

The Long View

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Palestine: Changing the narrative



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Cover photo (c) Sara Russell of Al-Quds Day protest, London, UK June 2017.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Welcome to the first issue of The Long View, a quarterly magazine from Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC). As the name suggests, the essays commissioned for this journal aim to look in depth and look forward. The type of work that occupies IHRC and other human rights and social justice organisations, is often by necessity a response to ongoing events. Whether it is limits on funds and human resources, or just the scale of immediate problems that need immediate solutions, reactive work and analyses are the norm of Muslim and indeed wider civil society particularly in Westernised¹ settings.

The Long View attempts to provide a space for thinkers to analyse in the long term and (kick)start or continue conversations on the same. The works herein are accessible but require that little bit longer to read than a daily op-ed or social media friendly text. It requires bucking the trend for soundbites and easy platitudes. The effort must surely be worth it?

Saied R. Ameli, whose academic oversight of IHRC's research work has been crucial to its success has written extensively about the need for Future Studies in civil society planning. In this issue Sadek Hamid applies this idea to the situation of Muslims in the UK, outlining how Future Studies can be used to map out various scenarios and challenges community organisations to begin this process. The three scenarios he maps out work from optimistic to pessimistic. This latter chimes with Narges Moballeghi's reflections on her visit to Bosnia in 2017 and the impact this had on her. Too young to remember the conflict in Bosnia, her discovery of

the history of the genocide and in particular the lead up to it cause her concern regarding the current state of Muslim communities in Europe today. She asks what can be learned and why is it that key lessons are not being discussed.

Faisal Bodi looks in detail at the proposals by the UK government for compulsory sex education in schools. Charting the developments in the policy and the backlash from Muslim, Christian and Jewish parents, Bodi highlights the hypocrisy of policy making regarding 'minority' issues by the current government. Forward thinking – here evidenced in part by the campaigns by various groups, advocates and parents – has brought about short-term results.

The solidarity between faith communities in this case is mirrored in the key article of this issue, by Roshan Salih. Thinking about solidarity for Palestine, Salih calls on Muslim organisations and leadership to eschew their current positions of submission to and fear of the losing favour or incurring the wrath of authorities, and to make a principled stand for Palestine. Not only is this solidarity in Salih's view crucial to righting the wrongs done to the Palestinians, it is simply the right and moral thing to do.

The Long View does not seek cynical and Machiavellian outlooks, and Salih's premise of morality as an increasingly lacking facet of our contemporary lives is an apt place to leave this overview.

We hope you take time to engage with the ideas and give us feedback via any of the platforms below.

Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali
Editors

Join the conversation by emailing us on info@ihrc.org, tweeting [@ihrc](https://twitter.com/ihrc) or find us on Facebook. You can even send us an old fashioned letter to IHRC, PO Box 598, Wembley, HA9 7XH, UK. Or pop by to the IHRC Bookshop for one of our events (or watch online www.ihrc.tv) at 202 Preston Road, Wembley, HA9 8PA. Find out what events are coming up at www.ihrc.org.uk/events.

¹ Westernised as opposed to Western, as Ramón Grosfoguel explains via a vis universities, Western ideas have permeated institutions and culture world-wide.

How to change the narrative on Palestine

Roshan Muhammed Salih argues that pro-Palestinian activists in the West must take a braver, more pro-active stand to advance the Palestinian narrative in the face of relentless Zionist hostility.

It can be really frustrating being a pro-Palestinian activist in the West because it effectively means that you have to put up with being targeted and demonised 24/7.

According to the Israel lobby, if you question Israel's "right to exist" you must be anti-Semitic; if you condemn Israel for stealing land and ethnically cleansing it you must be anti-Semitic; and if you call out Israel's Apartheid system and its wars and oppression you must be anti-Semitic.

So unsurprisingly many people just conclude that it's not worth the bother. Being labelled a "racist" and an "anti-Semite" can have real life consequences - you could lose your job and the prospect of getting another one when your name and the word "anti-Semite" is only a google search away.

Unfortunately, this is the reality for the pro-Palestine activist in the West, and there is no way of avoiding it because the only way you can appease the Israel lobby is if you give up Palestine activism. And for those of us whose hearts are close to Palestine that is simply not an option.

So we have no choice but to change our mindset and accept that getting targeted is an occupational hazard.

But that is not the point of this article. I don't want to focus on how we can fend off attacks from our enemies. Rather, I want to focus on how we can go on the offensive against them, put forward a positive case for the Palestinians and relentlessly expose the wrongdoing of Israel and its supporters.

But before I do that let me stress that what I am about to say is not based on my own reasoning, because as a non-Palestinian I don't believe I have the answers to the Palestinian issue. Rather, I have gleaned these ideas from the Palestinians I talk and listen to every day. After all, it is they who are the frontline victims of Israeli oppression and therefore it is they who should be leading the struggle.

Our job is to simply listen to them and support them.

What not to say

There is no doubt that public opinion in the West has become more sympathetic to the Palestinians over the past few decades, despite the fact that the mass mainstream media remains resolutely pro-Israel.

I assume this phenomenon is simply due to the fact that it's hard to hide the truth. No matter how hard you try to spin the facts, when Israel bombs Gaza the images speak for themselves. In addition, the rise of social media where unfiltered alternative views proliferate has been a great boon for the Palestinian cause.

But despite this, pro-Palestinian activists can still advance narratives that ultimately serve the interests of Israel. They often do this to remain within frameworks of debate that are deemed acceptable in the West.

One such narrative is, of course, the "two-state solution" which died a long time ago and only serves to cement Israel's hegemony over stolen land.

Another is the myth of non-violent resistance which denies the Palestinians agency and only serves to let the Israelis slaughter them with impunity.

And yet another is the willingness of many pro Palestinians to normalise relations with so-called "left wing Israelis" or "moderate Zionists," which is simply a different road to cementing Israel's hegemony over its ill-gotten gains.

So let us examine these narratives, and others, one by one.

The two-state solution

If you really care about Palestine then you need to stop talking about a two-state solution.

The vast majority of Palestinians I know think that the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is dead. Religious Palestinians think it's dead; secular Palestinians think it's dead; even many of those who publicly support it because they're part of the "peace process industry" will privately admit it's dead. What's more, a majority of Israelis think it's dead, including members of the cabinet.

Since the Oslo Accords of 1993 the "peace process" and the "two-state solution" have been the mantras of the so-called international community which has failed to deliver either.

But the truth is that Israel killed the Oslo peace process and the two-state solution by launching wars and implementing a brutal occupation. They killed it by building more and more settlements on Palestinian land

and populating them with Jews from all over the world. They killed it by constructing the Apartheid Wall. They killed it by separating the West Bank from Gaza. They killed it by isolating Palestinians from the world and from each other and by making them economically dependent on their oppressors.

This means that if a two-state solution were implemented today a Palestinian state would simply not be viable. After all, how can a state be viable when it has no contiguous territory, when it is under siege, when it has no control over its borders or its economy, or when it is not allowed to have an army?

Not to mention the fact that while millions of Palestinians and their descendants who were ethnically cleansed from their towns and villages will not be able to return to their ancestral homes, any Jew living in any country in the world is free to go there at any time.

Yet even "pro-Palestinian" Jeremy Corbyn still talks about the two-state solution (code for the destruction of the Palestinian cause) virtually every time he speaks about Palestine. He has said the UK would swiftly "recognise Palestine as a state" under a Labour government and would take steps towards "a genuine two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "very early on" if Labour won a general election.

Recognising a Palestinian state may well be a good thing but taking steps towards a two state solution is pure nonsense and Jeremy Corbyn probably knows it. But I guess he's trying to become Prime Minister so he has bigger fish to fry.

