



JAN 2004 | DHU'L HIJJAH 1424 | NO. 353
UK£.2.50 | US\$5.00 | RM10.00

MERVE KAVAKCI
PUT THIS WOMAN
IN HER PLACE

AISHA ALVI
SCARF TROUBLE IN
MIDDLE ENGLAND

JACK O'SULLIVAN
DO MUSLIM KIDS
NEED A NEW DAD?

AHMAD THOMSON
VALIDITY OF ISLAMIC WILLS

PLUS
THE DEATH OF TOM HURNDALL
TEACHING ACROSS THE JEWISH-MUSLIM DIVIDE
IRRITATING THE WORLD'S MOST WANTED MAN

"L'AFFAIRE DU FOULARD ISLAMIQUE"
**THE NEW WAR
ON HIJAB**



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FIQH TODAY

MUSLIMS AS MINORITIES

5th ANNUAL AMSS (UK) CONFERENCE

In cooperation with the IIT and The Muslim College

21st - 22nd FEBRUARY 2004

Developing a fiqh for Muslim minorities living in the West has become essential for the well being of these communities. Because of the absence of credible alternatives and ijihad Muslims are often forced to come up with their own "fiqh" answers to daily problems. The limited attempts to deal with many serious issues facing these communities have overlooked the views and contributions of Muslim social scientists who live in the West, speak its languages and have a comprehensive understanding of its social, political, religious and economic systems. The situation requires a new interpretation and ijihad that respond to the multifaceted problems facing these communities in a way which is free of the negative effects that are associated with the fiqh of expediency or crisis. Therefore, a methodology for a collective approach to the development of a fiqh for minorities is urgently needed. The conference aims to bring Shariah scholars and social scientists together to discuss these issues.

PAPERS:

- Axioms of Usul al Fiqh
- Minority Fiqh Between Macro & Micro Fiqh
- Pluralism: Islamic and Non-Islamic Law
- The Need for A European Fiqh & the Normalisation of Islam in Europe
- The Problem of Sexual Relations Among Muslim Youth in the West
- The Group Dimension in a Fiqh for Minorities
- Islamic Juristic Views on the Political & Legal Status of Muslims in Non-Muslim Countries
- From Fiqh for Minorities to Fiqh of Citizenship
- Micro Mujtahids & Implementation of Fiqh al-Aqaliyyat
- The Role of Politics in Reinforcing Identity
- Fiqh for Minorities and Maqasid al-Shariah

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FROM THE PULPIT



It is often easy to lose sense of the basic constituents of our ummah and faith. As I write from a noisy internet café in the holy city of Makkah, I am in a state of both wonderment and humility. It is the middle of the Hajj season and the sacred mosque is garlanded by the miracle that is the ummah. Hundreds of thousands of believers from each and every nook and cranny of the globe is represented here: farmers from Indonesia and Turkey, nomads from the Sahara, blue chip executives from California and Malaysia and scholars from Al-Azhar and Dewsbury.

To be in Makkah during this period is nothing short of a miracle: it is not a matter of wealth and health but more. Hajj is performed by both billionaires and paupers, those in wheelchairs and those fit to run a marathon. The acknowledgement of this Divine prerogative is enshrined in the talbiyah - the prayer uttered at all times by the pilgrims: "Here I am, O God! Here I am, at

Your service! You have no partner, here I am. All praise, grace and dominion belong to You. You have no partner."

To repeat this prayer together with hundreds of thousands of fellow pilgrims is an awesome experience full of joy and emotion. To understand that God has invited you to visit His house amongst millions of people is a thoroughly humbling experience.

This would be my seventh journey to the House of God but it is proving to be as exciting, as arduous and as overwhelming as my first one. The sense of adventure, of belonging, of learning and of sharing is difficult to describe. As is the senseless pushing and the shoving, the noises and the aromas, the supplications and the shouting.

The Noble Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, described the Hajj as the "supreme act of worship." Hajj is an exercise in spiritual renewal and rejuvenation like no other. In spirit, it combines all other acts of worship, helping us to remember God and make sacrifices for His sake. On this we have to expend time, money and energy. But Hajj is not just going to and from Makkah. Hajj shows how close we can get to God in this life.

While other acts of worship are about remembering God, Hajj is about reaching Him. Generally, when we worship God, we cannot see Him, but during Hajj, we come face to face with Him. When pilgrims stand before the House of God, it is like standing before God Himself. Then they are moved to walk around God's House, like a butterfly circling a scented flower.

The plain of Arafat, where the pilgrims spend one day, is like a postcard picture of Judgement Day. The Holy Book says, "When the trumpet is blown, behold, from the graves they rush forth to their Lord."

And indeed, thousands and thousands of God's servants flock in from all sides to witness the event. And what a great sight it is! All are dressed in the same, simple nature and all recite the same words, "Here we are at Your service, Lord."

Just as the Sacred Mosque in Makkah is the holiest, so is the worship that is performed there - as part of the pilgrimage - the most important. It is not just the pilgrims' duties during Hajj that make it important, but the spirit in which they carry them out.

Those of us who make claims of "working for the community" must imbibe ourselves with the Hajj spirit. The sense of specialness, humility and spiritual wonderment; the realisation of the diversity and variety of our ummah, and the need for tolerance, respect and love for the other are all critical lessons that makes a Hajji a special person.

We must never forget that the performance of Hajj is a serious obligation: to procrastinate it without proper reasons is spiritually dangerous and damaging to our personal development.

Today, let us all pray that we are among those who will assemble in God's presence in the plains of Arafat next year, *InshAllah*.

FUAD NAHDI

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KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS

IN A MOMENT OF
DIAGNOSTIC GUMPTION,
TASNEEM OSGOOD
PUTS THE COMMUNITY ON
THE EXAMINATION TABLE.

Your intrepid correspondent - still recovering from a perennial bout of 'flu - who can hardly manage to type in order to provide you, with yet another scintillating piece of prose.

Actually, all these bugs, with which the entire family has been re-infecting one another for the past month, have given me pause for thought. Everyone keeps saying how sick the community in Britain is, so perhaps it's time for a spot of diagnosis.

First and foremost, it appears that we may be suffering from "Communiti Divisus" - a critical condition whose symptoms include "Linguicitis" and "Ethnicities": sufferers tend to huddle in groups who share a common spoken tongue and hue of epidermis. Persons of other groups are regarded with pathological mistrust. This complaint is common to British, Pakistani, Arab, Malay, African - actually all types of Homo Islamicus.

"Communiti Divisus" is often accompanied by various types of internal brawling (Milk of Magnesia is not known to be particularly efficacious). This manifests itself in what is popularly known as "Whose side are you on?" Persons affected are likely to dream up ridiculous insults of dubious derivations, (So I'm Ninja, am I? Well, Go! Go! Power Rangers!).

Then there is "Chronic *Madh'hab* Syndrome", whereby the patient will be rigidly entrapped by his or her upbringing (or even that of the spouse) and suffers a semi-optical complaint known as "Tunnel Vision". Symptoms include foaming at the mouth, ranting and raving, and fearful oaths of condemnation - usually triggered off by the presence of (or even mere sight on the horizon) of a person or persons known or suspected to hold opposing views.

A related complaint is "Traditional Tenacity Disorder", which is suspected to be hereditary, although current research is aimed at finding a cure. Victims of this



unpleasant disorder suffer from a species of blindness which makes them follow blindly in the footsteps of their forefathers, fall prey to scientifically-disproved superstitions, adopt corrupt versions of the faith, etc.

Most people, however, suffer from a terrible soul-destroying affliction called "Critisisis". This is an extremely disabling illness. Sufferers rest their bums all day long, and do nothing except run down everything around them. Nobody is right, nothing done is appreciated. Recovery from this syndrome is difficult, because one has to be honest and brave - two very rare qualities for people who want to make the Pillars of Islam one long list of "don't do this" and, especially, "don't do that!"

But perhaps no other ailment is more disgusting and comical than "Genderum" - a condition normally suffered by the male gender. Sufferers believe behind every hijab should be an empty medulla oblongata: if any grey cells exist then they should be in a state of tabula rasa. This implies beards = brains = taqwa and scarves = void = *taqlid* (blind-faith) Short of a hard knock on the sufferer's block, this disease is hard to combat. The advice from experienced practitioners is to avoid these Jurassic creatures if possible, and if not, to be careful, and treat them like a deranged Pachycephalosaur.

Come Ramadan each year, we will come across a peculiar form of Seasonal Affective Disorder, colloquially known as "Oh-No-Here-Comes-Ramadan-Quick-Let's-Act-Religious." This causes people who might otherwise be down the pub (or National

Lottery Centres) to remember suddenly that they are supposed to be Muslims. Victims of this disorder appear quite unaware that Islam is a year-round religion. Scientists have yet to discover whether factors causing this disorder are hereditary or environmental (for example, a total lack of Islamic input on the part of the parents and other elders).

The Community is also, alas, not immune from certain indigenous complaints, examples of which are listed here:

- 1) Apathy, characterised by a pathological aversion towards "Not-Getting-Involved-Because-It's-Crazy-Down-There".
- 2) Irrational belief in white-haired bearded men who come down the chimney, even in centrally-heated homes.
- 3) A belief in My Country Right or Wrong (oops, no, sorry, that one is actually a pandemic, a bit like the blasted 'flu)
- 4) Contempt combined with arrogance: "Me! Mix with those garlic-stinking, vindaloo-guzzling, lassie-slurping, burping, shalwar-khamiz clowns? No way, over my middle-class ironed blazer!"
- 5) Other disorders too numerous and unpleasant to relate in a 'family magazine' such as this.

And last, but not least, The Good News. These complaints are not yet terminal. The prescribed remedy of preference is a five-times daily dose of salat (prayers), accompanied by regular fasting and even more regular sessions of zikr. Donating to charity is of tremendous value (the only thing that can change the Decree, and all that). A smile might do. Reading *Q-News* every week is not a bad idea. But more important is ensuring you are a bit more compassionate, sensitive and understanding towards fellow human beings: this is crucial in the maintenance of a continuous state of well-being, yours and others.

Finally, have it from me, the Quran and Sunnah are the only known practical and successful cures for these serious disorders. Any other prescription is worthy only of the NHS (Not Happy Secularists). ■

TASNEEM OSGOOD [IS NOT A LICENSED MEDICAL PRACTITIONER - ED.]

UP IN SMOKE

HT'S FAILED ATTEMPT TO FIGHT THE WAR ON DRUGS

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE IS ON THE RISE IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY. WHY THEN, ASKS DR REEHAN SABRI, ARE SOME ORGANISATIONS USING THE ISSUE TO GAIN POLITICAL CAPITAL, INSTEAD OF TACKLING THE REAL ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM?



Forty-nine percent of Bangladeshi men in the UK smoke. This staggering figure compares with 29% for white males, 28% for Pakistanis and 19% amongst predominantly Hindu Indians according to 'Understanding influences on smoking in Bangladeshi and Pakistani adults', a study published in 2003. It is astounding that Muslims continue to overlook the problem of substance abuse in our own community despite Islam's prohibition of everything that is injurious to the body or intoxicating.

It is reported that one in twelve Pakistani or Bangladeshi men in the UK say they drink alcohol. This may not be a public health problem and Muslims may drink less than any other group but what is worrying is that those who do drink often drink more than their age-equivalent peers. Evidence is also emerging of an increase in heroin use among young Muslims in London, according to a report published by Imperial College, London. Indeed, Pakistan is thought to have the highest number of opiate addicts in the world, according to a BBC News report from 2000. In the UK, the use of the stimulant or intoxicant qat has cast an ominous shadow over the Somali

community. One survey published in the British Journal of Psychiatry showed that three quarters of Somali Londoners admit to having used qat. Most say they use it more in the UK than back home.

THE MUSLIM RESPONSE

Substance abuse is not new. Wahshi who slayed both Hamzah, may Allah bless him, and Musaylimah the Liar, was a drunkard in his latter days. He was flogged for his crimes. On the other hand, Muslim youth who drink today are often held in high esteem by their peers for having become "liberated".

Since the overthrow of the Taliban, cheap and plentiful supplies of opium have once again flooded world markets. Advertising for alcohol, from which young Muslims are not immune, is ubiquitous. Smoking remains legal (though increasingly restricted in public spaces) despite continued protest from health workers. In the UK, qat is not illegal.

In predominantly Muslim countries, the most minimal restrictions do not apply. Governments allow American tobacco companies a free hand to advertise and sponsor

popular sports events; there are no "Smoking Kills" messages on cigarette packets and the poor peoples of the world are not even afforded filters on their cigarettes.

In the face of this massive problem, a number of respected scholars have issued legal rulings outlawing these substances. Organisations such as the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association have been planning anti-drug campaigns. Nafas, a Muslim drugs project, have a well-established program in Tower Hamlets. Their struggle is an uphill one. The overall response of the community continues to be woefully inadequate. It is not uncommon to see that the first thing Muslims do after walking out of the jummah prayer is to light up. Sometimes, even the imams publicly smoke. Knowledge of drugs is generally very poor.

ENTER HIZB UT TAHRIR...

Hizb ut Tahrir, the radical Muslim group, have proven to be masters of opportunism, having seized upon the chance to use the drugs issue as a basis for promoting themselves. In 2003, they launched their own drug campaign with seminars across

London and a special edition on drugs in their monthly journal, Khilafah Magazine. In October 2003, I attended one such seminar commissioned by a south London mosque called "Drugs: an Islamic Perspective". I went to offer my support to Hizb ut Tahrir in what I feel is a very important issue.

What I discovered was a shocking manipulation of the drug addiction problem by a group that will use any issue to platform its views. What is worse, they did profound harm to the general campaign against drugs.

UNQUALIFIED SPEAKERS

The seminar was divided into two parts. First we heard talks by "experts" and then we heard from ex-drug users and an ex-drug dealer. The ex-users and the ex-dealer were very good. The so-called experts, however, included one newly qualified GP (he had actually asked me for advice the day before the talk), an HT student himself, who had little or no experience in the area of drug misuse. His answers to questions demonstrated a lack of even basic knowledge of addictions. The second "expert" was also a member of HT who did not seem to know what certain drugs were and refused to condemn as unlawful the following three drugs: tobacco, qat and amphetamines.

"KHILAFAH, KHILAFAH, KHILAFAH!"

The lives of Muslims are literally being smoked or injected away - this issue is not a political football. It soon became clear that HT was intent on using this issue as a platform to propagate their views on what they consider the "real" issue - the absence of Khilafah. Few doubt the importance of legitimate Islamic leadership but is a 20 year old unemployed Muslim who spends £1000 of stolen money to feed his drug addiction, to wait until the coming of the Khilafah before he can get help?

MISINFORMATION

The speakers clearly rubbish interventions which are standard and effective. Essentially, they discouraged those with addictions from getting help without offering any alternatives. This, in a community already reluctant to access statutory services, is nothing short of disastrous. In fairness, one HT speaker did say that rehabilitation centres do some good. Unfortunately, the multitude of other HT supporters continued to suggest there was no effective treatment and no solution for drug problems until the re-establishment of the Khilafah.

At the end of the seminar, they handed out "drug information packs". Each pack

contained an unreadable assortment of literature on drugs and an "Islamic ruling" on drugs by - you guessed it, a member of HT.

We in the drug services recognise we are fighting an uphill battle and we understand the need for an approach that is sensitive to the needs of Muslim drug users. When we produce drug literature, we try to make it accessible to users because they are not going to read a dry twenty-page article. They need practical advice on how to get help.

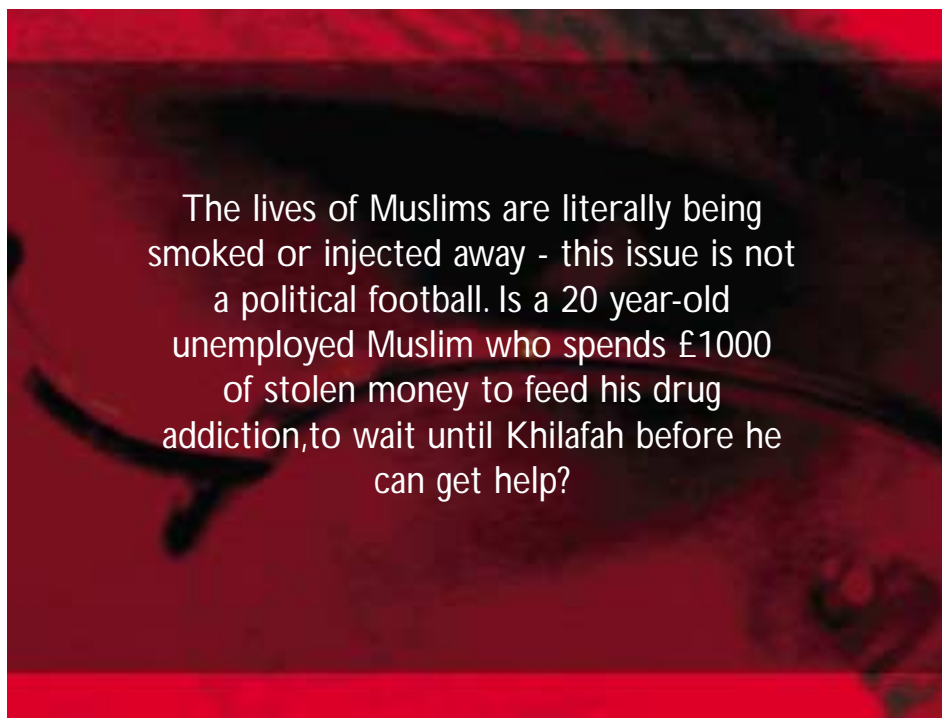
DUBIOUS PROPAGANDA AND HT'S OWN ADDICTION PROBLEMS

During the seminar, one member announced that a study published in a scientific journal claimed that the arrival of HT in a particular Muslim community had been instrumental in alleviating drug misuse. Oh really? Perhaps, next time I see someone with Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome, I should prescribe a dose of HT. When I later searched for the article, it was nowhere to be found nor have I been provided with a copy of it or even its reference.

allow his pregnant wife to smoke because it is harmful - but not because it is prohibited.

CONCLUSION

The anti-drugs campaign by Hizb ut Tahrir is bogus. They are unqualified in this field and are preventing Muslim addicts getting the help they need now. They claim to be against capitalism yet they line the pockets of American tobacco companies. The rate of smoking is higher in poor countries than it is the West. Amongst Muslims, smoking probably causes more deaths than all other drugs put together. Qat is a drug which has devastated the Somali community and there are fears of an epidemic in the UK. Even so, many stubbornly refuse to condemn its use. Wake up! How is HT going to run an Islamic state while wasting away from cancer and other consequences of substance abuse? Let not the consequences of the words of Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, be your end - "Whoever consumes poison, killing himself with it, then he will be consuming his poi-



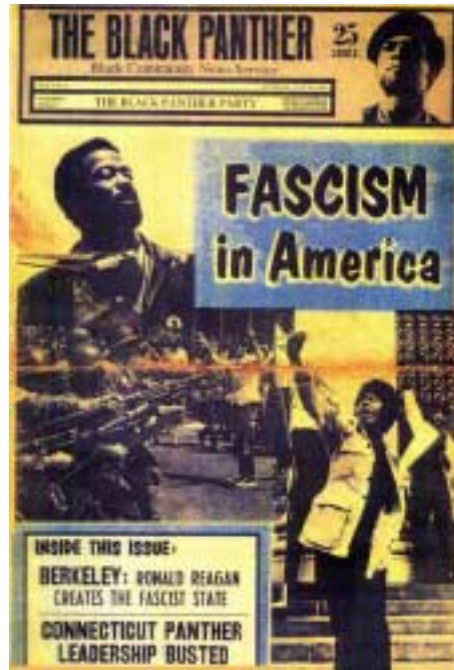
At one point I asked why these HT followers were offering advice on drugs when many of them are themselves addicted to the most dangerous of them all: nicotine. HT 'scholars' have also permitted the use of the intoxicating stimulant, qat. One HT member even said amphetamines are not prohibited, they are "doubtful". I asked explicitly for him to say tobacco, qat and amphetamines are prohibited but he refused. Many days later, I got one of them to admit that he would not

son in the hellfire, and he will abide in it permanently and eternally." ■

DR. REEHAN SABRI IS A SPECIALIST REGISTRAR IN ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR AT ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL SCHOOL, LONDON. HE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE UNION OF FORMER HIZB UT TAHRIR MEMBERS AND STUDENTS.

ROOTS OF RESISTANCE

BEYOND THE APOLOGETICS OF THE 'MUSLIM LIBERALS' AND THE EMPTY RHETORIC OF THE RADICAL FRINGE, THERE ARE REAL OPPORTUNITIES TO REDRESS THE CURRENT MALAISE OF BRITISH MUSLIMS. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IS A GOOD STARTING POINT, ARGUE ROMANA MAJID AND ADAM KHAN.



trism distorts the perception of reality about Muslims outside of London and undermines other determining factors that are equally important with regards to the realities they face.

An example of this is the extreme provocation by fascists in the Northern towns against the mainly South Asian Muslim community. The riots in the summer of 2001 was an act of rebellion and an expression of self defence against violent fascist attacks, but also a product of frustration against police harassment, unemployment and marginalisation. Muslim organisations based in London were at that time distanced from the existing realities faced by those they claimed to represent and in turn distanced themselves from the violence. This was made explicit by the Muslim youths affected in the Islamic Human Rights Commission report on the Oldham riots.

