the journey of our collective life, as Dante might have put it, who knew something about the imminence of death in the plural. We are definitely in the

³ Albert Swissa, "Bound Together: My Longings for Ishmael," trans. Gil Anidjar at <https://themarkaz.org/bound-together-my-longings-for-ishmael/>

⁴ My gratitude as well to Talal Asad, Joëlle Marelli and Aamer Ibraheem for their comments, criticisms, and suggestions as I reworked the lecture upon which this essay is based.

⁵ Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) or, from a different perspective, Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

midst of things, of persons and things. In the midst of ruins too, and unsure of who will sing, much less hear, al-ṣaṭlāl, the songs of our impossible mourning. So many to mourn, so much to lament and grieve, and more coming still, more dying today, as the wasteland grows. An inconceivable “we,” I repeat, the present absence of an unbearable conjunction, the sheer violence of a juxtaposition. And so I ask again, are these Israelis and Palestinians that we mourn or confront, that face and thereby gather each other, two nations or two nationalisms — dying nationalisms, Franz Fanon could have quipped — on one land? Or are they Jews and Arabs, two “ethnic” groups, one might say, “Semites” even, of contested nature, size and geography, not to mention, religion?⁶ Are they not, finally, Jews and Muslims, two so-called religious collectives, which is to say, two at least, of related but also distinct lineages and histories, and again geographies too? It would be wrong to omit from this list the matter of the state, the politics of oil and the economy of weapons and other technologies, or indeed the general question, not to say, the devastation, of the region. Speaking of a not so unique case of belatedly recognized genocide, Mahmood Mamdani, indispensable political thinker and, more recently, father of the Mayor of New York City, used to insistently call for “a regional analysis.”⁷ Before seeming to let go of that recommendation in his recent *Neither Settler Nor Native*, Mamdani had written that “a focus confined to Rwandan state boundaries inevitably translates into a silence about regional processes that fed

⁶ Gil Anidjar, *Sémites: Religion, race et politique en occident chrétien*, trad. Marc Nìchanian (Lormont: Le bord de l’eau, 2016).

⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 18; and see Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020).

the dynamic leading to the genocide.”⁸ The state or states and the region, the regions — devastated, as I said, or in the process of — working and destroying, warring against citizens and non-citizens. And perhaps what we are witnessing is to a large extent, less a society against the state, as the French anthropologist Pierre Clastres might have suggested, than the state against society, or else, equally accurately, society against itself. Is it not, after all, as many have said, if not necessarily argued, a civil war? A Gordian knot or else a thick cluster of fraternal and fratricidal wars, a fractured collection of seemingly endless and uncivil wars? In which region exactly? Within which natural and unnatural borders? Which nation and which religion?⁹

I have elsewhere tried to argue for the persistence of the Christian question as has Abeer Khshiboon, whom I definitely encourage you to read.¹⁰ But please consider that there is no single answer, much less a correct answer, except for “all of the above and more.” For at work but not at play, at war, and underneath all wars, is what Elias Jabre refers to as “the war of names.” Jabre most explicitly evokes Lebanon, but he is speaking as much of the region or regions I mentioned, explaining that war has carried them, carried him, carries him still as much as he carries war within him (*la guerre me porte comme je porte la*

⁸ Mamdani, *When Victims*, 8; it is the state, even if “the nonnational state we might aspire to after postcolonialism,” that guides Mamdani’s vision in *Neither Settler Nor Native*, within, one might say, the borders and certainly “the frontier of decolonization” (31), this in spite of the arbitrariness of colonial and postcolonial cartography.

⁹ See Jean-Pierre Luizard, *Les racines du chaos: Irak, Syrie, Liban, Yemen, Libye. Cinq États arabes en faillite* (Paris: Taillandier, 2022); Neil Partrick, *State Failure in the Middle East: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen* (London: Routledge, 2026)

¹⁰ Abeer Khshiboon, “Reclaiming History and Memory: Bridging the Jesus Event and the Nakba,” *Political Theology* 25: 7 (2024), 780-800.

guerre en moi).¹¹ Insisting on the role of fetishism, a generalized fetishism (of names and of wars, of laws and of explanations), Jabre no doubt helps us orient ourselves toward better formulated questions, as we otherwise persist in pondering the nature of a solution, which, never final, could on no account substitute for a response, a responsible response (rather than a “return to the return, a ḥazara be-teshuva,” that strange expression), simply, a teshuva.

Who (Else) Calls?

Long ago but still ahead of us, Moses Maimonides, at the time better known as Mūsā ibn Maymūn and whom Shahab Ahmed proposed we recognize as “an Islamic Jewish thinker,” Ibn Maymūn, then, made a scene.¹² He offered an early contribution to the questions we might have been asking. He contributed, in any case, to philosophy’s “garrulous theater,” as Louis Althusser’s felicitous expression had it. Maimonides constructed his own “little theoretical theatre.”¹³ He staged, in other words, a dramatic encounter.

Know that if one does not understand the language of a human being whom one hears speaking, one indubitably knows that he speaks, but without knowing what he intends to say. Something of even graver import may occur: sometimes one may hear in someone else’s speech words that in the language of the speaker indicate a certain meaning (tadullu ʿalā maʿnā) and by accident, that word indicates (tadullu) in the

¹¹ Elias Jabre, *Plus d’une loi, la guerre des noms: Derrida, Deleuze et Guattari, Foucault* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2024), 31.

¹² Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 448.

