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MUSTAFA CERIC
A VISION FOR
EUROPEAN MUSLIMS

MUQTEDAR KHAN
THE POLITICS AND
PROMISE OF DIALOGUE

INDLIEB FARAZI
THE SACRED ROOTS
OF COFFEE

BUTROS AL-BAKR
MY DISASTROUS LOVE LIFE

PLUS
CHILD MURDER IN TORONTO
THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST
GROWING UP WITH MALCOLM X

UNITE BUT FOLLOW ME...

WHO SPEAKS FOR
BRITISH MUSLIMS?



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FROM THE PULPIT



It is becoming clearer day by day that Muslims now living in the geographic West are a critical component of the global Muslim community. To some, they are vanguard forces operating deep within, so to speak, the belly of the beast, causing havoc and mischief within enemy forces. This colourful imagery is powerful and has many subscribers. But it is not one that we conform to.

Muslims living in the West - over 20 million of us - are not and should not be some kind of fifth column for any movement, let alone a crazed one. Our struggle is real and it is about our humanity and that of our neighbours regardless of their faith or absence of it.

Of course, we have duties and responsibilities as part of the ummah but our primary purpose remains our survival and prosperity as a spiritual community in the lands where we live. To achieve this we have to find ways and means of making ourselves relevant and useful to the society around us. That, unfortunately, is proving to be a very difficult task for a variety of reasons.

Few of us have grasped the uniqueness of our modern situation. There has never been so many of us outside the traditional lands of Islam in our history. And there has never been so many who have made hijrah out of dar ul-Islam because of the injustice, intolerance and inhumanity which exists there. But like the Companions who followed the Blessed Prophet, peace be upon him, to Madinah we can only return to Makkah if we succeed in creating a Madinah.

But we will have no Madinah to speak of if we do not make an effort to understand and respect the historical experiences of the societies we find ourselves in. It is imperative that we are clued up with what makes this society tick - or not tick.

It is heartening to see more and more Muslims getting engaged in the mainstream debates on citizenship, secularism and the whole notion of civic society. Though their contribution so far has been piecemeal, it has proved to be useful and of benefit.

Ultimately, however, the praise has got to go to those who have allowed this Muslim emergence. Whatever their motives, it is evidence that the system works. It is not perfect but that work, like any, is in progress.

Recently, events have indicated another unique quality of the Muslim community. In the past, however far from "home" Muslims went, it was always within some kind of religious milieu. This is not true of our situation today. Muslims in the West have to understand that their new homelands are zones where religion was vanquished on different levels a long time ago.

God and faith are private issues. We must learn to respect this if we are to be taken seriously. And those who champion secularism have both reason and justification and need to be engaged with both wisdom and good arguments.

It is time we move from unnecessary adversarial positions to ones of positive encountering. We must learn to listen compassionately and argue our views intelligently. At all times we should be open to learn from all those we come across in our lives. In a complex world we must learn to make sophisticated alliances in our endeavours. Our neighbours will always respect us for our principles. But only our compassion and humanity will endear their love for us.

An open, just and inquiring mind is the best weapon we can wield in our circumstances. Any other mental mindset - especially one obsessed with some pre-conceived "ism" - is just baloney. And may He increase us in wisdom and clarity. *Ameen.*

FAREENA ALAM

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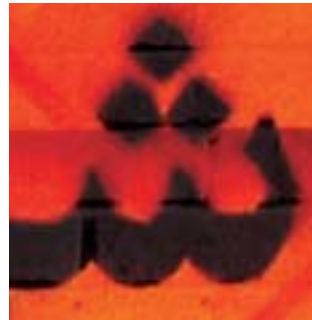
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“We in Europe need to offer a genuine and alternative interpretation of Islam that will lead to a cultural creativity that is recognisable as Islamic-European and European-Islamic.”

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ITSY BITSY TEENY WEENY YELLOW POLKA DOT COMMUNITY

“**B**rother, the Muslims’ domination of the word is nigh!”

“Really?”

“Ah yes! We multiply so much more quickly than them! Soon there will be 10 billion Muslims in the world! Not even 6 billion kaafirs can stand up to that! We just need to see through this kafir population control idea.”

“But isn’t it true that Cairo’s a bit overcrowded? Even Handsworth...”

“That is no problem, brother! The Amazon rain forest is lying vacant! All this environmentalism, you know, it’s just kafir plan...”

“But haven’t you forgotten something? Man’s role as custodian of the earth, the concept of Khilafah...”

“Brother, Islam arose in the desert. It is a Sunnah to turn the Amazon into a desert!”

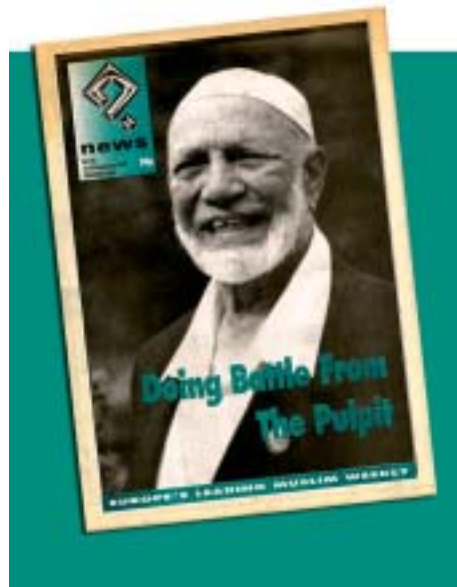
The above conversation (paraphrased somewhat) may strike you, gentle reader, as being a touch bizarre. But, it is only the logical conclusion of a mistake we almost all seem to commit - the sin of doing good to make ourselves feel better, and therefore making our plans grandiose, impractical and, just occasionally, berserk.

I don’t mean it’s wrong to attempt to cure poverty. I don’t mean it’s wrong to try to oppose injustice. But we don’t. We try to ensure that we feel satisfied with our attempts to do so. And that is a very different thing.

For example, most of us who count themselves as working for Islam in this country do so in three different ways: rallies and marches, apocalyptic literature (“The West is evil and this is why...” etc.) and dawah. And each of these as carried out is about as much as a bazooka to catch a butterfly.

Take, for example, the rallies. What do we wish to achieve? Obviously, an awareness of our concerns and a fostering of sympathy with them. But what is the result? At best, passers-by see a bunch of eccentric “Asians” holding up the traffic in their blind devotion to some imponderable God. At worst, annoyances and alienation fester in the brain, our calls and banners succeeding only in turning indifference into hatred.

You don’t have to be a guru to see this. You don’t even have to be moderately intelligent. But you do have to be aware. All rallies



achieve is, as one devoted rally-goer told me, “a release of tension” - and, of course, a sense of self-importance. But somehow I don’t recall those priorities figuring too high in the Sunnah.

By now, gentle reader, you will probably be wearing of all this negativity, and, maybe, secretly wondering how on earth dawah is going to be criticised. But again, it all depends as to how the dawah is carried out. If the purpose of it is to convert people to an ideology, it may be worse than useless. The only thing we can do is gently point to the existence of the One God - and pray. Islam may be on the earth but it is not of the earth.

“Ah, brother!” comes the refrain. “We could achieve so much if only we were united!” Well, instead of talking about it let’s do it. Let’s create a community from within. All it takes is for skilled people to give up their time.

Your little daughter is fretting at school. She can barely speak English. Instead of letting her get pushed into classes where her intelligence and her worth as a person will be degraded for the rest of her childhood, why not take her to a Muslim teacher who will allow her to feel human for a nominal fee?

Or: you need legal advice. The council is messing you up over accommodation. Instead of going to the CAB or trusting dodgy lawyers, why not go to a local Muslim

pal who can enlighten you for free?

Or: you need something to do, a place to go away from the drug dealers and gun-wielding hoods and card-frisking gamblers. Why not go to a place in the town centre and play table tennis, football or snooker for almost nothing? Better still, why not put on a play or draw some dragons and express your big God-given creativity as you were born to do?

All this can be organised through the mosque. Every mosque ought to have access to halal leisure facilities, and hit squads of lawyers, teachers, social workers, self-defence trainers, home helpers, carers... - people to fulfil all necessary roles. And where people stand in the way (like the miseries who argue against lawful art, in defiance of the consensus of the madhhabs - presumably if they had created the world, birds would not sing but mourn, and trees would be black and dome-shaped for efficient light collection), do not argue but get on with doing something else. In the face of success at helping your fellow man anyone with any human decency will give you a chance at trying more. And the one thing that never achieves anything is ceaseless conflict.

But it requires people to give up their time. To spend less time on melas, football and sarees. To be giving human beings who are humble and open enough to treat any Muslim, any human being as their family. In time, our services can be extended to non-Muslims: they are worthy people too and compassion is the best form of dawah. With the coming of the Internet, we have the facility in the long-term, to link mosques across the land. It is then that we shall know (Inshallah) how many Muslims live in dire poverty; how many are the victims of child abuse. It is then that our lobbying can become directed, cogent and effective. It is then that we will earn the right to be called an ummah.

But it takes humility. And compassion. And self-purification. It is only if we speak from the perspective of inner cleanliness that our efforts will be worth more than a snorkel to a shark.

For it is the Quran that tells us that Allah blesses he who “walks gently on the earth”. ■

ANATOMY OF WHITEWASH

THE GOVERNMENT MAY
HAVE BEEN EXONERATED
AFTER THE HUTTON
REPORT BUT A
DISTURBING NUMBER OF
QUESTIONS REMAIN
UNANSWERED, ARGUES
GER FRANCIS

Lord Hutton is a man of pedigree. As a barrister in Northern Ireland in the early 1970's he represented the Ministry of Defence at the Widgery inquiry into the killing of 14 unarmed Catholic civil rights marchers by British soldiers on the streets of Derry. He did a good job for his paymasters. The government was exonerated. Unfortunately, the repercussions of what became known as Bloody Sunday and the subsequent cover up, more than any other single issue, catapulted Northern Ireland into nearly two decades of war.

Perhaps with a repeat performance in mind, the government appointed Lord Hutton to oversee the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of David Kelly. True to form, he did not disappoint. When Hutton presented his report it appeared that the plan to set up the BBC as the fall guy for the death of David Kelly, and thereby create a diversion from much more serious issues, was a political masterstroke.

That plan, however, appears to have spectacularly backfired. No sooner had Hutton delivered his complete exoneration of the government than his findings were greeted with a wave of disbelief and then anger. From London to Glasgow BBC workers walked out in protest. Opinion polls showed as high as 70% of respondents questioned the credibility of Hutton's report. Guardian columnist Seamus Milne reflected the public mood when he wrote "the Hutton saga has in reality been a very British sideshow to that central issue - and the now barely-contested consensus that the reasons given for joining the war were false. Next to the national and global implications of what has been done - and the more than



15,000 people estimated to have died as a result - a loosely worded 6.07am BBC radio broadcast, and even the grim death of Dr Kelly, pale into insignificance."

In response to the public outcry about Hutton, the government started to back-track. First, Tony Blair claimed that he did not realise that the 45 minutes warning only referred to much less deadly field weapons. Then he commissioned the Butler inquiry into the use of government intelligence. This move has already faced sharp criticism for being another cover-up. The five-strong review team will hold all its meetings in private and will not examine Blair's personal role or that of individual ministers and officials. As Glenda Jackson MP noted Lord Butler most certainly will not "be trying to uncover how a serving prime minister, who had the time to take part in an episode of *The Simpsons* did not have the time to brief himself on the nature of the military threat posed to British troops."

Tony Blair now finds himself in a deepening political crisis. He had hoped when George Bush declared the war over to be riding high in the opinion polls from victory

in Iraq - the 'Baghdad bounce' as his spin masters called it. Instead he finds he is on the receiving end of a bounce of an entirely different kind. Each day seems to bring some new story indicting his involvement in this war: reports of a 'joint British and American spying operation at the United Nations scuppered a last-ditch initiative to avert the invasion of Iraq', reports of brutality by British troops on Iraqi detainees, reports of growing insurgent attacks on the occupying forces, and of course, reports, or rather lack of them, about WMD discoveries. The statement by the outgoing leader of the CIA-directed Iraq Survey Group, Dr David Kay, that he had not found evidence of stockpiles, and that he now believed they had never existed, is a further embarrassment for the government.

Increasingly, Tony Blair is starting to resemble Richard 'tricky dicky' Nixon. Just as the failed cover-up of the Watergate break-in eventually forced Nixon out of the Whitehouse, so the Hutton cover-up over the lies used to justify war with Iraq could well force Tony Blair from Downing Street. Now is the time to pile the pressure on. ■

SOMETHING IN THE AIR AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY

THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL IN THE AIR THESE DAYS AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY IN EGHAM, WRITES AYESHA GAMIET. THANKS TO A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY, A GROUND-BREAKING PROJECT IS ABOUT TO TAKE SHAPE.



The growing Muslim community based around the university is comprised of local Muslim residents as well as Muslim students from a multitude of nationalities. The resident Muslim families are actively involved in campus life providing students with home cooked iftar dinners in Ramadan, organising the jummah and tarawih prayers, organising Eid festivities and even coordinating umrah trips. Events have also reached out to the broader community. A day of sponsored fasting for charity attracted as many non-Muslim participants as Muslim ones.

Abdul Hadi Stancer represents the increasingly diverse face of Royal Holloway. The plumbing and heating engineer has been working at Royal Holloway University for the past 16 years. One of his first jobs was to install a foot washbasin in the bathroom of the prayer room. Abdul Hadi's first direct contact with Islam was through his sister's marriage to a Tunisian Muslim. Abdul Hadi himself took shahada at the Royal Holloway jummah prayers almost two months ago. The Royal Holloway community has welcomed him since becoming a Muslim, while he has been received with a mixture of acceptance and curiosity from his non-

Muslim friends.

In the mid 1980's the university authorities provided a prayer room for the small number of Muslim students. Today, the community consists of several hundred Muslims, yet there is no permanent building in the area for Muslims to use for prayers, as a madrasah or for social events. Until recently, events organised by local Muslim population have been hosted either in rooms situated on the campus, or hired venues in the local area. This is about to change.

After several years of negotiation between representatives of the Muslim community and the university officials, permission has been given for an Islamic Cultural Centre to be built on the campus. The project has the support of Vice Principal, Professor Francis Robinson and the Dean of Students, Doctor Richard Hancock. As well as providing a permanent building for Islamic events, the local Muslims hope that the centre will be a vibrant centre for outreach, education and dialogue. All major decisions regarding the centre will go through a board of trustees who have been selected from amongst Muslim residents. In a ground-breaking agreement, the university will donate the land for the centre. The Muslim community is responsible for providing the funding for the project - the cost of the building is estimated at £250,000 with a further £350,000 for fittings, fixtures and interior design.

The project team represents the strength and diversity of the community. Local architects, lawyers, businessmen, marketing and advertising experts, artists and engineers have signed on.

A considerable amount of the funding for the project will come from donations and sponsorships, but it will also draw on the resources of the local community. A substan-

tial amount has already been promised in pledges. Fundraising within the community is already well underway.

By presenting a successful model of partnership, Royal Holloway poses a challenge to other universities in Britain. How many universities will have the courage and creativity to create inclusive spaces on their campuses not just to celebrate diversity but to combat growing forces of Islamophobia and marginalisation? With many student Islamic societies struggling to gain recognition for religious holidays and prayer space, Royal Holloway's example is an encouraging sign of academe's growing openness to faith communities.

The Royal Holloway Islamic Cultural Centre needs to be in touch and relevant to the changing face of the Muslim population. A concerted effort needs to be made to ensure that the management reflects the diversity of Muslim society, unlike previous mosque projects that have often been dominated by an elite group of males, unrepresentative of the Muslim community. The very design of the centre must reflect the intent of the project - to be a space for genuine dialogue and authentic community expression that is welcoming to all. The involvement of students and women in the decision making process is essential to fulfilling the potential of the project. If successfully brought to fruition, the Royal Holloway Islamic Cultural Centre will be the one of the first of its kind in the United Kingdom and an indication of good things to come. ■

The Royal Holloway Islamic Cultural Centre is looking for donations, sponsorship and support. If you would like to contribute, contact the Treasurer, Tamim Osman on 01344 620 961 or benrajab@hotmail.com

A NEW INTERNATIONALISM

SALMA YAQOOB REPORTS
ON THE SECOND CAIRO
CONFERENCE AND ITS
POTENTIAL FOR A NEW
GLOBAL MOVEMENT
AGAINST OCCUPATION.

Anti-war activists in the United Kingdom have thus far, been quite unaware of the impact we have had around the world. I realised this when I attended the Second Cairo Conference Against Capitalist Globalisation, US Hegemony and Zionist Occupation last December. We were there to discuss how best to support the Iraqi and Palestinian resistance movements and how to challenge the American drive for power.

I was surprised and somewhat proud to learn that it was the impact of the huge 15 February 2003 demonstration in London that acted as a catalyst for the Tahir Square demonstration in Cairo where some 50,000 people took to the streets on 20 March 2003 - the day that war on Iraq broke out. Egyptians felt inspired by the fact that the British had marched against their own government, in support of the Iraqi people. This expression of humanity was not lost on people across the Middle East.

The Tahir Square demonstration was the first of its kind in over 25 years. In England, protesting usually means taking out a Saturday to get to London for the march. But for the Egyptians, it literally meant risking their lives. Egyptian police violently suppressed the protests and arrested a number of activists.

The police were also present at the anti-globalisation conference in December, following a highly charged contribution from the audience criticising the Mubarak government. The next day the conference was ringed by riot police waiting in anticipation of a street protest.

Over 1000 activists were present from Egypt and across the Middle East. Last year, only two British Muslims participated in the conference. This year, over a hundred were present, signalling the genuine interaction and involvement of Muslims in the British anti-war movement. The presence of the since deceased spiritual leader of the



Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Al-Hodeibi, may Allah have mercy on him, who had been imprisoned from 1965 to 1971 at the hands of then Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser, was of major symbolic importance. Other speakers included Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn MP, George Galloway MP, Azam Tamimi, John Rees and myself from Stop the War Coalition, former US attorney general Ramsey Clarke and former Humanitarian Coordinator with the United Nations in Iraq Dennis Halliday.

The presence of a wide range of international speakers and participants helped facilitate discussion and dialogue within the different strands of the Egyptian opposition, underlining the significance of the global nature of the anti-war movement. The conference was unique. It united various strands of Nasserist, Islamist, socialist and secular currents, many of whom have bitter histories of division among themselves. Speaker after speaker emphasised how opposition to US imperialism in the Middle East has laid the basis for a new unity.

The conference sent out a powerful message: instead of a "clash of civilisations" between the Arab, Muslim world and the West, the anti-war movement has enacted "a civilisation of solidarity" between East and West. In its solidarity with the people of Iraq, the anti-war movement sends a mes-

sage more powerful than any US or British missile: that ordinary people, irrespective of whether we live in Birmingham or Cairo, irrespective of whether we are Muslim or Christian, whether we are people of faith or no faith, have far more in common with each other - our fitra and our desire to live in a world based on peace and justice, than we have differences. And it is in that unity that ordinary people have the potential to become the world's new superpower.

The challenge is to build on this 'new internationalism'. However unity is not automatic. It has to be fought for. Because we are potentially so powerful, our enemies always try to divide us. Speaking as a Muslim who has engaged in politics for the first time with non-Muslims against Bush's so-called "war on terror" since September 11th, I, along with other Muslims have had two battles for unity to fight simultaneously. On the one hand we had to forge alliances with non-Muslims, mainly on the left, and on the other hand we had to encourage Muslims in Britain to come together between themselves, too, and act in a united manner against the wrongs that were being committed.