From the “race riots” in the North, to the recent protests and direct actions led by Muslim school students in East London, it is clear that we as a community and especially our youth need political direction.

Often we are confronted with two extreme solutions. On the one hand there is the language from some Muslim groups which engage in apologetic discourse and make too many compromises of their faith along the way. Malcolm X, used to refer to

such advocates as “Uncle Toms” and indeed many so called “Muslim liberals” or “progressive Muslims” from middle class professional backgrounds tell us to behave ourselves, apologise on behalf of “terrorists” and talk about how “Islam means peace”. On the other hand we have those who talk in empty rhetoric about the need for the Khilafah, that we should never work with “kafirs” and so on.

Our lack of concerted mobilisation means our response bears no leverage and therefore, no results. As no activated structure exists to support Muslim communities, we will continue to be powerless when confronted with racist policies. Psychologically, we have already begun to perceive ourselves as victims and the struggle to escape this mentality is exhausting.

In the end, the desire to halt our regress and begin to move forward necessitates by default the organization of the Muslim community. Again, this cannot be done without the inclusion of the ordinary Muslims on the street. Common action must be taken by all. The term ‘community’ in this instance works inwardly and outwardly. First, recognising the reality of the situation facing local Muslim neighbourhoods and then, linking with other discriminated people or groups.

The struggle of blacks, whether it be the African Diasporas in Europe or America, against exclusion, racism and oppression is relevant to our experience. The Black experience in Britain particularly during the 70s and 80s should be studied to grasp the process of community development, the effects of which still influence public perceptions and government policy. Study after study reveal that people of colour are seen as a problem by white society because their identity is to be perceived as being incompatible with ‘Britishness’.

The media and the police, who were infamous for violating and tyrannising the black community, are now following similar patterns against the Muslim community.

The association of black people with violent crime is parallel to the association of Muslims with terrorism and honour killings. Black cultural events and churches were identified as places of anti-police violence and it is now the case that mosques are identified as places of anti-government or subversive activity.

The formation of the Black Panther Party

in the United States in 1966, illustrated an attempt to organise and implement a social and political program for a people who had been historically denied equal opportunity. Inspired by Malcolm X, the founders of the party modelled it in his spirit advocating a revolutionary expression of black identity. Its social program grouped around ten main points and included issues that dealt with employment, healthcare and housing just as much as the desire for an end to police brutality, freedom for those unlawfully imprisoned, as well as real and relevant education.

The party developed community survival programmes around its ten points, dealing with day to day needs. This included free hot breakfasts for children from poor families and leaflets informing tired and harassed blacks of their legal rights. It is also clear when studying the movement, that the Black Panther Party was involved in an ideological struggle, one that wanted to galvanise a revolutionary political force, often uniting with other forces and other non-white groups such as marginalised Mexican, Native American, Puerto Rican and East and South East Asian communities.

However, despite insisting that democratic capitalism was a system 'incapable of permitting black and poor people from enjoying full and equal participation', the party utilised existing mainstream mechanisms of protest to bring about social change. It organised boycotts and even nominated its embers for public office. However, just as the Panthers were inspirational in their attempts to respond as equals rather than as a minority, we can



learn just as much from their gradual and forced demise.

Media campaigns were used to discredit their community programmes and smear campaigns were orchestrated by the intelligence services to cause distrust and rivalry within the ranks. Even more seriously, the party was infiltrated by agent provocateurs, members were assassinated and the legal system was used selectively to block its progress. The legal system was also used to falsely imprison hundreds of its members under false charges.

Meanwhile, the FBI's COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) declared the Black Panther Party to be the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country". A specific purpose of COINTELPRO was to prevent the rise of a "messiah", a charismatic black leader who might 'unify and electrify' black people. In addition, a 'war on heroine', much like the 'war on terror', was used to justify the expansion of federal investigative agencies using hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

By studying how the black community reacted to racism and the establishment in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the reactions of the state against that community, Muslims will better understand our own experiences. We need to learn from their successes and their failures. For example, the established race relations groups in Britain have failed to work with other marginalised groups and have focused much of

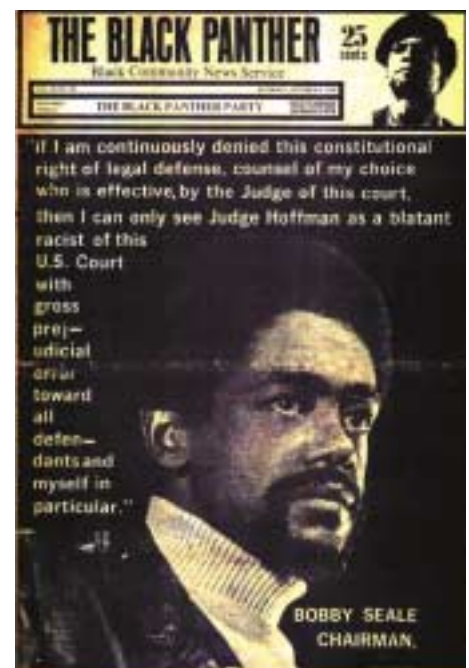
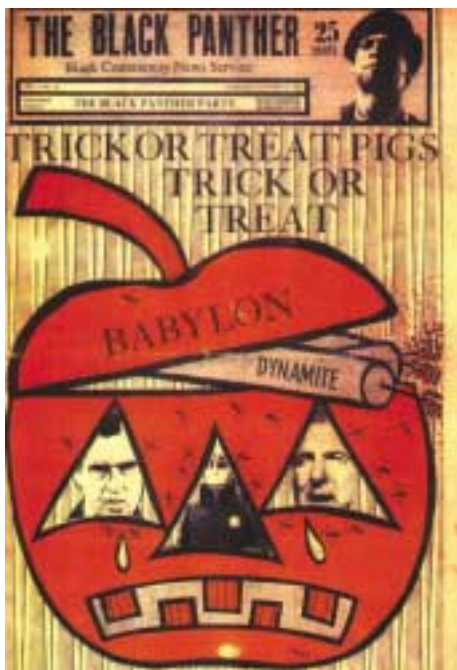
their energy on certain aspects of racism and anti-racist legislation.

We too can build community programmes and reclaim our mosques to fulfil their historical purpose, namely as centres for political activism as well as worship.

We need the commitment of all individuals to pool their resources, knowledge and experiences together which can begin to lead a progressive social movement against oppression and the violation of fundamental human rights. Eventually, this movement will not only deal with issues such as Islamophobia, the hijab ban and police brutality but also issues such as globalisation, privatisation and imperialist wars in non-Muslim countries.

IHRC is developing a workshop on this community-based approach where individuals dedicated to social change will be taught the means and methods of building programmes, engaging the community and setting the agenda. The training will include educating people on their rights as well as dealing with the media.

The responsibility for change rests firmly on our own shoulders. As individuals we are no less valuable in terms of our contribution than anyone else and it is time for us to seize this opportunity to build good foundations for the future. ■



ROMANA MAJID IS A RESEARCHER AT THE ISLAMIC HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (IHRC), ADAM KHAN IS A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST.

THE SMEAR OF ANTI-SEMITISM

LABOUR MP LOUISE
 ELLMAN MAY HAVE
 GOTTEN AWAY WITH HER
 DUBIOUS ATTACK ON THE
 MAB, BUT HER
 COMMENTS COULD HELP
 FUEL THE POLITICAL
 AGENDA OF BRITAIN'S
 EXTREME RIGHT.



Outrage has followed an attack on leaders of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) by Louise Ellman Labour/Co-op MP for Liverpool Riverside. Ellman accused MAB of ‘anti-Semitism’ and terrorist links, “... the House should not adjourn until it has debated the important issue of the role Islamicist [sic] organisations play in inciting racial hatred in the United Kingdom through propagating anti-semitism under the guise of anti-Zionism... It is time that the spotlight fell on the Muslim Association of Britain, particularly... Azzam Tamimi, Kamal El-Helbawy, Anas Al-Tikriti and Mohammed Sawalha.” Ellman accused Tamimi, who she said was “not a man of peace”, of inciting “hatred against Jews” by telling a Vienna conference that “Jews should sail on the sea in ships back to where they came or drown in it” and asked if MAB would dissociate itself from him.

In January, she also attacked Lib-Dem MP Jenny Tonge for commenting that she could understand why Palestinians, driven by despair, became suicide bombers. Despite the fact that Tonge stressed she was empathising with “the situation in which Palestinians live in” rather than sympathising with suicide operations, Ellman demanded that she apologise for ‘giving the green light to terrorism’. Ellman was flanked by Tory foreign secretary, Michael Ancram, who claimed the Lib-Dem initial response to Tonge’s remarks was ‘faint-hearted’ (although this was precisely the nature of the Tory response to William Hague last year when he outraged Arabs

and Muslims by saying they wanted to ‘drive the Jews into the sea’).

Happily, outgoing Lib-Dem deputy chairman, Donnachadh McCarthy, is mounting a petition for her reinstatement, and reports suggest great support from rank-and-file Liberal Democrats. Ellman, however, demanded an apology from Tonge and action against her by the Liberal Democrats, just as she demanded that MAB dissociate itself from Tamimi. This surely puts the Labour and Co-Operative Parties on the spot: what is good enough for the Lib-Dem goose is surely good enough for the Liver bird. She has judged herself, and suggested what action should be appropriate in this situation for someone attacking British Muslim leaders in this way.

MAB angrily denied Ellman’s accusations, rebuking her for hiding behind parliamentary privilege, which prevents her being sued for defamation. Writing in *The Guardian*, Altikriti stated, “...she would rather use the immunity of parliament than risk making such slanderous remarks in public...” Significantly, Ellman did not criticise any Jewish groups for inviting Israeli Defence Force Chief and Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz in 2002, despite the IDF’s appalling human rights record, nor did she demand that they ‘dissociate’ themselves from him.

Ellman also linked Muslim groups to the Far Right as being responsible for anti-Jewish violence, despite the fact that, as previously reported in *Q-News*, the British National Party has waged an overtly Islamophobic campaign. Her source for this accusation is the Community Security Trust,

part of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Tamimi denied Ellman’s allegations, “I haven’t been to Vienna for two or three years and all the speeches...were in Arabic. Either she is lying about what I said or it has been poorly translated or distorted.” He continued, “It is against my Islamic and human principles to say things like ‘we should drown the Jews’. My vision for a future Palestine is... where Jews, Muslims and Christians can live together... I cannot be an anti-Semite because I myself am Semitic... I am not anti-Jewish, I have many Jewish friends who know my position and agree with me.” Tamimi has been urging the “revision and elimination of false concepts that make no distinction between Jews and Zionists. The first is a bearer of Jewish faith... The second is a bearer of a settler colonial enterprise, an act of aggressor that should be resisted and deterred.”

MAB accused Ellman of being part of a pro-Israeli “unholy ‘crusade’” against British Muslims, “Ellman has been a staunch supporter of and apologist for successive Israeli governments. She is well known for her campaign to find the lost tribes of Israel, or what she calls ‘The Forgotten Jews’, to bring them to Palestine where they would dispossess more Palestinians of their lands and homes.” The accusations against a mainstream Muslim organisation as opposed to usual denunciations of fringe groups like ‘Supporters of Shariah (SoS)’, could be part of a pro-Israeli PR strategy to silence the growing pro-Palestinian mood by employing the smear of ‘anti-Semitism’.

Numerous solidarity groups have identified the pro-Israeli lobby as a major force behind the attack on Iraq to serve Israeli interests. By demonising MAB as ‘anti-Semitic’ and ‘terrorist-linked’, the effect is to discourage the wider anti-war and pro-Palestine coalition from co-operating with them, thus undermining the entire coalition itself.

Ellman’s definition of anti-semitism is essentially ‘demonising Israel and Zionists’. Altikriti commented that as an Arab and a Muslim, the charge of ‘anti-Semitism’ was untenable, since it originated in 19th century European racist ideas of ‘Aryan’ versus ‘Semite’, and thus, not applicable to Semitic Arabs. Arab countries frequently gave refuge to Jews fleeing Europe. Arabs and Muslims were innocent of the Holocaust perpetrated by Europeans against other Europeans.

Her definition of Zionism was 'Jewish national self-determination'. Considering the fact that historically, Zionists have demanded an ethnically-based Jewish state, wherein Palestinians had no place, how can this be considered anything but racist?

Ever since 1948, the regime has opposed any general return of Palestinian refugees, as this would lead to an Arab majority, and has enacted a law banning any candidates seeking to transform the state from being the property of the Jews alone to that of all its citizens, as in the UK. This would seem to be Ellman's position, as her statement hoped for "a secure Israel with integrity as a Jewish state". Notably, she did not condemn the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, their continued displacement from their homes, nor did she criticise the systematic discrimination against Israeli Arabs.

Disconcertingly, Phil Woolas, Deputy Leader of the House (who as MP for Oldham-West has many Muslim constituents), endorsed her, stating that her subject was "the most important of the afternoon."


The Co-operative Party, implicitly embarrassed, declined to take any specific action against Ellman, nor to specifically

respond, but hoped that all party representatives would think carefully of their comments on religiously sensitive issues. Kevin Lee, NW Regional Labour Party Director, sent Q-News a statement noting that "in the North West there are two candidates on the Labour Party's European list who are both Muslims - Rupa Huq and Ibrahim Adia", but made clear that they will take no action against Ellman. "Members of Parliament are free to express their own views on organisations and individuals... Differing views are held by MPs and it is not always the case that such views exactly represent the policies of their political party," he said. However, Ellman's words were endorsed by Woolas in his official role, so her comments cannot be characterised as 'personal views'. We put it to them, as their statement referred to the BNP, that Ellman's comments were more extreme than even the BNP, who carefully restricted themselves to attacking fringe elements like SoS, but Lee claimed that they had evidence the BNP had done so.

With some hesitation, we contacted the BNP, whose reaction at the mention of MAB was "Who? Are they the same thing as the Muslim Parliament?" They denied attacking


MAB and mainstream Muslim leaders and challenged Labour to present the claimed evidence. Whatever the case, Ellman's attack (and Woolas' endorsement) now enables the BNP to denounce the Muslim community as led by extremists. Sajjad Karim, NW Lib-Dem No. 2 Euro candidate attacked the Labour statement for failing to mention that Huq and Adia are No. 7 and No. 9 in the Labour list, so have no chance of being elected, demonstrating that they were merely 'token' candidates. BNP leader Griffin is standing in the region, and Karim suggested "no doubt he will find the actions" of Ellman and "her supportive colleagues as helpful to say the least." Karim condemned Ellman's outburst as "irresponsible" and "compounding the difficulties faced by ordinary Muslims". Richard Marbrow, Liverpool Liberal-Democrat councillor, observed that Muslims were "fed-up with being taken for granted by Labour". Since two Muslim Lib-Dem candidates will be standing in wards in Ellman's constituency next June, these elections might show just how fed-up they are. ■

ANTHONY MCROY




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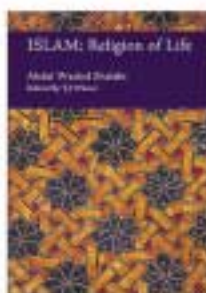
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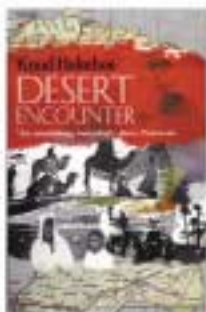
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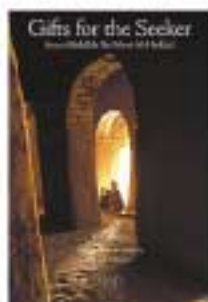
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A BRITISH MARTYR FOR PALESTINE

THE CASE OF TOM HURNDALL

CHALLENGING THE ISRAELI ARMY'S CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

ANTHONY MCROY

When a Briton carried out a 'martyrdom-operation' in Haifa last year, the British government was in an uproar - instant collaboration with the Israeli investigation was established. He not only killed himself, he took several Israelis with him. Soon after, another British martyr also gave his life, but this time no Israelis were killed. Instead, the Israelis killed him. He was an innocent peace activist attempting to save the lives of Palestinian children - and far from vigorous action to bring his murderers to justice, the British government is dragging its feet.

At last February's million-strong march against the war on Iraq, twenty-two year old Tom Hurndall met a group of people who were planning to serve as human shields in Iraq. Inspired, he headed for Jordan to help Iraqi refugees. His encounter there with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), later took him to Rafah, Palestine in April 2003. Carl Arrindell, family spokesman, said, "Tom always had the courage of his convictions", especially "to defend children whose lives were dear." Arrindell added that after Tom arrived in Palestine, "The tone of his journals changed dramatically." Previously, he has not had a negative view of the Israeli regime, but his experiences in Rafah changed everything.

On 11th April 2003, Tom was shot in the head by an Israeli sniper in a watchtower towering over an area where Palestinian children were at play. Tom was dressed in a fluorescent orange ISM vest. As his brother Billy put it, he was "shot for the simple reason that he was trying to escort them to safety." Like hundreds of Palestinians dying at checkpoints while awaiting medical attention, Tom endured a two-hour delay on the border. He was then taken to a specialist hospital in Beersheba and thereafter, back to London in a vegetative state, until his death.

"The initial IDF field report, which went to the British Embassy in Tel Aviv and to Tom's family, exonerated the soldier who had killed him. It claimed that Tom was in camouflage, and wielding a gun. In the face of eye-witness statements, such suggestions were withdrawn," said Arrindell. Later, the family was told that a 'Bedouin' soldier had been arrested - as if his ethnicity mattered. One can only imagine the UK government in similar circumstances stating that a 'black' soldier had been arrested.



The soldier was indicted on six charges, the most serious being aggravated assault, implying no intention to kill. Since Tom was shot by a rifle with an advanced telescopic lens, his parents are demanding that the charge be murder. Significantly, the soldier's excuse was that of the Nazis at Nuremberg - he was "only obeying orders". As Tom's family commented, there seems to be a 'culture of impunity' from the top that allows IDF soldiers to regard

Palestinians of all ages as sub-human open targets.

The Hurndall family wants the soldier - and everyone up the chain of command, prosecuted not just for Tom's sake, but for the sake of thousands of Palestinians who have no diplomatic defence. Arrindell noted, "Tom's act started off a ripple that forced the IDF for the first time in its history to hold an inquiry previously denied to Palestinians." This has not prevented an attempted cover-up. The tower from which the shot was fired and nearby buildings have been destroyed. Some say this is to conceal the evidence. They also denied British police permission to investigate.

The Hurndalls also fear that the soldier may be convicted, but soon released. This occurred to the Israeli officers responsible for the 1956 Kufr Kassem massacre of 43 innocent Israeli Arabs. They were released and restored to full rank after serving only three years imprisonment - in other words, once the heat was off.

Predictably, our government has not shown the same vigour needed to defend a Briton killed by Israelis as it did to investigate one killing them. Blair declined to meet Tom's family, and Straw refused to repeat his clamour over the Haifa bombing because it might upset the Israelis and "unsettle the peace process". None of the fourteen eyewitnesses have been interviewed by the Israelis or British - only by the family. Britain is clearly shirking its legal obligations to defend its citizens.

Arrindell stated that Tom's gesture "lit a flame across the planet that has become a mobilising symbol for all." Whilst Tom was not religious, he said before his death that he was 'inspired' by a visit to the Church of the Nativity. Tom's martyrdom for Palestinian children is a symbol of the continuing plunder of Palestine, and it behoves those who say they love Palestine to ensure that Tom's sacrifice is both remembered and effective in ending the massacre of this people. ■



DEMOCRACY IS

INSTEAD OF TRYING TO ISLAMISE WESTERN DEMOCRACY, WRITES IQBAL SIDDIQI

AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION BASED ON

Kamran Bokhari's frustration with the simplistic understandings of those he regards as "radical Islamists" is understandable, and indeed widely shared (Kamran Bokhari, "Is Democracy Disbelief?", *Q-News*, December 2003, p. 34-35). The importance of such groups should not be exaggerated, however. Although they are vocal in Britain, they represent only a marginal sector in Muslim political thought, and are not particularly influential. Rather they should be seen - at least in the British context - as phases through which many Muslims pass, and most then grow out of as they develop more rounded understandings of Islam and human society, realizing that Islam does not in fact provide a "well-defined, timeless system" for government and politics which would be a panacea for all political and social problems.

Unfortunately, Bokhari's own arguments - and those of other advocates of democracy as a better alternative for Muslim societies - are based on an equally simplistic understanding of their favoured prescription for Muslim societies, democracy. What is more, their attempts to integrate democracy into Muslim political thought and praxis are potentially far more damaging, both because Muslims are much more likely to be misguided by them than by the superficial musings of marginal Islamist groups, and because they are open to exploitation by forces whose concern is neither the correct implementation of Islamic principles nor the welfare of Muslim societies. Such forces have already achieved an unprecedented degree of political, social, cultural and intellectual hegemony over Muslim societies, and need no encouragement from us.

Bokhari uses Walter B. Gallie's idea of "contested concepts" to highlight the over-simplicity of some radical Islamists' understandings of democracy. Bokhari is quite right to consider that "no one brand of democracy is any more authentic than the other". On the same basis, however, it must also follow that Bokhari's preferred definition of democracy is not necessarily any more valid than that of the Islamists whom he criticises. Certainly many advocates of democracy would disagree with Bokhari's assertion that democracy is "nothing more than the most efficient means of political management available", with no ideological or value-driven element; not least the many political theorists who argue that democracy is inseparable from liberalism. Bokhari is entitled to use his own understanding of democracy as little more than "a constitutional framework"; but most people would probably consider the Islamists' definition closer to common understandings of democracy.

