CHAPTER 10

"They Are *Muhajir*, We Are *Ansar*"

Godforsakenness at the Myanmar-Bangladesh Border

Tanzeen Rashed Doha

There are two open tabs on my computer screen and a notebook at my desk. The first tab has a digital image of a Rohingya imam leading prayers in Balukhali, Cox's Bazar, at the site of a *masjid* (mosque) under construction. The second tab takes me to a Hadith website that cites the Prophet's dreams about Medina as the destination the of the first *hijra* (migration).[1] The notebook at my desk has texts related to recent conversations with Bangladeshi Islamists about their work with the Rohingya. The texts take multiple forms: long sentences, short remarks, crossed-out thoughts, question marks, exclamation marks, interpretive comments next to ethnographic statements, and blank spaces.

The imam, the mosque's religious leader, in the image is leading obligatory prayers under the open sky. The mosque under construction is a simple rectangular space at this point. There are bamboo sticks piled in front of the imam that will be used in the future to build the mosque. In the background, in the hills, are small temporary homes. The black-and-white image is gloomy. The deathworld the image fails to capture exceeds its representation, but the image as a tiny, shattered piece, like a shard of broken glass, interrupts the secular flow of digital reproduction.

The Hadith website, citing the Prophet's loving wife Aisha, reports that he dreamed of Medina before the *hijra*. Medina, in the Prophet's dream, is "a land of date palm trees, between two lava fields, the two stony tracts."[2] It is a place of tranquility, a place where soft mannered believers hospitable to the Prophet and his companions greet them. Boys and girls see the Prophet and exclaim

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in joy, "This is the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), he has come."[3]

The field notes are stories of devastation, what is referred to in Islamic discourses as a "*fasad*"—not just political violence but a disequilibrium of global scale caused by Man's desire for sovereignty and audacity to rebel against a divine order. The interlocutors in these notes experience abandonment—a feeling of being left alone by communities, neighbors, states, and the world as such. God himself appears quiet. Did God forsake them? It is precisely in moments of absolute loss that a believer depends on the Unseen (*ghayb*)—on what cannot be perceived by the senses but under whose gaze death finds an ideal home in those who submit, and life finds tribulation in those who persist.

How are trials and tribulations in the deathworld of the present read from within the classical texts of Islam's discursive tradition? How do the ulama, like the imam in the image, in their conviction find nearness to Allah in the aftermath of forced migration of the Muslim community? My notes do not tell me if the imam had dreams of hospitality across the border, but I do know that the Prophet's dreams in reports from his wife tell of the possibility of a true welcome after migration.

The Prophet's dreams show us that hospitality receives its form when those who have migrated (*muhajirin*) arrive.[4] When strangers and guests arrive, it is as if angels have arrived; a divine light illuminates a dark world. Their hosts and helpers (*ansar*) now have the opportunity to please Allah. Contrary to secular humanitarian charity in which the volunteer helps the dispossessed refugee, there are no victims or volunteers in these interactions between the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi Islamists. The suffering travelers as the companions of the leaders of the first Muslim migration (the *sabireen*) remain steadfast. They find brotherhood in calamity. In the certainty of death, they emulate the Prophet. It is as if life is breathed into them in the dreamscape of the Prophet. It is as if they are his companions, his brothers.[5]

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Jahan dedicated his time in three different locations in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar: Palongkhali, Balukhali, and Kutupalong. Jahan volunteered from his religious school (madrassa) and joined others in Islamist efforts to help the Rohingya during two different waves of migration. First, in 2016, he and other madrassa clerics and students provided materials, money, and food in small packets. The camps were not yet ready, so they could only help the Rohingya while they were still on the move without a clear idea of an actual place of refuge. Jahan walked alongside the Rohingya in their journey. What does it mean to walk alongside fellow believers who are distressed and in despair? What does it mean to walk without a clear destination? What does it mean to engage in service (*khidmat*) while being on the move?[6]

