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Introduction

IN 1962, Maryam Jameelah (1934–2012), formerly Margaret Marcus, left New York City for Lahore, Pakistan, at the invitation of the prominent Muslim political and religious leader Abul A'la Mawdudi. In the decades that followed, Jameelah eschewed her American Jewish upbringing to become a leading voice of the global Islamic Revival.

Three portraits of Jameelah capture her unlikely trajectory from a middle-class Jewish child in suburban New York to a global Muslim intellectual (figs. 0.1, 0.2, and 0.3). The first is Jameelah's self-portrait, drawn in pastels in 1944, when she was ten years old. The bright, cheery colors and the half-smile on her face portray the optimism of postwar middle-class Jewish life in the United States—a vision that Jameelah would come to reject, but never quite leave behind.

The second is a photograph taken of Jameelah in 1962, soon after her conversion to Islam and around the time of her emigration to Pakistan. Her hair is loosely covered in a white headscarf; she smiles directly at the camera as she sets off on a completely uncharted path. Though she would never return to the United States, she actively capitalized on both her insider knowledge of being American and her reputation as such.

The third image, taken on the streets of Lahore in the 1960s, is Jameelah as she wished to be seen by her readers—the embodiment of pure Muslim femininity. While the photographer and

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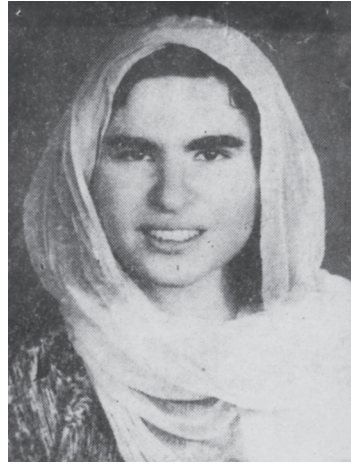


FIGURE 0.1. Maryam Jameelah, *I Am in My Room Making a Model Airplane*, 1944. Pastel drawing. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



FIGURE 0.2. Photograph of Maryam Jameelah, 1962. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

FIGURE 0.3. Photograph of Maryam Jameelah, 1965. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

original purpose of the image is unknown, it served an important function in Jameelah's career, appearing at the beginning of her books, articles, and pamphlets, signaling to the reader that *this* female author lived out the prescriptions for modesty and piety that she demanded of all Muslim women.

The circumstances that undergirded her dramatic transformation are fascinating. In 1960, before converting to Islam, Jameelah published her first article in the South African magazine *Muslim Digest*. Soon after, she wrote to Mawdudi (1903–79), the enormously influential Islamist Pakistani leader. Mawdudi led the Jamaat-i-Islami movement, a political and religious organization founded in 1941 that was dedicated to the Islamization of society and the creation of an Islamic state. After a substantial exchange of letters, and at Mawdudi's encouragement, Jameelah formally converted at the Islamic Mission in Brooklyn, NY. In 1962, Mawdudi invited Jameelah to relocate to Pakistan and start a new life. With her parents' support, she departed New York harbor for Lahore, arriving in July 1962 with her Smith Corona typewriter and a suitcase of clothes. In 1963, she married Muhammad Yusuf Khan, a Jamaat-i-Islami worker who also became her publisher. She was Khan's second wife, and together they had five children. After she moved to Pakistan, Jameelah began publishing books and pamphlets through Jamaat-i-Islami imprints, which gave her work much wider distribution in Pakistan, the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States, and Canada.

As is the case with many female intellectuals and religious figures, Jameelah's biography and publications have received limited scholarly attention. Yet her oeuvre is significant for understanding the role of affect in creating, solidifying, and sometimes subverting religious and political boundaries during the Cold War. Her work was translated into Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Turkish, and was reprinted and published widely, especially among Muslim communities in Anglo-American contexts like the US, UK, and South Africa. Jameelah's more than twenty books and pamphlets gained prominence due to their unrelenting critiques of modernity and arguments for the superiority and distinctiveness of Islam in opposition to "the West." Jameelah became a prominent author in the global Islamic Revival—the multifaceted, diffuse twentieth-century movement aimed at reinvigorating individual Muslim piety and enhancing the public presence of religion in politics, culture, and

education. She was instrumental in the revivalist project to restore Islam as the center of contemporary politics and culture. Jameelah has been described as one of Mawdudi's "most important disciples," and she was one of few female Muslim writers to make a name for herself on a global scale in the mid-twentieth century.¹

This book explores the role of affect, especially negative emotions, in cultivating transnational religious imagination. Jameelah harnessed negative affects—shame, disgust, anxiety—not only to critique what she saw as the catastrophes wrought by Western modernity, but also to generate a global Muslim solidarity that could be mobilized toward a reinvigorated Islamic future. The transnational appeal of Jameelah's work came from her ability to rouse collective emotions that resonated across geographic boundaries and established universalistic aspirations of the *umma*, or global Muslim community, that could serve as a third way between Western capitalism and Soviet communism. Women and gender norms became the key affective flashpoints through which she sought to bridge differences among Muslims with a variety of loyalties. Jameelah's corpus is thus critical to understanding how gender and affect are at the center of contemporary religious politics.