These are, of course, only two out of countless possible interpretations of democracy. There are many others, used by political philosophers and theorists, political scientists, politi-

cal activists, politicians, political analysts and commentators, journalists and others. Moreover, most peoples' use of the term 'democracy' is laden not only with value-judgements, but with historical and political connotations that cannot be ignored. This often includes the historicist assumptions of the modernisation thesis - that all societies, as they modernize, will become more and more like modern western societies - which underpin the common western assumption that western countries have some modern equivalent of the "white man's burden", to bring 'democracy' and 'freedom' to other societies less able to discover them by themselves. This is certainly evident in the way western politicians routinely speak of the need to democratise the Muslim world, and the way their statements are understood, even though they are nothing more than legitimising facades for hegemonic neo-imperialism.

Equally evident, to those willing to see it, is the remarkable inability of commentators supposedly sympathetic to Islam and Muslims to recognise or acknowledge these facades. Thus Noah Feldman can regard the US's long record of supporting despotic and dictatorial regimes against popular political movements as an aberration, without questioning what this record might suggest about the US's real agenda (*Q-News*, December 2003); while some Muslims are apparently so happy to find supposed Western sympathy for Islam that they ignore these obvious problems in the work of Feldman and others like him. Nazim Baksh, for example, in his laudatory review of Feldman's book *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy* (*Q-News*, October 2003) totally ignores Feldman's assumption that the US is an altruistic force for good in the Muslim world, and that what is good for US interests is good also for Muslims.

All of which begs the question: why should Muslims expend so much effort on trying to make relevant to Islam a concept that is so problematic even within western political culture?

The only possible answer is that democracy is seen as central to the apparent success of the most advanced and powerful civilization in the modern world. Historians have long since recognised the phenomenon of conquered peoples adopting the tools and culture of their conquerors in order to try to emulate their success. In the colonial period, Muslim elites adopted everything from western dress and institutions to western languages and ideologies, in order to become 'modern'; all it achieved was the consolidation of western hegemony over our societies, even as they remain dysfunctional disaster zones. This process was helped, of course, by the colonial powers' patronage of those that emulated them, and their deliberate

NO PANACEA

DIQI, WHAT MUSLIMS REALLY NEED TO DO IS DEVELOP MODELS OF POLITICAL
ON ISLAMIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES.

marginalisation - and brutal repression when necessary - of those who tried to assert alternatives rooted in indigenous Islamic traditions and values, a strategy which the post-colonial west and their allies continue to use today.

It may seem harsh to regard the efforts of some Muslim intellectuals to convince us that democracy is our best option as a continuation of this phenomenon. Many are undoubtedly sincere and well-meaning, perhaps even genuinely misled by the west's assiduous promotion of an image of itself as an altruistic force for good in the world (despite ample evidence to the contrary). Nonetheless, it is difficult not to suspect that the positions and rewards available to Muslims who say the right things are also a factor.

After all, it is not as though the true nature of western democracy is totally unrecognised, even with the west. The writings of intellectuals such as Naom Chomsky and Howard Zinn have long since exposed the reality that western democracy serves as little more than an legitimating device for the dominance of oligarchic moneyed elites. For those who view the contemporary west with open eyes, the realities of the domination of wealth in western politics; of the continued and increasing exploitation of the poor by the wealthy; of the manipulation of public opinion by political interests; of the resultant alienation of ordinary people from political processes; and of the enormous gap between the idealistic rhetoric of democratic ideals and the realities of democratic politics, should be inescapable.

Kamran Bokhari writes that "democracy is about providing a constitutional framework which would ensure legitimacy of the government, accountability, transparency, [and the] rule of law..". The reality is that democracy provides a veneer of legitimacy that disguises the absence of accountability, transparency and the rule of law, as well as the repression of dissidence, where it really matters; think, for example of the way that the the invasion of Iraq was legitimised, the passing of Islamophobic anti-terrorist legislation, the incarceration of political prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Britain and elsewhere, and increasing pressure on mahjubahs in European countries.

Bokhari also writes that democracy is an "efficient means of political management"; and so it is, for the management of political processes by elites determined to achieve their ends while minimising effective opposition. Yes, in that sense democracy certainly works, but is it really a model we should be trying to integrate into Islam?

What Muslims really need to do, instead of trying to Islamise western democracy, is to develop models of social and political organization, based on Islamic values and

principles, that are suitable to the complexities of modern societies. Bokhari invokes "counter-factual history" to suggest that Muslims might have been the first to discover democracy had it not been for their intellectual stagnation. A more realistic counter-factual history might suggest that Muslims would have found their own ways of reasserting the values of Islam in public life against the stagnant and despotic monarchies that had emerged from the corruption of the khilafah, had the natural evolution of Muslim societies not been derailed by the destructive impact of western colonialism. These ways would, of course, have been both rooted in Islamic principles and values, and suited to the changing conditions of modernising Muslim societies. Getting back to something like them is the task no facing us.

These models might well have certain elements in common with western democratic institutions, such as elections to determine public opinion; but, if they genuinely reflect Islamic goals and priorities, they will be quite different in key respects. These models will also, of course, be very different from the formulaic definitions of khilafah of some contemporary Islamist groups. They will be general and tentative of necessity, and will need to be tested and refined through historical experience when implemented, which is how social institutions develop; but they will at least be built on sounder foundations than any form of democracy transplanted from western discourse. Developing such models is the task that has been, and is being, addressed by Islamic movement activists, scholars and leaders as diverse as Maulana Mawdudi, Hasan an-Banna, Hasan al-Turabi, Malek Bennabi, Ali Shari'ati, Rashid Ghannouchi and, above all, the late Imam Khomeini, with his ijthad on the role of ulama in politics and his unprecedented attempt to establish the first Islamic state of the modern era.

While some of these scholars discuss Islamic political society with reference to democracy and other western concepts, such as Rashid Ghannouchi, all have far more nuanced understandings of democracy than those displayed by Bokhari and others like him. These are the sorts of "radical Islamists" whose work contemporary Muslim political academics and analysts need to engage with, not the marginal groups whose arguments Bokhari pointlessly demolishes. In the process, they might make a far more constructive contribution to Muslim political discourse than they can by seeking to 'Islamise' western-style democracy.

And if they find themselves ill-equipped or unable to do this, trained and operating as they are within western academic institutions and western discourses, then perhaps they are not the intellectuals Muslims should be looking to for ideas and insights at this crucial stage of our history. ■

CHRISTOPHER ALLEN REVISITS THE SETTING FOR SOME OF EUROPE'S WORST ANTI-MUSLIM RIOTS OF RECENT YEARS AND ASKS WHAT RELEVANCE THIS HAS TO BRITAIN TODAY.

EL EJIDO AV

"I'm worried about tension and frustration spilling over into the disintegration of community relations and social cohesion...I'm worried about people taking the law into their own hands"

So were the words of the Home Secretary David Blunkett in an interview with the New Statesman just over a year ago. At the time, his comments were being made against the backdrop of a rapidly intensifying and inflammatory situation where all but one of Britain's tabloid newspapers had decided that it was 'open season' to say and report anything - however inaccurate or dangerous - about refugees and asylum seekers in Britain. One year on and the situation can only be seen to have worsened, where 'open season' has become 'absolute norm'.

Whilst Blunkett expressed what he described as his fears and worries for the future, in suggesting that "we're all responsible for our actions and the subsequent outcome", for someone who has described certain sections of British society as 'whining maniacs', decried asylum seekers for 'swamping' our schools and suggested everything from enforced English classes through to citizenship tests, one can only hope that he too will accept his rightful responsibility should the situation across society deteriorate any further. It is probably not that difficult to understand why those such as the denounced - but widely supported - presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk thought that he could get away with saying whatever he wanted about whoever he wanted. If the Government can do it - Blunkett, Denis MacShane, Anne Cryer et al - why then not celebrities, one must ask?

Yet just a short glance into recent history highlights just how incendiary the situation is in Britain at the moment. And whilst the tabloids and Blunkett do little to douse the flames, a retrospective of what happened just four years ago in El Ejido, Spain must surely be a warning to us all.

El Ejido is situated in the Andalucian region of Almeira, and over recent years it has been transformed from a poverty-stricken near desert to possibly Europe's wealthiest agricultural area. This transformation was overseen by a handful of landowners and farmers who quite openly exploited cheap immigrant labour, mainly young Muslim men from Morocco. The immigrant workers were typically paid less than £2 an hour and an estimated 70% lived in overcrowded shacks, often without running water or electricity on the outskirts of the town. Many of the 15,000 immigrants had also paid in excess

The sheer violence and viciousness of the rampage clearly highlights the depths of barbarity that ordinary 'civilised' people are willing to stoop to when they take the law into their own hands.



of £500 to be smuggled into the country. However, this was largely ignored by the authorities as they did not want to question the huge profits of the businessmen. The local mayor also repeatedly blocked attempts to both improve the immigrants' conditions and break the effective apartheid system that existed in the area.

As has been recently seen in parts of Britain and elsewhere in Europe though, the resentment and enforced separation of communities allowed neo-Nazi, fascist and racist groups to exploit the situation for their own benefit. The proliferation of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment circulating in the area became epidemical. Not only did the far-right influence attitudes and tensions towards the immigrant community - around 10% of the town's total population - but the media further exacerbated the situation by regularly running stories and reports that indiscriminately accused 'immigrants' of being responsible for the alleged soaring crime

rates in the area. Incidentally, some time after the ensuing trouble, police chiefs reluctantly admitted that there had been no rise in crime in El Ejido during this period.

In an attempt to try and calm measures and bring about a long-term solution to the problem, parliament passed a law allowing up to 70,000 illegal immigrants to take up permanent residency. As a result, they also became eligible to expect better working conditions and entitled to the necessary legislative protection. As public opinion reached boiling point, the media and opposition parties immediately rejected parliament's measures and a rise in the number of attacks on immigrants in the town ensued. At the same time, two gardeners were stabbed to death and a Moroccan man was arrested in connection.

The situation again worsened a week later when another Moroccan - who was eventually diagnosed as being mentally ill - was arrested for murder. This time, the victim was a 26-year old local woman, Encarnacion Lopez, who was stabbed to death in the town's marketplace.

Attendance at her funeral became a somewhat symbolic gesture, where the local media encouraged people to attend in protest of the apparent wave of thefts and rapes being committed by illegal immigrants. The funeral was also publicised on a number of neo-Nazi websites in both Spain and elsewhere throughout Europe, encouraging supporters to attend more generally in protest of the mere presence of 'foreigners'.

DO A WARNING FROM HISTORY



Estimates reckon that almost 1,000 attended the funeral service, although during the service the mourners inside the church saw their numbers outside dramatically increase to a number in excess of 5,000. And as the coffin was lowered into the grave, the already agitated crowd became increasingly angry, and turned on local politicians who had to seek refuge in the church.

The mourners transformed themselves into a savage mob seeking revenge for this woman's death, and as a 5,000 strong mob orchestrated a pogrom on the streets of El Ejido, the battle cry became "Moors out": the same battle cry that previous generations of Spaniards had used to expel Muslims some 500 years earlier. The mob stoned immigrants, set fire to their shacks and urinated on copies of the Quran. Other Islamic symbols were also desecrated. In addition to burning down immigrant-owned shops and houses, some immigrants who tried to escape were pulled from their cars and beaten before their vehicles were smashed in front of them.

Most of the North African immigrants, in a state of abject terror, took to the foothills of the nearby sierra for safety in fear of their lives.

The reaction of the authorities was to give an explicit order to the police not to intervene, and for 24 hours, the town centre was barricaded against journalists, politicians and even Red Cross workers as the population was allowed to take matters into their own hands. It was only after three days of what was the worst outbreak of racist violence to affect modern Spain, were 500 riot police finally allowed into the town.

23 arrests were eventually made and 50 injuries were reported, with over half of those arrested being immigrants who had tried to defend themselves. The events left the rest of Spain reeling and prompted an official protest from Morocco. From official reports, there are no records that show that anyone participating in the mob violence was ever brought to trial, nor whether any of the immigrant population were missing.

Whilst El Ejido is recovering, it will never be the same again. Taunts and threats are a part of daily life for Muslim workers, despite many being legal citizens of Spain, and whilst the same number of illegal and legal immigrants reside there, many fewer are actually seen on the streets. A tinderbox situation remains, and many are just waiting for the necessary spark.

The warning therefore is clear for all to see and spelling it out is

unnecessary. The sheer violence and viciousness of the rampage clearly highlights the depths of barbarity that ordinary 'civilised' people are willing to stoop to when they take the law into their own hands. In this respect, we must all hope that neither the Home Secretary's comments nor the prolonged campaigns against asylum seekers are seen to be a green light to do the same here or indeed elsewhere.

The contemporary similarity with Britain is striking: the hyperbolic sensationalism of the media; the widespread belief that asylum seekers are illegal immigrants; and the demonisation of a community that exists largely without a voice.



But the contemporary similarity with Britain is striking: the hyperbolic sensationalism of the media; the exploitation by the far-right; the rhetorical politicking of central government; the urban myths relating to benefit fraud, 'swamping' schools and draining the NHS; the widespread belief that asylum seekers are illegal immigrants hell-bent on crime; and the demonisation of a community that exists largely without a voice.

The potential for violence - possibly even a recurrence of violence - must therefore be a possibility here.

Lessons must therefore be learned as history can give us the hindsight to counter

the problems of not having foresight. If, as David Blunkett suggested, British society is "febrile...at the moment" then we need to wake up to these realities today. Whilst he may truly endorse the view that we are all 'responsible for our actions and their subsequent outcome', he and others must stop the rhetoric and practices that have seen him dubbed the most right wing Home Secretary of the past 50 years and certain newspapers rehashing old racist diatribes that British society must surely have thought had been confined to the archives of history decades ago.

And so the relevance and significance of El Ejido could be more important now than ever. As the BNP have shown in local elections, the widespread and unchallenged demonisation of a particular group of people or communities - contemporarily, Muslims and asylum seekers - can reap serious rewards. From the streets of Burnley to Bradford, Oldham to Hanley, the tensions within Britain have been quite evident over the past few years. What one must ask now though, is 'when' rather than 'if' such tensions will begin to spill over onto the streets again. Already in Sittingbourne in Kent, residents have spoken of burning down a hotel if asylum seekers begin to be housed there.

Blunkett says that some communities in Britain are "like a coiled spring", ominously on the look out for scapegoats. As a warning to us all, El Ejido shows us the consequence of what that uncoiled spring may well look like. ■

FATHER KNOWS BEST

AT A MAJOR LONDON CONFERENCE IN APRIL, EXPERTS WILL DISCUSS HOW ISLAM CAN SUPPORT MODERN FATHERS AND ENSURE THEY GIVE THEIR BEST TO FAMILY LIFE, WRITES JACK O'SULLIVAN.

Last year, in a Message to Dad competition run by schools, a 10 year old British Muslim boy, sent this message to his father. "I had fun the other day when we went to the fair," he began. "When we went on the bumper cars I was scared, because everyone was bumping into us. The Waltzer was screaming. When we got off you were OK, but I was really dizzy. After we'd had a drink I had a go on Hook the Duck. It was easy. Thank you for taking me to the fair. I am excited about visiting Bangladesh with you soon. I am excited about going on an aeroplane."

The message offers an insight into how children value their fathers and time with them. And when fathers are not there, dead or separated from the family, children go on longing for them. In the same competition an 11-year old Muslim girl recorded her feelings at the loss of her dad. "If you look at the sky at night you will see that there are no more stars," starts her message. "And it's all your fault because every time I miss you a star falls from the sky. And I have missed you so much that there are no more stars in the sky and soon no moon."

It was messages like these that have prompted *Q-News*, the Muslim College, the An-Nisa Society and Fathers Direct to join forces for a special event to look at Islam and fatherhood. On 5 April, we are hoping that community workers, religious leaders and workers in mosques along with family sector workers with a specific interest in the Islamic perspective will come together to look at how fatherhood can be best harnessed for raising Muslim children in Britain.

Among those taking part in the three-hour forum will be Dr Zaki Badawi, Chair of Council of Imams and Mosques, and Principal of the Muslim College and Fuad Nahdi, Publisher of *Q-News*. Humera Khan of the An-Nisa Society will lead the event which explores the role of fathers within an Islamic context and the barriers that exist to a healthy Muslim family life in Britain. It will look at whether Muslim men feel that the institutions that so influence their children's lives - schools, health and social services - can better involve fathers.

Dr Badawi was a key supporter of last year's Message to Dad competition and was among a number of religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, who last Fathers' Day (June 15)

encouraged dads to spend more time with their children.

"Islam sees active fatherhood as central to a man's role in life and to the development of his children," explained Dr Badawi. "A Muslim father is - besides being an inspiring role model - a friend, a teacher and the source of much practical advice. There are so many pressures on men today, such as working hours, that sometimes it is very hard to fulfil these complex and difficult roles. But whatever the circumstances we must never neglect our duty to be compassionate and sensitive.

"A man named Al-Aqra ibn Habis visited the Noble Prophet and was surprised to see him kiss his grandsons, Hassan and Hussein. 'Do you kiss your children?' he asked, adding that he had ten children and never kissed one of them. '[That shows] you have no mercy and tenderness at all. Those who do not show mercy to others will not have God's mercy shown on them,' commented the Messenger of God."

The forum on Islam and fatherhood, sponsored by BT, is part of a one day conference taking place at London's Institute of Education on April 5 which places the spotlight on fatherhood issues in a host of areas, also including the workplace, health services, education and fatherhood among black and minority ethnic communities. Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has a long record of supporting active fatherhood and recently introduced paid paternity for all new dads, is among the speakers. Margaret Hodge, the Children's Minister, will also speak at the conference, which, uniquely, will have a parallel children's event at which young people will develop and then present their own thoughts about fatherhood.

There is now a great deal of research into the influence that good fathering has on children. This month, Charlie Lewis, Professor of Developmental Psychology at Lancaster University, and Professor Michael Lamb of the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development will publish a review of research into the impact of fatherhood. It shows that a child with an involved dad typically has better social skills by the time he or she reaches nursery. He can also be expected to do better at examinations at 16 and be less likely to have a criminal record at 21.

Likewise, fathers' hostility towards their 16-year olds and the extent to which they undermined their teenagers' autonomy during interaction predicted the degree of hostility and low self esteem reported in these "children" by close friends at age 25. Lewis and Lamb tentatively conclude that father-child relationships may be the most important influence of psychosocial health in older children and adults.

There is a tendency to think that fathers matter only to boys. However, latest research indicates that a good father-daughter relationship make its easier for women later on to develop and maintain lifelong relationships with men. In the background of female eating disorders is often found a poor relationship between a girl or woman and her father.

We are also witnessing dramatic changes in the behaviour of fathers. A couple of generations ago in Western society, it was rare for men to attend the birth of their children. Today, 96 per cent of fathers in the UK are present, according to a major study by the National Childbirth Trust.

Assumptions are also changing about work. There was a time when it was assumed that men earned the money and women stayed at home and raised the children. This is still true in many families, but in many others it is no longer the case. In families in Britain where both parents work, men now do one third of the parental childcare according to research published by the Equal Opportunities Commission. One third! That is a social revolution. And these are not such unusual families: in more than half of British families with children under five, both parents have jobs.

As all this change is happening, we are also living through a period of self-doubt and uncertainty about what a dad should do and be. There is the constant issue of balancing "being there" for your child and working enough to pay the bills. (Dads in the UK work longer hours than any other social group and actually increase their hours after the birth of a child) There are also deeper questions about identity, role and authority. Fuad Nahdi of Q News, raised in Kenya and now living in Britain, has written movingly about dealing with this uncertainty in raising his own children.

Writing soon after the events of September 11, he struggled to answer some of his son Nadir's questions. "Your experience should give you an edge at parenting, yet much of mine seems irrelevant," he confessed. "I grew up in a place where age was aspired to because it is associated with practical knowledge. I took it for granted that my father always knew more than me. Knowledge was one way for a father to assert authority over a child. But, thanks to new technology and a multi-faith, multi-cultural society, my own son makes me vulnerable. He often knows more than I do.

"I was raised in a small coastal village on the east coast of Africa. It was a cosy world of certainty. We were all alike and spoke alike. Nadir is in a class of 15 languages and eight faiths. He comes with questions needing answers."

"I can fob him off with wishy-washy answers. But he will see through me or I can humiliate myself and admit: 'I don't know'. Saying that means you lose stature. You have to come back with something useful. You have to realise that it is not about giving simple answers, but training him how to find the answer."

We hope that the conference in April will provide an opportunity for many Muslim parents - dads and mums - along with professionals in the field to tackle some of these issues. There are a lot of families who need answers. And we should not forget that children deserve the best father they can get. ■

For information on "Working With Fathers -The National Conference" on April 5 contact Jack O'Sullivan 01608 737125 or j.osullivan@fathersdirect.com

A QUIZ FOR DADS

DO YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD?
(your child can mark this)

Name your child's best friends?

What are your child's favourite TV programmes?

Name your child's favourite book.

Do you know the title and content of their latest video?

