JIHAD AND TERRORISM: A WAR OF WORDS
Cultures of Resistance Activism Forum is a project that aims to address the Western hostile use of language intended to restrict debate related to mainstream Islamist movements and currents. The project will explore more effective means to respond to hostile use of language—as well as explore how better to insist on an extending public debate beyond its standard focus on ‘Islamist violence’—by launching a ‘positive’ (non-defensive) discourse on Islamism.

In partnership with a wide number of social activist and public campaign groups, we aim to advocate for a shift in language from the defensive to the positive; to learn how others, in different struggles, have achieved this transition; and by this means, and by gaining greater critical mass, to open space in which a discourse of rebuttal and ‘resistance’ can be developed through visual and other means to imposed narratives and stereotyping. The aim is to change the terms of debate and to move it to a more directly challenging, but more widely accessible, advocacy of understanding Islamist ideology.
The response by Muslims in the West to the hostility that scenes of violence triggers... ignores the intellectual response posed by Islamists to the challenges of modernism

I thought corrupts language, George Orwell wrote in his 1946 essay Politics and the English Language, ‘language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should and do know better.’ Such is the case when it comes to media presentation and language used when referring to so-called ‘radical’ Islamist movements: language, visual images and media coverage is mostly focused upon figures and movements and their association with violence which evokes strong emotional and sentimental reactions amongst Western audiences. In the present political sphere, language is less about explaining or comprehending, but rather is about using power to impose an interpretation of meaning and philosophical concepts which are being used to underpin an ideology with which to pursue war and conflict. The aim is to challenge the use and manipulation of language—the language of demonisation—that is used to strengthen the Western identity, and as a tool to be used in a power game intended to undercut any potential rival centres of politics from emerging.

This focus on language is part of a wider initiative being co-ordinated by Conflicts Forum—in partnership with our partner organisations and individuals—which is looking at the possibilities for mobilising with British, European and international Muslim and non-Muslim activists against an imposed secular-liberal, free-market Western template for the emerging global order. This wider aim is to look at ways to deconstruct Western narratives and how to do this destruction through critical thinking followed by development of an alternative language and narrative. The objective is that by deliberately deconstructing Western narratives and iconography and its category of reasoning, as presently formulated, finding its metaphors, language and identity template of power and oppression—the template that it seeks to impose on the global order—space will open up in which a language, history and philosophy of resistance can be developed. Deconstruction of this template—as a creative process—will provide this space within which to develop a mobilisation strategy to offer a multiple-identity vision for the global order. The response by Muslims in the West to the hostility that scenes of violence triggers is usually that of a defensive recourse to campaigns seeking to limit Islamophobia. This approach, which although understandable, ignores the intellectual response posed by Islamists to the challenges of modernism and contemporary Western society, and which has sought to provide a response based on reason and the rich philosophical traditions of Islam.

Little of this Islamist intellectual challenge is heard in the West because, firstly, Western policy-makers have framed the debate in the language of ‘terrorism’, ‘hostility towards modernity’, ‘cultural backwardness’ and ‘hatred of Western values’. These epithets for the most part simply are wrong. Their repetition—as intended by their framers—however suggests that there is no intellectual Islamism case to hear—that Islamists are irrational. This is not true. Secondly, the Islamist intellectual response is rarely understood in the West because its metaphors, its iconography and its category of reasoning, as presently formulated, find little resonance in secular societies. It simply does not generate the ‘oh, I get it now!’ response from audiences.

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Jihad and Terrorism: A War of Words

All is War

Aki Nawaz is a veteran political activist, musician and rapper with the band Fun-Da-Mental. He has been working since his release from Guantanamo Bay in 2005. He regularly lectures around the country speaking about the effects of the ‘war on terror’ and detention without trial. He is also author of the critically acclaimed Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim’s Journey to Guantanamo and Back.

Jihad and Terrorism: A War of Words

All is War
In partnership with a wide range of organisations and individuals from the Middle East, South Africa, Europe, the USA and Canada, Conflicts Forum has initiated a project focused on media stereotyping. The aim of this partnership initiative is to explore the possibilities for addressing the Western hostile use of language intended to close down any debate extending beyond the standard focus on ‘Islamist violence’. We aim to find the visual imagery, and the metaphors appropriate in a secular society to generate the ‘oh, I get it now!’ moment for Western viewers in terms of the Islamist critique of Western modernity, and their alternative vision. This will require investing Islamist concepts with a new significance and meaning that provokes recognition and a positive response from Western audiences.

Essentially, we aim to critique Western language that is usually used to close down critical debate, and the associated Western ‘narrative’ that suggests a linear progress from historical ‘backwardness’ to Western ‘modernity’, accomplished via the achievement of the secular liberal nation-state—a narrative that implies that the West is advanced; and that others are backward along this continuum of history. We also seek to resist, and to expose, the use of language associated with imposing Western identity hegemony on others. By formulating assertive counter-responses, the aim is to disarticulate language intended to, and used to, erode, belittle and ridicule Muslim identities.

Through this partnership mobilisation initiative, our aim is to explore possibilities to find alliances across the global sphere with other communities—with whom there may be little obvious commonality—such as Western-based human and civil rights groups and anti-racist movements—but which, nonetheless, share with Muslim movements the desire to define identities other than Eurocentrism. All these movements, whether Muslim or secular, share a desire to place human beings back at the centre of society; who wish to see a just global order emerge, and who struggle for social justice.

Al Gore’s effective mobilisation of a global constituency in support of action to combat abuse of the planet promoted by visual techniques suggests a method of operation that may have a wider applicability. We will therefore particularly look at practical ways of using visual techniques to explain and to mobilise opinion by graphically depicting the escalating language and imagery of a war of identities, and war and conflict that is so often a consequence of this.

This magazine is the first of a series produced as part of this media and cultural stereotyping and wider political mobilisation initiative. The articles in this issue focus on the use/misuse of language and provide a critique of the demonisation and manipulation of Islamist concepts, thinking and ideas which underlie Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims and Islamist movements. Our aim is to develop a new discourse—a change in discourse away from that of ‘victimhood’ and of language used to defame communities and identities as part of a wider policy of instigating conflict, state-sponsored violence and militarism. This, we believe, is an essential pre-condition to political change.

Conflicts Forum

Above
Graffity (Palestine in Arabic) in the walls of Neirab Palestinian Refugee Camp, Syria
The agent insisted on repeating the word ‘terrorist’ when referring to me. Nothing new in his thought. Then, he used an Algebraic equation to prove his rather puerile point in trying to get me to cooperate. ‘Your equations’ is X=Z?, he said as he wrote out his findings. ‘X is you, Y is your non-co-operation and Z is ‘terrorist’—a term which will stay here for a very long time.’ After three years of this sort of thing I was no longer intimidated by the military or the interrogating agency. I replied by telling him that algebra was an Arabic word that clearly struck terror in the hearts of people in the West—and the east for that matter (at least if you were teenager studying trigonometry).

