Communication and the Rise of Early Islamic Civilization (570-632)

Aliaa Ibrahim Dakroury

Abstract

The rise of early Islamic civilization suggests a position that contradicts Harold Innis' theory of the bias of communication, in which his dominant group is empowered by a monopoly of the communication resources during a given time and space. This paper argues that the communication methods used by Prophet Muhammad's alternative social force during the early seventh century were, in fact, the main tool that organized Islamic society, helped develop its ideals, and aided the expansion and formation of one of the world's great civilizations. This paper discusses and analyzes the reasons behind the Prophet's communication methods and the subsequent the rise of early Islamic civilization.

In the sixteenth century of our era, a visitor from Mars might well have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim. He would have based his judgment partly on the strategic and political advantages of the Muslims, but partly also on the vitality of their general culture. Their social and political eminence leaps to the eye.[1]

A Challenge ... A Hypothesis

Many historians are interested in the so-called "golden age of Islam," defined as the historical period of Islamic expansion throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe between the ninth and seventeenth centuries CE. As Marshall Hodgson notes above, not only did Islam disseminate its religious beliefs through-

Aliaa Ibrahim Dakroury is a lecturer in the Communication Program, School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She is the winner of the Van Horne Prize at the Canadian Communication Association annual conference (2005), London, Ontario.

out this period, but it also made significant contributions in such areas as phi-
losophy, culture, music, literature, mathematics, and architecture.

Scholars are intrigued by what was behind the rise of this civilization,
questioning how it could have expanded in less than one hundred years to
become virtually a world empire during the age of caliphs, Muhammad's
political successors. Some argue that its rise is, in fact, a result of the strug-
gle between the nomadic and sedentary people living in and around
Madinah,[2] concluding that it was merely a local process. Others, adopting a
Marxist perspective, point to the economic and commercial resources that
led to particular Arab merchants claiming political dominance over other
tribes.[3] This essay will explore this question through the lens of communi-
cation, particularly its role in the development process, using the following
question, so aptly posed by Dudley, as its guide:

> If the dominant group within an organization [i.e., a social organization
> such as a society during a certain period] derives its power from a monop-
> oly of the existing communications technology [or communication
> resources in that society], how can an alternative form of communication
> [or alternative mode of communicating ideas, such as a new religion or
> movement] within different characteristics possibly spread?[4]

In other words, I will examine whether Islam spread only by the sword,
or used other tools to organize society, help develop its ideals, and aid in the
expansion and formation of one of the world's great civilizations. I will sug-
gest that the reasons behind the rise of early Islam, in opposition to existing
social, political, economic, and cultural status-quos in the Arabian peninsula
of the early seventh century, in fact rests in what Prophet Muhammad and his
followers communicated to others, as well as the communication methods
used. Therefore, my main focus here will be a close investigation of Islam's
development during Muhammad's lifetime (570-632).

The essay will start by briefly introducing the theoretical framework to
be used, Hodgson's development theory, and focusing specifically on those
threads that can be applied to Islam's rise. Then, using parallel historical evi-
dence, I will propose a socio-historical analysis of the reasons for this rise.
Finally, I will conclude with the major characterizations of the dynamics of
the change/transition from the pre-Islamic period (*jahiliyah*[5]) to Islam.

Islam, Civilization, and Communication

Communication is a key factor in determining whether a social organization
can be considered a "civilization." Hodgson argues that a society's level of

complexity and its people's high degree of "cultural self-sufficiency" are not sufficient to make it "totally self-sufficient," for in order to achieve such total self-sufficiency, it must communicate these patterns to other societies or cultures. Therefore, the concept of an "open network," an idea similar to Samuel Huntington's proposed "clash of civilizations," must be kept in mind throughout the following discussion.

Hodgson states that "even the cultural patterns [that] so large a group have in common will show interrelations with those of yet more distant peoples."[6] It is important to understand that the term *communication* may be used in many ways, not only in establishing the new religion among converts to Islam, for example, but also in determining Islam's rivals, waging wars, engaging in negotiations, creating new forms of social organization or changing existing ones, and even ending relationships. There are, of course, many other uses, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, among other scholars, criticize Hodgson for approaching world history from a "comparative history of power" perspective when studying the history of grand civilizations in "comparison" with the West. They point out that one deficiency of his approach lies in writing a world history that "position[s] the West in the context of the world."[7] However, I feel that such criticism is misplaced, because Hodgson does offer a comprehensive account of world history concerning Islamic civilization. This is evident when he describes his approach in *Rethinking World History*:

> Yet what we really want is to face the world as it actually is, not as our Western self-esteem would like to picture it. We may study our own Europe in more detail than other areas – on appropriate separate pages of the atlas. But when we look at the world as a whole – when we look at mankind as a whole – we want our own parts of it to fall into place so that we can see ourselves in true proportion. We need an equal-area world map for any purposes for which we need a world map at all.[8]