Who influences his/her opinions most?

What football team does he or she support?

If your child had £25 what would he/she spend it on?

What was your child's greatest achievement last year?

How would he/she spend an ideal day out?

ISLAM THE ENEMY

The lasting impression left from the era of the crusades lingers in the same vein that runs in today's media. Crusading propaganda served as an effective catalyst, using the power of words to stir men into aggressive action by projecting vulgar portrayals of the enemy. These days, propaganda takes two forms: explicit and implicit. The latter is more dangerous since it can furtively sway peoples' attitudes. Almost daily, we are confronted with words and images that we then unwittingly accept as norms. The word 'terrorist' repeatedly appears with 'Muslim' or 'Islam'. Words that should convey truth, beauty and peace are tainted by such associations and new words like 'Islamist' wrap all these negative perceptions in a single phrase. The oxymoron 'Muslim terrorist' is as much an anathema to Islam as 'Christian terrorist' is to Christianity. It is naive to suggest that all Muslims are entirely innocent of these slurs, but it is equally ignorant to demonise them all.

The association of the devil with Islam became a theme that ran through medieval Christianity. In the early 12th century, historian Guibert de Nogent, recounted that Muhammad, peace be upon him, "was being filled with profane teaching drawn by the devil's piping". Another writer, William, Bishop of Tyre, c. 1170, brands the Prophet, peace be upon him, as the "first born of Satan". The legacy of crusading rhetoric resonates in the words of Reverend Franklin Graham, George Bush's choice of preacher for his presidential inauguration. Graham called Islam 'a very wicked and evil religion'. The same rhetoric was again use by the President himself and many cringed at his use of the word 'crusade', and his primitive 'us versus them', 'good versus axis of evil' approach.

Manipulation of the news media was evident in the Jessica Lynch story that used the simple black and white formula with the good guys 'rescuing' Lynch from the 'bad' Iraqis, played out to the world's audience. The distasteful depiction of Muslims as agents of terror also permeates fiction, for example in BBC's Spooks and Hollywood films such as Under Siege. Entertainment



This 11th century cathedral statue depicts the superiority of the Christian over the turbaned Muslim upon whom he is standing. The military victory of Christian rulers over Islamic principalities of that time was accompanied by a campaign of anti-Islamic propaganda staged in Christian churches and their outdoor sculptures, where the Muslim is depicted as unrefined, materialistic, primitive, and sexually perverse. Photographic documentation by Claudio Lange.

FROM THE TIME OF THE FIRST CRUSADE, LAUNCHED IN 1095, THE CHRISTIAN WORLD HAS OFTEN VIEWED MUSLIMS NEGATIVELY, DEEMING THEM SATANIC AND EVIL. REMONA ALY LOOKS AT HOW THE ATTITUDES OF THE PAST RECUR IN THE PRESENT.

had its own parallel in the crusades, for example with Chanson de Roland, an epic poem composed during the end of the eleventh century where Muslim warriors are the villains, described as having 'evil traits' and whose souls are 'carried off by Satan'. The perpetual myth of the enemy in western films and dramas, cast the Japanese after Pearl Harbour, the Russians following the Cold War, and now Muslims are in the role of the enemy.

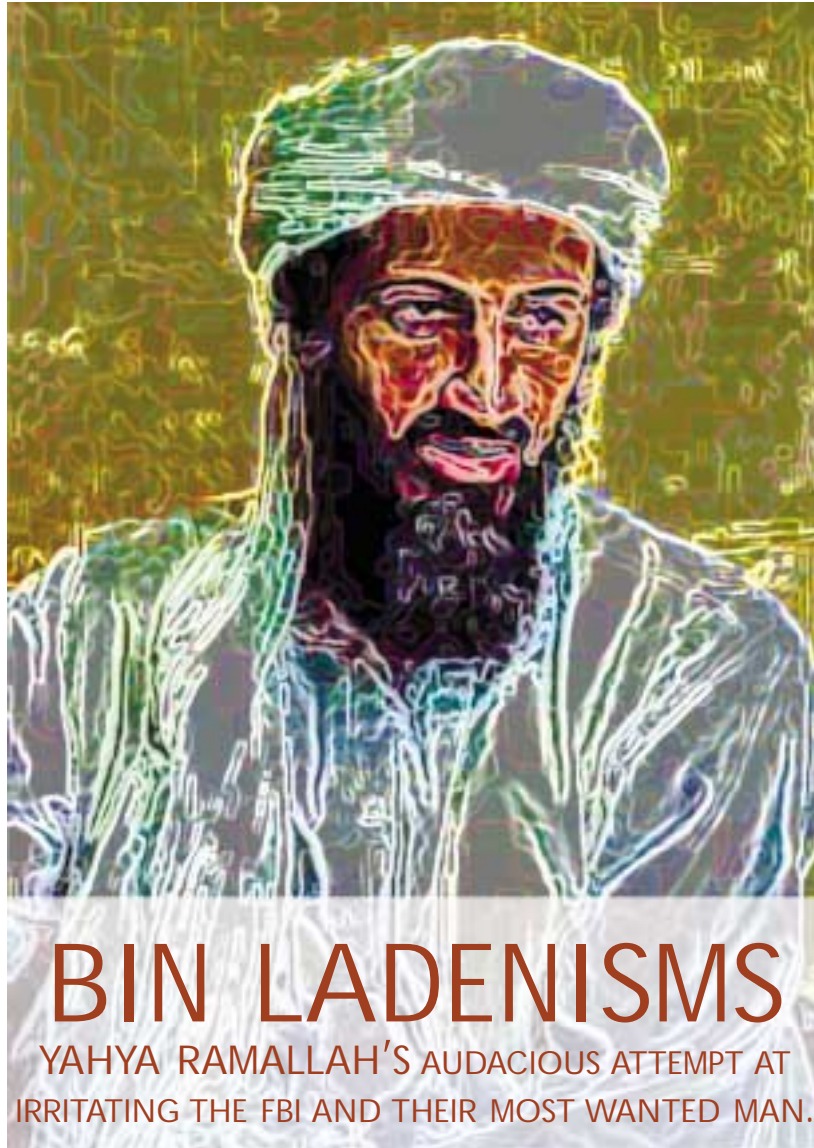
Robert Kilroy-Silk's notorious 'We owe the Arabs nothing' rant conjures up a grossly generalised image of all Arabs, reverberating the medieval sentiment. Take, for example, Kilroy's suggesting the Arab world to be 'loathsome' and then consider the 'Turci Spurci', 'filthy

Turks' labelled by Pope Urban II in 1095. This is not to flatter Kilroy with delusions of grandeur by grouping him with a medieval Pope, but merely to point out how the crusading era has left a legacy of enmity that we can find in today's newspapers. Of course, there are those who endeavour to offer less prejudiced views of 'the other', bringing balance and insight to news reporting, a rarity these days. The hate and total absence of mature balanced judgement may to some extent, be excused in medieval literates, but certainly should not be so easily dismissed today when mutual understanding and tolerance are meant to play key roles in the modern world.

The crusade chroniclers labelled their enemies in similar ways we do today - the hostile voices from the past find their echoes in the present. Labels facilitate our grasping of concepts and convey an identity for what is far more complicated than its title would suggest. Muslims have even begun to label themselves using others' definitions, dividing themselves into 'moderates' or 'extremists', yet by whose standards? The propaganda machine is fuelled with misplaced words, and chokes out dubious images for us to inhale. We must be wary of allowing them to become embedded in our subconscious. Terms that resound age-old grievances need to be addressed and challenged in ways that provide a platform for real intellectual thought and debate. ■

Admittedly, this is a puerile effort at light-hearted humour, and in no way denigrates the jihad activities of Bin Laden, ably supported by his CIA cohorts, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In contrast to Bin Ladenisms, Bushisms are genuinely hilarious, particularly ironic as the present incumbent of the White House, like his predecessors, is allegedly “the most powerful man on Earth” and is, for choice of a better word, stupid, if not the most stupid man on Earth. A democratic vote of the world’s population would concur with that view. It is the most stupid plot to try to suggest, as British PM Blair attempted during President Bush’s state visit to the UK in November 2003, that the President is actually shrewd - a bluff of a double-bluff, so to speak. Let us remind ourselves of the Bush doctrine’s foreign policy in its inception.

Four years earlier in November 1999, Bush was a presidential candidate being quizzed about foreign policy. The task he was given was to name four Presidents in four areas of the world. It is not expected that everyone would have been able to name all four, but most Muslims may have managed two, such as naming the head of Pakistan as General Pervez Musharraf, his Indian counterpart Vajpayee, and some even three, like Bin Laden, who, as an international affairs enthusiast, could have also named the Chechan President in 1999, Aslan Maskhadov. How many did Bush get? One - and even that could be a guess - as when he was asked who the President of Taiwan was, he replied, “Yeah, Lee.” If persisted, one suspects the first name offered might have, just might have, been ‘Bruce’, or at a stretch, ‘Jackie’, even ‘Ang’. But, it was his fumbling at naming General Musharraf that proved achingly funny. The interviewer asked who was the general who was in charge of Pakistan, and Bush quipped, in that notorious ‘direct’ manner of speaking, “The new Pakistani general, he’s just been elected, uhm, - not elected, this guy took over office. It appears this guy is going to bring stability to the country and I think that’s good news for the sub-continent.” The interviewer asked if he could name him, at which Bush replied, “General... uhm. I can’t name the general...uhm... General.” General was actually given by the interviewer in the question - it wasn’t a trick question. The moment proved presciently sweeter when General Musharraf became President Bush’s ally following the launch of ‘The War on Terror’. It



further substantiates how the American President appears to be a puppet of his masters, those strategising their ‘Project for the New American Century’.

Having fully offended the present American administration, we neither intend to offend Bin Laden, anyone who shares his name or is affiliated to his organisation, if only for our own safety. Alternatively, Bin Laden may, if sufficiently irritated, order an assassination. We hope that Bin Laden has greater priorities than us and our mere attempt at humour.

Bin Leiden - Based on the city of Leiden in west Netherlands which houses the country’s oldest university. The University is responsible for one of the greatest achievements of modern academia, The Encyclopedia of Islam, where for the first time in publishing history, a team of scholars of many different nationalities began work on a single scientific project. This may be dismissed as Orientalist drivel by Bin Laden, who would assuredly endorse al-

Qaeda’s CD-Rom version of The Encyclopaedia of Jihad as a future rival purchase.

Bin Ladin - Ladin is the Rhaeto-Romanic dialect of the Engadine in Switzerland, and therefore is very helpful for money laundering operations via Swiss Bank accounts. The Swiss also have export industries in cuckoo clocks, cheese and Toblerone bars if al-Qaeda is considering entering new markets.

Bin Ladena - Ladino is the language based on old Spanish and written in modified Hebrew characters, used by some Sephardic Jews; such an association may merit that assassination as would Binjamin Laden.

Bin Ladena - Ladino is also a mestizo or Spanish-speaking white person in Central America, which is exactly what Dubya is, and as his brother Jeb is married to a Hispanic woman, this is very handy for courting the substantial Hispanic vote. Debating with Usama’s brother, Khalil, naturally a Spanish speaker as Brazil’s Honorary Consul for Saudi Arabia, should therefore be easy.

Bin Leader - Bin Laden is Chief Executive Officer of al-Qaeda, and may remain in that position despite some of his management board being subject to a hostile takeover bid from Way Out West. Bin Laden may find it amusing that following a rejection from Texas University Law School, Dubya had to attend Harvard for his

MBA in 1975, and may therefore consider his business management skills far superior than those of Dubya's. Whereas Bin Laden received his public management degree from King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah and successfully managed a global recruitment drive for the Afghan jihad, Dubya's Harvard MBA could not prevent him from being a director of businesses which had losses totaling \$371 million from 1979 to 1992.

Bin Ladenator - Like The Terminator, Bin Laden likes making comebacks when you least expect it, such as immediately after the New Year. Following the election of Hollywood actor Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Governor of California, is it possible to envisage Bench-Press Laden running for Governor of Baghdad instead of Bremer Laden?

Bin Ladenistan - An area somewhere east Kandahar, of which current franchisees are profitable in Baghdad, and 2004 openings in Iran and Syria. No sign of McGolden Arches and Colonel Sanders in this area.

Bin Ladies Man - With four wives whom he often smiles about, Bin Laden is an accomplished and seasoned polygynist, and Time Magazine and other international publications have revealed that many females the world over swooned over Bin Laden's "soulful eyes".

Bionic Laden - Bin Laden becomes the \$300 Million Dollar Man after getting bionic parts.

Bin Lavidá Loca - No hip-swivelling, but Bin Laden does like to live dangerously. May also go under the name Bin Latin.

Benz Laden - When Bin Laden decides to enter the autotrading world with Mercedes.

Benzine Laden - Oil is a natural market for Middle East-based al-Qaeda, but renewable fossil fuels may be a better long-term option, if only as part of a Corporate Social Responsibility policy.

Tony Benn Laden - Tony Benn, British Labour Parliamentarian for decades, meets President Saddam Hussein in early 2003 to avert the Iraq war = "al-Qaeda connection to Benn Laden" says the press - White House.

Benefit Laden - Name given to an al-Qaeda operative working in the United Kingdom, claiming social security benefit for himself, his three wives and twenty kids.

Benedictine Laden - Name given to a monk who finally decides that Christian love is not working, the churches are emptier by the year, all media coverage is negative, so therefore joins al-Qaeda Group, LLC (USA), Ltd. (UK).

Bin Liner - The first "joke" to appear after Bin Laden, and so reprehensible, it warrants a fatwa.

Benetton Laden - Name given to controversial B-movie advertising techniques used by al-Qaeda fanboys (Bin Ladenettes) in the West every September 11 to celebrate the events. 'Towering Day' in history (like The Towering Inferno) or 'The Magnificent 19' (like The Magnificent Seven). Seem to be stuck in American cinema of the early Seventies, so should we expect Bin Laden to be crowned The Godfather this year? Cue Brando Laden.

Bin La Deen - Translated as 'the one without religion.' This was circulated after 9/11 by those using text messages, who probably

believe Neil Armstrong and Will Smith became Muslims as well, despite strenuous but polite denials by all.

Binocular Laden - Name of binoculars used to effectively evade Western military taskforces for years running - product endorsements for Nikon, Pentax or Ricoh would not be out of the question.

Biriani Laden - Though the British national dish is Chicken Tandoori, Bin Laden himself would have become accustomed to the meat and rice dish of the biryani during his stay in Kandahar.

Beatle Laden - Decides not to sing 'It's Bin a Hard Day's Night' when Americans decide to reduce Afghan mountains to dust.

Blair Laden - Bush Baby Buddy available when needed to launch wars and says "Trust Me" often.

Blaine Laden - Sits in box over the Thames for 44 days, so Western military taskforces know where he is, but don't apprehend him because of sheer entertainment value.

Blue-Chip Laden - "Venture Capitalist (also known as Benefactor Laden) offers share-options for al-Qaeda following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq - expect sustained profits in 2004 with emerging markets of Iran and Syria."

Bond Laden - Uses pay-off lines like "No more beating about the Bush, Bush" or "When Bush comes to shove".

Bounty Laden - Eats chocolate-covered coconut bar on his desert island, before selecting his Desert Island Discs.

Baby Laden - Travels to the Wild West and has brawls in the saloon with

Big Bad Baby Bush. Considered alliance with former rival Bad Baby Saddam, endowed with caterpillar-like moustache and green beret, before his capture.

Brand Laden - Following conversion to the ideas of Naomi Klein's No Logo, al-Qaeda does not utilise logos, and therefore if its CEO were invited to Buckingham Palace, as his colleagues were invited to the White House by President Reagan, there would be no Great Seal of al-Qaeda above a pop-tastic pavilion to receive him.

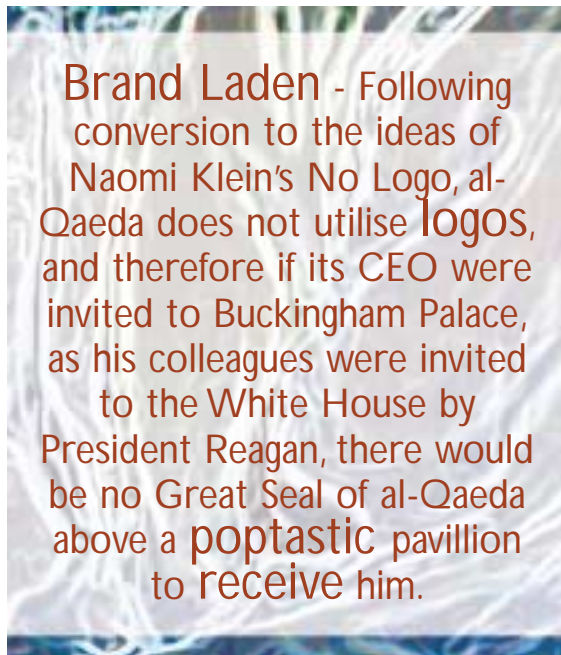
Brother Laden - Not an Amish member, but a foolish man of dreams who refers to you as 'akhi' before launching a vitriolic attack about how you are mistaken in your beliefs, and he and his fraternity are correct. May also have a brand of jurisprudence which condones smoking and enjoins rabble-rousing outside mosques after a Friday prayer.

Burger Laden - As part of 'Jihad vs. McWorld', the new Big Mac, and equally as obesity-inducing.

Bushwhacker Laden - Whilst living in the uncultivated areas of Afghanistan, finds time to whack a Bush or two.

Bin Ladenesque - Term adopted by Middle Eastern analysts to over-analyse spectacular tactics used for al-Qaeda outsourcing operations in the War on Terror.

Bin Le Don - Bin Laden fellowships exist at both Ox-ferd and Harvard, so if Dubya decides to visit the Bin Laden Fellow at his alma mater; they may find his Bushisms far more insulting to their kudos than the cool, calm, measured diatribes of Bin Laden on al-Jazeera! ■





BUILDING BRIDGES

PETER MARMOREK

My work on the bridge started late Thursday, 6 September 2001. I was working on my seating plans, my lesson plans and marking the first day's writing. Though the school year was only three days old, I felt two weeks behind. I sighed at the knock on my classroom door. Someone would probably want something from me.

At the door were two young women, wearing hijabs. I knew one was in my Writer's Craft class, Syrian, though I didn't know her name without my seating plan. I smiled and invited them in. They explained that they were on the executive of the Muslim Students Association, and needed an official staff advisor. They wanted to know if I would take on the role.

I hesitated, feeling incredibly complimented that they would ask a Jewish teacher, but not wanting to take on more work. They saw my hesitation, and explained fervently how many Muslim students had spoken of my World Religions course, and the unbiased way it taught Islam. They explained how they would do all the work, I just needed to be there to get official approval. After thirty years of teaching, I knew students always say that when they want you to be a staff advisor. Rarely is it true. But these two had an enthusiasm and energy that encouraged me to do it. I promised them the next day. They left; I went back to marking.

That night I thought about being Jewish and working with a Muslim group, and what that would mean to me and to them. I thought about the shame I felt at what the Israeli government was doing to Palestinians and remembered my grandmother's stories of non-Jews who had helped her escape Germany during the Holocaust, and how those stories had changed my attitude towards Germans. I thought about how easy it might be to be from the Middle East and hate all Jews for what some Jews were doing. And I thought it might not be much work, finding rooms for Friday Prayers, and holding occasional MSA meetings. The next day, 7 September, I agreed to do it. It didn't seem a very big decision. Big decisions often don't, as you make them.

These dates are here because they are important. Four days later, September 11, a student ran into my class yelling that two planes had just crashed into the World Trade Center. In the following days, we heard of the anti-Islamic backlash in North America, of mosques being

vandalized and Muslims harassed. The role of the MSA and its staff advisor clearly had become more than we'd thought it would be.

Within a few weeks we put up posters advertising a lecture: "September 11th: An Islamic Perspective". A packed school auditorium heard a charismatic Muslim speaker from a neighbouring school speak eloquently of the horror of the attack, of the 200 Muslims who died in it, and of how it violated the basic tenets of Islam. I spoke at the school staff meeting about the need to support our 300 Muslim students (20% of the school). We had only one minor incident: a 14 year old boy said, "What are you going to do, bomb me?" in an argument with a Muslim student. When the administration suspended him for three days, the word swiftly spread, and there were no further incidents.

By now I had come to know that the two girls who led the MSA were brilliant, hard-working students who continually generated exciting ideas and plans. We held an Iftar during Ramadan, and drew 400 students, 200 of whom were not Muslim. They came to learn from the two speakers, and shared the meal the MSA prepared.

The student in Writer's Craft had the highest mark in the class, and wrote profound stories about Islam. She wrote about a Muslim girl waiting for her first meeting with a young man approved of by her parents, and their ensuing conflict over whether a wife should only raise children, or can hold a job as well. She wrote about a Muslim girl at a fair, mocked for her hijab, who struggles against the temptation of an easier life without it. We talked deeply about her stories, her characters, and her values, and I learned some of what it feels like to be Muslim. I talked about Israel, and how every Friday I stood with "The Women In Black" to protest at the Israeli embassy and she was amazed because she didn't know of Jews who felt the treatment of the Palestinians was morally indefensible. She talked of her family fleeing Syria for Canada, and I talked of my family escaping the Holocaust. And one of us (I truly can't remember which) said, "We should create a Middle East presentation for the school on what's happening there."