But I also told him algebra wasn’t the only word Arabic word that frightened people and the West with the fighters of Afghanistan would respond to the word ‘terrorist’ when addressing the very real problems that issue in killing unarmed civilians. There is no rajoolah or honour desire for personal vengeance. So I spare him…’

During the 1980s, mujahideen became almost exclusively associated in the West with the fighters of Afghanistan resisting the Soviet Union’s occupation of their land. Their name was ennobled throughout Europe and America and, the rallying cry, under the banner of jihad, was endorsed by fatwas (religious edicts) from Islamic scholars as well as Western leaders and politicians. Even Hollywood waded in, lionizing the ‘glorious mujahideen’ with a dose of Sylvester Stallone in Rambo 3. A fact conveniently brushed aside today is that Afghan and Arab mujahideen were fighting not just for their land, but for their culture, their religion and their identity.

In the early days of Islam—and even before it—duels of strength would be fought between champion warriors of one-to-one combat. The Messenger (saw) and his companions were renowned for their ferocity and steadfastness in battle towards the enemy as much as they were known for their piety. But Islam is more towards the way which was intended. Rather than contradict one another. Even the physical jihad itself is said to have ended with the heart and tongue, as well as through wealth and actions. The hadith of Messenger (saw) says: ‘The mujahid is the one who strives against his own soul,’

By consensus of the Islamic schools of thought, any action or tool that leads to the accomplishment of the obligation, like prayer and fasting, on Muslims and men when their land is converted to Islam, prisoners and even the mujahid—in its linguistic meaning, ‘purification’, would also be entirely rejected. Those who engage in jihad (killing) are not called ‘mujahidin’ or ‘fighters’. However, such a usage is said to have become familiar among those who engaged in killing or doing what is called ‘shahada’ (mar- tyrdom). It would seem absurd for people who interpret jihad as the ‘daily struggle with the tenets of Snowdonia’s National Park and the mountains of Snowdonia’s National Park and the Scottish Highlands. Testimony from the instructors tells of how they found the bonds of friendship and even love that they developed for each other while fighting. ‘We are the people who fought against the army of God… it is difficult to prove to others the truth of our cause when the mujahideen were not carrying the word ‘terrorist’ that the Afghan mujahideen were not carrying out strikes against civilian targets in the West either.

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Perhaps the most revered personage in the Islamic doctrine. But, we can equally say too that the mujahideen were not carrying out strikes against civilian targets in the West either.

Islam is commonly described in the West as ‘holo war’. But holy war in Arabic would be ‘Harb al-Muqadassah’

There are even dire warnings in the Qur’an for Muslims who abandon jihad: If you do not march forth for Allah and His Messenger, then Allah will send upon you the worst of peoples and will replace you with another people, while you will be in no way able to harm Him. Allah has power over all things.

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junior, referring to “this crusade” soon realised how offensive it might sound to potential Muslim allies that the USA was now openly waging a war in a par with the Divine. The wording that followed was equally inapt. Operation Enduring Freedom proved beyond doubt that American freedom was indeed—for all of us unfortunate enough to have tasted American incorporation—a thing to be endured. It was more like ‘Operation End Your Freedom’ for us and the thousands more who were later detained around the world. We began to desire for justice, mutated into a wanton act of revenge and is now a war against a faith and anyone who is deemed to be a part of it is gifted (or cursed) with.

Muslims have learned the meaning of Bush’s ‘American justice’ in Guantánamo, Bagram, Abu Ghraib and the multitude of secret detention sites dotted around the world. The process of extraordinary rendition (kidnap, false imprisonment, torture); religious, racial and sexual abuse; cruel and degrading treatment are all designed to terrify victims and have produced false confessions to justify more occupation (and is now a war against a faith). That train of thought was started when the occupiers of Iraq and Afghanistan—today the Nazis too would have been welcomed by a few Britons—so as they had been in many other countries—and would have labelled the British terrorisers ‘terrorists’ as they had the French resistance.

The Arabic word ‘ihab’ is today used to describe terrorism. However, the usage of this word has altogether dissimilar roots and applications to its European counterpart. The Qur’an states: “And prepare against them [the enemy] what ever you are able from power and from steeds of war [weapons and stratagems] in order to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy of Allah and your enemy…”

Although the striking of terror referred to in this verse is sometimes incorrectly used by some Muslims to justify terrorism it is clear according to both classical and non-classical Qur’anic exegesis that the reference is to an army preparing for battle. Knowledge that a powerful and determined army, prepared and committed is enough to give any opponent force cause for concern. But armies—Muslim or not—are not gathered, supposedly, to threaten and terrorise civilian populations.

Another Qur’anic verse sometimes misapplied to the same effect is: “And if they transgress against you then transgress against them the way they transgress against you…” to justify indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians as a justifiable retaliatory tactic of war, going beyond the ‘collateral damage’ argument. But the same verse ends with: “And fear Allah and know that Allah is with those who fear him” repeating to his soldiers to never target women, children, old people, clergy or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence; and of coercing government or communities. The Qur’an states: “And fight in the Way of Allah those who are engaged in oppression, abuse and violation of human sanctity ordinarily forbade the use of fire to kill, mutilation of corpses, cutting down vegetation unnecessarily or torturing captured prisoners. Although jihad seeks to terrify those who are engaged in oppression, abuse and violation of human sanctity ordi
diers under the leadership of indicted war criminals Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadiz and Ratko Mladic. In addition to this, it is alleged that the Bosnian Serbs were brutally killed and ethnically cleansed from their own homes. Subsequently, thousands of Muslims from around the world once again volunteered under the banner of jihad to come to the rescue of their beleaguered co-religionists. However, crimes perpetuated by the enemies of Muslims did not give them leave to reciprocate. Muslims could not ever contemplate setting up rape camps for captured Serb women—or any other women.

It was after encountering the body of a non-Muslim woman killed in battle that the Prophet said: “She is not one who would have fought.” He then said to one of companions: “Catch up with Khalid [ Ibn al-Waleed, the foremost Muslim general] and tell him not to kill women, children and prisoners.” The Messenger was even more specific later, repeating to his soldiers to never target women, old men, clergy and unarmed villagers. He also emphatically forbade the use of fire to kill, mutilation of corpses, cutting down vegetation unnecessarily or torturing captured prisoners.

The stark irony lies in there being about as much honour in this as there is freedom.
At the outset of the Second Intifada, I was invited to listen in on a Tuesday morning conference call that took place between Israeli officials, senior officials of the Israeli embassy in Washington DC, and a large number of Americans who were high profile defenders of the Jewish state. My attendance was an accident: I had been invited by a friend who was intent to dispel my constant complaints that the Israelis and their American supporters were regularly—and I thought purposefully—misconstruing the depths of Palestinian anguish at the escalation of violence between the two peoples, and that Israeli rhetoric was fueling this escalation.