Threads of Revivalism

This book demonstrates that Jameelah came to revivalism, and many of her non-liberal views, through a distinctly American Jewish set of concerns about rising materialism and assimilation. What she feared above all else was her community's abandonment of religious distinctiveness to the crushing power of modernity. This trepidation animated her lifelong project of convincing other Muslims to feel that same fear and to respond by committing to preserving that distinctiveness.

Jameelah's rise and impact can only be understood by examining the intersecting histories of postwar America and global Islamic revivalism. In fact, I first discovered Jameelah's writing

through research I was conducting on the Muslim Students Association (MSA). In the 1960s and '70s, the MSA reprinted many of Jameelah's articles and helped to disseminate her ideas back to the country of her birth. I was intrigued by the global circulation of Jameelah's ideas and what her transnational trajectory could teach us about the crossing of religious and cultural boundaries. Her Jewish inheritances and chosen Muslim identity inextricably informed one another, resulting in a female religious figure who made use of racial and religious alterity to advance her transnational project of Muslim unity.

Jameelah's early religious outlook was shaped by, and forged in reaction to, a religious revival that expanded the institutional scale and congregational dimensions of American Judaism.² Her oppositional stances toward Western capitalism and cultural imperialism developed out of disenchantment with her affluent, Reform Jewish background, and later grew during a period of spiritual seeking in the late 1950s, which included stints with the Baha'i and the Ethical Culture movement. Although Jameelah was an affluent, educated woman in postwar America, she refused to submit to the expectation that she would marry young and pursue a life of caregiving and other domestic responsibilities.

Beginning with her earliest reflections on her childhood, and continuing through her later corpus, Jameelah argued that most American Jews had abandoned their faith's essential truths in favor of material comforts. An affect of loss, anguish, and anxiety, combined with an intense conviction that religious solidarity was the only antidote to the ills of modernity, permeated Jameelah's assessments of both American Jewish communities and Muslim-majority societies. "Why I Embraced Islam," the opening essay of her 1965 collection *Islam and Modernism*, illustrates this persistent thread in her work: "My parents' philosophy was that one must avoid contemplating the thought of death . . . the purpose of life is enjoyment and pleasure achieved through self-expression of one's talents, the love of family, the congenial company of friends, combined with the comfortable living and indulgence in the variety of

amusements that affluent America makes available in such abundance.”³ In describing her childhood, Jameelah lamented that the High Holy Days were mere occasions for socializing rather than solemn rituals of sacrifice and remembrance. She argued that the “congenial” character of these holidays portended Judaism’s collapse into an American civil religion and the end of Jews’ status as God’s chosen people. Resonating with deeply held anxieties over what it meant to be Jewish, her critiques of suburban communities ran against the affective currents of the postwar era that celebrated capitalist plenty as the pinnacle of human progress.

Many Reform Jews of this period experienced buoyed optimism over their rising status in the American matrix of religion, race, and class.⁴ At the same time, other American Jews experienced collective anxiety over which religious and cultural practices they had to give up to become more fully accepted into the American mainstream.⁵ Jameelah came of age in the transition from the postwar and Cold War eras, and experienced this period as a fraught transition from being a racial, minoritized other toward a closer affinity to ascendant whiteness marked by material wealth.⁶

Determined to help Muslims avoid a similar fate, Jameelah sought to preserve Islam as a “total system.” Jameelah understood Islam to be distinct and separate from other religious systems. It was also a bulwark against the threats posed by modern capitalism: “Islam demands the Muslim’s total allegiance. A Muslim is a Muslim every minute of the day. Islam is rigorous to a degree inconceivable to a person of any other faith. Its laws control very aspect of his life from birth to death. Awake or asleep, Islam is always with the Muslim. He is never for an instant allowed to forget what he is.”⁷ For Jameelah and many other revivalists, retaining Islam’s pure and elevated status demanded constant vigilance on the part of committed Muslims against that which is “un-Islamic.” In her eyes, many Muslims had become such in name only, swayed as they were by the allure of Western materialism.⁸ These two strains—that is, an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Islam and a vigilant attention to boundaries around Islam—became key features of

revivalism in American Muslim communities.⁹ Jameelah's writing was an important conduit for these two dimensions of revivalism: her writings reached transnational religious communities, and, in a twist of historical irony, deeply resonated with Muslims in the country of her birth.

I show that Jameelah's formative years were shaped by several trends associated with "big religion," which was characterized by mass institutionalization of American religious communities, increasing professionalization of clergy, governmental entanglements, and the rise of a civil religion.¹⁰ Religious congregations were bigger, more visible, more public than ever—mobilizing huge numbers of laypeople and clergy alike.¹¹ At the same time, a new vision of "tri-faith America" emerged that recognized Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism as equal yet discrete groups making up American civic life.¹² Promoting the value of tolerance, the tri-faith ideal placed a high premium on national unity to combat the Soviet threat.¹³ From living through the postwar realignment of faith and American national identity, Jameelah discerned the power with which religiously inflected nationalism could structure politics and everyday life. She saw herself as taking on the descent into materialism and nationalism that she observed in American society. What Jameelah imagined as the salve for the problem of modernity was the revival of Islam—what she called an Islamic awakening—one powerful enough to counter religious revivals of postwar America, both Christian and Jewish. As she cultivated a distrust of the intertwining of nationalism, materialism, and faith, Jameelah came to see the revival of Islam as the necessary antidote to the catastrophes of modernity.