On the other hand, others have seen his approach as endeavoring to track the efforts of Muslim intellectuals and philosophers and simply trying to "reinvent the Muslim biographical dictionaries." In addition, he has been called a pacifist because of his opposition to the "fact" that the "initial spread of Islam owed much to the sword."[9] Moreover, Edmund Burke maintains that Hodgson's interpretation of world history exposes his overarching philosophy on the interrelatedness of all human beings:

[He demonstrates his] belief in the moral unity of mankind in the modern age, and asks what meaning the Islamic religious heritage can have for modern human beings. He gives a number of answers: one is that we are all (including the West) in the same boat ... thus the study of the fate of the Islamic heritage can instruct us about our own and become part of the common patrimony of mankind.[10]

However, it seems that Hodgson's inclusion of Islamic civilization in the study of world history is not convincing enough to influence Burke, who argues in favor of a Eurocentric version of world history that situates the West at its core, thereby ignoring other histories. He attacks Hodgson:

What is Hodgson's framework of world history? A more truly adequate world history, he argues, would have to begin with the proposition that the history of human literate society must be the history of Asia and its outliers, and that Europe has no privileged role in such a story.[11]

Unlike Burke, I find Hodgson's argument to be plausible, as he challenges both Eurocentricism and particularism in writing world history. In their place, he offers a shared history of humanity, including Islamic history. He also deals with another problematic issue in world history: that of periodization. Hodgson writes that the rise of Islamic civilization was not random, but rather rose out of a regular process of interaction and performance. Moreover, he notes that one of its early ideals was dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims (e.g., Jews, Christians, and pagans), as well as between other civilizations.[12]

Hodgson divides Islamic civilization into six different periods that match the developmental phases of Islamic society, discusses each period individually, and at the same time compares them with other concurrent world historical events. The result is that, as Burke puts it, he "gets the reader to develop an eye for tracing particular strands of Islamic culture, while simultaneously keeping the civilization itself in world historical context."[13] Overall, Hodgson's approach offers an interesting perspective in the study of world history and the role of Islamic civilization within it. Burke comments:

By continually seeking to insert the story of Islamic civilization into the history of human literate society, Hodgson has broken sharply with the old paradigms and taken a major step toward a new kind of history. His use of ideal types and his careful definition of key concepts provide a refreshing change from the smug assumptions that have guided past efforts at a history of Islamic civilization.[14]

To Start ... Focus on the Space:
The Pre-Islamic Bedouin Background

I agree with Harold Innis' argument that "our knowledge of the civilizations depends in large part on the character of the media used by each civilization."[15] Thus, my questions in this section are: 1) How much do we know about the space (e.g., cultural, geographical, and social) where Islam first developed, and 2) What types of communication media were then in use?

In his analysis of a different history of civilizations, Hodgson adopts what he calls a synoptic approach to Islamic history as a part of the general history of civilizations. He suggests that Islam spread on many levels, such as the cultural, the social, and the political. However, this spread was not always constant or even, for Islam demonstrated a high degree of creativity and growth during some periods and failed to achieve it in others. Therefore, in order to understand the possible reasons for the rise of Islamic civilization, it makes sense to begin by exploring the early Islamic period in the Hijaz, just as a good start in understanding the history of Christianity would be to study the conditions that helped it rise in Palestine. As Hodgson says:

> In both cases the actual formation of the religion took place in a wider setting was at least as important as the local milieu of the founder. Islam was first established as the allegiance of a major community.[16]

Thus, keeping in mind that "The Qur'an appeared not in the atmosphere of the desert, but in that of high finance,"[17] a necessary first step in determining how Islam arose in the first place requires an investigation into pre-Islamic Arabia's social, economic, political, and religious organizations. This will be followed by an analysis of the reasons behind the Makkans' initial opposition to Islam, how this opposition was overcome, and the subsequent spread of Islam throughout Arabia that planted the seeds of the grand civilization to come.

Economic Resources

In the Bedouin life, possessing a camel is very important. It is not only the nomads' means of transportation, but also one of the main tools for surviving in the harsh desert environment where sources of water are scarce. Camels provide milk and food and, even more significantly, are the main means of trade.

Historically, the camel's hardiness and ability to thrive in the desert allowed Bedouins to travel long distances to trade. Gradually, they estab-

lished rest centers in certain locations that later became major trade centers/
cities on the long trade route between Makkah and the northern regions of
present-day Syria and the Fertile Crescent (where agriculture was practiced),
as well as between Makkah and the southern terminus of the trade route
from India and China. As a result, even though Makkah's scarce water
resources made agriculture impossible,[18] it developed into a major commer-
cial city because it was located at the crossroads of the trade routes connect-
ing Syria and Yemen, as well as Abyssinia and Iraq. Montgomery Watt says
that by the end of the sixth century, the Makkans even controlled the eastern
trade routes, the source of many of the luxury goods desired by Byzantium
and other western powers.

