



**From the Editorial Team . .  
Assalamu-Alaikum and Greetings !**

Welcome to the fifth issue of The Young European Muslim Newsletter (YEM)! This issue is based on Islamophobia. Because there is so much to cover on this subject, we have decided to dedicate YEM issues five and six to this hugely controversial problem.

We are a team of young people whose ages range from 13 to 19. We work together to produce a quarterly newsletter on 'Muslim issues' such as Ramadan, Eid, Hajj, Drugs and Solvent abuse etc. This fifth issue is based on Islamophobia. Meeting on a regular basis we discuss and design forthcoming newsletters.

We are constantly looking for feedback from yourselves as to what you think of this newsletter - was there any parts you particularly enjoyed? Can we make any improvements? - any form of feedback will be greatly appreciated.

***So get writing!!!***

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### **Islamophobia and the West**

Prejudice against Islam and Muslims in recent years has acquired new dimensions in many Western societies. Islam and its followers are being maligned. The systemic distortion of Islam and Muslims is no longer a minor irritant that can be ignored.

Some of those who have made a study of the phenomenon call it "Islamophobia," indicating

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thereby that the campaign has its root in a morbid fear of Islam and that, in the course of time; it will arouse the same fear in the public mind. The end result, they believe, will be the creation of a climate of hatred and distaste in these societies for everything Islamic.

This observation is not a case of over-sensitivity on the part of Muslims. In fact a number of Western thinkers and intellectuals have begun addressing the problem and warning their people of its consequences.

### **The Runnymede Trust**

An early warning note came from Professor Gordon Conway of Sussex University in Britain. Discussing the issue of this prejudice, he said that a careful look at the media, print media in particular, would show the extent of anti-Muslim sentiments. In tabloids, he pointed out, the attack against Islam was extremely harsh and savage, while in more respected papers it was more subtle.

Professor Conway attributes this hostility to various reasons, some religious, others racial. Obviously, intellectuals like professor Conway have read the warning signs and have the vision to see what they would mean in the future. They have seen the hate spreading and taking root in their societies, and having foreseen the danger, they have decided to confront it.

A group of British experts in race relations announced their decision to set up a special committee to study and analyse "Islamophobia," as manifested in the British media in particular. The commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia was established in 1995 by the Runnymede Trust. Its report, Islamophobia: a challenge for us all, was published in 1997 and launched at the House of Commons by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw. In fact, the formation of such a committee was one of the recommendations of an earlier study team, constituted by the same group of experts.

The subject of that study was “anti-Semitism in Britain.” They recommended the setting up of another committee similar to the one on anti-Semitism to monitor the bias against Muslims in Britain.

The Runnymede trust made sixty recommendations for practical action, addressed to government departments, health authorities, education authorities, employers and unions, community and voluntary organisations, and the media.

The commission was reconstituted in 1999 as an activity of the Uniting Britain Trust. Its purpose is to monitor and support the implementation of the recommendations in the original report. More generally, it provides information about Islamophobia and promotes policies and activities, which address and reduce anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination.

This new outlook and perspective, which are finding increasing acceptance in the Western intellectual arena, must be welcomed and supported by us. It will be of immense help in minimizing the harm done to the culture, values and followers of Islam by the hostile elements in the West. Such attempts at correction, coming from the West itself, would be able to influence Western minds better since they come from their own respected intellectuals, experts and writers.

## **The Nature of Islamophobia**

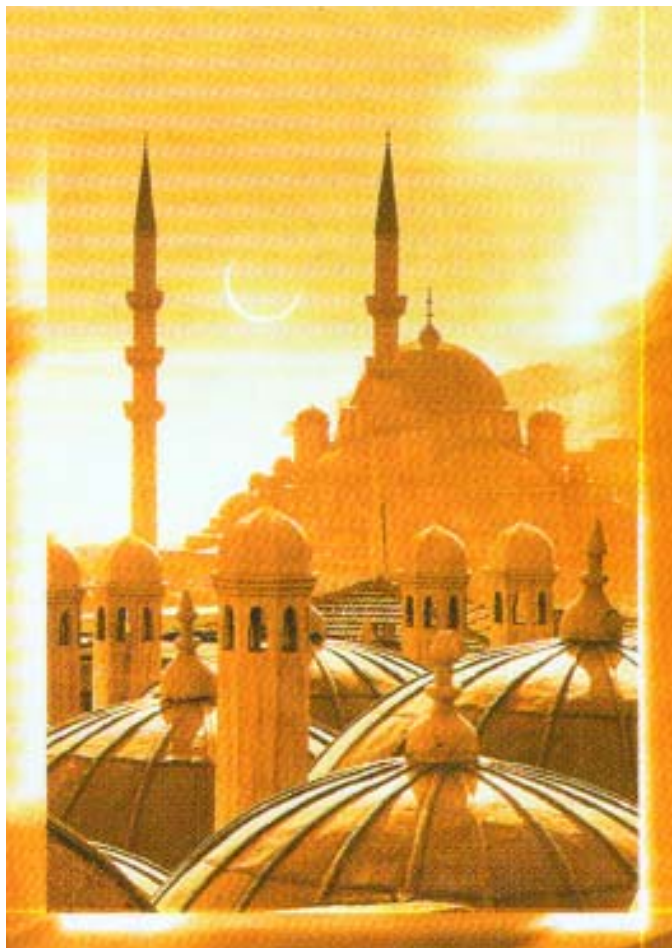
This is an extract from Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All compiled and published by the Runnymede Trust in 1997.