¹³ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 57, 174.

language of the hearer, the contrary of what the speaker intended. Thus the hearer will think that the signification (dalāla), that the word has for the speaker is the same as its signification (dalāla), for him. For instance if an Arab hears a Hebrew man saying ʔaba [Heb. he wishes], the Arab will think that he speaks of an individual who was reluctant with regard to some matter and refused, ʔabā, it This is similar to what happens with the multitude (liljūmhūr) with regard to the speech of the prophets [i.e., the Torah] excepting certain portions that they do not understand at all. As it says: The vision of all this is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed [Isaiah 29:11]. With regard to other portions, they understand what is the contrary of, or contradictory to, the true meaning. As it says: And ye have perverted the words of the living God [Jeremiah 23:36] ¹⁴

I wish I could linger on the intricacies of the scene here described, on the magnitude of its import with regard to Maimonides' philosophy at the very least, with regard to the ethical and political implications it carries for its readers and beyond. I have made some attempts to attend to the meaning and the significance of this passage, the meaning and significance of the dalāla, which Maimonides mobilizes here in a book itself entitled Dalālat al-Ḥaʾirīn. Here and now, I will restrict myself to saying that what Maimonides stages is indeed a scene, a theater of hearing, something like an "archaeology of our ears" as one Foucault scholar phrased it.¹⁵ In this scene, we are at once

¹⁴ Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 29; trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), volume II, 336-37; see, for an extended discussion, Gil Anidjar, *'Our Place in al-Andalus': Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab Jewish Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) and more recently as well my "Dalāla, Dialogue (Maimonides, Bouteldja, and Us)," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 9: 1 (Summer 2019), 57-70.

¹⁵ Lauri Siisiäinen, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* (London: Routledge, 2013), 5.

witnesses to an interpellation and are ourselves interpellated. We hear and watch a scene of interpellation. We hear and overhear language, the fact of language, the knowledge of language, the certainty that one knows what one hears and that one knows that what one hears is spoken in one's own language, a certainty that is quickly and deeply problematized and unsettled. The scene is one of hearing and of overhearing, perhaps of eavesdropping. And it is played out as well in the reading and writing of Maimonides's text in quite abyssal a manner. For Maimonides is writing in Arabic but he is also writing in Hebrew, a Hebrew appearing in the Arabic language, or perhaps it is the Arab, or the Arabic, that is here manifesting in Hebrew letters. I do not say that this is "Judeo-Arabic" and I refer you to Ella Shohat's recent work for an explanation.¹⁶ Be that as it may, when reading Maimonides, what one reads at any given moment, the writing that one reads, is either Arabic or Hebrew, and in that ambiguity, in this ignorant isolation — unless it is an excess of knowledge — one knows without knowing what one knows, that one knows what language one is reading. A language of one's own. Whether reading or hearing, overhearing, there is in the event, at this precise and divided juncture, what Martin Heidegger called a "being-with," a *Mitsein*, and certainly "the phenomenological evidence that in every case *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world, already dwells alongside . . . alongside the entity which the discourse is about."¹⁷ And so, Heidegger continues as if commenting on Maimonides, "even in cases where the speech is indistinct or in a foreign language." Heidegger

¹⁶ Ella Shohat, "The Invention of Judeo-Arabic," *Interventions* 19:2 (2017), 153-200.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), § 34; and see Jacques Derrida, "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht IV*)," trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, John Sallis, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 163-218; and see as well, Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, Christie V. McDonald, ed. (New York: Schocken, 1985).

makes clear that there is always the possibility of a mishearing involved, the possibility if not the necessity of a *mésentente*, as Jacques Rancière would say.¹⁸ Between the Hebrew and the Arab, in any case, between the Arab and the Jew, our attention is once again divided. What are we to hear or not hear? There is hearing and there is mishearing. There is misunderstanding and there is overhearing. And that state of affairs, which takes place between desire and denial, between wishing and refusing, knowing and not knowing as well as understanding and misunderstanding, that state of affairs is what takes place not only between the Jew and the Arab, between the text and the reader, but also, and this is truly remarkable, between the Jews (“the multitude”) and the prophets, the words of the prophets, between the revelation, the Torah, and its Jewish (that is, we can assume, Hebrew and later Jewish) audience, an audience that truly found itself within an earshot of the thunder and lighting that accompanies the revelation, the speech of the prophets, the words of the divinity. As they hear and overhear these words, as they hear the voice of revelation, the Jews are, for all intents and purposes, Arabs. That is what Maimonides is telling us. He is telling us that they know, those Jews that are also thereby Arab Jews, they think they know that the prophets speak in their language, a language of their own, in the language they know. And there is their mistake. More precisely, there is the very moment of (their) misunderstanding.

As we read this, as we hear this, we ourselves might feel compelled to ask a version of that Shakespearean question: Who is the merchant here? Who is the Jew? For my part, I would rather rephrase and ask instead, as my friend Mitchell

¹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Hart documented, the question popularized by the nineteenth century and forgotten since, namely, Was sind Juden?¹⁹ Or with equal pertinence and validity what a French exhibition recently pondered, namely, Le monde arabe existe-t-il (encore)?²⁰ And shall we leave aside “the idea of the Muslim world”?²¹ The reality or spectrality of the Sunni-Shi‘i divide? To summarize, at least partly: what are the Jews (to) the Muslims? What are they to and for the Qur’ān?

What I want to propose in the wake of these questions, is, no more than the beginning of an answer, the rudiments of an initial teshuva, and rather, after the fashion of Maimonides, my own little theoretical theater. It is one that imposed itself to me in a moment of revelation, a compulsive and compulsory intermission, in which I wondered whether it might be the case after all that there is “compulsion in religion” (assuming that we know what it is that we hear in that translated word, “religion”). And if not in religion, certainly in hearing and overhearing (in failing or refusing to hear too, as the Qur’ān makes clear). As Louis Althusser describes it in his meditation on interpellation, the compulsion is usually so strong that nine out of ten turn around when they hear the call — of the police, or of revelation (Althusser famously names Moses as a kind of paradigm, about which the Qur’ān would not disagree, where Moses appears 137 times).²² “Hey you!” Althusser exclaims and explains, by way of example, staging his own version of the primal scene, the primal theologico-political

¹⁹ Mitchell Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²⁰ *Le monde arabe existe-t-il (encore)?* (Paris: Seuil, 2020)

²¹ Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

²² Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Moses: How the Prophet Inspired Jews and Muslims to Flourish Together and Change the World* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2024).