“There is nothing nefarious in what we are doing in the American media,” this friend had told me, “and I’ll prove it to you.” The result was that I became one of 54 members of a weekly ‘messaging meeting’ between the Israeli government and their American supporters. The conference call that I was a part of was hosted by Ephraim Sneh, who laid on “the issue of the week” and then reviewed what he called “a handful of talking points” that “we would all like you [those listening in on the conference call] to focus on in the coming days.” Sneh then took questions from the participants, though there weren’t many. After a slight pause, Sneh once again repeated “the major message for the week” and then emphasized “a few key words that we should all be using.”

While the details of that conference call are buried deep in one of my notebooks, my memory still retains the utter surprise I felt at the Israeli political establishment’s focus and emphasis on the media—and particularly their attention on television. But I should not have been surprised and my friend was right: there was nothing nefarious in what was happening; the same kinds of meetings take place every week at the White House, at Number 10 Downing Street, and in nearly every national capital. ‘Messaging’—shaping what the media will report and how—is among the most important things that governments do.

But I sometimes get the impression that the Palestinians don’t pay much attention to it. Which means that those of us who are partisans on this issue, who live in the US or Europe (or anywhere else for that matter) and are asked to comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in public (and most especially in the media), have to take special care to respond clearly and carefully to the claims and allegations made by Israeli officials and their partisans. Over the past 25 years, I have appeared on literally dozens of national and international news and talk shows (on CNN, the BBC, al-Jazeera, MSNBC, and Fox News—among many others) to speak on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Those experiences have convinced me that there are a set of methods that can be effectively used when talking about this issue, that can make a difference in actually convincing people that there is more than one story here—and that second story is a story of occupation, oppression and dispossession.

I want to review some of the methods that I have used here, as well as some of the turns of phrases and arguments but first, allow me to simply list some of personal rules that I follow during my appearances:

**Talking about the Conflict**

Breaking stereotypes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is difficult, but it can be done.

Written by Mark Perry
Photograph by Aisling Byrne
Never raise your voice, never lose your temper, never interrupt. It was Marshall McLuhan, the guru of televi-
sion, who called television a “cool medium”—which meant that those who
speak clearly and concisely are more like-
to be listened to than those who do not.

Never lie. We are all faced with uncomfortable truths, and it’s simply
better to admit to them and get it out of
the way. But there are ways to acknowl-
edge the truth while making a salient
point. Doing so almost always places
the questioner on the defensive.

Never call someone who disagrees with you a liar. This is difficult to do, as
sometimes a person sitting opposite you
(television producers love debates) pur-
posely tries to make a point. This hap-
pened to me recently on a high profile talk show. The subject was Hamas. My
response to the lie was even-handed: “I
recently compared America’s allies in
Lebanon (a quite different topic than the
Israel-Palestinian conflict, to be sure, yet…) with Britain’s allies during the
American revolution—calling them
“Hussians,” a word that is immediately identifiable to all Americans and denotes
(for us), a group of soldiers who are not
only paid mercenaries, but cowardly. I
have often used similar historical refer-
ences to the American revolution, com-
paring the foreign occupation of
Palestinian lands with our own. These
kinds of comparisons always bring angry
responses from Israelis, who respond
quite predictably that “the two situations
are quite different…”—to which I
respond: “well, of course you would say
that, but of course they are occupations, so
they’re very much alike, and like the
American people, the Palestinians are
fighting for their independence.”

I have talked with a lot of people about
what works and what does not work on
television, on the radio and in print, and
there is some disagreement. And I know
some will disagree with my following points: I do not talk about international
law, or the United Nations, or how Israel
violates international law or UN resolu-
tions. The reason is that I think doing so
is a trap. The discussion then becomes
about the UN and international laws—
and not about Israel. Nor do I talk about
the impact of my views. I am often asked:

“Mr. Perry, how will your views
affect Israel?” My answer is always the
same. “Frankly, I don’t know how my
views will affect Israel and I don’t care. I
am an American citizen. So I am much
more concerned about how my views
will affect the US.” The “I don’t care” real-
ly puts people back. Nor will I concede
what people here in the US take as “givens”—that the Palestinians must, in
the end, give up the right of return. For
me the right of return is inviolable. Nor
will I concede that the Palestinians
should negotiate while under occupa-
tion. The right to resist occupation is not
simply a matter of international law, it is
inalienable—and given to all people,
everywhere, in any time.

Finally, while I have written that argu-
ning the Palestinian cause does not mean
that you need be disagreeable, I have,
from time-to-time, simply found myself
saying, firmly, that what a moderator or
other guest has said “is simply not true.”
And I have made a point, on rare occa-
sions, interrupting a guest to say this.
There is, after all, a limit and, not surpris-
ingly (given the subject) all of us often
reach it. 

Refusing talk to facilitate talk:
an overdue task, or an exercise
in appeasement?

Lecture by Alastair Crooke, given to
The Issam Fares Institute for Public
Policy and International Affairs,
American University of Beirut,
Beirut, 17 January 2008
Photography by Tanya Habjouqa

With this the leader of a Washington
think-tank smiled satisfied to her audi-
ce and sat down.

Clearly the baying scepticism of her
question “and you believe them?” was
fairly clear. It implies a conviction that
Islamists have nothing to say, or if they
do speak, and when they do have some-
ting to say, that this is just babble with
no particular meaning or sense to it.
This exchange conveys the sense in the
West that when Islamists speak, their lan-
guage is somehow shadowy, unreached
and coded, whereas our language—that
of the West—is transparent, accessible
and honest. When we say we support
democracy, we are serious, whereas when
Hezbollah or Hamas say that they
support democracy, they of course
are lying. This is the implication of the
way that the question above was framed.

The idea that non-Western cultures and
non-Western language is somehow
ephemeral and peripheral is an idea
deeper rooted in colonialism and coloni-
al thinking. In fact, it was the Greeks
who coined the word barbarians and
barbarism; for them, the people who
lived outside the bounds of their civilisa-
tion were barbarians. And it was from
this word literally that they coined the
word ba’ba’—people who stammered
and who spoke a language that had no
meaning. That’s what we all—barbarians—when we talk about Islam-
ists only speaking in babble today. At
that time the Greeks used it in particular
with reference to the Persians who they
accused of rejecting the ideas of the
Greek classical city state. Those people,
the Persians, had other ideas; they were
somehow uncivilised, slaves to tyrants.
Two weeks into the July 2006 war in Lebanon, Bint Jbail, a town in the south of Lebanon appeared to be annihilated, with survivors climbing out of the wreckage having survived intense aerial bombardment. This was once the vibrant city center—an homage to Khomeini. It has since been razed and the town residents are building/resurrecting a new monument to replace it.

