

CULTURE RES OF RESIST ANCE.

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Cultures of Resistance Activism Forum
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JIHAD AND TERRORISM: A WAR OF WORDS



About the Cultures of Resistance Activism Forum

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 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.

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Submissions and information on the project

If you would like to submit articles, photos
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Cover

An Iranian woman sits in front of
a satirized drawing of the Statue
of Liberty, painted on the wall of
the former US embassy wall during
a demonstration in Tehran, Iran,
November 2005

Javad Montazeri, WorldPictureNews

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L—R
Moazzam Begg;
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EDITORIAL

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

"If 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 components of the West's narrative, 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 Islamist case to hear—that Islamists are irrational. This is not true. Secondly, the Islamist intellectual response is rarely heard 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.



Aising Byrne

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

Graffiti (Palestine in Arabic) in the walls of Neirab Palestinian Refugee Camp, Syria

JIHAD AND TERRORISM

A WAR OF WORDS

During my years of incarceration at Bagram and Guantánamo Bay, I was interrogated well over 300 times. One of those interrogations, by the CIA in my third year of US captivity, I still recall with a sense of amusement.

Written by Moazzam Begg

The agent insisted on repeating the word ‘terrorist’ when referring to me. Nothing new I thought. Then, he used an Algebraic equation to prove his rather puerile point in trying to get me to cooperate. “Your equation is $X+Y=Z$,” he said as he wrote out his findings. “‘X’ is you, ‘Y’ is your non co-operation and ‘Z’ is terrorist—a terrorist who will stay here for a very long time.” After three years of this sort of thing I was no longer intimidated by the US military or the alphabet agencies. I replied by telling him that algebra was an Arabic word that clearly struck terror into 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 the West, and he knew it.

There are hundreds of English words that have etymological roots in the Arabic language. Most of them are taken for granted and attract little controversy when used by ordinary English-speaking people. ‘Arabic numerals’ revolutionised and replaced cumbersome Roman ones. The words ‘alkali’, ‘chemistry’, ‘arsenal’, ‘cipher’, ‘admiral’, ‘magazine’, ‘sherbet’, ‘syrup’, ‘tariff’, ‘zenith’, ‘algorithm’ and even ‘checkmate’ are but a few that hark back to an Islamic and Arabic past that helped civilise the world. A few words

were regarded with a simultaneous sense of repulsion and admiration—of the exotic and mysterious, like ‘assassins’, ‘Saracens’ and ‘harems’. But there is an Arabic word used in the English language today that provokes more confusion, suspicion, hostility and fear than all others: ‘jihad’. And the time has come for Muslims to reclaim it.

The word jihad comes from the root verb jahada which linguistically means ‘to struggle’. The Arabic lexicon describes jihad as, “Making the utmost effort to attain something beloved or to save oneself from something disliked.” It is from this literal interpretation that many Muslims—and non-Muslims—erroneously limit the concept of jihad solely to the internal, spiritual struggle. Whilst recognising the importance of the spiritual jihad—the jihad of the nafs (self)—there is a critical danger in applying literal interpretations to words that have accepted meanings according to the consensus of Islamic teachings and jurisprudence. This approach does little to address the very real problems that issue from deliberate mistranslations and misconstructions of Arabic words and concepts from which Islam is not immune.

The five daily prayers in Islam are referred to in their singular form as ‘salaah’. There is no dispute in this matter and anyone attempting to restrict the practice of prayer to the linguistic definition, which simply means ‘connection’, would be guilty of heresy. Likewise, a similar reinterpretation of the Islamic obligation of zakaah—a tax Muslims are required to pay that assists the poor, beggars, tax collectors, orphans, travellers, recent converts to Islam, prisoners and even the mujahideen—to its linguistic meaning, ‘purification’, would also be entirely rejected. Those who engage in jihad are called ‘mujahideen’ and those killed doing it are called ‘shuhadaa’ (martyrs). It would seem absurd for people who interpret jihad as ‘the daily struggle of life’ to call themselves ‘mujahideen’ in life and ‘martyrs’ in death.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes jihad as a “religious war of Muslims against unbelievers; campaign for or against a doctrine.” Jihad is commonly described in the West as “holy war”. But holy war in Arabic would be ‘Harb al-Muqadassah’ and this phrase is simply not found in the Qur’an or the Sunnah (the way of the Prophet) which

are the best sources from which to understand the concept of jihad—or any other Islamic doctrine.

Jihad and ‘qitaal’ (fighting) are mentioned collectively over one hundred times in the Qur’an. Both appear often with the words ‘fi sabeel lillah’ (in the cause of Allah). The subject of jihad is addressed in great detail throughout the Qur’an; some very large chapters deal almost exclusively with the topic. All the authentic books of ahadeeth (Prophetic sayings and actions) contain hundreds of chapters under the title of ‘jihad’. This is also true regarding hundreds of general books of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) as well as those written exclusively about jihad.

Islamic scholars have categorized jihad in four levels: Jihad of the nafs (self), jihad against the shaytaan (devil) [desires], jihad against unbelievers and hypocrites and jihad against oppressors and evil-doers. Thus, limiting jihad to any singular interpretation would be incorrect. The best approach is in recognising that the varying levels complement, rather than contradict one another. Even the physical jihad can be waged by the heart and tongue, as well as through wealth and actions. The hadeeth of Messenger (saws): “The mujahid is the one who strives against his own soul,” does not negate or contradict other ahadeeth that mention jihad as “the peak of the matter” or as a deed that is unmatched in reward.

By consensus of the Islamic schools of thought jihad becomes an individual obligation, like prayer and fasting, on Muslim men and women when their land is occupied by foreign enemies. That obligation extends to neighbouring lands continuously until the enemy has been repelled. If the whole body of believers abandon it they are in a state of sin, if enough of them do it to complete the task, they are absolved. Jihad using wealth is also obligatory in securing the release of Muslim prisoners. Imam Malik said: “If a Muslim is held as a prisoner of war... it is obligatory on others to secure his release, even if it requires all the Muslims’ wealth.” Some scholars even argue that had jihad been emphatically prohibited in Islam it would become permissible by necessity when Muslims lands are invaded, in the way that pork becomes permissible for the Muslim if there is nothing else to eat.

There are even dire warnings in the Qur’an for Muslims who abandon jihad: If you do not march forth Allah will chastise you grievously and will replace you with another people, while you will be in no way able to harm Him. Allah has power over everything and in the Prophetic hadeeth: ‘A nation does not abandon jihad except that it is humiliated.’