scene: “thus ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects,” individuals that are always already subjects, subjects that are therefore never entirely individuals, but have long become members of a collective. One collective or many? Althusser mentions a number of ideological state apparatuses (famously the Church, the school, the army) which are mobilized, Judith Butler notes, as part of a “highly religious scenario of a nominating call,” themselves “religious figuration[s] of interpellation.”²³ Althusser certainly “makes explicit the exemplary status that religious institutions have occupied,” and chief among them, he says, “the Christian religious ideology.”²⁴ He “makes it speak” (it is, after all, a theater). “It says: this is who you are: you are Peter!” And like Peter, many respond as they are, insofar as they are, I repeat, “interpellated as subjects with a personal identity,” subjects of a collective (“It is for you that I have shed this drop of my blood,” Althusser goes on to quote). And, hearing or overhearing this interpellation, each of them answers, one and all and all together now, “Yes, it really is me!”²⁵

Readers of this notorious text have insisted, and rightly so, on the individual, the personal and the subjective dimension that Althusser theorizes, but there is a persistent collective undertone, one might say, a political undertone that is obviously at play (the Church yes, but also, in full equivalence, the army and the

²³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 109; Butler goes on to add that “the theory of ideology is supported by a complicated set of theological metaphors,” to which they later refers as “religious tropes,” “religious analogies” (114).

²⁴ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 109.

²⁵ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 177-78.

school, the factory, the police). None of us are ever interpellated alone.²⁶ Our singularity, whatever its nature, is found and enacted on a stage, a world-stage, whereby other actors, witnesses as well as audiences are made to echo and comply too. Think of Butler's own, famously reiterated example of gender interpellation, "It's a girl!" Such interpellations involve much more than the individual concerned. They must be repeated and confirmed. They must be iterated and "reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time," disseminated.²⁷ Heard and overheard, if you will. They are in any case staging and establishing, instituting not just an identity but a belonging, a space and a location on a social map, a broad set of coordinated, often failed, relations, at once possible and impossible. They stage more than a family, in any case, something else than a religion, and at times a polity, the boundaries of which are in any case being defined and refined. In front of our very ears, so to speak.

I too have been speaking of hearing and of overhearing. I have restaged Maimonides's scene of overhearing and I attempted to reiterate Althusser's interpellation, his "little theoretical theatre." I should not try your patience further before you ask whether the lecture you are hearing will tell you anything about Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, and/or Jews and Muslims, but I do need to add that the "politics of hearing" and of overhearing have been explored quite brilliantly by Peter Szendy, whose book on the matter

²⁶ Butler does write of "the social" (*The Psychic Life*, 120) but, in this discussion, never invokes politics or the political. The nature of the collective, one might say, the kind of subject accounted (or unaccounted) for by Althusser and his readers certainly seems to oscillate between law and economics, psychoanalysis, religion and politics, however reliable, or tenuous, the distinction between them.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xvii.

is aptly titled, in English, *All Ears*. The original French title, however, is *Sur écoute*.²⁸ To be *sur écoute* means that you are being surveilled. It means, more specifically, that your phone is being tapped. Someone is listening in on your conversations, overhearing them. Szendy's book is indeed about spying, the "aesthetics of espionage," as its subtitle has it.²⁹ But Szendy also explains that *sur écoute* could be spelled as one word, thus creating a neologism, in French, which would translate the English "overhearing," eavesdropping.³⁰ Although he engages with Michel Foucault in a fascinating manner, Szendy does so for the most part in order to linger on surveillance, whether optical (the panopticon) or acoustic and aural (the panopticon was also intended, but failed, as a listening device). Yet, there occurs in Foucault's own text something quite striking, which resounds and resonates with Szendy's keen hearing. Foucault shows himself attentive to the *sur* of surveillance, a word we can now hear as "over-waking" or "over-watchfulness," and also "oversight," just as *surécoute* translates, for Szendy, "overhearing," a kind of listening that is a listening in or eavesdropping as well as a hyperbolic listening, an over-listening and indeed an overhearing. Foucault seems to me to underscore all this (or perhaps he over-scores it), by deploying a concept that, as far as I know, has not gained attention either in readings of Foucault or elsewhere. That concept is — listen to this — *surpouvoir*.

²⁸ Peter Szendy, *Sur écoute: Esthétique de l'espionnage* (Paris: Minuit, 2013), translated as *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage* by Roland Végsö (New York: Fordham, 2017).

²⁹ See, in a proximate context, Yonatan Mendel's work on "the securitization of Arabic," which is very much about listening and spying in Israel. Mendel articulates a transformation he describes as "from the Arabic of Ibn Maymūn to that of Unit 8200" (Y. Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic: Political and Security Considerations in the Making of Arabic language Studies in Israel* [New York: Palgrave, 2014], 11). And see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "*ʿġb, ḥshūmah, infajarat kunbūlah*" in *Eastern Appearance / Mother Tongue: A Present that Stirs in the Thickets of its Arab Past*, Yigal Nizri, ed. (Tel: Aviv: Babel, 2004), 29-44.

³⁰ The German *überhören*, it might be noted, refers to a failure to hear, a non-hearing.

It is right there in Discipline and Punish.³¹ Surpouvoir which harks back to the etymological antecedents of sovereignty (the Latin superanus, meaning supreme or superior) signals a hyperbole of power, an overpowering of everything, if you wish. As I proceed to tell you more on hearing and overhearing, I want you to keep in mind — as if against your will — that a kind of surpouvoir is at play. A power of listening, an overpowering by hearing.

Who Hears?

The other ear over-hears the unheard through the deafness. And we find again the whole semantics of Hören-Gehören, of hearing belonging.

— Jacques Derrida

Such an experience, if it is an experience, is what has led me here as I read the Qur'ān for what I thought was the nth time but turned out to have been something of a first time. The first time, in any case, I heard or overheard the Qur'ān which Muslims, and first of all the Arabs among them, have always known constitutes an unparalleled and otherwise irreproducible overpowering experience. There are, in fact, as Navid Kermani documents in his *God is Beautiful*, numerous stories of Qur'ān listeners literally overwhelmed and overpowered by its sound and beauty, by the sound of its beauty and the beauty of its sound. The Qur'ān, Kermani explains, has been repeatedly understood to constitute “an aesthetic challenge.” Among other examples, Kermani quotes Ṣādiq ar-Rāfi'ī, who in 1926, attended to the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān and wrote that “the kingdom of language (dawlat al-kalām) had become established among [the Arabs] but it had had no king until the Qur'ān

³¹ I have discussed all this at some length in an essay I called “Oversight,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41: 12 (2018), 2144-2160.

came to them.”³² So you might say that when I read the Qur’ān that one time, that first time, what I heard or perhaps overheard, was at once fully expected and unprecedented. I realized that the Qur’ān was calling me. It was talking to me.