However, despite being traders, caravan organizers, and entrepreneurs,
the Makkans depended on other societies for many of their needs. R. Bodley
explains that the arrival and departure of these caravans were important
events, since each Makkan had his own investment on the back of these
camels, varying from oils, perfumes, and manufactured goods from the
north (Syria, Egypt, and Persia), to spices and gold from the south.[19] In addi-
tion, for the nomads living around Makkah, these settled communities[20] were
extremely important sources of those essential items that they could not pro-
duce, such as clothes, weapons, grains, and metal products.[21]

Political Resources

The Makkans' political power was based on their economic power. As Watt
writes, the caravans came into contact with the major powers in those areas
frequented by their caravans: Byzantium, Persia, and Abyssinia. In the
northern Arabian Peninsula, such settled tribes as the Ghassanids had estab-
lished a strong connection and alliances with the Byzantium, thus protecting
its eastern gate from invasion. These tribes were originally Jews; however,
their ongoing contact with Byzantium eventually led to their conversion to
Christianity.

Moreover, the Quraysh, one of Makkah's most influential tribes and the
one into which Muhammad was born, gained a sufficient level of prestige
and nobility among the other clans to eventually assume control over their
political and military forces. Over time, the Quraysh became strong enough
to protect its caravans and clients, acquired many slaves to serve them as
fighters and soldiers, and formed many of the other clans into a confedera-
tion against outsiders. Finally, they secured a monopoly over the desert trade
routes through having the best guides, escorts, and camel drivers.[22]

Moral and Religious Resources

The existence of the *haram*[23] (the Ka`bah) also contributed to the Quraysh's reputation, because since it was located in their territory they were responsible for serving its visitors. The *haram* was a significant area of communication, as it was neutral territory in which all fighting, arguing, and killing was forbidden. Therefore, representatives of the various tribes used this area to conduct negotiations. Moreover, it

> … frequently thrived as a market town, both because merchants and artisans could rely on the security it provided them, and because tribesmen could go there to market without fear of encountering trouble . . . [briefly, it is] the only important market center in an entire region.[24]

As D. Margoliouth argues, these religious sites were closely intertwined with the Quraysh's economic interests. Having these popular monuments in one's territory was considered as possessing a source of fixed income, for its visitors had to pay taxes to the *haram's* staff. In addition, this particular *haram* had a nearby marketplace in which visitors could find such professionals as carpenters, sword-makers, money lenders, and wine merchants to meet their other needs. Finally, Margoliouth notes that if a Bedouin wanted to have his own idol, it was customary to go to Makkah to buy it.[25]

Cultural Resources

One important fact should be kept in mind here: Oral culture was one of the important resources for Arabian nomadic life. As Donner states:

> The nomads evolved only such a higher culture [as displaying little stratification of wealth or specialization of function from person to person] as they could carry easily with them – in particular the orally transmitted arts of singing, storytelling, genealogy, and poetry, all of which they developed to a very refined level, and in which they took great pride.[26]

Interestingly, one important communicative practice during that time, which continued to be practiced even after Islamic civilization's golden age began to decline, was poetry. Of equal importance were those places where the nomads engaged in such practices. Margoliouth says that all Arabs regularly assembled in circles at dusk for the *samar* (the night conversation), and that women held "salons in the court of their houses."[27] D. Dunlop adds that we might consider the organization of poetry in these *samars* as a social institution:

> We can be fairly certain that the age-old custom, amounting almost to an institution, of the *samar*, or night-conversation, in the tents of the desert, and similar meetings in the towns, gave rise to story-telling about the deeds of past and present chiefs in fight or foray, or in times of peace. The most interesting of these prose tales would be remembered and repeated.[28]

This constant communication among cities engendered by the trade caravans might justify Muhammad S. Mohamed's statement that "the spread of the poems during this time was as fast and effective as the wind crossing the Arabian desert."[29]

In summary, the available economic resources during the pre-Islamic period show the society's degree of complexity and, more importantly, gives us an idea of how a possible oppositional force representing a new religion, a new power, and a change in the established norms could be perceived as threatening to these social, political, economic, and religious norms and structures.

Communication Resources

Finally, it is important to consider one resource that combined most of the resources that allowed the pre-Islamic Makkans to assert their power: their communicative capacity. The Makkans were able to organize more than one communicative event in their area, for example, the Ukaz fair. Margoliouth describes how this annual event became an efficient means of communication, noting that it

> ... served a purpose similar to that for which the great games of Greece were utilised. Matters which were thought to concern the whole Arabian family could be communicated there, and opportunities were given for the gratification of other than warlike ambitions. Regarded as the home of the Arabian family, Ukaz was a place where women could be wooed.[30]

The question posed here would be what changes did Muhammad's message – Islam – bring to Makkah?

Phases of Change: Communication and the Rise of Islam

Studying the phases of change that led to Islam's rise contradicts Innis' argument that the "escape from these monopolies came from the fringes."[31]

Rather, I argue that this escape came from the core, from Makkah, which is a very interesting place in which to identify the dynamics of these phases.