### **The word ‘Islamophobia’**

The term Islamophobia refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs. The term is not, admittedly, ideal. Critics of it consider that its use panders to what they call political correctness and that it stifles legitimate criticism of Islam, and demonises and victimises anyone who wishes to engage in such criticism. When the Runnymede Trust first published its consultation paper, the Independent on Sunday (2 March 1997) ran a large headline in which the Runnymede Trust were accused of wishing to be ‘Islamic ally correct’.

The word ‘Islamophobia’ has been coined because there is a new reality, which needs naming. Anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed so that it can be identified and acted against. In a similar way there was a time in European history when a new word, anti-Semitism, was needed and

coined to highlight the growing dangers of anti-Jewish hostility. The coining of a new word, and with it the identification of a growing danger did not in that instance prevent eventual tragedy. By the same token, the mere use of the new word ‘Islamophobia’ will not in itself prevent tragic conflict and misuse. But, we believe, it can play a valuable part in the attempt of correcting perceptions and improving relationships.



Basically it is not phobic or prejudiced, of course, to disagree with or to disapprove of Muslim beliefs, laws or practices. Followers of other world faiths disagree with Muslims on points of theology and religious practice. In a liberal democracy it is inevitable and healthy that people will criticise and condemn, sometimes robustly, opinions and practices with which they disagree. It is legitimate to criticise policies and practices of Muslim states and regimes, for example, especially when their governments do not subscribe to internationally recognised human rights. Similarly, it is legitimate to criticise the treatment of women in some Muslim countries, or the views and attitudes, which some Muslims have towards ‘the West’, or towards other world faiths. It is important to recognise that debates, arguments and disagreements on all these issues take place just as much amongst Muslims, as between Muslims and non-Muslims.

How, then, can one tell the difference between legitimate criticism and disagreement on the one hand, and Islamophobia, or unfounded prejudice and hostility, on the other?

## Open and Closed Views of Islam

In order to begin answering this question it is useful, we suggest, to draw a key distinction between open and closed views of Islam. Phobic dread of Islam is the recurring characteristic of closed views. Legitimate disagreement and criticism, as also appreciation and respect, are aspects of open views.

In the table, included in this Newsletter, we itemise eight main features of closed views, and contrast them in each instance with eight main features of open views. We hope that readers will look quite closely at the table, since it highlights many of our findings. For example, our later articles which focus on the media maintains that much press coverage of Islam and Muslims over the years has reflected and fuelled "closed" views.

Do not view each itemised closed point separately. In fact closed views feed off each other, giving and gaining additional power and giving each other kick-starts. They are joined together in vicious circles, each making the others worse. Similarly it happens that open views feed off each other, and give each other additional clarity – they interact in circles, each making the others stronger and more productive. In summary form, the eight distinctions that we draw between closed and open views are to do with:

- 1 Whether Islam is seen as monolithic and static, or as diverse and dynamic.
- 2 Whether Islam is seen as other and separate, or as similar and interdependent.
- 3 Whether Islam is seen as inferior, or as different but equal.
- 4 Whether Islam is seen as an aggressive enemy or as a cooperative partner.
- 5 Whether Muslims are seen as manipulative or as sincere.
- 6 Whether Muslim criticisms of 'the West' are rejected or debated.
- 7 Whether discriminatory behaviour against Muslims is defended or opposed.
- 8 Whether anti-Muslim discourse is seen as natural or as problematic.

In the following paragraphs we consider each of these eight issues in turn. In each instance we discuss mainly features of closed views, i.e. the features of Islamophobia. But first, we recall briefly the historical context.

## The Historical Context

In 1920, when the French army entered Damascus, their commander marched directly to Saladin's tomb and declared, famously: "Nous revola, Saladin" – "we're back!" or "here we are again!", ('Christianity and Islam' by Jeremy Johns (1990), page 194). It was the end, so the commander believed, of an episode which had begun in November 1095, when Pope Urban II urged his audience to undertake a 'just war' against Muslims.

The episode included the spread of the Ottoman Empire as well as the Crusades themselves. When Constantinople (Istanbul) fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, Cardinal Bessarion, writing to the Doge of Venice, summarised the view which dominated western perceptions for centuries: "A city which was once so flourishing ... has been captured, despoiled, ravaged and completely sacked by the most inhuman barbarians ... by the fiercest of wild beasts".

In the nineteenth century the French humanist Ernest Renan said that a Muslim is "incapable of learning anything or of opening himself to a new idea" (quoted by John Esposito in *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, 1992). Such views were used to legitimise the colonisation of most Muslim countries by European powers.