I don’t mean this in a Robert de Niro, “are you talking to me?” manner of speaking. No. Besides, I could not tell whether I was willingly overhearing or else (feeling) compelled to listen and hear.³³ Was I not eavesdropping, ignoring the voices of the sunna?³⁴ What I realized, in any case, did not enable me to identify among my own divided attentions. My hearing or overhearing was already of a more collective nature, in other words. As I reflect upon it now, I recognize that what I am describing necessitates acknowledging how, throughout many of its Suras, the Qur’ān is talking to Jews, addressing them — if not only them — repeatedly.³⁵ I won’t say that this happens “all the time,” although that assertion should become debatable by the end of my lecture. What I mean for now is that the Qur’ān is literally interpellating Jews (all Jews? some Jews? We shall have to see, or rather, hear). Hardly a discovery you will

³² In Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*, trans. Tony Crawford (Cambridge, Polity, 2015), 7.

³³ See Eve Kossofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You” in her *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-151.

³⁴ The voices of the tradition or *sunna*, cannot be ignored and they add, and sometimes subtract, much of the apparent “plain” sense of the verses I quote below. Needless to say, this essay constitutes no more than an initial foray, at once belated, I said earlier, and all-too premature.

³⁵ “The sacred text is a voice,” wrote Michel de Certeau, cited by Leigh Eric Schmidt, whose own engagement with “hearing things” enables, as I pursue my Maimonidean argument, suspending the distinction between hearing and reading (Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 28).

say. Scholars, and Jewish scholars in particular, have been talking about “Muhammad and the Jews” for quite some time now.³⁶ Indeed, in its modern instantiation, the matter might be said to have been raised first by Abraham Geiger, who in 1833 asked “Was Hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?”³⁷ The question has been picked up ever since, often to “demonstrate” that Islam is indebted to Judaism. You could say, and Susannah Heschel said it (but Martin Kramer did too) that Jews have been reading the Qur’ān, studying Islam, just as Orientalists have, and perhaps — I do say, perhaps — better than them.³⁸ From Abraham Geiger and Ignaz (Ignác) Goldziher to Shlomo Goitein and Mark Cohen, Steven Wasserstrom and many more,³⁹ all the way to another Brown scholar whom I cannot fail to mention here, namely, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay whose recent *The Jewelers of the Ummah* is itself a powerful series of interpellations, letters sent to the living and to the dead in order to speak to them of the ummah, an ummah to which I shall

³⁶ See the excellent contributions included in the volume edited by Ottfried Fraisse, *Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context: Rationality, European Borders, and the Search for Belonging* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

³⁷ Geiger’s dissertation, “Whad did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism,” was translated into English by F.M. Young as *Judaism and Islam: A Prize Essay* (Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898).

³⁸ Susannah Heschel, “Orientalist Triangulations: Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Response to Christian Europe,” *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 147-167; and see Martin Kramer, *The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1999). Kramer credits Bernard Lewis for acknowledging the many factors that “allowed many Jewish scholars to approach Islam with an understanding and sympathy then uncommon in Europe” (vii), which Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has pointed out, constitutes an explicit endorsement of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.

³⁹ There have been and are still, among the ancients and the moderns, gifted scholars of history (almost always history), such as Shlomo Pines, Georges Vajda, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Uri Rubin, Michael Lecker, Meir Bar-Asher, Reuven Firestone, Andrew Rupin, Oliver Leaman, and more.

return in my conclusion.⁴⁰ And one could go back further in time and reflect on Maimonides again, of course, but on so many more engagements with and translations of the Qurʾān, Islamic philosophy and theology, grammar, poetry and more at the hands of Jews and Arab Jews, Persian Jews and Berber Jews, other Jews and more over the course of centuries. There is plenty of evidence as well of Muslims engaging with Jews and with Jewish sources, for the better and for the worse, and so for the better I will only mention the recent scholarly interventions of Salime Leyla Gürkan and Anoush Ganjipour.⁴¹ It is to a large extent Ganjipour's question ("Où est donc passée la pensée politique de l'islam?")⁴² as well as one of his key assertions ("la similitude structurale du judaïsme et de l'islam") that are guiding me throughout.⁴³

Aside from acknowledging that the names I have mentioned gather up and constitute little more than a still small voice when compared to the deluge of concerned governments, police and security services, media outlets, universities (yes, universities) and otherwise miraculously fashioned publics that rehearse and consume "dhimmitude" and other anti-Semitisms, all eagerly confirmed by the amplified voices of steadfast influencers, living and dead, from Ibn Ḥazm to Rashīd Riḍā and Sayyid Quṭb and further, clamoring about and often against Isrāʾīliyyāt and other imminent dangers. What remains

⁴⁰ Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *The Jewelers of the Ummah: A Potential History of the Jewish Muslim World* (London: Verso, 2024).

⁴¹ Salime Leyla Gürkan, "Jews in the Qurʾān: An Evaluation of the Naming and the Content," *Ilahiyat Studies* 7: 2 (Summer/Fall 2016), 163-206.

⁴² Anoush Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique de l'islam: Pasteur ou Léviathan* (Paris: Seuil, 2021), 14.