Jameelah's religious imagination offers an important window into how the Islamic Revival emerged in relation to twentieth-century American pluralism while also highlighting key convergences between global Islam and American religious thought. I use the term "Islamic Revival" broadly to encompass the multifaceted, transnational, diffuse movement aimed at reinvigorating Islam from the 1960s to the 1990s. Jameelah represents an early

figure in this longer trajectory. Several key elements of her thought became prominent as the twentieth century went on: an unabated embrace of Muslim universalism; a focus on individual piety as the basis for social change; and a catastrophizing outlook on modernity.

While scholars have long recognized the growth of revivalism after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, there is scant literature on how postwar and Cold War developments shaped revivalism outside the Middle East and South Asia. Current scholarship on Islamic revivalism tends to focus on its emergence within postcolonial contexts. In Egypt, for example, twentieth-century authoritarian regimes sought in many ways to manage and repress Muslim authorities and practices, but their efforts ultimately spurred new Muslim revivalist and reform movements that sought to restore Islam to its “rightful” status.¹⁴ Other accounts of revivalism emphasize how new religious authorities helped to both displace traditional Muslim scholars and pave the way for alternative interpretations of Islamic texts.¹⁵ Relatedly, some scholars explain revivalism as part of the broader “objectification” of religion—in which religion is no longer taken for granted.¹⁶

These important accounts do not fully capture the transnational pathways through which Jameelah established herself as a leading revivalist voice. As a young girl, she found herself drawn to the music of Umm Kulthum, the iconic Egyptian singer and actress, which sparked her imaginative and affective relationship with Arabs and the Middle East. As a teenager she read a lot of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideologue and inspiration for many revivalist thinkers. But it was Abul A’la Mawdudi who shaped Jameelah’s trajectory most profoundly. She first encountered his writings in English translation at the New York Public Library. Jameelah spent many hours of her youth there, especially in the Oriental Division. A few years later, she was probably reintroduced to his vision through her deep involvement in the transnational Black Sunni community at the State Street Mosque in Brooklyn, where she converted in 1961.¹⁷ At the center

of Mawdudi's vision was what Humeira Iqtidar calls a "conservative anti-colonialism" that centered on a critique of Western materialism and a corresponding insistence on the necessity of Muslims to act to oppose it.¹⁸ It was this combination of activism and anti-colonialism that captivated Jameelah's attention, particularly Mawdudi's insistence that you had to know your adversaries—who were often fellow Muslims.

Although invoked less explicitly, Jameelah's critique of modernity also echoed that of Traditionalism—a loose, diffuse twentieth-century philosophical movement that condemned materialism as the undoing of civilization. In *Islamic Culture in Theory and Practice*, she writes:

While the evils of atheism and materialism, supported by all the forces of modern technology, are working day and night to destroy us—spiritually, culturally and politically—rather than hold fast to faith in Allah, unite and combat our real enemies, we foolishly choose to tread the path of an alien civilization, hoping thereby in vain to attain social prestige and the comforts and pleasures of this transitory world in utter forgetfulness of the eternal Life Hereafter . . . this is not the way to "Progress" but can only result in our failure, degeneration, and doom, both individually and collectively!¹⁹

Here Jameelah employed two hallmark elements of Traditionalist thought as developed by René Guénon, the late nineteenth-century thinker who combined elements of Catholicism, occultism, and Sufism to diagnose modernity's ills. First, she followed Guénon's diagnosis that the West had destroyed "tradition," the timeless beliefs and practices that had previously ensured civilizational flourishing but were now drowned out by materialism. Second and more importantly, Jameelah adhered to Guénon's proposal that modernity constituted the end of civilization—not its apotheosis, as its proponents would have it. As Mark Sedgewick describes it, "Inversion was seen as an all-pervasive characteristic of modernity. While all that really matters is in fact in decline, people foolishly suppose

they see progress.”²⁰ Jameelah made ample use of Traditionalist inversions, particularly the idea that the comforts of modern life were in fact the opposite of how they were sold in glossy magazines and political rhetoric. Leisure and ease only generated an unending desire for more, which in turn produced inevitable malaise.²¹ Progress, equality, and freedom were far from aspirational ideals; instead, any society that celebrated them was well down the path to “doom” and “degeneration.”²²