In this global age, where our activities are watched via satellite television by millions across the world, the actions of Muslims in England resonate across the world. We should not underestimate the hope that is instilled, not just in the hearts of those people who we directly demonstrate for, but for those watching, who share the sense of outrage against war and are keen to join hands in an international struggle for freedom. Many people in the Middle East are now demonstrating against their own governments, who they correctly perceive as 'puppet regimes' for Western interests.

Ironically, whilst living in the country that is sending over the bombs, we are also living in a country which has one of the largest and vibrant anti-war movements. I hope that 20th March will see huge numbers on the streets - here and abroad, and through this unity we can show our support for the brave resistance of the Iraqi people. Inshallah our actions will not only resonate to future generations here, but resonate across the world - giving hope to us as an Ummah - as well as hope for humanity as a whole. ■

SPEAKING OF LEGALITIES

MOST REASONABLE PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE RULE OF LAW SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE RATHER THAN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TYRANNY. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WILL BE BREAKING ITS OWN LAW IF IT BANS THE HIJAB SINCE:

-1 -

The European Convention on Human Rights has been signed and ratified by France. ECHR rights including Article 9(i) rights to freedom of religion and freedom to manifest religion in worship, teaching, practice and observance, have been incorporated into French domestic law since 1974. Article 55 of the French Constitution confirms that any new French law should be in harmony with the ECHR.

-2 -

Wearing the hijab is a voluntary act of religious observance and therefore a valid expression of Article 9(i) rights. The hijab is not worn as "a religious symbol" - it is an integral part of the prophetic way of life which has been embodied by all the true followers of all the true prophets, including Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, blessings and peace be on them.

-3 -

Wearing the hijab is not a threat to anyone and does not violate anyone else's rights and freedoms. In accordance with the ECHR Article 9 rights, anyone who believes in accordance with their beliefs that wearing the hijab is not necessary is free not to wear the hijab - and anyone who believes in accordance with their beliefs that wearing the hijab is necessary for religious reasons is free to wear the hijab.

-4 -

This means that the proviso in Article 9(ii) is not applicable since banning the hijab can hardly be viewed as necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

-5 -

Therefore any French legislation banning the hijab constitutes direct religious discrimination by the organs of state in direct violation of the ECHR. This is a denial of a fundamental human right which the French state is in fact under a duty to protect and secure by virtue of Articles 1, 13 and 14 of the ECHR.

-6 -

The same reasoning applies to all members of the European Union who have signed and ratified the European Convention on Human Rights.

THE RELEVANT ARTICLES AND PROTOCOLS OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

As regards the religious rights of Muslims and other religious groups, Article 9 of the ECHR guarantees everyone living in Europe including the UK the right to choose their religion and the right to practise their religion:

-1 -

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

-2 -

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Furthermore, Article 2 of the First Protocol to the ECHR guarantees everyone living in Europe including the UK the right to have their children educated in accordance with their religious beliefs:

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

As a signatory to the ECHR, the French government is under a duty (under Article 1) to secure the rights which the Convention seeks to uphold and protect, and it is also under a duty (under Articles 13 & 14) to ensure that there is an effective remedy before a national authority for everyone whose Convention rights are violated:

Article 1 of the ECHR states:

The High Contracting Parties shall secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the rights and freedoms defined in Section I of this Convention.

Article 13 of the ECHR states:

Everyone whose rights and freedoms as set forth in this Convention are violated shall have an effective remedy before a national authority notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity.

Article 14 of the ECHR states:

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

THE POLITICS AND THE PROMISE OF CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUES

After attending two back-to-back “international dialogues of civilisations”, one in Doha, Qatar organized by Brookings Institution and the Emir of Qatar, and another in Paris hosted by UNESCO, Euro Mediterranean and President Jacques Chirac, I cannot help but reflect on the promise and the politics of dialogue.

The philosophical assumptions behind these dialogues are not too difficult to discern. Islam and the modern West share a common Abrahamic tradition and their foundational sources; Islamic law and philosophy and Western enlightenment philosophy have common roots - Hellenistic reason and Biblical revelation. The two civilisations have a common future, particularly in the light of strong economic relations between the West and the Muslim World and the growing presence of Islam in nearly every Western society.

Because the future of the two civilisations is inseparable, a clash will be devastating to both regardless of the asymmetry of power. A clash between Islam and the modern West would be like a clash between the present and the future for both. Islam is integral to the future of the West and Islamic civilisation's reticence towards modernity is untenable; eventually the Muslim world will have to modernise, democratise and recognise that its future too is interdependent.

Clearly the long-term benefits of cooperation and co-existence are apparent to all except those who are obtuse and whose reason and good will is blunted either by their hatred for the other or by the intoxication that comes from power. For them the clash is not only inevitable but also desirable as they seek a future for the self without the other.

Dialogues between the two civilisations help convince the undecided on both sides that there is hope and conflict is not inevitable. In the dialogue itself one can convince the other that not all interests are sacred and not all positions are etched in stone. With some compromise and much restraint, dialogues can bridge even the widest of divides.

Needless to say, I went to each of the two international forums with hope, excitement, and anticipation. But I discovered that the promise of a dialogue can be so easily compromised, even subverted by the politics that underpin them or by those political entrepreneurs who seek to exploit them to score political points at the expense of advancing understanding.

BASHING THE US AND ISLAM

The forum in Paris was entitled “The Clash of Civilisations will not happen”. Both President Chirac and Foreign Minister Villepin said they feared that growth of terrorism and the undermining of multilateralism in the world was threatening peace and enhancing the prospects of a clash. The forum was apparently designed to underscore the common traditions between Islam and the West but it actually ended up as a forum that rejected Islamic resurgence in the Muslim

World and maintained that America was a neo-colonial power.

Some of the topics were clearly provocative and in keeping with the French attempt to position themselves as the primary balancer of American unilateralism. One panel was titled “US: Common enemy or shared ally.” But there was no panel designed to examine how groups such as Al-Qaeda too might be contributing to realising the Huntingtonian prophesy. Another panel on which I was a speaker was titled, “Is the Arab World undergoing another colonisation?”

I have been a very vocal critic of George Bush's foreign policy, which I agree is often contrary to international law, international norms and common morality, but the Paris forum was seeking to bring secular forces in the Arab World closer to Europe by positioning the US as a new-colonial power seeking to dominate the oil resources of the region by force. Clearly the objective was to paint the US as an international villain and France as the international hero that is defending international norms, the multilateral order and a champion of third world rights.

As a result, I found myself as the only defender of America, pointing out to the audience that compared to Europe's history, American colonial ambitions are insignificant and as far as democracy and freedom of religion were concerned, the US was streets ahead of the French who even legislate what Muslim women can and cannot wear. I reminded them that the US was, as former Secretary of State Albright pointed out, the “indispensable nation,” and it was the US that acted to prevent genocides in Europe (Bosnia, Kosovo) and not France. Finally I had to remind Europeans that in spite of their pro-Palestine rhetoric they had done little for them. Even the Palestinians recognised that if they were to get their independence, it would have to be through a transformed US.

NO ROLE FOR ISLAM

On the panels that discussed Islam, only Muslims who saw no role for Islam in the public sphere were invited. As one of the voices advocating Islamic democracy, I was surprised to find myself in the audience, as people who had done little or nothing on the subject discussed how secular Muslims alone - not any interpretation of Islam - were ready for democracy. The general mood at the conference was that there could be no peace or dialogue with Islamists. The occasional voice that advocated Islamic democracy was booed.

The radical secular fundamentalism of France in my opinion will enhance rather than diminish the prospects of a clash of civilisations. Secular westernised Muslims have little influence in the Muslim world. Islam has become the dominant idiom of the Muslim world and the West must find a way to cooperate and co-exist with moderate or liberal Islamists who believe in democracy, tolerance and pluralism, but within the Islamic rubric. French style secularism is neither welcome in the Muslim World, nor in America, nor by a majority of French

IN THE WAKE OF TWO MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ON CIVILISATIONAL DIALOGUE, THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IS AS ROCKY AS EVER. MUQTEDAR KHAN TAKES US BEHIND CLOSED DOORS TO ASSESS THE POSSIBILITIES AND PERILS OF THE REALLY “BIG CONVERSATION”.

Muslims who now constitute about one fifth of the French population.

AN ENCOUNTER OF RHETORIC AND REALITY

The Doha dialogue was orchestrated by the Saban Center for Middle East policy at Brookings Institution. Unlike Paris, where the main players - Americans and Islamists - were conspicuously absent, the Doha Dialogue focused on bringing in all the key players in the ongoing struggle between the US and the Muslim World. Academics, policy makers, former government officials, media, former military personnel and a strong contingent of American Muslims represented the US. The American delegation included former President Bill Clinton, Ambassadors Richard Holbrooke, Martin Indyk and Edward Djerejian. The Muslim world was represented by former government officials, scholars, journalists, politicians and some key Islamists such as Professor Qazi Hussain the leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami and leader of the opposition in the Pakistani Parliament, and Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi an important leader in the Muslim brotherhood and easily the most prominent opinion maker and cleric of the Arab world.

The dialogue included open plenary sessions and several close door three-hour workshops. The different formats revealed the extent to which political considerations on the part of all parties undermines the promise of dialogues. In open sessions, Muslim representatives focused on US-Israeli relations as the crux of the crisis in US-Muslim relations and sought to underscore the injustices that Muslim suffer at the hands of US and Israel. In closed door sessions, representatives from the Muslim world acknowledged that political and even cultural reform was necessary in the Muslim world. Many were willing to concede that the Israeli-Palestinian issue could be settled peacefully. Above all, even the most stringent public critics of the US were more cooperative and willing to discuss things openly in private.

The American delegates tended to waffle on most issues in public. They were often unwilling to discuss key complaints that Muslims had with regards to US foreign policy. While there was a plenary session dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the American delegations' discomfort on the topic was palpable. But in private not only were many Americans willing to admit the insanity of the Bush administration's policies but also acknowledged the policy logjam that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute constituted. Many prominent Americans even acknowledged that perhaps it was time to rethink US positions vis-à-vis the Middle East crisis.

ISRAEL, NO MATTER WHAT

But the only public statement that everyone remembers is Ambassador Holbrooke's. At first he refused to discuss the issue and then finally made one statement, “the US will never turn its back on Israel.” Many Islamists interpreted this as “no matter what happens,

no matter what Israel does, the US will continue to finance, support and arm Israel.” Until Bill Clinton came to the rescue, Holbrooke's commitment to Israel had subverted the dialogue. Some cynics concluded from Holbrooke's comment that perhaps he might become the Secretary of State if Democrats won in November 2004 now that he had sworn his allegiance to Israel in public.

PUBLIC ENEMIES, PUBLIC ALLIES

On many issues it appeared as if Americans and Muslims were public enemies but private allies. When not posturing for the consumption of respective constituencies both arrogant Americans and intransigent Islamists were actually willing to negotiate, share their fears and aspirations and really open up to each other. In public dialogues the sources of divergence dominated, in private conversations areas that constituted common ground were explored.

One important development at the Doha dialogue was the realisation by all parties the potential of American Muslims as a catalyst for better communications and better relations between America and the Muslim World. Muslims from Malaysia to Morocco made it clear that they were looking towards American Muslims for guidance, support and initiative while dealing with the American establishment. Americans also began to realise that through American Muslims, America had an inside track to the Muslim World.

The conference ended with an eloquent and thoughtful talk by Bill Clinton. Unlike some Americans who showed both ignorance and insensitivity to Muslim concerns, Clinton showed not only a clear understanding of the underlying problems, but also great respect and familiarity with Islam, the Quran and Muslim issues. He was willing to acknowledge past mistakes, admit American limitations on key policy issues, and did not shy away from criticizing the Arabs, the Israelis and Americans for failing to resolve the Middle East crisis by now. Former President Clinton will make an excellent Dialogue Czar and the White House should perhaps take notice of this and appoint him an Ambassador at large to deal particularly with intractable conflicts such as Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and North Korea.

VIRTUES OF DIALOGUE

September 11 and its aftermath has exposed the underbelly of US-Muslim relations. The existing differences have been highlighted and exacerbated while new ones have emerged as a result of US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Everyone understands that while security issues are involved, so are identity, cultural, religious and economic issues. Therefore, military solutions have limited purchase. The tensions between the two can only be resolved through economic development, political reform and cultural dialogue. The lesser the use of force the better the prospects for a more amicable resolution to Muslim grievances and American insecurities. ■

MAKING OUR



FOUR YEARS AGO MUHAMMAD ARSAL KHAN AND HIS WIFE KANEEZ FATIMA WERE ARRESTED AND CHARGED IN THE KILLING OF THEIR FIVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER FARAH. IT WAS A GRUESOME MURDER THAT SENT SHOCKWAVES THROUGHOUT THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN CANADA. NAZIM BAKSH REFLECTS ON THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF THE MUSLIM FAMILY.

Farah's throat was slit with a knife, her body dismembered, washed, placed in garbage bags and buried in two different parks. Arsal, her biological father, told the arresting officers at the time that his daughter had killed herself and his only crime was covering up her death. He tried his best, he has testified in court, to give her a proper Islamic burial. The jury will decide his fate sometime in the next few weeks. Fortunately for him, Canada is not Texas.

Farah's biological mother, Muhammad Aarsal's first wife, came from Pakistan to testify at the trial. Her marriage to Aarsal is a tale from hell. She told the court that he would repeatedly beat her, locked her in a room for days and when she became pregnant, denied Farah was ever his. Nevertheless, the wise "elders" in their village awarded custody to Aarsal.

Shadowing this trial is a recent ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada on the constitutionality of corporal punishment. The court's ruling allow parents to spank their children while prohibiting conduct that is "degrading, inhuman and harmful" to the child. Elastic terms in dangerous times. The court would have parents hit their children so long as the spanking is not motivated by rage or frustration. According to these robed wise men and women, spanking a child when angry is likely to result in inadvertent harm to the child.

The Imam at Fuengirola Mosque in southern Spain, a short distance from the tourist resort city of Malaga, was sentenced to one year and three months in prison in January 2004. Forty-four-year-old Muhammad Kamal Mustafa, imam for 12 years, advocated in his book entitled "Women in Islam" that only "specific parts of the body, such as her feet and hands" could be struck, and then "using a stick that is not too big so as not to leave scars and bruises." "The beatings," he wrote, "must not be too harsh because the goal is to cause psychological suffering and not to humiliate or physically abuse."

Spanish authorities receive an estimated 16,000 complaints of domestic violence and accounts for 85 domestic murders a year. In Pakistan they don't appear to keep statistics. There isn't enough paper or hard drive space to store the data. In India women have decided to build their own mosques and I've heard that in some villages they are taking to arming themselves with high-powered shotguns. Word on the street is that they aren't interested in hunting elephants. It's the men who will dare strike them or their daughters they are most interested in.

The Riley Center in the United States reports that every nine seconds a woman is battered in the U.S and that 95 percent of all victims of domestic violence are women. Further, 50 percent of all women murdered in the United States are killed by a spouse or an acquaintance. Domestic violence occurs in 60 percent of marriages and is the most underreported crime. In 90 percent of the cases involving battered women, children were present.

These disturbing issues were on my mind as I sat in my study on the evening of the 9th day of Dhul Hijja gathering my thoughts for the Eid khutbah and trying as best as I could to make my advice relevant to the occasion.

It occurred to me that Prophet Ibrahim, upon him be blessings,

HOMES SOULFUL

was a “home-builder.” Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismael built the Kaaba. “And as they were raising the foundations of this house Ibrahim prayed, “Our Lord Accept this from us.” Allah accepted his supplication and honored the House by calling it, no less than fifteen times in the Quran, the “House of Allah.”

God says in the Quran, “He has established the Kaaba, an inviolable House, a symbol for all humanity” and “Lo, the first House appointed for mankind was at Becca (Mecca) a blessed place, a guidance to all people.” It is so because it is a house built on the foundation of submission to the Creator.

The Kaaba is the quintessential house, a model for all forms of domestic space, wherever they happen to be. The Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, is reported to have said that 120 Mercies descend daily on the Kaaba: 60 for those making the circumambulation, 40 for those praying in its vicinity and 20 for those who just look at it; A truly remarkable house.

It is an orientation in space and time towards an object that is celebrated, both in the heavens and on earth: untiring submission to the Divine.

As an orientation in space, the *qibla* or the direction to the Kaaba in prayers, facilitates unity among worshippers on a horizontal plane and this in turn gives rise to a unity of the hearts which often occurs when people’s intentions and actions are for God alone. It is an orientation in time, too because worshippers turn to it five different times daily and gravitate as well to its physical form at specific times during the lunar calendar.

It is so pivotal to the Muslim outlook that it has its mirror in the heavens referred to in the Quran as ‘*bayt-al-ma’mur*’ which is reported to be circled always by thousands of angels. Even so, Imam Al-Baydawi regarded the expression *bayt-al-ma’mur* as a metaphor for the heart of the believer - a place where love of the Creator is cherished.

The Kaaba is a place of peace. Allah says that all those who enters it are safe. It is a place of purity in that weapons are not allowed in its sanctuary. A person is not permitted to hunt, to kill, or to cut down trees. Allah commands us to worship the Lord of the House in Sura Quraysh and in return, we are promised food when hungry and security in times of fear.

Thus, my simple message to the assembly, as we commemorated the great sacrifices of Ibrahim, upon him be blessings, was: let us build our homes on the foundation of love of Allah and submission to His Will and like that great Prophet of God repeat the prayer: “*Rabana taqabbal minna*” - O Lord, Accept this from us.

Let us organize our homes in such a way that there is a corner dedicated to collective worship. A family that prays together stays together. Put copies of the Quran in prominent places to be read and reflected upon. Don’t allow the television to compete with sacred space.

Let us teach our children to observe proper conduct in regards to

the home. When they enter teach them to say “*As Salam Wa Alaikum*” even if no one is visible. Allah says in the Quran “Say *salam* when you enter.” People should announce themselves upon arrival and not sneak up on someone’s home, even if it is your own. Arrive by the front entrance and not from the rear. These are simple Islamic rules. Knock when you arrive and even if you hear voices inside and no one answers the door, leave.

Our homes should be places where our children and our women are safe. Husbands and wives should make a pact with each other and with their children that voices should not be raised in the home. Let us commit to make our homes gentle, pleasant, clean and tidy spaces infused with beauty. A place where healthy and pure food only is served even in if it be in small quantities.

There is no room for scolding, spanking, hitting, or striking in our homes or our schools. The problem with people today is that they are not balanced. You tell them they could pinch a child and they get out the pliers. You tell them they can hit with a miswak and they get a baseball bat. Our blessed Prophet never hit any of his wives or his children. Throw the guidelines out and follow the blessed Messenger. It is better to live in a society with deviant children instead of one where we mourn their death.

Follow these rules and ours can become homes like the homes Allah describes in the Quran, “(Lamp-giving light is found) in houses which Allah has elevated - and that His Name is remembered therein. Within them do people offer praise to Him at morning and evening.”

These are not the homes that Allah wages war against. Pray that our homes are not built on a foundation of disobedience and transgression.