But I digress so let's return to the central point: we must stop talking about two states and we must either talk about the liberation of occupied Palestine or about one state where everyone shares the land - one man, one vote.

The latter could be particularly appealing to a Western audience who have been brought up on democratic principles and will find it hard to argue against. And it also has the added advantage of spelling the end of the Zionist entity.

Israel's "right to exist"

Yes, Israel has no right to exist. I'll say that again: Israel has absolutely no right to exist. Just as Apartheid South Africa had no right to exist and was rightly consigned to the dustbin of history.

And as long as we keep making the comparison with Apartheid South Africa - a white supremacist state ruling over a black majority - we will be able to steer clear of any substantive trouble.

Saying Israel has no right to exist does not mean that we want to throw all the Jews into the sea, just as wanting to see the end of Apartheid South Africa didn't mean we wanted to kill all white people.

It just means that a Jewish state has no right to exist at the expense of another people, in the same way any religious or secular state does not have a right to exist at the expense of others.

Of course, many modern states such as the United States of America and Australia

aims to silence criticism of Israeli policies that clearly violate Palestinian human rights."

They say that it "attempts to erase Palestinian history, demonise solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality, suppress freedom of expression, and shield Israel's far-right regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and Apartheid from effective measures of accountability in accordance to international law."

Make no mistake, Palestinians themselves consider this normalisation a betrayal of their cause and an endorsement of Israel's brutality towards and dispossession of them

were also built through a process of land theft and ethnic cleansing, and morally they also have no right to exist. But unfortunately these states have now been established for several centuries so the facts on the ground determine their reality, despite the undeniable moral case against them.

And of course that is what Israel seeks to accomplish – to establish facts on the ground (such as settlements and walls) that make any moral case irrelevant. But unlike the indigenous people of America and Australia, the dispossession of the Palestinians is a relatively recent phenomenon and there are millions of people alive today who directly suffered it or are bearing the consequences of it.

So we must fight to make sure those facts on the ground don't become permanent.

Rejecting the Israel lobby's anti-Semitism definition

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, which has been pushed heavily by the Zionist lobby and adopted by major political parties and local councils, is nothing but an attempt to stifle anti-Israel criticism and target Jeremy Corbyn.

It effectively says that questioning Israel's "right to exist" is anti-Semitic; it says that calling Israel "racist" is anti-Semitic; and it says that accusing Jews of being more loyal to Israel than their home countries is anti-Semitic.

Therefore, this definition must be wholly rejected by pro-Palestinians, which in the main (thankfully), it has been.

Lest there be any doubt, Palestinian organisations say the IHRA definition is a "false, anti-Palestinian definition of anti-Semitism which seeks to conflate anti-Semitism with criticism of Israel. This definition

"The discredited IHRA guidelines deliberately conflate hostility to or prejudice or discrimination against Jews on the one hand with legitimate critiques of Israel's policies and system of injustice on the other."

Yet some activists who claim to be pro-Palestinian still insist on supporting this definition of anti-Semitism on the grounds that Jews and Muslims in the West must work together to combat both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in a common anti-discrimination struggle.

The naivety of this position seems too obvious to spell out and it has even resulted in Zionists having input into a recent definition of Islamophobia.

No to normalisation

My understanding of Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions is all-encompassing. Boycotting Israel means exactly that – a total boycott of all Israeli institutions as well as those who support them.

Yet several Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE and Bahrain have been slowly normalising relations with Israel over the past few years.

This normalisation always starts off with secret diplomacy, then it moves onto cultural exchange visits, and then you get low-level or retired officials meeting each other publicly. Eventually, the leaders of Israel and these Muslim nations meet in public and formally recognise each other, paving the way for a normalisation of all political, economic and military ties.

The reason why the process happens in this gradual way is because Muslim public opinion is staunchly anti-Israel, so it has to be gently coaxed in a certain direction. But make no mistake, Palestinians themselves consider this normalisation a betrayal of their cause and an endorsement of Israel's brutality towards and dispossession of them.

I tell this story because this "soft normalisation" process is happening right here in Britain between some of our biggest Muslim mosques and institutions under the guise of seemingly harmless interfaith activities.

Take the annual Mitzvah Day, for example, founded by the pro-Israel Laura Marks who was Senior Vice President of the pro-Israel Board of Deputies of British Jews from 2012-2015. She also co-founded the Jewish Muslim Women's Network, Nisa-Nashim, which earlier this year criticised the former L'Oréal model Amena Khan for denouncing Israel.

Mitzvah Day is sponsored by Our Israel, Our Future which says it has been building meaningful connections between the UK Jewish community and the people of Israel for nearly 100 years.

Another of Mitzvah Day's donors and sponsors is the Shores Charitable Trust which states that its objectives are the "advancement of the Jewish religion by strengthening the continuity of normative Judaism, and the promotion both in Israel and elsewhere of projects which are both charitable... and benefit the wider Jewish Community."

Another donor and sponsor of Mitzvah Day is the European Jewish Fund which runs projects in Israel.

In terms of media coverage, Mitzvah Day was heavily promoted in pro-Israel British newspapers such as the Jewish News and the Jewish Chronicle. And last but not least it was attended and endorsed by Israel's ambassador to the UK, the notorious apologist for Israeli crimes, Mark Regev.

As you will have noticed there is a common theme to all I have mentioned above – Israel, Israel, Israel.

My view – based on years of reading pro-Israel media and following Israeli politics – is that the promotion of interfaith is a deliberate tactic to firmly establish Israel as a *fait accompli*, to neuter criticism of it and to divide groups which could pose a threat to it.

It is based on the Israeli peace building industry that flourished after the Oslo Accords. But this is not peace based on justice; it is peace based on Israel keeping everything they stole and the Palestinians just accepting it. It's like a burglar who steals your house and then says to you: you can't have your house back but let's be friends!

The Zionists reason that if they can make personal connections with influential Muslims then it will become more difficult for those Muslims to become harsh critics of Israel for fear of disrupting those relationships or rocking the boat. So instead they may simply limit themselves to mild criticism of certain aspects of Israeli policy but never question fundamental aspects of Israel's very nature.

And of course this means that those Muslim activists who do question the way Israel was founded (through theft of land and ethnic cleansing), or how Israel has sustained itself since (through war, occupation, oppression and Apartheid), are deemed

extremists who need to be sidelined.

This also means that the “moderates” and “extremists” will never work together or form a united front against the Zionist enemy. And remember, as with states, this soft normalisation with tea and biscuits is just a prelude to a more formal alliance between Zionists and mainstream Muslims.

Thankfully, Jews and Muslims rub along together pretty well in the West and there are no serious problems between them on a religious level. However, there is without doubt a political problem between pro Palestinians (Muslims and non-Muslims) and Zionists (Jews and non-Jews) over Israel-Palestine.

So I would humbly suggest that if Muslims want to do interfaith with Jews, they should do it with the many secular and religious Jews that share our struggle against the Zionist entity. After all, it is their voice that needs amplifying, not the Zionist lobby who already have major platforms.

Resistance

Here's a novel idea: how about supporting those groups who are actually on the frontlines fighting Israel and not hoping that you can sweep them under the carpet? Or worse still, sell them down the river by condemning them.

Unfortunately, there are some pro-Palestinian activists in the West who would like the Palestinian resistance struggle to resemble a Gandhi-esque fight against British colonialism in India; in other words, a wholly non-violent struggle.

But the Palestinians have tried that and where exactly has it got them? The Palestinian Liberation Organisation recognised Israel and committed to non-violence decades ago but that hasn't stopped the Israelis from stealing more Palestinian land and ruling Palestine Authority areas with the iron fist of Apartheid.