Affective Economy and Revivalist Publics

In reconsidering the relationship between American postwar religion and twentieth-century Islamic revivalism, I incorporate affect theory to conceptualize the transnational contours of religion and politics. Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed and Donovan Schaeffer, I use “affect” to refer to collective emotions that accomplish important religious and political work as they circulate among bodies, objects, and communities.²³ As a case study, Jameelah’s work provides exceptional insight into a strain of 1960s and 1970s revivalism that sought to harness negative affects centered around women, the family, and sexuality in order to generate global Muslim solidarity. Scholars have tended to portray Islamic revivalism as an “ideological” version of Islam that seeks to make a simplified set of beliefs and practices universal and normative for all Muslims.²⁴ For example, Omid Safi calls such attempts “pamphlet Islam,” identifying this orientation in short books, guides, and other prescriptive literature popular in American mosques during the 1980s and 1990s.²⁵ Safi criticizes this genre as excessively reductive because it erases the historical and cultural diversity of Islam while also marginalizing important strains of Muslim piety, such as Sufism. Jameelah’s work could be seen as potentially falling into this genre. She primarily wrote short books and pamphlets that aspired to create internal uniformity among Muslims; she repeatedly politicized Muslim identity and decried any changes in Islamic practice that she considered to be immutable. *But why would such reductionism be appealing, and to*

whom? I argue that we cannot understand the vast appeal of revivalism writ large without analyzing collective emotion.

Foregrounding the role of affect in religious politics offers key insights into how communities form attachments over and against “others.” Ahmed’s concept of affective economy hinges on what she calls the “objects of emotion” that circulate through cultural production—as opposed to emotions being the preserve of individuals. Collective emotions are often harnessed to forge communities through relations of “difference and displacement.”²⁶ As they move through social texts and practices, emotions forge powerful bonds between individuals and their identities. For example, Ahmed explores how hate, as a collective emotion, catalyzes white British and Australian citizens to imagine themselves into a “discourse of pain” in which outsiders threaten to destroy the social fabric.²⁷ Hate is not simply “out there” as an emotion waiting to be tapped, nor is it an internal emotion generated from within an individual self. Rather, hate is produced through the relationships cultivated between white citizens and groups such as immigrants that are marked as “undesirable.”

Jameelah’s writings contributed to an affective economy that connected Muslims to broad civilizational imperatives and transnational religious belonging. Affect does more than just attach individuals to others in community; it also binds Muslims to grand narratives of Islamic and global histories, creating a “felt sense of us.”²⁸ Shenila Khoja-Moolji makes a similar point regarding the construction of Muslim and Pakistani identities. She demonstrates how the cultivation of affect around certain bodies, or what she calls “figurations,” produce “ambivalent attachments” to the state and to the Taliban, who compete with one another for sovereignty in contemporary Pakistan.²⁹ Gendered affective attachments play a key role in forming what Khoja-Moolji calls “feeling publics.”³⁰ As Schaefer argues, “The chunky raw materials making up the contact zone between bodies and worlds—the membrane between bodies and power—include not only a range of unnamed forces, but the named affects or emotions.”³¹

While these examples demonstrate how affect cultivates attachments to the nation-state, this book focuses on how affect shaped transnational Muslim revivalist publics in the 1960s and 1970s. I argue that the umma, as Jameelah conceived of it, is a *feeling public*. By emphasizing the role of affect in generating attachment to the umma, I underscore its contingency and flexibility as a theological and political concept. The idea of the umma has a long history, dating to the origins of Islam, but its meaning depends on the context in which it is imagined and acted upon. Jameelah's notion of the umma was highly politicized, and closely related to her use of another term, "Muslim civilization."³² Jameelah's insistence on the primacy of Islam as a total way of life was by no means a framework that other Muslims universally shared. As she herself lamented throughout her writings, contemporary Muslims attached themselves to all sorts of other political and religious communities, particularly national and ethnic identities. Within this context of competing allegiances and identities, Jameelah's aim was to make her audiences *feel* like they belonged, first and foremost, to a *universal* Muslim community.

By generating disgust, shame, and outrage, Jameelah contested and inverted the universalist claims of the West—the teleological narratives of modernization theory, the triumphalist ideology of “tri-faith” America, and the neocolonial justifications for economic and cultural interventions in Asia and Africa. I show how Jameelah's aspirational project emerged from an idiosyncratic braiding of ideologies, communities, and practices.³³ Her work engages with a broad range of religious and political frameworks of the postwar and Cold War eras, enabling us to see the global circulation of universalist Islamic projects. As Jameelah understood it, her life's mission was to extricate a pure Muslim way of life away from the corruption wrought by colonialism and capitalism. By focusing on Jameelah as a singular figure, I illuminate how transnational religious imagination is rooted in smaller scales of local religious networks and individual lives.³⁴