The home of the blessed Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, was physically attached to his mosque. Reflecting on this, Abu Bakr Siraj Ad-Din (Martin Lings) noted in a speech at Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1964:

“*For twelve hundred years -- and more in many Islamic countries - the houses of his people were prolongations of the mosques. The Muslim would take off his shoes when he entered his house just as he would take them off when he entered the mosque; he would sit in his house in the same manner as he sat in the mosque; he would put such ornaments on the walls of his house as he saw on the walls of the mosque; nor would he put in his house any ornaments that would not be suitable for the mosque. Thus he was continually surrounded by reminders of the spiritual dignity and spiritual responsibilities of man, and he dressed himself according to the same principles.*”

A home is perhaps the nearest thing to our souls and its influence is lasting and tremendously powerful. Whenever we turn our faces in the direction of the Kaaba it is an opportunity for us to orient our hearts and our homes - our inner and our outer - to Allah. ■

Spanish authorities receive an estimated 16,000 complaints of domestic violence and 85 domestic murders a year. In Pakistan they don't appear to keep statistics. There isn't enough paper or hard drive space to store the data.

SACRED CULTURE OF THE BEAN

SOCIALISING OVER A CUP OF COFFEE IS A CENTURIES OLD EUROPEAN TRADITION AND MODERN CAFÉ CULTURE HAS RECENTLY TAKEN OFF IN BRITAIN. LITTLE DO THEY KNOW, BUT COFFEE CHAINS AND ADDICTS OWE A DEBT TO A MYSTERIOUS MR HASSAN AND HIS SOHO COFFEE HOUSE, AS INDLIEB FARAZI FINDS OUT.

Omar likes to start his day off with a shot of espresso to wake him up and prepare him for work in the city. He will probably grab cups of hot java throughout the day and when his working hours wrap up, the 25 year-old London accountant, looks forward to relaxing with his friends over a bittersweet caffeine warmer.

“Working long hours can take its toll and lets face it, most people don’t have job satisfaction so I look forward to weekends and evenings when I can unwind with friends at a nice coffee shop.”

Most Londoners will pass at least a dozen coffee shops on their way to work in the mornings and now many, like Omar, need a quick fix before their day can begin. It was the Costa Brothers who first caught on in the 1980s, being bought out in 1995 by the Whitbread. The rival Seattle Coffee Company was soon taken over by Starbucks and the race to make Great Britain a “coffee country” had begun.

Enter the mysterious Mr Hassan. Established in 1887, his Algerian Coffee Store is still around and is a testament to the Muslim involvement in London’s long standing obsession with the dark brew. Tucked away along Old Compton Street, the walls of this tiny shop are covered with shelves heaving with jars of beans. The air is filled with the heady perfume of some of the finest coffees in the world.

Mr Hassan first opened the store to sell prepared drinks of coffee to passers by as well as coffee granules to take home and prepare. Today the shop still retains its original name and shop counter, but is now owned by an Italian family.

Paul Crocetta inherited the store from his father-in-law but knows nothing about the original owner. “All I know is that he is called Mr Hassan and he opened it in 1887,” he says. “I do not know where his descendants are now; I do not know why he first opened it here. I do not even know his first name. I just know that today we are continuing the trade in coffee.”

Even though Mr Hassan remains a name without a face, he is proof that coffee was a hit in Britain far earlier than the current caffeine craze. To coffee historians, having a Muslim start a coffee shop in the heart of London seems thoroughly apropos given Islam’s long relationship with “the bean”.

First discovered in the mountainous Kaffa province of Ethiopia, coffee’s real spiritual home is Mocha, Yemen where around the year 1200, a saintly man of the Shadhili sufi order is said to have brewed the first cup. Hagiographies tell of Ali ibn Umar and the divine inspiration he received while wandering the fertile lands around Mocha filled as they were with naturally growing coffee plants. Instructed to boil the beans and drink the brew, spiritual orders in Yemen and soon much of the Islamic world regarded coffee as an aid for devotion, allowing dervishes to remain awake for long hours dedicating their nights to divine remembrance.

Mocha was also the main port for the one sea route to Makkah, but the Arabs had a strict policy not to export any fertile beans so that coffee could not be cultivated anywhere else. But soon the first coffee houses, known as qahveh khaneh began to spring up all over Makkah.

While scholars argued over the permissibility of coffee, people across Muslim lands were quick to take to it. As Stewart Lee Allen reports in his travelogue, *The Devil’s Cup: A History of the World According to Coffee*, that, “by the 1400s, when the Turks conquered Yemen, coffee from Mocha was being drunk throughout the Islamic world. When the first English trader visited the port, in 1606, almost half a century before Europe’s first café opened, he reported that there were over thirty-five merchant ships from as far away as India crowding the harbour, all waiting for the bags of coffee that cluttered the docks.”

While the pious used coffee for sacred purposes, coffee houses across the Muslim world became synonymous with music, gambling and free-wheeling social, political and religious discussions that were soon seen as a threat by the ruling powers of the sixteenth century. Doctors - who were only interested in dispensing coffee as a costly medicine, and clerics who saw their congregations deserting the temple for the coffee house, tried to shut down the coffee houses. But it was the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV who saw the drinking of coffee as a source of sedition and, in a frenzy of blood letting, had anywhere from ten thousand to one hundred thousand people killed for imbibing java and its associated vices, smoking and political argumentation.

These persecutions failed, as not only was coffee delicious but wine was forbidden, water was scarce and brackish and goat’s milk generally regarded as unpalatable. The grand viziers finally gave up when they realised the coffee houses could provide them with an important source of tax revenue.

It did not take long before lawyers, artists and those who worked at night discovered the delights and the side effects of coffee. No longer did coffee have to be prescribed by doctors; it was fast becoming a permanent part of the civilised, cultured world of Islam.

Coffee reached Vienna in 1683, just after the city had been besieged in war with the Turks. The retreating Janissary army left behind bags of coffee, which were retained by a Polish Army Officer, Franz Georg Kolschitzky. A focus of much historical debate, one story says that Kolschitzky was a double agent who undermined the Turkish siege and later petitioned the Austrian Emperor for abandoned beans. Knowing how to best use his booty, he later opened central Europe’s first coffee house in Vienna and became quite rich as a result of this venture. He also established the habit of refining the brew by filtering out the grounds, sweetening it, and adding a dash of milk - hence, inventing Viennese coffee.

The coffee shop, a soon popular institution, had opponents every-

In the ancient Arab world, coffee became such a staple part of family life that one of the causes allowed by law for marital separation was a husband's refusal to produce coffee for his wife.

where. In Italy, priests asked Pope Clement VIII to forbid the favourite drink of the Ottoman Empire considering it part of the infidel threat. On taking one sip, the pope found the drink delicious and baptised it - making it an acceptable Christian beverage.

The popularity spread through Europe to such an extent that, during the 17th and 18th centuries, there were more coffee shops in London than there are today. Coffee shops were nothing like today's trendy shops. A true coffeehouse was crowded, smelly, noisy, feisty, smoky, celebrated and condemned. On the street in London you located the nearby coffeehouse by sniffing the air for roasting beans, or by looking for a wooden sign shaped to resemble a Turkish coffee pot.

Coffee in fact, first came to Britain in the 17th century. London's first coffee house was opened in St. Michael's Alley in 1652. It was immediately successful and many others quickly followed suit and by 1676, their large clientele of sober gentlemen were seen to be such a threat to the status quo that the King, following the example of Murad IV, attempted in vain to have them closed down.

Coffee shops have always offered a place for intellectuals to meet and discuss the issues of the day. In the 1800s they were used extensively by artists, intellectuals, merchants, bankers and became forums for political activities. When they became popular in England, the coffee houses were dubbed "penny universities". It was said that in a coffee house a man could "pick up more useful knowledge than by applying himself to his books for a whole month".

While losing ground to tea in the 1700s, coffee fought back and a century later regained its popularity. Working class men in the West End knew where to get their fix: from Mr Hassan and his curious Soho café.

Today, walking along a road in London's Wood Green area, misted-up coffee shops dot the shabby Victorian parade and Algerian men are busy starting their day with a cup of strong coffee.

Across the city in west London Mohaman Al-Shiekhly opened Cafe Buzz after getting fed up of travelling into central London every time he wanted to socialise over a cuppa.

Mohaman's café provides a non-alcoholic relaxed environment for people to meet, eat halal sandwiches, and drink a wide range of coffees and fruit juices. Like the days of old Mohaman's café offers an environment for free speech, for people to bandy political ideas about. "We often get groups like HT coming in, but the staff and I refuse to get involved in politics. We don't get drawn into debates, but customers are more than welcome to express their own views."

Mr Hassan would have concurred. As his shop lives on, so does the great tradition of coffee drinking and brewing he brought with him from the Muslim world. Every coffee drinker the world over ought to raise their cup to a civilisation that didn't just cultivate a plant, but bequeathed us "the culture of the bean". Let's all drink to that! ■

ST. VALENTINE'S COURTING D

ANOTHER YEAR GONE AND STILL NO SPOUSE. A PROMISING INTRODUCTION DUSTBIN, YET HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL FOR THE PORTLY BUTROS AL-B

I reminded myself on a recent trip to a famous ice-cream shop that, despite the numerous flavours on offer, I should restrain myself and only have one scoop of ice-cream. It would mean that last minute on the rowing machine would not be as exhausting as it usually is. I only have one stomach, so two scoops would be unjust. And my slightly portly figure will move a pound or two closer to impressing the "sisters", even though every previous effort has failed. With the new Islamic year 1425 upon me, I was lamenting my near-acquisition of a wife.

February 14, St. Valentine's Day, arrived and went, another year without a spouse, another year when supermarkets and card shops have aisles set aside for the "Lurrrrrrve" season, where love-shaped cushions retailing at an astronomical price sit beside red fluffy teddy bears retailing for even more. Schmaltz, sentimentalist, materialist, capitalist - waiting only for the onslaught of Easter Bunnies and chocolate eggs to replace them. Valentine's Day is also the day the infamous Chicago mobster, Al Capone, conducted his "massacre". This year the teddies looked especially appealing for assassination as did the cushions for silencers.

Now the following account has been amended to preserve identities and to not exceed the assassination warrants already on my head. That disclaimer at the end of a film's credits stating that "any similarity with any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental" is in effect here, or I may end up as Al Capone intended. Following Eid al-Adha, at another annual family gathering, I did happen to meet my female cousin, who is still in that limbo stage of not donning the hijab just yet. These are those sort of preliminary marital discussions, where neither participant has spoken to the other for the past decade following the onset of adolescence, with parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and babies all spectators for any spark of matrimony. The baby seemed to be particularly

keen, perhaps thinking a year from now, he won't be the youngest member of the tribe. As a suitor, I had to make sure my behaviour was tip-top. Naturally, my nervousness led to some spectacular blunders.

In the initial stages of the conversation, I was asked, following the French farce, what I thought of the headscarf or veil in general. I

believed, as a result of years of studying, and still being mystified by, the opposite sex, that some women are simply far too ugly and therefore the veil should be obligatory on them. If Hanbali jurisprudence dictates that a "beautiful" girl must adorn the veil, then the converse must be equally true! "Uhm, yes" was the stunned response I received. The female cousin may have erroneously inferred this meant herself; it was merely breaking the ice. It ended up breaking my back.

Perceived to be far too superficial and narcissistic, my beard was at a later stage called to account.

Now, beards come in all shapes and sizes, from your Maliki-goatee, to your fashionable 40-minute-a-day-maintenance-Craig-David-style-with-Engrue-Englesias-skullcap-accessory to your more Fuzzy-Bear sort of look. I am of the school that if one has chosen to adorn themselves with a beard, it must follow the rules stipulated by the Sunnah, ably articulated in fatwas, and particularly that it should be maintained accordingly. Perhaps, the MBA should be for master of beard administration. My beard, each trimmed hair, quivered as if on trial. As her father was of the school who had been clean-shaven since the Ottomans, she felt that she preferred men, or rather her future spouse, to be clean-shaven. Here I learned a valuable lesson to be utilised on future occasions. Muslim ladies tend to immensely admire Sayyida Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), for the excellence of her faith, and, amongst her many enhanced attributes, an ocean of beauty and intelligence. A slightly vain, though slightly heavy set peacock

I still believe that some women are far too ugly so the veil should be obligatory on them. If Hanbali jurisprudence dictates that a "beautiful" girl must adorn the veil, then the converse must be equally true!

S DISASTER

DUCTION SEEMS DESTINED FOR THE
-BAKR.

myself, I had finally submitted to the idea of keeping a beard, neither by the ill-brandishing of selective jurisprudence by an immature demagogue, nor by the need to resemble Neanderthal man, but by reflecting on Sayyida Aisha's statement that a beard beautifies a man's face. Articulating this at the crucial point, the female cousin, admittedly intimidated by the exemplar quoted, did believe I had justified my case for keeping a beard, meaning the blunders temporarily ceased. But I don't think the baby of the family should resolve just yet to hear the patter of tiny feet the following year.

A slap might have arrived for justifying polygyny, but a Matrix-like slide, I hoped - though difficult in my portly condition, I know - would be my saviour against a swollen face. If there is a subject to really irk a Muslim lady, from your arch-feminist secularist to your staunch Islamist, then it is this one par excellence. Evidences for and against - from Quranic verses, hadith, jurisprudence, common law - all seem to fly back and forth in this debate. One may cite, as an example that an argument against polygyny is the existence of not one but two, three or four mother-in-laws, truly enough to make any man reconsider. Four cooks, ably assisted by their militant Mamas, may spoil the broth by conspiring to make me far chubbier, with gluttony proving to be a truly deadly sin. But at a time when beautiful and intelligent Muslim women find themselves without suitable suitors and pushing a non-descript age, for the restoration of the celestial balance, I implore the virtues of Sunni polygyny unequivocally. I am not, like Andrew Marvell, seeking to hasten my 'Coy Mistress' for my own pleasure, for no such mistress can exist, but merely articulating what I would like my brothers and sisters to have. Mere altruism, I assure you. If one female could virtually slap me by reading this, they surely would have done so by now. In my condition, I may even mistake it for affection.

There is wisdom in the maxim that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. We are living in an age where Home Economics is being dropped for Economics, and male chefs dominate the television waves. The microwave assumes a sacrosanct place in the kitchen for the plethora of ready-meals it "nukes". If one were to say that a man's castle is home, and his cook is his queen, a flurry of slaps and handbags would bombard his, not my, face. But, there may be some truth to the statement. Men have already begun to emulate the chefs

on television, down to donning the apron for the cooking and the tawdry chef's hat in defiance of good taste. Citing the notion of division of labour in economic theory, when the man provides the funds, the lady should be able to cook, or at least supervise the cooking. Aphrodisiacs would be the first lesson.

Prior to the advent of Viagra, dwindling fertility rates and increasing marital discord, aphrodisiacs were always important in the sphere of marital relations in Islam, as good meals result in babies with chubby cheeks and dumplly thighs amongst other holistic benefits. In the West, three aphrodisiacs seem to feature strongly, particularly marketed as luxury goods during the Valentine season: champagne, strawberries and oysters. The first is not celestial wine, so delicious fruit juice, made from the choicest natural fruits from the world over, will have to suffice. Strawberries do not have Quranic citations, but pomegranates, grapes and bananas do. That does not mean strawberries do not have their own virtues; when combined with sugar and fresh cream, and milk (a Divine blessing), the results increase potency, improve the complexion but do also result in portliness, and therefore moderation is advised. Oysters are related Quranically to the houris of Paradise, who are "like preserved pearls", and as seafood is largely permissible to eat, the Divine association cannot be missed. But, foremost for aphrodisiacs, there is the Prophetic advice of eating harisa, a meat and wheat dish, with eggs, dates and coconuts amongst others foods recommended. At least, my kin in religion will be able to put much of this theoretical knowledge to current use, as I languish in fear of the ever-imminent slap from the opposite sex.

It is possible those slaps will only arrive once in matrimony, hence my agility training. Despite my blunders, the female cousin and I are now in constant e-correspondence, duly under the complete supervision of her censoring mahram, clearly demonstrating that in Islam, three is a legitimate crowd until two becomes legitimate company. Who knows, this time next year, I may be aided and abetted by a veiled assassin in a joint-mission to purge supermarkets and card shops of the scourge of red fluffly love teddy bears. ■

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“FREEDOM OF SPIRIT AND STRENGTH OF MIND”

IN A TIME OF MISTRUST AND INCREASING ISOLATION, MUSTAFA CERIC, REIS-UL-ULAMA AND GRAND MUFTI OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, CALLS ON EUROPEAN MUSLIMS TO EMBRACE THE WAY OF INTERACTION AND REDISCOVER THE PASSION AND CULTURAL CREATIVITY OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION.

We Muslims here in Europe must take full responsibility, including our faith responsibility, before God, the ummah and Europe in developing a peaceful relationship with our Christian and Jewish nationhood based on our Islamic universal morality and our particular civic interests so that one day we may be of help to the universal ummah, rather than to be in need of its help.

I believe that it is now time that we in Europe offer a genuine, and if I may say, an alternative interpretation of Islam that would lead us to a cultural creativity that is recognisable as Islamic-European and European Islamic.

The real enemy of Islam is neither the West nor East. The real enemy of Islam is our Muslim jahiliyyah (ignorance). It is not by chance that the Muslim historians have designated the time before Islam as the time of jahiliyyah and not the time of kafiriyyah (disbelief). I trust highly the wisdom of our historians and their sense of realism. Our jahiliyyah is manifested today in the sense that we present Islam to the world not as a universal message, as it were, but as a tribal culture and national pride. Then, we wonder why the Europeans do not appreciate the universal values of Islam which are of great benefit to the whole of humanity, but rather see Islam, as in fact we present it, as a specific culture from the East that has nothing to do with Europe. I believe that Europe, and the West in general, is an ideal place for Muslims to work out a universal worldview that will bring the ummah closer to itself as well as to the whole world.

The phenomenon of the Islamic civilisation may be seen as a wheel that is turning on the axis of a continuous divine message from Adam to the last Messenger Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon them both). A civilisation is an effort of the human spirit to balance the memory of the past with the memory of the future, to express the meaning of life, and to present the nature of the human soul both in its hope and in its fear. Indeed, civilisation is the state of mind which Ibn Khaldun called as'abiyya, the passion for a decent human life as it progresses from one stage to another with a purpose of self-actualisation in history. Important forces in this passion for human life are the freedom of human spirit and the strength

of human mind.

The attribute “Islamic” to civilisation should lead us to the notion of the coexistence of continuity and change in history and in life. That is the crucial point whereby the course of the Islamic civilisation has been determined in the past - its ability to comprehend the essential continuity of tradition with possible changes in history. In fact, the coexistence of continuity and change is the major idea, which provided the Islamic civilisation with unprecedented success in world history.

I should remind you that the glorious time of the Islamic civilisation had been the time of its interaction with other civilisations. The idea of isolation is strange to the Islamic civilisation. It is clear, then, that Muslims in the past knew how to interact with other who had been both similar to and different from their faith and their expectations of life and history. Furthermore, they knew how to appreciate the different opinions amongst themselves while keeping in mind the same direction towards the glory of the Islamic civilisation as a common achievement of the whole ummah.

Islamic civilisation... [was] made for interaction and cooperation. However, in order to go towards that direction, [we] must reject the idea of historical guilt [which] is being imposed upon the Muslims in the sense that the current generation of youth [feel they] must correct all the mistakes of the previous generations before correcting its own immediate ones and thinking about the long-term future of the ummah.