On the other hand, one could argue that the willingness of Hamas or Hezbollah to fight back with arms has actually led to Palestinian and Lebanese land being liberated. Without armed struggle Palestinians would not be at least partially in control of their own affairs in Gaza and Lebanon would now be called “Greater Israel.”

Let's not be shy about this - Palestinians have the right to defend themselves militarily as any occupied people around the world have a right to, while Israel is an occupying power and has an obligation to withdraw.

But the key point is that non-Palestinians should not tell Palestinians what to do; our role is to simply support them.

Whatever the Palestinian consensus is I'm fine with that. If the consensus is to fight Israel with arms I support that because an occupied people has the right to resist an occupation militarily. If they want to struggle by peaceful means through cultural boycotts or politics then I also support that.

And if they want to do a combination of both then that's great too.

Coordinate with each other

There may be many pro-Palestine activists around the world but they tend to exist in isolated bubbles. But just think how much their voices could be amplified if they coordinated with each other using modern means of communication by sharing each other's work and messages?

Given half the chance our leaders may well sell us down the river so that they can get their knighthoods and appear on the mainstream media

It's become a bad joke how Muslims are terrible at working with each other but surely when it comes to Palestine they can put their differences aside and do exactly that? This is the one issue, after all, where there is virtually no disagreement among us.

Strong leadership

Like all Muslims across the world I have been brought up with the belief that Palestine is the central political cause of the Muslim Ummah. After all, this is the land of Al Aqsa where the Prophet (saw) performed his Night Journey; a land that was usurped by mainly European settlers at the expense of the indigenous people who still suffer to this day.

But I fear that our community leaders are selling this cause out for the sake of gaining entrance into the Establishment fold. And if we don't stop them now from going down this shameless route it will be completely normal for Muslims to work alongside those who are directly or indirectly oppressing our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

Where is the shame of these community leaders? Where is the love of Palestine in their hearts?

Personally, I want a Muslim leadership that will not be cowed by government threats or bogus accusations of anti-Semitism. I want a leadership that truly represents the community and not their own vested interests. And I want to be part of a Muslim community that is led by lions, not mice.

Given half the chance our leaders may well sell us down the river so that they can get their knighthoods and appear on the mainstream media. So we need to hold them to account for what they are doing and keep them honest. They work for us and gain their legitimacy from us, not the other way around.

Prospects for Israel and the Palestinians

To conclude I must admit that I feel that there is no solution to the Palestine issue at the moment.

There is no military solution because Israel is much more powerful in this regard, and there is no political solution because the countries that supposedly support Palestine are divided and weaker than the countries that support Israel.

So the only thing the Palestinians can do is sit and wait for a better historical moment and not leave the land. I know I have no right to say this living in the comfort of the West, but maybe the highest calling of Palestinians today is to literally give up any hope for a better future by staying where they are and not emigrating.

I would never condemn Palestinians who choose to leave Palestine for a better life, but I only have the upmost admiration for those who choose to stay in Palestine despite the fact that they know they're signing away their lives.

But let me end with a message of hope – Israel may be sitting pretty now but will it be in in 50 years' time?

It is facing a demographic timebomb with a rapidly rising Palestinian population, and also a rapidly rising ultra-orthodox Jewish population which doesn't serve in the army and doesn't contribute much to the economy.

Will Israel's main backer – America – still want to support a Western colonial outpost in the Middle East when the whole region becomes less strategic with the end of the energy age? Will America still have the same cultural affinity with Israel as internally it inevitably becomes a more Hispanic and non-white nation?

With the advent of a multi-polar world and rising Muslim powers, will Palestinians finally get the financial, military and political backing they deserve?

None of us know the answers to these questions but I do know that time is against Israel and an argument can be made that it needs a deal more than the Palestinians do.

So whether we live in Palestine or outside it, let's not give the Israelis something now that they almost certainly will not get in the future.

• Roshan Muhammed Salih

is the editor of British Muslim news website 5Pillars and is a documentary maker for Press TV. He has been a journalist for 17 years and in the past has worked for London Weekend Television, Islam Channel, Al Jazeera and others.

Bosnia: The forgotten warning for European Muslims

Reflecting on her commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre **Nargess Moballaghi** sees alarming parallels with the Europe of today

“Go back to where you came from.” A phrase so well worn, it should be old by now. But, like the spandex leggings that should have stayed in the 80’s, it’s back in fashion in a big way.

Unlike many, I’ve never been on the receiving end of the “go back home” classic, but as a young teenager in the late 90’s, I do have one very strong memory, of an Eastern European woman, telling my mother to “go back home.” We were in a Primark in West London. Incidentally, those were also the days before Primark was in fashion, and I would get dragged in there unwillingly, dragging my teenage feet, by my uncool mother trying to dress me. I’ve never forgotten the way mum, unfazed and almost amused, turned back and flippantly said “guess what love, I am.” Even standing in Primark, I thought my mother was very cool.

I am sure, in 2019, that Eastern European woman has been told to “go home” far more times than she ever dished it out to visibly Muslim women in the 1990s.

In recent weeks the deeply political nature of this racist phase hit home when Shamima Begum, a British teenager who was lured to join ISIS in Syria as a 15-year old girl, was stripped of her citizenship, effectively, and illegally, rendering her stateless.

Shamima, who has just given birth in a Syrian refugee camp, wants to come home. But in today’s aggressively toxic Islamophobic environment, where that actually is, has been allowed to, even encouraged to be questioned.

Her story encapsulates everything that the phrase “go back to where you came from” contains.

The Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, stripped her of her British citizenship, claiming that she was a dual-national. It turns out, she just happens to be a British citizen from parents with an immigrant heritage. Bangladesh says she is not a citizen, and they won’t take her in. And why should they, when reports suggest she has never even been to the country?

It’s obvious where “home” is. Except it isn’t.

Shamima’s story is not new, though the

level of attention it has attracted is. Many Britons have quietly been rendered stateless, a move illegal under international law, as the British government tries to find legal loopholes to create a precedent that will make this practice increasingly easy to implement and broaden.

As a journalist, who has spent over 15 years monitoring the mood in communities across Britain I am not often surprised by public reaction to a story. But even I have been surprised by the intensity and scale of public outrage at Shamima. Overwhelmingly, the anger and emotion is so heightened it has rendered rationality or objectivity reprehensible. For days, it seemed like the majority of Muslims, non-Muslims, the far-right, the far-left, were all united, in a collective moment of mass hysteria. “Burn the Witch” they all cried.

It was for me a rare, and rather terrifying glimpse, of what decades of Islamophobic media coverage, political discourse and tightening legislation can achieve when it all aligns; an uncompromising mob mentality on a national scale with no rhyme nor reason.

Except this is a very familiar tune and the conductor of our orchestra is highly skilled. And despite it playing all the time, it’s a song that far too many of us in Europe haven’t listened to enough. We haven’t learned the lyrics. We haven’t learned the riffs. And maybe one of the reasons we can’t recognise the remix, is because we never heard the original.

It is the eerie soundtrack that I heard when I travelled to Bosnia in the Summer of 2017, a trip filled with terrifying tunes I have still not been able to get out of my head.

The Genocide we never learned at school

As a product of the mid-80’s, I was only seven years old when the atrocities in Bosnia really started to unfold in 1992. Within four years, over half a million Muslims had been killed, two million made refugees and over 80,000 women raped.

It’s not that I hadn’t heard of what happened in Bosnia, it was there, somewhere; a passing comment, a passing news article

about a tribunal or court case. I belong to the generation that was just old enough to remember the name and too young to have really engaged with the issue.