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Jahan spoke very little in those encounters. During the 2016 migration, words were mostly used for the sake of collective recitations (*dhikr*), to ask Allah for forgiveness, for mercy, for help. Jahan listened more and made himself available and adequate to history. Even though the local dialect is similar to the Rohingya language, there was a language barrier. This barrier was also an opening for a world of the quiet, a meditative silence, in which believers grasp the place of divinity within calamity, within catastrophe. This mode of quietude is not about divine vindication. Jahan is not wondering why a perfect God allows for suffering. His quietude is literal. Jahan does not initiate active conversations with the other, nor does he ask himself questions or inquire Allah for answers in desperation. The moving non-enunciative space is a place where utterances and speech acts become impossible. This inability to find words creates the conditions for a leap of faith, a reliance on God (*tawakkul*), generating a meditative space of stillness. The recitations—praising the Unseen—signal full submission. They squeeze out speech and construct a singular world of Allah's ninety-nine names. They prepare a ground in a groundless world—a temporary refuge, a transient condition in which human contingencies are subsumed under a divine order of divine names—only to be groundless again.

Jahan's approach reminded me of a specific Prophetic story in the Hadith. In Sahih Muslim, Anas reports that a woman suffering and experiencing grief said:

> "Allah's Messenger, I want something from you." The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded: "Mother of so and so, see on which side of the road you would like (to stand and talk) so that I may do the needful for you." He stood aside with her on the roadside until she got what she needed.

Some have translated the last part "until she got what she needed" more specifically as "until she was able to say what she wanted to her heart's content."[7] The Prophet did not initiate a conversation but rather allowed for the fellow believer in distress to speak as much as she needed. When the Prophet asks, "On which side of the road you would like (to stand and talk)?" he not only gives permission to the woman to share her thoughts, but he also orients himself and the woman in relation to the road on which they were both standing. This positioning and orienting prepares a particular kind of space that is generative for theological counsel. In 2016, when Jahan walks alongside the Rohingya, their bodies in motion—in remembrance of God position themselves in relation to one another within a War on Terror at the outskirts of nation-states—transgress secular spatiality and allow for a sense of belonging without having to dwell in a home.

In a more recent conversation, I asked Jahan about the 2016 migration and the construction of the space of non-enunciation and the meditative mood of the encounter:

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> In 2016 when the Rohingya Muslims crossed the border and arrived in Cox's Bazar, escaping Burmese state violence, you had mentioned that the Islamists from your madrassa and other areas had to organize very quickly. But it seems the lack of preparation in terms of organizing materials and resources allowed for a different approach in the way you accepted them and tended to their needs. You spoke little in those interactions. The description of it seems to have this mood of stillness. Of course, it was a time of calamity, but behind it or beneath it there was a kind of quietness.

Jahan responded:

> The migration was unexpected. The government at the time did not officially state they would allow the Rohingya to come in. The Rohingya traveled into Cox's Bazar regardless, and we felt obligated to be there, to do whatever we could. We were not prepared. We tried to provide them with some essentials, but our lack of preparation meant that we received them, welcomed them, but did not have enough materials for them. We did not speak much. Their condition made us silent. We wondered why Allah allowed such devastation and despair.

The Rohingya and the Deobandi students worked at the margins and in-between spaces of nation-states. It was unclear if the Rohingya would settle somewhere on the Bangladeshi side or if they would return to Myanmar. Precarious either way, such mobility of the Rohingya destabilizes a predetermined secular space—signaling a kind of geographical indeterminacy and volatility. The movements in the border region, immediately outside of the killing fields of the Burmese state and barely within Bangladesh, do not necessarily signify an outside-of-nation-state cartography as much as it denotes the manner in which the War on Terror constricts and puts pressure on movements while simultaneously tracing and following along the pathways created by enemy combatants. This demonstrates not just how the war is global but also how capacious it remains in its own transgressive powers. Put differently, while there are moments of interruption of secular geography by the movements of the Rohingya in their dynamic with the Deobandi Islamists, it is the war itself that transgresses secular boundaries even as it engages in a secularizing war against Islam—the attempt to de-essentialize its orthodox structure. The War on Terror creates statelessness, which exceeds the notion of migration because for believers (*mu'min*), such a condition demands a rigorous exploration of concepts like *hijrat* (migration) and *jihad* (struggle) in the classical tradition of Islam to make them historically adequate in the present.