In other words, the contemporary generation should hold fast to the belief of freedom from past mistakes and thus take responsibility for the future of the world not in the way of isolation, nor in the way of assimilation, but in the way of equal cultural interaction and civilisational cooperation. The middle ground of historic interaction and rational cooperation is the right way out of the embarrassment of isolation and the risk of assimilation of the Islamic civilisation. ■

Excerpted from the keynote address at the 2004 conference of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists UK.

DISMANTLING THE CULTURE OF SECTARIANISM



IN PAKISTAN, HARDLY A WEEK GOES BY WHERE A MUSLIM IS NOT KILLED OR MAIMED BY SUNNI-SHI'ITE VIOLENCE OR SALAFI-SUNNI VIOLENCE. SUCH OCCURRENCES ARE COMMONPLACE, ALL IN THE GOOD NAME OF PRESERVING THE PURITY OF THE RELIGION. FRIGHTENINGLY, THIS IS NOT JUST THE CASE IN PAKISTAN AND IT'S ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG, WARNS IMAM LUQMAN AHMED.

In Afghanistan it's dreadful enough that the U.S. military machine has blown the country to smithereens, now obvious obstacles to rebuilding has been augmented by the violently competitive warlords, fighting each other for power. In Iraq, intermittent violence between Sunnis and Shiites boils like a volcanic crescendo waiting to erupt should the American forces ever decide to leave. In Kurdistan another powder keg is slowly igniting between the Kurds, the Arabs and the Turkmen.

In Tajikistan after the recent fall of the Russian empire, the country capitulated into a vicious civil war. Tens of thousands of Muslims were killed and close to a million were displaced in a conflict that although ostensibly was between fundamentalist Muslims against Marxist Muslims, was really about clan rivalry and ethno-nationalism. Whether it is civil strife in Uzbekistan, sectarian violence in Algeria, Wahhaabi-Shi'ite, or Tuareg darker-skinned Muslim clashes in Mali, the tragedy of Muslim on Muslim violence and intolerance in the Muslim world goes unabated.

Such is the culture of sectarianism. While hardly a Muslim innovation, we seem to have perfected it in the modern age. It's the "my race is better than your race, my nationality is better than your nationality, my politics are better than your politics, my tribe is bet-

ter than your tribe, my Islam is better than your Islam" mentality. This mindset has led us to either depend on despotic, ruthless rulers to keep us from each other's throats, or set about trying to kill, control and marginalize each other in the name of Islam, region, political party, tribe or race. If the notion of tribal, ethnic or racial preference taking precedence over Islamic solidarity became outdated with the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, then certainly, now in the 21st century, it should have become an ancient relic of antiquity. By now, we should be laughing at our since discarded ignorance the same way that Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab once laughed at himself for the time when, overcome by hunger, he ate one his idols for lunch.

Alarmingly, this culture of Muslim-sectarianism is gradually finding its way into America. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with a little ethnic, tribal or even racial pride. Unbridled however, it swaggers into racism and very easily graduates into the type of sectarian modality that we are burdened with today. Instead of sheepishly reminiscing how once upon a time in America there were such things as an Afghani Mosque, an Afro-American Mosque, or an Arab Mosque, we find ourselves foolishly trying to relive an undig-

nified and disastrous past of sectarianism, based on tribal, ethnic or racial loyalty. Destined for failure, the sectarian trend of American Muslims communities must be eradicated before it gets out of control. Anecdotaly, it should come as no surprise to Muslims in America that we are met with intolerance when we fail at tolerance amongst ourselves. The American civil war, the numerous race riots throughout American history, and the civil rights protests of the sixties, has convinced much of America that racism, segregation and narrow-minded bigotry is counter productive. Even bi-racial marriage, once considered intolerable, has become an innocuous, accepted social practice. Ironically, amongst Muslims living in America, inter-racial marriage is still largely taboo.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, saw the self-destructive pattern inherent in sectarian proclivities and the potential damage that it posed to the Muslim peoples. This is why he opposed it from the very beginning. After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet, peace be upon him, commanded Bilal, the freed African slave, to climb atop the Kaaba to make the call to prayer. After Bilal did so, someone remarked, "Muhammad couldn't find anyone to be a muezzin except this black crow!" Others uttered similar derisive statements about Bilal. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was informed of these remarks he summoned the men who made them and they admitted their statements. Then the verse was revealed; "*Oh you people, surely We have created you from a male and a female. And We have made you into tribes and nations in order to know one another. Surely the most righteous amongst you to Allah is the most pious.*" Regrettably, these types of sentiments still prevail amongst us.

During the seventies and eighties, America's response to racism and bigotry was to embark on an elaborate, slogan-laden campaign of re-education and behavior modification. African American history entered public schools, anti-discrimination and anti-segregation policies were adopted in employment, education, finance, and politics. It took a while for people to catch on and it is still a work in progress but here we are, a generation later, and those efforts have been largely successful.

Thirty years ago, sexual harassment in the work place was commonplace. However, through extensive re-education, most Americans now consider sexual harassment unacceptable. There was a time when a husband could brutalise his wife, send her to the grocery store with two black eyes and not receive anything more than a furtive scowl from his neighbor. Now after a generation of re-education, and aggressive legislation, a hearty bruise bearing slap in the face will get someone jail time.

In six-century Arabia, idol worship was widely accepted. However after re-education in the form of wahy (divine inspiration), not only was it abolished but never again since that time have statues been worshipped in the Arabian peninsula. Re-education, a successful tool employed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, still has merit. In the United States, a domestic culture has emerged that allows us to agree to disagree. We are accustomed to being able to work together, side by side for a common good. From kindergarten we are taught to get along, to work together, to play together and mend our differences. Even in the ruthless world of American politics, opposing forces frequently find common ground and build coalitions. Thus, we need to amplify the message that we neither want nor need the type

of sectarianism, intolerance and racism practiced by Muslims in the Muslim world, here in the United States.

African American Muslims have lived through some of the worst examples of racial bigotry and subjugation in history. This is why they resist sectarianism so defiantly coming from their Muslim brothers from abroad.

Americans as a group increasingly abhor racism. African American Muslims are exceptionally appalled by it and resist it so defiantly because for over four hundred years, they have lived through some of the worst examples of racial bigotry and subjugation in history. Much like the oblivion of many white racists in earlier

times to their deranged attitudes about race and ethnicity, many immigrants Muslims fail to perceive the indifference shown to African American Muslims, African Muslims or Muslims of color. Likewise, many African American Muslims also fail to realize the inherent dangers of

Black Nationalism.

In the early 1960s when some of the first modern mass waves of Muslim immigrants came to the United States, an alliance between converts and immigrant Muslims was forged. They needed each other as they do now. It is lamentable that after gaining a secure foothold in American society, many immigrant communities have started to show an unhealthy indifference towards the indigenous African American and to a degree, the white American Muslim population. Obviously that is not the case for all immigrant Muslims. However, this ominous drift is strong enough that there is widespread consensus amongst those affected that it is a growing crisis.

We are slowly moving away from unity and moving towards separation and disunity. This is why there is an imminent need for re-education. Unity, like faith, needs to be taught by imams in their sermons and teachers need to address it in schools. New converts to Islam and newly arriving Muslim immigrants need to be oriented towards it from the very beginning. Although older Muslims tend to be deeply entrenched in sectarian tendencies, much hope prevails for the coming generations. However the time for re-education is now while we as Muslim peoples in America are still in our adolescence. Otherwise we may find ourselves twenty-five years from now in the same pathetically fragmented condition that haunts the Muslim world today.

Sectarianism, the insidious Achilles heel of the Muslims, is arguable one of the primary deterrents to global Muslim unity. Muslims living in the United States are uniquely positioned to counter this disease by creating an ethnically neutral and color blind, Islamic culture. We not only possess the freedom and the infancy to socially and intellectually evolve, we have the world as our captive audience.

Allah in His wisdom has assembled Muslims in the United States from all over the world comprising virtually every major ethnic and racial group. Perhaps we are being tested to see if collectively we can create a new Muslim reality where Islam takes precedence over our color, our race our tribe and our ethnicity. It is as if Allah has brought us all together here on the world stage of America to demonstrate the term *ibaadah Allahi ikhwaanaa* (servants of Allah and brethren). The scholars of Islam unanimously agree that it is *fard* (incumbent) upon the Muslims to be servants of Allah and brethren. If we fail to rise up to this challenge, I fear that ultimately, the most notable import to the West that the Muslims will be credited with will be sectarianism. ■

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WHO SPEAKS FOR BRITISH MUSLIMS?

A man from Mars lands in Blackburn. "Take me to your leader," he tells a Muslim youth wearing a Johnny Wilkinson rugby shirt. A little overwhelmed by the request, the youth thinks about taking him to the mosque committee, but on second thought decides to do some digging on the Internet. He returns annoyed and confused. "Which planet are you and these people from?" the young man asks as he heads for the Job Centre and, then, the mosque.

At the best of times the issue of representation is contentious. But when it comes to Britain's Muslims it gives a new meaning to the notion of a minefield: how do you interface with a community that consists of 56 nationalities, speaks 70 languages and prays in more than 1,200 mosques?

When New Labour came to power almost seven years ago they did make efforts to embrace the largest minority group in the country. Muslims were appointed to the House of Lords and elected into the House of Commons. Muslim schools have been granted state funding and Eid Parties have been held in Parliament, Downing Street and Whitehall. This year's FCO Hajj delegation was the most successful to date. In hindsight, however, the "third way" vis-à-vis British Muslims lacked both boldness and innovation.

The continued refusal to legally recognise Islamophobia is neither wise nor visionary. Despite increasing awareness, evidence and appreciation of, anti-Muslim discrimination has been hard to sell. This is partly because anything "religious" is looked upon with suspicion by the majority of liberal do-gooders.

Government departments and agencies have had to cope with the challenges posed by the Muslim community. Inevitably the question has been with whom and how to interface with the community. Used to working within rigid institutions civil servants find organisations with pretentious claims like the Muslim Council of Britain a godsend: they are equally boring and unchallenging and claims of "representative body" shifts the responsibility of consulting and incorporating other opinions and views on policy that affects Muslims.

It is too late in the day to play politics with either the Muslim community or its representation. We must guard ourselves against the extreme moderates who want to paint a rosy picture of British Muslims. The fact is that our community is in a mess. Proper representation can only be one that can articulate the anger, bewilderment and uneasiness that is the trademarks of most of our young alienated people. They have few friends, a mediocre leadership, trust hardly anyone and have little stake in what goes around - even if undertaken in their name.

The enthusiasm and imagination of our young people needs to be appreciated and harnessed. We need to institute strategies that would make them *mujahids* against the ignorance of Islam in society and against poverty and injustice within their own communities. We need to listen to the trials and tribulations of their efforts to juggle the fact that they are British, Muslim and young.

But all these call for a massive revolution in how we perceive and understand representation. One thing is certain: we will get the kind of

Muslim tomorrow that we invest in today.

Otherwise we will end up with halal Martians: people who are neither of us nor with us. ■

“UNITE BUT FOLLOW ME”

THE TRAGIC COMEDY OF MUSLIM REPRESENTATION

BRITISH MUSLIM POLITICS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A BIT LIKE MONTY PYTHON’S LIFE OF BRIAN. SMALL GROUPS OF MEN CALL FOR UNITY BUT WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN IS ‘UNITE BUT FOLLOW ME’. FAR FROM UNITING THE COMMUNITY, ARGUES HUMERA KHAN, THESE CALLS USUALLY RESULT IN A MYRIAD OF SPLINTER GROUPS ALL ESPOUSING VARIATIONS OF THE SAME IDEA WITH THE ONLY REAL DIFFERENCE BEING THE ORDER OF THE WORDS: ‘MUSLIM’, ‘ASSOCIATION’, ‘COUNCIL’ OR ‘BRITAIN’.



There is almost something eerie about writing on British Muslim representation. For decades Muslim political and public aspirations have either been focused overseas or hijacked by angry young men who believe it is ‘haram’ to engage in politics in a non-Muslim country.

That was then and due to the relentless global traumas hitting the Muslim world, British Muslims have been forced to stand up and be counted. One sign of our coming of age has been the acceptance of the term of British Muslim. Regular readers of Q-News will remember the barrage of letters that greeted the use of this term by the ‘angry brigade’ who made differentiating between being a ‘British Muslim’ or a ‘Muslim in Britain’ the central thesis of their political agenda. Thankfully, this is no longer the case and we can get on with dealing with the really important issues.

British Muslim political awareness has been slow and reluctant. Two main factors have contributed to this. Firstly, has been the ‘going-home’ syndrome amongst Muslim first generation settlers resulting in the lack of investment in community infrastructure other than essential prayer facilities, madrasah provision and halal meat. The second factor is the legal invisibility of the Muslim community, thanks to an institutionally Islamophobic and race biased political system.

But, to suggest Muslims have been politically inactive during the last four or five decades would be erroneous. While not engaging in mainstream British politics in any organised way, Muslim communities settling in Britain have kept a vigilant eye on politics back home. Newspapers and channels like the Daily Jang and Al-Jazeera have diligently been reporting on the state of the Muslim world helping to both form and forge opinion. The British Muslim understanding of these issues is relatively more passionate, more articulate and more organised.

When not keeping an eye on back-home politics, mosque committees became the next focus of Muslim ambition with aspiring leaders of the fledgling community vying with each other to win the hearts and souls of the faithful. Eventually or inevitably, factions and sub-factions developed representing the various religious, political and cultural divides in the Muslim world. As the small rooms and terraced mosques rented or bought through the hard earned money of early migrants evolved into purpose built structures funded from the Middle East, so too did the increase in internal conflicts and intrigues.

In this vacuum, some Muslim groups formed with the intention of doing dawah. These groups were not interested in engaging in mainstream society and were often hostile to it. They were mainly interested in gathering Muslim allegiances to their theological or political faction.

As the need to engage in mainstream political processes became

Muslim candidates once elected found themselves in an agenda dilemma - were they there to repre

apparent, those frustrated with internal shenanigans turned their attention towards mainstream society. This development operated more at an individual level with some Muslims becoming active in the struggles against racism and others standing for local councils. To what extent this development actually engaged the Muslim community is dubious, as mainstream political parties were often looking more for 'racial' window dressing than meaningful engagement.

Muslim candidates once elected found themselves in an agenda dilemma - were they there to represent Muslims, the politics of their party or the constituents who elected them? While the latter two are obviously correct, representing Muslims and Muslim issues became more contentious. Muslim councillors found that being Muslim and speaking on issues that concerned a 'faith-based' community was not easy. But, this was not so for other minorities as representatives from the Irish, Caribbean, Hindu and Jewish communities found that they were not penalised for speaking as members of their specific community or on its behalf. The result of this was that the politics of Muslim councillors went sideways and focused more on internal 'nest-making' than community building.

Muslim representation in other areas of public life like the media, sports, public bodies and the legal profession has also been slow and meandering. Those that have succeeded have usually had to park their Muslim identity outside the door. Individuals that have succeeded have not done so because being Muslim was anything significant to them and in fact, the few that get through are over-represented by those who feel alienated or hostile to Islam. Professionally speaking, these Muslims usually kept their faith low-profile until it became more lucrative to 'step out of the closet' and tout for available opportunities particularly since 9/11.

Prior to 9/11 Muslim participation in mainstream British society had been limited primarily due to the inadequacies of the Race Relations Act and the reluctance of successive governments to recognise the existence of faith based communities and their experience of religious discrimination. More specifically, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge historical and institutionally entrenched Islamophobia.

While the men formed groups in never ending variations, it was left to Muslim women and young people to get on with the work that needed to be done. Most Muslim organisations are void of women and young people. Those women who are involved are rarely given authority and most are kept in the margins. Women and young people are seldom acknowledged, consulted or appreciated and the role of women more often than not is relegated to that of a women's auxiliary - providing tea and cooking the after meeting nosh for our elder male statesmen.

Being excluded from decision-making, Muslim women, who tend



to be in the frontline of meeting social needs, have been forced to make themselves relevant. While you may not necessarily see them at photo calls and high powered delegations you will see them getting training in education, media, social work, health care and counselling. Muslim women are now a quiet but potent presence in statutory bodies and other public arenas increasingly becoming team managers, directors of departments and chairs of committees. Women's organisations have led the way in setting agendas and developing much needed social welfare projects that support families and heal communities. All of these efforts contribute significantly to the development of Muslim-sensitive social welfare services.

For young Muslims the Rushdie Affair proved to be a major catalyst. For the first time young people took to the streets more concerned really about their own discontentment than any pertinent understanding of the Satanic Verses. But, unfortunately no one listened to their voices and while some Muslims organisations set up youth initiatives they tended to be dawah orientated and not responding to real needs on the ground. Young people experiencing racism, Islamophobia, social and family disintegration needed more tangible help. They needed a multitude of resources for activities such as sports and leisure, personal development, employment opportunities and most importantly they needed support through the various challenges posed by being young, British and Muslim.

It took the riots of 2001 for young British Muslim to make their discontent heard and then it was already too late. Responding once the horse has bolted requires the double effort of not only resolving the current crisis but also in investing in avoiding crisis from erupting again. Once again Muslim trouble spots have been the focus of attention and endless reports have been written, but we remain without any real objective understanding of the issues, without any meaningful leadership and without the development of a forward thinking Muslim agenda.

Given our checkered history with public participation and representation the burning question, that still needs to be asked, is: Who represents British Muslims? ■

present **Muslims**, the politics of the party they represent or the constituents who elected them?

Even in multicultural London, the anti-Muslim climate generated by the 'war on terrorism' has facilitated the re-emergence of the British National Party campaigning on an Islamophobic and anti-asylum agenda. Muslims in Britain comprise communities that are at the very bottom of the socio-economic pecking order with a high level of exclusion from mainstream opportunities and the political process. The majority of asylum seekers are displaced Muslims who suffer double disadvantage and have to absorb vicious attacks, not just from racist thugs and the tabloid press, but from the "respectable" ranks of well heeled ministers and MPs. This sharp objective reality requires the radical and robust representation of Muslims in the power centres that determine the future of our country.

It is sobering to consider that the only representation London Muslims have is in the form of local councillors in a few of the bor-

oughs. We have no MP, no Euro MP, no London Assembly member and no strategic political clout of any kind. Our voluntary sector and faith based networks are weak in the articulation of a Muslim agenda that does justice to the sophistication and diversity of the community and can effectively demolish the binary myths, so loved by the establishment, of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims and 'fundamentalist' vs. 'moderate' Islam.

bringing together a broad representation of London's organised Muslims to discuss the massive implications of 9/11 for the city and the ominous escalation of anti-Muslim violence.

It was through this initiative, initially focussing on issues of security for London's Muslims, that the London Muslim Coalition (LMC) evolved. The LMC was successful in bringing together the widest representation of London's Muslims with the objective of fostering unity and a co-ordinated approach to London government.

I was painfully aware that the Muslim community, whilst comprising an eighth of London's population had no representation whatsoever in London's power centres. This has resulted in a situation in which some individual Muslims and organisations are regularly 'consulted' on all kinds of issues but in actual fact have no power to influence policy in any meaningful way. A plethora of consultative meetings

SEEKING A VOICE FOR LONDON MUSLIMS

BRITISH MUSLIMS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF LONDON'S COSMOPOLITAN REALITY. ALMOST ONE MILLION MAKE THE CITY THEIR HOME, ENCOMPASSING A DIZZYING DIVERSITY OF RACES, NATIONALITIES AND CULTURES, WRITES KUMAR MURSHID.

In the aftermath of September 11th there was a frantic rush in government to find Muslim 'representatives' who could be held up as 'sensible' and 'moderate' with whom various levels of the establishment could do 'business'.