Like many of my generation, racism at home and war abroad was how we grew up and grew into our activism. For me, fighting racism at home centred on the struggles of the British Black community, without the focus it has on Muslims and Islam today. I was a teenager in college in the lead-up to the Iraq war, which was for my generation, the defining moment of our politics.

So, perhaps, in that context, Bosnia fell through the cracks. Or maybe it was shoved down them. I don’t remember ever discussing Bosnia at school. When I scanned back through my memory, there are certain key political events that I remember from the classroom; the Columbine school shooting in 1999, the day of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The latter was an early defining moment for me; “I must have been a little older when Stephen was killed,” I said to myself. But then I remembered, no, it was 1993, the very same year that the Bosnian genocide was escalating. Knowing everything I do today, about how media and politics actually work, I look back at that time and think there is a reason I don’t remember.

I owe the memories I now have to the Islamic Human Rights Commission, an NGO based in London, that has tried to keep the legacy and the lessons of the Bosnian genocide alive for those generations that have not been taught to remember it.

Since 2010, one way they have been doing this is by holding an annual “Genocide Memorial Day.” Although the key event is a conference in London, “GMD” has a curriculum for schools and an annual poetry competition for students. Young people aged 11- 18 are encouraged to submit work that reflects the theme of ‘protecting humanity from genocide’

The prize for winning the competition is a trip to Bosnia, including the annual Srebrenica memorial on 11th July.

The IHRC had commissioned me to film with the 2017 competition winner for a documentary.

I met Tarzina for the first time at Heathrow airport. She was by then, 19 years old, born after the genocide had taken place, “I’d never even heard of Bosnia before winning this competition,” she told me as we were boarding.

“I can’t believe I had never even heard of Bosnia” is what she told me before she left a week a later.

Travelling to Bosnia; a trip back to today

Our guide for the trip was political activist, Demir Mahmutchajic. We would spend the next 10 days travelling across Bosnia from Sarajevo, to Srebrenica to Stolac and back.

Demir wanted to fight in the war. He felt he was tricked out of it. After his parents planned a brief trip for him to London, they told him he must stay there to study. He spent the next decade in Britain, fighting for his people from afar. His brother had a different fate. He was killed in battle. On the second day of our trip, Demir took Tarzina and I to his brother's grave. It was a first glimpse of what I had yet to understand about the people there.

Bosnia is an extremely beautiful and laid back country, it's people are friendly, the pace is slow, the atmosphere friendly. But you just have to scratch the surface for the wounds to seep out.

For Demir, that was still loss, tears, regret, and trying to make up for all the years he missed.

I once interviewed a man who had been the victim of long-lasting child sexual abuse by the teachers and priests at his school. I called him a victim. He explained to me the psychological process, the immense battle, the years it had taken for him to become strong enough to stop calling himself a victim and start calling himself a survivor. I always remember that conversation and I have never looked at survivors the same way again, and I always try not to call them victims.

Bosnia is a country filled with survivors; survivors with their own stories and their own memories to burden them. For Demir, one memory is the fact that his brother died with no shoes. Bosnian Muslims didn't have the most basic of equipment of uniform. There weren't boots to waste. They would leave them for those who would survive.

"I was 15 years old when aggression on my country was started by the fifth largest military in the world at the time," Demir says. "In the early days of the war, a Serbian general gave an order to his soldiers in one town to 'clear the area of all Muslims regardless of the costs to his own soldiers. They cleared the Muslims and his army suffered no loss at all. That's what kind of 'conflict' this was. Genocides are not conflicts, we are not talking about war, we are not talking about two armies fighting each other, we are talking about a fully fledged organised, military force, indoctrinated to slaughter, to eat up, those who are systematically dehumanised and turned into vermin. This is the same pattern, same scenario for so long. This does not happen overnight."

So how many nights does it take to turn humans into vermin?

In 2015, Katie Hopkins wrote an article in *The Sun*, Britain's most read newspaper, calling migrants crossing the Mediterranean

"cockroaches" and "feral humans," claiming they were "spreading like the norovirus." Her suggested solution? Use gunships on them. Her comments came in the same week 400 migrants were feared to have drowned to their death trying to get to the safety of the shore.

I told Demir this, one day, driving in the mini-van, I was asking him if he sees any similarities between Bosnia and what is happening across Europe today? He told me that I don't understand how bad it has to get, or in other words, I don't understand how bad it can get. "Katie Hopkins has to become your most respected television news anchor, your most credible journalist, that's what the situation was here."

In the UK and across Europe today, we are definitely many nights down the road, it's just that we don't know our destination, how

'safe haven'.

In an attempt to conceal the crime, some Serbian forces dug up the bodies of Srebrenica's victims and moved them to other burial sites across Bosnia. More than 1,000 remain missing, with more being found and returned to Srebrenica for burial every year.

Every year on 11th July tens of thousands flock to the main grave site in Srebrenica. It has become a pilgrimage of sorts, but Demir didn't want us to just see Srebrenica only on the 11th, he wanted us to see it the day before and the day after too.

So on the morning of 10th July we set off on the four-hour drive. As we got closer, it got busier. Hundreds of people were arriving on their motorbikes having rode across the country. Others were driving, walking, using any means to get there on time.

The police had closed off the main

The Srebrenica massacre of July 1995 was the biggest organised slaughter in modern Europe – 8000 men, women and children were butchered by Serb forces in 12 days

long it will take to get there, or what it might look like when we arrive.

Journalism is certainly eroding and facilitating fascist narratives in the mainstream at an unprecedented rate. Today, Tommy Robinson is a journalist, in fact he works at the same alt-right "media outlet" as Katie Hopkins.

But surely, we will never go down that road again? This is Europe in 2019 after all.

But what of 1992? Didn't the people see what was unfolding I asked Demir?

The reason the genocide happened, he told me, was because people were not prepared. However bad it got, they kept saying "nothing that bad would ever happen in Europe. It's the 1990s." So when it did happen, it felt like it happened overnight, because no one ever believed it was possible. They were in shock, they couldn't mobilise. They weren't prepared because they made the mistake of thinking it was impossible.

I went to bed that night, with two sides of my own brain battling it out; the one warning not to exaggerate, the other warning to ring the alarm. I fell asleep wondering how you can ever know if you have got the balance right, or if you will wake up one morning realising you told yourself what is happening never could.

Srebrenica; a pilgrimage

The Srebrenica massacre of July 1995 remains the most haunting symbol of the conflict. It was the biggest organised slaughter in modern Europe – 8000 men, women and children were butchered by Serb forces in 12 days, all under the noses of UN troops in what was supposed to be a UN-protected

roads so we had to take an alternative route through the hills and mountains. Our minivan could not cope with the ascent, so we lightened its load – us – as Demir drove it uphill.

We walked, not a long distance, maybe only about five or ten minutes. It was scorching hot, over 40 degrees Celsius and quickly went from uncomfortable to intolerable. Bosnian Muslims who were lucky not be slaughtered had to spend days if not more walking through these mountains, in this heat, being shelled, being shot at, being hunted like animals.

As we walked uphill and turned a corner, there was a police checkpoint. Though they did not bother us beyond intensive stares, Demir told us that that the police officers were wearing the same insignia as those who perpetrated the genocide on these very days in 1995.

"How do you think that feels for the mother who is coming to do a prayer for the few bones of her entire male family and she is being watched by those wearing the same insignia?"

That night we met with a lady who had survived the genocide, after her father broke ranks with the rest of the villagers who had placed their trust in the UN safe zone and had walked down to their own slaughter. Instead, her father took a small group and walked for days with no food or water through the very mountains we had just walked up. They were just as friendly, warm and relaxed as everybody else I had met, and also kind enough to give us a place to sleep that night.

The next morning as I interviewed her,

her husband and son, I saw that look, the one I had seen in Demir at his brother's grave and with which I had now become familiar.