For Jameelah, Muslims had to *feel* the collective weight of modernity's destruction. This book traces Jameelah's lifelong attempt to pull Muslims' attention back to Islam by stirring a constellation of negative emotions, or what I call an "anti-modern affect." At times she targeted specific affects such as disgust or shame; at other times, Jameelah employed an "affectsphere," a term that I use to refer to the constellation of emotions that Jameelah used to enhance Muslim attachment to her vision for an Islamic politics.³⁵ Jameelah attempted to build solidarity through what Sianne Ngai identifies as "ugly feelings" around the catastrophic effects of modernity.³⁶ By excoriating the destructive effects of modernity, Jameelah sought to drive her audiences toward the revivalist cause. For Jameelah, existential threats required constant iteration and repetition: "The Muslim divides the world into two opposing camps—Dar al-Islam, or the 'Abode of Islam' and Dar al-Harb, the 'Abode of the Unbelievers.' The worst affliction of mankind is not poverty, disease or illiteracy, but Kufr [state of unbelief or ingratitude]. Teen-age pregnant brides, unwed mothers, venereal disease, abortions, rapes, illegitimate children, drunken derelicts, and chauvinistic nationalism—all reflect the consequences of Kufr."³⁷ Jameelah's writing conveyed an urgent sense of impending destruction: the rot at the heart of modernity that derives from the condition of *kufir*, which she understands as the rejection of the transcendental aims and the ethical and rituals prescriptions of Islam. Note that each of her examples of the worst effects of modernity relate to gender, sex, and sexuality, whether in Muslim or non-Muslim societies. While rampant immorality was most egregious in the West, Jameelah lamented that Muslims themselves helped to create the conditions of *kufir* in their own societies.

Gender, sexuality, and feminism were the central nodes around which these boundaries are drawn. Women's bodies constituted particularly "sticky" objects in Jameelah's writing.³⁸ That is, Jameelah reserved *her most negative* emotions for women as symbols of modernity's depravity. This stickiness applied to Muslim and

non-Muslim women alike. Jameelah assumed a universal set of gendered expectations to which all women—whether Muslim or non-Muslim—ought to conform. For a civilization to thrive, each woman had to privilege caregiving responsibilities within the home, ensure that sexual expression was limited to marriage, and submit to the leadership of her husband. Feminism encouraged women to engage in premarital (or extramarital) sexual activity or, even worse, she thought, in homosexual activity. In Jameelah's catastrophizing worldview, feminism was the worst possible manifestation of this materialism because it privileged individual choice over collective good and material goals over transcendent aspirations.

While she held out the possibility that an Islamic state might facilitate a thriving Muslim society, Jameelah emphasized the nuclear family structure as the core religious and political building block of a resurgent Islam. To her, the one ubiquitous sign of civilizational collapse, whether in Pakistan or the US, was the decline of the family. Whereas Mawdudi and many revivalists were more oriented toward the state and focused on building Islamist organizations, Jameelah's approach reflected the American post-war sensibility that the family was the basis for social stability and the locus of religion in the modern society.³⁹

What, then, linked revivalist Muslims across the vast geographies and cultures that separated them? Jameelah understood that political persuasion is as much about feelings as it is about ideas. Affect had the potential to cross transnational boundaries in a way that specific political or legal prescriptions could not. Jameelah's vision depended on the portability of negative affect as the basis for Muslim unity. In this way, her use of anti-modern affect underscores the impact of the "transcultural problematic of modernity" articulated by Islamist thinkers that crossed religious, cultural, and political lines and that hinged on the recognition of a common set of crises: modernity as a kind of pathology; the erosion of morality; and the decline of community.⁴⁰ Even when Jameelah was not naming or invoking specific emotions, her polemics were—always—shot through with affect.

In unpacking the role of collective emotion in modern Muslim politics, I want to acknowledge the ways that the politics of emotion have been weaponized against women and against Muslims. As a woman, Jameelah was subjected to tropes that associate femininity with being disproportionately emotional. Charges of excessive emotionality directed toward women, whether as “hysterical,” irrational, or silly, have been used to discount women’s political critiques, to diminish their capacity to narrate their own experiences, and to cast doubt on their ability to serve as authoritative observers and experts.⁴¹

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have also generated fraught discourses around Islam and emotion. Muslims have historically been portrayed as emotional actors who are irrationally bound to backward conceptions of politics. These representations play on well-worn colonialist associations of “other” religions as backward and primitive—in contrast to “enlightened” and “rational” religions, namely Protestant Christianity. In the climate of the “War on Terror,” practices of surveillance, discrimination, and violence against Muslims were justified in part by the assumption that Muslims were excessively attached to their religion, driven by fits of irrationality and blind rage.⁴² Muslim women were thus triply “othered” on account of their gender, religion, and (presumed) racial difference.⁴³ I argue that the excessive affect that undergirds Jameelah’s writings has as much to teach us about a distinctly American religious politics as it does about the global Muslim revivalism.

By exploring the many sources of Jameelah’s affective framework, especially the American strains, I underscore that her stark, binary views were not an expression of an irrational, radical Islam that can somehow be extracted or isolated from other aspects of her religious and political trajectory. To do so would reinforce the very binaries that Jameelah sought to uphold and ignore the political and economic conditions through which religious violence is justified. Instead, I examine how Cold War politics—in Pakistan and the US, but also in transnational revivalist networks—shaped her vision.