As the Rohingya as the *muhajir* (refugee-migrants) and the Bangladeshi Islamists as the *ansar* (helpers), contests secular cartography to construct an experiential space as the body of the *umma* (Muslim community) in the border region, I am reminded of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's observation that "the body inhabits space (and time, for that matter) . . . in motion because movement is not content with passively undergoing space and time, it actively as-

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sumes them, it takes them up in their original signification that is effaced in the banality of established situations." Jahan explains the instability of not having established camps and the temporariness of space:

> We did not know where they would go. We were unsure. Are they arriving here and disappearing within the country? Or, are they returning to Burma after a few days of respite? We wanted to be there in the immediate context when they arrived. That was important to us. To be present.

It is in this context without "the banality of established situations" that the Rohingya find themselves finding new space in their movement as the body of a damaged *umma* (Muslim community). But there is a difference between individual body spatiality that acts and a collective mass moving as a body—a broken-off piece of the *umma*—in a situation of permanent war that has to act. To act and to have to act are not the same phenomenon. The Rohingya create space as subjects of the Burmese War on Terror, as a mass in which they are not the representation of a sum total of individuals but are an abstract mass who are persecuted within the historicity of the War on Terror. This mass, the disfigured part of the *umma*, immanently violates secular historicity as it inhabits space in motion. For the Rohingya "the banality of established situations" is also an experience of constant (re)adjustment to new techniques of war. Even though they are accustomed to an established structure of war, they encounter unexpected shifts and deviations. The "established situation" of war is antifoundational, has self-movement within it, and is without a predictable pattern in the way it surveils, targets, tortures, and disciplines the Rohingya. Because of this inherent heterogeneity, the War on Terror forces the Rohingya to adjust to varying speeds and intensities of motion. Even as they are creating a new space in the camps, the Rohingya Muslims are subjects of suspicion, always at risk of being without a ground. In other words, a brutal banality—and a banal brutality—is present whether there are "established situations" or not. They are on the move, as *muhajirin*; as framed by the War on Terror, they are also stateless strangers, and terror suspects.

I pressed Jahan to tell me more about the condition of silence and sense of curiosity and their relation after hearing the following two sentences in his articulations: First, that "their condition made us silent at first"; and second that "we wondered why Allah allowed such devastation and despair." Is silence a necessary condition as one wonders about why God allows what he allows? This was not a demanding gesture toward God but rather a political-mystical exploration of godforsakenness: a journey into absence in the most elemental sense. Jahan clarifies:

> We are not like the seculars. We do not doubt God. We want to have a sense of our condition. God is intervening through absence. What exactly is this intervention? We

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> want to feel this intervention in our heart [*hridoy*], we want to grasp it on the inside [*bhitor theke bujhte chai*].

God forsakes us in order to not forsake us. This awareness of a condition among the Islamists—of a particular kind of godforsakenness in which God abandons because He remains—works in direct opposition to atheist existentialism. Jean-Paul Sartre, as an atheist existentialist, emphasized that existence precedes essence, which makes God unnecessary, and therefore, subjects can be free.[8] In Jahan's statements, however, there is less of a focus on the sequence of existence and essence; instead, through feeling and sensing, he arrives at an instinctual antihistorical question mark. A believer like Jahan interrogates how God intervenes through absence and calls into question the secularizing strategies of the War on Terror.

Jahan explains to me that, while the actual interaction with the Rohingya in 2016 involved silence and minimal speech, during nighttime the Deobandi Islamists engaged in spirited analytical conversations on the possible causes and conditions of this divine catastrophe. A sermon (*khutba*) given by leading twentieth-century Islamic scholar Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi in the early 1960s at Rangoon's Surti Jamah Masjid soon became the basis of these conversations. The text of the speech (in the original Urdu as well as Bengali translations) began to circulate widely in various madrassa networks. The core message from the sermon is clear in the following excerpt:

> Everything in this *duniya* [world] is *dhongshoshil* [destructible]. Property, respect, everything will end one day. What will remain eternally is only Allah's name, active work [*mehanat*] in Allah's path, and active work and sacrifice [*qurbani*] for Allah's din. . . . If you take time outside of your business and work to propagate and establish Islam, then Allah Ta' Ala will gift you with power in this country and paradise in the next life. But if you do not do so, then remember, you will not be able to even stay in this country. Not as a political figure, I am saying this through the light given to me by Allah as a believer [*mu'min*]—it will become impossible for you to stay in this country if you do not try with all your spirit to propagate and spread the true religion [*din*].[9]