⁴³ Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 29; Ganjipour goes on to explain that, for the Qurʾān, what emerges from the history of the Children of Israel is that "without guidance and within perplexity (*égarement*), the ones become the enemies of the others" (69)

missing from all these, as far as I could find, is something that is simply overwhelming, even overpowering, not least because of the way it has been ignored in its significance with regard to what occupies us here — names, wars and battle lines that cannot be confined to historical or historiographical questions.⁴⁴ It seems rather urgent today to engage with the Qur’ān “as if it was revealed last night,” as Muhammad Shahrur argued.⁴⁵

Readers of the Qur’ān, I have already mentioned, have long been aware of its aesthetic dimensions. They have also discussed the fact that much of the Qur’ān is written in the vocative mode, “patterns of address” as Rosalind Ward Gwynne calls them, the Qur’ān’s “appellative rhetoric,” in the words of Thomas Hoffmann.⁴⁶ The most emblematic, if not the most frequent, illustration is also the most potent instance of a divine performative, whereby being is conjured and brought about. “Whenever We will anything to be, We but say unto it our Word ‘Be’ — and it is (kun fa-yakūn)” (Q 16: 40). More frequent are interpellations of people (yā ayyuhā ‘l-nās, yā ayyuhā ‘lladhīna āmanū) and inanimate entities, believers, disbelievers and hypocrites, (willing and unwilling) collectives and individuals, the Prophet himself but also other prophets as well as jinn, collectives of different religions, beginning of course with the peoples of the book, as well, finally, as Jews, who appear under — or perhaps these only

⁴⁴ The prevalence of historical and historiographical questions continues to occupy the best minds; see e.g. Michael E. Pregill, “From the Mishnah to Muḥammad: Jewish Traditions of Late Antiquity and the Composition of the Qur’an,” *Studies in Late Antiquity* 7: 4 (2023), 516-560.

⁴⁵ *The Qur’an, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur*, trans. and ed. Andreas Christmann (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

⁴⁶ Rosalind Ward Gwynne, “Patterns of Address” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 73-87; Thomas Hoffmann, “The Appealing Qur’ān: On the Rhetorical Strategy of Vocatives and Interpellation in the Qur’ān,” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 22: 1 (2020), 5-30.

sound as — many names, names such as “children of Israel,” “Jews” “those of the Jewish faith” “those who have inherited the book” or “those who read the book.” More broadly, “people of the Book” are the addressees of a definite call, a call repeatedly voiced in the Qur’ān either by God himself (“O Children of Israel, yā banī Israʾīl, remember those blessings of Mine . . .” 2: 40), or in a less direct way (“Ask, then, the children of Israel to tell thee . . .” 17:101; “Jesus, the son of Mary, said ‘O children of Israel . . .’” 61:6) or yet as in implicit but definitely intended audience (“Behold, this Qur’ān explains to the children of Israel most of that whereon they held divergent views,” 27:76). All this goes a long way, it seems to me, to engage with the question raised as well by David Marshall, namely “how does the Qur’ān present the relationship between Muhammad’s followers and those outside their community?”⁴⁷ Firstly, but interpellating them, something that occurs with a frequency that is surely remarkable in any sacred text, which addresses itself explicitly or implicitly to “its” community, a community of readers, here of believers, a community such sacred texts are concerned to bringing about, with varying degrees of success or, in the case of the Old Testament, also failure. What is most striking, in any case, about this proliferation is that it is voiced in the vocative. The Qur’ān does speak about the Jews, of course, in the third person (“O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies!” 5: 51), but to a truly remarkable extent, it speaks to the Jews, in the second person. As Thomas Hoffmann elaborates, who first referred to Althusser in this context, the Qur’ān is “the

⁴⁷ David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur’anic Study* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Marshall, who announces his original interest in *daʿwa* never explores the question of address as constitutive of the relation he seeks to understand. He mentions ethics and eschatology, categorization and punishment or destruction, but never interpellation. Incidentally, Marshall never thematizes enmity, barely evoking with any degree of explicitness enemies.

appealing Qur'ān" and it has "a plurality of addresses."⁴⁸ In fact, the Qur'ān is well known for the way it shifts between persons, both speaker and addressee, a figure of speech or a style of speech, a highly praised feature of the Arabic language, called *iltifāt*, a word that means, literally, "to turn or turn one's face toward."⁴⁹

True to what Charles Hirschkind so eloquently described, whereby, within the Islamic interpretive tradition, "the rhetorical act is accomplished by the hearer and not the speaker,"⁵⁰ I would like to propose that the Qur'ānic equivalent of "interpellation" might in fact be *iltifāt*. Still, whether positively or negatively, the Qur'ān actively hails the Jews, it interpellates them, calls out to them and calls on them to turn toward it and face it, to hear it and listen to it, not necessarily to abide by it, but first of all to let themselves be exposed to its sound and to its voice. The Qur'ān does not force itself on the Jews. It may exhort them, condemn them and even threaten them, but at no point are Jews forced to listen, not even to hear (I am not saying that compulsion is never in force, of course). And yet, not unlike the voice of conscience or the voice of the friend identified by Martin Heidegger as a basic structure of the human *Dasein*, not unlike that wayward child whose mother, Heidegger also says, calls and demands obedience,⁵¹ the Jews who have hereby been called, and called

⁴⁸ Hoffmann, "The Appealing Qur'ān," 8

⁴⁹ Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: 'Iltifāt' and Related Features in the Qur'ān," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55: 3 (1992), 407-432.

⁵⁰ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 35

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 34; and see Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: HarperCollins Lecture V, p. 48; Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 70-71; on "the maternalizing call," see 21-25.

directly and explicitly, who are being called again and again, performatively and perhaps perfunctorily by now, Jews have yet to turn around and face the Qur'ān's music or musicality. They have yet to intervene, moreover, in the multiple dialogues that, Mustansir Mir reminds us, the Qur'ān stages again and again, in a theatrical or dramatic fashion of its own.⁵² Stage direction: qūl. Say.

But is it in fact clear who exactly is being addressed? What after all is the collective (or collectives) brought into existence by such a call, such a revelation? Meir Bar-Asher, for one, thinks it still worth asking, "to whom is the Qur'ān addressed?"⁵³ Bar-Asher might have been quoting the British Arabist, Richard Bell, who wrote that, in the Qur'ān, "this question of who speaks and who is addressed, that is, of the dramatic form, is worthy of consideration."⁵⁴ And since I have been speaking of theater, I will flag that there are reasons to consider this the utmost political question, or perhaps, it is the most antipolitical question, depending on whether you read Nicole Loraux on tragedy, or Cedric Robinson on politics.⁵⁵ What should in any case be clear, as Devin Stewart points out, is that Qur'ānic vocatives "serve to establish, define, and invoke the identities of particular groups and so play an important role in the formation of community."⁵⁶ Interpellation, in other words, does not only "forge a certain

⁵² Mustansir Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'ān," *Religion and Literature* 24: 1 (Spring 1992), 1-22.