I knew it was a minefield. Five per cent of the school was Jewish, and no one can say anything about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict without mortally offending someone. But because I was Jewish, no one would accuse me of anti-Semitism; because I was two years from retirement, it couldn't hurt my career. And I kept hearing the echoes of those questions Rabbi Hillel asked 2500 years ago, "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

So I went to the school administration and got approval. The MSA helped me find three speakers: a Muslim, Lebanese Christian, and Jew from "The Women in Black" protests. I created a combined Palestinian/Israeli flag for publicity. We produced a brochure with facts, maps and spaces for student comments, and we were ready. Again the auditorium was jammed. Most of the students loved it. Some were interested (one wrote, "I had no idea there were political problems in the Middle East.") And some really, really hated it.

A Jewish girl confronted me in tears and anger about why no speakers had defended the Israeli Government. I understood her fury; it is a terrible thing to hear yourself described as an oppressor when you believe you are the victim. I too had grown up with the myth of plucky little Israel standing up to a gang of Arab bullies, and had believed it until I took a course from Noam Chomsky, and learned another way of seeing history. But that had been a slow and hard transition, not one that happened quickly.

I kept hearing the echoes of those questions Rabbi Hillel asked 2500 years ago, "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

The girl wasn't able to hear anything I said to her in that moment. The next day her father sent an eight page fax entitled "Pro-Palestinian Propaganda in Peel Schools" to our school, the Peel Board of Education, the Minister of Education, the local synagogue, and the largest newspaper in Canada. The fax was furious and intemperate...the advertising had promised a discussion: why had only one perspective been presented?

The Board investigated and I was asked by my principal about my selection of speakers. I explained that I had only brought in speakers who proposed peaceful solutions and had not chosen any speaker who supported violence, either suicide bombing or Israeli military, because I believed advocating violence was inappropriate in public schools. The board approved my position, and the investigation ended.

One of the Jewish teachers in the school loved the presentation.

The other didn't speak to me for the next year. But I knew that I had achieved one of my goals for taking on the role of staff advisor: no MSA member from this group would ever say, "All Jews support Israel and hate Muslims."

The next year arrived, my last as a teacher, and my two MSA leaders had graduated. I wondered whether to stay on. But the new MSA executive was so enthusiastic about my support and importance that I had no real choice. Again, we ran a successful Iftar. We staged a powerful presentation on "Ten Misconceptions You Have about Islam" which both Muslim and non-Muslim students loved.

At the end of the year, the MSA presented me with a farewell gift thanking me for "continuous dedication to the MSA...(you) always pushed us forward and supported our decisions every step of the way". And then it was over.

Good teaching always works two ways. The teacher changes the students, but is also changed by them. Through my association with the MSA, I had learned to understand Islam at a deeper level than textbook learning, because I had seen the living power of the religion in my students' lives. I had made Muslim friends, both students and adults. And I saw, more clearly than before, that even in Canada there was a strong element of racism and intolerance that needed to be fought, and that that fight started in me, because I had my own biases and prejudices. Once, writing about Muslim students, I had cheerfully noted "our culture has much to learn from them". And then, with horror, I saw just what I'd written. "Our culture"? "Them?" And I was hugely grateful to my students for helping me start to see my own blinders.

So even though I am now retired, I am still walking the path that those two students pulled me onto. I work with Tikkun, a group inspired by Jewish social justice traditions that works to heal the rift between Jews and Muslims, by working with like-minded Muslim groups, and by speaking out against injustices against Muslims, in both Palestine and Canada. I remain in touch through email with many ex-MSA students. And I see the Jewish/Muslim conflict not as an irreconcilable war, but a family quarrel that can be solved through deep and truthful communication between us.

Is it enough? No, of course not. No one individual's work is ever enough. But as an old Canadian saying puts it, "No one snowflake thinks it is responsible for the avalanche." Working with what I learned from my students in the MSA, I am helping to add one small piece to a bridge being built between two shores. Others will add more pieces from both sides until, Inshallah, the two spans meet and the bridge is built. ■



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RACIAL PROFILING DEEPENING DIVISIONS

NEW MEASURES HAVE LED TO A BREAKDOWN IN THE RULE OF LAW,
A CASE OF ASSUMING GUILT WITHOUT DUE PROCESS.

Standing at the checkout, Adeel Akhtar finds himself redirected to immigration. He is brusquely asked if he has friends in the Middle East, or knows anyone who approved of the attacks on September 11th. Another journey and a 50-year-old Pakistani housewife from London's suburbs is stopped. She is handcuffed, chained and marched back through the departure lounge.

These are not isolated incidents. Rather, they are an undeclared norm. Since September 11th, over 1,000 people who were born in the Middle East have been detained indefinitely for "immigration infractions." The multitude of accounts of Asian or Arab men and women being stopped at immigration for humiliating and unnecessary checks has demonstrated that racial profiling is an unacknowledged fact of America's new security policy. In light of the US Attorney General's call for some 5,000 men of Arab origin to be questioned by federal investigators, there arises legitimate ground for concern.

While advocates of racial profiling point to its effectiveness in stopping terrorism, in its practical manifestation, it has come hand in hand with a break down in the rule of law. A person is found guilty without the opportunity to prove his or her innocence.

It would be naive to look at racial profiling as an isolated process in today's political climate. The picture painted has an ugly background and Guantanamo Bay is the embarrassing, illegitimate spawn that has resulted.

Bush's infamous quote hardly helps: "You are either with us or against us." The first casualty of this media-perpetuated notion of the "clash of civilisations" between Islam and the West has been our common humanity. Profiling is merely a political tool which helps create the essential "other" or invisible enemy. There is no "clash" of civilisations - a statement that implies an inherent incompatibility between Islam and the West. What has emerged since September 11th is the "crash" of civilization with the downward spiral of widespread ignorance and fear.

On arriving at immigrations, it is unlikely that the September 11th pilots would have hinted at their ambitions if questioned about their purpose of stay. The patronising nature of questions that are asked by US authorities only induces more anti-US sentiment. The lines of interrogation are hardly incisive. Being asked on the Dell website whether one is going to use a computer to make weapons of mass destruction is clearly not going to lead to the option of "why don't you upgrade to Windows XP Professional?" The procedure is a dead end, making people who might be slightly irritated, very irritated. This combined with singling out Arabs and Asians nudges



moderate Muslims towards more extreme positions, creating new problems, which hitherto did not exist.

As Amnesty International noted in May 2003, "Racial profiling and detention of immigrants in the USA and labelling of refugees and asylum-seekers as 'terrorists' in Europe have compounded the stigmatisation...Action that makes people feel insecure cannot make societies secure." Wise words - profiling is a polarising process; it separates Muslims from the rest of society.

And where will racial profiling lead us? The position of the US as a global hegemon morally obliges it to behave responsibly. To gain legitimacy for bombing yet another strategically located nation, Blair and Bush created an enemy. Invisible enemies are hard to portray in today's information-rich world. And so we fall back on race and religion.

With US supremacy we are witnessing the internationalisation of Hitlerian ideology. Racial profiling is a means to an end.

Racial profiling is hardly an effective means of stopping people who are increasingly determined and who will come up with increasingly elaborate plans like that of the attack on the Twin Towers. The US has consistently turned a blind eye to the roots of the problem: Irrational discrimination against Muslims; economic, social and political imposition of an incompatible system of governance; pillaging of natural resources to the disadvantage of the native population; restraints on the establishment of Islamic education. Increasing victimisation will only exacerbate the current situation. The growing anger of Muslims needs to be countered by including Muslims in society rather than excluding them. Ignorance on one side and frustration on the other is a dangerous combination.

As the miasma surrounding historical events, such as the McCarthy era, has long since dissipated, history will stand true in the future. Indeed this era is a testament to the here and now. Nixon said about McCarthy on 4 March 1954, "Men who have in the past done effective work exposing Communists in this country have, by reckless talk and questionable methods, made themselves the issue rather than the cause they believe in so deeply." It would be the fallacy of a nation, indeed a generation, to accept a morally unfair, stigmatised and ignorant system of law and order. US and UK foreign policy today is turning a blind eye to the real sources of the problem. Every generation sows the political seeds of the future which in turn shape and determine the course that is to prevail. Let's not be the generation that nurtures the seeds of racism that will only divide us and our children after us. ■

RAIHAN ALFARADHI AND AFAAF RAJBEE ARE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS



“L’AFFAIRE DU FOULARD ISLAMIQUE”

A plan by the French government to ban the hijab in public schools has once again brought the question of Muslim women and dress to the forefront of the ongoing public discussion about Islam in Europe. President Jacques Chirac claims this is about “conspicuous” religious symbols including Jewish skullcaps, turbans and large crucifixes, but let’s face it - the dispute into which he has stepped is about the headscarf.

Needless to say, the hijab is not our favourite topic of discussion. Fraught by reductionist arguments on both sides, debates about the hijab simply reduce Muslim women to a piece of cloth. We long for the day when a Muslim woman is neither the sum nor the absence of a headscarf.

Mr Chirac, a Christian wearing a cross is not analogous to a Sikh wearing a turban, a Muslim wearing a scarf or a Jew wearing a skullcap. To hang a crucifix is a personal display of faith. To observant Muslims, Jews and Sikhs, however, head coverings are obligations. Their observance therefore, falls under the rubric of freedom of expression and conscience, not, as you would have it, proselytism.

Perhaps, the hijabi can be a frightening - we are “the veiled women,” poisoning “free and democratic” cultures with our “weak and submissive ways.” A Muslim woman, more often than not, wears the hijab because it is a spiritual expression of her values.

When French supporters of the ban speak of the oppression of women, we say that the real issue is not the hijab at all. The issue is a red herring, diverting our attention from the real problems: France’s five million Muslims suffer from one of the poorest and least developed race relations policies in the west. They are the bottom of rung of society, suffering from racism on all fronts.

If this ban comes into effect, France would be driving determined Muslim students who wear headscarves into the hands of religiously sponsored institutions, where notions of mutual tolerance are unlikely to be a central focus. In effect, as France’s blunt Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy,

argued, the law would only intensify the problems it is trying to resolve. Do not forget the reasons why the West embraced the concept of a separation of church and state to begin with - every attempt by one religion or ideology to dictate its precepts on others led to only greater problems. The idea was to get the state out of the business of telling people what they should believe or how they could express it.

So, is hijab a political symbol? At times, it can be. It is a way for Muslim women to mark their identity and publicly declare their faith. In the face of rising Islamophobia, it may even be considered an act of resistance.

Can hijab be used by some as a form of oppression? Yes it can be. While we condemn France, we must also censure the governments of Tunisia, Turkey and other nations who have also taken legal measures to block free religious expression. We question societies where the hijab is imposed in coercive ways.

We understand the challenges that Muslim women face. Muslim women fight day-to-day with multiple racisms, prejudices and barriers. We cannot afford to have this largely undocumented story of struggle further obscured by the Chiracs and the Stasis.

At the same time, we do not and must not condemn those who choose not to wear it. Our faith is broad enough to encompass all levels of practice, united as we are, by a simple, powerful creed. We also need to celebrate the tens of thousands of women who are contributing to the well being of their communities and are an integral part of the broader struggle for a better Britain and a better world for all.

This month our writers consider the scope, contradictions and implications of the current crisis. We know this debate isn’t over a headscarf. It’s about faith, the value of freedom and the consequences of expression. And if we think that resolution of the French controversy will be the end of it, think again - we ain’t seen nothing yet. ■

ALMOST FIVE YEARS AGO, MERVE KAVAKCI WAS PUBLICLY FORCED OUT OF HER ELECTED POSITION IN THE TURKISH PARLIAMENT AFTER SHE REFUSED TO REMOVE HER HIJAB. IN THIS EXCLUSIVE ESSAY, SHE CHALLENGES THE SECULAR FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THEIR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE "DANGEROUS" YET "OPPRESSED" MUSLIM WOMAN.

PUT THIS
WOMAN
IN HER
PLACE

It was right after the September 11 attacks. Forty-five minutes into my interview with an American journalist, she posed a question that left me aghast, "What would you do if hijab was banned in the United States? Would you take it off?" I did not know how to respond to such a preposterous question. "If the day comes when wearing the hijab is banned in America,"

I said, "America would not be 'America' any more. I guess I would have to find a new 'America' and move there."

Since then, what I thought as myopic, far-fetched and ludicrous has become increasingly likely. The world, with America at its center, is literally evincing a mounting intolerance towards practicing Muslims, lacking the ability to differentiate between what they call "terrorists" and those who are peaceful, devout Muslims. Conceivably, a Muslim woman's right to wear hijab has been thrust to the frontline. Was America becoming "un-American" before our eyes? Was the world hurtling into a period of tenacious dictatorship, in a process unfolding sooner than we would have ever surmised?

There is no doubt in many minds that President Bush is a man of strong religious convictions. In fact, and perhaps ironically, this aspect of his personality was precisely what appealed to the Muslim voters in 2000 elections, leading American Muslims to block vote for the first time. Nevertheless, during his first days in the White House, long before 11 September 2001, President Bush cancelled the annual iftar program at the last minute and later, in the years to follow, he has invited and been in contact with an entirely new group of

Muslims who, some argue, do not represent the “Muslim vote”.

The attacks on September 11th changed everything. Dialogue between American Muslims and Washington’s new administration was gravely ravaged. For many, the government’s attempt at fighting terrorism turned into a fight against Muslims. It was clear that the clout of the fervent Christian right wing in the Bush administration had cast a shadow over the White House. Its treatment of Muslims was partial and incendiary to say the least. Investigations, raids, unexpected visits and the like continued to exacerbate the debilitated dialogue between American Muslims and the Bush Administration.

The deterioration in communication was crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it left American Muslims disconnected, ostracized and marginalized. Secondly, the example set by America, was emulated around the world vis-a-vis their stance on Islam and Muslims. When President Bush put it in the blunt terms of “You are with us or against us”, he -perhaps inadvertently, but effectively nonetheless - gave fuel to the unremitting witch-hunt of Muslims. He also led the world down a one way street that would ineluctably end with a no way out predicament. Some, who have long been waiting for a reason to take the Muslim on, delightfully seized the opportunity with no vacillation. They have interpreted Bush’s call as a free pass to assail Muslims. In their conniving pursuit of “getting” the Muslims, I would argue, what could have ever been a better target than a woman’s sacred covering - her hijab?

Right after the aforementioned proverbial ultimatum by President Bush, the governments of Spain and Indonesia curbed hijab-wearing students from attending classes. After weeks of heated discussions, common sense prevailed and the ban was lifted. In countries such as Tunisia, France and Turkey which have been implementing the ban on hijab for decades, took the opportunity given by President Bush to justify their coercive stance on hijab. Unlike the cases in Spain and Indonesia, the hijab issue continued to be problematic in these countries. In no time however, September 11 spurred further intolerance towards the hijab, leading to bans in parts of Germany, Belgium, Denmark and the United States.

As to where hijab intolerance finds support and how to go about eliminating it, one has to evaluate the issue both within the context of a particular country and the context of “across the board” political and social dynamics. Among France, Tunisia and Turkey, to the surprise of many, Tunisia is in fact the worst violator of women’s rights. While such concerns have fallen on deaf ears, the Tunisian government remains intransigent in its laws concerning hijab. Women are not permitted to even walk on the streets wearing the hijab. Tunisia, under the Presidency of Bourguiba opted to accultur-



Some... have interpreted Bush’s call as a “free pass” to assail devout Muslims. In their conniving pursuit of “getting” the Muslims, I would argue, what could have ever been a better target than a woman’s sacred covering - her hijab?

ate devout Tunisian women by simply barring hijab everywhere, taking on the very characteristics of a police state. Whoever dares to defy or protest the ban faces dire consequences.

France, on the other hand, is a democracy with a “laic” state edifice. It has at times banned the wearing of religious symbols including hijab in state elementary and secondary education. Nonetheless, the French government accommodates religious schools where girls can choose to wear hijab. Despite such accommodation in early education, the French government and French society are very well-known for the tendency to discriminate against hijabi women in the workforce. France’s laic structure should not be confused with the “secularism” in the American or Canadian context. Theoretically speaking, a laic state, unlike a secular state, holds “control” over religion to a varying extent. A secular state on the other hand would pose neither as a religious nor a non-religious entity. Therefore, despite the fact that the word “laic” is translated to English as “secular”, a laic statehood cannot pose an impartial stance on religion. It does carry - as in the case of France - the elements of non-religiosity in its making. Therefore, its vantage point espouses a negative, non-objective view of religion in the public sphere. Hence, its distance from religiosity and non-religiosity cannot be squared. It patently favors non-religiosity over religiosity.

A second example of laic statehood is Turkey. Turkey imported its laic structure from France but went further in her intolerance towards the hijab. Unlike France, religious schools in Turkey belong to the state. Thus, religious education is controlled by the state itself. While the Turkish state strives to prevent religion’s interference over state affairs, it falls into aberration of creating its own religion or a “state religion” if you will. Hence, a girl who is to attend a religious or regular school in Turkey cannot wear hijab under any circumstances. The ban is meticulously implemented in higher education as well. As far as professional life is concerned, most of the private realm is also under the control and inspection of the state. As a result of this pervasive ban, today we witness the emergence of a new social class in Turkey, dubbed “victimized women in hijab” who are caught in between their religious convictions and their education and professions. This social stratum is comprised of girls and women who were coerced into quitting their education and ousted from their professions. Any attempt to enter the public realm in religious attire would cause a great deal of trepidation and indignation on the part of the “protectors” of the laic state. One recent manifestation of such a crisis was President Sezer’s decision not to invite the hijab-wearing wives of the MPs of the ruling party to the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic. Despite the chiding he received from

the public, the President did not budge. He ended up with the company of merely a few members, including the Prime Minister Erdogan whose wife was also not invited because she wears a hijab. Erdogan opted to stand with a phlegmatic stature and sufficed by responding to a journalist's question concerning his wife's absence by asking, "How would you feel if you were in her shoes?"

Following the elections of 3 November 2002, which brought the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to office with a landslide victory much to the chagrin of many Kemalists, the wife of the Speaker of the Parliament Mrs. Arinc (who also wears a headscarf) was zeroed in on by the staunchly secular elite and the Turkish media for accompanying her husband, the President and his wife, to the airport as the President was leaving for a visit abroad. The contention was then, as it is now, that the "public realm" must not be marred by any religious symbols.

Nonetheless, even the Arinc crisis did not evoke the wrath and indignation of the secular fundamentalists as much as my own infamous crisis. It took place in the aftermath of the 1999 general elections when I walked into the Turkish Parliament with my headscarf as an elected M.P. from Istanbul. The so-called proponents of westernisation and democratisation of Turkey, parliamentarians from the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), thwarted my oath-taking after a provoking speech from the then Prime Minister Ecevit. For over forty-five minutes, following Ecevit's demands that fellow members of the parliament "Put this woman in her place!", I was subjected to chantings of "Get out! Get Out!"

I was terrified and obfuscated as I sat there in what is supposed to be the nation's parliament, watching some one hundred and fifty people who simply could not adhere to the oath of office they were about to take before the nation - an oath that they would uphold the law and not discriminate against anyone based on religion, ethnicity and the like. There I was, facing a group of men and women who could not look beyond what I wore.

Just eleven days later, my citizenship was revoked and I was accused of a number of charges - from "instigating hatred amongst people" to "striving to destroy the laic structure of the Turkish state". The Constitutional Court closed down our party, and banned five MPs, including myself from running for office for five years.

Laic states like France and Turkey can easily be defied if they claim to be both democratic and adherents to values of human rights -which is the case in both of these countries.



States can indeed be secular. Can or should people be coerced into being secular? Is it legitimate to demand that one leave his or her religious convictions at home as he or she walks out the door?

The caveat with such a system is its proclivity towards a tyrannical reign like anti-religious fascism. Due to the state's involvement in religious affairs with the intention to keep religion under control, the state becomes a means to stifle rights. Eventually, it poses itself as an inextricable part of religious affairs because it claims to "own" religion. Hence, the emergence of a "state religion" does not serve the purpose of true secularism.

Regardless of the geographical premise in which the ban on hijab manifests itself, the supporting arguments seem to be similar. Unremittingly, the contention seems to hover around the question of "public realm". What is public realm and what is not? Addressing questions pertinent to the public realm may not be as easy as it seems. Attempting to draw a public realm raises further questions for the democratic mind. For instance, on what basis could the common people be denied from existing in "public"? Is it possible that what is said to be the public realm is occupied or shaped by the "private" which is claimed by the elite? The claim voiced by the proponents of the ban is that, "If the hijab is permitted, the secular state will face perdition." States can indeed be secular. Can or should people be coerced into being secular? Is it legitimate to demand from one to leave his or her religious convictions at home as he or she walks out the door? Since it is literally impossible to divorce oneself from one's convictions, that is to be "impartial", how can a quasi secular statesman or woman guarantee others that he or she does not reflect his or her non-religiosity in his or her daily work in public realm. Would not he or she

be considered as biased and non-objective as much as a religious person, but on the other end of the continuum? These are some of the questions which challenge both "secular" and "laic" states.

Another very common aspect of the issue raised by secularists who are the proponents of the ban is the "fear" aspect. The fulcrum is the argument that, "If we permit you to wear a headscarf now, one day you'll come to power and force everyone else to wear headscarves and strip us of our rights". Despite the grotesqueness of such an extrapolation, such fears do reign even in democratic minds. Nonetheless, this argument is problematic for it fails to respond to the question of whether "the abridgement of specific ecumenical rights can be legitimised and justified in pursuit of 'protecting' another set of ecumenical rights due to the 'potential' threat of the former over the latter?"