Jahan and his Islamist companions, in their own analysis, not only agreed with Syed Nadwi's emphasis on Islamization at the base of society through moral reform (*da'wa*), they observed that the problem was exasperated by the failures of struggle (*jihad*) against the Burmese state. Jahan explained:

> We were listening to Shaykh Nadwi's *khutba* over and over again during this time. He predicted the crisis [*shongkot*] faced by the Rohingya in Myanmar many years ago. But I also spoke to other *ulama* [religious scholars] during this time who had participated in struggle [*jihad*] against the Burmese state. They told me that many of the traveling *mujahideen* [Islamic fighters] from Bangladesh were detained by the Burmese security because corrupt elements in the Rohingya had collaborated

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with Burmese intelligence. Some of our *ulama* blame the failures of the *jihad* on this moral corruption. Shaykh Nadwi was right, the society at large needed *da'wa* [moral self-reform], but under the new circumstances there was no alternative to armed *jihad*. And, a real breakthrough would be possible if the Rohingya with the help of other Muslims had an ongoing successful *jihad* without any moral deviance.

In a different context, in Kashmir, anthropologist Cabeiri Robinson shows how processes and transformations in the real, social world produce *jihad* in the concrete sense. She calls this "the social production of *jihad*."[10] Jahan's emphasis reverses Robinson's point. *Jihad* becomes an objectively necessary ethical instrument for the construction of new social relations, resulting in the jihadi production of the social. In other words, Rohingya militancy as *jihad* aims to displace the given order for a new social. Jahan's emphasis on the simultaneity of *da'wa* and *jihad* is not rooted in secular agency and freedom; it emerges from an antihistorical aspiration to exceed the immanence of history and disarticulates and reconfigures freedom itself. In other words, *jihad* in this specific discourse is the name of a dynamic transgression of the present.

In the autumn of 2017, when the camps were established, Jahan and other Islamic workers not only carried and distributed food and donated money and other essentials, they also built twelve mosques and installed thirteen tube-well water pumps and some toilets. Jahan says, "Our main objective this time was to build *masajid* and to organize money to pay salaries for permanent imams and teachers." At the time, Jahan did not realize that there would soon be government intervention. The months September through November now felt distant. Those three months allowed for unrestricted opportunities to engage in Islamic activity. By wintertime, the regime restricted their efforts, only allowing licensed NGOs to work in the camps. The government gave orders to destroy many of the mosques. While they gave practical justifications—such as avoiding having too many mosques in the same few blocks—there is suspicion among the *ulama* that this was a strategic security measure of de-Islamization of the camps by the regime. Jahan confirms:

In the last four years, there has been a decrease in Islamic activity for the Rohingya. In the past, Islamists used to visit the camps to teach the Qur'an and Hadith to give them relief [*'shantona*], but that is not possible anymore. Now, most of the work is done by government-supported NGOs.

While Jahan did not directly condemn the NGOs, he appeared to have a sense of their limitations in the Islamic context. He stated that the NGOs would not know how to help the Rohingya with their own self-preservation because they would look at them simply as "refugees."

To an anthropologist well aware of critiques of liberal-secular humanitarianism, this was an ideal point in our conversation where I felt compelled to press

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Jahan to explain more and to give an example of how the Rohingya were more than refugees. Jahan, instead of deconstructing the Western basis of humanitarianism, utilized Islamic vocabulary and concepts to make his point. "As the Rohingya were forced to migrate, making a *hijrat*, to Bangladesh there were many mid-level and senior *ulama* among them who had classical knowledge. This knowledge could have been used for their own welfare, to help them stand up with dignity again," he said. I asked him if he had the opportunity to meet with the Rohingya *ulama*. Jahan replied:

> At our madrasa, I read a book on Arabic linguistics [*bhashatotto*]. The book was written in Urdu. The author was a Rohingya *alem* [a religious scholar]. Our madrassa historically had a connection with the training of the Rohingya in classical Islamic education. When we went to the camps, we heard that a renowned *alem* was among the refugees. I asked for his name, and they said: Maulana Azam. I realized then that he is the author of the linguistics book I studied in my Daurae-hadith program. I met him at the camp. We spoke in Arabic.