It is in the conduct of this business that our 'representatives' have been quite thoroughly used as a PR tool to justify an increasingly draconian approach to Muslims and laws that protect civil liberties. Whilst the approach of the national government was steeped in mixed messages and a clear inability to respond to the fundamental concerns of grassroots Muslims, London government in the form of Ken Livingstone offered the possibility of a more meaningful dialogue by

with various tiers of government has not resulted in the enhanced empowerment of London's Muslims.

Ken Livingstone has been the most courageous and principled of politicians in articulating the situation of Muslims in London and the broader injustices faced by global Muslim community, whether Palestinians, Iraqis or Afghans. Ken's description of Bush as 'the biggest threat to world peace' resonated positively within the community.

But the London mayor, with whom I have been involved in anti-racist campaigning for well over a decade, knows well that gestures, no matter how welcome, are only a beginning. The real task of supporting and facilitating the development of strong, independent Muslim voices has to be undertaken in earnest. Consequently, it was a great boost for the LMC to be launched at City Hall by Ken in April 2003.

In spite of this, the LMC faced a high degree of marginalisation and found itself systematically unsupported. Certain sections of the Muslim establishment felt increasingly threatened that the LMC might steal their representative thunder and even though they formed a central part of the LMC, they began to covertly undermine it. Apparently,

segments of the influential white left had decided that the only organisations they needed to deal with were the Muslim Council of Britain and the Muslim Association of Britain and everyone else could happily be ignored.

My own role as Chair of the LMC came under attack, not just from the Zionist lobby - who take issue with my public advocacy on Palestine, but also from some Muslims who consider my secular, socialist political background a disqualification for leading a Muslim organisation.

These criticisms are a cover for the inability of local government and the Muslim establishment to deal with the Muslim reality in London. Coalitions work because they force the privileged into dialogue. The marginalisation of the LMC has been profoundly damaging to the essential idea that the diversity of London Muslims can be pow-

Nationally, the picture is not much better and the paucity of Muslim representation is simply scandalous.

The Muslim Council of Britain has had remarkable recognition from the establishment and plays an important representational role but has often appeared too malleable and out of sync with the grassroots. The Muslim Association of Britain for its part has to be thanked for its anti-war mobilisation through which Muslims were able to flex political muscle in relation to the paternalistic approach of the white left to notions of Black or indeed Muslim leadership of mainstream movements.

In examining the context of representation we have to bear in mind the factors that influence the actions of individuals as well as the collective Muslim consciousness. For example, as someone of South Asian and Bengali Muslim background and as someone who fought in the



erfully represented in a manner that does justice to grassroots aspirations and concerns.

London's Muslims must be able to punch in accordance with their very significant weight. London is not just the capital of British Islam, it is recognised as the capital of European Islam and this gives London's Muslims a hefty responsibility to fly the banner for European Islam at a time when mainstream political parties and governments in Europe are taking extreme anti-Muslim positions and threatening their fundamental human rights.

London's demography suggests that the Muslim presence here should rightfully translate to twelve London MPs, four London Assembly members and two London Euro-MPs as well as a significant presence in local government.

The only way something like this can come to fruition is by a systematic and determined engagement of Muslims in London's political life. This engagement has to be robust and independent. The already too few Muslim political voices are often muted as a result of 'career considerations' and a distorted sense of loyalty to a political party.

Liberation war of Bangladesh against a brutal and oppressive Pakistani army, my understanding of Islam is deeply influenced, both by the interplay of religious and linguistic nationalism as well as the specific colonial encounter in India and Bengal. The historical and current experiences of Muslims of North African or Arab origin are bound to be different. Such differences will have a bearing on how we analyse and view the modern political arena. It is of crucial importance that these differences are recognised and accommodated so that Muslims can then formulate powerful arguments that 'represent' all of us.

The legitimacy and effectiveness of such representation will be influenced not by our ability to converse with the other side but on how carefully we have developed our positions through a long 'conversation' amongst ourselves. That means we have to understand our diverse constituencies and their historical, cultural, class and political formations. We then have to translate those understandings into a 'unified' Muslim voice sufficiently robust to influence a redefinition of the British political agenda. Such a process will make our representation effective, legitimate and above all autonomous. ■

RETURN OF THE BROWN SAHIB

BIRMINGHAM MP KHALID MEHMOOD IS AT IT AGAIN. HE SUPPORTED THE WAR ON AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ, REFUSED TO CALL TO TASK MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY WHEN THEY UNFAIRLY ATTACKED THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND, NOW, HE'S TRYING TO EXPLAIN AWAY THE BRENT EAST FIASCO. WHO NEEDS POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES LIKE THIS, ASKS SHABANA KHAN.

Recent cabinet revolts, the nagging absence of WMDs in Iraq and a far-too-cosy relationship with a hawkish White House, have left Tony Blair's credibility with voters, especially British Muslims, waning.

With recent attacks on the Muslim community by Liverpool Labour MP Louise Ellman, Labour's growing credibility gap doesn't stop with Mr Blair. However, there is one MP who has proven that he is an avowed apologist for Islamophobia in the Labour Party. What is more shocking is that this MP happens to be a Muslim.

He is of course MP Khalid Mehmood of Birmingham Perry Bar.

Mehmood is a politician, full stop. His claims to be a representative of British Muslims within Labour have been repeatedly undermined by his own actions. Under the Raj, he would probably have been called a 'brown sahib'.

While British Muslims were reeling from post-September 11 backlash and the imminent war on Afghanistan, he allowed his name to be attached to a newspaper article that called on Muslims to agree to the attacks. The article was allegedly written by Dennis MacShane, whose recent pronouncement calling on Muslims to choose between the "British way" and the "terrorist" way made headlines across the country. Mehmood refused to join Labour's own conscientious objectors who voted against the war on Iraq. He also said nothing to defend Muslims after the foolish outburst of his friend, MacShane.

Now in 2004, Khalid Mehmood has decided once again to carry the torch for the Islamophobes by standing against the Muslim community, with Labour mandarins who have blocked the selection of a senior Muslim Labour member, Shahid Malik.

On 8th February, during a bizarre telephone interview on Radio LBC, Mehmood insisted that the Brent East General Committee had done nothing wrong in knocking out two Muslim men, who had secured the highest number of votes and nominations, from the process of selecting the Labour candidate for the next general election. According to Mehmood, no rules had been broken. Instead, he implied that Muslims should not be sore losers. This is the same allegedly "safe Labour" constituency where, in response to the Iraq war, Sarah Teather, 29, became the youngest MP in Westminster when she overturned a 13,047 Labour majority to snatch the seat for the Liberal Democrats. The seat had once been held by current London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

Well, let us bring a rule from Labour's National Executive Committee to Mehmood's attention. It states under Article 11C that, "CLP General Committee shall meet as a shortlisting committee and draw up a shortlist with due regard made by party units and affiliates."



There are some who will argue that Mehmood does not have to do anything for anyone. He is an MP for Birmingham Perry Bar and he represents them alone. At least that's Mehmood's argument.

To that we say fine, but then we refuse to accept Mehmood as one of the two statistics used to reassure British Muslims that Labour has two Muslim MPs. If he refuses to stand with the community on issues that matter to us then he is not a representative of the Muslim community and Labour supporters would be wise not to tie Mehmood to us. He has done nothing for us and his presence only serves to undermine the fight to counter Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice within the political system.

Mehmood himself admits that Muslims in his constituency do not vote for him. This can only be to the credit of Perry Bar Muslims as they seem to be aware of Mehmood's self aggrandising agenda.

The Labour Party so far seems to only allow Mehmood-type characters through the doors of power, but these people exist to serve the Labour party and not Muslim voters that Labour so desperately wants to reach out to. They are 'Yes, Prime Minister' sell-outs and it would be catastrophic for the British Muslim community to accept such men or women as their representatives in the House of Commons.

The Labour Party's Brent East affair which knocked out Shahid Malik, the only Muslim and Asian member of Labour's powerful National Executive Committee and Ahmed Shahzad, the Deputy Mayor of Brent has shown how far some old guard party loyalists are willing to go to subvert the democratic impulses of their own members to maintain their control over local Labour associations. Furthermore, by failing to step in and correct the obvious flaws in the initial process, Mr Blair and the rest of the NEC has further discredited Labour as the political home of British Muslims. The comments of Khalid Mehmood only add to the community's indignation and anger.

Mehmood is the 'puppet' who is brought out and paraded in front of us to inform us that we are wrong and the racists are right. If there is one thing we have learnt, it is that we cannot support a Muslim politician merely because he or she is a Muslim.

British Muslims are hopping mad at being taken for granted by Labour. Last year's Brent East by-election was just an opening salvo of this discontent. Come the next general election, Mehmood and dozen other Labour MPs in seats with significant Muslim populations might find themselves in the electoral line of fire. ■

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STILL MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING



AT THIS TIME OF CRISIS, WE ARE DESPERATELY IN NEED OF LEGITIMATE VOICES TO REPRESENT OUR INTERESTS, HOLDING POLICY MAKERS TO ACCOUNT ON ISSUES OF CONCERN TO BRITISH MUSLIMS. THE PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTATION, REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP ARE ENSHRINED IN THE QURAN AND SUNNAH. BUT HOW ARE THESE PRINCIPLES APPLIED TODAY? DO WE HAVE THE REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP THAT WE NEED TO STEER US THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT TIMES? **KHALIDA KHAN** INVESTIGATES.

For almost twenty years the main body, which claimed to represent British Muslims, was the Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO) established in 1970. In the wake of the Rushdie affair, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was established. The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) followed it soon after. Amongst these, the most prominent is the Muslim Council of Britain. But how representative is it and does it truly represent the voices at the grassroots and at the margins? If not, what needs to be done to build effective structures to enhance and empower Muslims and their local communities?

As the MCB has modelled itself on the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD) it is appropriate to compare how representative the MCB is in contrast to the BOD. The BOD was founded in 1760 and it has developed its role as the representative body for the British Jewish community during this long period of time. Its 330 Deputies are elected by synagogues, synagogal bodies and communal organisations, including charities, youth groups, and women's organisations amongst others. It has 205 affiliated organisations that serve a Jewish population estimated by the 2001 Census to number 267,000. Many of the affiliates are major charities such as Jewish Care, which is the largest health and social care Jewish charity, with over 2,000 staff and 2,500 volunteers helping over 7,000 people in the community every week. They run 70 centres and specialist services throughout South East London with an annual income of about £35.5 million a year.

The Muslim Council of Britain, on the other hand, seeks to represent a much larger and much more deprived Muslim population of around 1.6 million according to the last census. However, the MCB has only 350 affiliates who are mainly mosques and theological-based organisations with few members representing Muslim voluntary groups catering for the health and social welfare of the community. The number of Muslim women's organisations affiliated to it is even fewer. On a numerical basis alone, in view of the substantial Muslim community, the MCB should have several thousand organisations affiliated to it representing a cross section of organisations and interest groups in the Muslim community.

In addition, the Jewish voluntary sector is robust whereas the Muslim voluntary sector is embryonic, under-resourced and struggling. It is beleaguered and survives on the most minimal of resources, lacking the knowledge and experience of how to facilitate the best interests of the community, with the added burden of the legacy of a race-based view of society, which has socially excluded the Muslim community. Most BOD affiliates are likely to be from well-resourced and healthy organisations with a good understanding of how their issues and concerns need to be taken forward and with local infrastructures that facilitate debate and discussion. Localised organisation is abysmal within the Muslim community. There are hardly any opportunities for intra-community dialogue to thrash out issues, gain understanding and expe-

rience before positions on issues are fine-tuned enough to be taken forward, both at the local and national level. As a consequence the community is at sixes and sevens when it comes to any common understanding of the Muslim agenda and how to facilitate it in the wider arena. In fact, there are no mechanisms at the local level to feed the concerns of the voices at the grassroots upwards to a national representative body.

What diverse voices there are in the Muslim community have, many complain, been suppressed since the advent of the MCB. They say that the MCB is entitled to develop its work and thinking just as much as they are. But they claim that they are being elbowed out by the MCB. Despite all the protestations by the MCB that it does not seek to 'duplicate, supplant or belittle existing work or to seek to become the sole rallying point' numerous Muslim organisations claim that it does precisely that.

Groups, hampered by lack of resources and lacking the government patronage that the MCB now enjoys, remonstrate that their contributions are wiped off by the MCB. The MCB, they say, actively works to present itself as the only mover and shaker in the Muslim community. In their opinion, the body often plagiarises the work of other Muslim organisations and they also allege that the MCB has on many occasions sabotaged joint working initiatives with other Muslim groups, such as during the BBC Islam Season, the Census Campaign, Religious Discrimination Campaign, Crime & Disorder Bill Campaign and the London Muslim Coalition.

Many are also suspicious as to how independent a representative body can be when it was set up at the behest of Michael Howard, Home Secretary, in the dying days of the last Conservative government, regardless of whether or not the community was ready for it. Neither the Conservatives nor the Labour government, that followed it, care to delve too deeply into how representative MCB truly is for it serves their purpose adequately, lifting the burden of genuine, broad based consultation with British Muslims from their shoulders.

The consequence is that it is widely assumed that the MCB is truly the sole representative and "one-stop-shop" for all things Muslim and that it compares on like-for-like basis with the BOD. With its impressive web-site, glossy publications and complex and awe-inspiring hierarchal structure and workings, it gives the impression that the Muslim community is well-developed and can be compared to the mature and sophisticated Jewish community and treated as such. However, this is far from the truth and is extremely dangerous. Journalists, researchers, government bodies and other policy makers and providers simply assume that MCB has the full mandate from the community to validate policies, legislation and initiatives on its behalf. This is not good news, as the MCB has far to go before it can claim to be of the standard of BOD in representing Jewish interests. Meanwhile, policies will be set down and difficult to overturn and there will be a monolithic view of the community as projected by the MCB.

What those who seek to be the only Muslim representative body fail to realise is that diversity is healthy and needs to be encouraged.

What those who seek to be the only Muslim representative body fail to realise is that diversity is healthy and needs to be encouraged. The government listens to voices from a variety of sources. That is called good government and in Islamic terms it is called 'shura' if anyone needs reminding

The government listens to voices from a variety of sources. This process is good government and in Islamic terms it is called 'shura' if anyone needs reminding. There is room for all sorts of voices to speak in the interests of the community.

Surely, it is better for the community to develop organically and create a body when it has matured and is ready for it. It will mean having leadership that is truly representative and has a finger on the pulse of the community.

That leadership must come from genuine processes of consultation that extends beyond the usual suspects, namely the patriarchal and exclusionary institutions, that are out of touch and unable to cope with the complex communities that we have today.

There is arrogance, totally out of sync with Islamic teachings on leadership and representation that come from claiming

the mantle of representation. The real processes of consultation are being ignored and the most vulnerable are being marginalised.

There is really no shortcut to getting the leadership we long for. The good old sturdy English oak can take many years to grow. But it all begins with the planting and nurturing of a tiny acorn so that it can develop the strong roots necessary to sustain the mighty tree. Similarly, resources have to be invested and the hard work has to be done to develop the community at the grassroots and local level. There is no getting away from it. No amount of 'leadership' initiatives to develop the tiny 'elite' corps in the community, the majority of whom have had privileged lives, will provide us with the quality Muslim citizen with the capability to represent the community at all levels of society. After all, Prophets came from and lived within their communities undergoing hardships and tribulations with their people. When we have representatives that have lived amongst us and suffered with us then only can they understand and empathise with the needs of the community.

Representing Islam and the Muslim community is not the task of a few, but the duty of all, acting at various levels of social and political interaction. The reality is that what we have is a community that has been acknowledged as the new underclass in this country with the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation. It is large, diverse, multi-ethnic, at different levels of development and fractured both within and from each other. With the colonisation of the Muslim world and the dismantling of Islamic institutions and infrastructures, most Muslims have not had any meaningful Islamic training that can adequately equip them to live a God-conscious principled life in the contemporary context. Most do not have the skills to even represent themselves when it comes, for example, to making housing applications or dealing with their children's problems at school let alone at any public forum. This is what we need to address as a priority.

It will only be, when we have a society brimming with God-conscious, able and responsible individuals, that we will be able to produce leaders who we truly respect and who act within the true Islamic principles and not in the interests of ego, power, self-advancement and personal interests. It is then that we will have institutions that can truly represent us with our full backing. ■

The erstwhile Foreign Minister, Robin Cook, proclaimed Britain's favourite dish is Chicken Tikka Masala in response to claims that 'Anglo-Saxon culture' was being undermined. Norman Tebitt's, 'Britishness' could be decided by test cricket, England versus Pakistan - supporting Pakistan is to be 'something other'. Definitions of what is 'British' and what is 'something other' have long been the privilege of the ruling Protestant English. However, beyond the political and rhetorical jingoism lie important questions of identity and belonging for Britain's Muslims. The presence of Muslims in Britain can be traced to early medieval times with an interesting chronology of influences, events and characters. However, the formation of a sizeable Muslim community in Britain is a relatively new phenomenon, which begins, in the early nineteenth century to the present. The decline of Britain's global dominance and the settlement of large Muslim post-colonial migrant communities are subject areas well documented but the social and political inclusion of this large Muslim population as full, equal and participating British citizens is hindered by external perceptions and projections rather than internal conflicts that may occur as a result of shifting or new identities. In relation to the 'Britishness' of Britain's Muslims, perceptions of Muslims as the paradigmatic other have been crystallised by the comments above by politicians from both ends of the political spectrum.

Racism is of course not particular to Britain, it is part of a global phenomenon structured within the framework of the capitalist world economy. But just as economies transform so too does racism along the same politico-economic structures and social formations. For example, compare the plight of pre-eighteenth century European Jews with the fully Europeanised communities in existence today. This process was, in part, the result of Wilhelm Christian Dohm's efforts for Jewish emancipation, who declared in 1781 that Jews were capable of enlightenment and should therefore be fully assimilated into European society. Although Marxist studies on racism pinpoint the economic roots of the current crisis, the evolution of racism encompasses the combined effects of economic, political, ideological and cultural processes. Racism as it exists in Britain today cannot be treated merely as a sociological phenomenon: it has to be located in the historical development of the political and religious structures of British society. Whilst some scholars have meticulously traced the roots of British racism to nascent sixteenth century colonialism, others cite the Enlightenment as the major contributor in the construction of a systematic and institutionalised racism. The Enlightenment project worked in parallel with reasserted Protestant pietism and evangelism and the tensions between both surfaced as empirical rationalism versus religious emotion. Further, the Enlightenment's reliance on Greek classicism imposed anthropological notions and value judgements based on physical beauty. Both phrenology (skull reading) and physiognomy (reading the face) are rooted in eighteenth century anthropology.