Historically speaking, whenever the Qur’an cries to aid the oppressed: And what is the matter that you do not fight in the cause of Allah and the weak and oppressed amongst men, women and children who cry, ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors and raise for us one who will protect and raise for us one who will help people have always responded. Over time that number has dwindled, but the Prophet (saws) said: ‘There will not cease to be a group from my people, fighting upon the truth evident over those who fight them...’

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 fataawa (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 units were brought over to the UK during the ‘80s and given training by SAS (Special Air Services) commandos in the picturesque mountains of Snowdonia’s National Park and the Scottish Highlands. Testimony from the instructors tells of how they found the mujahideen, mountain-men themselves, so easy to teach. In fact, it was due to the British supplied Blowpipe anti aircraft missile system that the face of the war in Afghanistan changed. But not in the way which was intended.

The Mi-24 Soviet helicopter gunship, sometimes called “the Devil’s Chariot”, with its terrifying arsenal of mini-guns and rockets, wrought havoc upon the lightly defended mud-brick villages of the Afghan mujahideen. They had very few anti-aircraft capabilities and that is why the British supplied them with Blowpipe—which turned out to be high-

ly ineffective. It is at this point the US introduced clandestine supplies of heat-seeking Stinger anti-aircraft missiles which produced a kill-rate of 7:10. This became the catalyst in changing the face and direction of the war, the jihad, in Afghanistan.

Of course, there was widespread international support for the Afghan, Arab and Muslim resistance fighters back then and they were not referred to derogatively as ‘jihadists’ (instead of mujahideen) who practiced ‘jihadism’ (instead of jihad) and ‘Islamism’ (instead of Islam). But, we can equally say too that the mujahideen were not carrying out strikes against civilian targets in the West either.

In the early days of Islam—and even before it—duels of strength would be fought between champion warriors of opposing forces in one-to-one combat. This was part of the test of manhood (rajoolah) encompassing individual skill and courage. The Messenger (saws) and his companions were renowned for their ferocity and steadfastness in battle towards the enemy as much as they were for their mercy and magnanimity towards the vanquished. In one of the most celebrated duels ever recorded in Islamic history, during the Battle of the Trench, Ali, the Prophet’s cousin, accepted the challenge to fight Amr, “the greatest warrior in Arabia”. After a long, harrowing duel between the two fighters Ali managed to subdue his opponent. However, just as the final death-blow approached Amr spat in Ali’s face. What Ali did next has resounded throughout Muslim history—both Shiite and Sunni—as the quintessential example of selflessness, even if it is seldom practiced today. Ali rose calmly from Amr’s chest, wiped his face, and said. “Know, O Amr, I only kill in the way of Allah and not for any private motive. Since you spat in my face, my killing you now may be from a desire for personal vengeance. So I spare your life.” There is no rajoolah or honour in killing unarmed civilians.

Perhaps the most revered personage in the Muslim world—after the Prophet Mohammed (saws)—is that of Salahuddin (Saladin). For liberating Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the crusaders he has earned an eternal place in the hearts of Muslims throughout history. Even in these days of great trauma and turmoil it is not unusual to hear

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

Imams of mosques supplicate for the emergence of such a liberator. But it is admiration the West has given him that has truly set Salahuddin apart. His largess towards his enemies is the stuff of legend and his chivalry exemplary. His characteristics of humility, piety, bravery, honour, integrity and generosity are what most Muslims aspire to; especially the mujahideen. His recapture of Jerusalem in 1187 was comparatively tame to the wanton bloodlust carried out by the crusaders in 1099. He even pardoned many of those who fought against him as well as freeing a huge number of captives and giving rights of free passage and worship to civilians. And yet, non-Muslims who have bravely challenged Western misconceptions of Islam have fallen into the trap of denial. In his spectacular book about the life of Salahuddin one historian author writes astonishingly: “In the twenty first century, this term jihad has powerful resonance in the Islamic world. Although the word is not found in the Qur’an, it was in use from a very early date.” Such flagrant errors only enhance the notion that there is little desire in the West to really understand Islam.

In the wake of the attacks on September 11th the US administration attempted to launch its ‘war on terror’ under the name of *Operation Infinite Justice*. However, the ill-advised Bush

It began with a desire for justice, mutated into a wanton act of revenge and is now a war against a faith

junior, referring to “this crusade” soon realised how offensive it might sound to potential Muslim allies that the USA was now establishing itself on a par with the Divine. The rewording 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 incarceration—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. It began with a desire for justice, mutated into a wanton act of revenge and is now a war against a faith and the resources its people are 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 inhuman and degrading treatment are all designed to terrorise victims and have produced false confessions to justify more occupation of Muslim land. It is terrorism of the very worst kind, especially since it is carried out in the name of virtue. Inside the detention camps of Guantánamo—where the iguana is protected by law under the Endangered Species Act—

the detained men have no human or legal rights. Everything afforded to them is a ‘privilege’, including toilet paper. Outside each of the camps there is a plaque that reads “Honor Bound to Defend Freedom”. The stark irony lies in there being about as much honour in this as there is freedom.

There was little honour too in the violent strikes against civilians which claimed 2,976 lives in the US, 191 in Spain and 52 in the UK. But at least we know these numbers—down to the single digit—because each individual counts. In stark contrast, thousands of tonnes of tomahawk missiles, ‘hellfire’ rockets, cluster bombs, smart bombs, phosphorus bombs, 1500lb ‘daisy-cutters’ and billions of rounds fired from machine guns and assault rifles have killed more people in Iraq and Afghanistan than anyone knows. Estimates put the numbers at anything from 100,000 to two million. The reason why there are no reliable figures in either country is because no one counts. Not the killers and not the killed. They are less than collateral damage. They are not even numbers. They are nothing. If September 11th was terrorism—and I believe it was—then what do we call this?

The word ‘terrorism’ entered the English language in the late nineteenth century after the French revolution and

the ensuing ‘Reign of Terror’ gave birth to French democracy. However, since the notion of terrorism was first applied to a state rather than to an individuals or groups it has been almost impossible to arrive at a singular definition. Hence there are over 100 of them. The only common factor agreed upon is the inclusion of violence—or its threat. The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes the terrorist as “one who favours or uses terror-inspiring methods of governing or of coercing government or community.” It is not surprising that more recent definitions of terrorism, such as the one found in the American Heritage Dictionary, omit the inclusion of governments as potential candidates: “The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.”

It is not surprising too that Muslims have become angry and have even responded with actions outside the Islamic constraints in unleashing their outrage. If resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was jihad, if the repelling the massacres by the Serbs in Bosnia was jihad then how can resisting the present occupations of these Muslims lands be anything else? Was jihad simply a tool that could be used and discarded according to interests? The problem is that very few people care to distinguish between people who fight—or prepare to fight—invading forces abroad and those who choose to bring their fight to unarmed civilians who have little to do with it (and in many cases oppose the war too).