Muhammad was born around 570 into the Bani Hashim clan, one of the Quraysh tribe's wealthy families. Of course, this clan had its own commercial share in the semi-annual trading journeys[32] to the north and the south. At a young age, he became an orphan and entered his uncle's house, where he was raised as one of this clan leader's own children. He accompanied many of these caravan trips and gradually became known for his honesty and truthfulness in trading – characteristics that were not often found among the principles of pre-Islamic merchants.

The revelation of the Qur'an began in 610, when he was told to inform his people that they should worship only the One God (Allah) and abandon their traditional pagan life. Starting with this point in time, I will differentiate between four main phases of disseminating this message to illustrate the change that it wrought in the aforementioned pre-Islamic social structure.

Recruiting the First Followers

In his *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark offers a sociological explanation for Christianity's rise and proposes a general outline of the apparent developmental dissemination of a new religion. One of his interesting explanations is why people tend to convert/deviate, thereby breaking the established norms, or to conform to either a religion or an idea. He argues that they usually find more benefits in converting, a concept that he calls "stakes in conformity," and notes that individuals' stakes vary. Stark adds that this can be seen in many religions, among them Islam:

> Conversion to new, deviant religious groups occurs when, other things being equal, people have or develop stronger attachments to members of the group than they have to nonmembers.[33]

Establishing a new group (i.e., starting to organize a group of random members) is a significant moment in the growth of any new movement or religion. In the case of Islam, Muhammad preached secretly for three years, during which he carefully recruited his followers. I agree with Stark and other historians that Muhammad's first followers were his close friends and relatives, just as in the case of Jesus, who started with his mother and brothers.[34] Secrecy was crucial at this stage. His first convert was his wife, Khadijah.[35] Stressing the importance of her role in Muhammad's life, Watt says that "certainly she seems to have played an important role at critical

junctures of his life in encouraging him to proceed on his way as a prophet."[36] Khadijah's cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was born a pagan but then converted to Judaism and then to Christianity, was his second convert: "The first translation into Arabic of the Old and New Testaments is attributed to Waraka."[37] Other friends and relatives joined his secret group, among them his cousin `Ali, his best friend Abu Bakr, his servant Zayd, and his uncle Hamzah, among others.

One should also mention briefly these converts' socioeconomic status. Stark argues that they were mainly "young men of considerable privilege."[38] Tor Andrae agrees with him, although adding that they were also from the "common people."[39] But Watt argues against this claim, stating that the basic characteristics of the early converts can be divided into three main classes: "1) *younger sons of the best families*, ... 2) *men, mostly young, from other families*, ... [and] 3) *men without close ties to any clan*."[40] Here, I might add that after reviewing some historical names and their backgrounds, I can refute some of these claims and point out that, in reality, these early converts represented a variety of ages, social, economic, and political ranges: `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Awf was forty, Sa`d ibn Abi Waqqas was seventeen, and `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt was twenty-eight. Finally, Stark refutes some of the sociologists' claims that "all religious movements are the work of the 'lower strata.'"[41] Applying this rule to early Islam, Donner agrees that Muhammad's "followers were mostly poor or socially undistinguished individuals."[42] However, Watt opposes this on the grounds that Abu Bakr was clearly a very wealthy man, as his fortune was about "40 thousand dirhams when he became Muslim."[43]

By the end of this phase, the secret group was exposed to Muhammad's personal teaching (inter-personal communication). One important fact here is that the traditional paganism was not abandoned during this phase,[44] an action that Hodgson calls "a regional balance of power." One of Muhammad's basic goals was to establish a peaceful balance among Makkah's pagan, Jewish, and Christian inhabitants. This phase's developmental dynamic is seen through Muhammad's desire to confirm and correct the monotheistic traditions.[45] However, as we shall see, this was not the case during the second phase.

Commitment to the New Means Quitting the Old

Stark identifies the second step as the need to be deeply committed to a particular faith, which can be realized only by abandoning the old one:

New religious movements mainly draw their converts from the ranks of the religiously inactive and discontented, and those affiliated with the most accommodated (worldly) religious communities.[46]

Thus, this phase might also be called the oppositional stage of Islam's spread, for it marks the beginning of the clash between the principles, ideals, and preaching of the opposing groups. After three years of secret preaching, Muhammad established the prerequisites of his group's order, which Hodgson interprets as:

> There could be no intermediaries, no half-gods. And if people genuinely made the fundamental moral choice of turning to God for His guidance, they should not turn back to the petty cults which were there to serve only their lusts.[47]

If we recall Innis' argument how escaping from the monopolies comes from the peripheries and not the core, then the following four major characteristics of Islam clearly refute his argument.

PUBLIC PREACHING. By publicly opposing his people's traditional paganism and asserting his own new religious group, Muhammad created opposition and resistance on two fronts: his method of communal organization and his opposition to his own tribe (the Quraysh) and its monopolies over resources and knowledge. However, we should note that the Makkans, even the Quraysh, largely agreed that Muhammad was an honest and truthful man. Although this reputation raised his credibility and prestige among the new converts and sympathizers, it did not save him from the Quraysh's allegations that he was a magician, crazy, and a great poet who had somehow invented the Qur'an and then claimed that it was a holy scripture.