I asked, "Why did you speak in Arabic? You lived in Chittagong for so long. The local dialect is similar to the Rohingya language, right? You could have also spoken to him in Urdu. Why Arabic?" Jahan paused, and then tried to explain:

> There are several dialects in Chittagong depending on specific regions, and I could not catch the Rohingya dialect that well. I don't know why we did not speak in Urdu though. We spoke in Arabic. It happened spontaneously.

The first encounter between Jahan and Maulana Azam is not ideal.[11] The student does not meet the author at a seminar or conference. As a true student (*talib-ul-ilm*), he is active in the world; he translates the verses of the Qur'an into his concrete life; his heart (*qalb*) is affected by the stories of Rohingya suffering initiates a step toward humility—a need to receive himself as an ordinary believer in a divine order who has to find himself, realizing that he can grasp himself precisely when the world that makes him disintegrates. It is in these moments of divine tribulation, as he witnesses history in fragments, that he encounters the Real through hospitality. Maulana Azam arrives within the appearance of accidents of death and destitution. He arrives within those three to four months before government restrictions when the community (*ummah*) takes care of itself. He arrives after making *hijrat*, after migrating. The student (*talib-ul-ilm*) receives him, listens to him, pays attention to him, inquires about his well-being and about the condition of his soul. Jahan does not know yet that the maulana is the author. Someone in the camp mentions the senior *alem*'s name: Maulana Azam! Jahan remembers. Jahan becomes curious. He is concerned in an affectionate way. He wants to make sure the maulana is unharmed. He is also anxious. The maulana's book taught him Arabic linguistics,

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opened up a new language with a grammar to decipher an entirely new world. That author whose book he read in the early years of the *Daurae Hadith* program is present in front of him, in flesh but with a broken heart across from the killing fields of the Burmese state.[12]

Jahan's body stiffens. He is anxious. It is a strange circumstance for a first meeting with an *alem*-author who was formative in his Islamic learning. But there is a second kind of anxiety that is much more elemental and fundamental. This other anxiety initiates a feeling of groundlessness. In the border regions, cartographies reveal themselves as apparitions, and states appear to lose stability. The student and the maulana find themselves elsewhere as if in another geography. This elsewhere has a regionality outside of known regions. Even though they encounter each other in a secular geography, there is a disruption of "the obviousness" of a secular spatiality—in which the condition of "not being at home" is not essentially about the absence of community, or exclusion from a citizen-state, or the overall failure to find sovereignty but rather reveals itself to be a primordial condition. Absence and exclusion in the given order, however, in the immediate and concrete deathworld, work as the entry point for a speculation on absolute absence, resulting in a foundational anxiety.

As words are uttered and language mediates speech, both the student and the maulana refuse their mother tongue. Jahan speaks in broken Arabic, and the maulana responds in perfect Qur'anic Arabic. When I asked Jahan why he spoke in Arabic, he did not have a precise answer. He paused. The pause before speech, before language, is the distance between the two forms of anxiety—the nervousness with which Jahan made sense of the fact that the author he read had participated in the migration and arrived and the more fundamental anxiety that shakes the very ground of the world Jahan inhabits. There are moments of silence within and in between anxiety, and a lack of destination even as words are uttered in speech acts.

Even though his reasoning appeared pragmatic at first, Jahan's utterances and sentences within the problem of language have within them the same kind of groundlessness. The space, the camps, and that specific region is both a place and a nonplace. It is home, it is not home. It is home precisely because it is not home. It is an attempt to move away from ruin, from gunfire. And in language as well, in Jahan and the maulana's refusal of regional languages in favor of Qur'anic Arabic, there is the momentary possibility of the emergence of an elsewhere in which there is a dwelling without permanence.

Jahan's encounter with Maulana Azam is not primarily between a reader and an author. It is not just a meeting between a maulana (graduate religious scholar) and a *talib-ul-ilm* (student of knowledge). Even though they meet each other unexpectedly in the midst of devastation, it is not an encounter between a refugee and a humanitarian worker. The essence of their first meeting

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is not the tragedy of a humanitarian catastrophe. What the given circumstances make clear is that there is in fact a divine responsibility—a kind of caring-for that obligates Jahan toward Maulana Azam. This exists long before their first actual encounter in the refugee camps, before the first time reading his book on Arabic language theory in the madrassa, and even before his first imagination of what it might mean to meet him one day—whether in dreams or as they have met in the border regions between Rakhine and Cox's Bazar in the corridor of the War on Terror.

Jahan began a conversation with Maulana Azam about the condition of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The scholar's response shifted from the personal (biographical) to the political past as he shared his political-theological observations. Jahan explains:

> Maulana Azam shared his personal memory of Chittagong. He studied in Chittagong. He inquired about one of his *alem* friends from the past. I asked him about the Rohingya situation, and asked what he thought was the root cause of this massive catastrophe [*boro shongkot*]. Maulana Azam recited the famous Qur'anic verse from Surah Ra'd: "Indeed, Allah would never change a people's state of favor until they change their own state of faith. And if it is Allah's Will to torment a people, it can never be averted, nor can they find a protector other than Him." I asked him how this verse [*ayat*] applies to his community. The maulana explained: "Our problem is that we keep thinking about OIC [Organization of Islamic Cooperation] funds and how they will help us. This kind of thinking is inside our people. The Burmese authorities commanded us to leave. And, now we are here. There is no thinking of resistance [*protibader kono chinta nai*]. Since the eighties, the Rohingya have assured themselves by thinking that if anything happens, we will move to Bangladesh. People from the Rohingya nation are spread out in different parts of the world. They left their home and their heritage.

A second scholar, Maulana Abdullah—who wrote in Urdu and Arabic about the Prophet's family and heritage—standing next to Maulana Azam, chimed in and provided nuance to the conversation:

> Yes, it is true that the resistance has been unsuccessful, but you have to remember that the Rohingya are not targets only because they are Muslim. There are other Muslims in Rangoon. The Myanmar society is fine with them. Those Muslims are established there. They have recognition and are respected. The Rohingya are looked at as a different '*jaat*' [nation or race], as poor, and as later immigrants to Burma and are treated as foreigners. Some of the non-Rohingya Muslims in Rangoon also hate us.

Maulana Abdullah's valuable insights add the question of subalternity to Maulana Azam's Qur'anic assessments and ethico-political frustration.[13]

The two insights enhance each other because the concern over the status of faith among the Rohingya becomes less of a moral concern when their subaltern condition is identified. While Mahmood Mamdani's contextualiza-

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tion of the production of "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" in the political-historical post-911 world is relevant here, the question of the Rohingya exceeds the occupation of "the bad Muslim's" positionality. The Rohingya are enemy combatants as "bad Muslims" within the contingencies of the War on Terror, of course, but they are also what *the political* cannot register as subjects, and in this sense, they challenge Western assumptions about humanitarianism and secular aid. They arrive, they remain silent, they disappear. Or, they arrive, they find a temporary home in divine language, and they haunt the secular present as they disappear again.

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The abstract question of human nature is not at the surface of interactions between the Rohingya and the Islamists at the border region. But "what is it that makes us who we are?" remains as a curiosity, a question mark, an object of inquisitiveness that emerges in the midst of devastation. Islamic classifications and categories initiating practices of silence, speech, and analysis explode binaries of essence/existence, determination/free will, and despair/agency. In the immanent place of wretchedness, where one feels damned, godforsakenness is the condition of possibility of what flickers.

God—the Merciful—remains on his throne.

By tracing the pause between speech and language, the stillness of believers in states of despair, the immanent unfolding of a momentary space outside and in between given cartographies of nation-states, this ethnographic meditation has dwelled on the fundamental anxiety beneath movements that trouble the narrative arc of secular historicism.[14] The conversations between Jahan and the Rohingya *ulama* reflect a fragment of a global Deobandi discursive tradition. By rehistoricizing classical Islamic stories of helpers (*ansar*) and migrant-refugees (*muhajir*), from the Prophet's Medina to the present, such a discourse calls into question the assumptive logics of secular humanitarianism and displaces categories of humanitarian "volunteers" and "refugees." The chapter discovers varied observations in the encounters between Rohingya guardians, transmitters, and interpreters of religious knowledge (*ulama*) and Deobdandi practitioners—on moral self-criticism, political-theological critiques of the modern War on Terror states, and the possibility of antisecular geographies—that find a coherence in a contemporary Islamism. The chapter works itself out in movement within echoes of collective recitations in praise of God (*dhikr*) as it confronts displacement and calamity, withdraws from this-worldly resolution, and refrains from articulating a politically stable rhetoric in the present as divine texts and prophetic dreams in the classical tradition haunt the future of extinguished time.