Iwould be wrong to absolve Protestant Christianity from the developed ideologies of racism that emanated via the Enlightenment. The origins of pietistic Protestant domination can be dated back to 1517 when Martin Luther nailed up his catalogue of contentions on the Cathedral doors at Wittenberg. The two major themes of Luther's reformation movement were individualism - in rights and responsibilities and egalitarianism - the reforms

BRITISH MUSLIMS OR MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN? CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA VERSUS TEST CRICKET

IN THE LIGHT OF THE ON-GOING DEBATE ON BRITISHNESS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHNIC, CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM, THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IS, ARE WE BRITISH MUSLIMS OR MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN? **M.S. SEDDON** REFLECTS.

saw the authority of the Church disempowered and Christianity demystified. Absolution by priests was no longer needed when salvation could be sought through 'works'. Reformist thinking undermined the feudal society and in a sense laid the foundations for modern western democracy. The decentralisation of the institutionalised Church gave rise to the phenomenon of Christian 'sects'. Religious plurality not only questioned traditional church dogmatics; it also instigated the birth of the secular nation state. Protestantism through an asserted religious piety began an intolerant and irreconcilable polarity between not only Papist Christians, but also Muslims and Jews. Luther wrote in 1529, 'May our dear Lord Jesus Christ, help and come down from heaven with the last judgement, and smite both Turk and Pope to the earth'. This newly developed 'choseness' theorised eschatology with distinct imperialist and racial assertions. The Protestant obsession with Jewish 'restorationism', a peculiar form of non-Jewish Zionism preached that if the Jews could be restored to Palestine they would rise-up and annihilate the Muslims. Thereafter, Jews would convert to Christianity and the removal of Islam and Judaism would give Britain control of Jerusalem in preparation for the Messiah. This reductionist ideology served both British imperialist dreams and the Protestant millenarianist eschatology. This Pax Britannica vision was remarkably partially realised some three centuries later.

Colonialism, with its primary economic function, reinforced racist ideologies formulated via empirical sciences which were further condoned in the form of religious supremacy and Protestant revivalism. Religious zeal may have helped to provide a moral and spiritual validation for Britain's empire building which began in the reign of Elizabeth 1. In many respects the unevangelised pagan fared better than his Muslim counterpart - the 'Noble Savage' was preferred over the 'Saracen Infidel'. In the sixteenth century a man's colour had become a defining characteristic and determining factor in his salvation. It was believed that the Africans' blackness was 'biblical' and represented Ham's original disobedience to Noah. Within Christian cosmology racism was transmogrifying 'others' into devils whose external blackness was an open manifestation of an even greater darkness within. By the nineteenth century Britain's global politico-economic dominance was transformed into military might. After two world wars in the twentieth century, the Muslim world was dismantled and neatly carved-up between its European beneficiaries. The subconscious fear of Ottoman military supremacy and Muslim economic dominance experienced in medieval times had finally been exorcised.

Imperialism brought an influx of immigrant workers to Britain in two distinct waves. The first saw a small number of colonial subjects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some came as traders and merchants whilst others found their way here as sailors. The second wave came after world war two when the British government, prompted by industrialists, encouraged large numbers of South Asians to the UK during the post-war economic boom.

Racism as it exists in Britain today cannot be treated merely as a sociological phenomenon: it has to be located in the historical development of the political and religious structures of British society.

Although an institutionalised structured racism was set in place long before Britain received its first Black and Asian immigrants, the 'alien' cultures were seen as the cause and the symptom of the destruction of the 'British way of life'. This perceived 'threat' led to race riots in the late 1950s after tensions mounted in the face of rising racial discrimination. Race riots are an integral feature of British racism dating to twelfth century Jewish pogroms. The Lascars of Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and South Shields were the subjects of race violence in 1919 and the 1930s. Whilst the Labour Party condemned the 1958 riots and opposed racial discrimination and immigration controls, the Conservative government, in 1959, introduced a Bill to control commonwealth immigration to Britain. The political parties have ever since pandered to the fears of racists and ethnic minorities alike, both gaining much political capital in the process. Whilst the real issues relating to racism are never addressed, endemic institutionalised racism is nurtured and perpetuated.

A pedantic and etymological definition of the word British might be, 'relating to, denoting, or characteristic of Britain or any of its natives, citizens or inhabitants of the United Kingdom.' If one studies the historical development of the British nation we would find that this ubiquitous definition of 'British' reflects the true composition of its people. Clearly, being British is to be part of an eclectic multi-racial and cultural phenomenon and the earliest inhabitants of these Isles were the Indo-European Celtic peoples. The Anglo-Saxon arrival in the fifth century was not just another colonisation; it was the beginning of a new hybrid race - the English. Anglo-Saxon settlers marginalised British language, religion and culture through their dominance. The Britons or 'Welsh' as they became called, from the Saxon word *weahlisc* meaning 'foreigner', were either exiled into the western and northern highlands or integrated into the evolving Anglo-Saxon sovereignties. The achievement of the Anglo-Saxons was the making of England, not the United Kingdom or even Great Britain, but more or less what we mean by England today. The English are now English in language only racially they are a conglomeration of Celtic, Roman, German, Nordic, Norman and Flemish peoples. The historian Charles Thomas has commented on the English identity crisis stating, 'the English, heaven knows, should find enough problems in defining their own identity without seeking to extend it to other peoples.' The myth of Anglo-Saxon 'Britishness' continues a historical and cultural hegemony long since past.

Hybrid English Christianity via Protestantism provided a new cultural and religious framework in which all else was evaluated. As a consequence Catholicism, Judaism and Islam were demonised and mythologised through erroneous interpretations and preoccupations with all things other. Orientalism as a system of scholarship began in the early fourteenth century with the establishment by the Church Council in Vienna to promote an understanding of the orient. Importantly, Orientalism has helped Europeans define themselves in terms of what they are not as well as providing a

monolithic construct by which the East is comprehended. The transformation of Orientalism from an academic discourse into a multifaceted hydra of interchangeable meanings has been eruditely deconstructed by scholars like the late, great, Edward Said.

In terms of mythology, Orientalism has contributed in locating the Muslim in the typography of Sodom. Eroticism and uninhibited sexuality was attributed to Orientals (i.e. Muslims) through imaginative travelogues, popular plays, novels and lowbrow art. All contributed, and still do, in 'placing' Orientals as the descendants of the Biblical city of Sodom. The sexual deviations of the Sodomites have become a western manifestation of the 'forbidden fruit' of Adam and Eve, thereby, creating a theologically demonised other. Using Orientalism as an ideological tool, western imperialism gave rise to the most arrogant and abhorrent form of racial superiority. For British colonial racists the 'quaint foreigner' remained the acceptable other only when contained within his colonised geographical boundaries. Once the other wished to domicile in the country that had been made the focus of his material aspirations, Akbar Ahmed notes that the alien becomes 'no longer romantic and mysterious, he is contemptible and smelly. There is an inane triumphalism and, lurking not too far underneath it, bigotry and racism.'

The politics of perpetuating otherness in the national context relies upon Britain's imperial past coupled with a developed racist ideology which exploits the themes of 'the British nation, culture and people'. Translated to the specifics of racism in Britain today, we would witness it as stereotyping and perpetuating fallacies that Black and Asian cultures are 'primitive' and underdeveloped in comparison with the west. It would follow that most, if not all, 'ethnics' would carry these disadvantages regardless of their British national and cultural identities. The effect is a 'common-sense' justification of imperialism, colonialism and racism. Within the process of nation building formed around state government and state religion social entities outside this framework would naturally be seen as something 'other'. Brian S. Turner, referring to the 'Celtic fringe', speaks of the continuing isolation within the emerging English nation-state of social minorities which he says are 'characteristically religious minorities'. Into the terminology of defining social minorities as others came the usage of the term 'ethnic'. The word originates from the Old Testament Hebrew and was translated to Greek from the word *ethnos*, a derivative of *ethnikos*, which originally meant heathen or pagan. It was used in this context in English from the fourteenth century until the mid-nineteenth when it gradually began to refer to racial characteristics. The connotations of the word ethnic are locked into the idea of the other created by the process of the English nation-state based on race and religious identity.

Social scientists are largely responsible for the perpetuation of religious, social and ethnic minorities being viewed as the other through their ethnic and cultural studies of Muslim sub-groups who are essentialised and presented as a normative. Yet, the cultural and

religious practices of a South Asian community in Bradford no more reflect the normative for British Muslims than do the Hausa Nigerian migrants in Manchester. The resulting outsider perceptions are that Islam is idiosyncratic and reflective of a particular ethnic entity. Beyond the intra-Muslim politics and theological differences that this genre of research produce, these studies also explore the 'challenges' of shifting and multiple identities among British Muslims whose heightened sense of Britishness is often represented as a considerable contention with their traditional Muslim and cultural identities. The suggestion is that a synthesis between being British and Muslim is impossible.

The 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of internalised immigrant diaspora and exilic identities by British Muslims have been created and fuelled by a plethora of ethnic, cultural and anthropological studies aimed at projecting and reinforcing notions of otherness

The 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of internalised immigrant diaspora and exilic identities by British Muslims have been created and fuelled by a plethora of ethnic, cultural and anthropological studies aimed at projecting and reinforcing notions of otherness. David Mason, like Tariq Modood, has alluded to Muslims being isolated and disadvantaged by what he calls, 'a growing stigmatization of Muslims as unique and self-chosen outsiders'. He explains the influence of the developing anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain via the controversies surrounding the Satanic Verses, the Gulf War and a rise in Islamic revivalism. These phenomena have, he claims, increased Muslim-Christian polemics providing 'a focus for inter-ethnic hostilities in such countries as Britain'. But the idea that Muslims cannot integrate into mainstream British society is largely projected as being problematic of the 'outsider' minority

rather than the result of identity negation or social exclusion. Measured by their responses to their religious convictions and national identities, particularly when there is a contention, British Muslims are located at the periphery of British culture. Whilst the reality of an emerging identity that is increasingly British is experienced, finding a voice to express it is increasingly difficult. This is perhaps because the Britishness which Muslims possess is hybrid and is actually located in the historical and cultural evolution of Britain.

In the wake of September 11th and as if to add substance to the discussions surrounding British Muslims' national allegiances and loyalties, Muslim leaders moved quickly to distance themselves and Islam from religious extremism and terrorism - placing themselves 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Prime Minister. This public pronouncement of British Muslim identity was soon frustrated and compounded when the government later committed troops to Afghanistan and then Iraq. In its bid to be the voice for British Muslims, the Muslim Council of Britain publicly condemned the bombing of Afghanistan and rightly questioned the validity of the invasion of Iraq. Here Muslims generally were viewed through the prism of their universal identity, forced to adhere to their religious community - the Ummah, in preference to their national identity. This apparent shift in allegiance and identity once again forced the question - British Muslims or Muslims in Britain? ■

WHO ARE “MODERATE” MUSLIMS?

THERE HAS BEEN A RECENT UPSURGE IN THE GLOBAL DISCOURSE ABOUT MODERATE ISLAM, WITH AN ASSORTMENT OF MUSLIM INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS RUSHING TO CLAIM THIS NEW PUBLIC SPACE. BUT, WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “MODERATE” AND WHAT SETS THEM APART FROM THE “EXTREMISTS”, “FANATICS” AND “RADICALS”? KAMRAN BOKHARI PROVIDES SOME ANSWERS.

The question of ‘moderate Islam’ is problematised by the fact that not only is the West, led by the United States, trying to seek out the moderates in the Islamic world, but that there are a diverse set of Muslims who claim to be the upholders of moderate Islam, and hence, claim to be ‘authentic’ moderate Muslims. What is interesting is not the western demand for moderation but Muslim supply of moderation.

BI-LEVEL RELATIVITY

The word ‘moderate’ is relative in two respects. First, when we refer to an individual, group, or state as being moderate, we are saying that it is moderate in relation to other individuals, groups, or states from a common ideological background. The Muslim Brotherhood is considered a moderate Islamist group compared to al-Qaeda. Iran’s Islamic republic is moderate when compared to Afghanistan under the Taliban Emirate. Second, the use of the term ‘moderate’ pre-supposes a benchmark, based on which an individual, group, or state is gauged for its deviation from or conformity with. This begs the question of what is that criterion by which individuals, groups, and states can be classified as moderate. The search for an answer to this question, I believe, must commence with a consideration of the various grammatical usages of this expression.

A DOSE OF LEXICOGRAPHY

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word moderate can be used in three grammatical forms - as an adjective, a verb or a noun. When used as a noun, it refers to the one who bears moderate views or who is affiliated to a group pursuing a moderate approach or agenda. In terms of being a verb, to moderate means to lower the concentration or excessiveness of something. It could also mean to become less aggressive, harsh, or intense. Finally, as an adjective, moderate represents shunning extreme behavior or expression. In other words, it symbolises the qualities of one who observes equitable limits. To be a moderate in this sense could also be understood as tending toward the center as opposed to the periphery. Moderate has also been used to typify political or social beliefs that are not of a radical nature.

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE BAYOU

Having established the lexical boundaries of the term moderate, let us now take a look at the genre of those in the Muslim world who claim

to be moderates. It has actually become somewhat fashionable these days to refer to oneself or one’s ilk as being a moderate. There are at least four different types of Muslims, who advance themselves as the adherents of moderate Islam. Among this medley are moderate Islamists, traditional Muslims, liberal Muslims, and certain regimes in the Muslim world.

Moderate Islamists claim the mantle of moderate Islam in a bid to distinguish themselves from the radical and militant types. Traditional Muslims who are different from the moderate Islamists (in that they do not advance a particular political ideology based on Islam) are quick to point that historically they have always constituted the majority of Muslims. They emphasise that their status as the historical mainstream of Islam is because they have refrained from adopting any immoderate tendencies to advance their cause. Most practicing Muslims (a great many of who perhaps identify with the Sufi strand of Islam) fall in this category.

Liberal Muslims represents the third group which might adhere to a certain minimalist degree of personal religious commitment, but for the most part, have embraced secularity in the public realm. This category owing to its privileged status as being equipped with western education seeks to claim exclusive leadership over moderate Islam, for the purposes of securing its rather elitist standing in the Muslim countries.

The above three categories are as far as non-state actors are concerned, but states are also quite active in this quest to appear moderate. It is interesting to note that a generation ago, some of these states strongly promoted Islam as a means to legitimise their *raison d’être*. In fact, in this process such regimes allied themselves to certain radical tendencies, which back then, were confined to the fringes of society. Patronage from states had a huge strengthening effect on these marginal entities. It is quite ironic that, today certain regimes, which were hitherto nurturing militant Islamists to consolidate their hold on power, are now threatened by their own protégés. Some of these, who in the wake of September 11 have issued a clarion call for moderation, constitute the fourth category of Muslims advancing themselves as the torchbearers of moderate Islam. These include Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey and Egypt.

IN SEARCH OF AUTHENTICITY

The roots of contemporary Islamic resurgence, which can be traced back to the late 19th century is a movement in search of a modern but Islamically authentic response to the dominance of the western civilisation. From this tendency emerged the ideology of Islamism, which eventually became hyper-factionalised. The quest for authenticity became an intra-Islamist affair as much as it was an intra-Muslim debate. Today as it stands, Islamists to varying degrees view moderation as a function of secularism. As far as Islamists are concerned, there seems to be a direct correlation between calls for moderation and secularism. Islamists fear that any attempts towards the development of a moderate discourse on Islam will lead to the secularisation and hence, dilution of Islam.

Most fascinatingly is the intra-Islamist debate where different types of Islamists in an effort to claim authenticity for their particular discourse refer to their rival trends as being secular. Jihadists to start with, claim that all other types of Islamists (including their non-jihadic neo-salafist co-ideologues) exhibit secularist inclinations. Moving away from this extreme, we will find the Hizb al-Tahrir types arguing that

they too condemn such Islamists who have fallen prey to secularism, but that they are not as such. From the point of view of Hizb al-Tahrir, al-Muhajiroun, Tanzeem-i-Islami and the like, the Muslim Brotherhood types are Islamists gone secular. However, the Muslim Brotherhood will also refute such allegations and point to the non-Islamist Muslims as being the true secularists in the Muslim world. One should note that as we move along the Islamist political spectrum from the jihadists to the Muslim Brotherhood types, there is a decreasing tendency towards literal interpretation of the texts.

At the heart of all of this is the desire of Islamists for Islamic authenticity and legitimacy. Generally, speaking, Islamists do not like labels such as moderate, radical, and militant as identification markers because they see this as an attempt by the West to create dissension among the ranks of the ummah, to dilute Islam, and target Muslims for the purposes of political persecution. While some or even all of this may be true to some degree, the problem is one having to do with the confusion between normative principles and empirical realities among many Islamists. There is a need to appreciate the difference between Islamic principles and their operationalisation in real life. In other words, there are Muslims who adopt moderate, radical, and militant means to promote Islam.


EPILOGUE

There is lot of external ideological pressure on the Muslim world to reform Islamic thought, ever since those passenger planes were ploughed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. This in turn

has generated intense internal competition as regards the actual locus of moderate Muslims and the race to define moderate Islam. Variant types of Muslims are scrambling to appropriate this new space known as moderate Islam. Regardless of how one defines moderate Islam, there is a need to recognise the upper and lower limits of this space.


It is essential that the lower limit be strictly defined and the upper limit loosely. Put differently, there is an acute need to underscore that moderate Islam is about respecting the plurality of ijthad and hence, rejecting violence as a means to capturing the political center-stage in the Muslim world. The shunning of the use of force to promote a particularistic political agenda should be the minimum requirement to qualify as a moderate Muslim. Here this does not mean abandoning the right to self-defense and just war, but this right must be exercised at least in accordance to one fundamental principle. Muslim groups must not target non-combatants and their civilian property, for this is the very essence of terrorism.

What is intriguing in this regard is that those who would otherwise argue for a literalist interpretation of the texts engage in twisted logic when they wish to justify their use of violence. Normally one would see such groups tirelessly elevating revelation over reason, but succumb to the temptation of reason (albeit circular) to legitimise their modus operandi. As for the threshold of moderate Islam, it should be left sufficiently wide and open so as to allow for healthy exchange of ideas and free intellectual competition. This I humbly submit be the criteria to identify moderate Muslims lest this phrase ends up being yet another exclusivist label. ■




Traditional Scholarship & Modern Misunderstandings Understanding The Ahle al-Sunnah
By Abu Ammar

- Seeking assistance from other than Allah Ta'ala
- The permissibility to say 'Ya Muhammad'
- The true picture concerning the death of our Prophet
- Waseela
- Noor- The blessed light of our Prophet
- Ilim ul Ghayb- The Knowledge of the Unseen
- Haadhir Naadhir
- The Concept of Bid'ah in Islam
- Celebrating Milaad un Nabi
- To make the intention to travel to our Prophet ... Muhammad's resting place
- The excellency of the 15th night of Shaaban
- Ethal at-Thawaab
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- Criticism levelled against Imam Abu Hanifah
- Muslim & Bukhari are the only source of sunnah!!!!
- Raf ul Yad'ain
- Recitation of Qiraah behind Imam
- Recitation of Azeen loudly behind Imam of Salaah
- Placing hands below the navel
- Salaah!!!!




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- Things Which Invalidate the Fast and Require Kaffarah
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- Spiritual Retreat (Tilka)
- The Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr)
- The Zakat of 'Sid al-Fitr
- The Day of 'Eid al-Fitr

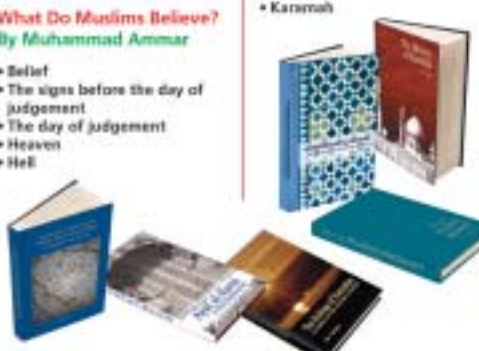


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- Belief
- The signs before the day of judgement
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- Hell



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THE SEARCH FOR AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY

BEYOND THE ANGRY RHETORIC OF A BLACK AND WHITE WORLD LIES A PROFOUND REJECTION OF ISLAM'S CLASSICAL HERITAGE. AFTAB AHMAD MALIK EXPLORES HOW A REVIVAL OF TRADITION HOLDS THE KEY TO FINDING GENUINE LEADERSHIP.