A DEMAND FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. As previously discussed, the basic characteristics of the pre-Islamic mode of organization emphasized extreme individuality and fostered the blood-relationship as the only principle of social organization. By opposing this traditional mode, Muhammad introduced new and opposing practices and concepts: the need for brotherhood and sisterhood among converts and the existence of certain reciprocal rights and duties among them. These ideas of equality and rights were not acceptable to pagan Makkah's traditional social structure. And, although this created more clashes between the opposing groups, during this phase "the Qur'an makes no attempt to restore the old order."[48]

A STRONG ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION. Another refutation of Innis' claim can be seen in the Makkans' rejection of the new religion.

Indeed, they directed a great deal of hostility toward Muhammad and his followers, who were perceived as threatening Makkah's economic, and therefore its political, monopoly over the available local resources. Adopting Islam meant abandoning their traditional pagan life along with the ensuing decline of their pilgrim-derived income. Moreover, their political prestige among the other tribes would also suffer, for they would no longer carry out the duties associated with their *haram*.

Oppositional forces establish both rivalries and alliances. The Quraysh started to communicate with other tribes and formed a confederation to boycott Muhammad, his followers, and his family and allies. Given their power, dominant opinions, and leadership, it was inevitable that the Quraysh would succeed in this undertaking.

ETHICAL AND MORAL CLASHES. At first glance, it might appear that this opposition was simply the result of the Quraysh's attempt to protect their traditional pagan lifestyle. However, I argue that Islam's opposition to tradition was only one obvious factor. A more significant and underlying one was the economic, moral, ethical, and political implications of what would happen if Muhammad's new religion began to get the upper hand in this struggle.

Also during this stage, many Qur'anic verses attacked the social and moral practices associated with the Makkans' economics and trade: Muhammad forbade usury, criticized individual wealth and the extreme income of some merchants, and emphasized the wide gap between its poor and rich inhabitants. To the Makkans, one's prestige was based upon one's wealth, for the rich people could buy many poets to praise them in public and voice their nobility.[49] As time went on, even more criticisms were heaped upon the Quraysh, such as its established norms in marriage and slave-owning.

Thus, it is easy to identify how the second stage of Islam's rise changes in relation to the first. As Hodgson states:

> For a time, Muhammad may have preached the new cult without insisting on the overthrow of any of the old cults; once he even tried to find a place for a cult of the greater, Makkan goddesses as intermediaries, subordinate to that of Allah; yet, before long, insistence on the exclusive cult of God alone became the central dogma of Islam.[50]

Enhancement and Emphasis on Theology

Despite Stark's argument that "when people retrospectively describe their conversions, they tend to put the stress on theology,"[51] here, although I do not deny its effectiveness at least from a communicative perspective, I refrain from arguing in favor of the political effectiveness of the Qur'an's

supernatural revelation and the subsequent miraculous effects on Muhammad's followers. What is more important to our discussion here is analyzing how these supernatural incidents affected the Muslims and the pagans who converted after witnessing them. One significant event is the *isra'* and *mi`raj* (Muhammad's ascension to heaven), which coincided with the Qurayshi boycott of his family, clan, followers, and allies, as well as the migration of some Muslims to Abyssinia between 616 and 619. Hence, the main theme of this phase could be described as:

> The essential step in joining the Muslim community came to be the abandonment of idolatry (*shirk*, literally association of something else with God); that is, any cult of beings other than the Creator-god.[52]

A timely question to pose here is how Islam continued to expand despite the challenges mentioned above. This will be discussed in the following part of this essay.

Expansion and Widening the Network

This last phase needs a more in-depth explanation, because it manifests how the previous three phases culminated in the strong wave that has lasted until the present day. What we must consider closely in the following illustration is how Muhammad established various relationships through conversion and new followers, as well as how he was able to turn enemies into friends, create new norms among Muslims, conquer other clans, deal with enemies or opposition, and establish new relationships through diplomacy.

Generally, it can be argued that Muhammad established his powerful network around 620 and then kept it open. It is worth quoting Stark's description of the basis of a successful – and controversial – movement's expansion:

> [The basis] is growth through social networks, through a *structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments*. Most new religious movements fail because they quickly become closed, or semiclosed networks. That is, they fail to keep forming and sustaining attachments to outsiders and thereby lose the capacity to grow. Successful movements discover techniques for remaining open networks, able to reach out and into new adjacent social networks. And herein lies the capacity of movements to sustain exponential rates of growth over a long period of time.[53]

The developmental dynamics of Muhammad's network are as follows:

MIGRATION. The first dynamic that helped developed Islam in this stage was the strategic migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madinah. This event

was not confined to the converts' desire to avoid persecution; rather, as Hodgson maintains, it was done to establish a new social order: "It was an opportunity to build a new order of social life such as the development of his faith had more and more obviously demanded."[54]

By migrating, Muhammad created a new form of social organization that differed totally from that of pre-Islamic society. Muhammad created an ummah: "… the word that Muhammad used for the new grouping, based on ... individual acceptance of the faith which Muhammad preached."[55] He successfully joined nomadic converts to his community's open network. For example, he finally settled the tensions between Madinah's two major clans, the Aws and the Khazraj, and thus created new relationships.