I could not understand what she was saying, but I didn't need to, I am human after all. She cried and then she stared into space for a very long time. Another survivor. Another story.

The next morning, her son took us all to the memorial. It was the hottest temperature that I have ever had to walk in, in the mid-40's, so hot in fact my camera overheated and malfunctioned.

We walked, and we walked, and then we saw it. 6500 tombstones. As I walked around the hordes of people, their individual stories hit me like waves. The old woman sitting under an umbrella holding a tombstone. The young man on a hill crying gentle tears, who told me he travels every year from Turkey and has half a dozen family members buried here. And at the bottom of the hill, the coffins, each wrapped in green.

I have visited the biggest cemetery in the world and I have buried my own father; there is a particular energy to a burial, to a funeral, to laying someone to rest. In Srebrenica on that day, it was the energy of burying your father, your son, your brother, intensified and multiplied in the biggest cemetery. The energy was buzzing at you, telling you that something was not right, that what happened here had left agitated the soil in which these bodies were buried.

In most of those coffins there were only a few bones. I watched a man cry over his loved one as if he had died only yesterday, displaying that familiar desire to be able to reach out and hold your loved one one last time before they have to go.

And then there was the call to prayer followed by a few minutes of breeze, of quiet, before the souls attached to those bones were finally given some peace.

We went back to the cemetery that same evening, just as the sun was setting. There were exactly three people there; a cameraman, his assistant, and an old lady walking by a grave.

There was pin drop silence. An eerie calm had descended on the now deserted site. It was as if the memorial service had not taken place at all. It was a moment in

which to really absorb what this place represented. I walked around the 6500 tombstones and then I stopped at as many as I could to read their names and ages. The youngest was just three years old.

Srebrenica was the worst of the atrocities committed during the aggression against Bosnia, so it is right that it should be remembered, but it felt wrong that it is the only massacre that is.

"The genocide in Bosnia started in 1992, not 1995," Demir says. "In the first

Every step of my journey through Bosnia, reminded me of the similarities with Europe today

few months of war from April to June 1992 there were concentration camps set up, there were torture chambers, there were rape chambers. 80,000 women were systematically raped, an organised rape process, where soldiers coming back from the front lines were 'rewarded'. Hundreds of thousands were placed in concentration camps waiting for their turn to be killed. The reason they were not all killed is because the camps were exposed, they were not able to hide it. They were not so brave as to come out and do it openly" But, where no one was looking, there were unspeakable crimes committed; "buses full of Bosnian Muslims were just thrown off the top of cliffs, they wouldn't even waste bullets on those who they were massacring".

Demir continued: "In Prejidor, in 1992 all Muslims were forced to wear white armbands or put on their houses a white piece of cloth to mark them. That was in the first months of aggression, over 70% of Bosnian Muslims were displaced, that's 1.5 million people, 1 million outside of the country, 500,000 internally. There are

towns that are completely empty. To minimise such an endeavour, such organisation, such a scale of planning, 100,000s involved in, to scale it down to just the incident in Srebrenica, is nothing but a carefully thought out strategy how to ignore and eventually come to the point that what happened in Bosnia would not matter anymore, we would forget, we would not think about it, and when somebody raises a question, we would say everybody did something wrong and Srebrenica was the exception, not a rule"

Today, the exception is again becoming the rule. Every step of my journey through Bosnia, reminded me of the similarities with Europe today. But that still leaves the questions unanswered; how many nights does it take to turn humans into vermin? What road are we really on and how long until we get there?

We can count the nights and the bodies in Bosnia, because it happened.

But here and elsewhere in Europe we will never know until it does. Is that a risk we are willing to take?

What doesn't require us to wait and see, is understanding that it is the process and not the tipping point that needs to be identified. It is the principles and not our emotions that need to guide us. And that we don't have to wait until it gets worse to make things better.

The Bosnian genocide did not happen overnight. But it did happen and not long enough ago for us to confine it to the history books.

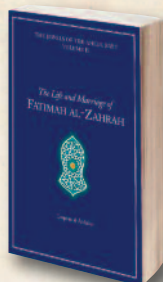
So whilst we might not know how possible it is that Muslims in Europe could face a similar fate again, we do know that it is not impossible.

That in itself is something to reflect on, especially at a time when we have thrown Shamima Begum under the bus. Because it's not impossible that we're on that very same bus being driven to the cliff edge.

• Nargess Moballeghi

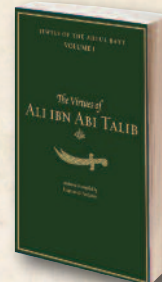
is an independent journalist and documentary filmmaker. She has spent over 12 years as a news reporter in the Middle East and Europe with a special interest in UK and Middle East politics, Islamophobia and global social justice issues.

*Jewels
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Bayt*



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Exposed and explained: The insidious agenda to foist LGBT on our children

With parents up in arms over government plans to overhaul relationships and sex education in schools, **Faisal Bodi** analyses how the LGBT “Trojan Horse” is rapidly infiltrating our schools

The sight of agitated Muslim parents protesting outside inner city schools is one with which most of us are unwelcomingly familiar. Whether it's over the right to wear religious attire or a purge of Muslim governors under the pretext of “extremism”, the image presented of us as reactionaries stubbornly pushing back against the tide of enlightened western progress invariably overshadows the legitimate concerns we hold. With the introduction of an aggressive social engineering programme epitomised by the Prevent anti-extremism strategy and the so-called Trojan Horse affair, the state has made clear its intention to drag Muslims, kicking and screaming if necessary, down the road of secular liberalism.

The latest flashpoint centres around the sensitive issue of sex and relationship education. Parents at the Parkfield Community school in Birmingham, a primary whose roll is 98% Muslim, have objected to a programme run by the openly gay deputy head teacher Andrew Moffatt which pushes a LGBT agenda on a community whose religious ethos is totally at odds with it. Under the “No Outsiders” programme drawn up by Moffatt himself, primary schoolchildren are introduced to questions of sexuality through stories about same-sex relationships and marriages. “No Outsiders” asks children to explore different identities, accept homosexuality as morally correct, and states that “five-year-olds need to be taught that gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and trans people exist.”

Parents at the school maintain that they have never been consulted and only found out about the programme after their children mentioned it. According to parents, they are coming home and showing signs of confusion over gender identity. One four-year-old child came home and reported that her teacher had said, ‘We can be a boy or a girl’ and ‘wear boy's clothes or girl's clothes’. Another one told her mother that she learnt ‘boys can marry boys and girls can marry girls.’ Moffatt is also reported to have told one class that “it is OK to be gay in all religions,” and explained that “he was gay and a Christian, and that they could be gay or lesbian and be Muslim.”

Although 400 Parkfield parents signed a petition asking for ‘No Outsiders’ to be removed from the curriculum, the school initially said it had no intention of changing its teaching. It was only after an overwhelming majority of parents kept their children away from school in protest on the first Friday of March that the school authorities relented, eventually saying they would suspend “No Outsiders” indefinitely until a resolution is reached with parents.

Determined lobby

Moffatt is no stranger to controversy. A long-time campaigner for the normalisation of homosexuality, he was forced to resign from another primary school in the city, Chilwell Croft Academy, in 2014, after Christian and Muslims parents complained that his educational resource, a collection of books titled Challenging Homophobia in Primary Schools (CHIPS), was used in literacy lessons for 10 and 11-year-olds. Moffatt's choice to return to work across the city in an exclusively Muslim school was not accidental. In 2016 he told the Guardian that his aim was to increase acceptance of LGBT issues in challenging communities. “There was no point in going to an area where it would be an easy task. I had to go where I might meet the same challenges in order to find a different way to meet them. I was determined to make LGBT equality a reality in any community.”