Making sense of relations between Islam and the West requires awareness of the faith and its diverse interpretations. Many who have been puzzled about anti-Americanism in the Middle East and Muslim world have failed to realise that anti-Americanism is driven not by a blind hatred of America or religious zealotry, but by frustration and anger with U.S. policy in the Muslim world. Failure to see and understand this connection, will only serve to fuel the frustration felt by many British Muslims, frustrations that manifest as major themes in polemics against the West by groups such as Hizb at-Tahrir and its splinter group, al-Muhajirun.

Capitalising on the emotions of young Muslims who only see apathy towards Islam in this so called 'War on Terror', these groups channel this growing anger into fiery rhetoric and construct a world view where the individual is the authority, and where the magnificence of God is represented through the authoritarian voice of the self-righteous self. The complexities and nuances of traditional scholarship vanish while a simple and comforting world is constructed. It is a black and white world, a world that has no need for colour or beauty.

While Muslim scholars try to emphasise the numerous moral and humanistic aspects of the Islamic tradition, they are accused by such groups of being pro-West, pro-Israeli, pro-government or being insufficiently sensitised to the suffering of the Palestinians, Kashmiris, Chechens or other oppressed Muslim populations. The danger here is blindingly obvious: in a highly polarised and politicised climate, much of what is authentically Islamic and genuinely beautiful will be lost. Nobility and integrity, two characteristic traits that are expounded in the Prophet's example, have given way to hastiness, harshness and carelessness, as young Muslim allow their frustrations to become the cause of their reaction. While Muslims talk about the place of tolerance in Islam, Hizb at-Tahrir and al-Muhajirun rightfully point to the intolerance of governments of the US, Israel, India, Russia and others, who consistently oppress and destroy Muslim communities, all in the name of fighting terrorism. While the vast majority of British Muslims clearly do not share their views, nor approve of their 'dawah' activities, they do share their concerns, and it is here that confusion amongst the young generation of Muslims sets in: who speaks for Islam and by what authority?

RELIGIOUS ILLITERACY

This question would not arise, had it not been for the rampant religious illiteracy that currently prevails amongst Muslims in the West. By this, I mean the lack of exposure to traditional Islam, to the full range of authoritative responses, throughout the ages to currently controverted questions. Members and 'affiliates' of such groups tend to be individuals who have degrees in engineering, medicine, or computer science but have had a very limited education in the humanities or social sciences. Even more, the vast majority do not possess a basic education in Islamic theology, law or philosophy and consequently, most do not even possess the training that would enable them to read or understand classical texts, a symptom which has resulted from a number of causes, including the dismantling of traditional institutions of learning. These institutions once sustained and propagated Islamic orthodoxy and marginalised Muslim extremism. Here, students who were to become our leading scholars and sages were taught never to be hasty to condemn others who differed with them.

In stark contrast today, because of the confusion between 'knowledge' and 'information,' ignorance of Islamic scholarship blinds us both to its richness and robs us of its diversity. The acquisition of the former is not as simple as it may initially seem, nor is its acquisition without conditions. Information does not necessarily mean knowledge, nor did the 'ulema lose sight of the importance of adab in gaining it. The centrality of adab, and its relationship with knowledge, has always been at the root of the Islamic tradition. Whereas for some, the time in which information can be accessed depends upon the speed of a modem, for others who are firmly rooted within the traditional method of acquiring knowledge, it has always been understood that the latter can only be acquired 'painstakingly at the hands of those who know'. Unfortunately today, the Quranic injunction to 'ask the people of remembrance if you do not know' and the associated divine question 'are they the same those who know and those who do not know?' seems to have been lost within the quagmire of information overload produced by the hi-tech age of the Internet.

The problem Muslims face today is not in the religious texts, as some Western analysts and commentators have asserted, rather, it is in

the reader. In most cases, the Islamic heritage is lost between analytically competent readers who are woefully incapable of penetrating the classical texts, and readers who can decipher the classical texts, but who live in a time warp and are largely oblivious to the hermeneutic and analytic strategies of modern scholars. In other words, the first group is equipped to handle modernity, but not the classical tradition, while the second group is in precisely the opposite position. This dilemma ought to be recognised as the real tragedy of modern Islamic scholarship.

THE EROSION OF AUTHORITY

The guardians of the Islamic tradition are the jurists and scholars, who have all but lost influence in a world where a modern secular education is perceived to be a certificate to have an opinion on just about all aspects of Islamic law. With the inability now to acknowledge and recognize the true heirs of the prophets, young and frustrated Muslims have had a devastating effect when it comes to recognition of authority in Islam. An overwhelming sort of individualism has crept into the ranks of university educated Muslims: they think themselves equal to the legitimate interpreters of Islamic law-when in fact they are not equals; they think that they know, when in fact, they know not even the fundamentals of the religion. This erosion of recognition of true authority has come about due to the levelling within the Muslim ranks: everyone, including the scholars and sages are brought down to the same level of the person who is levelling, both in mentality and attitude. This results in a loss in the capacity and ability to recognize and acknowledge true scholars. If everyone is now levelled and is placed on the same ground as the leveller - how can the true pioneers stand out above the rest?

Armed with the tools of rationalisation, this approach has reduced Islam into only one of its dimensions, namely sacred law and the nature of man to the physical (body) and psychological (soul). However, according to the traditional view, both man and women are not two but three levels of being: the third being the spiritual. Thus, one of the profound effects that modernism had upon Islam is that there is no room for any spiritual development, whereas traditionally, Islam had stressed that the spiritual and the temporal are the two sides of the same coin. As a result, there is a state of virtual anarchy in modern Islam: it is not clear who speaks with authority on religious issues.

ISLAM: THE SOCIAL AND MORAL OUTCAST

Upon hearing their rallying cries, most non-Muslims cannot be blamed to see Islam as an idiosyncrasy; a moral and social oddity that is incapable of finding common ground with the rest of human society. As such, the danger here is that the interpretive modalities of the Hizb and al-Muhajirun transform Islam into the outcast, or the "other". Those incapable of understanding the complexities and richness of the Islamic tradition are contributing to the vulgarisation of Islam in such a way that its richness and humanism are becoming a very distant memory.

So what happened to the civilisation that produced tolerance, knowledge and beauty? A lot. An aggressive European force wiped out the Islamic civilisation. Colonialism and the expulsion of Palestinians happened. Despotic and exploitative regimes have taken

power in nearly every Muslim country. Most importantly, however, the custodians of Islamic orthodoxy and the institutions that produced them have all but been dismantled. In their place, in the Muslim ghettos, a theology that is largely dismissive of the classical juristic tradition and one that feeds on powerlessness, alienation and defeat, has been allowed to spread. This has been a long and slow process, but it is one that "community" leaders remain in denial of. Most, if not all British Muslims share the anger of groups such as Hizb at-Tahrir and al-Muhajirun, about Palestine, and at how these colonized Muslims have been treated. The danger is real and apparent: the anger over Palestine has been in most cases the catalyst for the radicalisation of Muslims. From Derby to Birmingham, from London to Luton, you can hear the frustration. Unless the voices of the mainstream are listened to, and not heard, there will be no understanding of what happened to Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif.

The challenge that confronts Muslims today is that political interests have come to dominate the public discourse, and to a large extent, ethical and moral discourses have become marginalized. While the overwhelming majority of Muslims abhor extremism, violence and the desecration of Islam, like most Muslims, I too know that the war on terrorism and the striking unashamed double standards of Western foreign policy in the Muslim world is not part of a solution, but merely a catalyst for the radicalization of ideas in the Muslim mind, leading to a perversion of faith.

THE FUTURE?

The Muslim world faces a crisis of authority on a global and communal level. This crisis is evident from those individuals stepping forward and claiming to be the spokesperson for Islam and for the community of Muslims. They do this, even though they have neither the religious position nor any formal, recognizable religious learning. They serve only to further compound the confusion in the public arena as to what Islam stands for. In local communities, unless there are properly educated, articulate and charismatic leaders, Muslims trying to find and assert their identity, both as Muslim and British, face quite depressing choices. However, all is not lost. Immense work has been done over the past decade or so to revive traditional Islam

in the West. It is clear now, that a renewal has begun. Over this last decade, scholars have sought to bring a balance between the mind, the spirit and the heart, so as to revive the importance and relevance of sacred knowledge in the modern world. Their message is not of despair, hatred and

anger, but of hope, mercy and of beauty. Emulating both the inner and outer aspects of the Sunnah, they aim to restore equilibrium to the soul and mind. Being both articulate and original, Muslims have within them, a source of inspiration and a ray of hope. ■

The problem Muslims face today is not in the religious texts, as some Western analysts and commentators have asserted, rather, it is in the reader.

AFTAB AHMAD MALIK is editor of the anthology *The Empire and the Crescent: Global implications for a new American Century* (Amal Press: Bristol) 2003.

شريعة

AEROSOL ARABIC

GRAFFITI OFTEN CONJURES UP IMAGES OF DISAFFECTED YOUTH, VANDALISM AND URBAN DECAY. MUHAMMAD ALI'S ART CHALLENGES THESE ASSUMPTIONS. A COMBINATION OF TWO VERY DIFFERENT ARTISTIC FORMS, HE DRAWS ON HIS FAITH AND THE ENERGY OF THE STREET TO CREATE A STYLE THAT IS UNIQUELY WESTERN AND ISLAMIC.

To the eyes of the police and Home Office apparatchiks, graffiti is merely an urban eyesore born out of anti-social behaviour. However, beyond the negative press, graffiti has quietly elevated itself to a complex form of artistic expression. Many graffiti artists, far from being illiterate vandals, believe that their art is about words. They transform letters and phrases through style and colour, giving new meaning to language in a way that no classroom environment can.

Networks of self-taught artists from around the world proudly display their works on baseball courts, parks and walls - the grey urban jungle comes alive with the simmering creativity of city youth struggling to express themselves and the urban condition. This is art without a brush and the city is the canvas. Although many remain sceptical, graffiti art is increasingly embraced by gallery culture.

My fascination with graffiti stems from my childhood. I was more interesting in doodling than I was in painting still life and figure drawing. I couldn't connect with the depressing lives of "great" artists. Studying Van Gogh's life made me sick. I didn't want my art to drive me to that. I needed something real to me, something that was within reach.

I eventually discovered aerosol paint - but I wasn't interested in vandalism. My art teachers treated my taste with disdain but who cared? I was doing my own thing. I would drop my palette just the way I wanted to; use colours like black and silver even though my art teacher taught against it.

I moved on to study multimedia at university. The screen became the new canvas, and design programs became my new tools. Through a freelance web design company I explored graphic design and typography and eventually went on to design computer games. To help fund my studies, I continued my aerosol art, however. I was commissioned to do paintings for the Birmingham City Council, including large public murals. The work depicted multiculturalism and unity, bringing ugly grey walls alive with some brilliant colours.

Like many young Muslims around me, I became drawn to Islam at university. Feeling that I had neglected something very beautiful for too long, I considered using my art to reflect my faith. Islam too could be slick, stylish and charismatic. The colours and the shapes could reflect the energy of the urban Muslim, living in the West.

As I rediscovered the Quran, I was further struck by the sublime beauty of the Arabic script. It was powerful and fluid, mirroring the strength of the message and its transcendent significance. I suddenly wanted to paint again, but now my inspiration was the Arabic language.

Graffiti art fused with the sacred script may seem like a strange cocktail, but in fact, graffiti artists have always possessed a fascination with letterforms. Like in Islamic art, words are the focal point for the graffiti artist. I wanted to take an art form that belonged on the street and connect it with ordinary people and give it new meaning through the divine meanings contained in the book of Allah.

With my work, I hope to inspire youth by introducing a new kind of Islamic art that is born in the West and therefore, something that belongs to us. It's a question of identity. I want my work to reach out to young people and say, "You might be born and bred here, but that doesn't mean you can't be proud of your identity as a Muslim. Do it with confidence."

My elders have always criticised me for engaging in "useless art" instead of medicine or law. But I feel satisfied. My work has recently helped raise funds for urgent causes like earthquake relief in Iran and an orphanage in Afghanistan. My style, I hope, will serve as a bridge between Islam and the West, a breath of fresh air. Ultimately, I want my work to be accessible so people can hang it up in their homes and offices.

Art must inspire reflection. I believe in appreciating and celebrating art that inspires us to remember our Creator and ultimately, be inspired to do everything for His sake alone. ■

MUHAMMAD ALI'S work was last displayed at the Kufa Gallery in London in an immensely successful charity auction which raised money for Bam. His next display will be at Manchester University on 24 March 2004 during the Islamic Awareness Week. View his work at www.aerosolarabic.com.

LIFE AFTER MALCOLM X



It's hard for my granddaughter to imagine a world where no one asked you what country you were from because everyone believed that all black people were hostages of both the ruling class and their own ignorance.

My 13-year-old granddaughter couldn't imagine what life was like in the sixties as we sat together recently to watch a documentary on the life of Malcolm X. As I tried to explain to her what the world was like then, I realised that the identity of American Muslims in that time and the present is part of the legacy of the man who we came to call El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

I wasn't afforded the luxury of being totally clueless about the significance of what was going on in the world as many of today's young people are. I was intensely aware of the changes that were going on around me when I was thirteen. I had to be. This necessity was created by the increasingly crude methods of suppression used by state, eager to keep the doors closed on any genuine expression of African American power. The protests across the country and the growing urgency, created to shake off the moral attrition of the age, held our attention.

Despite the anarchy that loomed over society in the 1960's, or perhaps because of it, the exultation and anticipation of a new age of freedom motivated most black people to learn and experience as much as they could. Today young people seem to be happy to be fed information through numerous filters in order not to compromise their "quality time" for entertainment. But during Malcolm X's time "the revolution" was our entertainment. The plethora of new ideas, some nonsensical, like the spiritual oddities of Elijah Muhammad, and many truly revolutionary, like the new ideas of faith and brotherhood at the time of Malcolm's conversion, was our mental stimulation and our social nexus. We had to filter our own information as laboriously as our grandparents had carried water from the bossman's well.

We were fed discourse and rhetoric from numerous charismatic young black men and women and various "movements" promising to bring us to ever-increasing levels of freedom and enlightenment. If we wanted to remain in the "in crowd", we had to gather as much information as possible and know how to disseminate it. To the black community of the 60's, knowing where you had been was just as important as knowing where you were going.

Malcolm X's speeches taught us that we comprised the economic and cultural backbone of America. We were self-righteously aware that we were just as much the shame of the United States' disgraceful past as the foundation for its promising future. When Malcolm X explained that the plight of the African American was not a civil rights issue, but a human rights issue and sought to make this point before the UN, I felt the elation of any young girl who is finally released from holding a vital secret. Never again was the ruling class allowed to suppress our humanness without being exposed. Or so I thought.

While Malcolm X was seeking human rights on the world stage, Dr. Martin Luther King was seeking civil rights in the nation's capitol. The ruling class soon discovered it would be more amenable to granting civil rights, which they could control, than to addressing their domestic issues on an international platform. The spotlight was fixed on the "enlightened, peace-loving" Christian Dr. King, while reluctant references were only given when necessary to Malcolm X with the adjectives, "Black Muslim Militant", until you felt compelled to choose between being Muslim and a part of the world, or a Christian and, hopefully one day, being part of America.

It's hard for my granddaughter to imagine a world where no one asked you what country you were from because everyone believed that all black people were hostages of both the ruling class and their own ignorance. She can't image not belonging to the world community, not being a sister of all other races and ethnicities. That is due to the legacy of Malcolm X. He internationalised us, connected us to the spiritual fraternity of faith and the idea of social justice that is universal to all peoples.

The African Americans of today are confronted by a crucial dilemma. Every advance that was made under Dr. King, every "civil right" or "liberty" or measure of "progress" that was gained during that time has been methodically snipped away from our national fabric until 2002 when, under the Bush administration and its Patriot Act, it was unceremoniously swept under the rug and trampled upon. For American Muslims, the gains in social value, in independence of mind and in our cherished identity as being the only Americans with ties of brotherhood to every other country in the world has only increased after the teachings and sacrifice of Malcolm X.

This year we mark the fortieth anniversary of the Hajj that changed Malcolm X's life. We owe to my granddaughter's generation never to let the memory of that transformation pass from memory. Malcolm gave us a vision of Islam that was willing to embrace and make peace with and in the world. When we, who still remember Malcolm and saw him with our own eyes, have passed away, we do not want the vitality of his message to go with us. Without that spirit of conviction, faith and belief in universal justice, we will all be left poorer. And Allah knows, in these times we need it most of all. ■

MICHELLE WALROND is the international news editor for Toronto Minaret

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SUSPICION TOWARD DAUGHTER

SHAYKH GIBRIL HADDAD

Can I secretly read my daughter's e-mail or check incoming calls on her cell phone if I have reason to believe she is lying to me about some serious matters? I know that we are not supposed to spy on others, but this is my child, and I am sick with worry over her drastic change in behaviour.

Spying on your daughter will not provide help to face the negative changes in her life whether it confirms or does not confirm your suspicions. A parent's dua is answered and the Divine support is there for the long duration, but are we availing ourselves of that powerful protection? The behaviour of children will most probably be patterned after the habits they formed at home and, to a lesser extent, at school with the company they keep. If these have not been constantly filled and re-filled with the light of guidance and best choices from the start, then what can we do at the end, when the children become teen-agers and rebel?

It is best not to antagonize her or go behind her back or try and control her; rather, sit with her and regain her confidence by trying to show her that her best interests have always been at the center of your concerns and that you are right to be worried if you believe she is playing with fire. At the same time repent to Allah Most High in your own right and turn to Him with sincere pleas that He guide your daughter in the ways He loves and approves.

WHO DOES THE SWEATER BELONG TO?

FARAZ RABBANI

My step mom took some wool I had bought and made a sweater without my permission. Now she wants to keep the sweater and pay me for the wool. The problem is that I don't want the money because I can't get the same wool, which I liked very much, again. Who does the sweater belong to?

The sweater belongs to you, as your mother-in-law used your property without your permission.

'Ala' al-Din al-Haskafi mentions in his *Durr al-Mukhtar*, a primary reference for

WHAT YOU OUGHT TO KNOW

sound positions in the Hanafi school: "If someone purchased cotton and a woman knitted it, then the entire knitting is the owner's."

This was confirmed by Ibn Abidin in his *Radd al-Muhtar*, a super-commentary on the *Durr*, where he referenced the issue to the early Hanafi *fatwa* work *al-Multaqat*. [*Ibn Abidin/Haskafi, Radd al-Muhtar 'ala al-Durr al-Mukhtar*, 4.219, *Bulaq* ed.]

BODY-BUILDING

FARAZ RABBANI

Is taking steroids and supplements for body building or any other sport allowed?

Allah Most High said, "And do not cast yourselves to ruin," [Qur'an, 2.195] The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "There shall be no harming nor reciprocating harm." [Ibn Maja and Daraqutni; Nawawi declared it sound (*hasan*)]

From these and other primary texts, the scholars have explained that there are degrees of harm. Harm that leads to immediate or expected loss of life or limb is impermissible and sinful, while other harm to oneself is disliked. [Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, 6.457-458]

Thus, steroids or supplements that could be harmful-according to reliable medical opinion-would be disliked, and impermissible when likely to cause considerable harm.