It seems that the contentious discourse over hijab will not taper off any time soon. Meanwhile, haplessly, the world will become a place where religious expression is stifled and where it becomes increasingly harder to simply "be" a Muslim woman. ■



BIG TROUBLE IN MIDDLE ENGLAND

I WAS ONLY FOURTEEN WHEN MY SISTER FATIMA AND I WERE SUSPENDED FROM OUR 'NICE LITTLE SCHOOL' IN BOWDON, CHESHIRE, WRITES AISHA ALVI. ALTRINCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL HAD HIT THE HEADLINES FOR THE WRONG REASONS. AT ISSUE WASN'T OUR GRADES, IT WAS OUR HEADSCARVES.

I was born and brought up in the heart of Bowdon, a small village about fifteen miles outside of Manchester. Not only was there no Muslim community in the area, and it was so unusual for a 'brown' person to be sighted in the suburbs, that my uncle was once stopped by the police while walking from the rail station to our house and asked where he was going. When he said that his brother had bought a house in Bowdon, the police immediately knew he was speaking of Dr. Alvi and he was told to go on his merry way!

I grew up attending the local Church of England Primary School. We took part in the Christian assembly which meant singing hymns, reciting the Lord's Prayer and being a narrator from the Holy Bible, which always stirred something deep within me. This holy book was precious, as was the Quran, which my father would read aloud to us in translation at home. We attended the local Church with school for special services and even attended the local Baptist Church in school holidays. We were told by my mother not to call God by the name of Jesus or Father, or sing hymns about the

crucifixion. As for everything else we very much took part, especially the much loved nativity play which was always a real treat.

My father was an eye surgeon and consultant ophthalmologist. He and my mother would take us to the first purpose built mosque in Manchester on significant occasions in the Islamic calendar. Living away from the community and mosque meant my parents had to take it upon themselves to teach us the daily prayers in Arabic, fasting in Ramadan, being told about the holy cities of Makkah and Medina and that girls who had boyfriends and went to discos 'were very bad'.

When I was ten, I started attending the Muslim Youth Foundation circles in Manchester with my sister Saima and started learning more about Islam. I had always felt there was something more to my faith than just the basics. Despite being young, I had always felt that I did not fit in with both the children at school and in the neighbourhood. I was never 'one of them'. The Manchester gatherings helped me realise that I was a British Muslim.



I decided to wear hijab in my second year at Altrincham. This was not something that I had discussed with my parents. I did not need to. I had been making decisions on the way I wanted to lead my life from very early on. It was simple matter for me: would I brave enough to practice the letter and the spirit of the sacred laws on dress and modesty? Out of politeness I requested my father to ask our headmistress, Mrs. Doris Delides if it was agreeable for me to wear a headscarf to school. At the time, it did not cross my mind that there would be any problem. My concerns were about facing up to friends and the rest of the school about my change of attire. After all I would be the only girl dressed in the school in a headscarf. This was a school with very few 'non-white' faces and to see a person in hijab would be tremendously unusual. Even in my own family, only my sister Saima wore the hijab - my mother and other sisters did not. At least the Head and staff would be aware and supportive of my decision; how naïve I was!

I was asked in the first instance to show how the scarf would be worn. I assured the Head that it would tucked securely into my white blouse. But that wasn't the point. I was told that I would not be allowed to wear the scarf in school. It was agreed that the matter would be discussed with the governing body. In the meantime, I decided to wear the scarf to and from school. As time went on, my sister Fatima decided she too wanted to wear hijab. I now felt a little stronger. I wasn't alone.

For two years we found ourselves going back and forth with the headmistress. We were both told in no uncertain terms that it was against the school rules and that 'no form of headdress may be worn'. Mrs Delides defended her position stating that the corridors were very narrow and our scarves might get caught on someone's bag when moving between buildings and lessons. The story of the famous ballet dancer Isadora Duncan who strangled herself to death on her scarf was cited to us as an example of the danger our scarves posed. No mention was made at the time about safety issues in the laboratory or gymnasium. This was only used later when the school needed to justify themselves to the press.

We told her that other schools in the area had started allowing Muslim girls to wear scarves. It was suggested that we go to one of 'those' schools. But, this was the only girl's only grammar school in the area, why should we go anywhere else?

Fatima drafted a letter of protest to the governing body of the

school pointing out that we felt that we were being 'watched' by the school authorities. We were told by the head that "when in Rome do as the Roman do" - a strange thing to say to people born and raised in the UK. We had no country to go back to; this was our country.

The school quoted from guidelines issued by the Muslim Education Coordination Council (MECC) which did not give any mention of headscarves though halal meat, separate shower facilities and festivals were highlighted. We explained that this was due to an oversight on the part of the MECC, something which could easily be rectified by the very many Muslim authorities in the UK. In fact, no school policy even existed on the issue. However, at the beginning of the following academic year, 'no form of headdress may be worn', was added to the list of rules.

My parents were frustrated. On one occasion, my mother had sided with Mrs. Delides against us saying that there was no need to wear headscarves in a girls' school. We were battling to get my parents on side too!

This had gone on long enough. Fatima and I agreed that we must force the issues. Without consulting our parents she decided to go to school wearing the hijab. It was decided that I would stay off school this first day and wait to see what happened.

In our hearts, we took our strength from God and in our minds we were armed with our basic right to an education in a school for which we had passed a difficult entrance examination. Once we displayed our conviction, there was no turning back. In truth, this was the most daunting part. At the age of fourteen, I worried about how my education would suffer. What schools would actually accept me when I was turned out? How would friends and family react? Was this the right step?

Our day of reckoning finally came. We refused to obey the rules of a school in a country where all religions and cultures were supposed to be tolerated. Fatima went to school and was called to the head's office. She was asked to remove the scarf, if she did not she would not be allowed to attend classes and would thus, be sent home. She refused and with no one at home to come and get her, Fatima was kept next to the headmistress's office in what used to be a store room. At lunchtime, she was asked to remove her hijab which she said she just could not do. Consequently, she was not allowed to go for lunch to the dining hall, instead she was given one banana to eat.

An emergency meeting convened by Mrs. Delides with a few members of the governing body in the school library was held to discuss the situation at hand. My father, Fatima and I went together with our legal counsel and were made to feel right from the moment that we had stepped into something that would not be resolved easily. The underlying attitude of the governing body was to back whatever decision the Head had made. The jury left the room and on return told us in no uncertain terms that we are formally suspended from school from this point onwards if we choose to wear the scarves. If we removed the scarves then we could resume our education immediately. My heart sank. The worst case scenario was now before us.

At this point, we now not only had to be strong in ourselves but continuously convince my worrying father that there was no other way. The school did not bother to send the letter of suspension until days later so we decided to continue going to school. Our routine became one of going to school, being 'caught' by the two deputy heads who were on duty to look out for us. If we made it just after the ringing of the bell, we were lucky enough to be able to sit through assembly. Then, my father or older sister would be called so that we could be sent home. Given that, it was not clearly stated in

writing that we were suspended so we continued going to school up until 23 January 1990 when the decision was reversed by the governing body.

The media interest sparked by one small piece printed in the now defunct Sunday Correspondent, was beyond our wildest imagination. We deliberately did not comment because we did not want to add fuel to the fire. In local news reports the Head had claimed that we were boycotting lessons, which was not true. Annoyed we decided it was time to make our story public if we were asked but we had to tread very carefully

Before we knew it the press were contacting every Alvi in Manchester! They were our relatives who then directed them to our family. It was press, press, press. Press in the morning at school, press at our house, and press on the phone. We were inundated. It was exhausting.

The headscarf affair was now in full swing, it was becoming a glamorised scandal. During this period the late Lady Diana visited an Islamic Centre in Stanmore where she removed her shoes and donned a black headscarf. The Daily Star had a front cover story shouting 'Di-Atollah!' The press paralleled her visit with our dilemma claiming she was showing her support to our cause.

The hate mail we received was abominable - thanks to tabloids that printed our address. Some may say, they reflected the true sentiments of how British people feel in this country. "We did not fight in the war for people like you to come and live in our country," said one letter, "go back to where you came from". My poor father had his picture cut out of the newspapers, defaced and sent back to us. Ironically, some of the public were demanding that he give us our 'freedom'. The police even considered prosecuting a well known racist thug who had put his name and address on the letters. One letter said "It is a good job that the press printed your address. At least I know where you live; I can post a petrol bomb through your letter box."

The fact that we were not being forced by our father to wear the scarves, an untruth presumed by the media, won some journalists over. The Guardian and Jewish Gazette threw their support behind us, calling the ban intolerant. Of the journalists covering the case, I want to make special mention of Terry Lloyd, who died last year in Iraq. His honesty, integrity and support set him apart. His death is a real loss to the journalism in Britain.

The full governing body meeting to consider the issue was finally held on 23 January 1990 at the local town hall. The press crowded into our house, in anticipation of the phone call from the town hall with the decision. It was decided that my father would answer the call and there would be live coverage of the reaction to the decision. It was nerve racking. When daddy answered the call, he made a statement saying the governors had voted in our favour. We could go back to school. Daddy hugged us both in front of the press. I cried tears of joy and relief.

Ironically, the school in a press statement said we 'were to wear scarves in dark colours'. This was their feeble last attempt at enforcing some kind of authority. It was the head who had asked us to wear white to and from school so it would match our white blouses.

The day we were allowed to enter the school premises, after weeks of being forcibly removed and barred, we heard a huge cheer from many of our schoolmates.

Several girls in my year at school opposed the hijab, however. I had debated the issue with them in the weeks running up to our decision to refuse to remove our scarves. Anna Lloyd, in her art folder displayed the slogan: "Ban the Headscarves". "What will Moslems demand next?" asked some others.

The pressure didn't end there. We received a death threat from the National Front the day we returned to school saying "the girls are in mortal danger". We were not sure if it was a hoax but it had to be taken seriously. A member of the National Front even called our house, had a lengthy conversation with my father asking why we were causing all this trouble. My father handled in a very calm, peaceful manner so as not to antagonise this man. We never heard anything after that.

Our lives had been turned upside down. Most of my peers were talking about the latest fashion, pop video or the cool guys from Altrincham Boys. In stark contrast my life had been overtaken by round table discussions with family, friends and people of authority about being able to wear a simple piece of cloth on my head! For the first time in my life I truly saw the racism and religious intolerance that existed in Britain.

People talk about integration and assimilation. I have done that. While we have grown up and lived in a white middle class English community, have we been accepted for our way of life? We accepted the English way of life but when it came down to it we were expected by some to give up aspects of our faith. It was something that we could simply not do. It reminds me of what the head-



mistress had told my sister: that education for an Asian girl is a waste because she never uses it. Her qualifications are just to help her get a better husband, so giving her a university place is pointless. I can now only laugh at such narrow minded prejudice. I am now a Barrister with a Masters of Law degree. Enough said.

When I see pictures of young women in France and elsewhere fighting for the right to wear the hijab, I

understand what they are going through. I understand what it feels like to be under a microscope, to have your faith maligned and your family threatened. I also know the kind of strength it takes to stand for your convictions and stand up for your fundamental human rights. We are slowly changing perceptions of our supposed widespread oppression. Our participation in the campaign for free religious expression is a rite of passage towards a day when we will be seen as equal citizens committed to a better Britain and a better world. When I go past Altrincham today and see dozens of girls in hijab and school uniform, I know we have made a difference. ■



DEAR MONSIEUR

RAISED IN ITS CULTURE, FLUENT IN ITS LANGUAGE, FRANCE'S COMPLEX
 RELATIONSHIP WITH ISLAM, BASHIR EBRAHIM SUBMITTED HIS LETTER TO
 FRANCE. SO WHEN BERNARD STASI CAME TO LAURENT FABER FOR ADVICE
 BEFORE THE FORMER MINISTER GOT AN EARFUL FROM THE PRESIDENT,
 HERE ARE EXCERPTS FROM HIS SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE. STASI
 2003 RECOMMENDED THE BANNING OF ISLAMIC SYMBOLS AND
 RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN PUBLIC PLACES.

The presence of some 15 million Muslims in Europe, of which 5 million are in France, and the increasing number of conversions to Islam by people of European descent has made Islam an integral part of European landscape. With the EU urging the harmonisation of the laws and attitudes towards religious minorities based on principles of equality, tolerance and freedom of expression, France and other nations must reassess their approach to religion and revisit their understanding of laïcité, or secularism.

With France's opposition to the war in Iraq, it is uniquely placed to play a positive role in both opposing unilateralism in world affairs and building bridges with the Muslim world, which sees France as not having joined the "war on Islam". This newfound respect, which years of post-colonial French foreign policy failed to achieve, now run the risk of disappearing as a result of "L'affaire foulard Islamique". Legislating against the headscarf will give global Islam a bloody nose, and a permanent sense of public humiliation for French Muslims.

Due to the sharp drop in birth rates across all industrialised Western Europe, Europe will need at least 20 million new immigrants in the next 25 years, according to UN and EU demographic studies. With three-quarters of all refugees come from the Muslim world, will France lose out to, say Britain, by alienating newcomers with policies restricting religious freedom?

Look at the example of Britain which is considered to be a community of communities. Each community contains many identities with many people belonging to more than one community. Every community influences, has an impact on and in turn is influenced by others. Britain is the space they all share. Some have far more power than others, but no group or community owns Britain. According to Bhikku Parekh, author of *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, the good society cherishes the diversity of and encourages a creative dialogue between its different cultures and their moral visions.

By contrast, France takes no official note of its citizens' ethnicity, culture and religion and does not record these in its census. It has continuously refused to even to consider the concept of multiculturalism let alone to adopt it. For France, multiculturalism means giving in to demands of immigrants. But multicultural policies and programs should not be solely identified with immigration issues, as Canada, Australia and Britain have successfully demonstrated. However, the rise of far right political groups in French politics, as was demonstrated by the strong Presidential candidacy of Jean-Marie Le Pen,

and perhaps the events of September 11, multiculturalism has begun to dominate the political agenda of France.

A cohesive notion of citizenship cannot be based simply on the idea that we should respect other people's values. It requires a positive articulation of the values to which we should all aspire. France needs to be cohesive as well as respectful of diversity and must find ways of nurturing diversity while fostering a common sense of belonging and a shared identity among its members. Shared values cannot be based purely on the 1905 law or be rooted in a mythical secular past.

This sense cannot take root and flourish within a structure of deep economic or social inequalities or by radicalising the Muslim populations of the French suburbs. All citizens are not only individuals but also members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities. France must become both a community of citizens and a community of communities. France needs to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences.

Integration is a two-way process. You cannot expect a community to successfully integrate when society itself refuses to integrate them. French Muslims are socially excluded, an underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream. The current French model of integration is high on banning the hijab, but says precious little about addressing housing policies that produced "des quartiers en rupture avec le tissu social", an education system which produce low achievement, or an economic policy which systematically produces high unemployment amongst certain communities. Successful and meaningful integration cannot take place in an environment of gross social deprivation and exclusion. There have even been several documented cases of applications for French citizenship being refused from French Muslims on the ground of their adherence to Islam!

French Muslims will not go away. France must not forget that she once assumed complete sovereignty over most of Muslim North Africa and the 1905 secularism law existed then "belle et bien". Where was the incompatibility between Islam and secularism?

French secularism was the result of painful negotiation and compromise between the Catholic Church and the state. How such negotiations and compromises, if any, will take form with French Muslims remains to be seen, for there is no "Muslim Church", or "Jewish

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Church" for that matter.

The creation of the CFCM, Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (French Council of Muslims), is a positive step in this process. However, if there is to be "un Islam de France" then Islam should be accommodated in both social and the political spheres. This does not mean introducing shariah within French laws, but it may simply mean putting an end to the process of demonising Islam, or discriminating against Muslims who wish to wear the scarf.

Even Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, himself said in an interview in *le Figaro* on 30 April, 2003 that, "France has for the last 40 years refused to face the realities of its immigrants. Islam was judged to be incompatible with the values of the Republic, therefore what did you do with five million Muslims who could not practice their religion in the open. You sent them to the suburbs to be radicalised and produced an Islam of the cellars and garages that has fed extremism and the language of violence."

The presence of religious symbols has been resolved in secular states like Britain and Canada, where concerns over Sikhs wearing their religiously mandated turbans were resolved through changes in legislation and regulation. The United States Congress intervened to allow Orthodox Jews to wear their yarmulkes while on active military duty.

Secularism is not monolithic and in some forms allows for the presence of religious traditions, language and customs without those things being, for the most part, exclusionary. The recent change in British employment laws forbidding discrimination on the basis of religion was accompanied by a statement from Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart who said, "The new measures making discrimination unlawful on grounds of religion will help bring about much wider equality."

As for the question of the headscarf during the first hijab crisis in 1989 at Creil, the opponents of the hijab said that it was an "ostentatious symbol" intended to put pressure on other Muslim girls and entailed proselytisation. The hijab, they further claimed, symbolized and reinforced women's oppression and that the hijab was an ideologically motivated assertion of religious identity inspired by a wider fundamentalist movement, which schools have a duty to combat.

Truthfully, if the "veil" is an expression of fundamentalism, then all Muslim Women who wear hijab, here or abroad, must by definition be fundamentalists, including the stridently liberal former Pakistan PM Benazir Bhutto!

There is no evidence to support the view that the hijab was intend-



ed to proselytize among non-Muslims or to put religious pressure on other Muslim girls. Its also assumes that Muslim girls wore the hijab under parental or communal pressure. Testimonies of the girls involved in the 1989 controversy indicate otherwise, as does the recent case of the expulsion of Lila and Alma Levy, who wore the hijab on their own and are supported by their Jewish father and secular Algerian mother. Similarly there is no evidence of political interests by the hijab wearers. In fact, in a recent poll of French Muslims, 78% feel that Islam is compatible with the values of the French Republic.

Oppression doesn't come from headscarves. The oppression of women lies in real issues such as illiteracy and lack of education. Even with improved education, many women will still choose to wear the headscarf, because it is their choice and their way of expressing their religion and culture.

To see the hijab merely as a sign of subjection, is to be trapped in crude cultural stereotypes and fail to appreciate the way complex processes of social change and intercultural negotiation are symbolised and triggered.

What is frequently and conveniently forgotten is the fact that Muslims have been present in Europe for centuries, at times actively engaged in the creation of European civilisation. In fact, modern Europe is a product of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and secular contributions and Europe is now the place where all these faiths and ideologies come together. Europe is at the heart of the modern dialogue of civilisations and the place where such a dialogue can best happen.

History will judge whether this incredible "ménage à quatre" will be embedded into the political framework across the EU or whether it will be the case of "two is company, three's a crowd and four is a non-starter", in other words, a return to the notion of a homogenous pure white, Christian Europe. If so, what's next?

The 1905 French law separating the Church and State, removed the judicial and educational privileges enjoyed by the Catholic Church and gave it to civil bodies. It left the practices of Christianity, ostentatious or not, largely unaffected. There is no "Eglise Musulmane" or Muslim Church in France, let alone any Muslim "privilege" to remove. Thus to ban the Hijab, would not be to defend the values of the Republic or to defend secularism, but to demonstrate secular fundamentalism at work. M. Stasi, the results of such a policy will be simply disastrous. ■

Recently, I attended a talk about the difficulty of wearing hijab in a certain Muslim country. A speaker was narrating - to a non-Muslim audience - the incredible obstacles in her path to wearing hijab. She was an optimistic, brave and articulate woman. I was also struck by her use of the word “choice” to describe her decision to wear the hijab.

What’s new, you say? We all hear women describe wearing the hijab as “an act of choice.” And this is indeed accurate; it is often a courageous act of choice. It doesn’t give women many advantages, either in the West or in postcolonial Muslim countries, where wearing such clothing is perceived as an act of downward social mobility and rigid religiosity.

But, why am I hung up on the word “choice”? Do I begrudge hijabis the use of that word? Not at all. I know that in many ways wearing hijab is a choice; I made it too. But eventually I made the opposite choice as well: doffing the headscarf. While I support my hijabi sisters in their choice, I half-expect support in mine.

In that panel, a secular Iranian woman assumed that the issue was exclusively one of hijab, and not of women’s religious freedom and agency. She spoke of many Iranian women who are forced to wear hijab. However, given the first speaker’s discourse of choice, the Iranian woman’s comments were out of place. The secular woman’s agenda isn’t necessarily opposed to the hijabi woman’s.

We must support the choices of women, whether they choose hijab or not. I oppose the use of compulsion in the headscarf - removing it or wearing it - and I question whether covering was ever legally enforced. But the Iranian lady’s comments represent why alliances between certain secular feminist women and Muslim women are fraught with difficulty. The fact that Iranian women are forced to wear chadors does not justify a snappish secular reaction against, for instance, Turkish or French hijabis. This is one of the obstacles to sisterhood. But so is the lack of support from hijabis to women whose cannot choose to *not* wear headscarves.

I half-accept this lack of support. How can they support me not observing what they consider an obligatory act? However, if they have any understanding of the nature of Islamic law, they should know that difference of opinion in [the Prophet’s] ummah is a mercy, according to a hadith.

I digress. The word that got me going was “choice.”