Moffatt's dogged determination is a striking feature of the LGBT lobby as a whole. Britain's most prominent LGBT campaign group, Stonewall, now works with over 1500 schools across the UK in promoting wider acceptance of LGBT practices and people. It has never made any secret of its desire to effect cultural and attitudinal change. Stonewall's philosophy is that LGBT relationships are intrinsically good and equal to heterosexual relationships. Its campaigning has led to changes in legislation and policy that have accelerated the normalisation of LGBT, the biggest change coming in 2003 when the ban on intentionally promoting homosexuality (Section 28

amendment to the Local Government Act) was repealed.

Currently schools are under no obligation to promote LGBT but the schools watchdog OFSTED is already acting as a spearhead for policy changes set to come into force next year that will entrench LGBT in the education system. At present OFSTED inspectors at both primary and secondary level are tasked, *inter alia*, with finding out if children have had any lessons about same-sex families and whether pupils who consider themselves transgender feel safe and free from bullying. OFSTED's current head of corporate strategy, Luke Tryl was previously Head of Education at Stonewall and a special advisor to the Department for Education. Openly homosexual and Christian, he believes there should be no restrictions on religions teaching the tenets of their faith. “If they say, ‘In our religion we do not condone gay relationships’, or whatever, they should be able to. As long as they say, ‘But under British law, gay marriage is allowed,’” he told Schoolsweek last November.

That position, however, seems to be at variance with OFSTED's inspection regime which actively tries to seek out anti-LGBT views amongst teachers and pupils and mark down schools for not conforming to the emergent orthodoxy. In recent years Christian and Jewish schools which were previously classed as good or outstanding have been downgraded on account of their failure to teach children explicitly about issues such as sexual orientation and gender re-assignment. In the case of Beis Yaakov, an orthodox Jewish all-girls primary school in Salford which scored outstanding on every other measure, its failure to teach these issues was enough for OFSTED to grade it as “failing” in 2014 and put it into special measures. Only after the school had amended its PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) classes to include discussions of homosexuality and transgender issues was it returned to a “good” grading. Another orthodox Haredi Jewish school in north London, Vishnitz Girls School, was downgraded from “good” in 2013 to “inadequate” in 2017, with one of the reasons cited being its failure to ensure that the PSHE curriculum promotes respect for sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The pressure to stay on the right side of OFSTED has even led to one secondary Muslim girls' school in the north west of England and many schools with majority Muslim pupils signing up to Stonewall's LGBT training programmes.

Predictably, the government's obvious determination to normalise and legitimise LGBT through the education system has come up against the equally tenacious will of parents. LGBT aside, many parents feel that school-age children are too young to be taught about sex and relationships full stop. A common refrain from parents is that such teaching sexualises children at a delicate age when we should be protecting their innocence, more so in an environment characterised by the proliferation of pornography and sexual imagery. Moreover there is no evidence to suggest that homophobic bullying, the oft-stated justification for introducing LGBT issues to children, actually exists at primary school level to a degree that would necessitate state intervention on this scale. "What incidents of homophobic or transgender bullying have occurred that merit such a curricular intervention? What horrors have occurred that would warrant teachers explicitly teaching primary school-aged children about homosexual relationships and transgender identity? Do they have evidence that, without programmes like No Outsiders, children would be full of hate, tearing into anyone who was different to themselves?", wrote Alka Seghal Cuthbert in *Spiked*.

The strength of parental feelings on the issue came through in a government stakeholder engagement process held between November 2017 - March 2018 as a prelude to its planned sex education shake-up. The consultation received an unprecedented 23,000 submissions, the vast majority of them from parents, with Muslims and Jews said to be over-represented in the responses. According to the limited information released by the government, only a small proportion of respondents favoured teaching about sexual identity at primary level with around half of all respondents saying that within the context of relationships education they would prefer schools to teach about families and respect.

Yet despite that the government has proposed making relationships education compulsory and there is also no assurance that sex education would not be delivered within science lessons. So while parents will retain their right to withdraw children from sex education classes they may find themselves disarmed when it comes to relationships education and teaching about sex in other subjects in the curriculum that are compulsory. Naturally, there is concern that the LGBT agenda will be smuggled into primary schools in the face of the government's own compelling evidence that this is not something parents want. (Note the irony in the government being prepared to ignore parents' concerns about the sexualisation of children whilst tacitly condoning OFSTED head Amanda Spielman's ridiculous assertion that the hijab could be seen as a sign that young Muslim girls were being sexualised). Parents of secondary school pupils will also

lose the right to withdraw their children from relationships education although they will be able to remove them from sex education up to and until three terms before they turn 16. However, even then parents' wishes can be overruled by the headteacher if he or she decides it is in the pupil's best interests.

These and other proposals were recently opened up for public consultation with a view to a final policy being drawn up later this year ready for introduction in 2020. But if the government's LGBT advice for independent schools is anything to go by the future looks bleak. Although independent schools are exempt from the rules governing maintained schools (those funded by the government) the DfE has nevertheless published advice which requires them to teach same-sex relationships and gender reassignment. Even primary school children should be "aware of the ways in which people can be different and be respectful of those differences", says the draft advice to independent schools (a consultation on the draft advice has recently closed and the DfE is currently considering responses).

Challenging the proposals

One Jewish father has already commenced a legal action against the DfE on the basis that the requirement violates the European Convention on Human Rights freedom of religion guarantees as schools will no longer be permitted to say homosexuality is a sin in line with religious beliefs. Lawyers for Shraga Stern, the director of a construction firm whose children attend a London independent school, made the allegations in a letter to Education Secretary Damian Hinds MP and Education Minister Nick Gibb MP. Stern says the government's advice that the sexual choices of people identifying as LGBT are "equally valid" "goes to the heart of the ethical worldview taught by a faith school. Belief in God and in a religious way of life distinguishes between action that is morally good and action that is sin....The Draft Advice goes beyond requiring toleration and in effect challenges the very essence of religious belief," says the letter. At other Jewish independent schools, parents have even withdrawn consent for OFSTED inspectors to talk to their children about personal development, safeguarding issues or anti-bullying policies because they fear they will be used as a pre-text to raise LGBT issues.

OFSTED, however, seems intent on driving through its intended agenda telling the Observer in January 2019: "Most faith schools – state and independent – see no contradiction between teaching the tenets of their faith and the legal requirement to promote British values, including respect for democracy and the rule of law or to encourage respect for people with different characteristics such as those of a different faith, sexual orientation or race. "However,

for the small minority who will not comply with the law, it is Ofsted's duty to report those failings so that action can be taken to improve or close these schools."

This policy marks a clear departure from previous requirements. Until recently, equalities advice for maintained schools from the Department for Education issued in 2014 made it clear that "it should not be unlawful for a teacher in any school to express personal views on sexual orientation provided that it is done in an appropriate manner and context". So in theory, it was perfectly acceptable for a teacher to spell out a morally based case against same-sex or extra-marital relationships. However in 2017 the government revised its view citing recent European case law and the European Convention of Human Rights as a justification. Under the Equalities Act 2010, it is unlawful for any education provider to discriminate between pupils on grounds of these protected characteristics: disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and sex. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission which enforces the Act, in what represents a complete about-turn from the government's previous position, it would now not only be unlawful for schools to reject a pupil for admission on the basis that he/she was homosexual but also if a schoolteacher was to describe homosexuality as 'unnatural' or cover only heterosexual relationships in a lesson.

That seems to be a very latitudinous interpretation of legislation which was drafted to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment and not to socially engineer an acceptance of a particular sexual identity or lifestyle. It reinforces a widely-held view that equalities legislation is being used as a Trojan horse to smuggle into education an LGBT agenda that is all about fostering the acceptance of particular, minority sexual behaviours and identities.