⁵³ Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'ān*, trans. Ethan Rundell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 57.

⁵⁴ Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, W. Montgomery Watt, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 65.

⁵⁵ Nicole Loraux, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016)

⁵⁶ Devin Stewart, "Vocatives in the Qur'ān and the Framing of Prophetic Proclamations" in *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'ān*, Nicolai Sinai, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 6.

Islamic subjectivity," it fashions and brings about a collective.⁵⁷ Enter the Ummah.

The Qur'ān, which may or may not be identical with umm al-kitāb, "the mother of the book" (this contested term may better designate the hidden, heavenly tablet from which derive the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān itself), the Qur'ān, then, talks to the Jews. It speaks of and to the Children of Israel, a name that "appears in sixteen surahs and forty verses."⁵⁸ There are further examples: "O Children of Israel, yā banī Israʿīl, remember those blessings of Mine with which I graced you and fulfill your promise unto me, [whereupon] I shall fulfill My promise unto you; and of Me, of Me stand in awe!" (Q 2:40) "And lo! We accepted this solemn pledge from [you,] the Children of Israel . . . And yet, save for a few of you, you turned away: for you are obstinate folk" (2:83) "And . . . it is you who slay one another and drive some of your own people from their homelands, aiding one another in sin and hatred . . . Do you, then, believe in some parts of the divine writ and deny the truth of other parts? What, then, could be the reward of those among you who do such things . . . For God is not unmindful of what you do" (2:85). As I mentioned, and as Leyla Gürkan painstakingly documented, there are many names that can be read as names for the Jews, and they are indeed different, each demanding careful listening, reading, interpretation, not just historicizing, which would get us into questions of Meccan and Medinan surahs as well as questions of abrogation. What remains undoubtedly the case is that "no other people are mentioned in the Qur'ān as often as the people of Israel."⁵⁹ Whether speaking of Jews or of their

⁵⁷ Hoffmann, "The Appealing Qur'ān," 19-23.

⁵⁸ Gürkan, "Jews in the Qur'ān," 180

⁵⁹ Gürkan, "Jews in the Qur'ān," 163

prophets (Moses and Abraham are particularly important for the Qur'ān, but Ganjipour calls our attention to David, the state if not the star of David) and more generally, of the “People of the Book,” the Qur'ān “clearly distinguishes between the well-behaved and the ill-behaved among each group.”⁶⁰ It demands that its hearers or overhearers position or identify themselves, perhaps recognize themselves, among a number of possibilities (“those among you,” “save for a few of you”). Their hearing and listening, their reading and their interpretation, their responses too, will have to vary accordingly.

Jews are, as I said, also spoken about. “Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians — all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds — shall have their reward with their sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve” (2:62). The Prophet is also repeatedly told to speak to them, to answer them or admonish them, and Jews are quoted too, speaking, arguing, with God, with the Prophet, with others. And much but not all that is said to the Jews and about them, about some of them, is critical, not to say outright damning and condemning (“Are thou not aware of those who, having been granted their share of the divine writ, now barter it away for error, and want you to lose your way? But God knows best who are your enemies (wa-allahu aʿlamu bi-aḥdāʾikum) and none can give succor as God does. Among those of the Jewish faith, there are some who distort the meaning of the revealed words, taking them out of their context,” 4:44-46; “It is but a just recompense for those who make war on God and His apostle, and endeavor to spread corruption on earth, that they are being slain in great numbers, or crucified in great numbers, or have, in result of their perverseness, their hands

⁶⁰ Gürkan, “Jews in the Qur'ān,” 176

and feet cut off in great numbers, or are being [entirely] banished from [the face of] the earth: such is their ignominy in this world," 5:33). Jews — some among the Jews — are thus undoubtedly described as enemies ("You are sure to find that the people most hostile (ashād an-nās ʿadawatan) to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God (al-yahūd wa-al-ladhīna ashrakū)," 5:82; "some of the children of Israel came to believe [in the apostleship of Jesus] whereas others denied the truth. But [now] we have given strength against their foes (ʿalā ʿaduwwihim)," 61:14) an issue that continues to concern me, particularly because, when it comes to the Qur'ān, we might still be in need of an understanding of enmity, of the figures of the enemy or of the enemies that people the Qur'ān and what their significance, much less what an ethics of enmity, might mean (Ganjipour argues that enmity is central to the anthropology of the Qur'ān).⁶¹ I shall return to this but what I want to underscore for now is that my concern is less with the content of the addresses or exhortations to the Jews, but rather with the sheer and, to my mind, extraordinary fact that the Holy Qur'ān does not (as we might have learned to expect from the Bible, say) speak of enemies and others exclusively in the third person. Instead, the Qur'ān speaks to the Jews, directly to them. At the same time, it bears repeating, the Qur'ān deploys an insistent rhetoric of exception or of selection ("And yet, save for a few of you, you turned away," 2:83; "[But] they are all alike: among the followers of earlier revelation there are upright people," 3:113; "Those of the Children of Israel who were bent on denying the truth have [already] been cursed," 5:78). The burden is therefore on the (Jewish) hearer or overhearer to identify the specific addressee of the interpellation, to raise questions with regard to the nature and scope of the addresses ("O you who have attained to faith! If you pay heed to some of those to whom revelation

⁶¹ Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 63.

was vouchsafed afore time, they might cause you to renounce the truth," 3:100) as well as with regard to internal, but also external, divisions among the people. The Qur'ān calls on the Jews, and interpellates them in a way that cannot simply be historicized (the dominant mode of Qur'ān scholarship and Islamic studies, but also of much by way of traditional interpretation). Rather, the Qur'ān, the living voice of the Qur'ān calls upon the Jews, who are bound to hear and overhear, bound to turn around and, as it were, face the music. At the very least, Jews are bound to ask: "Are you talking to us?" The answer is yes, by the way, in case that wasn't clear. And the question that follows, it seems to me, is what is the nature of the exchange or dialogue thus initiated? What political imaginary is thereby constituted, conjured, held in abeyance? What constituency, what polity is hereby brought into being?