I once heard a young woman scornfully tell her Muslim friends about her conversations with a Christian friend. This Christian woman had said that she must surely be oppressed since she wore hijab. “But I tell them,” said the hijabi woman, “this is my choice! And in my country, you know, this is quite a difficult choice. My friend prays for me to find Christ. She doesn’t know anything about

Islam. She didn’t know that the ‘Christian’ countries haven’t always been Christian. I tell her that I didn’t just become Muslim because I was born Muslim. I read and researched things. But she doesn’t know anything about Islam!”

Aside from sympathizing with the fact that all Muslim women must deal with the “oppressed woman” stereotype, I couldn’t help but feel like her ego was getting in the way.

I wondered why she assumed that by virtue of being a Muslim, her choice of dress-in contrast to that of non-Muslims-was a pure exercise of choice and agency. Could one not argue that her exposure to a particular Islamic group, the peculiar culture of her country, and her mother (who wore hijab too) had something to do with her “choice”? Why must we consider people of other faiths as exercising no agency whatsoever, while

we attribute to ourselves a piety of purpose that challenges all determining factors?

I remembered an ayah that caused me much grief some years back. I mean ‘grief’ in the most amazing and terrible way. This was the end of *al-Takwir*, a beautiful chapter of the Quran, “This [message] is no less than a reminder to all humanity, to every one of you who wills to walk in a straight way. But you cannot will it unless God--the Sustainer of all the worlds--wills” (verses 27 to 29).

At the time that I read it - *really* read (though I probably still haven’t *really* read it), I was struggling with an apathy that had taken hold of my soul for a period of time. I saw those who had *taqwa* - I mean God-awareness, not “piety”-and I saw that I didn’t have it. I did a number of outward things to earn blessings, but my stagnancy remained. When I read this *ayah*, I was reminded that it was indeed *grace* and not my own merit that would alleviate my pain. God alone could take me out of the darkness. My own efforts had been “good deeds” bumping against each other in the dark, stepping on each other’s toes and barely getting anywhere.

Surah al-Muddathir reiterated the lesson, “Nay, verily this is an admonition; and whoever wills may take it to heart. But they will not take it to heart unless God so wills; for He is the Fount of all God-awareness and the Fount of all forgiveness” (verses 54-56).

So what was I to do? I turned to scholars, and asked them about the *ayah* that was making me sleepless. Is it God who is going to make me want to be good? Can I even want to want to be good on my own? The answer was no. You had to ask for guidance, like Adam and Eve, and unlike Satan. The master of a slave-woman found her praying in the middle of the night, and exclaimed that she must love Allah otherwise she would not be sacrificing sleep like this. She laughed. “You are wrong,” she said, “It is God who loves me, otherwise He would not have caused me to stand awake in prayer in the middle of the night.”

Some claim that this kind of answer implies we must passively sit by the roadside, since “we can’t do anything anyway!” But if you’re not permitted the one extreme of pure free will occurring in a vacuum, that does-

She insisted she wore the hijab out of choice, but I couldn’t help but feel her ego was getting in the way. What was it about her being Muslim and her wearing a headscarf that made her feel like it was a straightforward matter of choice and agency?

THE DILEMMA

n't mean the other extreme is the only alternative. After all, the Qur'an tells us that *la'in shakartum la-azeedannakum* ("If you are grateful I will give you more"), and that *yahdi ilaihi man anaab* ("He guides toward Himself the one who turns to Him). And the scholars remind us that *al-amr bayn al-amrain* (the matter is between the two matters).

This last comment "the matter is between the two matters" summarizes the scholarly view. Reality is between free will and predestination. When I read *Inner Aspects of Faith* by Shahidullah Faridi, I stopped worrying about it quite so much.

So why did I digress from hijab to free will versus predestination? Because I think I see secularising trends in contemporary Islamist discourse - an often rigid, hegemonic discourse that does not allow for alternatives, especially in North American Muslim communities.

The theme of "choice" in contemporary Islamic discourse lacks an adequate balancing mate of divine grace and gratitude. There isn't enough oomph, enough humility, in the conditioning *Alhamdulillahs* after the epic narration of our great deeds. We coo over panels of converts who describe how they read and thought and decided things. The other day, at a conference, I heard an inspiring Muslim activist sister claim that most Western converts converted because a rational examination of the data revealed to them the truth of Islam, and because they were dissatisfied with the intellectual notion of the Trinity. What about the spiritual experiences that led these men and women? Did something happen in their hearts? Did God play a role in their lives at all? Sometimes it doesn't sound like it.

Sometimes the language of choice even appears mildly blasphemous. It is as if we were Greek gods in our little religious epics, making moral decisions and congratulating ourselves on them.

Rationality goes hand in hand with the talk of "choice". It is an important part of our search for truth. But it does not work alone. When Allah speaks of those who reflect, He also says "He who wishes Allah to guide him, Allah opens his heart to submission." To what extent does contemporary Islamic discourse focus on this? We know all about the intellect, but what do we know about our souls? We know about choice, but who gave us that choice?

There are those who rant about "*shirk*" in Islamic practices they do not approve of; but how often is egotism indicated as potential *shirk*? When we take the credit for good deeds that were performed by the *tawfeeq* granted by Allah, we forget the oft-repeated phrase *la hawla wa la quwwata illa billah* (There is no power and no strength except in Allah.) We forget we have no power to do anything good, or to will any good-hijab or anything else-except by the power of God. ■

BY SHABANA MIR

OF CHOICE

COUNSEL ON DEATH

Prepare yourself for death, O my brother, for it will descend.
Do not draw out your hopes
in case your heart treats
you harshly.

Persevere in reflection which will make you aware
and move you to do good works, for life will soon depart.

Constantly reflect on the states of the Last Hour, the Rising,
the Gathering, and the Balance of actions which is set up.

Then there is the Bridge which will have obstacles laid out on it
to make the crossing difficult for the rebellious.

While whoever was obedient and sincere towards Allah
will pass over it like a flash of lightning or a wind and will go on.

If you wish to be given a drink from the Fountain
on the Day of Gathering,
you must love the Prophet
and his descendants.

And bless the Guide who intercedes for mankind. He is the one
who will plead for us when creation is terrified.

May the blessings of Allah be upon him in every land,
and on his family and Companions and those who love him.

I ask the Lord, Allah, for the gift of true happiness
and a seal of goodness for me and those who draw near.

FROM THE DIWAN OF
SHAYKH MUHAMMAD IBN AL-HABIB

A LEGACY

IF YOU WANT YOUR WEALTH TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SHARIAH AFTER YOUR DEATH, IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR YOU TO LEAVE A WILL WHICH IS VALID UNDER ENGLISH LAW AND WHICH EXPRESSES THAT WISH, WRITES
AHMAD THOMSON

Malik related to me from Nafi' from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: "It is the duty of a Muslim who has anything to bequeath not to let two nights pass without writing a Will about it." (Al-Muwatta' of Imam Malik: 37.1.1)

The beauty of the Shariah is its simplicity and certainty. When you are writing your Islamic Will, you do not have to try and figure out which of your relatives Will still be alive when you die in order to make sure that they Will receive something. Whoever administers your estate Will ascertain which of your relatives are still alive and what fixed shares they are automatically entitled to inherit by applying the criteria of the Shariah. If, however, you wish to make a bequest to someone who is not a relative, or to a charity or to a project, then you must specifically record this in your Will, remembering that only up to a third of your estate can be bequeathed in this way. The remaining two thirds must go to your relatives in the fixed shares prescribed by Allah. If you do not make any bequests of up to a third of your estate, then all of your estate Will be divided between your surviving relatives.

In a Muslim community, these principles of the Shariah are applied automatically as a matter of common sense and best practice, but in many countries today including the United Kingdom, if you do not leave an Islamic Will which states that you wish these principles to be applied - and which is valid in the eyes of the law of the land - then different criteria Will be applied.

There is not a country in the world today whose rulers can claim that all its laws are in accordance with the Shariah of Islam. Accordingly all Muslims living today are faced with the challenge of living in accordance with the Shariah as far as they are able to do so, while realising that they Will not always be able to put what they know into action. In the United Kingdom, for example, all Muslims at one time or another are obliged to submit to man-made laws which either conflict or are not in harmony with the Shariah of Islam. It is, however, often possible to follow the Shariah without breaking the English law, and vice versa. It is also possible at times to do something in accordance with the Shariah by utilising the English law, rather than by trying to avoid it.

WORTH LEAVING

Writing a valid Will which will be recognised by the English courts, even though it expresses the deceased's wish to have his or her wealth distributed in accordance with the Shariah, is one example of this - even though many of the principles governing the English law of inheritance are different from the criteria which are applied within the Shariah. For example:

- o If you do not leave a valid Will, then under English law you are deemed to have died 'intestate', and your wealth will be distributed to certain relatives in fixed shares - which are not the same as those laid down by the Shariah - or if there are no such relatives, then it will go to the Crown, that is, the government.
- o If you are married, and if both you and your spouse die leaving children under 18 years old, and if there is no valid Will stating whom you would like to be the guardian of any minor children who survive you, then they might be taken into care by the Local Authority.
- o If you have been married only in accordance with the Shariah in the United Kingdom, you will not be regarded as having been legally married for the purposes of English law. This means that if you die without having made a Will, your spouse will be regarded as an 'unmarried partner' and would not be permitted to inherit anything from your estate.
- o If, on the other hand, you married both under the Shariah and under English law at a registry office, and were then subsequently divorced under the Shariah but not under English law, then under English law you would still be regarded as 'married', and if you then died without having made a Will, your former spouse would then inherit from your estate even though he or she would no longer be entitled to a fixed share under the Shariah. If you were also in the process of being divorced under English law, but the decree absolute had not yet been pronounced at the time of your death, then again, under English law you would still be regarded as legally 'married'.
- o Similarly, if a Muslim man married a non-Muslim woman both under the Shariah and under English law at a registry office, and then he died without leaving a Will, then under English law she would be

and accordingly entitled to a certain



share of his

property, whereas under the Shariah she would not be entitled to a fixed share of his property - although he would have been entitled to make a specific bequest to her out of a third of his property, provided that it did not exceed the fixed share that she would have received had she been a Muslim.

In other words, there are contradictions between the English

law and the Shariah. When each is applied separately to an identical situation, the outcome is different, depending on which set of criteria is applied - although of course there are times when there is an overlap between the two and some of the criteria are identical.

Since English law is at present not subject to the Shariah, and is inevitably regarded in the English courts as having precedence over the Shariah, it follows that where there is any apparent contradiction between the two, the English law Will always be applied. This means, in practical terms, that it is necessary to comply with all the legal formalities required by English law before a Will can be regarded as valid. Provided that this is done, the English courts will then be prepared to give effect to your intentions as expressed in your Will - including having your property distributed in accordance with the Shariah after your death - provided that these intentions are clearly expressed and are free from ambiguity.

In other words, it is possible, under English law, to prepare a valid Will stating that you wish your wealth to be distributed in accordance with the Shariah of Islam - and so to subsequently have your wealth distributed in this manner after your death - provided that you have complied with all the legal formalities required by English law. In order to do this, it is necessary to have an understanding of both the Shariah and English law, since both require certain conditions to be fulfilled. Thus, for example, if the requirements under English law are not fulfilled, then your Will won't be considered valid; and if these requirements have been satisfied and your Will is valid, then you must also have ensured that the wishes expressed in your Will are in accordance with the Shariah.

So in order to ensure that your assets are distributed in accordance with the Shariah after your death, you must write a Will, and that Will must comply with the requirements of English law in order to be valid. If you do not do this, your wealth will not be distributed in accordance with the Shariah after you die.

It may appear to be a relatively minor way of going about things, but by ensuring that your wealth is distributed in accordance with the Shariah after your death, you are also helping to establish the deen of Islam - and in the eyes of Allah there is no better deen than this: "Surely the deen with Allah is Islam." (Qur'an: 3.19) May we live

to see all of the deen of Islam established by wise and sincere people, in all its beauty and majesty. Amin. This is the meaning of those well known words, "Peace in our time." ■



PRE PANIC

LAST RAMADAN, NAJIY A
LOOKED PALE A
WORKING FULL TIME AND TAK IN

Fifteen years ago, I was diagnosed with panic disorder. My friend went on to describe the same symptoms that had rendered me bedridden. All the guilt and stress that go with struggling to fulfill all those roles had taken its toll and manifested in what she called a breakdown. But her story was even more distressing, because it took her over two months to get diagnosed. For eight weeks she suffered through all kinds of “shot in the dark” medical tests, believing she was dying. She was finally able to get treatment when her husband described her situation to a doctor at the mosque. He recognized the disorder immediately, and she is now doing well under his care - gaining strength and resuming a normal life.

IF THEY ONLY TRUSTED ALLAH

For people with no panic attack experience, it seems logical, “If they only trusted Allah, they wouldn’t find themselves going over the edge.” But it’s not that simple. Often well-meaning family and friends make it worse. Comments like, “Just relax” or “Don’t think about it” or the worst, “Just be strong. You can do it!” imply that the panic attacks are somehow within the patient’s control, or that they constitute a character flaw.

NOTHING COULD BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH.

Panic disorder is very often a condition of those who pride themselves on self-control. Sufferers are usually intelligent, empathetic people, who feel the pain and anguish of others more than most people. They are often hyper-conscientious about their work, their homes and their family’s safety. They are uncomfortable when they feel that they are not fulfilling all their roles 100%. Guilt about not being perfect is a lifelong emotion.

WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENS?

During a panic attack the body’s “fight or flight” system is triggered for no apparent reason. This is a reflex that Allah gave us to allow us to either defend ourselves or flee in times of danger. When this response is triggered, adrenaline and other chemicals flood the body, fear overtakes the mind, the pace and depth of breathing

changes, the heart races, digestion stops, and blood flows to the extremities. If danger is present, all this is a wonderful gift from Allah, allowing us to cope with threats and giving us extra strength. However, if there is no danger present, the body has no way of discharging that extra energy. Sufferers feel enormous fear, tremble, experience heart palpitations, feel alternately cold and hot, are hit by waves of nausea, diarrhea and breathlessness. The most frustrating thing is that the body is designed so that the brain cannot override this response. It is physically impossible to rationalise or “talk yourself out of” a panic attack. No amount of intellectual knowledge or reassurances that you are safe will stop it.

WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

Eighty-nine million people worldwide suffer from panic disorder and yet, no one knows why. Theories abound but all we know is that panic disorder, which is historically and geographically universal, has a very physical dimension. It is a disorder that has a genetic component. When the genetic marker is present, environment and life circumstances can combine to trigger it, just like some people have a genetic predisposition to high blood pressure or heart disease, and their lifestyle and environment can combine to trigger those conditions. We also know it is a physical illness because medication can control it, demonstrating that it is chemical in nature and the fact that the frequency and severity of attacks are affected by chemically or hormonally significant events such as the menstrual cycle and pregnancy.

DEALING WITH PANIC

Once diagnosed, the sufferer is usually prescribed a combination of medication and cognitive or behavioral therapy. Tricyclic and SSRI antidepressants in very low doses work to prevent the brain from going into panic mode. Often patients are also prescribed a sedative such as Xanax or Lorazepam to help them override the panic and relax enough to function when an attack actually strikes. These secondary medications are usually taken regularly at first, then gradually tapered down until they are no longer necessary unless an attack should recur, which, once the disorder is under control is usually less than once a

RESSING THE IC BUTTON

Y AH DIANA HELWANI BUMPED INTO AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE. HER FRIEND
LE AND THIN AND LATER ADMITTED THAT SHE HAD RECENTLY "COLLAPSED" WHILE
K ING CARE OF HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN. IT ALL SOUNDED ODDLY FAMILIAR.

year. In cognitive or behavioral therapy, the patient is taught to think about stress differently, and process it in different ways. Some people have also had success with alternative therapies such as acupuncture or meditation.

But even if treatment has begun and strength begins to return, panic disorder can remain terrifying for Muslims because for us all things have a spiritual dimension. Patients often feel guilty and inadequate for having the disorder. They question their own spirituality. They wonder about the role of jinn ("Maybe I'm possessed?"). They wonder if they are being punished or tested. They wonder why they have this uncontrollable weakness when others are normal and can't even begin to relate to it.

If we all had the iman of Khalid Ibn Walid, may Allah be pleased with him, when he drank the poison with the name of Allah and it didn't harm him, then we would be unencumbered by the travails of this dunya. But the fact that we are not the companions of the Blessed Prophet does not mean that we are spiritually doomed, either. There are ways we can improve our spiritual life to better enable us to cope with our tests. These methods are the same for panic sufferers as they are for everyone else. Concentrate

on your five daily prayers - establish it regularly and guard it fiercely. Keep your tongue busy remembering Allah. Study the seerah and the biographies of the sahabah - it will soften your heart.

Strengthen your connections with the Muslim community - forming a network of relationships that will aid you both in your spiritual jihad and in your times of physical need.

It is okay to accept help. Sufferers frequently choose to suffer alone rather than impose on anyone else. But in refusing help they not only prolong their own recovery, they also deny blessings to those around them who hate to see them suffer, and whose own spirituality could be strengthened by helping them.

To conclude, if you or someone you know suffers from panic attacks, see the doctor to address the physical side of it, and then concentrate on spiritual nourishment. Muslims have always been advised to address both our physical and our spiritual needs. When we pay attention to both we will be healthier in mind, body, and most of all, spirit. ■

FACTS ABOUT PANIC DISORDER

Panic disorder is not a result of weak iman.

It is a chemical malfunction which triggers the brain's fight or flight response for no apparent reason.

It has genetic, psychological and biological roots. Combined with high levels of stress, the disorder can be triggered.

15% of the population will experience a panic attack at some point in their lives.

1.5% of the population suffers from full-blown panic disorder.

Both panic attacks and panic disorder are more common in women than in men.

Symptoms of panic usually emerge in early to mid adulthood, although many patients report having experienced panic symptoms as children.

Left untreated, patients with panic disorder are at an increased risk of clinical depression, self mutilation or suicide attempts.

Panic disorder can be treated on both the physical and spiritual levels.

NAJIYAH DIANA HELWANI IS A MOTHER OF SIX AND AN ACADEMIC COUNSELOR AT THE ISLAMIC SCHOOL OF KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate. May His abundant blessing and most perfect of peace be on His Beloved Prophet, the best of creation, and his family, companions and followers.

GIVING ZAKAT

FARAZ RABBANI

My sister is poor and does not have a place to live. Can I give her a house I own as a form of zakat? The value of this house is equal to six years of zakat payment according to the wealth I have today.

Yes, it would be permitted to give your sister that house for your present and future zakat-to the amount of its current market value, using a conservative pricing.

This is because:

1. It is permitted to give zakat to one's siblings. In fact, if they are needy, it is most praiseworthy to give one's zakat to immediate family (thought not to parents and their parents, children and their offspring, and one's spouses). [Ibn Abidin, Radd al-Muhtar]

2. It is permitted to give zakat before it becomes due, even years ahead. [ibid. ; Nasafi, Kanz al-Daqa'iq]

MALE DOCTORS

FARAZ RABBANI

I have a lump in my breast but don't want to be examined by a doctor as it is unlikely the doctor will be female. Instead, I am relying on God that this harm is removed from me. However, I am told I should seek medical advice as it is sunnah to seek the means. What should I do?

What you are doing is a mistake. Enquire - there are almost certainly female doctors able to treat you. If a female doctor is not available-after enquiry-then it would be permitted to go to a male doctor. You could only uncover to the extent genuinely necessary and need to have a third party present in the room.

The sunnah with regards to actions is to take the best means possible, outwardly (such as medical treatment) and inwardly (such as absolute reliance and trust in Allah, and seeking Allah's aide through earnest supplication).

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

FARAZ RABBANI

I have non-Muslim family members who buy gifts for us during the Christmas season. I don't want to be impolite by asking them not to. Yet, I don't want to be involved in something that may be against my religion. Is it?

WHAT YOU OUGHT TO KNOW

There is nothing wrong with accepting the gifts: these are not per se religious acts, but social customs.

It is permitted to give gifts during the winter break with the intention of strengthening family ties, though one should try one's best to do so in a dignified but distinct manner, in order to avoid falling into the semblance 'imitation'.

MISERLINESS

FARAZ RABBANI

What is the difference between being cheap and being economical?

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

"Two traits are not found together in a believer: miserliness and bad character." [Tirmidhi]

Imam Barkawi (Allah have mercy on him) defined miserliness (bukhl) in his al-Tariqa al-Muhammadiyah:

"Being miserly and cheap is to hold on to money when it must be spent, by command of the Shariah or by the dictates of dignified behaviour (muru'a)... This differs according to individuals and situations."

He also defined wastefulness:

"Wastefulness and excessiveness is the habit of spending when one is expected to exercise restraint, by the command of the Shariah or the dictates of dignified behaviour."

Dignified behaviour is a genuine urge within one to benefit others to the extent possible, and being caring and considerate (futuwwa)." [Barkawi, al-Tariqa al-Muhammadiyah (3/2-3, printed with Khadimi's interlineal commentary, al-Bariqa al-Mahmudiyya)]

Moderation is the golden mean between these two extremes. The early Muslims used

to say, "The best of matters are those in moderation." [Aj'luni, Kashf al-Khafa' (1.469-470)]

Allah Most High said in the Qur'an that, "The servants of the All-Merciful are those who walk in the earth modestly..."