His second concern was overcoming Madinah's forces of opposition, in particular the Jewish clans that monopolized commercial ties, as they were good financiers and dealers who had a very strong connection with the Quraysh. Muhammad created his new community by convincing these Jewish clans to sign the Madinah Covenant, which stated that Muslims, Jews, and Christian would cooperate with each other so that they could all live together in peace. In other words, he was altering relationships. Abd-al-Rahman Azzam describes this covenant as:

> … one of the most valuable international agreements ... casting light on the fundamentals governing relationships between themselves and members of different religious communities. With this covenant, the Muslims became a nation and the Islamic state was born.[56]

POWER. After the migration, Muhammad and his followers started to break the Quraysh's monopoly on the region's economic resources. Taking advantage of Madinah's location on the trade route to Syria, Muslims started to assert their power by attacking Makkan caravans. Watt describes what the Quraysh had to lose: "These caravans were large and they were composed sometimes of 2,500 camels loaded with different goods."[57] It is interesting to note here how Muhammad used certain tools of communication to instruct his followers on how to attack these caravans. Margoliouth says that "how news travels in the East is to this day a wonder."[58] He mentions three methods: carrier pigeons to carry messages, certain types of signaling (secret codes) to ensure that the messages remained secret, and placing scouts and spies along the road so that the Muslims would know when the caravans were approaching the ambush area.

THE GROWTH OF POWER AND REPUTATION. One of Muhammad's political policies was to expand Muslim power northward so that he could widen

his network and control the Quraysh's access to important resources. As for his policy toward the south, he made diplomatic overtures to its clans soon after the conquest of Makkah. Then, he sent three expeditions to expand Muslim power through military actions. This latter policy was successful.

Now that we have analyzed these phases of Islam's expansion in the early seventh century, we turn to the role of communication by means of a socio-historical analysis of Islam's rise in the pre- and post-Islamic periods.

Islam's Developmental Characteristics after 620-632

This period is characterized by three elements: the high degree of centralized authority, the establishment of legal institutions, and the establishment of an administrative organization.

The High Degree of Centralized Authority

During the pre-Islamic period, authority was not precisely identified. For example, a clan with enough power could overrule or override other clans. But for Muslims, the central authority was clearly identified by and in Muhammad, who was Madinah's dominant political chief. In other words, he replaced the old tribal form of arbitrary power with a more interconnected network of relationships, a "cohesiveness that resulted both from a new ideology and from the gradual rise of new institutional and organizational arrangements. It grew, in short, into a true state."[59]

Hodgson suggests that this characteristic could be regarded as the seeds of a civilization, as opposed to Toynbee's assertion that civilization is based only on "an inner cultural development."[60] Instead, Hodgson sees civilization more as a compound of several cultures: "a relatively extensive grouping of interrelated cultures insofar as they have shared in cumulative traditions in the form of high culture on the urban, literate level."[61] To show this in the context of the subject at hand, Hodgson, as interpreted by Burke, defines the basis for an Islamic civilization as shared ideals and their communication:

> It is the presence of Islamic ideals ... that marks off Islamic civilization from those that preceded it. These ideals provide the central standards of legitimation of the society. The dialogue of successive generations of Muslims with these ideals, that is, with the Qur'anic message as revealed to Muhammad, constitutes (in a sense constructs) the civilization of Islam.[62]

More clarification is perhaps needed, however, for the concept of ummah (community) as a cornerstone of the organizational criteria in the new Islamic

open network. The term *ummah* is used to denote grouping, unification, and mutuality as opposed to the pre-Islamic organization's extreme individualism. Muhammad wanted his followers to think, act, and communicate with each other. The central authority was now the ummah, and Muhammad was its representative, followed by his advisors (viz., caliphs and commanders). The ummah did not include only Muslims, but also Jews, Christian, and even pagans, for it supported the idea of peaceful coexistence:

> It was a covenant between Islamic peoples and Jews and even pagans, for in Yathrib [Madinah] at that time dwelt many idol worshipers who joined the Pact and thereby became another link in the chain.[63]

The Establishment of Legal Institutions

After establishing the Muslim state, the Muslims agreed that absolute legal power was in God's hands: "Islam stresses not only God's omnipotence and omniscience, but also His function as the ultimate lawgiver and judge of all human action."[64] I give below one example of the changes in legal formulations related to social relations after 622: women's rights.