Talking to the Enemy

I mentioned earlier that we have all become familiar with the popular — increasingly popular and widespread — argument that the Qur'ān is "anti-Semitic," that Islam constitutes a clear and present danger to Jews and to Christians, and to liberal democracies; that it sought, and still seeks, to conquer and convert, to humiliate and possibly annihilate religious minorities under its rule. Sounding an unavoidably apologetic tone, sounder scholarly work has attempted to answer such charges by providing historical context to Jewish existence at the time of the Prophet, scrutinize the hadith and other sources, or argue about the complexities and vicissitudes of the legal, social and economic status of Jews under Islamic rule. Will history — and those speaking on its behalf — save us then? Those familiar with colonial policy and the layered processes whereby the rise of nationalism and the advent of the modern state, in its colonial and postcolonial forms have contributed to discrimination,

violence and forced migration will less often recognize the role played by the rise of historicism and the relegation to that proverbial bin of “peoples without history” along with their anti-modern fellow travelers (with regard to the possibility of genocide, for instance).⁶² Proponents of interfaith dialogue, for their part, have placed rightful emphasis on a general desire for peace, arguing that religious traditions can and must be engaged for the potential coexistence they enable.

What I would like to do, to begin to do, is, I think, different, and it is twofold. First, I want to ask whether it is possible to take seriously the Qur’ānic apostrophic rhetoric, the interpellation that, from within the Qur’ān, addresses itself to Jews — at times to the Jews as enemies — calling them to account for what it understands of their relation to the revelation they have received and to which they remain obligated. To put it briefly, I propose to read the Qur’ān as calling upon the Jews to engage in teshuva as well as to initiate a response, a teshuva, an answer to its challenge [“Be not like those [children of Israel] who gave offense to Moses” [33: 69]]. The second moment of what I propose underscores the difficulty of this challenge by recognizing that the Qur’ān, and possibly the Islamic tradition at large, deploys a singular ontology of the enemy. The enemy is therefore, as Anoush Ganjipour argues, a crucial meeting point of the theological and the political.⁶³ Utterly unequivocal with regard to the fact that there are enemies of God — the double genitive applying — is the way, in the Qur’ān, the enemy is secularized, remarkably so. I wish to ask, then, about the political imagination at play when we — unless it is they — are addressed as

⁶² See Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁶³ Ganjipour, *L’ambivalence politique*, 118.

an enemy (“Nay, but God has rejected them because of their refusal to acknowledge the truth” [2: 88]; “verily, those who deny the truth are your open foes (inna alkafirīn kānū lakum ʿaduwwan)” [4: 101]), whereby we hear or discover that we may have an enemy, that we may well be an enemy, and are therefore called upon to respond. “Whosoever is an enemy of God and His angels (ʿaduwwan allah wamalayikatihi) and His message-bearers, including Gabriel and Michael, [should know that,] verily, God is the enemy of all who deny the truth (fa’inna allah ʿaduwwu lilkaḥfirīn)” [2: 97-98]). To have or to be an enemy — that is, it seems to me, the Qur’ānic question, the Qur’ānic interpellation, such as it is addressed to Jews (and to others as well). Which in itself constitutes an opportunity to ask further about the meaning and the practice of enmity, the necessity or inevitability of it, but also about the responsible response or teshuva after the Qur’ānic revelation.

Surely, I will not be able to elaborate much further in the space of an essay that is already too long. It will perhaps suffice to point out that the enemy, in the Qur’ān, or perhaps I should say, enemies in the Qur’ān, come the closest I have found to doing the work of conceptualization that has seemed to me necessary, and such that it is awaiting us still.⁶⁴ Beginning with Satan (Iblis) — “verily, he is your open foe (innahu lakum ʿadūwun mubīn),” 2: 168; and see 6:142, 12:5, 35:6 — and the work of seduction he successfully conducts, the Qur’ān posits an ontological difference, a transformation, whereby human begins become enemies. Such is, for instance, the singularity of the Fall in the Qur’ān.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ I have recently revisited a claim I made long ago, namely, that no labor of conceptualization has in fact been performed that would satisfy the claim that there is, in fact, a *concept* of the enemy; see my “Enemy” in *Political Theology: Key Concepts*, Arthur Bradley, Antonio Cerella and Elettra Stimilli, eds. (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming)

⁶⁵ Ganjipour, *L’ambivalence politique*, 63.

Describing Adam and his wife in the garden, the Qur'ān narrates that "Satan caused them both to stumble therein and thus about about the loss of their erstwhile state. And so We said: Down with you, [and be henceforth] enemies unto one another [liba^cd ʿadūwwun]" (2: 36; and see 7: 24; 20: 123; and see Ganjipour, 63). Yet the nature and contingency of that becoming is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the manner in which the Qur'ān has Abel respond to Cain's declaration of enmity ("I will kill you," Cain says). "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of all worlds, and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire: such is the evildoers' reward" (5: 28-29). The domestic enemy, which may well be the universal enemy, is further underscored. "O you who have attained to faith! Behold, some of your spouses and your children are enemies unto you (ʿaduwwan lakum): so beware of them! But if you pardon [their faults] and forbear, and forgive — then, behold, God will be much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (64: 14). Thus, the process of becoming-enemy, far from being final, can also be reversed. "And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies (idh kuntum a^cda'an), He brought your hearts together" (3: 103).⁶⁶ Yet, the enmity that the fault of Adam brings about "initially becomes manifest in the history of the children of Israel: without guidance and while straying, the ones become enemies of the others."⁶⁷ The story of Adam is meant to recall, indeed, to remind those who hear it of its consequences. It is also addressed, Anoush Ganjipour writes, "specifically to the Jews . . . [for] everything is as if the history of the forgetting of Adam was a reminder (un rappel) to the Jews, as if to remind them that they have forgotten the covenant" (67).

⁶⁶ Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 98.

⁶⁷ Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 69.