Essentially language is a tool of power which is being used very deliberately in the West to erode the identity of people from having any real meaning.
The implied sense that they’re lying—
the deceit that was implied in this ques-
tion states becomes nothing more
prison even today. And violence by
ly 40 Hamas parliamentarians remain in
the civilised world. In fact, approximate-
d parliamentarians as we would within
no longer necessary for us to treat elect-
They are not part of the civilised world:
parliamentarians from the uncivilised
of international law. When Hamas or
simply have put them beyond the scope
are, in a sense, beyond civilisation in the
roots, the creepers and stalks of the jun-
garden you could see the tentacles, the
jungle”, a villa of civilisation. This villa
has taken Edward Said’s analysis and
Greeks of their true intentions and plans
ploy couldn’t trust other city states. Other
Islamism which has emptied language of
anything, any real content.

This happens not only with Hamas
and Hezbollah. You see exactly the same
process taking place elsewhere. In
Iraq you will see, for example, the
Western Powers involved in the removal
al-Sadr and others and they comment,
well of course this is what they say, but
in reality this is not what they mean. When
Muqtadir al-Sad talks about Arab
nationalism or Arab ties or community
connections within Iraq, he describes
mean what he says. When

Resistance can be the way to facilitate dialogue, but only one sort of dialogue

Fanon suggests that behind the anguish of those written off as backward lies a
deeper, a Western indifference: “this automatic manner of classifying him and
depreciating everything in him, his courage, his determination, his principles, is
not an appropriate or possible answer in the language of mediation. When
language is not being used for
communication or to comprehend or to
mediate, it is being used here to erode an
alternative use of language.

In a sense this underlies the reason why
we face resistance. Because in one
way, resistance can be the way to facili-
tate dialogue, but only one sort of dia-
logue, I want to term is the dialogue
on the “other” [in the guise of the white man], for
the “other” alone can give him his
worth and self esteem. For some, at
the climax of their anguish, there remains
only one solution for the miserable [colo-
nial]. Fanon suggests that is to be
overwhelmed by a desire to furnish proof of
his whiteness [modernity] to others and
above all to himself. He argues that he
should stop making arguments that

have understood this and wrote
about this most clearly is Frantz
Fanon who, writing in the 1960s when
the World to the West was ready to
identify and identification of his
time working in colonial Algeria, about
the feelings of inadequacy and dependency
of the black man. As he puts it, it is
necessary when societies get stuck, like
the borders of South Africa.
It was, in essence, this latter inter-
vention that led me to start to think and critique the language of the
east and its insistence on special rights for white people—that
allowed to South Africa to step beyond those limits and
to move to a new situation. This is
what I mean by the need for an internal
rethinking and alternative values which

should be heard what Islamists are really say-
ing. Only in this way will the ideas about
Islamism and what it says about the West
become possible, because only then will it be
possible for the West to grow and develop. It was not an effort
simply to criticise the West in order to
be able to hear what Islamists are really saying. Only by the
way they were used in the immediate
critique coupled with the resist-
ance that was taking place from within
the Muslim world. Only in this way can the ideas about
Islam and what it says about the West become possible, because only then will it be
possible to hear what the Islamists are really saying.
In a sense, this is the paradox of the current situation: that you need to refuse dialogue to get dialogue. Only by refusing to engage on the terms set by the West, are we only prepared to sit down and talk on different terms, will simply accept your rules. Only when the West understands the need to listen to these insights on their own terms will we see a dialogue that has any real meaning. The Islamists do have ideas, they do have an ideology which has a potential to sever stale relationships in societies and stale ideas between people and societies. They have a category of rationality which Muslims find both energising and mobilising as one can see from the excitement and energy if you visit Gaza or south Lebanon—the excitement of young people who work with Hamas who are stimulated by these fresh ideas.

For the West, Islamist discourse is a discontinuity in the Western narrative that does not fit neatly in our view of history. When a sudden thing comes up—like the Iranian revolution—we regard it as an aberration with little real meaning to us because we are on a different track of narrative and therefore it can be safely ignored. The West sees nothing more important for itself than what has been called its ‘fetish of the individual’, and clearly this was the message that Mr Bush brought in his tour around the world in January 2008. Nothing is more important than the primacy and freedom of individuality. Individualism is the basic entity around whom social processes, fears, passion and reason and propensities for good and evil all circulate.

Islamists are saying that Western thinking in this fashion is flawed—these wants and needs of man that we are all so familiar with and that get catered to so well in the West are actually diminishing man himself. They diminish him and the single-minded pursuit of these needs diminishes others. Individuals become simply a means to an end, whether it’s a means of simply satisfying our individual economic, social or sexual needs. Elevation of this personal and material welfare of the individual objectifies the human being and is, in a sense, a result of trying to put the individual before others in our contact with the outside world. Islamists argue too about the need to re-establish ideas which go beyond need and wants, that are multi-dimensional, that return the human being not simply to this narrow category of the rational economic actor that seeks simply to maximise his or her economic and material welfare, but looks at him/her in a multi-faceted way and puts him/her back at the centre of society again.

Islamists also are increasingly recognising that Western modernity in the processes of history and our meaning of modernity. They do not accept the idea that the whole of history is portrayed as a continuous spectrum from backwardness to modern secular life and that they do not accept that the West is at the most advanced form of society—at the extreme of the spectrum from backwardness to advanced-ness. Nor do they accept that this model is the only appropriate or available model for others. They do not accept that those who offer a vision of a different future are by Western definition, those who are either cultural or too resistant to be able to attain modernity. They do not accept the power relationships of the West that exist within our societies or between our societies. They do not accept that the success and advance of the individual is the litmus of advance in society versus their view that it is actually the cohesiveness of society and community which should be the test of progress. For Islamists, they view progress in terms of progress towards community cohesion and not simply the progress of an individual.

They also question our understanding of individualism and what it means in terms of freedom. Does individualism mean freedom? This is a question that is being widely asked by many Muslims: they query the Western claim to the universality of its rationality based on its foundations in empiricism and scientific methodology. They do not accept that this basis for Western rationality is somehow more objective and therefore superior to other forms of rationality. They hold that the West, by confining itself to a narrow, ostensibly objective form of thinking has excluded deductive, syllogistic and metaphorical thinking. Islamists would say that the West believe this to be the essence of rationality, they think that it is objective. But Muslims see it just as laden with values judgements as any basis of thinking and by restating its rationality on only one basis of critical thinking—empiricism—it has lost the capability of seeing issues in the round. They therefore reject the claim to universality to Western thinking or values.

You may or you may not agree with the Islamists on these points. You may see, and many of you probably do, contradictions and divergences in Islamist discourse and in a short talk like this
done and be more realistic in seeing what we’ve become. Is the only answer within the present Western limits of thinking to the challenge of Islam and the Islamic revolution... to bomb it? Is that where we have got to? Do we not have to see and think that this is the limit to what we have become? Moving beyond these limits also requires listening to some of the insights that others have.