As a case study, Jameelah's corpus attunes us to the multiple affective threads that shape representations of Muslim women, which became particularly emotionally charged in the twentieth century. Often portrayed as victims of an oppressive, patriarchal religion, Muslim women became symbols of the Islam/West binary.⁴⁴ Jameelah made her career about entrenching this opposition and the constellation of big negative emotions around it. Jameelah suffered and struggled throughout her life against the weight of injustices that she discerned keenly as an intellectual and felt viscerally as a human being. She believed that Muslim women *were* victims, but not because they were subject to the patriarchal authoritarianism of Muslim men. Instead, she saw Muslim women as the paradigmatic victims of colonialism and capitalism. As a result, Jameelah sought to cultivate a range of bad feelings around women in order to demarcate how the "West" threatened to corrupt a pristine (imagined) Islam.

An Unconventional Biography

As the reader has probably already gathered, this book is *not* a conventional biography. For a textured account of Jameelah's life, consider *The Convert: A Tale of Exile and Extremism* by Deborah Baker. Baker examines the dynamics of Jameelah's interpersonal relationships, and I leave these dimensions of her story in Baker's capable hands. My focus is more squarely on Jameelah's ambivalent and sometimes fraught position within the global Islamic Revival: as an American, as a convert, as a woman, and as a writer trying to make a name for herself.

Jameelah was something of an enigma. As I discuss below, she left a substantial archive. She correctly predicted that her story would be of interest to future scholars. Yet her impact has only begun to be appreciated in recent years. As scholars have begun to investigate Jameelah's contributions, they have naturally felt compelled to start with the particular piece of the puzzle that relates directly to her expertise. Jameelah was first understood as an

important convert, most notably in Marcia Hermansen's 1999 comparative analysis of Muslim conversion narratives. Hermansen makes the astute observation that Jameelah's authority hinged on cultivating her insider status to American culture.⁴⁵ Jameelah has also been compared to other towering Muslim figures of the twentieth century, appearing as the sole woman in John Voll's and John Esposito's 2001 *Makers of Contemporary Islam*.⁴⁶ More recent studies have examined Jameelah beyond her immediate Muslim context, exploring her lifelong engagement with Judaism and with feminism. Abraham Rubin argues that Jameelah ought to be viewed as a Jewish thinker, not just as a Muslim one.⁴⁷ Amina Jamal and Elora Shehabuddin have shown that how Jameelah is a key figure in transnational feminist and Islamist networks that linked the United States to South Asia because her work so clearly is indebted to feminist frameworks—even though she was a fervent anti-feminist.

These prior studies evince why Jameelah's story belongs in multiple conversations. However, these extant accounts largely do not engage how scholars in other fields have interpreted her impact. By bridging these conversations, I reach a different set of conclusions about what Jameelah's story and corpus teach us about contemporary Islam and American religious history. Instead of altogether eschewing her Jewish and American past, I show that Jameelah was a "perpetual convert" whose authority and position in her Muslim milieu depended on preserving an ongoing Jewish identity and American insider status. Jameelah never fully left the American context behind. As such, I consider her affective approach in relation to anti-feminist, conservative voices of the US religious Right. Like many female political and religious figures associated with such movements, such as Phyllis Schlafly (d. 2016), the prominent American Catholic anti-feminist activist, Jameelah used her public platform to decry the state of the modern world and to argue that women's obligations were primarily in the domestic realm. Jameelah contributed to an American religious politics that hinged on generating negative

collective emotions toward modernity, with gender and sexuality as the focal point.

Moreover, taking a global approach to American religious history illustrates how actively rousing collective feelings is essential to enhancing the cross-cultural appeal of universalist visions. By expanding the geographic lens to include both the US and Pakistan, I demonstrate the multidirectional vectors that engendered religious revivalism. While she never returned to the US in person, Jameelah's ideas—and the affective framework upon which they were built—resonated through multiple generations of Muslim Americans. Having circulated widely in South Asia, Jameelah's ideas found considerable traction among US Muslims who arrived after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, many of whom had revivalist proclivities. From the late 1960s onward, this important group of American Muslims looked to Jameelah's writings as they navigated the emerging culture wars around gender and sexuality.

My analysis also draws on recent innovations in the methods of critical biography that demonstrate the importance of seemingly idiosyncratic figures for understanding contemporary religion. One touchstone is Sarah Imhoff's self-described "weird biography" of Jesse Sampter, the American Jewish Zionist poet who moved to Palestine in 1919. Imhoff argues that "distinctive embodied experience points to the far wider cultural phenomenon of the complex relationship between the body and religious thought."⁴⁸ Within this framework, scholars embrace "imperfections and incongruities" as a key feature, rather than as an exception, of contemporary religious politics.⁴⁹ As historian Lois Banner puts it, "A life deeply lived, like any complex historical narrative, moves across space, time, and areas of human involvement both capriciously and predictably, validating certain historical constructions while challenging others."⁵⁰ Jameelah's vision illustrates the fragmented, multivalent threads of collective feelings that form the basis for ambitious projects of reform and renewal. Our deeply felt attachments to large-scale communities—religion, nation—emerge out of a bricolage

of affects that are often galvanized through unlikely proponents. It is precisely Jameelah's unexpected qualities that drew readers to her work in the first place.