Whether there is a continuous line from the Crusades of medieval times through the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism to the Islamophobia of the 1990s, with each main event having an element of "here we are again", is a question on which historians disagree. At first sight, certainly, there appears to be continuity. It is present in the perceptions of both Muslims and non-Muslims. An alternative view is that human beings make selective use of the past in order to understand and to justify aspects of the present, and that the past is continually being re-defined, even re-invented.

According to this view both Muslims and non-Muslims choose to 'remember' the past (more accurately, choose stories from the past) to illustrate feelings, fears and animosities in the present. Either way, the task of combating Islamophobia involves a denial of the power which stories about the past in general, and about the Crusades in particular, do certainly have. The task involves having an open view of Islam, in opposition to the closed view, which the stories themselves reflect and perpetuate.

### **Islam Seen as Monolithic and Static rather than as Diverse and Dynamic**

A closed view typically pictures Islam as undistinguished, rigid and colossal, and is intolerant of internal pluralism and deliberation. They are therefore insensitive to significant differences and variations within the world of Islam, and in particular they are unable

to appreciate that there are tensions and disagreements amongst Muslims. For example, they ignore debates about human rights and freedoms in Muslim countries, and about appropriate relationships between Islam and other world faiths. In short, debates and differences that are taken for granted amongst non-Muslims are neither seen nor heard when they take place within Islam.

Sweeping generalisations are then made about all Muslims, in ways, which would not happen in the case of, for example, all Roman Catholics, or all Germans. Also, it is all too easy in these circumstances to argue from the particular to the general – any episode in which an individual Muslim is judged to have behaved badly is used as an illustrative example to condemn all Muslims without exception.

Diversity within Islam, as also diversity within other religions, is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Some of the differences within a religion are doctrinal, to do with interpretations of historic beliefs, the nature and role of symbols, the authority of scripture, the authority of leaders. Others are about forms of worship and organisation. Others again are about lifestyle, cultural customs and personal morality, and about views of politics and social justice.

Further, there are of course well-known differences in all religions between the 'observant' or 'committed' (whether 'from the cradle' or 'born-again') and the 'nominal' or 'cultural'. In Islam as in all other religions there are overlaps between religious and non-religious differences. Often the latter are more significant in determining how conflicts arise and develop, and how they are managed or resolved.

Worldly differences which have an impact on religious affiliation and practice include differences of status, caste, wealth and social class (historically, as is well known, the distinction between church and chapel in England was linked to social class), of ethnicity (as for example in Northern Ireland, or in the former Yugoslavia between Catholic Croat and Orthodox Serb), of national, regional, linguistic or cultural identity, and with regard to gender issues and roles, the role and authority of elders, access to education, the social control of the young, and the urban-rural divide.

The following list summarises some of the differences and diversities, which are ignored or over-simplified in much Islamophobic discourse.

- Differences between the Middle East and South Asia, Iranians and Arabs, Bosnia and Chechnya, Nigeria and Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh;
- Differences between Muslims who are profoundly critical of the human rights records of certain Muslim countries and those who maintain

that such criticisms are merely symptoms of Islamophobia;

- Differences between interpretations of specific terminology, doctrines and injunctions in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions.
- Differences between the perceptions and experiences of men and women.
- Differences between older and younger generations, particularly in the Muslim communities of Western Europe.
- Differences between members of different social classes.
- Differences between a wide range of political movements, parties and projects which have little in common with each other apart from the tendency of their opponents to label them as fundamentalist.
- Differences between major strands and paths in the twentieth century, for example between Sufism and Islamism, or between the movements known as modernism and revivalism.

A consequence of ignoring differences and diversity within Islam is that criticisms in the British media of countries such as Iraq, Iran or Saudi Arabia are understood as coded attacks on Muslims in places such as Bradford, Birmingham or Tower Hamlets. Later in this Newsletter we quote a brief satire in the Sun newspaper, which combines an attack on Pakistani-background people in Birmingham with references to Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat, Colonel Gaddafi and Ayatollah Khomeini.

### **“Fundamentalism”**

A recurring phrase in the Western media nowadays is 'fundamentalism'. It is not, we believe, a helpful term. (See 'Fundamentalism in Christianity' on page 11). We provide a brief history of the term, recalling that it was coined as self-definition in the first instance by a strand within Christianity and only much later, almost as a metaphor, to criticise aspects of Islam. It is emphatically not a term, which Muslims themselves, ever use for purposes of self-definition, and the 'fundamentals' in Islam to which it claims to refer are of a different order from those to which it refers in Christianity.

### **Islam seen as 'Other' and 'Seperate' rather than as 'Similiar and 'Interdependent'**

People with closed views see many differences between Islam and the non-Muslim world, particularly the so-called West. Islam is perceived as the 'other', with few or no similarities between itself and other civilisations and cultures, with few or no shared concepts and moral values. Further, Islam is seen as "sealed" off from the rest of the

world, with no common roots or mixing in either direction.