Islamists recognise that some thinkers in the West stand above this conflict and that their thinking is relevant to all mankind. This conflict that we see and which is no longer possibly as real as it was when the Enlightenment started. We all know this is not true. Many in the West find it difficult to bear the ideas that are coming out of this part of the world and when they do they say “and you believe them? And you listen to this nonsense, this babble!” The ability to actually think and look critically at ourselves is probably the missing element in this political process of talking. We do need, if we want to move away from this conflict, to escape from our current conditioned thinking—what Foucault described as the “blackmail of the narrative of history”—of our narrative of the enlightenment, which is no longer possibly as real as it was when the Enlightenment started.

We need to challenge our acquiescence to Western language and norms which we all submit to. I speak from my experience of having worked in the European Union and in the diplomatic arena that some things are just not possible to say in the West anymore. You notice the silences in the Annapolis process; what word about the siege on Gaza or Hamas? Does anyone remember hearing about this? Saying these things in Western diplomatic circles have become unacceptable. Someone at a gathering in Washington recently raised the question about Hamas and everyone said, “we simply cannot discuss that here, not in this meeting; it’s not acceptable”.

In a sense, I am saying that what is needed is a resistance in the West; a resistance from within—along the South African model—the business men and the critical thinkers who can see, who look at what’s happening in Iran, in this region and say: “Have we got this right? Do you think we ought to be rethinking this? Have we reached the limits of our thinking? Maybe we ought to step beyond ‘special rights for white men’ in the Middle East and think afresh.”

I believe we need to think afresh, to go back to some of the foundations of Western culture not simply to diminish or criticise them, but this is the means by which we can step beyond our present impasse. Unless there is an internal critique of what is happening, we shall remain stuck. We may proceed by bombing Iran and possibly killing another two hundred thousand people, and we shall be asking ourselves, is this really what we want to do? Is this a moral thing to do? But this will not change the situation.

Unless there is this questioning and re-thinking in the West—and I use the word deliberately—then I think that the West will remain unchanged. This is also the view of many Islamist thinkers—that the West will remain unchanged and that talking is pointless and therefore conflict will continue. We will have no real dialogue and will have only process with no real meaning—a process of un-meaning rather than meaning.

Talking therefore, in terms of the title of this talk, is not overdue. Sadly, at this stage, the West cannot hear. Talking at this stage is premature—the only answer is to continue the paradox of refusal to talk in the hope that this will provoke people to think about how—at some point—they can step past the limits of a mindset that is opposed to listening to others.

More people in Tehran read Foucault probably do in Oxford or Cambridge
The journey from London and San Francisco to political Islam, Islamism or just Islam for two of the six of us who founded the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) back in 1997 is not a reflection on IHRC’s ethos, which is simple to stand up for the oppressed whoever they are and whomsoever oppresses them. It is perhaps that simplicity or more specifically its sound derivations that has attracted the label of ‘Islamist’ to the organisation, its work, offices, volunteers, (some of whom I have not even met). It starts with the Quranic verse: “75. And what reason have you that you should not fight in the way of Allah and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, (of) those who said: Our Lord! cause us to go forth to the fray those of us, whose towns are oppressed, and give us from Thee a guardian and a helper.”

It’s an important concept that makes IHRC’s work applicable not only to Muslim constituencies, but reflects universal concern that imbues Islamic notions of duty—an important and politically significant dynamic aspect of the religion that is often overlooked (maybe deliberately so) by those amongst political and cultural elites, who deny Islamic notions of ‘ummah’ as chauvinistic and other aspects of the religion as particular and antithetical to reason and right and all else that the Enlightenment (supposedly) gave (European) humanity.

Working from the ground—advocating for prisoners in various countries, victims of discrimination, writing about and interpreting human rights theories and laws, and trying to apply them and make them relevant for the communities who desperately need that discourse, has given us an insight into how languages of Islam and non-Islam work in a global political culture of polarization and a global subculture where the voiceless and oppressed struggle to articulate their very real grievances and change the way they are defined by language as cultural, law, policy and war.

Journeys: Leningrad

At the Piskaryovsky Memorial Cemetery circa 1984, 1 (Arzu) who understood that the USSR had fought a war in Afghanistan, and that Nazi Germany was still about to unleash its claws on Europe, had found to its upheavals over 700,000 inhabitants of Leningrad died during a 900-day siege of that city. Unnamed, and buried en masse, they are still remembered. Communism came and went, but the war remains.

Standing in the same place in 1989 with a group of 16-year-old, high achievers in British schools, for us this was the same school as me, I was nauseated to hear them say they didn’t realise the ‘Russians’ and the ‘we’ that are part of the or the other ideas would be more easily understood with some better culturally sympathetic translation. As the benchmarks of Palestine and Tunisia can (and have tried to) explain themselves in terms of democratic aspirations in a manner that those brought up in Western traditions of democracy can relate to. This would make more sense if Western traditions of democracy had a universal model that other aspirations can be measured against. One of us just having studied the rise of the KGB and its ‘black book’ just ahead of that, the glory days of rampant corruption of Belgium is seriously exhausted, and is still struggling with America and Super Tuesday. First past the post is pretty easy in comparison, as was the Palestinian Authority before Bush et al decided that a government of National Unity is the only road to survival, for the people. It’s anti-democratic and effectively appointed another government.

While critiquing, various Marxist and critical schools of international politics will point out the heightened state of consciousness that the oppressed have to see the truth of any situation... it comes from Hegel with Marx’s additional explanation. No thought of Sartrean, no idea of mustachioed Che Guevara, the same men performing the same job (but with the addition of Israeli Defence Force guards) in Jenin six months later. It’s not that the language is corrupted or corrupting, it is the refusal to share the language by the powerful with the powerless.

For another one of us (Massoud), it wasn’t enough of an argument that many Americans were being slaughtered therefore the war was wrong. Wrong argument then, wrong argument now. The primary slaughter of war is a people of another nation, and for that reason, back in ‘68, “We were all Ho Chi Minh”, and for the same reason in 2006, aside from any other ethical, legal or military arguments that have a just war, we authorised IHRC to add its name to the posters of dead and injured Lebanese serving during the 33-day war, because then and now, “We are All Hiribullah.” The Spectator and various parts of the right wing press declared that this was a sign that an Iranian backed spate of terror attacks on the UK were imminent, citing Iran’s continued support for Shia post- ers and IHRC. They failed to note that Hiribullah flags at said demonstrations were supported by many including orthodox Rabbis, and the now infamous banners held by amongst others middle class English women appalled at the slaughter...