In her study of women's rights during the early rise of Islam, Nabia Abbott argues that "Muhammad strove successfully for the improvement of the economic and legal status of all Moslem women."[65] She adds that a Muslim woman enjoyed more freedom and independence than did a pagan woman. In terms of religion, she could accept or reject the faith that others (i.e., her father, husband, or brothers) were trying to impose on her. She was given many rights related to acquiring an education, even a religious education. For example, Muhammad allowed female Muslims to serve as imams.[66] Moreover, they were key players in the military, where they served in various medical roles during military expeditions. In fact, some historical documents show that women fought side by side as veterans in major Muslim battles, such as the Battle of Uhud (625). Abbott says that Umm Umara, fought along with her husband in that battle: "The evidence so far would seem to indicate that Muhammad recognized the women as free and participating citizens of the new and militant state."[67]

Here, we can say that this new legal institution was one of the most important changes from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic mode of organization.

The Establishment of an Administrative Organization

Given that the new Islamic state was established in a place with no significant natural resources, Muhammad needed to control other agricultural

resources, especially in the market centers upon which the nomads, particularly the Quraysh, depended, Khaybar (conquered in 628), Makkah (conquered in 630), and Ta'if (conquered in 630). Indeed, Donner says that the year 630 was called the "year of delegations" because after seeing the powerful coalition that presented itself during the Hunayn expedition,[68] many northern and southern tribes sought an alliance with Muhammad.[69]

After incorporating these cities into the new state, a powerful administration was needed to conduct their affairs according to Muhammad's teachings. He established a system of taxation and, concurrently, created an administrative network to supervise it and to teach Islamic principles. Thus, he created a centralized regime to collect zakat (taxation tribute) made up of agents who worked in both the central cities and on the peripheries. It is important to mention here that Muhammad, now the region's undisputed leader, wisely gave important posts to those Qurayshis who converted to Islam, thereby capitalizing on their reputations among the other tribes. Accordingly, it is not strange to find Watt describing Muhammad as a "social reformer" in terms of morality and of many other aspects of Muslim life.[70]

Conclusion: A Sudden or a Developmental Change?

In conclusion, we have seen that communication was a prime reason for Islam's successful rise in its early years, both through what was communicated as well as the means by which it was communicated. In short, the factors that strengthened Islam in its early years were its ability to change existing norms that contradicted Muhammad's teachings and its ability to restore and maintain the positive norms that distinguished the Arab tribes from other groups. These goals were realized because of the communication methods used by Muhammad and his early followers.

Finally, I agree with Huntington's criticism of modernization theory, which claims that the rise of modernity in a given society is closely related to moving away from tradition and its norms or forms:

> Modern practices, belief, institutions are simply added to traditional ones. It is false to believe that tradition and modernity "are mutually exclusive." Modern society is not simply modern; it is modern *and* traditional.[71]

One example that supports this viewpoint is that Muhammad maintained the traditional Arab tribal practice of generosity (viz., hospitality toward foreigners, newcomers, or guests). However, he altered its moral grounding by claiming that the reason for being generous to others is that all

human beings are equal and share a common human-ness, instead of the pre-Islamic claim that being generous is meant to garner prestige among other clans and thus to claim nobility, a sign of which was the extent of one's generosity: "The Qur'an does not attack; rather it criticizes the Makkans because they do not live up to it."[72]

Moreover, Muhammad maintained the tradition of poetry and literature, but altered it so that it could fit into the new form of organization. Arabs usually appreciated poetry and held this form of communication in high esteem, even to the point of hanging famous poems or odes on the Ka`bah's walls. These were known as the "suspended poems" (*al-Mu`allaqat*) or the "golden poems" (*al-Mudhahabat*) because the Arabs wrote them in gold letters on Egyptian papyrus.[73]

Poetry continued to be composed after Islam's rise. In fact, Muhammad himself used it as a tool during his conflict with the Quraysh. Hassan ibn Thabit was a very respectable poet who, after his conversion, was entrusted with responding to the Qurayshi allegations and criticism against Muhammad and Islam. Donner says that "Muhammad's poet, Hassan b. Thabit, consistently heaped scorn on Muhammad's enemies not only for their stiff-necked opposition to God's will, but also for their failure to live up to traditional virtues."[74]

At the same time, and in accordance with Huntington's argument, Islam continued to use the same tool of communication but rejected its *jahiliyah* mode: emphasizing the tribal personality (e.g., their love of women and slavery, as well as their fondness for wine, gambling, and drunkenness).

Many have seen the rise of Islam, although studied here only during Muhammad's lifetime, as a sudden change or conversion to the new mode of beliefs. However, as can be seen in the previous discussion, this change was not sudden, but rather the culmination of a developmental movement. Moreover, it can also be argued that this change was not causal, because applying the same conditions to another set of circumstances will result in a different outcome. To a great extent, this highlights the dynamic evolution and process that characterized Islam's rise. Thus, we can conclude that communication was a key factor in the rise of early Islam and that more research should be undertaken to uncover its role in history.