In fact, Jameelah's subversions of the boundaries that she sought to construct and maintain enhanced rather than detracted from her appeal. To name a few: she was an expatriate and convert from Judaism who unwaveringly asserted her Americanness and Jewishness; she was a prominent female author and intellectual who sought to deny those opportunities to other women; and she was a critic of colonialism who deployed colonial tropes and rhetoric to critique her fellow Muslims. Even as she wrote about the antisemitism and social exclusion that she experienced as an American Jew, Jameelah portrayed her childhood communities as inevitably assimilating into whiteness. However, in Pakistan, she was seen as a white American with indisputable access to the privileges of membership in "mainstream" America. Jameelah understood herself as special because of her prescient recognition of the evils of American life—which she had sacrificed for the cause of the umma.

While Jameelah worked tirelessly to present her vision of Islam as coherent, timeless, and unassailable, her story illustrates the messiness that undergirds the quest to maintain distinct religious boundaries. The incongruities of Jameelah's corpus further demonstrate the unpredictable ways that religious communities intersect. Such convergences are often less visible for religious traditions whose relationship has become highly politicized, as they are for contemporary Muslim and Jewish communities. This book argues that modern Jewish converts to Islam—who at first glance seem to be outliers—are essential for understanding "literal" and imagined crossings of religious and cultural boundaries. Through their multivalent religious lives, converts like Jameelah provide a lens into aspirational visions for new religious and political communities.⁵¹ In this respect, she embodies a core dimension of twentieth-century religious history: the transnational religious imagination.

Although Jameelah spent her career asserting the incompatibility of “Islam” and “the West,” she was, of course, shaped in turn by both American and Muslim politics. Just as important, Jameelah’s writings exemplify the kind of “recombinatory,” contingent encounters that have typified much of contemporary Islamic history. Jameelah embodied these incongruities in perhaps exceptional ways, but she should not be dismissed as exceptional. Instead, I contend that remarkable lives such as Jameelah’s throw into sharp relief the unpredictable events that create the possibilities for crossing lines of religious and cultural difference.

Archives and Sources

Jameelah was a keen archivist of her own life. She spent hours and hours in the New York Public Library (NYPL), where she made friends with archivists, including Mr. Parr, who helped her locate books by Muslim authors such as Qutb and Mawdudi, and books on religions such as Buddhism. Over time, her research and writing produced her own mass of materials, encompassing hundreds of letters, newspaper and magazine clippings, dozens of drawings and other artwork, bibliographies, interview transcripts, family photographs, and two VHS tapes. Coming full circle, ultimately Jameelah selected the NYPL as the repository for her life’s work.

That Jameelah chose an American institution to preserve her legacy attunes us to important dimensions of her self-understanding and her intended audience. The choice of venue is somewhat curious given that Jameelah so vociferously lambasted American institutions for their imperialistic designs and their suppression of marginalized voices and narratives. However, given her positive associations with the place, its staff, and its extensive collections, it is likely that Jameelah saw the library as an exception to this rule. The NYPL gave Jameelah the freedom to read widely and deeply. Largely an autodidact, she used her time there to delve into American intellectual paradigms, as well as into African and Asian scholarship that challenged US academic frameworks. Jameelah

deposited the first installment of her archives, consisting of her childhood drawings and a first draft of *Ahmad Khalil*, in the Rare Books and Manuscript Division just before she left for Pakistan in 1962. Over the following decade, she intermittently sent additional materials back to the library. In the 1990s, as she approached the end of her life, Jameelah mailed even larger batches of her letters, unpublished papers, and drawings as gifts to the library. Her expressed intention was to create an archive that would carry on her legacy and facilitate critical research on her work. In 2005, she sent a final set of materials to the NYPL. I would wager that Jameelah also hoped that she would one day become a formidable public intellectual who appealed to the American masses.

Jameelah recognized that her personal story was essential to her stature as a Muslim intellectual. She even compiled a “Chronology of Life History and Articles,” which she sent to the NYPL in the late 1990s, for scholars whom she imagined would be interested in her impact on contemporary Islam. She created detailed timelines of her life that included the dates of her first and last menstrual period, her marriage and the births of her children and grandchildren, the death of her daughter Ayesha in 1964, and the dates of her parents’ passings, as well as the time that she spent in multiple mental health institutions. She also included the names and dates of the religious institutions that she attended, her childhood art and dance classes, her volunteer activities, the publication dates of her major books, and the appearance of Urdu, Arabic, Indonesian, and Turkish translations, among others.⁵²