Smuggling LGBT into the whole curriculum

Even if the government now changes tack and retains the right of parents to remove their children from all relationships and sex education, it may not be enough to stop children being taught to see LGBT behaviour as acceptable. The LGBT locomotive is already steaming through the education system and integrating LGBT into all subject areas. Last year Stonewall published a guide for secondary schools, "Creating an LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum", designed to show them how to easily and naturally integrate LGBT issues into their curricula. Sponsored by the education publisher Pearson, the guide says schools are unable to fulfil their duty to teach tolerance and diversity without reference to LGBT. "Under the Equality Duty, all schools should take proactive steps to promote respect and understanding of differ-

ent groups of people, including LGBT people. All schools are also required to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils and British values, such as a mutual respect and tolerance; this is something that Ofsted looks at across all schools. This is impossible to do without reflecting the experiences of LGBT people, who exist in all walks of life."

So, in the manipulative hands of the LGBT lobby the Equalities Act, an anti-discrimination tool, has been turned into an official duty on everyone to affirm the acceptability of LGBT behaviours/identities even if they consider them to be morally reprehensible. Accepting this logic one would be justified in asking why the state is not also pushing for schools to promote the beliefs of faith groups as it could be similarly argued that since religion is also a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act it is impossible to teach tolerance and mutual respect without affirming that they are correct.

What can we do?

The Stonewall guide is a real eye-opener and reveals the extent to which the LGBT agenda stands to become woven into the fabric of secondary school teaching. In English for example it suggests studying fiction by LGBT authors, discussing how their LGBT identity may have influenced their writing and advises teachers to introduce LGBT themes in discussions about representation in literatures. Critics have suggested that this undermines educational standards as teachers will be required to choose books not on the basis of their literary qualities but whether they represent LGBT themes. Even in subjects such as maths where opportunities to introduce LGBT themes would appear less obvious, it says that teachers should "take opportunities to mention LGBT people", and "include references to different family structures". In science it asks teachers to use language and examples that include LGBT people when setting questions. "For example, 'two women would like to have a baby together, and the doctor recommends they use In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)'."

Campaigners like Moffatt have also started weaving LGBT acceptance into the warp and woof of school life. The 'No Outsiders' programme is designed to eliminate the possibility of parents sidestepping LGBT tuition by opting for their children to be removed from SRE and RE lessons. Moffatt is clear that withdrawal from "No Outsiders" is not permitted as it draws in a range of issues relating diversity: "The law says you can remove your child from RE or sex education lessons but this is a lesson celebrating diversity. The lessons are not one-off sessions; the ethos is all around the school. It is not possible to shield children from our school ethos," he writes.

Muslim educational campaigners are not unaware of the dangers. "One of the

major misunderstandings is that the LGBT agenda is being fed solely through relationships education and sex education," explains Yusuf Patel who runs the website sreislamic.org, a resource to help parents navigate the rapidly changing landscape. "Since homosexual marriages were legalised in 2014 schools have had an obligation to teach about it in and in a cross-curricular way. However, what is actually happening goes beyond teaching that

This 'queering' and 're-gendering' of society is being pushed by a dangerous ideology

same-sex marriage is legal to actively proselytising and saying it is acceptable to be gay or to explore that identity." Patel believes that instead of being cowed by the powerful LGBT lobby and its supporters in government, people of faith should be developing alternative narratives within the public space that are faithful to their religious values.

Given the direction of travel and the constraints presented by PREVENT, which has seen Muslim schoolchildren and parents collared by anti-extremism officials for expressing orthodox religious views, this is easier said than done but for Patel there is no other option. "Our community should be facing up to the challenge and taking OFSTED and the government to court. Muslim parents should be telling school heads and governors that they are prepared to withdraw their pupils from lessons. We should not shy away from telling heads that either they work with us or like the parents at Parkfield we will protest outside schools".

That's also the view taken by StopRSE (stoprse.com), an online campaign set up to inform parents of the changes happening to sex and relationship education. It takes an unapologetically uncompromising stance on what it calls an insidious, ideologically driven agenda to push acceptance of LGBT. "This 'queering' and 're-gendering' of society is being pushed by a dangerous ideology as the physical, psychological and spiritual damage that can be caused to children who are encouraged to transgender is immense. Teaching such ideas to children is tantamount to child abuse and should have no part in a school curriculum...." states a model letter designed for parents to send to their MPs.

Kate Godfrey, who runs the website, is urging parents to start talking to their schools and children. "Parents are allowed

to get involved in policy development so they should be engaged in deciding what their children will be taught," she says. "Secondly parents should also be talking to their children and teaching them about LGBT from an Islamic perspective. They should be creating a close bond with them so that they can become the trusted source that their children go to for this information".

The scenes outside Parkfield Community School seem to be a glimpse into what to expect on a national level over the coming months. Not only is the government trampling on parental rights enshrined in international conventions on educating their children in line with religious beliefs but it is also willfully violating the very national legislation (Equalities Act) it claims to be upholding by giving precedence to one protected characteristic (sexual orientation) over another (religion). As the parents in Parkfield have repeatedly stated, they do not have any objections to their children being told that some people choose to be LGBT and that is their choice. However, that does not mean they should be compelled to affirm that those identities and behaviours are right. Tolerance and respect for an LGBT individual does not necessarily mean one has to approve of his/her beliefs and practices. Nor does it follow that if you consider homosexuality to be wrong you are homophobic (or will grow up to be so) any more than it follows that you are Islamophobic if you don't believe in Islam.

Belatedly, Muslim leaders and parents are rising to the challenge. Imams have sent out messages on social media and organised lectures warning of the dangers inherent in the government's proposals. Hizb ut-Tahrir has been particularly vocal on the issue organising lectures around the country and handing out information leaflets. SreIslamic organised a national day of action on 22 February 2019 on which mosques sent postcards to the DfE urging it to protect the parental right to withdraw their children from those lessons where sex or relationships education is taught. Beyond schools there is a nagging fear that this is the thin end of a wedge that will also eventually also take in private madrasas (Islamic religious schools). In 2015 then PM David Cameron spoke of the need to bring madrasas under state regulation and ban teaching that was deemed to be incompatible with so-called fundamental British values. With what is happening in schools it's not a huge leap to imagine a future in which madrasas are also prohibited from teaching that homosexuality is wrong.

• Faisal Bodi

is the IHRC's press officer. He has worked as a journalist in both the print and broadcast media specialising in Muslim affairs. During a journalistic career spanning some 15 years Faisal wrote extensively for the Guardian, and also worked for the BBC and Aljazeera.

The Future(s) of Islam in Britain

With so many different currents affecting its direction, **Dr. Sadek Hamid** tries to map the possible trajectories British Islam might take in the years ahead

“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

Malcolm X

Challenges within the British Muslim Present

For more than a decade, Muslims in Britain have been living under tremendous pressure. The daily news cycles perpetuate fear and hostility towards Muslims and their faith, as we are repeatedly told that they constitute an unprecedented security threat, failing to integrate, prone to misogyny and criminal perversion. No other minority is subjected to the same level of sustained public scrutiny. These narratives mask the more pressing actual everyday issues in which ‘Muslims suffer the greatest economic disadvantages of any group in society due to a mix of discrimination and Islamophobia, stereotyping, pressure from traditional families, a lack of tailored advice around higher education choices and scarcity of role models across education and employment.’ One study conducted by the Social Mobility Commission noted that they are ‘more likely than non-Muslims to experience neighbourhood deprivation, housing, educational and health disadvantage, and unemployment. It also noted that these factors impact most on women and young people with many feeling that they have ‘to work “ten times harder” than their counterparts due to cultural differences and discrimination’ and deal with ‘teachers (who) have either stereotypical or overly low expectations of young Muslims’ and worryingly that ‘young Muslims feel a real challenge in maintaining their identity while seeking to succeed in Britain.’