This is where the subculture exists, because increasingly people do understand that Islamists speak the same language and that actually sometimes the language of normativity starts with them. Islamism didn’t start with Vali e Fagh or Khilafah, it starts with the oppressed trying to (re)gain control over their lives and destiny without becoming part of the system that created that inequality, that oppression. In majority and what has been called the universal rejection of right wing military (and pseudo military) regimes, so-called left wing revolutions that have led to bloody killings of political opponents of various backgrounds, and monarchies of the Middle East (Pahlavi) or traditional (Saudi) forms of repression. Islamically oriented movements in minority situations sometimes reflect or sympathise with some or other of these movements, but they also have an agenda of their own. Whether they aspire to political integration like Christian nationalist parties within India or the Zionist lobby, or indeed rewrite the script of human rights to reflect a more universal understanding of justice these movements speak, write and engage in ways that can be understood by those who are already part of it. Nothing is lost in translation because there is nothing to translate.

The work of IHRC is testament to at least some of that in that its officers and supporters come not only from different Muslims schools of thought, they reflect Muslims and non-Muslims from different political and ethnic backgrounds, classes and travellers on different and similar roads to radicalisation. Whether it’s via Britton, Berkley or Bradford, some things speak across borders. It is a revolution in its own right and question is not how to make ‘Islamism’ whatever that may be, more accessible—it already is. The question is what sort of confrontation between those who understand its various forms and those who refuse to turn their heads. This will be determined by the intransigence of the powerful—and no amount of talking can change that without the powerful’s inclination to listen honestly...
I was so frightened and shocked by what I saw there, to be amongst a people denied what we take for granted: personal safety, food and shelter. I spent the next three years searching for "who is best positioned to really make a difference here". The trail led me to Conflicts Forum. There is a wide constituency in the West who want to know more and are confused and angry about what is happening in the Middle East. But whilst US/Israel have a strangle-hold on international media, little is revealed. So, how to implement new perceptions? To turn this fact so that the dominant party is obliged to respond rather than, as is now the case, always initiating. To get past Western fears, to counter the entrenched belief that Israelis are modern, civilised and "like us" whilst Palestinians are backward, chaotic and ruthless; to counter the distorted language being thrown out and to communicate this to the outside world.

Yonatan Mendel, writing in the London Review of Books, lists word manipulations: targeted assassinations rather than murder; that it’s only Palestinians who have ‘blood on their hands’; words such as ‘occupation/apartheid/racism’ are not used and there is an embargo in Israeli media of the term ‘East Jerusalem’. Knowing about these forms of distortion and censorship serves to expose how much we do not know about what we think we know.

What differentiates Conflicts Forum is its high level of engagement with parties that others can’t reach. Therefore it is necessary and important that our work on language is implemented and that it doesn’t just remain an intellectual exercise but that it is ‘put to work’ and can be accessed by researchers and journalists.

Might the opening up of language start the thaw? And then what will follow? All the wise men on both sides are saying the same thing: "You have to talk, learn to listen, to hear the other side’s narrative, then maybe understanding creeps in."

There is a need for talking as what we don’t understand we fear and what we fear we demonise. George Mitchell summarising: "If neither party can hear the case of the other side, you haven’t got a peace process."

Among the many invitations for dialogue, Habiballah Sheikh Jerada was talking to us in Beirut last June, where he said: "I like my mobile! My wife loves her microwave! But we also have much to offer. Debt is an anathema to us—for the world to be led by a country borrowing $1 billion a day and then at the same time this is the USA that casts us culturally backward! We are very aware of global issues—climate change, global security, financial meltdown, revitalising our communities. We are co-dependent. Isn’t it time we shared our wisdom on how the World community should be organised?" For me, this was an inspirational message.

The Chinese sage Lu Kun wrote “the song of good people” in the sixteenth century, of which perhaps the most important thing to learn is the need to share personal experience and, above all, to put yourself in another’s shoes. I put myself in my enemy’s shoes, I look back at him; two people/two tribes may never follow? All the wise men on both sides are saying the same thing: "We have a strangle-hold on our political perceptions and prejudices."

Written by Sukant Chandan
Photography by Maddy Bingham

"The Islamic ‘Other’ in Film"

Docu-dramas, documentary films and feature films are perhaps some of the most influential media by which we develop our political perceptions and prejudices.

Written by Sukant Chandan
Photography by Maddy Bingham

This has been recognised long ago and put to use on a mass scale during the Second World War, when films were used to rally the masses in the Allied countries against Hitlerite fascism. It was a time when the US made films celebrating Soviet guerrilla martyr attacks against the Nazi occupation, such as in the film North Star. The US has ever since pumped massive amounts of resources into this medium through the cinema, TV and more recently the internet.

With the emergence of the internet, online video file sharing and peer-to-peer download services in the last decade, the grip of the big production houses has decreased, and people now have relatively more access than before to a more complex and critical understanding of politics and culture. Consequently, films have also played a major role in shaping public opinion, and perceptions of the ‘Other’. The Other being non-white.
people generally, but today specifically defined as Muslims and Islamists which, we are told, do not share or are against ‘our’ values.

Perhaps the most well known example of a documentary film that has shaped public opinion is Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11. Many other films have had an impact on political discourses which are defining our time. Islamophobia, Western initiated war and occupation, or in the words of the world’s self-exclaimed standard bearers of democracy: “full spectrum dominance” and “shock and awe”.

While it is often US-made films that receive most attention, there have perhaps been more interesting and nuanced films made in Britain. Such films include White Girl, Mark of Cain, Britz and several documentaries, especially on the issue of Palestine.

Moore and Nick Broomfield’s films have been commercial successes. However one is not sure that they have been successful in assisting their mass audiences in understanding Muslims and their struggles for independence such as in Iraq or Palestine or through-out the Muslim world generally.

Fahrenheit 9/11 is seen by many as an insightful critique of US government reaction to 9/11, but it fails to give any insight into US foreign policy in the Middle East, policies that have led many in the region to view the 9/11 attacks as a reaction against the oppression of Arabs and Muslims over generations. Unexpectedly, the film does come from the right, however it is important to remember that people who oppose Western arrogance and for every time that we come from the left, it is important to remember that people who oppose Western arrogance and colonialism are defined as hostile by us,

Fahrenheit 9/11 is a bad movie, but not for the reason that it portrays Muslims as Muslims generally, but for the reasons of making pictures about Muslims as and to indict major politicians in the British film Meeting Resistance.

This didn’t start with George W Bush and the war on terror, it started with George W Bush and the war on terror, it started with the introduction of a new policy of ‘full spectrum dominance’ and ‘shock and awe’. Fahrenheit 9/11 is a documentary film of the now notorious massacre of 24 men, women and children by US marines in November 2005. While the film does show the gun-ho nature of the Marines, it fails to depict the Iraqis accurately. Iraqis are a proud people with a long history and tradition of multi-cultural Iraqi, Arab and Islamic culture which includes a deep sense of patriotism which they have defended against colonization of the past and today against neo-colonialism.