On 28 June 1940, Nazi forces occupied the British Channel islands as the enemy was knocked on Britain’s southern door. Whilst the bulk of British soldiers were engaged in operations around Europe, North Africa and the Far East over 1.5 million men joined the Home Guard, or ‘Dad’s Army’ as it was affectionately known. The contingency plan against a successful German occupation of Britain included the re-training of these men in guerrilla tactics. That training began in Osterley Park, London, where communist veterans of the Spanish civil war taught British volunteers how to make Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Molotov cocktails, hand

grenades and planned to sabotage and terrorise potential Nazi occupiers. The success of this training spread and several more camps were opened. Thankfully, the Nazis were defeated on their own soil but, they would have been in for a spot of bother had they landed in Britain. Rather like the occupiers of Iraq and Afghanistan, today the Nazis too would have been welcomed by a few Britons—as they had been in many other countries—and would have labelled the British insurgents ‘terrorists’ as they had the French *résistance*.

The Arabic word ‘irhab’ 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 contemporary 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 opposing force cause for concern. But armies—Muslim or not—are not gathered, supposedly, to threaten and terrorise civilian populations.

Another Qur’anic verse sometimes misappropriated in the same way 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” making it clear that however brutal the enemy may be Muslims are still required to do that which is conducive with fearing their Creator. The Qur’an states also: And fight in the Way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors. Indiscriminate slaughter and rapine are not practices sanctioned by Islam.

During the war—or jihad—in Bosnia in the ‘90s thousands of Muslim women were systematically raped by Serbian sol-

Outside each of the camps there is a plaque that reads “Honor Bound to Defend Freedom”. The stark irony lies in there being about as much honour in this as there is freedom

diers under the leadership of indicted war criminals Slobodan Milosovic, Radovan Karadic and Ratko Mladic. In addition to this, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians 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 perpetrated by the enemies of Muslims did not give them leave to reciprocate. Muslims could not ever contemplate setting up rape camps for captured Serbian 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, children, old people, 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.

Although jihad seeks to terrify those who are engaged in oppression, abuse and violation of human sanctity ordi-

nary, decent human beings should not have to fear it, even when their governments have committed crimes in their names. Being just to the enemy might be the hardest jihad of the nafs but it is required from Muslims nonetheless.

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah. Even as we resist our oppressors we should never allow them to become our teachers. ■

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 purposely—misconstruing the depths of Palestinian anguish at the escalation of violence between the two peoples, and that Israeli rhetoric was fuelling 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*



Palestinian refugee activists,
Neirab Refugee Camp,
Aleppo, Syria

Never raise your voice, never lose your temper, never interrupt. It was Marshall McLuhan, the guru of television, who called television a “cool medium”—which meant that those who speak clearly and concisely are more likely 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 acknowledge 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) purposely lies to make a point. This happened to me recently on a high profile talk show. The subject was Hamas. My response to the lie was even-handed: “I think my colleague is misinformed on this point,” I said evenly. “Hamas has not imposed Sharia law in Gaza.”

Rehearse. This sounds hackneyed, even pedantic. But I make a special point of practicing one-liners out loud, to myself, on the way to an interview. There is almost always a pre-interview, and I want to make certain that I’m prepared—that I don’t fumble my way through an interview. And I attempt to predict what a moderator will ask, and practice responses. No one likes to be surprised, and television networks prize a guest who is well prepared.

Listen to what the other person says. It’s actually amazing the number of times I will agree with an Israeli official on the air. About one year ago on al-Jazeera, an Israeli official said that his government would not negotiate a peace treaty with Syria “because the United States is opposed to us doing so.” I nodded my cool assent: “It is good to hear an Israeli official agree that his nation’s foreign policy is in the hands of George Bush. Congratulations.”

Since we are all attempting to think through this conflict—and each of us are engaged in it every day—you would think that it would be fairly simple to come up with ways of explaining it that are new and unique. But this remains our greatest challenge, and it remains difficult to identify a powerful means of getting our message across. I rely mostly on metaphors, and on history. My colleague

at Conflicts Forum, Alastair Crooke, is quite good at this. When the issue of Hamas’ recognizing Israel was a particular focus of the media, Alastair would smile wryly and shake his head ever so slightly: “Listen, if you wake up in the morning and look on your front lawn and see that there is a tank there, well of course you certainly recognize that you have a problem,” he said. “The problem is to keep the tank from going around back and ripping up your garden. That’s the real issue here.” The metaphor was very clever and very disarming. It communicated Palestinian powerlessness in the face of Israeli military superiority, it conveyed the problem faced by a nation under occupation, and it completely discredited the idea that the Palestinians do not “recognize” that they are occupied—it put the real issue, that they are a nation dispossessed and under occupation back at the centre of the debate.

The appeal to history is a good idea, so long as the history is clear. For instance, I recently compared America’s allies in Lebanon (a quite different topic than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to be sure, yet...) with Britain’s allies during the American revolution—calling them “Hessians,” 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 references to the American revolution, comparing 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 resolutions. The reason is that I think doing so is a trap. The discussion then becomes about the UN and international law—and not about Israel. Nor do I talk about the impact of my views. I am often asked:

“Well, 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” really 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 occupation. 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 arguing 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 of, on rare occasions, interrupting a guest to say this. There is, after all, a limit and, not surprisingly (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*

“So, you spoke to the leaders of Hezbollah?” “Yes.” “And you also speak with the leaders of Hamas?” “Yes.” “And they told you that they support democracy?” “Yes.” “And you believe them?”

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

Clearly the biting 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 something 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 language is somehow shadowy, unreachable 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, then 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 parochial is an idea deeply rooted in colonialism and colonial 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 civilisation were barbarians. And it was from this word literally that they coined the word ba’ba’d—people who stammered and who spoke a language that had no meaning. That’s what we call them—barbarians—when we talk about Islamists 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. These people, the Persians, had other ideas; they were somehow uncivilised, slaves to tyranny.

THE PARADOX OF ISLAMISM

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
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The implied sense that they're lying—the deceit that was implied in this question about Islamist discourse, about democracy or about their policy—is also another classical inheritance that we have. This essentially came from Plato who argued very strongly that you simply couldn't trust other city states. Other city states lied and used subterfuge and deceit in order to try and deceive the Greeks of their true intentions and plans and so nothing these people said could be taken at face value because they must be just lying and deceitful.