And enmity will not pass from the world. It is, in fact, coeval with the world, which seems to me one more reason to think here of secularization. “Hence, [warn all men of] the Day when the enemies of God {a^cdā’u allah} shall be gathered together before the fire, and then shall be driven onward” (41: 19, 26). “On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes unto one another — all save the God-conscious” (43: 67; and see 46: 5). Which does not mean that the enemy, this or that enemy, cannot be forgiven for “whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with God — for verily He does not love evildoers” (42: 40).

God may therefore be an enemy. And God’s enemies are also “your enemies (ʿaduwwukum)” (8: 60). “O you who have attained to faith! Do not take My enemies — who are your enemies as well (ʿaduwwi waʿaduwwukum)— for your friends” (60: 1). God certainly makes enemies and Pharaoh, in this context, offers, of course, a paradigmatic example (“for [We had willed] that he become an enemy unto them (liyakūn lahum ʿaduwwan) and [a source of] grief, seeing that Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were sinners indeed! [28: 8]), but among Christians too, for instance, “We have given rise among them to enmity and hatred (adāwata wa-lbagħḍā’a) until Resurrection day” (5: 14). More generally, “And thus it is that against every prophet We have set up as enemies (likul nabī ʿaduwwan) the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings [jinn] that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind” (6: 112; 25: 31). God can also unmake, which is to say, destroy enemies (8: 12, 17).

The Ummah or The Political as Maternal

As implausible as it may now seem, I want to conclude by returning to the mention I have made earlier of a mother's call. As many have pointed out without much by way of elaboration, the ummah, the word ummah, cannot but sound — we have been dwelling in the realm of the acoustic, in the politics of hearing — the ummah then cannot but sound and resound with the mother, umm, and with the maternal. Elsewhere I have tried to argue that it is high time that, after the paternal and the patriarchal, after the fraternal, we turn to the political as maternal.⁶⁸ There I began to suggest that, if in no other register than that of sound, the ummah constitutes an acknowledgment of that notion. The collective, the political is maternal. As I reflect on umm al-kitāb and perused the wonderful meditations on the ummah as a political entity that remains to be thought, I have learned from the work of Anoush Ganjipour, whom I mentioned earlier and who distinguishes modes of governance (the pastoral, the state), and who expounds as well on the ummah.⁶⁹ In search of an adequate vocabulary for another political imaginary, I found further encouragement in the arguments of Salman Sayyid, who, in his *Recalling the Caliphate* writes that "The Qur'ān-ummah nexus has to be preserved in a form in which the Qur'ān is a horizon towards which the ummah has to move."⁷⁰ Equally significant are the extended reflections offered by Katryn Jomaa in her *Ummah: A New Paradigm for a Global World*.⁷¹ Neither of them spend much time on the maternal, but they do provide a few important clues, unmistakable signs that seem to me

⁶⁸ Gil Anidjar, *On the Sovereignty of Mothers: The Political as Maternal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).

⁶⁹ Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 74-83.

⁷⁰ Salman Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and the World Order* (London: Hurst and Company, 2014), 162.

⁷¹ Katryn A. Jomaa, *Ummah: A New Paradigm for a Global World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021),

worth pursuing in the work ahead. Jomaa, in particular, is less preoccupied with questions of leadership and government (recall here Cedric Robinson's "myth of leadership"). She focuses instead on "the political function of the ummah, which is regrettably missing in Islamic scholarship."⁷² She begins by reminding us that, among the common meanings of the word ummah are "a group of people, followers of a prophet, a specific religion, exemplary human beings, unrivaled individuals, and a period of time."⁷³ With regard to that last notion, consider the profound connection between mothers and time, the extension and finitude of the collective that is enabled and maintained by the labor of mothers. The Qur'ān explains that "for all people, ummah, a term, ajal, has been set: and when [the end] of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it" (Q 7: 34). It would take too long to elaborate the otherwise exhausted association that binds mortality, less to natality as is commonly assumed, than to maternity. "The act of forming an ummah starts with an individual will," writes Jomaa.⁷⁴ Be that as it may, the maternal presents as a recurring thread, a cord that binds the ummah to leaders and models ("the verb amma," meaning to lead," Jomaa says, is also related to imām, a word that itself also means 'mother') as well as to an education that has not reached its formal stages and is therefore, just like the Prophet of Islam, ummi.⁷⁵ We are all successors, khulafa', we humans (Q 2: 30), perhaps because we have all been

⁷² Jomaa, *Ummah*, 119.

⁷³ Jomaa, *Ummah*, 21; and see Ganjipour, *L'ambivalence politique*, 80, where Ganjipour comments on Q 16:120, where Abraham himself is described as an *ummaḥ*.

⁷⁴ Jomaa, *Ummah*, 91.

⁷⁵ See Sebastian Günther, "Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet: An Islamic Creed in the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic Exegesis," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* IV:1 (2002), 11; it seems to me that there is here an echo of the Greek *physis*,

mothered, more or less well, more or less by our own mothers.⁷⁶ Mothers, in any case, have long been forging ahead, amama, leading and calling, calling and leading (“and among the folks, qawm, of Moses there have been people, ummah, who would guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light,” Q 7: 159). Mothers have been calling, and I am not sure we have answered. Since these two mothers of Ishmael and Isaac, Sarah and Hagar, we have ignored the dialectic of the mother and the slave. We have ignored the politics of hearing that are inscribed in the very name of Ishmael. I say the politics of hearing but perhaps I mean the religion of hearing. Or vice-versa. I have been speaking, in any case, of Israelis and Palestinians, of Jews and of Arabs, of Muslims and Jews, if not of Muslim Jews.⁷⁷ I have tried to speak of, better to respond, responsibly to respond, as Jacques Derrida used to say, to respond to the ambivalent call of the Judeo-Islamic. Perhaps I have, and perhaps I have not. Only God knows. Allāhu Aʿlam.

⁷⁶ Han Hsien Liew, “The Caliphate of Adam: Theological Politics of the Qur’ānic Term *Ḥalīfa*,” *Arabica* 63 (2016), 1-29.

⁷⁷ Gil Anidjar, “Muslim Jews,” *Qui Parle* 18:1 (Fall / Winter 2009), 1-23.