Endnotes

1.   Marshall Hodgson, "The Role of Islam in World History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 2, (1970): 99.

2. Madinah means "city." Muhammad migrated from Makkah to Yathrib, which he renamed Madinah after establishing the first Islamic state there in 622.
3. Anatoly Khazanov, "Muhammad and Jenghiz Khan Compared: The Religious Factor in World Empire Building," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 3 (1993): 461-65.
4. Leonard Dudley, "Space, Time, Number: Harold A. Innis as Evolutionary Theorist," *The Canadian Journal of Economics* 28, no. 4a (1995): 757.
5. Muslims use this term to describe the pre-Islamic period. The English translation means the state of non-knowledge, of darkness in mind and thought.
6. In other words, communication plays an important role not only as a tool of interaction between a given civilization and its peoples, but also as a cornerstone in its construction and existence, influence, and location in world history. Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81.
7. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (1995): 1038.
8. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, 5.
9. Edmund Burke III, "Islamic History as World History: Marshall Hodgson 'The Venture of Islam,'" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 2 (1979): 245.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 248.
12. Muhammad Sayed Muhammad, in his analysis of the prophetic traditions (hadiths), points to one in which Muhammad asks all Muslims to seek knowledge even if it is in China, as an indication that one Islamic ideal is interaction between other civilizations and cultures. This also shows that Muhammad knew about China and its contribution to knowledge. Muhammad Said Muhammad, *Mass Media Responsibility in Islam* (Cairo: El Khanki Library, 1983). (Originally in Arabic: *Al-Mas'uliyah al-A`lamiyah fi al-Islam*).
13. Burke, *Islamic History as World History*, 258.
14. Ibid., 263.
15. Harold Innis, "The Bias of Communication," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 15, no. 4 (1949): 457.
16. Hodgson, *The Role of Islam in World History*, 105.
17. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 3.
18. Ibid., 2.
19. R. V. C. Bodley, *The Messenger: The Life of Muhammad* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 31-32.
20. We should notice here the importance of distinguishing between the Bedouin or nomadic status of the Makkans before Islam, as opposed to their status as a settled community after Islam. Indeed, Muhammad was trying to establish a "settled community" in these early years of the Islamic era.
21. Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 26.

22. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah,* 7-10.
23. *Ḥaram* refers to the Ka`bah, to which Muslims direct their prayers and make pilgrimage. Traditionally, Muslims considered Adam as its original builder. This task was then carried on by his descendants down to Abraham and Isma'il. In the pre-Islamic period, pagans usually put their objects of veneration (e.g., a tree, a stone, or an idol) around the *haram* so anyone who wanted to could visit it during the pilgrimage season.
24. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 34-35.
25. D. S. Margoliouth, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1905), 10-13.
26. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 17.
27. Margoliouth, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam*, 83.
28. D. M. Dunlop, *Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500* (London: Longman, 1971), 37.
29. Muhammad, *Mass Media Responsibility in Islam*, 98.
30. Margoliouth, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam*, 6.
31. Innis "The Bias of Communication," 461.
32. Some Qur'anic verses refer to these trips as "the journeys of winter and summer" (106: 1-4).
33. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18.
34. Ibid., 17-18.
35. Khadijah was a prosperous Qurayshi widow merchant who married Muhammad when she was in her forties. She hired Muhammad as her agent after learning of his honesty and truthfulness. Bodley adds that her business methods were modern, that she lent money to other merchants, and that she was a joint partner in many commercial transactions. Bodley, *The Messenger*, 41.
36. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah*, 39.
37. Bodley, *The Messenger*, 50.
38. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 45.
39. Tor Andrae, *Muhammad: The Man and His Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks/The Cloister Library, 1960), 116.
40. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah*, 95.
41. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 29.
42. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 53.
43. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah*, 89.
44. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 166.
45. Hodgson, *The Role of Islam in World History*, 105-06.
46. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 19. Italics in the original.
47. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 166.
48. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah*, 48.
49. Ibid., 75-76.

50. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 166.
51. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 19.
52. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 166.
53. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 20. Italics in the original.
54. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 172.
55. Ibid., 173.
56. Abd-al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* (London: Quartet Books, 1979), 128.
57. Watt, *Muhammad at Madinah*, 2.
58. Margoliouth, *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam,* 252.
59. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 54.
60. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History*, 83.
61. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 91.
62. Burke, *Islamic History as World History*, 245.
63. Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, 129.
64. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 55.
65. Nabia Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1, no. 1 (1942): 107.
66. Ibid., 106-07.
67. Ibid., 119.
68. The Hunayn expedition was a major battle, for after defeating the Quraysh there, Muhammad and his followers (especially the Makkan migrants) were able to return to their home city.
69. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests,* 63-64.
70. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 234.
71. Samuel Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics," *Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (1971): 295.
72. Watt, *Muhammad at Makkah*, 82.
73. Muhammad, *Mass Media Responsibility in Islam*, 98-105.
74. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 64.