It would not be permitted to use steroids or supplements banned by sporting authorities if one is participating in competitive sports, as this would entail deception. The Beloved of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The one who cheats is not of us." [Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, and others]

He also said (peace and blessings be upon him), "The one who does not fulfill trusts has no faith, and the one who does not fulfill commitments has no religion." [Ahmad, with a sound chain of narrators]

COMEDY

FARAZ RABBANI

Is stand up comedy permissible in Shariah?

It is in itself permitted to make people laugh. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Verily, I joke, but I only speak the truth." [Tabarani; Hathami declared its chain to be sound (*hasan*) in *Majma' al-Zawa'id*, 8.89]

Joking and jest are only reprehensible if done in reprehensible ways, or if they lead to the reprehensible, such as heedlessness that leads to the non-fulfillment of one's duty to Allah. [*Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bari*]

If accompanied by noble intentions and to achieve recognized benefits - like the comedy of Sidi Azhar Usman (www.azhar.com), a committed Muslim who is in close contact and cooperation with traditional scholars - then it would be a praiseworthy matter.

Imam Badr al-Din al-Ayni explains, in fact, that joking and jest in upright ways is from the sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). As such, the believer should follow the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in adopting a cheerful, light disposition within praiseworthy limits, for the best of ways are those of moderation. [*Ayni, Umdat al-Qari Sharh Sharh al-Bukhari*, 22.169]

HOLIDAY PAY

FARAZ RABBANI

My twelve month teaching contract ends in August. From July to August, when I am school holiday, I will continue to be paid. If I decide that I do not want to continue work in the new school year, starting September, do I end the contract after the holiday ends and thus, earn holiday pay, or should I inform my employer before the end of the holidays? The contract just stipulates that either party must give a week's notice before terminating the contract.

The holiday pay is part of your 12-month contract, which basically entails ten months of teaching and grants you two months of vacation. As such, there is nothing wrong, Islamically, with terminating the contract after the holidays in a way acceptable within the terms of the contract and customary practice in schools. ■

FARAZ RABBANI answers questions and teaches through *Sunni Path* www.sunnipath.com



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“THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST” IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

great speculation about this film and whether or not it would be anti-Semitic.

Gibson describes *The Passion* as the most realistic rendering of the last twelve hours of Christ ever done. Great attention was paid to the sets and costumes. The spoken languages are Latin and Aramaic in a quest for authenticity. Only reluctantly did Gibson finally agree to include English subtitles. Certainly it is the bloodiest film about Christ, garnering an “R” rating, restricted to age 17 and above unless accompanied by an adult, because of the graphic depiction of violence done to Jesus.

Different audiences will experience this film different ways. Evangelical Christian audiences who believe in a literal interpretation of the Gospels have declared that *The Passion* is exactly as it really happened. They are spiritually moved in a very powerful way and their churches have pre-purchased thousands of tickets for their members.

Many Christians more devoted to ecumenical discourse have strenuously challenged the film as being counter to modern Christian understanding of the Gospels, gratuitously gruesome and poison to the advances made in Christian-Jewish relations since Vatican II. They question whether the true message of Jesus’ love is found in his crucifixion or in his resurrection.

Jewish audiences cannot help but notice how the Jews are portrayed as arranging the capture of Jesus and manipulating a reluctant Pontius Pilate into ordering his torture and crucifixion. All the while, a Satanic figure lurks in the background.

To Jews, already sensitive to the history of Passion Plays, this film seems likely to revive the accusations of deicide that Vatican II was supposed to finally put to rest.

Is *The Passion of the Christ* an anti-Semitic film? Probably not, if anti-Semitic means that it was made with the intention of

stirring up anti-Jewish feeling. Rather it was meant to portray reality according to the beliefs of Mel Gibson. But Mel Gibson is neither a theologian nor a historian and this film should be viewed as a personal artistic expression rather than as religious truth or accurate history.

But is it likely to stir up already existing anti-Semitic feelings in much of the world? Absolutely. Already, evangelical churches have been seen placing on the marquee outside their entrances, “The Jews Killed Christ” and “The Jews Killed the Lord Jesus” as if the film has finally given the world the final proof.

On the positive side, these messages were removed the very same day under pressure of other churches that found such messages repellent and unchristian.

The Passion of the Christ may indeed stir up religious passion to the point that ecumenical strides taken over the last four decades are set back. On the other hand, it may remind us all that peace can only be found if we diligently defend the bridges that have already been built between faith communities and constantly seek ways to build new ones.

Only time will tell. ■

DAVID SHTULMAN

Mel Gibson’s new film, *The Passion of the Christ*, was formally released on Ash Wednesday in more than 3000 theatres across the United States. Already, in the weeks before its release, the controversy it sparked had guaranteed its financial success. Indeed, some accounts say that Gibson may have recovered his entire \$25 million personal investment in day one alone.

In 1965 the Second Vatican Council pronounced that “Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all, so that all might attain salvation” thus releasing the Jews from the age-old accusation deicide. Many Protestant churches have also revised their theology absolving the Jews and recognizing Judaism as the root from which the tree of Christianity has grown. These changes have allowed for enormous advancements in Christian-Jewish understanding.

Gibson, however, is a member of a schismatic traditionalist Catholic sect that rejects the changes in Vatican II. In addition, Passion Plays, a genre of religious drama describing the suffering, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, have triggered violent anti-Semitic outbreaks, especially in France and Germany, dating back to the 13th century. Therefore, there was

THE GREAT ARABIAN HORSE RACE

(THAT REALLY NEVER HAPPENED)

HOLLYWOOD IS RACING TOWARDS DISASTER. NOT ONLY IS THE WALT DISNEY STUDIO ABOUT TO RELEASE A \$90 MILLION FILM THAT IS HISTORICALLY INACCURATE, BUT AS SAYYIDA A'ISHA KHAN REPORTS, IT ALSO CONTAINS ANTI-ISLAMIC DIALOGUE AND PERPETUATES TIRED STEREOTYPES ABOUT ARABS AND MUSLIMS.

Entitled *Hidalgo*, the film stars Viggo Mortensen of *Lord of the Rings* fame, and is based on the Baron Munchausen-type fantasies of a deceased American named Frank Hopkins.

During the 1940s Hopkins regaled a naïve American public with stories about how he had won the “world’s greatest horseman” award no less than three times. Not only did he claim to have been the star of Buffalo Bill’s infamous Wild West show, the counterfeit cowboy also told anyone who would listen that he had been a dispatch rider for the US Cavalry, buffalo hunter, Indian fighter, wild horse hunter, endurance racer, trick rider, circus ringmaster, bounty hunter, Rough Rider, big game guide and secret agent.

In reality, Hopkins was a construction worker who lived in Long Island, New York.

But in Hopkins’ mythology, he not only did everything in the Old West, he knew everyone as well, including Wild Bill Hickok, Sitting Bull and Billy the Kid. He even claimed friendship with Queen Victoria! “Her Majesty gave us tea on the second balcony...,” he wrote. “She was just the grandest, motherly little lady.”

But it is Hopkins’ mythological mustang that has got him and the Walt Disney studio in trouble. Hopkins claimed to have won more than 400 endurance horse races all over the world, including a 3,000 mile dash across the Empty Quarter of the Arabian Peninsula.

Hopkins maintained that it was in Paris that he was approached by an Arab businessman with the improbable name of Ras Rasmussen and invited to take his famous mustang horse, *Hidalgo*, and enter a 1,000-year-old race across Arabia in 1890. Hopkins said he won the race with 33 hours to spare.

Historians and experts in the Arabian horse world have ridiculed both the premise of the race and its purported starting point, the port of Aden. “There is absolutely no record of any horse race in the past staged from Aden!” said Ghalib Al-Quaiti, the last ruling Sultan of the Quaiti State in what is now Yemen. Dr. Mohammed Talal Al-Rasheed call it a “shabby fantasy.”

Dr. Awad Al-Badi, Director of Research, King Faisal Center



for Research and Islamic Studies is equally scathing: “There is absolutely no record or reference to Hopkins with or without his mustangs ever having set foot on Arabian soil. The idea of a historic long distance Arab horse race is pure nonsense and flies against all reason. Such an event... in the past is impossible simply from a technical, logistical, cultural and geopolitical point of view. This race has never been part of our rich traditions and equestrian heritage.”

Yet this race is the highlight of the film, which Disney insists is “based on the true story” of Frank Hopkins.

Eighty experts in five countries have poured scorn on Hopkins’ claims and dubbed him the biggest Old West and equestrian fraud in history. The Walt Disney company has ignored their findings.

Nina Heyn, Disney’s Executive Director of International Publicity, dismissed concerns expressed by the historians. “No one here really cares about the historical aspects,” Heyn said. “Once a movie has been shot people move on to the others. If it transpires that the historical aspects are in question, I don’t think people would care that much. *Hidalgo* is a family film. It has little to do with reality.”

But Hollywood has added a disturbing new dimension to the Hopkins myth by introducing a strong anti-Islamic theme. According to the script, Hopkins is invited to participate in the race by “Sheikh Rashid,” a character played in the film by Omar Sharif.

In an exchange between the sheikh and his nephew, Rashid says, “Boldly spoken for a man with no wives.” The nephew retorts, “I sold them all away.”

Even the sheikh’s daughter is put on the line by the scriptwriters of this “family film.” The script has her saying, “If Bin Mubarek (Hopkins’ rival) wins the race on my father’s stallion, I become his fifth wife. The youngest of his harem. No more than a slave in his house.”

To make matters worse, just before filming on *Hidalgo* was complete, Disney and the scriptwriter put out a last minute call for an additional scene. The casting call read, “*Hidalgo* rides into Los Angeles searching for scimitar wielding racer.” The scene called on the chosen actor to “fall from his injured horse mid-race, and, in this particular contest, the rules require that he must first kill the horse, then himself- which he does, using his scimitar.”

The movie “*Hidalgo*” is based on blatant historical fraud. That’s bad enough. What’s even worse is that it promotes ugly stereotypes, portrays Arabs as dehumanised caricatures, and projects an inaccurate picture of Islam and Arabic culture and its great equestrian heritage. That’s just plain wicked. ■

FORGIVE ME

With Your Beautiful Names have I opened my petitioning
And from You sought pardon - grant me my request.
My God we are caught in the sea of our blemishes,
Offences and crimes are piled up on every side.
And You are the Forgiver of every sinful action
Save only disbelief and associating partners with You.
And we know that God is the Unique, the Creator
Whose favours mount up beyond the counting of a reckoner.
And therefore have we held out our hands towards our Lord;
At the Door of the Pardoner, eraser of blemishes.
In You, generous Lord, we hope - that You will grant repentance
Sufficing to erase the Recording Angel's script;
And in everything grant us sincerity;
And do grant Your succour to neighbour and to friend.
O Merciful One, grant us our hopes and our petitioning,
You are generous in goodness to rebel and to penitent.

*Muhammad ibn ash-Shahid al-Jaza'iri, in Majmu' u'l-qasa'id
wa'l-ad'iyah quoted in Muslim Devotions by Constance E.
Padwick (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996).*

LOYALTY AND BELONGING

We are in the middle of an identity crisis, not just in the UK but throughout the world. Many of us do not know who or what we are. Some have impossible naïve notions of what they should be; they cling to a romanticised heritage, subscribe to an unchanging tradition and are ready to kill or be killed to save an essence of a fixed identity. Others have abandoned the very idea of a fixed identity; they change their identity with as much ease as they change their designer trainers. To 'know thyself' as Socrates put it, is both a fundamental human urge and a basic question in philosophy. But in a rapidly globalising world, all those things which once provided us with a sense of confidence in ourselves - nation states with a homogeneous population, well established local communities, allegiance to history and tradition - are all being challenged. The Queen

in her speech to Parliament on 31st April 2002, made reference to the massive changes that have taken place in Britain since her Coronation in 1953 - then, more or less uniform and Anglican, now multi-cultural and multi-faith...

Islam in particular, in the UK of today has much to offer us in our quest for identity. Certainly, at its best, it gives us recognition and provides a framework of behaviour and beliefs which help us make sense of the world and place our own struggles in some historical context. The danger is that many people cling to religion as a sort of protective clothing from the rigours of public life - becoming ever more zealous and unquestioning in the face of an increasingly complex world and sophisticated media.

But to simply use religion to gain our identity and some form of recognition is to be partial and deny the other aspects of our self-interest - what Islam has to say about the struggle for bread and water and our human need, or obligation to associate with others...Islamic methodology prescribes that Islam must be presented and shared with the public at large and this must be done in as peaceful and gracious a way as possible through interaction, conversation and social and political participation. Indeed, Islam positively denounces monasticism and enjoins instead family, community, integration, cooperation and mutual respect. In the section of his book which offers 'A practical framework for positive change', Zahid Parvez applauds the role

and potential of the mosque in UK communities - particularly where it provides more than just a worship centre or focus for identity for an ethnic or geographical community. He argues that the mosque can still be the centre of community life - offering teaching, counseling, support for the vulnerable, succour for the lonely and guidance on citizenship and survival in a pluralistic society.



The challenge for all the world's great religions in the face of an increasingly dominant market place, led by the global corporations of consumerism and finance, is partly to recognise this as a major threat to the core values of each religion - and partly to adjust and develop that which we do best in the face of such threats and temptations. The word 'religion' is derived from the world 'religade' which literally means to 'bind together'. How 'People of the Book' use their religion to 'do together' and to do this non-violent-

ly and democratically is the great challenge we face today. How best should our mosques and churches prepare our people to challenge a system which creates injustice, winners and losers and an unequal distribution of resources - how to perform jihad today and still be effective and gracious remains a dilemma for many.

It is understandably tempting, therefore, to abdicate to the government the responsibility for meeting our human need for bread and water, to use our faith and cultural practices which are associated with it to give us identity and recognition and to associate but only ever with people who agree with us - or worse to nurture amongst Muslims living in the West a condition of kufr (or living amongst unbelievers). A powerful sense of kufr helps the believer to live in Western exile in a state of chronic persecution, from which a limited sort of theology is born, and on which its survival depends. There has to be a more constructive and life giving alternative for the British Muslims now determined to make their way in this country and still be loyal to the tenets of the faith and its obligations on 'believers' to change and challenge injustice wherever it is found. ■

Extracted from British Muslims - Influencing UK public life: a case study, by Neil Jameson. Published in British Muslims - Loyalty and Belonging, by the Islamic Foundation & the Citizenship Organising Foundation, 2003

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

In the previous edition of *Q-News*, two articles (by Raihan Alfaradhi and Afaaf Rajbee, and Merve Kavakci), quote George Bush's "infamous" statement made soon after September 11th, "You are either with us or against us".

This is what most people would say in similar circumstances. Its common usage has clouded, I believe, our collective memory, because I recall vividly that Bush actually said, "You are either with us or with the terrorists".

The difference is startling, for in one sentence he destroyed any acceptable avenues for genuine dissent against US policies. Who, after all, wants to be branded as a terrorist?

Given that dissent (against the British monarchy) was the founding stone of the United States of America itself, this was a sign of things to come as Bush has used the appalling events of September 11th as a pretext to destroy the very democracy and democratic institutions that he claims to be promoting elsewhere, notably in Iraq. The suspension of habeas corpus and due legal process, rule by US mega-corporations and a foreign policy based on corporate rather than national interests bodes ill for the rest of us.

Without dissent, democracies don't work, so perhaps there is some hope for us there as the facade of normality will fall in due course, Inshallah, exposing Bush, Blair and the rest of his cronies for what they are; opportunists pushing an agenda that fails the people it purports to serve. The sooner the electorate on both sides of the Atlantic wake up to that fact, the better.

Ibrahim Hewitt
 Leicester

the ones I have read in the last few editions of your magazine, just increase the community's misery and lack of direction. If you won't debate the real issues, then at least don't malign those who do.

Fatima Anwar
 Walthamstow

golden brown in front of them they would lapse, even if they were surrounded by gay rent-boys. The HT man doesn't seem to realise that aversion to an addiction has little to do with disgust towards other people, rather it is their disgust about their own behaviour that should be emphasised. Perhaps that's just too subtle for HT-wallahs. They should stick to lifting heavy weights or get some halal sex, as this will solve their khilafah complex.

M. Rahman
 Cambridge

DIALOGUE

I am happy to see that *Q-News* is open to differences of opinion. I did not agree with several things in the Democracy edition and was

HALF TRUTHS

We expect tabloid journalists to attack Muslims groups and organisation unfairly and without just cause. It is both sad and disheartening that *Q-News* has published articles in two consecutive months which make unnecessarily negative comments about the Hizb ut-Tahrir. This displays not only a lack of good etiquette, but goes against the need for meaningful dialogue that you so often

go on about. The fact that HR continue to grow in popularity and influence among young Muslims in Britain is indicative of the fact that they are reaching people and addressing their needs in ways that you cannot begin to do. It is *Q-News* that is out of touch with the realities of the ummah. What young Muslims need is an ideological understanding of Islam that really empowers them. Journalistic hack jobs, like

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glad to see my thoughts reflected in Siddiqui's response. We, as Muslims, must allow one another to express ourselves and we need to have dialogue from within.

Hajj Salman Patel
Ilford

INCISIVE

I am late with this compliment by almost a year, but Nazim Baksh's insightful piece on Abdullah el-Faisal, "When we were young", in the March 2003 edition of *Q-News* completes the full circle of the latter's introduction to Islam and his eventual incarceration. Moreover, for me, this piece explains graphically the theological turmoil that has besieged Guyana since I left the country back in the early 70s. I was proud and happy to read this clinical and incisive work by Nazim Baksh, because he was a witness to what happened there. He had the vision, insight and wisdom to discriminate between false extremism and fundamental truth of the "straight path". May Allah (swt) bless and guide him for his noble efforts and I look forward to reading more of his thoughts and ideas.

Mohamad K Yusuff
Washington DC

BRITISHNESS

Your cover story last month ("The New War on Hijab") was typical apologist nonsense. As a secular humanist who is frightened by the historic and contemporary excesses of religion, I am deeply disturbed by your attacks on the French response to the headscarf. Not only is France justified in its decision to ban over religious imagery from public school, I hope that Britain and other European nations will follow suit. You cannot explain away Islam's repression of women and the status accorded to them in your faith. As a European I understand what religious fundamentalism can lead to. This continent was torn apart

by religious wars for hundreds of years. At least the reformation allowed the rise of secular states. Muslims are free to practice their religion as a private devotion - that is true religious freedom. Don't impose your backward ways and attitudes on us; we've fought too hard to get here and right thinking people aren't going to squander away their freedoms in the name of a shallow "tolerance".

Margaret Jacobs
Cambridge

"What does it mean to be British"? I'll tell you, what it means to be British! It means that you can wear whatever you like, including a hijab or burka. It means you can practice any religion without persecution. It means that you are not treated as a second class citizen because of race, creed or sex, unlike many Islamic countries. It means you can read a book, any book. It means you are able to travel throughout Europe. It means you are free to write divisive, xenophobic, one sided articles, such as these! It means you should give thanks, and remember those that gave their youth for people like you and I. It means you can have freedom of speech. It means you can receive this e-mail without censorship. It means I am proud of my forefathers' efforts to make Britain a place where you and I can live in peace. It means I know my roots, where I come from! It means that I am proud to be British, and I remember the following, in remembrance of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice so that I can send you this message in a land of relative freedom!

*They shall not grow old,
As we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember them*

Kevin Jones
United Kingdom

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