Battle of Haditha treats the Iraqi resistance in an even more problematic manner than that of the Iraqi non-combatants. One of the main resistance light, while a few moments ago he just massacred her family. The Western view er would rightly never accept such a depiction of a soldier of the Third Reich in relation to the French or Dutch, and would never accept the anti-fascist resistance as a fundamentally suspect move ment, so why should the viewer accept such a portrayal in this instance?

Radical Arab Nationalist Ibrahim Alloush explains in a critique of the film, “when the humanization perspective becomes a cover for humanizing the invader in Iraq or Palestine independently of politics, it changes into an aromatic, orientalist mechanism of reducing the Arab cause to a form of shallow humanitarian advocacy at best, and political misguidedness based on confusion of benchman and victim at worst... Undeniably, the movie’s message is tricky: it is an exorcism to exterminate the Marines in Iraq and the non-ideological resistance; present the residents as aim less burn animals ready for slaughter; and to indict major politicians in the West and ideologists in the East. Ultimately, it is a liberal media which turns reality on its head. Chassay’s reports cuts through the warped message in much of the main-stream media that Fatah equals a shared democratic value with Western democratic and that Hamas equals terrorism and ‘others’. Chassay shows that in Gaza Fatah’s armed wing are actively engaged in sending rockets into Israel, while Hamas is trying to defend the people’s right to self-defense. Hamas’ responsibility that any home-made Palestinian rockets are targeted at Israeli strategic points. Chassay shows the impact on Palest inians in Gaza of the blockade on Gaza by Israel. He explains that the resistance on Iraq’s soil. The puzzling thing about Broomefield’s ‘docu-drama’ is the way in which he depicted the relationship between the Iraqi civilians and resistance; it seems this was at odds with reality. The resi dents of Haditha have said that the resid ence are a part of the community who defend the people against the occupa tion forces. For some reason Broomfield has decided to completely distort the relationship between the resistance and the people of Haditha.

In contrast to Moore and Broomfield there are a number of British-made film productions which positively challenge the mainstream Islamicophobic discourse. In conversation with The Guardian jour nalist and film-maker Clancy Chassay on the subject of his video reports from Gaza, he said of his short films: “It encourages the viewer to engage with our shared humanity; a humanity too often denied to these victims.”

Indeed it is not a complicated princi ple to understand, but the ability to engage in a process to share a common humanity is beyond many people as a result of the sheer mass of mainstream media which turns reality on its head. Chassay’s reports cuts through the warped message in much of the main stream media that Fatah equals a shared democratic value with Western Demo cracy, and that Hamas equals terrorism and ‘others’. Chassay shows that in Gaza Fatah’s armed wing are actively engaged in sending rockets into Israel, while Hamas is trying to defend the people’s right to self-defense. Hamas’ responsibility that any home-made Palestinian rockets are targeted at Israeli strategic points. Chassay shows the impact on Palestin ians in Gaza of the blockade on Gaza by Israel. He explains that the resistance on Iraq’s soil. The puzzling thing about Broomefield’s ‘docu-drama’ is the way in which he depicted the relationship between the Iraqi civilians and resistance; it seems this was at odds with reality. The residents of Haditha have said that the resistance are a part of the community who defend the people against the occupation forces. For some reason Broomfield has decided to completely distort the relationship between the resistance and the people of Haditha.

Another off-limits subject seems to be the resistance, and that is Steve Connors’ documentary film Meeting Resistance.

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‘Riding Patriotic’ from Meeting Resistance
An analysis of the “integration” discourse in Belgium.

Written by Dyah Abou Jablah of the Arab European League

In the year 2000, some friends and I who were involved in social and cultural work within the Arab community in Belgium founded the Arab European League (AEL). I was elected president of the movement and we immediately started a debate on what is often referred to as the “integration issue”. At that time integration was the holy cow of multi-cultural society, and a concept that is beyond any criticism that defines the epistemological frame of citizenship and participation. Integration was understood as the adaptation of the newcomer (whether first or second generation) to the host society. In order to integrate one had to adapt himself (Zich Aanpassen) and that included dropping cultural and ideological aspects of one’s identity that are unacceptable by the dominant culture of the host society and adopting Belgian culture. If this didn’t occur a person would be then viewed as “un-integrated” and will face exclusion from society on several levels such as in employment, housing and education. However, if one “integrated” then one was considered an example to others and therefore will be granted extra advantages.

Our analysis was that such an integration paradigm is inherently racist and oppressive. It is racist because it is culturalist and culturalism is one of the main features of racism in our modern time. Integration is viewed as something undertaken by the newcomer and not the responsibility of society as a whole. It is the sole responsibility of the newcomer to integrate into the host society, and that society does not need to adapt itself as a friendly host, rather society is seen as static and fully defined. So the newcomer is supposed to annex himself to the new entity he/she is joining without having any right to participate in shaping it and defining it. In this thinking immigration is an act opposed to citizenship; it is an other dimension, and is only legitimized by the need of cheap labour for the host society. The immigrant is a guest worker than has two choices: returning home once his/her economic exploitation is fulfilled, or melting into the mass and abandoning everything that makes him/her different, i.e. most of that which defines himself/herself. The first generation of immigrants who remained in Belgium after years of working in the mines, the metal industry and the construction of roads and bridges adapted a very passive approach that is to work and live on the margins of society in constant anticipation of returning to their countries of origin. They accepted the position of migrant workers and after retiring they remained in Belgium because of their children who were born there and who had a stronger bond with the country. Mentally the first generation never left the countries of origin and never had to face the issue of integration in an active way, and the host society ignored the issue till the second generation appeared on the scene.

There comes a time when the second generation cannot be ignored in the streets of major cities. When they showed the symptoms of a generation faced with an identity crisis, racism and discrimination, all resulting in a social crisis rejected inwards and outwards—once all this was taking place, the weapon of integration was then raised and targeted at this generation. The children of immigrants who were born and raised in Belgium had to “integrate” and assume the position of grateful and obedient. If they refused to integrate they would be excluded and blamed for it. The second generation spoke French with an accent, and when walking in the streets. They behaved less like guests and more like citizens and therefore they posed a problem to the racist mindset.

Immediately the far-right reacted and called for deporting the immigrants to their countries of origin. The weapon of integration was then directed at the children of immigrants and we come face to face with an identity crisis, racism and discrimination, all resulting in a social crisis rejected inwards and outwards—once all this was taking place, the weapon of integration was then raised and targeted at this generation. The children of immigrants who were born and raised in Belgium had to “integrate” and assume the position of grateful and obedient. If they refused to integrate they would be excluded and blamed for it. The second generation spoke French with an accent, and when walking in the streets. They behaved less like guests and more like citizens and therefore they posed a problem to the racist mindset.