We have today in the West, not only this classical language, but we have in a sense a new Orientalist language which has taken Edward Said's analysis and criticisms about Western language and the 'other' to new peaks. We have a language which was summed up when Ehud Barak, then defence Minister of Israel, when he described Israel as a "villa in the jungle", a villa of civilisation. This villa was set down in the jungle and at the villa walls; just at the edge of the cultivated garden you could see the tentacles, the roots, the creepers and stalks of the jungle encroaching closer and closer on that civilisation. Of course the tentacles of the jungle are Gaza and Hamas. They are, in a sense, beyond civilisation in the language of the new Orientalism; we simply have put them beyond the scope of civilisation, not only beyond the scope of civilisation but also beyond the scope of international law. When Hamas or parliamentarians from the uncivilised people beyond the villa walls are elected to parliament, they are not part of us. They are not part of the civilised world: they lie beyond it, these barbarians. It is no longer necessary for us to treat elected parliamentarians as we would within the civilised world. In fact, approximately 40 Hamas parliamentarians remain in prison even today. And violence by nation states becomes nothing more than the legitimate response of civilisation. What these barbarians are practicing is not resistance, they are not fighting oppression. They are, as our leaders describe it, false grievances (as Mr Blair called it). Muslims have false grievances against the West and worse, they have become "extremists".

So when the woman in a conference rather like this stood up and said "and you believed Hamas and Hezbollah when they told you they support democ-

racy?" Well, clearly in her view, Hezbollah and Hamas are simply lying. The West has a presumption of deceit and that presumption erodes the content and the face value of anything these movements can say. Conservatives in the West, and in America particularly, go a little further and say that you don't even have to listen and understand because you know that this is simply totalitarianism, and under this totalitarianism is an attempt to destroy our open and cosmopolitan society—just as the totalitarians succeeded in destroying the open and tolerant society of the Weimar republic. The West, in essence, has an approach to Islamism which has emptied language of any meaning, of 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 press refers to the statements of Muqtadr 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 Muqtadr al-Sadr talks about Arab nationalism or Arab ties or community connections within Iraq, he doesn't mean what he says. The Western press describes this simply as a struggle for power and at the root of this struggle is religion". Statements that people make are erased of content and meaning because when they say things, they don't really mean what they say because we understand their true nature and understand that it is simply a struggle for power.

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. It is language that is intended to make Islamists superficial, to make the whole identity of Islamism unattractive and repellent to moderates in the West, to turn people against it. It is essentially trying to crush alternative movements and alternative centres of power, to prevent new power from arising to challenge the West in this region, whether in Iraq, Palestine or Lebanon. This emptying of identity and language of meaning is a reflection of how the West uses and conceives of its power. A number of political philosophers in the West are quite clear that they believe that liberals are queasy about power itself; that power frightens liberals and they don't really have the

steel to crush alternatives to our power. They believe that there are those in the West that have an unduly optimistic view about compromise and mediation and that somehow this attempt to understand the 'other' is appeasement. It is the conservatives' dismissal of these humanistic views that is a matter for moral philosophers, but politicians understand that power and the role of power is to destroy rival contenders in the use of power.

So in this sense of the unmeaning of language, where the West has been involved in destroying the substance and the content of language, what should be the Islamists' response? Clearly it is simply neither appropriate nor possible to 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 undermine identity. This is not an appropriate use of language.

In a sense this underlies the reason that we face resistance. Because in one way, resistance can be the way to facilitate dialogue, but only one sort of dialogue. I want to come back to what that is because we're not talking about a simple misunderstanding in the West; it is not the case, for example, that if you or I were to sit down with Dick Cheney and said this is how we see things, that he would reply: "well now I really understand". That is not going to happen because this is essentially about power—the West retaining power.

The person who understood this and wrote about this most clearly is Frantz Fanon who, writing in the 1960s when he wrote particularly from his own experience and identification from his time working in colonial Algeria, about the feelings of inadequacy and dependency experienced by the colonised. Fanon describes in powerful terms the impact of language and power on a colonised people: "Every colonised people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural creativity ultimately finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle".

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 deep anger, a Western indifference: "this automatic manner of classifying him and de-civilising him", he suggests, imposes discrimination, robs him of individuality and tells him that he must bring himself into step with the superior modern world. These pressures may ultimately lead to the collapse of ego. The goal of his behaviour will become fixated 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 [colonial]. 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 "no longer be confronted by the dilemma to turn white [modern] or to disappear".

The alternative for this mindset of passive acceptance for Fanon was clear: those affected must abandon their hallucinatory search after whiteness [Western modernity] and act for change [pursue resistance] in order to compel the 'white man' to acknowledge that I, a black person/Muslim, am human.

The desire to place the human being back at the centre of society, to acknowledge Muslims as humans with rights and values, and to end the demonisation of Muslims is exactly the same agenda as that of most mainstream Islamist movements. Islamists are putting forward the virtues and historic needs of the human being as the essence of what they are trying to do. It is also the echo of the civil rights movement and is still the echo

when you meet Muslims in Leicester and Bradford in the UK today when they come and say I would like some respect—"give me some respect and dignity".

In a sense, what I am suggesting is resistance. We should not be surprised when we are faced with armed resistance which is essentially the result of emptying our language of any meaning and substance. This is only to be expected if we treat language in this way. It is a paradox that the West should do this because it is, of course, a crushing of alternative thinking and alternative values which completely contradicts our claim to reflect enlightenment values. Enlightenment values were a sense of moving toward critical thinking and rationality, which I describe as a form of Ijtihad for the Christian caliphate which ended with the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The Enlightenment was an attempt to think critically about the West and move away from old thinking. But as we see, the present refusal to listen, to try and crush alternative thinking is a weakness. It is in fact, Osama bin Laden who has pointed out most forcefully that this implies a sense of vacuity at the centre of Western life that it has to crush alternative thinking. It also, of course, promotes conflict because it eliminates the possibility of using language as a means to try and resolve conflict by making it no longer a tool for conflict and understanding, and instead making it a tool of power to undermine, weaken and destroy your enemies.

Michel Foucault who visited and thought about the Iranian revolution suggested that what is necessary is for the West to begin a critique and questioning of the present limits to Western thinking. He described the present situation as one of petrified thinking that the West needed to step beyond. He argued for the need to understand how Western thinking has become trapped by its own narrative and by its inability to accept other thinking and that it was going to be necessary to go beyond these limits before it would be possible for the West to grow and develop. It was not an effort simply to criticise the West in order to be contrarian and for the sake of criticism alone: the aim was to try and provide the stimulus for a society that had become passive and paralysed and was no longer able to engage in intellectual and critical thinking and was frightened of ideas

coming from elsewhere. The only way the West can move on is to step beyond the limits of this thinking. The insights of the Islamists can, in fact, help the West in this process of moving beyond Western petrified thinking.