The alternative, 'open' view sees similarities and shared values, also, shared problems and weaknesses, and many kinds of interaction. In the open view it is impossible to assert that – for example – Islam is 'East' and Europe is 'West' (or 'Judeo-Christian'), with no inter-connections or common ground. On the contrary, the open view stresses that there are close links between the three Abrahamic religions. At the same time it acknowledges that there are significant differences between Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and that each has its own specific outlook on what these differences are, and on how they should be managed.



### Islam seen as 'Inferior' not Different

Claims that Islam is different and "other" often involves stereotypes and claims about 'us' (non-Muslims) as well as about 'them' (Muslims), and the notion that 'we' are superior. 'We' are civilised, reasonable, generous, efficient, sophisticated, enlightened, non-sexist. 'They' are primitive, violent, irrational, scheming, disorganised, and oppressive.

An open view rejects such simplifications both about 'us' and about 'them'. It acknowledges that Islam is distinctively different in significant respects from other religions and from 'the West', but does not see it as deficient or less worthy of esteem. Us/them contrasts, with 'them' seen as inferior, are typically expressed through stories – anecdotes, rumours, gossip, jokes and news items as well as grand narratives. In a later article we recall the power of stories in the media. In the meanwhile some examples of such stereotype and them/us dualism are summarised in non-narrative form below.

### Claims about 'Otherness' and 'Inferiority'

- Claims that Muslim cultures mistreat women, but that other religions and cultures have outgrown patriarchy and prejudice.
- Claims that Muslims co-opt religious observance and beliefs to bolster or justify political and military projects, but that such fusing of spiritual and worldly power is not pursued in societies influenced by other religions.
- Claims that they are literalists in their interpretation of scriptures, but that similar literalism is found only on the fringes of other faiths.
- Claims that they have difficulties in sending representatives to meet external bodies, but that issues of political representation and legitimacy are straightforward in other religions.
- Claims that they are unwilling and unreflective, but that other religions and societies have their healthy internal debates and diversity.

### Islam seen as an Enemy not as a Partner

Closed views see Islam as violent and aggressive, firmly committed to barbaric terrorism, and implacably hostile to the non-Muslim world. Islam was once, said [Peregrine Worsthorne](#) in the early 1990's, "a great civilisation worthy of being argued with". But now, he continued, "it has degenerated into a primitive enemy fit only to be sensitively subjugated" **Sunday Telegraph, 3 February 1991**. When the Runnymede Trust's consultation paper was published in February 1997, he again asserted that all Muslims, all over the world, approve of terrorism and atrocities perpetrated against the West, and implied that they are morally inferior to Christians:.....

.....**"How would Islam react if Saddam Hussein, out of the blue, succeeded in dropping a nuclear bomb on Israel? Would the Islamic people recoil in horror, or would they be dancing in the streets? Based on what we know of the Islamic world's reaction to the earlier atrocities of Saddam, I think we can guess at the answer. Just as not one reproach was heard from a single mosque about these atrocities, including genocide, so there would be not one word of reproach from a single mosque if he incinerated Tel Aviv by a sneak nuclear attack. Nor, in all likelihood, would there be any more if a city belonging to America were to suffer the same fate ... contemporary Islam ... is a truly frightening force.**

**When Nazis erupted in a Christian country, the other Christian countries combined to smother that evil. Other Muslim countries have done very little to smother either Saddam or the Iranian Ayatollah and still less to put down terrorism. To worry about contemporary Islam is not mad. It would be mad to do otherwise", ('I Believe in Islamophobia', Daily Telegraph, 1 March 1997).!!!**

Let us consider this statement in some detail, particularly since it was written in direct response to something written by the Runnymede Trust and since it received high-profile publication. There are four main points that should be made. First point, which may at first seem rather trivial but in fact is of considerable importance. Mr Worsthorne appears to use the word 'Islamic' as a replacement for 'Muslim' – not only are all 'Islamic people' Muslims but also, in his view, all Muslims are 'Islamic people'. If indeed this is his meaning, his key statement is simply false. It is absolutely not the case that all Muslims admire the policies of, for example, Saddam Hussein, nor that all approve of the activities of terrorist organisations.

However, it may be, that the author is using the word 'Islamic' to refer to what is sometimes known as 'political Islam' as distinct from 'religious Islam'. The more usual term, if this is his intention, is 'Islamist' rather than 'Islamic'. It refers to all political movements, including democratic movements committed to the rule of law as well to terrorists and to oppressive regimes, which maintain that they are motivated by Islamic principles.

The use of the word 'Islamic' to refer to terrorism or to oppression is deeply offensive to the vast majority of British Muslims. In any case it is untrue to claim that all Islamists have a single political outlook. It is, however, accurate to observe that some Islamists support terror. If that is all that Worsthorne is saying, we have no dispute with the content, as distinct from the meaning of his argument.

Second point, the equation that some Muslims (those who support terrorism or run the governments of certain countries) are with all Muslims is an example of what we have called a closed view of Islam, even if the statement about some Muslims is accurate.

Third point, it is no doubt true that "not one reproach was heard" from Muslims about Saddam's atrocities by Mr Worsthorne himself. But this is a comment on the western media's failure to report such reproaches, not on their actual non-existence. In point of fact, to repeat, very large numbers of Muslims, both in Britain and throughout the world, regularly express disapproval of terrorism perpetrated in, and justified by, the name of Islam.