While carrying this tremendous and noble burden the white man is helped by “integrated” immigrants who are supposed to be a democratic institution, but in fact is used to oppress and imprison them. The integration model was presented as a multicultural model while in essence it was the opposite. The intellectual heritage of colonialism was revived to serve the project of immigration. The superiority of Western civilization in a linear understanding of human history where the white man’s culture and way of life is the pinnacle of evolution was the foundation on which the state demanded that we join this superior culture and abandon our own. The white man is also the liberator and emancipator of “oppressed women” of the immigrant community. They see women as people who need integration and have therefore the moral obligation to break the old “retarded cultures’ and ‘enlighten’ them. This doesn’t mean that the great white liberator and emancipator can not appreciate the exoticism of these savage women and men, on the contrary, a promotion of this exoticism and a taste for it are very useful tools to counter the claim of racism and assimilationism. The savages might have nice cuisine and some funny dances that can be kept for that purpose and fully enjoyed by everybody.

We redefined integration as a process that is holistic in that it is the responsibility of society as a whole to make space for new comers and adapt itself to multicultural realities, therefore demanding that diversity is no more seen as a problem but as a reality. Unfortunately this model of integration we were putting forward was violently rejected. We were attacked as daring to demand change in society, demanding adaptation to our needs as citizens; how can we even dream of such an abomination? What we conceived as basic human rights and common sense was considered in the paradigm of “integration” as running the world upside down. The reaction to the AEL was explosive, we were persecuted, imprisoned, fired from our jobs and declared persona non grata.

Since then, eight years later, we have succeeded in breaking the hegemony of the debate and clearly introduced a new discourse of citizenship and human rights in Belgium. Nevertheless the colonial structure of integration and exclusion is still in place and alive and kicking. They are still trying to make this a cultural issue while it is an issue of human rights, and our right to have a different culture while being equal citizens is still being rejected. However words are powerful and now we are also talking, debating and defining. Instead of integration being defined as assimilation, we believe it is citizenship and equal rights.
Afghan boy featuring on the cover artwork of Fun-Da-Mental’s 2001 album, There Shall Be Love.

A common man’s conscience.

Written by Aki Narwal

After 9/11 I recall commentators in the British media saying that the manner in which the US media was debating the political issues arising out of the attacks was diabolical, and the terminology was out of some cowboy movie. From that time until today I am absolutely gob-smacked to see how the West has followed down a path where a “clash of terminologies” and the “hijacking and false ownership of language” has become the norm. It’s enough to make one cry, but it has now become a complete comedy so much so that Muslims are not only fed up, but have easily been so different if only the West had listened to the warning signs, which are minor compared to their similarities. Humans seem to like to play on their differences which are minor compared to their similarities.

Muslims just want to live according to the rules of their own personal life or of that of their community’s structures. There is nothing to be alarmed at; people live like this anyway, they just happen not to be Muslim. Muslims allegedly want have been so intense that some Muslims have reacted by demanding things that they otherwise would not have. The dynamics are comical.

The nature of the debate, which for a brief time was actually respectful, has been totally manipulated to a one-sided propaganda can imagine. They are intense and worthy of being listened to. At the same time there is a need to go beyond the same old landscape of Western imperialism’s short-term interests and actions which means that instead of enlightened and progressive strategies we are all being dragged into further manufactured conflicts.

“They love to make war but do not like war against them; they love to kill but not be killed; they love to exploit but not be exploited; they love to hate but not be hated; they love to terrorise but...”. The list of accusations goes on endlessly. The terminology has become so absurd that most people do not believe that Muslims are innocent.

Tears and parades for soldiers killed in the name of those other hypocritical concepts of “democracy, liberty, and freedom” are an affront to any sense of decency. Who has raised the issue of how many innocents these soldiers probably killed before meeting the same treatment that they meted out to countless others?

The potential for a healthy debate on the West and Muslims has been suffocated. The exaggerations about what Muslims allegedly want have been so intense that some Muslims have reacted by demanding things that they otherwise would not have. The dynamics are comical.

Time is running out for the despots and tyrants of the Muslim world. Their form of governance is about to fall and it seems that, unless they vacate their thrones, only Islamic revolutions by the multitudes with the backing of the common people will prevail — then their governance will go through difficult times and hopefully manifest itself into some system of balance. We have been here before and are here again today.

The West is on a self-defeating path and the reverberations of its actions are having profound effects that most people are aware of. The West has totally lost its self-created moral high ground. Muslims on the whole will not be manipulated, submissive or dictated to. This is because seldom has wisdom emanated out of a colonial and imperial history. What progress has been made!

It is embarrassing to see that people believe what they hear in the media in an age where information is almost at everyone’s fingertips. Some say Muslims have become victims of media misrepresentations but in reality the real victims are those that ‘lock stock and barrel’ consume every piece of shallow analysis and as a result of this have decided that Muslims are the problem. Muslims realise that their voices are not tolerated in the mainstream media (deja vu Northern Ireland), and are resigned to this. It is only fools like me who seem to think there is a worthy ideological battle to be fought, whereas most Muslims I know and meet — although they encourage me in my efforts — themselves feel that “the media will never change and let them keep barking”.

This is not necessarily apathy or unwillingness on our part to discuss the issues of our time. Far from it, debates are rife inside the Muslim community, but take place behind closed doors. These debates are more revealing than the gullible victims of Western propaganda can imagine. They are intense and worthy of being listened to. At the same time there is a need to go beyond the same old landscape of Western imperialism’s short-term interests and actions which means that instead of enlightened and progressive strategies we are all being dragged into further manufactured conflicts.

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The nature of the debate, which for a brief time was actually respectful, has been totally manipulated to a one-sided arrogance diatribe. The amount of times I have been accused of justifying terrorism is laughable. Firstly, I believe in legitimate resistance, secondly I have no definition of the word Terrorism and if it’s the same one you have then my justification of terrorism” is nothing compared to yours.

It cannot be denied that some Muslims want to establish their own system according to their beliefs and religious structures. I have as much problem with this as I have with a Marxist or liberal secularist. In other words I have none! Unless you have a reasoned debate, not 30-second sound bites, then we will never realise that in reality we actually have a lot more in common. Humans seem to like to play on their differences which are minor compared to their similarities.

Write off the West as ideologically bankrupt. It’s simply “let them dominate, it’s the same one you have then my ‘justification of terrorism’ is nothing compared to yours.”

We will continue to unequivocally support Hezbollah and Hamas and we will endeavour to influence Al Qaeda to change its direction and tactics to a nobler one to resisting injustice directly rather than creating more injustice.

You can keep your words and manipulate them as you wish — you can keep us out of the debating chamber and refuse to give us a platform. Have your 30 seconds of fame. Misrepresent and dominate us but we know it is a loss that all of us are feeling.
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