And among their description is that they are those

"...who, when they spend, are neither wasteful nor stingy, but between that is a just stand..." [Qur'an, 27.67] ccess.

HOROSCOPES

FARAZ RABBANI

What is the Islamic view on horoscopes?

It is impermissible to follow horoscopes and astrology, because the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) sternly forbade it. Abu Hurayra and al-Hasan (Allah be pleased with them) both related that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whoever seeks a fortune-teller or astrologer and believes what they say has disbelieved in that which was revealed to Muhammad." [Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, and Ibn Maja] Imam Tirmidhi and others explained that this means that they have acted in a way only befitting disbelievers, not that the person falls into disbelief. The way of believers is to hold fast to the words of the Beloved of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), "Be avid for that which benefits you," [Muslim] which includes avoiding useless matters that are from the darkness that Islam came to dispel and seeking the light of guidance that brings tranquility and joy to hearts, minds, and souls.

ADULTEROUS HUSBAND

FARAZ RABBANI

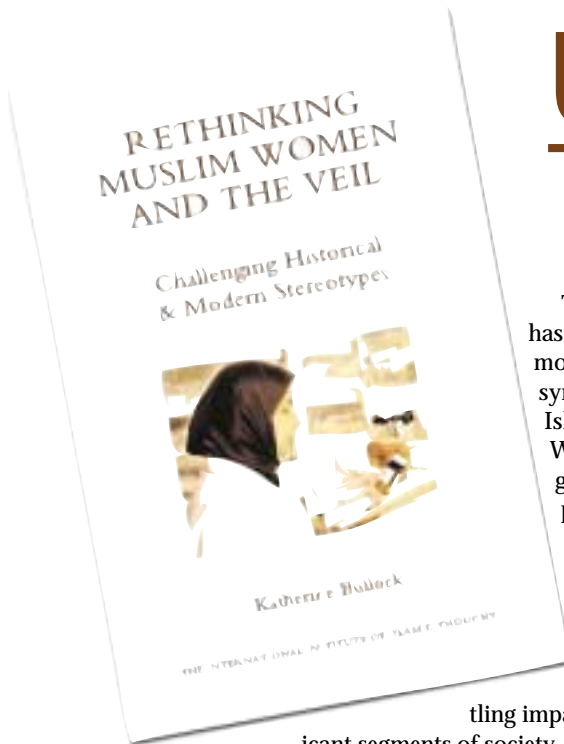
If a man has had sexual intercourse with another woman and does not pray except when in trouble, is it right for his wife to remain with him?

A lot of considerations enter into such an issue, including her future, the impact on her religious practice, emotional state, and her rights as an individual, as well as the children's future. As such, it is best to go to a local scholar of learning and wisdom and seek counsel on this issue in person.

And Allah alone gives success. ■

FARAZ RABBANI ANSWERS QUESTIONS AND TEACHES THROUGH SUNNI PATH WWW.SUNNIPATH.COM

UNVEILING THE SCARF



The hijab has become the most visible symbol of Islam in the West. Its growing presence in an increasingly diverse Europe has had an unsettling impact on significant segments of society.

The far right sees the hijab as the public manifestation of a coming demographic shift that will see Muslims, due to high levels of immigration and birth rates, become a dominant urban force across the continent. For the liberal left, the hijab confronts their antiquated notions of secularism and liberation; especially since second generation Muslim women are confidently adopting the hijab as a sign of their religious identity. The tabloid press eager to exploit fears of a rupture in the social fabric, portray hijab as a cultural interlocutor, an outsider to be regarded at best with caution and at worst with violent exclusion.

Until now, most mainstream Muslim responses to critiques of hijab and the "status" of women in Islam have been largely apologetic, mired in simplistic language and unsophisticated argument. With no reference to the wider academic literature, these missives have appeared polemical and emotional. Just as with dominant feminist critiques, they largely ignore the voice of Muslim women themselves. They fail to answer the real concerns about certain oppressive practices within the Muslim world and the coercive imposition of the hijab in many Islamic cultures.

Katherine Bullock's *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil* is a profoundly important contribution to the debate. It is a rigorously researched, powerful critique of the prevailing notion that the veil is a symbol and means of oppression. Bullock's honest presentation pulls no punches. While situating herself as a practising Muslim woman within a largely secular debate, Bullock is critical of both the traditional feminists and the polemical Muslim apologetics. Instead, her multidisciplinary approach seeks to redefine and challenge popular definitions of "liberty" and "equality".

Bullock is mindful of the historical contexts in which Western ideas of Muslim women and the veil developed. The colonial experience, driven by ideas of global conquest, economic domination and cultural superiority create the lens through which Islam in general and Muslim women in particular are viewed. Bullock examines the ways in which colonial

perceptions were adopted and used by native elites to undermine religious notions of modesty and dress. Using Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, she reveals the Eurocentric conceptions of Oriental inferiority and sees their political policy implications in the Colonial Period.

The colonial concerns over the "oppressive" veil were ironic, since, "the colonial governments in particular were concerned to break down the Muslim patriarchal family, segregation, veiling, and any other practice that stood in the way of them having control over their colonial subjects." Feminist philosophy that later developed in Middle East adopted this Orientalist approach. Bullock also draws in the growing body of social history to demonstrate that in many cases Colonial policies and modernization initiatives in the Muslim world actually took away women's economic and mobility rights. The move to ban the veil in the early twentieth century, Bullock argues, was a desperate way to control the religious aspirations and identity Muslim women. The recent "re-veiling" phenomenon challenges the power of authoritarian governments to dictate the direction of religious practice and interpretation.

At the heart of her book is the question of representation. For too long the voices, experiences and self-understanding of Muslim women has been appropriated by the feminist discourse on one end and the male religious authority on the other. She localises the experience of the veil in her study of Muslim women in Toronto, Canada to demonstrate the remarkable complexity in the way the veil is both worn and understood. Bullock might be criticised for not choosing a wider sample of the diverse Muslim community in Toronto, but she readily recognizes this deficiency, arguing that her study is not a totalising one. It merely suggests that marginalised voices, usually considered to be outside the discourse, have a central role to play in framing notions of the veil. Bullock persuasively calls for a re-appropriation of the veil discourse.

Finally, Bullock sees the donning of the veil as expression that has multiple meanings. Her inclusion of spiritual perspectives in this rubric of understanding is an important addition to the existing academic literature. Furthermore, her critique of Fatima Mernissi is both timely and measured. Mernissi arguments have so smitten the Western feminist discourse that undertaking an analysis of her position is critically important to moving the debate beyond its usual parameters.

While, Bullock moves easily between various disciplines she builds her multifaceted argument in a way that is both readable and erudite. *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil* is not just an important academic work, but it is the starting point for whole new approach to the hijab and women in Islam in day-to-day Islamic discourse. There is much to disagree with, but the strength of the book is as much its approach as it is its conclusion. Bullock is an avowed feminist who is part of a movement that is making feminism more inclusive and also more able to engage in honest, meaningful dialogue. Given the rumblings from the continent, her contribution is timely. ■

FOR HOPE

My Lord, if we consider Your generosity, the marvel is that any perish.
If we consider Your justice, the marvel is that any are saved.
My Lord, if it is Your generosity that calls us account, we shall attain to Your good pleasure.
If it be Your justice that calls us to account, we shall not attain even Your forgiveness.
My Lord, how can I hope in You, I being I?
And how can I help but hope in You, You being You?
If we are powerless to avoid a sin which You have written down for us, You are powerful to forgive us for it.

My Lord, through Your mercy forgive my sins.
O my Lord, though my sinful deeds make me feel Your justice, the greatness of Your compassion, makes me place my hope in You.
O Lord, I have not merited Paradise by my deeds, and I cannot endure the pains of the Fire, so I entrust myself simply to Your grace.
If on the Day of Resurrection I am asked, "What have you brought unto Me?" I shall reply: "What can one straight from prison, with unkempt hair, and tattered garment, burdened with worldly care and full of shame, bring unto You? Wash from me my sins, give unto me the robe of the redeemed, and through Your mercy cast me not away from Your presence."

The prayer of Yahya ibn Mu'adh al-Razi excerpted from Tadhkiratul Awliya, quoted in Muslim Devotions by Constance E. Padwick (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996).



BEAUTY AND MODESTY

A *modestynik* is my word for a modern single young woman raised in a secular home, who has hitherto seemed perfectly normal but who, inexplicably and without any prior notice, starts wearing very long skirts and issuing spontaneous announcements that is she now *shomer negiah*, which means that she isn't going to have physical contact with men before marriage, and that she is now dressing according to the standards of Jewish modesty. She is the type of woman who, when you hear about how she is living her life, might cause you to exclaim: "Yikes! What's her problem?!" Hence, among those who do not know her, she is usually known as an *abusenik*, a woman you know has been abused, even though she insists she hasn't been. Otherwise, you figure, why would she be so weird?

"She must have been abused by her father."

"Maybe she had a Bad Experience, poor thing."

Conventional wisdom has it that the woman who returns to modesty is hiding, running away from sex. This is because today, modesty is often confused with prudery. But it is not prudery. Indeed, promiscuity is really much closer to prudery. Whether she decides to have scores of men or none, promiscuous and prudish women in some sense embrace the same flippant world view, which one might call the nothing-fazes-me world view. As types, they represent two sides of the same un-erotic coin, which flips over arrogantly and announces to the world when it lands: "Ha! - I cannot be moved." Modesty is prudery's true opposite, because it admits that one can be moved and issues a specific invitation for one man to try.

Promiscuity and prudery are both a kind of antagonistic indifference, a running away from the meaning of one place in the world, whereas modesty is fundamentally about knowing, protecting that knowledge, and directing it to something higher, beyond just two. Something more than just man and wife. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh."

We thought we could have everything and everyone, and really we came up with nothing. "If it feels good, do it," was the motto of the 60s, and after we did it, we found it no longer felt good. We thought that giving up extra-erotic considerations would liberate the erotic, but in fact it spoiled it entirely. The proverb "woo, wed

and bed her," often found in big English dramas and ballads in 1500-1800, was changed to just "bed her," and this change turned out not to be sexy, as we expected, just depressing.

Indeed, the feminist Sally Cline now refers to the sexual revolution, in retrospect as the "Genital Appropriation Era":

What the Genital Appropriation Era actually permitted was more

access to women's bodies by more men; what it actually achieved was not a great deal of liberation for women but a great deal of legitimacy for male promiscuity; what it actually passed onto women was the male fragmentation of emotion from body, and the easily internalised schism between genital sex and responsible loving.

Of course, in rejecting the "old rules" of the sexual revolution, and returning to rules that are more centred on women's emotional needs, today's young women are returning to even older rules - often, those very rules of modesty their own mothers once called sexist.

But the return to modesty among today's young women represents more than just a rebellion against their mothers' rules. It is a rejection of something more fundamental, of a philosophy which dates from before the sexual revolution. "Virtue," Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1951 apropos of defending Sade, "Chimerical and Imaginary,

encloses us in a world of appearances; whereas vice's intimate link with the flesh guarantees its genuineness...if virtue arouses no sensation, it is because it has no real basis." The persistence of sexual modesty challenges and ultimately refutes this equation of the libertine with the erotic, because those who are returning to virtue are doing so for precisely sensual reasons. They are often totally secular, but have found vice boring and insipid. Beauvoir said that Sade showed that "no aphrodisiac is so potent as the defiance of Good," and now history has proved her and Sade wrong.

Modesty is the proof that morality is sexy.

It may even be proof of God, because it means that we have been designed in such a way that when we humans act like animals, without any restraint and without any rules, we just don't have as much fun. ■

Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue (New York: Free Press, 1999) by Wendy Shalit, a young Jewish American woman



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TAKE THAT

I just wanted to say that in your December edition that you mis-used the story of Hadrat Ali, may Allah be please with him. Hadrat Ali didn't slay the man because it was a personal insult. If, however, the insult had been against the entire ummah, then Hadrat Ali would have been the first to mount his horse and raise his sword. There are countless stories where

MESSAGES FROM THE MASSES

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the Muslims waged war when the ummah was insulted. Do you know how angry the Sahaba were when a sister was abused by the people of a neighbouring town? They mounted their horses and ransacked the entire town out of anger. Yes, anger. Anger is the word. Are we not supposed to feel angry when the enemy rapes our sisters? In fact, any man who doesn't feel anger at this is not a man.

The stories are countless. When someone insults the ummah, the salihien defend the honor of the ummah.

You contend in your article that the Muslims shouldn't become emotional when the ummah is attacked, and you bring up the story of Hadrat Ali to back this up. That is a faulty assumption, because there is a difference between a personal insult and an insult to the ummah.

You also accuse other Muslims of being apologists, but I wonder who the real apologist is?

Allah *Ta'alla* knows best.
Javad Hashmi

LOVELIES

I now have three colourful pin-ups in my university dormitory room - all cut outs of the invocations page in *Q-News*. *Jazak Allah* - the prayers are useful and they look great as posters too. Do you have any prayers for students?

On a similar note, I think the new look of the magazine is brilliant - so well done. At last, we have a Muslim publication that doesn't look like cardboard.

Saleyha Amin
London

ASSAULT

We are already seeing the affects of what happens on the other side of the world on Muslims in England. According to newspaper reports, a teacher called Hazel Dick is on trial for forcefully removing a hijab from a Muslim student's head, causing one of the pins used to hold the scarf in place to scratch the students neck, and for saying,

"Doesn't your religion teach you no respect? Would you look at your father like that? The amount of respect you give to Allah, that is the amount I respect your shoe, Islam is a big joke!"

The head of science of Bretton Woods Community School in Peterborough, denies religiously

aggravated assault. She claims the girl unpinned the scarf and she merely "reached up and took it off, just slid off at the back."

By her words, she forgot one simple fact; it is against the law to touch a student. Instead, a teacher should go to the headmaster.

The hearing continues but Dick Hazel needs to remind herself that the joke is on her. England isn't France and if it was, Muslims, whether they are students or adults, will not tolerate anyone abusing their right to practice their belief.

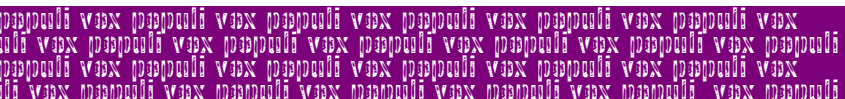
As an experienced Student Support Worker and Outreach Worker, I have found that teachers treat students without respect, disregarding that students are their clients. They are paid to teach them. Parents give teachers and the school the responsibility to keep their child safe.

There has been far too much emphasis on 'school uniforms.' What is needed are improvements in retention and achievement, raising self esteem, preserving the student's identity and using the students' cultures and beliefs to inspire them in their studies. Instead, a high percentage of students from the Black and Ethnic minority are failing. Those who should be standing up to make a change for the benefit of the system, have become the very same people that contribute to students failing.

An e-mail I received from a Black and Ethnic Minority student support and outreach worker in England a month ago said, "I am here for nothing but the wage. I don't care about the job, or to make changes to the system. I just want to work, make my money and go home."

These are the very people who shouldn't be in jobs where the nurturing of our students is paramount.

Adam Taha
Sheffield



LETTER OF THE MONTH

I am writing to express my deepest appreciation for *Q-News* and the difference it has made in the British Muslim and mainstream communities.

Rarely does a magazine define a community while simultaneously commenting on it. *Q-News* has done just that with eloquence and insight. I am encouraged that a media source can influence a community so positively in its informative and critical roles.

From its inception, *Q-News* has been engaged in issues that matter to the British Muslim community and to those affected by it in mainstream society. I have always been impressed with its ability to apply youthful humour and penetrating analysis to the deeply held Islamic values and thought underlying and shaping their efforts.

Q-News has survived over a decade, and continues to prove itself as a journal of excellent standards with high levels of professionalism.

As someone who has seen the birth and remarkable growth of this magazine, I know that in our troubled times, there can be nothing more important than the kind of intelligent dialogue and analysis exemplified by *Q-News* in Britain and it is my hope to see it brought to American society as it seeks to improve its tumultuous relationship with the Muslim world.

I am confident of the important role that *Q-News* will play in helping to build a dialogue between the Muslim-American communities, the Muslim-British communities, and the mainstream American community.

This kind of international effort is necessary to mobilize the Muslim-American communities to dialogue, inform, and influence the larger American society.

Q-News is ready and capable to begin this journey in the United States today, and its insights are critical for improved relationships tomorrow.

I am disappointed that the magazine has had financial difficulties in light of the increasingly important role they play in society.

We must recognize the necessity of their efforts and must support them so that they can continue to inform us and enable us to build bridges between our societies and the world around us.

Professor Akbar Ahmed
Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Prof
of International Relations
American University
Washington, DC

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FRENCH NOT ONLY OFFENDERS ON HIJAB

ANGER AGAINST FRANCE IS JUSTIFIED, BUT WHAT ABOUT IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA, ASKS TAREK FATAH

THIS PIECE FIRST APPEARED IN THE TORONTO STAR AND IS REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

The proposed French law banning the hijab in that country's public school system has outraged Canada's Muslim community and many civil liberty activists. Considering that France has been vocal in its support of the Muslim world in international affairs, many Muslims are bewildered by President Jacques Chirac's ill-advised initiative.

Recently, anger against the French proposal brought about a hundred Toronto Muslims to the streets. In freezing temperatures, they stood outside the French consulate waving placards and raising slogans to register their protest.

However, as I marched in solidarity with my fellow Muslims, I couldn't help but realise that our reaction to the French initiative was not based on universal principles.

The French law may be foolish - if not outright racist - but our outrage against it leaves the door open for others to accuse us of double standards.

If Muslims feel governments have no business dictating what their citizens should, or should not wear, then we need to apply this principle to all governments, not just the French.

If we consider the French law against the hijab offensive, then the Saudi and Iranian laws enforcing compulsory wearing of the hijab should also be condemned because they take away a woman's right to choose. While the proposed French law would ban Muslim women from wearing the hijab in school, the Saudi and Iranian laws ban women from appearing in public without the hijab.

In the worst application of the Saudi law, 15 schoolgirls perished in March, 2002, when they were not permitted to flee their burning school in Mecca because they were not "wearing correct Islamic dress."

Why then are we not questioning the hijab laws of Saudi Arabia and Iran? Why is our anger directed against the French alone? Is it because Saudi Arabia and Iran are Muslim countries?

I asked a number of people at Saturday's demonstration whether they were willing to stage a similar protest against Saudi Arabia and Iran. While some agreed with my rationale, many more answered my questions with empty stares or a flat refusal to even entertain such a discussion.

Considering the fact that the situation of Muslim women in Saudi Arabia far outweighs the problems facing them in France, the inability of the young Muslim protesters to see the obvious parallels,

was disappointing. Mouna Naim, a respected journalist with the French newspaper *Le Monde*, in a report from Saudi Arabia wrote of a 13-year-old Saudi girl who asked, "Why was I born a girl? This is a country of men, and I wish I was one."

The *Le Monde* correspondent wrote that while many Saudi women voluntarily wear the head cover, many others "find the wearing of the garment intolerable because they see it as embodying the raft of restrictions they have to endure, which include the requirement that the slightest patch of flesh must remain covered, reducing women to formless, uniform shadows."

In the days leading up to the demonstration outside the French consulate, there was considerable debate on the Internet on whether the French and Saudi laws were flip sides of the same argument, that is, state enforcement of citizen's dress codes.

Judy Rebick, former head of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and currently a professor at Ryerson, while supporting the protest outside the French consulate, addressed the concerns that demonstrating only against France without at the same time criticizing Saudi Arabia would send the wrong message. She wrote: "I have heard similar concerns expressed by women's groups from the Middle East. If we lived in France it would be a different story but since we are protesting the action of a foreign government, I think we should protest both sides of the problem.

"I think if we are going to protest against a state forcing women not to wear the hijab we should also protest forcing women to wear the hijab."

Rebick went on to say, "In France, it is racism and Islamophobia. In Saudi Arabia, it is fundamentalism and sexism. I think it is a good time to make the point that we are for freedom from oppression everywhere."

Muslims will be well served if they took Rebick's suggestion to heart. Failure to apply the principle of universality, and refusal to double-critique our positions, could seriously hurt our credibility.

When we Muslims demand that others respect our human rights, we need to be courageous and honest enough to recognize the oppression within our own community and speak out against it. ■

TAREK FATAH IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE MUSLIM CANADIAN CONGRESS AND HOST OF THE WEEKLY TV SHOW, THE MUSLIM CHRONICLE

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE MOST BENEFICENT, THE MOST MERCIFUL



H A J J
20
04



The British Hajj delegation

in Saudi Arabia was composed of
8 doctors, **2** islamic counsellor & **2** foreign officials

1800 pilgrims were seen to by the
British Hajj delegation team of
medical experts in Makkah and Mina in **3** days



As the month of Hajj approaches, many British citizens prepare for their pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. The British Hajj delegation will once again be present, ensuring that British Hajjis have a stress-free Hajj.



The Hajj delegation is comprised of medical and religious specialists and Foreign Office officials who can offer —

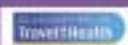
- Initial treatment of illness and injuries
- Counselling support and advice
- A full range of consular services, including advice on travel expenses, passports and visa issues

It is strongly advisable for British Hajjis to make use of the many services offered by the Hajj delegation.

For further information please contact the Hajj Delegation at:

**Hajj Secretariat, The Islamic Cultural Centre,
146 Park Road, London NW8 7RG**

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