At the same time, Jameelah was less scrupulous in crafting the overarching *narrative* evinced by the materials in her archive. For example, her files contain an overabundance of letters purportedly exchanged with her parents and sister, spanning from 1945 through her journey by boat to Pakistan in 1962, and then a different set of letters written after her emigration. The letters have been collected in two volumes published in 1989: *A Quest for the Truth: Memoirs of a Childhood* and *Youth in America, 1945–1962: The Story of One Western Convert*. At first glance these letters provide a treasure

trove of contemporaneous accounts of her remarkable journey and her subsequent life in Pakistan, detailing her adjustment to a new culture, her struggles as a mother, and her interactions with Mawdudi, his family, and the Jamaat-i-Islami. However, it is highly likely that Jameelah wrote many of these letters retrospectively, even several decades after their supposed dates, particularly the letters that are dated prior to her arrival in Pakistan. In addition to the peculiar fact that these early letters include no replies from her parents, many of the letters include anachronistic references to events that took place *after* the supposed date they were written.⁵³ The letters also provide a polished narrative, culminating in her climactic conversion and emigration. In other words, they read more like a hagiography than like personal letters home.⁵⁴ Jameelah's later letters do appear to be authentic and became the primary way that she sustained her relationship with her parents.⁵⁵ Through these letters, Jameelah also requested middlebrow publications, such as *Time*, be sent to her in Pakistan, which then provided her with crucial insider knowledge of current American events.

I take a very different view of the 1960–62 correspondence between Jameelah in New York and Mawdudi in Lahore. Central to my analysis, these letters demonstrate the prominent role that affect played in the two thinkers' respective visions of Islam. Unlike some of the letters purportedly sent to her parents, these letters were actually *exchanged*, and they provide a singular perspective on how personal relationships can shape transnational religious movements as well as how Jameelah navigated for her purposes the challenges and opportunities of Mawdudi's revivalism. As a highly visible figure, Mawdudi likely understood all his correspondence to be for public consumption in some way, and he seemed aware that their exchanges were potentially subject to Pakistani state surveillance and monitoring. But that does not seem to have been his primary motivation for writing back to Jameelah, nor was it her motivation for writing to him. Jameelah, in fact, kept most parts of his letters: the Urdu originals in Mawdudi's handwriting, the English translations typed by his secretary, and

the postmarked envelopes. Three decades later, a Saudi publishing house edited and translated their correspondence into English.⁵⁶ These translated letters confirm the story that Jameelah told about how she came to live in Pakistan. Note that the published volume omits several less savory details, such as Mawdudi's admonition to Jameelah in saying her lack of linguistic skills would limit her appeal—a prediction that proved to be untrue.

It is unsurprising that Jameelah sought to shape her biography directly. She understood that her ability to reach a broad audience depended largely on how her conversion from Judaism to Islam was narrated and received. As such, I approach both her NYPL archive and correspondence with Mawdudi cautiously, focusing my analysis on the collective emotions that she wanted these archives to generate.

Chapter Outline

This book encompasses two parts. The first section is structured chronologically, examining the transnational religious and political convergences that transformed Jameelah into a Muslim public intellectual and shaped her affective vision. These first three chapters, which focus on the late 1940s to the early 1960s, frame Jameelah as a “perpetual convert” for whom the story of her conversion was an essential and enduring feature of her appeal to transnational Muslim audiences. Chapter 1 traces Jameelah's early childhood and adolescence in American Jewish communities and her experimentation with a variety of religious traditions. I excavate the range of postwar anxieties that shaped Jameelah's anti-modern affect: from her navigation of diverse religious and intellectual spaces in the 1950s to the beginnings of her assessment that modernity posed an existential threat not just to Islam, but also to religion more broadly. The second chapter explores Jameelah's conversion to Islam in the early 1960s as well as how she sought to cultivate her religious and intellectual authority. Through her religious and intellectual journeys, she developed the conviction that religious belonging was

primarily emotional and cultivated affective affinities with real and imagined Muslims. The third chapter argues that Jameelah's appeal within Pakistani revivalist circles led by Mawdudi hinged on the expression of shared anti-modern affects. Despite Jameelah's triple disavowal of her Judaism, her whiteness, and her socioeconomic privilege, these were the very elements that made her so appealing to Mawdudi and other revivalists.

The second part of the book analyzes the affective economy of the Islamic Revival through the lens of Jameelah's corpus, exploring the dynamic emotional frameworks that undergirded her effort to build a global Muslim community. Gender and the family became essential emotional nodes for that project. Chapter 4 takes up the affectsphere of suffering that Jameelah cultivated around Palestine. I focus on her novel, *Ahmad Khalil*, which tells the story of a fictional Palestinian family who lost their home in 1948. As I demonstrate, she was decidedly disinterested in the politics of territory, law, and citizenship, instead framing the Israeli occupation of Palestine as the paradigmatic site where families were being destroyed by the dual evils of colonialism and capitalism. Chapter 5 turns to Jameelah's writings on gender. Her project of mobilizing global Islamic revival relied, foremost, on generating shame (and related negative affects) around the status of women in the modern world. The sixth and final chapter traces Jameelah's impact in the United States, where her work found a broad readership through American Muslim publishing networks, especially among the Muslim Students Association. Jameelah's writing combined the universalism of many post-1965 immigrants with a critique of American gender norms. This critique helped to cultivate religious outsiderhood as a moral stance while also enmeshing American Muslims in the emergent culture wars. By identifying these surprising convergences, I demonstrate that Jameelah's embrace of anti-modern affects are part of broader religious conservative reactions to a perceived ascendant liberal modernity.

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