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It is no accident, some commentators have suggested, that the recent demonising of Islam began at much the same time that the "evil empire" of communism receded as a real threat. Western political and popular culture required a new enemy, a merciless "other", to replace the Soviet Union. Also, it is cynically if plausibly claimed, the western armaments industry needed a new enemy.

Be that as it may, it is certainly the case that Islam is depicted in Islamophobic discourse as wholly evil, wholly bent on – to recall an influential phrase used by Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard University – "a clash of civilisations", (Samuel Huntington: The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order, Simon and Schuster 1996). **"The impending war will be with foreign states, the argument runs, and also there will be "waves of boat people", all of them Muslim, descending on the shores of Southern Europe and "there will be riots in the cities of Europe with much bloodshed". (The quotations are from a speech by David Atkinson MP at a meeting of the Western European Union, reported in his local newspaper, the Bournemouth Evening Echo, 7th-8th December 1994).!!!**



When Prince Charles called for building bridges between Islam and the West, in a speech on spirituality and science at Wilton Park in December 1996, there were widespread Islamophobic criticisms of his views in the press. Most coverage ignored what he had said about modern science and about spirituality, and focused instead on topics he had not referred to at all, such as immigration or aspects of geo-politics.

An article in the Daily Telegraph, for example, headlined 'Prince Charles is Wrong – Islam does threaten the West' implied that Prince Charles' proposals should be rejected since "many British Muslims ... feel, first and foremost, members of the worldwide Muslim community and only secondly, members of British society"; (from 'Prince Charles is wrong – Islam does menace the West', by Patrick Sookhdeo, Daily Telegraph, 19th December 1996).

The following quotations express the perception that Islam is essentially a threat, both in the world at large and within Britain in particular. They mention Islam as a successor to Nazism and communism, and contain imagery of both invasion and infiltration.

We wish to emphasise that our concern throughout this newsletter, as also in the consultation paper to which Mr Worsthorne was responding, is with the situation of British Muslims, and with the impact of Islamophobia upon them, not primarily with issues of geopolitics. There is a place, both in Britain itself as well as in the world more generally, for robust disagreements about the policies and programmes of Islamists as well as other global faith parties e.g. Zionist parties. But, particularly within Britain, it is important that such disagreement should be conducted within the parameters of what we have called here an open view of Islam. The absence of an open view and the expression on the contrary of closed views, systematically acts to the disadvantage of British Muslims. This is our fundamental point. It is on this point that we should welcome further debate with Mr Worsthorne, and with others (of whom, we readily acknowledge, there are many) who hold the same views as he does.

## Perceptions of Islam as a Threat

### "At least as dangerous"

"Muslim fundamentalism is at least as dangerous as communism once was. Please do not underestimate this risk ... at the conclusion of this age it is a serious threat, because it represents terrorism, religious fanaticism and exploitation of social and economic justice." (Willi Claes, Secretary General of NATO!!! Quoted from a television interview reported by Inter Press Service, 18 February 1995).

### "Chief threat to global peace"

"Muslim fundamentalism is fast becoming the chief threat to global peace and security as well as a cause of national and local disturbance through terrorism. It is akin to the menace posed by Nazism and fascism in the 1930s and then by communism in the 1950s." (Clare Hollingsworth, Defence Correspondent!!! International Herald Tribune, 9 November 1993).

### "Different civilisation"

"The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power." (Samuel Huntington, Harvard University, 'The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order', 1996, page 217).



### "The hooded hordes will win"

"You can be British without speaking English or being Christian or being white, but nevertheless Britain is basically English-speaking, Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become basically Urdu-speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry ... Because of our obstinate refusal to have enough babies, Western European civilisation will start to die at the point when it could have been revived with new blood. Then the hooded hordes will win, and the Koran will be taught, as Gibbon famously imagined, in the schools of Oxford. (Charles Moore, editor of The Spectator, 'Time for a More Liberal and "Racist" Immigration Policy', The Spectator, 19 October 1991.

### 'There will be wars'

We do not know who primed and put the Oklahoma bomb in its place; we do know that they were, in the fullest meaning of the word, fanatics. Unlike most of us, they do not in the least mind being killed; indeed, they are delighted, because they believe that they are going to a far, far better place ... Do you realise that in perhaps half a century, not more and perhaps a good deal less, there will be wars, in which fanatical Muslims will be winning? As for Oklahoma, it will be called Khartoum-on-the-Mississippi, and woe betide anyone who calls it anything else. (Bernard Levin, columnist, The Times, 21 April 1995. \*

*\* (Muslims had in fact no responsibility for the Oklahoma bombing.)*

## Muslims seen as Manipulative, not Sincere

It is frequently alleged that Muslims use their religion for strategic, political and military advantage rather than as a religious faith and as a way of life shaped by a comprehensive legal tradition. The Observer article, which first popularised the term 'Muslim fundamentalism', quoted in the article (Fundamentalism in Christianity on page 11,) asserted that Islam had been "revived by the ayatollahs and their admirers as a device, indistinguishable from a weapon, for running a modern state". Muslims are assumed to have an instrumental or manipulative view of their religion rather than to be sincere in their beliefs, for their faith is "indistinguishable from a weapon".

A cartoon which first appeared a few years ago in the Washington Post, and which was later syndicated throughout the western press, showed "an Islamic holy man". He was presented as an 'authoritarian ayatollah' or 'mad mullah' who was considering the day ahead of him. "Let's see," he said. "Things to do today. I'll shut the newspapers, kill an adulteress, flog her lover, shoot the Kurds, send 'em some money, assassinate an orchestra, and oh, yes ... must not forget about God. If he prays, I'll listen." This image of Islam is often expressed succinctly in cartoons and caricatures.

The same view that Muslims are not sincere in their religious beliefs is reflected over and over again in the quotations elsewhere in this newsletter. An open view of Islam, however, shows respect for Muslim beliefs and practices, and tries to understand them rather than dismiss them as devious or insincere.

## Discrimination Against Muslims Defended Rather Than Challenged

Islamophobia in Britain is often mixed with racism, violence and harassment on the streets, and direct or indirect discrimination in the workplace. A closed view of Islam has the effect of justifying such racism. The expression of a closed view in the media, for example, gives support and comfort to racist behaviour, regardless of whether this was the wish or aim of the journalist responsible. Islamophobia merges with crude colour racism, since most Muslims are perceived to have black or brown skins, and also anti-immigrant prejudice, since Muslims in Britain are perceived to have alien customs, specifically 'Asian' customs.

The ways in which anti-Muslim feeling may be combined with anti-immigrant and anti-'Asian' feeling were strikingly seen in a satire, which appeared a few years ago in the Sun newspaper, on the 12th November 1991. It is reprinted below. The paper ridiculed a primary school in

Birmingham, which had decided to remove images of pigs in the illustrations of the alphabet on its classroom walls, since depictions of pigs were offensive to some of the school's Muslim (specifically Pakistani-background) parents and children.

The Sun's offensive satire on Islam involved a scattergun approach which took in the Middle East much more than Pakistan, and also the whole South Asian presence in Britain as represented by 'Indian' restaurants and food. Further, it was directed at initiatives within the education system to make schools more generous and inclusive, such that pupils of all backgrounds, religions and ethnicities have access to, and may benefit from, the curriculum.

"For far too long we have been teaching English in a white, middle-class, racist, sexist fashion. If we want to encourage immigrants to assimilate into our society we must help them to learn our language. For this reason, the Government has decided to scrap the old A is for Apple, B is for Ball, C is for Cat method and introduce a new alphabet tailored to the needs of Muslim pupils. From next term, all schools will be required to use the following system.

A is for Ayatollah,

B is for Baghdad,

C is for Curry,

D is for Djabella,

E is for Emir,

F is for Fatwa,

G is for Gaddafi,

H is for Hizbollah,

I is for Intifada,

J is for Jihad,

K is for Khomeni,

L is for Lebanon,

M is for Mecca,

N is for Nan,

O is for Onion Bhaji,

P is for Palestine,

Q is for Q8,

R is for Rushdie,

S is for Saddam,

T is for Tehran,

U is for United Arab Emirates,

V is for Vindaloo,

W is for West Bank,

X is for Xenophobia,

Y is for Yasser Arafat,

Z is for Zionist Imperialist Aggressor Running Dogs of the Great Satan.

**(The Sun, 12 November 1991.) !!!**

Hostile views of Muslims are frequently combined with attacks on 'political correctness', and on 'liberals', the Race Relations Act, and the Commission for Racial Equality. A columnist says she is happy to accept Muslim customs if she encounters them when on holiday in a Muslim country:

**“When I go into a shop in Luxor, and find its keeper bobbing up and down on a prayer-mat like a demented yo-yo, I don’t interrupt. I steal away quietly and come back later. When I’m woken in Aswan at five in the morning by high-decibel wailing outside my window, I don’t yell back. I plug my ears and try to go back to sleep. It’s only courteous,” Carol Sarler, The People, 15 January 1995.**

Having established thus her readiness to respect Islam, she turns her attention to liberalism and political correctness back in Britain:

**“With the wishy-washy excuse that ‘it’s their culture’, we are supposed to tolerate idiots slaughtering goats on streets in Kensington, groups of idiots burning books on streets in Bradford and wealthy bigger groups building mosques on streets everywhere (try building a Methodist church in the central square in Riyadh and see how you get on). Inside these mosques they encourage the murder of Salman Rushdie, a British citizen, as decreed by a dead idiot in Iran, but, say the liberals, don’t worry about that: let’s change OUR religious services instead, to make sure WE don’t cause offense. And so we get schoolchildren denied the fun of singing Christmas carols – and, while we’re at it, let’s cancel the food of British tradition and serve halal food at inner-city council meetings,” (Carol Sarler, The People, 15 January 1995).**



## Muslim Views Not Considered

Islamophobia prevents Muslims from being invited or encouraged to take a full part in society’s moral deliberations and debates, and prevents their views from “finding meaning”, as a correspondent put it, in the country as a whole.

At a conference on Muslim community development in 1996 Tariq Modood referred to the respect in which the Chief Rabbi is widely held, and looked to the day when Muslim spokespeople will command a similar hearing:

“He does not just talk on Jewish matters or just to a Jewish audience. A lot of what he does is aimed at a broad national public ... He is listened to and debated with on that basis, as someone that has something interesting to say ... Insha’Allah a time will come when Muslims will contribute to newspapers, to public debates and to arguments, and will be heard and appreciated, addressing not just Muslim issues but common social, national and international problems...” (‘Muslim Community Development: a starting point’, Leicester, March 1996).

## Anti-Muslim Discourse Seen As Natural, Not Problematic

The expression of anti-Muslim ideas and sentiments is increasingly respectable. They are a natural, taken-for-granted ingredient of the commonsense world of millions of people every day. This aspect of Islamophobia was illustrated by the quotations above, and is illustrated at length in our later article on the media.

It is not only tabloid newspapers which demonise Islam. There are routine derogatory references in all the British press, and in a range of widely-distributed pamphlets and books. Even organisations and individuals known for their liberalism and anti-racism express prejudice against Islam and Muslims. An independent correspondent put the point as follows:

“A deep dislike of Islam is not a new phenomenon in our society. What is new is the way it is articulated today by those sections of society who claim the responsibility of secularism, liberalism and tolerance. They are in the forefront of the fight against racism and against Islam and Muslims at the same time. They preach equality of opportunities for all, yet turn a blind eye to the fact that this society offers only unequal opportunities for Muslims.”

Liberalism’s prejudices are seen in particular, the argument continues, in the slowness and lukewarm assent with which the race relations lobby has responded over the years to proposals that discrimination on grounds of religion should be made unlawful and in insensitivity to Muslim concerns and sense of outrage in relation to the Rushdie Affair.

One comment which gave much offense in this connection was the claim that the Qur’an is **“food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which society can be safely or sensibly based. It gives weapons and strength to the thought police.” (Fay Weldon: Sacred Cows, 1989.)** The author later maintained in an interview that these **“peaceful and apt”** words are **“a perfectly valid comment to make about either the Bible or the Koran.”** She said also: **“I say hooray for Muslims and down with Islam. The mullahs have done everyone a great disservice.” (Independent on Sunday, 2 March 1997.)**

On this latter point one of the century's leaders of liberal opinion, Stephen Spender, wondered in the Spectator "how far democracy is taught in English schools where there are large numbers of immigrants", Stephen Spender: 'Hoist By His Own Canard', The Spectator, 16 November 1991. He added that he found himself thinking "almost nostalgically of American schools, where children are made every morning to salute the American Flag" and wished that there was "a flag of democracy, symbolising freedom of speech, which children going into English schools were made to salute".

In context it was clear that the term 'immigrant' here meant Muslim, and that Spender believed Muslim children in Britain, as distinct from other children, need special training in democracy and patriotism.

As in liberalism, and also in the academic world, another correspondent writing from a university referred to the "rejection of otherwise thinking academics", whenever Islam is referred to in everyday conversation, and the academic world within the British climate of opinion as a whole: "Not only is the academic world a pillar of Islamophobia but also a hothouse of influences which spill down through dinner parties and think tanks into political parties, journalism, the arts, popular culture, the professions, local authorities, and everyday thought and encounters in the workplace and on the street."

Islamophobic dialogue, sometimes blatant but frequently subtle and coded, is part of the fabric of everyday life in modern Britain, in much the same ways that anti-semitic dialogue was taken for granted earlier in the century. Those who urge that it should be challenged and reduced do not underestimate the difficulties before them, or the seriousness and urgency of the task.

## Consequences and Connections

The consequences of Islamophobia may be summarised as follows:

### Injustice

Islamophobia hinders the development of a just society, characterised by social inclusion and cultural diversity. For it is a constant source of threat and distress to British Muslims and implies that they do not have the same rights as other British citizens.

### Effects on the young

Persistent Islamophobia in the media means that young British Muslims develop a sense of cultural inferiority and lose confidence both in themselves and in their parents. They tend then to 'drop out' and may be readily influenced by extremist groups which seem to give them a strong sense of identity.

### Dangers of disorder

Islamophobia increases the likelihood of serious social disorder, with consequent high costs for the economy and for the justice system.

### Muting of mainstream voices

Islamophobia makes it more difficult for mainstream voices and influences within Muslim communities to be expressed and heard. In consequence many Muslims are driven into the hands of extremists, and take in extremist opinions.

### Waste in the economy

Islamophobia means that much talent is wasted. This is bad for the economy, and bad for international trade.

### Obstructing cooperation and interchange

Islamophobia prevents Muslims and non-Muslims from cooperating appropriately on the joint decision and solution of major shared problems, for example problems relating to urban poverty and deprivation. Further, it prevents non-Muslims from appreciating and benefiting from Islam's cultural, artistic and intellectual heritage, and from its moral teachings. Likewise it obstructs Muslim appreciation of cultural achievements in the non-Muslim world.

### Harming international relations

One of the great strengths of a multi-cultural society is that it is more likely to be efficient and competitive on the world scene. But Islamophobia means that Britain is weaker than it need be in political, economic and cultural relations with other countries and it actively damages international relations, diplomacy and trade.

Further, Islamophobia makes it more difficult for Muslims and non-Muslims to cooperate in the solution and management of shared problems such as global ecological issues and conflict situations (for example, most notably in recent years, in the former republic of Yugoslavia). Many Muslims believe Islamophobia has played a major part in Western attitudes to events in Bosnia, and has prevented so far a just and lasting settlement. A correspondent of the Runnymede Trust (not himself a Muslim) wrote as follows:

"During the Bosnian war I had many encounters with politicians, including a senior cabinet minister. It was clear to me that irrespective of their political loyalties their reluctance to sanction military intervention in Bosnia was rooted in a large degree in their reluctance to support the creation of a new Muslim state in Europe. '**Muslims have a tendency to fanaticism,**' the cabinet minister told me, when I asked why the government was refusing to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian government."

## Fundamentalism in Christianity

The term 'fundamentalism' was coined as a proud self-definition by a movement within American Protestantism in the period 1865–1910. It became publicly well-known from 1919 onwards, with the foundation of the World Christian Fundamentalist Association. The movement stood for a re-affirmation of historic Christian theology, morality and interpretation of scripture – the so-called 'fundamentals' – and was in opposition to modernising and liberalising tendencies in American church life. Its essential distinguishing feature was an insistence on a literal interpretation of the Bible, as distinct from treating stories such as the Creation in the light of modern scientific knowledge, and therefore as symbolic. For decades after 1919 the only people who used the term 'fundamentalist' were Christians. Some used the term in proud self-definition, others as a term of disapproval.



Fundamentalists tended to be in sympathy with, and frequently indeed associated with, the political right. Christian fundamentalism, in both its theological aspects and in its interaction with right-wing politics, continues to be considerably stronger in the United States than in Europe.

## Application of the term "Fundamentalism" To Islam

The term was first applied to Islam in the Middle East Journal in 1957. But it was not until 1981 that its application to Islam gained currency. On 27 September 1981 there was an article by Anthony Burgess in the Observer. This referred to "the phenomenon of the new, or rather very old, Islam, the dangerous fundamentalism revived by the ayatollahs and their admirers as a device, indistinguishable from a weapon, for running a modern state".

Burgess said also that Muslim states such as Iran were "little more than intolerant, bloody, and finally incompetent animations of the Holy Book [the Qur'an]". He compared the Qur'an to Mein Kampf and concluded that there is "more blood and stupidity than glamour in the theocracy of the Sons of the Prophet".

Burgess's article was widely influential and quite soon the terms 'Islamic' and 'fundamentalist' became almost inseparable in the Western media. For example, in the Daily Telegraph's on-line archives from November 1994 to May 1997, there were 194 items containing the word 'fundamentalist' and 142 of these (almost three quarters) also contained the word 'Islamic'. Only 29 (15 per cent) contained the word 'Christian'.

When applied to Islam the term refers almost always to political matters not to theology, and more especially to the use of terror or repression. But because of its origins in Christian theology and dispute, particularly with regard to doctrines about the accuracy of scripture, there is an understood assumption in the Western media that the use of terror by dissidents or repressive states is sanctioned or even encouraged by the Qur'an. Actually, this assumption is no truer of the Qur'an than of the Bible.

To equate Islam and Islamic beliefs uncritically with extremism is to judge Islam only by those who wreak havoc, a standard not applied to Judaism and Christianity... There are lessons to be learned from a past in which fear of a monolithic Soviet threat often blinded the United States to the Soviet bloc's diversity. Which in turn led to uncritical support for "anti-Communist" dictatorships, and enabled the "free world" to tolerate the suppression of legitimate dissent and massive human rights violations by governments that labelled the opposition 'Communist' or 'socialist.'

Muslims vary as much in their interpretations of Islam as followers of other faiths with theirs. For the vast majority of believers, Islam, like other world religions, is a faith of peace and social justice, moving its adherents to worship God, obey His laws, and be socially responsible.

## To Be Continued...

In the next issue this highly emotive theme will continue. We are going to cover as many Islamophobic incidents as possible. These will include national and international incidents. We will include the Islamophobic overdrive which commenced following September 11th.

If you know of any Islamophobic experiences, whether personal or professional, we want you to let us know about them. We will try to include your letters in the next issue.



## Contributors

The Editorial Team would like to thank the following young people who have greatly contributed and helped to produce this issue.

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## Lancashire Council of Mosques Mission Statement. . .

Lancashire Council of Mosques, acknowledges the pivotal role that Mosques play in religious, social, economic, and community development. The aim is to promote the aspirations of the Muslim community in Lancashire.

The vision of Lancashire Council of Mosques is to facilitate equality of opportunity and involvement, on an individual as well as collective basis for all.