Dealing with this array of structural challenges often has an overwhelming effect due to the sheer scale of negativity that Muslims encounter on a daily basis. It also can produce a reactionary defensiveness to the increasing number of difficult social problems that are affecting Muslims within their communities. Changing family structures, rising divorce rates, inter-generational disconnects, educational under-achievement, substance addiction, disproportionate rates of incarceration, harmful cultural practices, sectarianism and socio-religious divides are among the many issues that aggravate the

external pressures on communities. While some British Muslims are responding in creative ways, many are so exhausted from these challenges and don’t have much time left to think about the future; or perhaps they feel they live in a world not of their own making which leaves them feeling powerless to make a difference.

The Past and Present is Prologue

It is axiomatic that to understand the present, one must try to understand the past. We are all living through the effects of decisions that were made at various points of recent human history – some were planned and others were perhaps unintended consequences. One obvious example is the case of European empire. Colonialists never expected that the descendants of the people that they conquered would one day be populating their continent in the tens of millions. Today, western European countries contain a substantial number of settled Muslim citizens, a development which has created various social tensions and individual state responses. In recent years, Europe has experienced a large influx of refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and other predominantly Muslim countries. This increase of Muslim migrants has triggered tense public debate about immigration, identity, and Islam.

Various social changes have been taking place across these societies over the last twenty years and have impacted upon Muslim communities as people modify their values, attitudes and lifestyles. These include more women entering higher education and employment, young people marrying later, couples having fewer children and nuclear families replacing extended households. This has been accompanied by greater access to digital technologies which have changed young peoples’ attitudes towards their religion and culture, particularly on issues such as identity, gender, relationships, popular culture and consumerism.

Muslim communities in Britain have also experienced huge changes and have become more diversified through an influx of economic migrants, political asylum seekers and spouses from transcontinental marriages. These new arrivals have visibly reconfigured the visual and spatial geography of established minority communities and have brought with them different ideas

about religious practice and culture. This gradual transformation has sometimes created tensions between the newer and settled Muslim communities, as well as non-Muslims concerned about the latest cycle of immigration. As already indicated, attitudes have hardened against British Muslims and tensions have heightened after various failed and successful terrorist plots, continuous negative media coverage, rising Islamophobic sentiment, increasing anti-Muslim hate crimes and the pressure to comply with the latest government diktats. Understandably, many Muslims are preoccupied with battling social disadvantage, racism, Islamophobia, state surveillance policies or international crises that result in Muslim suffering.

In the next 15 years, Muslims globally are expected to grow at about twice the rate of non-Muslims and if current trends continue, by 2030 they might make up 26 percent of the world’s total projected population. In Europe this could increase to around 58 million with cities like London, Leicester, Bradford, Brussels, Paris and Marseille, possessing very large Muslim populations. For some hostile observers, this changing demographic could possibly reconfigure the makeup of western societies as young adult Muslims become political actors among ageing populations with relatively lower reproductive rates – causing an ‘Islamisation of Europe’. However, will the growing numbers of European Muslims necessary result in more empowerment or will it feed more Islamophobia? What if certain British cities become ‘majority-Muslim’? Perhaps life will continue in much the same way or will right-wing sentiments increase and adversely influence state policy? Rephrasing the question posed, what are Muslims doing to prepare for the future?

The Future is Tomorrow

It is often forgotten that Islam is a future-oriented religion. Indeed, numerous Muslim scholars from the past articulated their thoughts about the future such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufail and Ibn Rushd. The historian Ibn Khaldun is well known for his work on the grand patterns of social change – so it seems reasonable to expect that the future should be taken seriously by contemporary Muslim intelligentsia. Unfortunately, today only a handful of Muslim thinkers have contemplated the future. Among them, Ziauddin Sardar is one of the few Muslims to have systematically thought through these matters in his books *The Future of Muslim Civilization* and *Islamic Futures: the Shape of Ideas to Come*. In contrast, Tariq Ramadan, in his *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* discusses how Muslims in the West can engage with and actively contribute in the fields of education, citizenship, politics, economics and interfaith dialogue.

While scholars have proposed their own ideas about how Muslims can move forward to better alternative futures, religious reform movements and activists within communities have counter-productively remained fixated on reforming matters of theology, spirituality

or narrow political issues. To date none of them has articulated a holistic future vision to positively transform Muslim communities collectively. Beyond their ability to shape popular religious discourses, the actual influence of these groups in communities is limited. As a result, the medium and long term future is likely to be shaped by the continuation of social trends currently taking place outside and within Muslim communities.

Three Possibilities

Future studies is the systematic study of possible, probable and preferable futures. It is an inter-disciplinary area of study that functions upon key concepts such as probability and predictability, continuity and change and applies tools such as the Delphi method, Environmental Scanning Technique, Visioning and Backcasting. It analyses data from the past and emerging issues in the present to identify recognisable patterns and trends that help to predict future trajectories. Knowing what is likely to happen in the longer term if current trends continue, helps with the assessment of the likely impact of change.

The trends themselves may take different forms such as linear, exponential or cyclical. A simple application of the future scenario planning method can help anticipate what might happen in the next 15-20 years by extrapolating current social trends. British Muslims may face three broad possibilities – one represents a reimagining of positive developments that are currently taking place, the second anticipates a probable continuation of current negative trends, the third is an undesirable worst case scenario.

Mainstreaming

In the first, British Muslims become more culturally and economically confident. Muslims in places such as Bradford, Birmingham and Leicester become a demographic majority and Muslims contribute significantly in the fields of business, education, science and medicine. The “halal industry” expands significantly and employs both Muslims and non-Muslims who influence mainstream social tastes in food, fashion, music and uptake of Islamic Finance products, which are increasingly purchased by non-Muslims. The sectarianism that prevented Muslims from working together in the past has been overcome. Significant numbers of public figures convert to Islam and carve a meaningful synthesis of British and Islamic culture. Muslim women are represented in most mosques and religious institutions and are at the forefront of creative social innovation. Successive governments recognise the value of their Muslim communities and make the UK a more attractive place for rich Muslim countries to invest. Islamophobic behaviour and attitudes become a thing of the past as Muslims become embedded in local and national government, positively influencing decision making processes and attain visible representation in the mainstream media.

Groundhog Day

In the second scenario, the more middle class Muslims move to different parts of the country in what might be called ‘Muslim flight’ in search of better employment, leaving a less well qualified, poorer, more disadvantaged core of Muslims left behind in the inner-city. In addition, a brain-drain of professionals occurs as they leave the country to seek opportunities in the Gulf and South East Asia. Less educated Muslims and university graduates in economically impoverished towns and cities continue to struggle to find work and remain stuck in the less skilled sectors, joining the grey economy or resorting to crime. Communities in multicultural cities and towns become social fragmented and Muslim and non-Muslims groups fight for limited resources, jobs and residential space. Muslims remain divided internally on the basis of religious differences, mosques fail to attract young people, exclude women and ambitious individuals and self-styled, moderate groups compete to secure government funding to fight extremism. The media and state continues to pursue policies that demonise Muslim communities and help sustain the divides between different Muslims and the rest of society.

Assimilation/Repatriation

A more extreme version of the second scenario as a more intolerant political climate ensues and economic decline results in the search for scapegoats and amplification of xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiments. Increased radicalisation of disgruntled white working classes and disenfranchised young people from Muslim and BAME communities become angry and increasingly engage in violent street level conflicts. