Al-Qāᶜida as a "pragmatic base": Contributions of area studies to sociolinguistics

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Abstract

This article explores area studies contributions to sociolinguistics by examining Sunni reformers' use of the Arabic term *al-qāᶜida*, or a "pragmatic base." Material is drawn from an audiocassette collection formerly owned by Usāma Bin Lādīn. Divergent approaches to the *qāᶜida* suggest that the term functions a base for many forms of spatial, temporal, social, and ethical orientation. Much of the critical leverage of the concept stems from speakers' sense of Arabic as a template of ethical attunement that cues language users to founding Muslim lifeways and leaders in and beyond the Arabian Peninsula. A review of Western Arabic sociolinguistics shows how scholars have hampered and also enhanced an understanding of the pragmatic resourcefulness of Arabic. Special attention is given to the ways area studies can help situate Arabic as a signifying practice that accommodates diverse textual, historical, and territorial claims.
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1. Introduction

> "[We] considered American Army bases which we have from seventies in Iraq. Also, in the Saudi Arabian, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. This is kind of invasion, but I'm not here to convince you. Is not or not is mostly speech is ask you to be fair with people. I'm don't have anything to say that I'm not enemy. This is why the language of any war in the world is killing. I mean the language of the war is victims. I don't like to kill people. I feel very sorry they been killed kids in 9/11. What I will do? This

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is the language... But they said every law, they have exceptions, this is your bad luck you been part of the exception of our laws."[1]

– Khālid Shaĭkh Muḥammad, during his hearing by the Combatant Status Review Tribunal, a transcript of which was released in March, 2007. In this testimony, Muḥammad asserts that he served as military operational commander for Al Qaeda, and that he planned the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 9/11 attacks, and dozens of other terrorist operations.

In this essay, I highlight the advantages of an area studies approach to sociolinguistics by attending to debates over the significance of the Arabic term *al-qāᶜida*. Middle East area studies, shaped by Cold War geopolitical priorities, have traditionally included not only the Arab world, but also North Africa, Turkey and Iran. Transregional and global from its outset, the field has played host to strident intellectual debates about the legitimacy and historical viability of bounded linguistic and cultural communities. Although moribund during the 1990s, area studies received a new boost after the attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and other targets in 2001. As ideas about older territorial blocs are once again reinvoked, area studies scholars continue to offer valuable insights by showing how peoples in given regional areas, as well as specialists who study them, invoke long-established communal norms only within contexts of situated interaction that are institutionally variable and unfolding. Essential social congeries in the War on Terror and al-Qaeda are no exception. In recent years, area studies scholars, journalists, and activists have shown how the coherence of al-Qaeda, as a terrorist organization with a recognized internal hierarchy, has institutional moorings in the United States, where policy and legal initiatives have been designed to prosecute an amorphous group of transnational militants (Burke, 2003, pp. 10–11; Curtis, 2004; Keenan, 2006). From such perspectives, the concept of *al-qāᶜida* has denoted a recognizable organizational group not since the late 1980s, as most studies assert (Alexander and Swetnam, 2001, p. 4, pp. 78–81; Gunaratna, 2002, pp. 55–56). Rather, the concept emerged only after September 11th, 2001, when its worldwide association with Usāma Bin Lādin and the 9/11 hijackers turned it into a recruiting tool with considerable symbolic leverage.[2] I aim to contribute to these studies by exploring how several Arabic-speaking Muslim reformers use the term. For Muslim reformers as for Westerners, the *qāᶜida* becomes a spatial, temporal, and ethical "base" or precept through situated regimes of knowledge. The conceptual integrity of the term, however, is best delineated by area studies scholars who hold language to be a contested epistemological and expressive practice, and not simply a means to assert consensus over referential certainties.

My interests in the precept of the *qāᶜida* derive from my own professional engagements. As an area studies scholar in the United States who focuses on Arabic, Islam, and media studies, I have recently become involved, in a profoundly unanticipated way, with charting

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[1] (Verbatim Transcript, 2007).
[2] These studies foreground the testimony of Jamāl al-Faḍl in the USA vs. Bin Lādin case in 2001 (see especially Burke, 2003, pp. 11–12). Al-Faḍl's assertions that *al-qaᶜida* was a recognized militant organization by 1998 need contextualizing as part of his plea-bargain arrangement with prosecutors who were seeking to indict Bin Lādin for his attacks on in Nairobi and Dar al-Salam in 1998. His testimony also contradicted statements at the same trial by the Federal Bureau of Investigation officials that one of the suspected African-embassy bombers, Khalfān Khālis Muḥammad, had never heard of a group called al-Qaᶜida.

the intellectual armature of Usāma Bin Lādin himself, at least as archived in a particular collection of audiocassettes currently held at Yale University. In December of 2001, after Taliban forces fled from Qandahar, Afghanistan, under pressure from U.S.-led operational forces, Cable News Networks acquired the collection from Bin Lādin's personal compound, where he had lived since 1997. Containing 1459 cassettes, the collection features recordings of over 200 leading Islamists from around the world, and includes many of the most influential militants at the time (e.g. Bin Lādin himself, Abū Zubayda, Abū Qutāda, ʿAbdalla ʿAzzām, and ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥman). Over the last several years, I have been archiving the contents of the collection, the vast majority (98%) of which is in Arabic, and features a wide variety of material including sermons, political speeches, lectures, informal conversations, poetry recitations, sung anthems, and creative radio dramas. My goals in this essay, then, reflect my efforts to explain how the collection is a site of tremendous polyvalence, dissonance, and debate, and not simply the monolithic "memory bank" of a single, unified organization.

To date, my survey of the cassettes in Yale's archive show no indication that the term *al-qāʿida* was used before 2001 to denote a specific group or organization.[3] As many have learned, the term means "the base" in Arabic; and yet, the *qāʿida* is a base for many forms of spatial, temporal, social, and ethical orientation. With regard to the cassette collection, I propose that we approach the *qāʿida* as a pragmatic precept or rule whose application varies according to usage. While rules can be considered formal systems of induction, so too they are social constructs that change over time as they re-articulate governing norms of behavior, thought, and action. In his study of language practice, Ludwig Wittgenstein has suggested that rules provide speakers with customary "sign-posts" that make sense only when invoked in specific interactions. Rules are contingent, reflexive "techniques" more than they are context-free predictions of verbal behavior; indeed, he suggests, "We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm" (Wittgenstein (1998 [1958], p. 47)). Wittgenstein's insights on the pragmatic mooring of rules provide an elegant tool for exploring area studies' established interests in the ethnic coding of language, or ethnolinguistics. Approaching ethnicity as a set of formative narratives about communal territories and their lived histories, I draw further from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1994 [1975]) concept of the literary chronotope (literally a "time-space"). As I show through analysis of several speech segments featured in the cassette collection, speakers cue audiences to different kinds of "bases" through narratives about the spatial and temporal genesis of Arabic. Such narratives treat Arabic not solely as a way of speaking or of using linguistic signs. Arabic also becomes a template of ethical "attunement," defined by Alton Becker as "a way of sounding, shaping, remembering, interacting, and referring" (Becker, 1995, p.

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[3] My assertion counters the view of CNN terrorism analyst (Bergen, 2006, pp. 78–81), who claims that Al Qaeda was founded in 1988 and that arguments to the contrary by Jason Burke and Adam Curtis are "nonsense." To back up his assertion, Bergen cites excerpts from two written communiqués between Bin Lādin and his associates in 1988 that mention a "base" (*qaʿida*) and "the military base" (*al-qaʿida al-ʿaskariyya*). Nothing in either document suggests that these terms meant anything other than a generic military camp, despite Bergen's leading insinuations. Certainly Bin Lādin and his associates set up bases in an organized fashion, but only after 2001 does the term "Al Qaʿida" come to be used by militants to signify a worldwide organization. As this essay suggests, the *qāʿida's* leverage as a resource for action or building consensus draws from a far more disparate range of narratives. While these narratives may or may not be present in the two documents cited, Bergen's aggressive editorial interventions – not unusual for such trade books – prevent closer analysis.

397). Through imaginative evocations of indigenous Arabic lifeways, speakers associate Arabic "rules" with contexts of customary usage both on and beyond the Arabian Peninsula. By demonstrating creative skill in applying rules, speakers ultimately seek ethical leverage against global regimes of representation.

In order to assess the advantages of a linguistic and cultural approach to the *qāʿida*, I begin with a few general remarks on the semantics of the term in Arabic, moving quickly to an analysis of the term's usage by three speakers in the collection: one moderate jurisprudent and two militants, the latter of whom devote considerable portions of their cassettes to outlining strategies for armed struggle, establishing training camps, and teaching recruits how to use weapons and conduct themselves in combat. In the second half of the essay, I explore the ways that Arabic scholars trained in Western linguistic disciplines have hampered, and also enabled studying language as a set of chronotopic techniques. I focus, in particular, on the contributions of area studies to understanding the chronotopic aspects of language, devoting special attention to Muslim understandings of Arabic as a template of attunement. Throughout the essay, I recur to the three segments of cassette-recorded speech to explore how the *qāʿida's* significance for Muslim reformers is best approached at the intersection of multiple disciplines of knowledge and ethical action.

2. The rule of a jurisprudent: precedents of linguistic habitus

In Bin Lādin's cassette collection, the term *qāʿida* is occasionally used to mean a military or militant "base." This is not its primary significance for most speakers, however. Far more frequently, the term indexes a more flexible linguistic "base." The latter approach is taken by the preponderance of Muslim preachers, jurisprudents, and language teachers who are featured in the collection, many of whom were hired in training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan to instruct young, vernacular Arabic speakers in the virtues of Classical Arabic, the language of the Qurʾān and Islamic law. In primary schools across the Arab world, such speakers learn that the *qāʿida* (plural *qawāʿid*) simply means a linguistic "rule." In its broader senses, which I won't be able to cover in this essay, concepts of the *qāʿida* offer Arabic speakers valuable "sign-posts" in domains of music, reproductive health, statecraft, and militancy. It is in studies of language, Islamic jurisprudence, and the foundations of moral knowledge that the concept has been elaborated most rigorously, as the following excerpts serve to illustrate.[4]

Among the cassettes in the collection is a lecture delivered sometime in the early 1990s by one of Kuwait's most esteemed moderate intellectuals and jurisprudents, Ṭāriq Al-Suwaīdān. Known to millions through his regular appearance on television shows as well as through a voluminous set of publications, al-Suwaīdān's lecture is entitled "God's Ordinance: Prescriptions and Pragmatics." Delivered in standard Arabic, the jurisprudent

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[4] In Yemeni music theory, the *qāʿida* is the "base" tone that is used by performers to invest musical themes with rhythmic and melodic tension. In Egyptian discourses of reproductive health, the *qāʿida* signifies "menstruation," a cycle of foundational energy that is accompanied by rituals and taboos, and that is tempered only during pregnancy and in the latter years of a woman's life. (Personal communication with Niloofar Haeri, September 8, 2006.) Jurists approach the *qāʿida* as a general legal principle that has been induced from Prophetic sayings or from important rulings and consensus by jurisprudents. Indeed, it is precisely due to their normative generality that, as Frank Vogel states, "they can allow broad license for reversal" (Vogel, 2000, pp. 105–106).

focuses on the question: How can Muslims know God's plan for them? His answer lies in exegetical technique. After outlining the approaches of several schools of Muslim law, al-Suwaīdān emphasizes the central role of *hadīth* texts, or orally transmitted narratives of the Prophet Muḥammad's words and deeds, in guiding young students toward understanding Islam's message. Such a position underscores a common theme for Sunnis, especially in reform traditions that emphasize "independent reasoning" (*ijtihād*), and al-Suwaīdān situates these traditions in the setting of early Medina, where the Prophet Muḥammad and his supporters founded the first Islamic community. Proceeding with a discussion of Islam's core doctrinal pretext (*hujja*), al-Suwaīdān recommends four primary sources for cultivating knowledge of God's will. These sources are, in order: the Qurʾān, technical terms in Islamic law and discussions of belief (*ʿaqīda*), Arabic, and disciplined reasoning (*ʿilm al-manṭaq*). Between the initial and final anchors of the Qurʾān, on one end, and reasoning, on the other, then, lies Arabic and its terminological apparatus. It is the mediation of Arabic that draws my attention.

Knowledge of God's plan, al-Suwaīdān explains, requires learning what he terms "applied ethics" (*ḥukm farʿi*), the tenets of which can be understood by situating Islam historically in its emergence from the natural habits of native Arabic speakers:

> In the beginning, there were no foundational principles (for Muslims). Like the Arabs, (Muslims) were moving along with Arabic and its precepts, naturally. They didn't have principles or grammar – these were lacking. But their nature was like that. It was the same even for the legal scholars. They moved along according to the principles of their natures, as did the most esteemed jurisprudents. And after this came documentation, first by the Imam Aḥmad al-Shafiʿī... and then others... They began to follow the legal opinions of Abī Ḥanīfa... and at this point they gained a path...[5]

According to al-Suwaīdān, the applied ethics of Islam have been cultivated through a centuries-long process of language acquisition and refinement. Employing an argument familiar enough to sociolinguists, the jurisprudent suggests that Arabic has a social history, and that its flexible "precepts" (*qawāʿid*) and "grammar" have been formalized along a "path" (*nahj*). This historic path has gained coherence over time not through state standardization, as might be argued by Western sociolinguists, but, rather, given the wide geographical compass of Islam's historical networks of learning, through chains of Arab legal scholarship. Indeed, al-Suwaīdān reminds listeners, shortly later, that a single consensus or "pretext" (*hujja*) among Muslims has emerged, and that this pretext is substantiated not only in the ethics of linguistic refinement, but also in something deeper and more instinctive, in what he calls the pre-grammatical "nature" of the early Arabs. The ethics of language inhered in the embodied dispositions, or "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1993 [1977], p. 72), of Arabs who lived and spoke as a community even before the formation of explicit rules for codifying lifeways.

Al-Suwaīdān's view of language as a natural and instinctive characteristic of early Arab speakers is not uncommon. Indeed, such a position was held by early Muslim grammarians. After the Prophet Muḥammad delivered the Qurʾān in a series of recitations during the 7th-century, grammarians made efforts to systematize and disseminate the Qurʾān's

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[5] Cassette #1229 in the Islamic Audiotape Collection, Yale University.

insights to larger and more diverse communities. While the Qurʾān provided the inimitable ideal of Arabic, recourse was also made to the linguistic *usage* of central Arabian nomads who were closest to the Prophet Muḥammad's own tribe of Quraish. In the centuries that followed, the linguistic and cultural customs of the Arabs have continued to provide language theorists with important models of community, in their ideal as well as practical forms.

We might approach such views as a kind of ethnolinguistic "ideology." In this case, Arabic signals the expressive resources of a common Arab people. This ideology privileges certain political orders and territorial hierarchies, moreover. The Arabian Peninsula is foregrounded, for instance, along with those speakers best qualified to embody its virtues. I want to push further, however, in order to trouble the easy equation between Arabic and a flattened ethnic imaginary of "the Arab world," the Arabian Peninsula, or any other spatial or temporal referent commonly identified as "Arab." Such spaces are, of course, always socialized in accordance with specific institutions, groups, or people who seek to mobilize them in different contests for recognition. In order to account for the dynamism of ethnos, let us follow al-Suwaīdān's observations, considering how language is a process of knowing and ethical attunement that is continuously uprooted and re-territorialized.

Al-Suwaīdān makes an explicit link between the guiding rules or "precepts" that early Muslims used to understand God's decrees and their natural, instinctive habits. These habits include not only ways of using Arabic, but also ways of moving physically across space. Describing the ways that early Muslims scholars used language, he explains "Like the Arabs, they were moving along", and, later, he reiterates "they were moving along" (*kanū māshiyīn*) according to the principles of their natures. Ultimately, he said, they "found it possible to move along a path." At the center of al-Suwaīdān's reasoned pedagogy is not only Arabic, but a chronotopic attunement to Arabic in which the Arabian peninsula and its early inhabitants figure centrally. Crucially, however, the conceptual stage for this Arab time-space is far from static. Invoked initially as a temporal return ("in the beginning"), the precepts of Arabic become mobilized spatially as well as biographically, as figures of anonymous early nomads give way to a series of path-finding legal personalities. Figures of note include the Gaza-born Imam Muḥammad al-Shāfiʿī, widely considered to be one of the most important early theorists of Islamic law, and Abī Ḥanīfa al-ʿAnbarī, an 8th-century Persian jurist who promoted the use of commonsense reasoning in Islam.

Al-Suwaīdān's model of the ontological genesis of Arabic proves to be a hermeneutic resource by its subsequent linkage to exegetical tradition. When reading the Qurʾān, he continues, one can discover what God considers to be obligatory for Muslims by attending to imperative verbs. Verbs that command Muslims to do things are sufficient evidence for identifying what is obligatory. Noting verbal tense is only a first step, however. Such an exegetical technique, the jurisprudent suggests, is a *qāʿida*, a flexible rule or precept, and in this regard is conditional. A *qāʿida* has pragmatic exceptions: The precept applies "except if its associated context (*qarīna*) is separated from it." If another piece of evidence appears to call the imperative verb into doubt, its obligation is accordingly conditional. How is such evidence assembled? First, al-Suwaīdān explains, by relying upon Arabic, and he adds: "We use this precept that was given to us by linguists: They have linguistic evidence that has been gathered from the imperative verb's usage by Arabs." Second, however, evidence for the *qāʿida's* applicability in any given situation must be gathered from the inner comportment of those best qualified to speak Arabic morally, especially jurisprudents and those familiar with Islamic law, whatever their ethnic origins. In the practice of

discovering God's plan, linguistic evidence is not enough, since linguistic precepts can be fully internalized. "When [legal experts] use Arabic precepts," al-Suwaīdān continues, "they consider them intuitive. This [intuition is granted to them through] the work of language, and, thus, they are able to decide whether the imperative verb satisfies what is needed to be obligatory." The logic of the *qāʿida*, is, thus, unmistakably attached to one's intimacy with Arabic, and with an intuition that comes through full conversance with the pragmatic scope of language-in-use. The *qāʿida* is a product of expressive acculturation.[6] In short, al-Suwaīdān gives strong credence to the esteemed purveyors of Muslim knowledge in the Arabic-speaking world, even as listeners are offered exegetical lessons by which they might participate in moral reasoning themselves.

3. The rules of militants: precedents of topographic habitus

In cassettes of the collection that feature speeches on militancy, the term *al-qāʿida* is used in the sense of an operational "base" for militants to regroup, train, and launch attacks. The ways in which militants talk about the *qāʿida* suggest that they draw from the chronotopic orientations of the precept as developed by their teachers, while also venturing in entirely new directions. In these cases, the *qāʿida's* topographic and territorial moorings are foregrounded, and as these coordinates are situated temporally in narratives of historical events both recent and long past, speakers cue listeners to a more maverick set of ethical orientations that include, but are not restricted by, the proper use of language.

In one of his early and most important speeches to world audiences, Usāma Bin Lādin's launches his own vision of global jihad by situating the *qāʿida's* ethnolinguistic associations with early Arabs amidst a more global set of nation-state territories. Delivered in 1996, the speech has become known as "The Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Two Holy Sanctuaries." Bin Lādin begins by denouncing American efforts to assassinate and imprison a range of clerics in Saudi Arabia, his own natal homeland. Calling attention to conditions that have influenced his own effective public speaking, he then narrates a set of maneuvers through geographic and topographic spaces that have allowed him to establish a "safe base" (*qāʿida āmina*):

> After this injustice, we have suffered by being prevented from addressing Muslims [publicly]. We have been exiled from Pakistan, the Sudan, and Afghanistan, hence a prolonged absence on my part. But by the Grace of Allah, a safe base has now been found in Khurasan, on the summit of the Hindu Kush – this summit where, by the Grace of God, the largest infidel military force of the world (i.e. the Soviet Union) was destroyed, and where the myth of the superpower withered before the *mujāhidīn's* cries of "God Is Greater" (*Allahu Akbar*). Today, from atop the same summit of Afghanistan, we work to lift the iniquity that had been imposed on the Muslim community by the Jewish-Crusader alliance, particularly after they have occupied the land of the two Holy Sanctuaries.[7]

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[6] In summing up before moving to his next topic, Suwaidan reminds listeners that there are three types of evidence: "We have [situational] evidence (*dalīl farʿī*) for applied ethics, we have general evidence (*dalīl kullī*), and we have a precept (*qāʿida*)." The *qāʿida*, in other words, provides an interpretive medium for comparing idealized norms of moral behavior with the ethical complexities of situated social interaction.

[7] Cassette #503 in the Islamic Audiotape Collection, Yale University.

Part of the force of his declaration comes from his cosmopolitan associations with modern nation-states, especially "Pakistan, the Sudan, and Afghanistan," all of which had proven second homes to Bin Lādin, despite his "exile" at the time. A subtler chronotope is invoked as the concept of the "base" is given spatial and temporal qualification. On the one hand, the base is located outside the Arabian Peninsula, in territories made legend through earlier Muslim wars against infidels, including Hindus ("Hindu Kush," by some accounts, is derived from a Persian term for "Hindu killer" that was given to the region during 11th-century Muslim expansions), and also Communists in the former Soviet Union. These battles acquire moral significance "today," however, in association with venerable patterns of spatial and temporal attunement on the Arabian Peninsula. Central to such attunement are the "two Holy Sanctuaries" of Madina and Mecca, whose early reclamation sets a precedent for urgent resistance to U.S.-led "Judeo-Christian" forces stationed on the Peninsula since 1990. More subtly, a *qāᶜida* is best founded by those who can model themselves in the fashion of early Arabian warriors, decamping into the Peninsula's remoter mountains in times of duress. On three occasions in the above excerpt, Bin Lādin reiterates that the base is located on a "summit" (*dhurwa*), a word that recalls an aphorism printed on cassettes in the collection and well known among militants: "*Jihād is the summit of religion's camel-hump*" (*jihād dhurwa sanām al-dīn*).[8] For Bin Lādin, the *qāᶜida* on the peaks of Afghanistan gains force in association with an Arabian context that, while separated from it, provides a key component of its ethical foundations. Establishing such a base requires cultivating the kind of competences that are associated less with speakers of eloquent Arabic or Muslim jurisprudents than with those who can situate themselves within a utopian purview that joins an imaginative rendition of armed Arab mobility to the reclamation of sacred metropolitan spaces, most notably Madina and Mecca. Such a message would likely have held a special appeal to disenfranchised youth from the Arabian Peninsula who formed the vast majority of Bin Lādin's core followers in the years leading up to the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001.

Before comparing Bin Lādin's version of the *qāᶜida* with that of the jurisprudent mentioned above, let us consider the excerpt of a speech by another militant represented in the cassette collection. Recorded sometime during the mid 1990s, this cassette features an anonymous speaker discussing the importance of the Arabian Peninsula, and especially Yemen (Bin Lādin's ancestral homeland), to launching a global *jihād*.[9] As for Bin Lādin, the power of the *qāᶜida* is identified in relation to a modern nation-state system, although its more flexible, pragmatic strength draws from movement across state borderlands, especially near states that have yet to be "liberated." Unlike in the previous two examples, this speaker regularly employs vernacular Arabic, a register that is foregrounded especially when discussing the cruder obligations of combat, as we will see below.

> …it is very important that work on the Arabian Peninsula be focused on the base (*qāᶜida*) of Yemen. This accords with precepts (*qawāᶜid*) – the geographical truths of the place, as a chain of mountains that extends from the middle of the Peninsula

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[8] This aphorism draws upon a *ḥadith* narrated by Abū Isā al-Tirmidhī that relates a statement made by the Prophet to Muᶜādh Bin Jabal: "'Shall I inform you of the origin of the matter, its pillar and peak?' I said, 'Yes, O Messenger of Allah!' He said, 'The origin of the matter is to become a Muslim, its pillar is to perform the prayer, and its hump is Jihad."

[9] Throughout the cassette, the speaker focuses on the ways Yemenis can help Muslims drive American military forces off the Arabian Peninsula, in particular, and Christians and Jews from Muslim lands, generally.

down to Yemen. We must focus the work of *jihād* on these mountains, and create *jihādī* camps in this extensive mountain range so that Yemen can be established, as a base. This is the case for commanders in liberated places as well as in their posterior areas. Just as the posterior base of the *jihād* on the [occupied] Arabian Peninsula can't be completed except in Yemen, or in the borderlands near Yemen, inside Saudi Arabia, but on the shared borders... Just as you see, now, in places that are a *mujāhidīn* base... for *mujāhidīn* leaders in Pakistan: Even though part of [the base] is in the posterior areas of Iran, part of it is also, in truth, in Pakistan, as well as in Afghanistan.[10]

For the speaker, the moral and tactical leverage of the *qā°ida* arises from its accordance with "precepts" (*qawā°id*), as scholars of jurisprudence might allow. Showing uncertainty, however, the speaker hesitates and then qualifies himself: these precepts are best demonstrated less in moral consensus about proper linguistic usage than in the "geographical truths of the place" (*haqāyiq jughrāfiyya fī-l-makān*). Such truths founded in Yemen, above all, but also extend along a chain of mountains that cuts across the two states of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The ethical force of such a base, moreover, lies in its twin presence as a location in territories that are "liberated" (*muḥarrar*) and also in "posterior" (*khalfī*) areas that have yet to be secured. For the speaker, the former territories appear to be Yemen, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, while territories under occupation include Saudi Arabia, where large numbers of U.S. military forces were stationed at the time, and also Iran, where Shi°a Muslims have long been the majority. The "base," thus, acquires power by linking places that are primary and sacrosanct to those that remain embattled.

Later, perhaps in an effort to motivate his listeners, the speaker searches for a trope to express the kind of agent who might be best suited to negotiating such a trans-national topography. He arrives at the image of a transhumant Arab nomad. This nomad's ability to survive, however, rests partly in his competences in metropolitan settings. Employing marked vernacular Arabic, the speaker creatively describes the moral benefits of seizing and amassing booty:[11]

> You've got to think about how to take your money from the enemy. Before launching *jihād*, let this sit in your mind: The raid of Badr. Wherever the enemy's money is found, go take the money.
> Whoever kills an enemy gains wealth... Vitality among Muslims comes from a state of wealth, not from poverty.
> Whoever finances operations in cities, the operations that are called terrorist operations in cities, he has with him posts in the mountains for *mujāhidīn*. When a brother gets suspicious, or is discovered... or someone is injured and people are taken captive and taken away, he immediately undertakes a nomadic journey to the mountain on high. You've got to establish a base (*qā°ida*) on the high mountain. That is the first command. The people who live in the city, among those who have been downtrodden, go to such a base, then, if they want to get better. They go draw from the base, if they want to train, or get a salary, or money. They go to the base, taking from the mountain on high...

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[10] Cassette #1110 in the Islamic Audiotape Collection, Yale University.
[11] In this case, the speaker's Egyptian vernacular is evident in his choice of phonemes ([dh] is pronounced is [z], [j] as [g]), in syntax (with conjoining multiple verbs without conjunctions, e.g. *lāzim tfakkir*), and in lexicon ("wherever" becomes *fīn* rather than standard *aynamā*, "is found" becomes *fī* rather than *yūjad*).

The people of the city are, basically, undertaking the administrative work of *jihād*, since the administration of Muslim society is best conducted by urban people. You can establish an Illuminated City [i.e. Medina] in Yemen... Such [early] initiatives by Muslims followed the moral pathway [*sunna*]. You [too] should create a radiant city that is an Illuminated City, an illuminated base, an illuminated *jihādī* base, an Islamic base that can direct the work of *jihād*. This is the city.

In explaining the tactics required of the modern *jihādī*, the speaker continues to find the notion of the base instrumental. Initially, the exemplary moral tactician is one who can imaginatively journey, back in time, to the "raid of Badr" in which Prophet Muḥammad won his first victory against unconverted Arab tribes led by Meccan elites. This tribal warrior, however, has access to wealth, and under times of duress in the troubled cities, can protect his assets by taking "a nomadic journey" (*yishidd al-raḥāla*) into the safer highlands, to the "*qāᶜida* on high." As the speaker progresses, the power of the *qāᶜida* is increasingly associated not with actual city dwellers, the structural laymen of *jihād* who are portrayed as embroiled administrators, but rather with the creative founders of a utopian city. In calling this place an "Illuminated City" (*madīna munawwara*), the speaker refers to the moniker by which Muslims have long known Madina, where Islam's first Muslim community was founded by the Prophet Muḥammad in 622 AD. Through chronotopic reclamation, this early Arab Muslim sanctuary becomes the prototype for 21st-century utopian militants. By securing new territories with proper retrospective insight, listeners can found an "illuminated *jihādī* base" (*qāᶜida jihādiyya munawwara*) to direct the work of their brethren.

A comparison between the militants' use of the term *qāᶜida* and that of the jurisprudent Ṭāriq al-Suwaīdān reveal similarities, as well as important differences. As for the jurisprudent, the resourcefulness of the *qāᶜida* derives not from its fixed and timeless structure. Rather, the *qāᶜida* acquires value in relation to contexts that are conceptually "separated" from it. As for al-Suwaīdān, too, the relation between the "base" and its contextual deployment is to be determined through a particular spatio-temporal mooring: one must seek recourse to the communities, social customs, and instinctive lifeways of exemplary Arabic speakers on and around the Arabian Peninsula. It is precisely on matters of authority, however, that the militants differ from the jurisprudent. Perhaps not surprisingly, from the militants' perspective the *qāᶜida's* strategic and ethical leverage works in relation to a system of modern states engaged in geopolitical struggles. Invoking tactical maneuvers both within, but also, crucially, across territories of state jurisdiction, militants use the concept of the *qāᶜida* to create new cosmological narratives of primordial acts and topographies. The unfolding deeds of this cosmogony are exemplified, in particular, by canny utopian warriors rather than by legal specialists or statesmen.[12] According to the anonymous militant speaker, one's "first command" (*awwal amr*) or obligation is only indirectly related to God's will as conveyed through a Qurᵓānic exegesis of imperative verbs; instead,

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[12] In the introductory quote, Khālid Shaīkh Muḥammad seems to defend his leadership of Al-Qaeda by mobilizing the concept of the *qāᶜida* in this militant fashion. Speaking in English, Muḥammad first mentions hostile American "bases" on the Arabian Peninsula. The geopolitical significance of such bases is elaborated not solely in terms of state entities (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain), but in terms of the "language" of killers that is inspired and licensed by such bases. The ethics of killing are narrated, specifically, in terms of "exceptions" to generalized ethical language rules, or "laws" as Muḥammad prefers to call them. For Muḥammad, such rule-exceptions serve to underscore more typical, primordial ways of conducting "our" laws.

the most important command is to secure a safe territorial zone, to "establish a base (*qāᶜida*) on the high mountain." The radically populist authority of such commanders is conveyed further in the final segments of his speech. In telling his audience that "You [too] should create a radiant city that is a Shining City," the speaker ratifies each listener as a potential prophetic activist who might catalyze great transformations. As agents of dramatic change, their power lies less in exegetical scholarship or formal education than in their ability to perceive "geographical truths" that belie the artificial boundaries of states, nations, and their ordering principles. As for Bin Lādin, the mythic heroes of this cosmogony are the kinds of deterritorialized migrants, workers, and disenfranchised youth who have so often formed the bulwark of militant movements across the world. As a final gesture of self-empowerment to his listeners, the anonymous speaker appends an *ad hoc* closing remark to the excerpt quoted immediately above. Possibly alerted to an engaged tape-recorder next to him, he states: "By copying cassettes for us, by copying cassettes for the interior, and as people change the base (*al-qāᶜida*) through copying *[he pauses, and then adds]*: Wherever we have control over our regions, cassette copying takes place in them."[13] Advancement will be achieved not through the kinds of "documentation" or "legal opinions" that are highlighted by al-Suwaidān, but through one's use of inexpensive cassette technologies to disseminate *jihādī* discourse. A practical knowledge of cassette duplication becomes, in fact, the ultimate resource for influential speech acts. By duplicating cassettes "for the interior" (*li-l-dākhil*) (the ground for such a referent – spatial, spiritual, cosmological, epistemological – remaining underspecified), any user can impel the radical re-structuring of the *qāᶜida*. He or she can expand not simply the contexts by which evidential norms are to be qualified, but also sacred territories as well.

The verbal aplomb of the two militant speakers suggests their familiarity with the perspectives of jurisprudents and Arabic language teachers on the value of the "precept" in Muslim hermeneutics. Their experiences and goals have led them toward other formulas for moral transformation, however. In a recent study of Sunni models of textual communication, Arabic linguist Mohamed ᶜAli demonstrates how conservative reformers (*salafīs*), taking cue from the writings of 14th-century thinker Tāqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, adopt an especially pragmatic approach to language rules. Wary of established consensus over the ideal referential certitude, or "base" (*aṣl*) significance, of given utterances, *salafīs* hold speakers capable of creating a degree of mutually shared "introspection" (*al-ḥiss al-bāṭin*) into the foundational associations of given utterances (Ali, 2000, p. 92). Speakers build consensus, in particular, by relying upon their knowledge of each other's discursive and behavioral habits, a process more easily achieved where models of collective identity (e.g. an original Muslim community based in Madina) are foregrounded. In traditions of jurisprudence that rely on this model of signification, the ethics of "rules" (*qawāᶜid*) evoked by speakers are assessed in accordance with complex taxonomies of signification, the likes of which are not invoked by militants.[14] Instead, as Bin Lādin and the anonymous militant speaker struggle to link guiding precepts to emergent contexts of interaction, they employ a set of narratives about indigenous Arab lifeways that evoke founding heroes and their deeds. According to Wittgenstein (1998 [1958], p. 85), language

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[13] In Arabic: *bi-ṭabbᶜ al-shaā᾽iṭ lanā, bi-ṭabbᶜ al-sharā᾽iṭ lā dākhil wa ḥawwalīn sic al-qaᶜida bi-l-ṭabbᶜ [pause] al-manāṭiq ilaynā fīhā al-sayṭara b-yaṭabbᶜ fīhā al-sharīṭ.*

[14] Such taxonomies include categories of verbal and non-verbal signification, as well as distinctions between ontological (*wad᾽*), rational, and natural signs.

rules only make sense if they are understood symbolically, as dynamic sign-posts that, while customarily constraining, are not causally determining of one's behavior either in the present or in the future. When invoking a rule, in other words, a speaker highlights not only the conventional assumptions and entailments of given utterances, but also his or her own active role in recognizing such rules as game-like conventions, and in being able to deploy them tactically in accordance with more proximate modes of social discourse, spatial orientation, memory and reference. In signaling speakers' creative attunement to established social foundations, such rule-invocation is "really a mythological description of the use of a rule" (Wittgenstein (1998 [1958], p. 85).) By way of example, speakers use rules to identify the deep mythic charters of given social groups, along with their own roles as myth-narrators. In the excerpts above, militants invoke new social charters by making past epochs and their geographical "bases" into templates for present redeployment.

4. Contested disciplines of arabic: the advantages of area studies

Can the above narratives of Arabic speech and signification allow us to identify several contending disciplines of Arabic ethnolinguistics? To what extent are the state-centric and topographic narratives of the militant speakers, in particular, compatible with the indigenous associations of the $qā^c ida$ for most speakers? While seeking preliminary answers to these questions, I want to resist the impulse to "decode" the "extreme" rhetoric of militants with a more complex set of enquiries into disciplinary legacies that enable, and also obstruct, understanding of Arabic as a historically situated cultural practice. I'll focus, in particular, on Western traditions of sociolinguistics. What analytic tools have we inherited for studying language as a regionally variegated cultural practice, and what advantages do area studies offer sociolinguists?

Beginning in the late 19th-century, promising studies of everyday spoken Arabic emerged among European dialectologists who sought to understand the cultural bearings of classical texts. Amidst flourishing European nationalist movements and a growing field of Indo-European studies, language scholars traveled to Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Palestine, and Yemen in order to initiate research on varieties of spoken Arabic that might illuminate enduring civilizational proclivities (Burckhardt, 1830; de Landberg, 1901; Lerchundi, 1872; Pharaon, 1832; Stumme, 1896; Wetzstein, 1868). Since many of these scholars had received training in philology and ancient Near Eastern history, they often focused on comparative Semitic morphologies. Tri-consonantal root structures of Arabic verbs were frequently categorized in morphological clusters, along with associated inflectional patterns. As a result, some of the strongest contributions that these scholars of Arabic made to general linguistic theory have been morphological typologies (Comrie, 1992). While focusing much attention on the practical variations of Classical Arabic, however, these linguists also developed important insights into the ways vernacular Arabic systematically informed other language varieties through situated contexts of speech usage. Indeed, their work would be drawn upon many years later by Arab nationalists who sought insights into the ways shared Arab discourses emerged from a diversity of regional communities.

Arabic sociolinguistics was advanced in the mid 20th-century by another generation of Western scholars who grew interested in processes of Arabic language standardization that were accelerated by nationalism, state education, and new print-media markets. Fore-

most among these scholars was American linguist Charles Ferguson. While trained in both Moroccan and Bengali vernaculars, Ferguson took great interest in the formal linguistics of Prague School theorists, as well as Edward Sapir. Through his work at the American Foreign Service Arabic field school in Beirut, and later at Harvard's Middle East Center, he inspired several generations of Arabic students to pursue studies in standardization, communicative functionality, and structural markedness (Belnap and Haeri, 1997). For many students, diglossia became a principal model for assessing the social indexes of given registers, and connections with standardization would later be elaborated in distinctions of "formality" and "informality," "state" and "tribe," "prestige" and "dispreferred" in ways that all too often neglected Ferguson's careful attention to the social and cultural embedding of linguistic norms.[15] Valuable though standardization studies have been in identifying the functions of language codes within given institutional orders, especially state educational systems, scholars only begun to explore the contextual variability of such functions within complex traditions of knowledge, ethics, and social authority that inform and sometimes challenge the coherence of state disciplinary regimes. A notable recent attempt to integrate older studies of diglossia with current scholarship on globalization and language markets is Niloofar Haeri's *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*: *Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt* (2003). Haeri's volume has been rightly commended for its nuanced analysis of Egyptians' use of Classical Arabic in everyday settings. A careful attention to phonology, aspect, and grammatical agreement, in particular, produces many fascinating insights into the politics of emerging language communities. As Haeri shows by focusing on the standardization of Arabic through state education and print media from the 19th-century onward, Egyptians feel increasingly alienated from Classical Arabic insofar as the language has been ideologically co-opted by the state in search of an authoritative and "sacred" voice that might resist popular contestation. Keen to convey her informants' ideological viewpoints, however, Haeri ultimately struggles with an overly formal assessment of the functional resources of Classical Arabic. Citing Ferdinand de Saussure, Haeri holds such Arabic is held to be "non-arbitrary", an assertion that while felicitous for studying new currents of primordialism in nationalist culture, underemphasizes the rich socio-indexical qualities of sacred knowledge that are invoked in styles of Qurʾānic recitation, poetry, and historically situated speech acts generally. As Gafaïti (2002) has demonstrated in Algerian post-independence contexts, Classical Arabic reform is always socially charged, its coding as a sacred tongue always asserted in relation to quite "arbitrary" claims of cultural and political entitlement. Decades of Arabicization

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[15] See, for example, Yushmanov (1961), whose account of the social valence of "literary" and "spoken" Arabic registers stems directly from observations on the spread of literacy and the Qurʾān, with inadequate attention to indigenous understandings of authority or power. More recently, Shryock (1997) deploys a model of diglossia that locates the social valences of orality with tribes, and of written and literary registers with states. To be sure, such a model can been justified as a dominant ideology of linguistic community in the Middle East and North Africa: tribal expression is stereotypically defined in oral volubility for Arabs, and this iconic association between a social group and a specific form of media becomes a useful metapragmatic resource for signaling social affiliation in more conventional ways. Such stereotypical associations might even be shown to provide marginalized groups with a means to narrate identity in a more favorable light, amidst pressures from centralized state authorities to dictate identity in terms of official, written historiography, as explored in more helpful ways by Shryock (1997). Nevertheless, the more contextually variable, pragmatic habits of a speech community can entextualize stereotypes in ways that are coded altogether differently than they tend to be in normative language communities. Such differences are elegantly explored, for example, by Caton, 1991, pp. 214–234.

in Algeria, for example, have helped nationalize a pre-independence nostalgia for elite Chaoui-Berber authenticity, despite claims by transnational Algerian intellectuals that Classical Arabic naturally privileges historical links with Peninsular Arabs.[16]

As sociolinguists look to other currents of Western language theory to help situate language-use amidst historical discourses of moral knowledge and authority, earlier work by Prague School language formalists have offered certain insights. For Charles Ferguson as for many others, Roman Jakobson's work in the early 20th-century has been especially instructive. Jakobson's studies of language functionality both extended, and complicated, a science of linguistic interaction that has been indebted to certain strains of Western Enlightenment rationalism. On the one hand, interlocutors seek to coordinate their referential universes with the aim of sharing common understandings about communicative goals. As John Locke had once argued, language could be viewed as an abstract set of signs by which reflective beings apprehend the world (Bauman and Briggs, 2000). Jakobson also attended, however, to other less programmatic aspects of communication, as illustrated most famously in his discussion of the "poetic function" of language. The poetics of an utterance can foreground more "emotive" functions, in contrast to those transmitted through "ideation" (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). Language poetics remind us, in particular, that language is a source of self-discovery that is continuously being reinvented. By employing ambiguity to query norms of behavior, action, and feeling, poetry creates a "double-sensed message" that is expressed "in a split addresser, in a split addressee, and… in a split reference" (Jakobson, 1960, p. 371). Jakobson's colleagues in Prague, especially Jurji Tynjanov and Jan Mukarovsky, redoubled efforts to retrieve some of these fuller models of linguistic action by exploring the aesthetics of linguistic form, opening the way for further inquiry into the spatial and temporal "atmosphere" of communicative sociality as it unfolds in particular historical settings.[17] In subsequent years, disciplinary emphasis on the strictly communicative functions of language units, facilitated by select readings of Jakobson's work, overshadow the prescience of such perspectives.

As we seek to account for the salience of chronotopic "atmospheres" in daily communicative acts, I suggest that areal linguistics offer special leverage in three ways: first, by showing how nation-state rhetorics are not simply marginalized by globalization, but are re-asserted and transformed as symbolic repertoires that citizens use in encounters with a growing plurality of discourse communities; second, by investigating the ways in which dominant models of language-use are routinely qualified by indigenous modes of knowing and ethical action, including especially, in the Arab-Islamic world, poetry and law; and third, by engaging critically with the social legacies of intellectual reasoning in given areas. Before reviewing my own efforts to integrate these three fields through a study of the

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[16] Given the pre-independence advantages enjoyed by Chaoui-Berber elites in state politics and education, Classical Arabic came to be associated with their cultural purview. In many respects, according to Gafaïti, the Islamicization of Arabic as a "sacred" language over the last decade has only strengthened its regionalized class and ethnic distinctions by rendering their associations for Arabic speakers more immediate.

[17] Tynjanov's early emphasis on the particular functionality of linguistic form in unfolding contexts of usage is discussed by Titunik (1986 [1973]). Mukarovsky (1964 [1948], p. 32, 66) later delved into the chronotopic inflections of linguistic functions. An "aesthetic" aspect of language, he stated, departs from strict communicative functions and becomes functionless, having a "negative character" insofar as external objectives of communication are denied and the linguistic unit assumes a purpose in itself. Much of the epistemological force of poetry's negative character, he adds, emerges from the spatial and temporal "atmosphere" that is associated with a poem's original compositional setting.

qāᶜida, I'll consider each contribution of areal linguistics in turn, even as they mutually inform one another.

A welcome recent contribution to Arabic sociolinguistics and language formation is Yasir Suleiman's *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (2004). By adopting the broader trans-regional perspective of area studies scholars, Suleiman approaches Arabic, as well as Hebrew and English, as a symbolic practice as much as a set of referential relations in the Saussurean sense. The symbolic resourcefulness of language becomes especially pronounced, he argues further, when studied through "the socio-politics of map making" (Suleiman (2004, p. 229)). Although too often neglected in sociolinguistics, studies of territorial assertions through language offer valuable opportunities to study identity formations that include, but are not primarily subject to, mechanisms of state standardization and control. Where the spatial and temporal borders of linguistic communities are explored in talk that is ordinary as well as exceptional, private as well as public, the ethics of language receives special attention. Indeed, Suleiman focuses on two fields of ethical discourse in particular: religion, especially Islam, and poetry. Through case studies of specific nationalist movements that have engaged audiences within and beyond state borders by invoking more universal Islamic discourses as well as Arabic poetry, Suleiman sheds valuable light on the ways that "map making" occurs through linguistic symbols (e.g. place names) that are trans-regional as well as global.[18] The author's areal concentration helps revise older models of standardization and hegemonic state culture with more refined insights into the ways state rhetoric is coded symbolically by language users according to the norms of multiple discourse communities. While cuing readers to the importance of situating discourse and identity amidst a plurality of Muslim ethical practices, however, Suleiman ultimately defers analysis of the social, historical, and textual features of such practices in order to foreground modern vocabularies of national identity. In my view, area specialists are especially well qualified to explore the practical deployment of nationalist vocabularies by showing how language forms acquire social and symbolic "functions" through indigenous ways of knowing and ethical comportment. As my analysis of the *qāᶜida* suggests, Islamist reformers who seek to mobilize audiences outside the discursive purview of established state institutions can find critical leverage in vernacular Arabic, and need not uphold the standard doctrinal view (elaborated by Suleiman (2004, p. 74)) that Classical Arabic is always preferred. When grappling with the ethics of language use, Muslims have long employed an array of semiotic and interpretive resources for evaluating everyday speech in relation to transcendent ideals. The pragmatics of Arabic rhetoric are best approached through comparative studies of how Muslims in diverse language communities talk about ethical speech and verbal interaction. Along with specific case studies, we need broader theoretical frameworks that can put discussions of ethical discourse into social and historical perspective.

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[18] Suleiman provides a fascinating case-study of the poetics of Arabic and territoriality in Saudi Arabia. Insofar as an indigenous cultural and political movement holds Arabic to be under attack in an era of global language regimes, Saudis seek ostensibly counter-global, non-representational moorings to Arabic that might help forestall its perceived deterioration. Islamists who reassert their connections with the Arabian Peninsula are some of the most successful proponents of such a perspective. Crucially, Suleiman notes, Islamist language-defenders can assemble a credible ethnolinguistic variety only through a global print culture whose idioms of "authorship" and "tradition" reflect the stakes of a cultural marketplace that advantages elites. In short, the breadth of Suleiman's areal studies approach allows him to provide nuanced insights into the ways performance, discourse, and power all inform the use of even Classical Arabic in daily life.

Muslim theories of speech and rhetoric offer valuable insights into the social indexes of language because they disturb stable sign-signified relations with fuller accounts of ethical discourse. This is especially the case with Sunni Muslim reformers (*salafīs*), such as Ṭāriq al-Suwaīdān, for whom language-use is a profoundly moral enterprise. In this respect, al-Suwaīdān draws from a tradition of language philosophy developed by such figures as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a polymath intellectual, and, according to many Muslim reformers, an especially qualified moral predecessor. By foregrounding knowledge of logical reasoning (*ᶜilm al-manṭaq*) and grammar (*naḥw*), al-Suwaīdān emphasizes an Arabic science of figures (*maᶜānī*) that received much attention by such scholars as al-Ghazālī, and that has been overshadowed in much Western scholarship due to traditional interests in metaphors (*bayān*) and ornaments (*badīᶜ*) (Halldén, 2005, p. 22). As my earlier discussion of the *qāᶜida* illustrates, disciplines of reasoning and grammar are approached less as ornamental elaborations than as pragmatic precepts that link customary foundations of Arabic talk and signifying behavior with proximal modes of spatial and temporal orientation. Such "rules" are practical tools for using a language community's established norms in new spatial and temporal contexts.

A chronotopic impulse in Arabic grammatical reasoning can be explored by area-studies scholars who attend to historical links between the formal codification of Arabic and core principles of Islamic law and doctrine. By the 8th century, Arabic philology was becoming a disciplined ethical practice (Knysh, 2006, pp. 212–213). Arabic language rules were held to coordinate scriptural ideals delivered by the Prophet Muḥammad in the 7th-century AD with venerable traditions of moral inquiry on the Arabian Peninsula. Given a growing range of exegetical debates, many of them informed by a proliferation of orally transmitted traditions of the Prophet (sing. *ḥadīth*), the study of verbal figures and tropes assumed central importance not only in clarifying verses that were considered ambiguous, but also in rediscovering original correspondences of word and concept.[19] The embellished Arabic of the Qurʾān was held to be a unique resource for moral reform. So too, however, were other varieties of Arabic considered instrumental to grammatical reasoning. As early Muslim philologists worked to substantiate their understandings of divine writ, for example, they regularly sought recourse to spoken discourse from central Arabian Bedouin, including, but not restricted to, the Prophet's own tribe of Quraīsh. The influential grammarian ᶜAmr IbnᶜUthmān al-Sībawayhi held, in fact, that the diction of certain Arabian tribes was preferable to that of the Qurʾān (Kermani, 2004, p. 213). Collections of poetry from indigenous Arab tribes were also revered, especially where they conveyed a grammar of sensuous experience as much as of deductive logic (Versteegh, 1983, p. 149). The Arabic variety that became most valued in subsequent centuries of Islamic law and exegesis, then, was not solely "classical." As an ethical medium, Arabic functioned, more precisely, as a template of attunement from popular dialects and vernaculars to more refined aesthetic fixities.[20] The value of such a template is evident not only in regional dialects that provide

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[19] Noted among early scholars who emphasized the importance of poetry to understanding the Qurᶜān were Abu al-Hasan ᶜAbd al-Jabbar (d.1024/5) and ᶜAbd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d.1078). The contemporary Egyptian scholar Naṣr Abu Zaid draws from this exegetical tradition (as noted by Kermani (2004)).

[20] In developing the structural ideals of Arabic grammar, early grammarians were well aware of the influence of everyday spoken varieties of Arabic, and were concerned with a growing tendency to Qurʾānic verses in regionalized dialects (a trend known at the time as solepcism (*laḥn*).) The discipline of Arabic grammar was a moral exercise that required continuous engagement with Arabic's socialized variants.

phonic structure to such texts as the Qurʾān, popular legal manuals, linguistic treatises, and a variety of literary genres (Motski, 2006, p. 68; Allen, 1998, pp. 87–88). The importance of everyday oral diction to ethical attunement continues to be reaffirmed through widespread interest among Muslims, including many *salafīs*, in regional traditions of eloquent speech and poetry, some of them pointedly vernacular (Miller, 2007). Decentralized media technologies like audiocassettes, handwritten poems, pamphlets, and electronic chat-rooms are common sites for exploring such alternative registers of authoritative speech and authorship.

If sociolinguistics aims, in part, to provide insights into the culture of language, as it is transmitted in situated acts of ethical inquiry and social action, area studies can also offer important guidance by identifying traditions of intellectual reasoning that have informed speakers' verbal repertoires. Studies of Arabic offer a valuable counterpoint to Western paradigms of cultural "capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) precisely because rationalism, too, has long been an important discourse in the Muslim world, supplementing and at times counterpoised to millennia of Greek-influenced Western thought. In efforts to foreground the parallels and tensions of critical Enlightenment thought as it unfolded in Western and Arab traditions, many post-colonial theorists have begun with maximal contrasts between what seems most Other – these days, often Wahhabism – and what is, at least to critical theorists, most familiar, namely traditions of Western Enlightenment thought. Thus, we have Talal Asad's essay (1993b) on the alternative rational precepts of Saudi-Wahhabi cleric Shaikh El Zuʿayr, or more recently, Roxanne Euben's (1999) comparisons of the work of Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb, frequently described as one of al-Qaeda's most important intellectual founders, with the critical theory of Charles MacIntire. So, too, we have seen a range of studies of Muslim public spheres that highlight, and complicate, differences between Muslim and Western subjects, and that frequently help underscore disjunctions between Western state and religious orders and the logics of discourse in the Muslim non-West (Asad, 1993a; Hirschkind, 2006; Mitchell, 1988; Starrett, 1998). Contributions by anthropologists of the Arab world have included a commendable record, notable in area-studies initiatives, of accommodating "other" voices through first-person narratives and collaborative dialogues (as noted by Abu-Lughod (1989)).

Comparative areal linguistics offer valuable tools for refining our models of cultural variation in modern critical thought. East–West divides aside, debates over intentionality and rationalism, social authority, and ethical sensibility have always been informed by particular histories of language formation. Studies of contested language precepts can help elucidate the epistemological stakes that accompany communicative disciplines, opening inquiry into the political mobilization of textual and symbolic practice in specific locales. In the Arab world, for example, Islam has provided a venerable hermeneutics for ethical language-use, helping to channel and elaborate culture in ways are somewhat distinct from other monotheistic world religions. These hermeneutic resources have been refined, over time, through Muslims' interactions with the Qurʾān, a text – or, perhaps better, a "text-concept" – that is unique among world religions for its emphasis on the simultaneous and hierarchized co-presence of writing and orality. As suggested by Graham (1987, pp. 79–80), while the Qurʾān is, of all sacred texts, the prototypical "book of scripture" – and thus an object of greater calligraphic veneration than more oral-substantive traditions of textual spirituality, such as the Vedas or other Hindu texts – so, too, has the Qurʾān's written word always been secondary, in practice, to oral transmission and aural presence, to a far greater extent than Judaism or Christianity. The result, I suggest,

is a flexible template of co-existing ontological registers that has an extraordinary potential to reconcile localized speech acts with a sense of transcendent moral coherence. The politics of the *qāᶜida* engage these stakes, as speakers seek to contextualize their own oratory in relation to very different chronotopes of textual authority, customary precedent, exemplary reason and action. Whereas al-Suwaīdān emphasizes recourse to early jurisprudents' written "documentation" (*tawthīq*), for example, the anonymous militant and Bin Lādin evoke the territorial wherewithal of early Arab raiders who, much like modern audiocassette-using militants, can establish new bases for radical reform from the Muslim world's remote highlands.

Scholars of Muslim philosophy and history have occasionally tried to generalize the intellectual implications of these contrasting ontological binaries through a typology that differentiates "logocentrism" from rationalism (see, for example (Arkoun, 1984, pp. 194–195).) Logocentrists, on the one hand, believe that God has removed himself from human affairs, and that mankind must accordingly cling to Qurʾānic prescriptions and associated moral pathways with rigorous, even pointedly blind, adherence. When confronting moral or exegetical ambiguities, logocentrists give more emphasis to interpretive precedent and communal consensus than to direct engagement with sacred texts. Such exegetes also favor strict rules for understanding God's design, especially when codified by jurisprudents in writing and applicable to a wide variety of cases. Rationalists, by contrast, emphasize God's final unknowability, a premise that grants humans more latitude in using reason as well as sensual attunement to align everyday actions with divine orders. Familiarity with genealogies of oral traditions narrating the Prophet's words and deeds (*ḥadīth*/plural *aḥādīth*) are of a piece with such rationalism, providing a flexible and pragmatic corpus of rules that can keep the inevitable fallibilities of human reasoning in check. In practice, of course, ethical rules and their theological entailments have always been explored in relation to each other, through engagements with "the word" (*logos*), in its various traditional and creative manifestations.[21] The three speakers examined in the first section of this essay all approached the "rule" (*qāᶜida*) as a pragmatic resource – a precept for ethical reasoning and action – although none can be classified neatly as either logocentrists or rationalists. While al-Suwaīdān is an esteemed Saudi jurisprudent, he has also been enormously successful at bringing the complexities of Islamic law to a broader set of intellectual and ethical debates that engage diverse audiences. Conversely, Usāma Bin Lādin and the anonymous militant speaker draw from the conceptual frameworks of established legal scholars and jurisprudents, even as they embed legal tradition in unorthodox narratives about the ethical self-fashioning of militants engaged with tyrannous states. In all cases, as I have shown, speakers' views of the ontological origins of Arabic prove instrumental, even as their spatial and temporal models of rule-engagement differ radically from each other.

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[21] The sensitivity of Arab language ideology to the practical intertwining of "logocentric" and "rationalist" positions is reflected early Muslim language philosophy. Speech and its figures was held to invoke multiple, co-existing values of *phesis*, or natural words, and *thesis*, or created words (Versteegh, 1977). During the 8–11th centuries, a theory for the moral authority of "created" words, in particular, was developed, and this theory proved instrumental to emerging ideas about Arab civilization and its subjects (Versteegh, 1977). Such shifts in the moral and ontological coding of language, and in the value of a "civil" Arabic in particular, created new opportunities for Arabic speakers to explore the religious and moral value of humanist discourses.

As areal sociolinguists develop new approaches for studying the territorial stakes of ethnolinguistic narratives, legal anthropology is likely to offer important guidance. This is especially the case where state authorities and legal experts struggle for legitimacy using the same set of nationalist symbols and narratives, as happens frequently in the inevitably fraught terrain of "public spheres" (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996; Starrett, 1998). Studies of juridical reasoning have been especially helpful in showing how exegesis and interpretive rules are formulated in relation to discourse communities that vary from each other at regional, national, and global levels. In his work on Muslim reform in Indonesia, for example, John Bowen (1999) outlines a contrast between "transcendental" and "comprehensive" forms of legal reasoning.[22] Where transcendentalists emphasize individuals' direct engagement with the Qurʾān and oral traditions (in keeping with the vein of "rationalism" discussed above), Arabic proves instrumental, as does the expertise of a global diaspora of Muslims who have been born or trained in the Arabic-speaking heartlands (Bowen, 1999, p. 86). Those who exercise comprehensive reasoning, by contrast, foreground consensual agreement among jurists and Muslim scholars (Bowen, 1999, p. 88–89). For the latter group, narratives of an all-inclusive Indonesian identity are often foregrounded. Bowen's subtle attention to the discursive and textual habits of each community provide important cues for Arabic rule-usage: while transcendental reasoning favors a more syncretic use of Arabic alongside Indonesian and Malay vernaculars (often through popular newspaper columns), comprehensive reasoning assumes a purist stance toward Classical Arabic, and is more likely to assert comprehensive rules that should apply in all circumstances by virtue of the interpretive precedent of established Indonesian authorities (Bowen, 1999, p. 102). Sacred languages have practical local inflections, as discussed earlier. It seems to me, moreover, that Bowen's observations on the sociological entailments of different strands of legal reasoning through Classical Arabic lead us to the following hypothesis. As expanding public spheres and global reform discourses make "comprehensive" claims to Muslim authority more accessible to, and potentially contested by, diverse groups of people, debates over legality and ethical action are increasingly likely to be formulated in terms of the ethno-primordial foundations of rules for Arabic language-use and interpretation.

My own contributions in this essay aim at situating rule-use amidst a wider range of disciplines of reasoning than legal scholars tend to allow. In a recent study of the divine moral imperative (*ḥukm*), Ebrahim Moosa (1998) notes that despite many studies of the philosophy of Muslim law, few attend to the ways in which legal rules become known.[23] Unpacking the epistemology of legal rules is especially important, he argues, because law is always a pedagogic practice, designed to instruct humans on the relation of present actions to transcendent orders. Focusing on the work of Muslim jurisprudents, Moosa observes that the practical application of legal principles has long been explained through

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[22] He draws upon Frank Vogel's dissertation, later revised and published in Vogel (2000, pp. 23–28, 37–38).

[23] One notable exception is Al-Azmeh (1994)). Focusing on Muslim jurisprudents' efforts to consolidate their authority in leading Muslims toward salvation, Azmeh argues that the "science of legal theory, *usūl al-fiqh*, was one means by which the Muslim clerico-legal institution caused the world to lose its bearings in time and space and become Islamic" (Al-Azmeh, 1994, p. 191). Clerical efforts to keep rules of legal reasoning so abstract and general as to be inaccessible to local interpretive communities were routinely confounded, Azmeh notes, by more quotidian legal practices that accommodated customary exchange practices and matters of communal welfare (Al-Azmeh, 1994, pp. 191–192). Azmeh's careful attention to the epistemological presuppositions of dominant legal discourses is especially valuable for calling attention to their qualifications and contestations in practice.

creative myths and cosmological narratives that illustrate how eternal rules guide human ethical behavior (Al-Azmeh, 1994, p. 18). By using analogies between challenging ethical issues in everyday life with foundational instances of spoken words and action, jurisprudents give transcendent moral codes new relevance. I have explored the function of such analogies and cosmological narratives for a wider assortment of intellectuals and activists, including militants, who invoke origins of Arabic attunement in efforts to justify what they view to be present moral imperatives.

5. Conclusion

Arabic is a key symbolic resource in Muslim thought and collective memory. I have argued in this essay that Arabic can be considered a template of ethical attunement, though only vis-à-vis situated disciplines of belief, reason, and chronotopic narrative. My focus on the precept of the *qāᶜida* has been directed toward exploring the possibilities and challenges of elaborating such a thesis. At issue are the ethnolinguistic resources through which techniques of ethical self-fashioning, channeled by Islam toward traditions of Abrahamic faith and piety that avail an inclusive moral community, become re-configured toward supporting militant movements and acts of violence against established systems of law and order. The association of language with enduring ethnic proclivities (e.g. patterns of sociality and exchange, ways of thinking and behaving, shared physiological substances) is, of course, ethically neutral; reaffirming communal solidarity through language can be put to good ends as well as evil. My goal in this essay has been to expand our analytic vocabulary in order to account for the ways in which ethnic associations of language figure into contrasting formulas for ethical self-fashioning. In some respects, foundational Arabic "rules" promote respect for pluralism, intellectual debate, and open inquiry into source texts and their moral prescriptions. In other instances, such rules are used to fuel collective opposition to threatening global forces through indigenous claims to exceptionalism, including the exceptional use of militancy to achieve group objectives. Distinguishing between these very different tendencies toward rule-use requires situating Arabic in relation to culturally variable modes of expressive attunement.

Seeking a productive dialogue between traditions of Western sociolinguistics and Muslim theories of language and signification, I have focused on three speeches featured in Bin Lādin's former audiocassette collection. The jurisprudent Ṭāriq al-Suwaīdān employs the *qāᶜida* in the manner of moderate *salafī* reformers, deferring to the precedent of established religious authorities while encouraging his listeners to use reasoning. The two militants, by contrast, employ imaginative narratives of transnational Arab raiders, especially those who can navigate between remote mountains and hallowed metropolitan centers, to defend their own formulas for reasoned ethical action. Since 2001, when the cassettes in the collection were confiscated, the concept of al-Qaeda has acquired new associational terrains. In Iraq and other locales, the "pragmatic base" is being discussed, interpreted, and re-tailored in accordance with new contexts, as Western intelligence and media sources never hesitate to remind us. The implications of such deployments for institutions of moral authority and global security are less monolithic than they would seem. In this essay, I have suggested that we devote more attention to how narratives of "space-time" origins of the *qāᶜida* intersect with, and also diverge from each other. As diverse communities struggle to reaffirm core aspects of identity amidst processes of global integration and inequality, experiences of space-time continua are increasingly explored through nar-

ratives of discrete language varieties, though such trends have been little studied (Silver-stein, 2000). In considering the chronotopic aspects of Arabic, I have drawn attention to the legacies and contributions of area studies. If areal linguists' interests in original texts have led to a surfeit of studies of morphology, communicative functions, and diglossia, the interdisciplinary emphasis of area studies has underscored the ways Arabic is a signifying practice attuned to more diverse formations of textual authority, historical memory, and territoriality.

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