Jahan's affirmation—"They [the Rohingya] are *muhajir*, we are *ansar*"—as he speculates on the condition of godforsakenness with extraordinary poise,

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can be (mis)read as a yearning to break history open in the present or as fetishized nostalgia for an ideal self-valorized community, but such statements in their sentiment explore in a state of perplexity what it means to obey the impossible in the utter absence of origins and grounds.

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Notes

1. "Migration" or "emigration" in Arabic (in South Asia pronounced *hijrat*). While practicing Muslims may think of migration in ideal terms, where the Prophet and his companions arrive at Medina and find refuge and a true welcome, in sites of contemporary warfare, migration is a devastating experience. Having said that, in traditions of twentieth-century Islamism, *hijra* is often conceptualized in ethico-political and pragmatic terms, with emphasis on the Meccan period when the Prophet and the earliest believers were persecuted for promoting God's revelations (Qur'an).
2. Al-Bukhari narrated on the authority of Aisha that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said to the Muslims, "I have been shown the land to which you will immigrate: it has palm trees between two lava fields, two stony tracts." *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3905.
3. Narrated by al-Bara bin Azib (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3925).
4. In the classical sense, the *muhajirin* were the first migrants of Islamic history, the early converts to Islam who migrated with the Prophet. But in a general sense, the *muhajirin* as a concept has been applied to various Islamic histories of migration.
5. Anas ibn Malik reported, "The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'I wish I could meet my brothers.' The Prophet's companions said, 'Are we not your brothers?' The Prophet said, 'You are my companions, but my brothers are those who have faith in me although they never saw me.'" *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 12169.
6. About *khidma* (service), Amira Mittermaier writes, "God, moreover, is continuously *made* present through rituals, such as prayer, sacrifice, and almsgiving, and through the very phrase *li-llah* and the way that it relentlessly orients charitable gifts away from the human recipients." Mittermaier, *Giving to God*, 7. In the context of the Rohingya/Islamist encounter, however, there is a larger emphasis on God as absent author; godforsakenness is a meditation on this condition of absence (which is different from nonexistence) during times of divine tribulation.
7. Thanks to Arif Rabbani, who clarified that the first translation for *ḥattá faraghat min ḥājatihā* ("until she got what she needed") is literal, and the second translation ("until she was able to express herself to her heart's content") is more interpretative within the context of the ḥadīth.

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8. See Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. In *On Suicide Bombing*, Talal Asad shows how suicide bombing through acts of extreme/absolute freedom disarticulates the genealogy and binary of freedom itself, creating horror in liberal moderns.
9. Nadvi, "1961 Burma Me Maula Ali Miya Nadvi ka Historical Bayan." The original is in Urdu, and the translation here is mine from a portion of the speech that was translated into Bengali and circulated in an Islamic text message group.
10. Robinson, *Body of Victim*.
11. *Maulana* is a title that denotes a Muslim religious leader, in particular a graduate of a religious institutions
12. This is a six-year intensive program on Islamic jurisprudence focusing on the foundational texts of Islam, the Qur'an, and the Hadith.
13. Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" emphasizes the subaltern produced by the difference between being stateless and being a migrant. To be stateless is to not be registered in the civil society, where even if the Rohingya are to speak, the civil society cannot hear them. This world was created in those months in 2016 and 2017 where, within a specific discursive tradition of Islam in the border regions, encounters of silence and language were mediated.
14. Here I am engaging Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis* and Iqbal's "Reprising Islamic Political Theology" though my focus in this chapter—whether discussing the physical movement of the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi Islamists or the fundamental anxiety experienced by Jahan as he encounters a Rohingya *alim*—is less about the (in)validity of analytic categories like "crisis," "critique," or "historicism" than about the pauses, withdrawals, ruptures, and gaps within the dynamic of modern history's formation of itself as the secular. Islam is the most prominent name signifying such a phenomenon.

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