I think the clearest example of this was perhaps in South Africa. I was in South Africa a little earlier, but saw some of the roots of this taking shape. There was, of course, in South Africa a resistance, the African National Congress. Despite this resistance, there was no change in the thinking of the white elite who ignored it as best they could. What really brought about the change was when firms and business men like Anglo-American and Oppenheimer began to question the limits of South African thinking, and began to question the idea that special rights for white men in South Africa was both a desirable or sustainable program for the future of that country. These business men eventually linked up with activists and other movements so there was in a sense an internal resistance critiquing the elite in South Africa. It was, in essence, this latter internal resistance—people who were ready to think and critique the language of the elite and its insistence on special rights for white people—that managed to allow 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 critique and that is what I think Foucault had in mind when he talked about the necessity when societies get stuck, like the South African's were stuck in their discourse of special rights for white men, to look to the insights of others about how they see and understand our society. How they moved on was simply the internal critique coupled with the resistance that was taking place from within the borders of South Africa.

Only in this way will the ideas about Islamism and what it says about the West become clear. Only then will it be possible to hear what Islamists are really saying—not just in terms of language and slogans—but what actually is the meaning of what they are saying. Only by the West stepping beyond the limits of its present thinking will real dialogue become possible, because only then will it be possible to hear some of the things which are being said; and understand how they relate to all of us, both in the West and in the Muslim world.



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Cartoon by Detainee DD, exhibited as part of the unique art exhibition *CAPTIVATED: The Art of the Interned* (July 2008). Comprising the works of those men detained without trial in the UK, the exhibition highlights the mental health concerns and the hidden human tragedy taking place in the name of 'security'

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In a sense, this is the paradox of the current situation: that you need to refuse dialogue to get dialogue. Only by the refusal of dialogue which the Islamists are doing by saying "no, we're not willing to engage on the terms set by the West; we're only prepared to sit down and talk on different terms", will real dialogue become possible. In other words, they are saying, "we want to change the rules of the game, and not 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 region 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.

Muslims also are increasingly recognising that Western modernity in the

I would say that Islamists are not claiming empirical thinking is wrong

fashion that I've just described it has exhausted its resources. Western secular life is no longer the future that beckons but will become archaic and a vision redolent of colonialism and the domination of the past to which they have fallen victim. They also believe that the pervasive power relationships that exist within Western societies both at governmental and working level in terms of working in a corporation or an enterprise actually limit and do not increase an individual's well being. They hold, and they believe, that these relationships actually isolate people from one another. This sense of isolation, of moral loneliness, creates a sense of illusory freedom and anxiety experienced by so many people in the West.

These are some of the things that Islamists are saying, and as you notice, all of them are rooted in the common human experience. I don't think any of these concepts can be described particularly as theological issues. In short, Islamists are offering a fundamental disagreement, a disagreement to our narra-

tive 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 Western secular life and that they do not accept that the West is 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 culturally unable 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 really 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 metaphysical 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 that by resting 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

obviously everyone is confined to generalities. But the point that I am trying to make is that surely Islamists are saying something? It is not just the 'babble of barbarians', of uncivilised people whose language does not have any substance or meaning and that we therefore do not have to listen.

Before any of you become too defensive about the West and its thinking, I would say that Islamists are not claiming empirical thinking is wrong. They are just saying that it is only one component of rational thinking. When the West diverged from the joint tradition with Islam of philosophy and having different forms of rationality and chose only to have an empirical one, we actually diminished human beings; individuals became objectified and the way we treat many people and our planet has become objectified because of this fashion of thinking. They are not dismissing Western thinking: there are, I believe, many more people in Tehran reading Hegel, Habermas and Foucault than probably do in Oxford or Cambridge. 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 seems from events that we are experiencing to be becoming worse, I would therefore suggest, is not suitable for resolution though well-meaning mediation by well meaning people coming from Europe or the United States to speak to the other because clearly it is important that this should happen. It does happen, but it is not going to tackle the issue of power and the way the West fails to hear or listen to what others are saying to it. Nor will it lead to the escape from what I call the vacuous 'peace process industry', the industry we see in Palestine, in the Palestine-Israeli process with many people and organisations living off the grants and aid for promoting talking between people. Not unless it is going to deal with meaning and actually hear what people are saying and not simply dealing with process for processes' sake will a solution become possible.

In short, what we have to do if we want to have a serious peace process, it is necessary for us—the West—to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are saying and what we are thinking and doing 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 Iran and the Iranian 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.

Muslim thinkers and philosophers are presenting a serious and substantial critique of Western thinking and society. It is a critique not a critique of the Enlightenment per se, but what we have turned the Enlightenment into in terms of its power relationships and the concentration of power within Western societies. They see this as being far from the original Enlightenment model which has now entered into myth that somehow we all live in a society which is encouraging creative new dynamic thinking in the West. We all know this is not true. Many in the West find it difficult to hear 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'. Is this what we mean when we talk about living in the age of the Enlightenment?

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 awakening in the West—and I use the word deliberately—an awakening—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 than probably do in Oxford or Cambridge

*Written by Massoud Shadjareh and Arzu Merali
Photograph by Tanya Habjouqa*

BRIXTON, BERKLEY AND OTHER ROADS TO RADICALISATION

Previous page

06 December, 2006: Lebanese protesters gather in downtown Beirut protesting against Siniora's government which they claim was unconstitutional and illegitimate. They said that gathering in their thousands in front of the Lebanese Parliament was the only democratic choice they had to force him from power. One young girl stands in the front of the crowd, transfixed by a gigantic video screen of Sayyed Nasrallah rallying his supporters

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 whosoever they are and whomsoever oppresses them. It is perhaps that simplicity or more specifically its source of derivation that has attracted the label of 'Islamist' to the organisation, its work, officers, volunteers (some of whom are not even Muslim). It starts with the Quranic verse:

"4:75. 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 say: Our Lord! cause us to go forth from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee 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 dynamic aspect of the religion that is often overlooked (maybe deliberately so) by those amongst political and cultural elites, who decry 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 culture, law, policy and war.

Journeys: Leningrad

At the Piskariovskoye Memorial Cemetery circa 1984, I (Arzu) who understood that the USSR had fought against Nazi Germany was still astounded to find that upwards of 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 pain remains in St Petersburg.

Standing in the same place in 1989 with a group of 16 year-old, high achieving British students, from the same school as me, I was nauseated to hear them say they didn't realize the 'Russians' were on 'our' side in the war. They just couldn't believe that communists fought alongside 'us'. The group was very multicultural, but the belief was very British by that time, the glory days of rampant Thatcherism and Reaganism, where even the Soviet Leadership felt it needed to define itself as Westward looking.

It's the same belief that fuels the lack of understanding of Muslim and other non-Western responses. After the 9/11 attacks, there were spontaneous shows of solidarity by Iranians with the victims, people lighting candles in the street and praying for the victims, statements of censure from the leader of Hizbullah, yet the enduring image of Muslim response was that of an unfortunate Palestinian woman celebrating what she thought was the assassination of George Bush (a celebration that many in the secular, Western anti-war movement of today may well join in should it happen).

It's the same idea that others don't speak the same ethical language, or worse still have no ethical language, and worse still that 'we' are the only ethical ones with the only ethical discourse, that fuels the glorification of the firemen at the World Trade Center but demonises the same men performing the same job (but with the addition of Israeli Defence Force gunfire) 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.

Not lost in translation

Back to the two of us. Two generations are reflected in these notes, but many signifiers are the same—Ernesto Che Guevara the man and the T-shirt, and the failure to get round to watching the Motorcycle Diaries... is but one of the lexical themes of our lives that has brought two 'Islamists' together. The two of us—significantly different in age, ethnicity, class, and even counties of birth and upbringing—have travelled shockingly similar paths to our current

habitation of the world of undefined 'Islamism' and every other pejorative tag that can be applied by right wing think tanks and their strange fellows of the bed amongst the radical left.

And here is the crunch...

It is often argued that Islamist movements are too diverse to have one label (we agree) and that their policies and ideas would be more easily understood with some better culturally sympathetic translation. Thus the indigenous movements 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 government and democracy 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 that reflects the will of the people is anti-democratic and effectively appointed another government.

Whilst critiquing, various Marxists 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 Shariati, no idea of mustadhafeen. Yet the Islamic concept revived with the Iranian revolution, is lost. The idea that they may say substantially the same thing lost at the side of a mass grave in Leningrad...

Old revolutionaries die hard

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 was of 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 affiliations the authors may have, we authorised IHRC to add its name to the posters of dead and injured Lebanese children during the 33-day war, because then and now, "We are All Hizbullah." 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 in particular the posters and IHRC. They failed to note that Hizbullah flags at said demonstrations were sported 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 doesn't start with Vali e Faqih 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 Muslim countries, it can reflect the popular 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 modernising (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 Democratic parties or emulate 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 want to understand. 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 Brixton, Berkley or Baghdad, some things speak across borders. It is a revolution in itself. The 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 listen to it will take. That in large part 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. ■

Massoud Shadjareh and Arzu Merali are founders of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London. Both have authored articles, reports and papers on human rights issues and Islam.

There are many 'radicalising' moments in our lives. The very first for one of us was joining the anti-Vietnam war movement whilst at Berkley, for another it was watching the Brixton riots on the UK national news. For both of us, prevailing language—from the BBC News to the Republican and Democratic war rhetoric and its popular opposition amongst veterans against the war—belied cultural values of superiority, and exposed our own beliefs hitherto, as having internalised a sense of inferiority. Suddenly we no longer felt that we were naturally some way down the teleological ladder that defined progress, development and all things normative in the cultures we found ourselves in, against the cultures we were defined as coming from.

Our communities of radicalisation, include decades down the line many members of governments, think tanks and academia in the USA and UK (elsewhere even), parliamentarians and voguish civil society leaders whose journeys could just as easily have been ours...

For another one of us, it wasn't enough of an argument that many Americans were being slaughtered therefore the war was wrong. Wrong argument then, wrong argument now

A NOTE APRIL 2008

Written by Tom Clark

I feel urged to write something for this first "Mobilisation Edition". I am writing as a UK fundraising organiser for Conflicts Forum and as someone who has attended a number of their events/dialogues in Beirut and London.

Fundraising for work like this is tough; continually up against questions like "how's that peace thing going?", "what are we getting for our money? Outcomes!?" And then from an influential trustee "surely we are wasting our money until the US stops arming Israel?" but as Mark Perry responds: "we don't care about arming Israel, we've just got to stop them being used!" The imminent unveiling of a liberal Israel lobby in the US to counter the hawkish AIPAC (see *Gorenberg Prospect April 08*) might be significant here?

So many insightful articles are constantly being written and broadcasted, but still the hatred that this conflict sustains echoes across the globe... and it's not getting fixed. The present misery is allowed to exist as the future recedes into the past and everything is allowed to fester.

I went first to the Occupied Territories six years ago to support two Quaker schools in Ramallah.

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 the PR tide 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 even a prohibition 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 distinguishes 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, Hezbollah's 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 as 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 Wworld 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 agree on the 'facts', but surely the things we do agree on are far greater than those we don't? ■

The sky is blue!

The smell of coffee is good!

I love my children!

We all want a better life!

'The Teacher', taken from the 2006 film, *Meeting Resistance*

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 Molly 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 have decreased, and people now have relatively more access than before to a more complex and critical understanding of politics and culture. Documentary 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-proclaimed 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.

Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield's films have been commercial successes. However one is not so 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 throughout 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. Unsurprisingly criticism of the film has come from the right, however it is important that people who oppose Western arrogance do not let Moore off the hook as Muslims are given no time whatsoever in representing themselves. Robert Jensen's review of the film has been one of the few critiques from a progressive point of view. He states: "The sad truth is that *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a bad movie, but not for the reasons it is being attacked in the dominant culture. It's at times a racist movie. And the analysis that underlies the film's main political points is either dangerously incomplete or virtually incoherent."

Jensen argues that there is no fair representation of Muslims in the film, and the representation of countries like Morocco are far from respectful, let alone inline with challenging racism and prejudice. While the film contributed to

the climate of mass opposition in the West to the Iraq war, it failed to give any understanding of what Muslims are thinking and doing about their oppression; rather the only portrayal in the film of Muslims was the rich Gulf Arabs (the Bin Laden family who are one of the main construction industrialists in the region) who are in cahoots with Bush and Co. Jensen spoke about his criticisms of the film, saying that at the time of writing his review he was too soft on the movie and explains: "Since the end of WWII, there has been bipartisan support for US attempts to dominate the politics of the Middle East. Republican and Democratic administrations alike have pursued illegal and immoral policies, using overt and covert violence. This didn't start with George W Bush and won't end when he's out of office. Moore's movie failed to offer any coherent analysis of the historical and political context for Bush's failed wars, and hence did little to help viewers deepen their understanding."

Broomfield's recently released *Battle for Haditha* on the other hand does feature Iraqi protagonists in the community where the massacre took place as well as persons involved in the Iraqi resistance. This film was expected to be a critical film of the now notorious massacre of 24 men, women and children by US marines in November 2005. While the film does show the gung-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-confessional Iraqi, Arab and Islamic culture which includes a deep sense of patriotism which they have defended against colonialism 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 fighters is a drunk and joins the struggle due to financial reasons, while the Islamist resistance leader, a cleric, is a very shady and manipulative character who cares nothing about the Iraqi people. In contrast, despite the animal-like behaviour of the Marines, they are shown as victims of their political and military leaders. There is no doubt that the viewer is supposed to sympathise with the Marines culminating in one of them leading an Iraqi girl by the hand into the



'US Go Home' from *Meeting Resistance*

light, while a few moments ago he just massacred her family. The Western viewer 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 movement, 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 humanitarian perspective becomes a cover for humanizing the invader in Iraq or Palestine independently of politics, it changes into an arrogant, orientalist mechanism of reducing the Arab cause to a form of shallow humanitarian advocacy at best, and political misguidance based on conflation of henchman and victim at worst... Undeniably, the movie's message is tricky: it is in an effort to exonerate the Marines in Iraq and the non-ideological resistance; present the residents as aimless barn animals ready for slaughter; and to indict major politicians in the West and ideologists in the East. Ultimately, it is a liberal message and stems from lack of comprehension of the ongoing battle between the occupation

and the resistance on Iraq's soil." The puzzling thing about Broomfield'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.

In contrast to Moore and Broomfield there are a number of British-made film productions which positively challenge the mainstream Islamophobic discourse. In discussion with The Guardian journalist 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 principle 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 democracy, and that Hamas equals terrorism and repression. Chassay shows that in Gaza Fatah's armed wing are actively engaged in sending rockets into Israel, whereas we are led to believe that it is Hamas' responsibility that any home-made Palestinian rockets are targeted at Israel. The second round of films from Chassay shows the impact on Palestinians in Gaza of the blockade on Gaza by Israel and with which the West is complicit. These latter films challenges a Western audience as much as the first set of Chassay's films as they force the viewer to see beyond the 'terrorists' label, and see Palestinians as people, albeit a brutally oppressed people.

One of the bravest films to be made is the British film *Britz*, a film that raised some uncomfortable home truths about the ramifications of British foreign and domestic policies towards Muslims. The film's director Peter Kosminsky has said that the film was not aimed at Muslim audiences but at white Western audiences, particularly those in Britain. Moazzam Begg in his review of the film following a special preview screening states: "He [Kosminsky] replied that it was to make people ask more questions about internal and foreign policy; about spooks as well as suicide bombers. Indeed, it was to boldly ask the question whether the effects of personal trauma—in this case Nasima's best friend who is detained without trial and then subjected to a control order—coupled with societal hostility and a sense of political impotence can lead someone to the path of violent extremism. And if it can, are we able to understand?"

Britz addressed political taboos head on. In this day and age it takes confidence and political daring to take up political themes that should be some of the main political issues that urgently need addressing. The onus is on intellectuals, writers, film-makers and those engaged in progressive political change to radically adjust the parameters of the debate (or the lack of debate), otherwise it is left to those in weaker positions to try and raise these issues but are either ignored or vilified in an atmosphere reminiscent of McCarthyite totalitarianism.

Another off-limits subject seems to be the Iraqi resistance. There is only one documentary film that has reported on

the resistance, and that is Steve Connors' and Molly Bingham's *Meeting Resistance*. This film was shot during the small window of time immediately after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 when Western filmmakers could still meet and interview those involved in the resistance. The film shows people from all walks of life, young men, professionals, religious clerics, a house wife and political activists, all part of the resistance who have nearly an hour and a half on film to discuss their motivations and the nature of their involvement in the struggle to free their country.

In conversation with Connors at the British Museum's screening of *Meeting Resistance* during the London Documentary Film Festival, Connors explained how the film challenges many assumptions and misrepresentations of the resistance to occupation in Iraq: "Firstly, it pushes back on the 'insurgency' title. To use one word to describe all the different reasons for violence in Iraq is ridiculous and—far from simplifying the issues—just creates more confusion."

When asked in what ways the film challenges Western preconceptions of the conflict in Iraq, Connors replied "I think the film allows the audience to rethink and re-humanise the resistance faction of the Iraqi political scene and shows them to be people whose aspirations are not so dissimilar from our own. Denying a view of Iraqis as actors in their own history then perpetuates the notion that we Westerners are the only ones civilized and sophisticated enough to provide a solution instead of facing the reality that we are actually the major problem in Iraq. Unfortunately most Western filmmakers (or journalists) who have tackled Iraq simply haven't been sufficiently self aware to look at themselves and the subject in this way".

Connors is right when he highlights the dearth of filmmakers that approach the Muslim and Islamic Other in a human way rather than in way that adopts every Eurocentric stereotype of Muslims. Nevertheless, despite the flawed depictions of Muslims and their liberation struggles, and in the face of the lack of films like *Britz* and *Meeting Resistance*, these and other groundbreaking films are outstanding examples for others to build upon and positively influence wider audiences. ■



THE LANGUAGE OF

OPPRESSION

An analysis of the “integration” discourse in Belgium.

Written by Dyab Abou Jahjah
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 ‘integrates’ then one is 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 has no civic 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 immigrant workers 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 a return 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 accepted this position and 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 lost generation faced with an identity crisis, racism and discrimination, all resulting in a social crisis relected 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 guests. If they refused to integrate they would be excluded and blamed for it. The second generations spoke French and Flemish confidently and were visible 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 ‘solve’ the issue of diversity by eradicating it. The integration discourse came as a response to this and was supposed to be a democratic reaction, but in fact integration as it was understood in Belgium means cultural assimilation with the threat of exclusion. This was less democratic than deportation as put forward by the far-right. It practically meant the same; namely the eradication of diversity by making the “other” lose everything that makes him an ‘other’. The integra-



Arab youth with the AEL flag in the streets of Brussels, during the summer of 2003



tion model was presented as a multicultural model while in essence it was the opposite of multiculturalism.

The intellectual heritage of colonialism was revived to serve the project of integration. 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 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.

While carrying this tremendous and noble burden the white man is helped by “integrated” immigrants who are supposed to be pioneers for their own people and who will be the white man’s allies in showing the rest the correct path. These “integrated” immigrants are then exhibited in political parties, in parliament and on TV screens, to speak in the name of the white man and explain his noble cause and to express their hatred of the old ways and backward culture

that is used to oppress and imprison them. They are considered the spokesperson of their whole community while they have no affinity or interaction with that community. They are in reality the emissaries of the white man in the community, and they continuously remind the community the terms of integration and wave the threat of exclusion in its face.

Based on this ideology of integration, a whole industry was constructed: the integration industry comprising of organisations, campaigns, initiatives all financed by the government with generous subsidies and all aimed at conveying the same colonial message: integrate—i.e. assimilate—or be excluded!

This “integration sector” as it is called in Belgium soon became the biggest tool of oppression. It appropriated all the active individuals and organisations of the community and transformed them into “evolved emissaries” and maintained the culturalist nature of the integration paradigm.

When we unmasked this whole mechanism and rejected integration as a paradigm and demanded that the state adopts a human rights approach instead and claimed our role and position as citizens, we were immediately labelled as extremists and fanatics. The whole integration machine turned its wrath on us. All the “enlightened” immigrants were given platforms and roles to fight against us. Claiming as we did that we are not guests but citizens and that equal rights are not something you have to earn by adopting a certain culture but inherent and inal-

ienable human rights that we have by the virtue of our own humanity was blasphemous in the temple of integrationists.

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 turning 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 homogeneity 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. ■

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 now laugh at the actions that show that the West sees itself superior in morality and politics.

It is not hard to arrive at such a sad conclusion. We Muslims believe that without us having to wage any battle the West has defeated itself by exposing a mindset that is borne 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 every person’s fingertips. Some say Muslims have become victims of media misrepresentation 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 (déjà 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.

“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.

The nature of the debate, which for a brief time was actually respectful, has been totally manipulated to a one-sided arrogant 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.

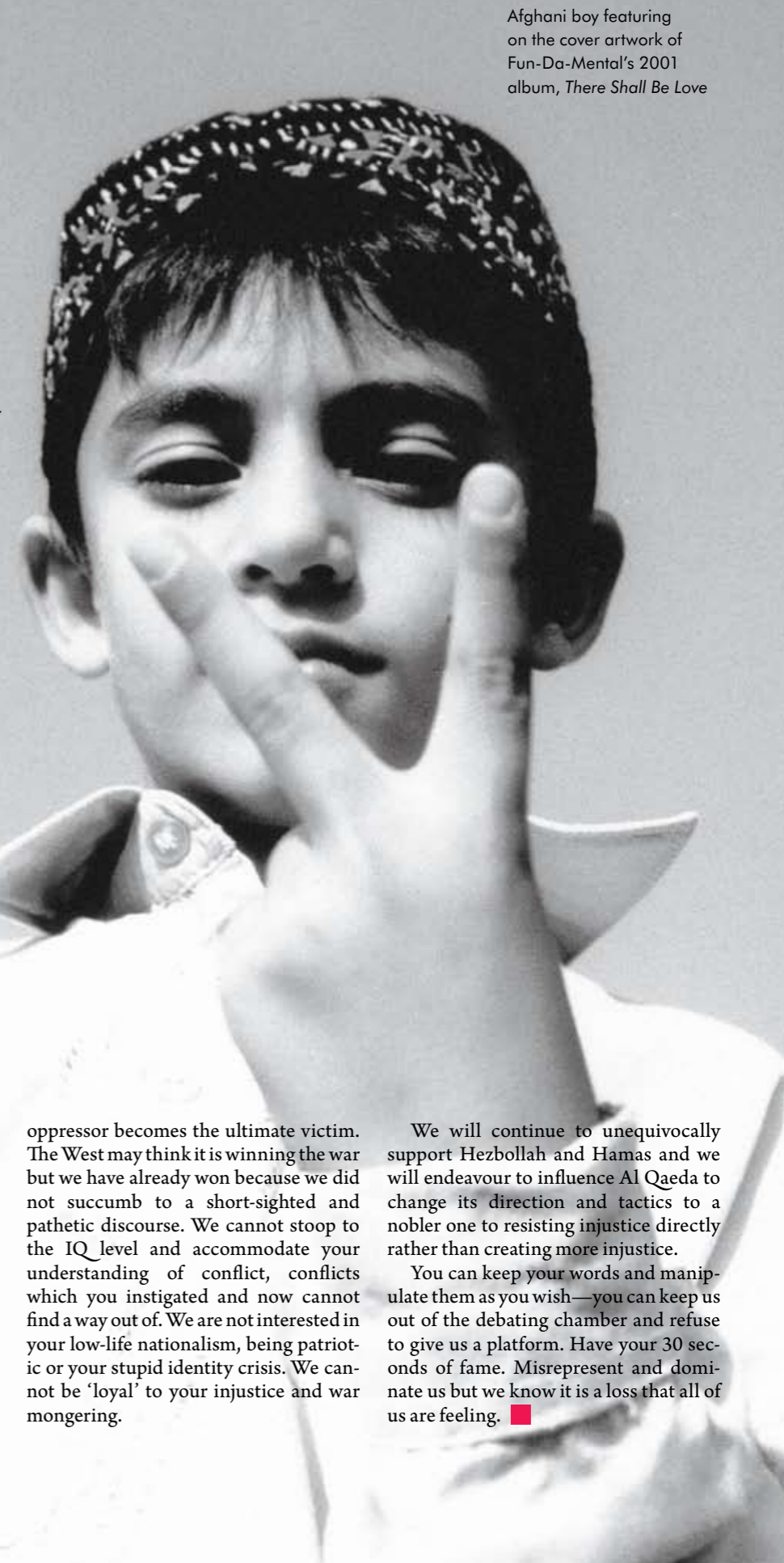
Muslims just want to live according to the rules of their own personal life or of that of their community’s structures. There is nothing to be alarmed at; people live like this anyway, they just happen not to be Muslim.

The wealthy live in their ghettos as do the middle and other classes—it is a historical fact and is not monopolised by any specific race or religion. The most important global issue is elevating those that suffer economically or otherwise out of their oppression.

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 mullahs 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 from the West; arrogance always drowns out logic and common sense. It could have easily been so different if only the West had listened to the warning signs, but those who warned the West were Muslims, and who wants to listen to Muslims? Not many, but the Muslims do not care, they rejected you when you refuse to listen.

It is not all victim-hood and oppression, it’s simply “let them dominate, it will not last”. History shows that the



Afghani boy featuring on the cover artwork of Fun-Da-Mental’s 2001 album, *There Shall Be Love*

oppressor becomes the ultimate victim. The West may think it is winning the war but we have already won because we did not succumb to a short-sighted and pathetic discourse. We cannot stoop to the IQ level and accommodate your understanding of conflict, conflicts which you instigated and now cannot find a way out of. We are not interested in your low-life nationalism, being patriotic or your stupid identity crisis. We cannot be ‘loyal’ to your injustice and war mongering.


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. ■

ALL IS WAR

A common man’s conscience.

Written by Aki Nawaz



Muslims realise that their voices are not tolerated in the mainstream media (déjà 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

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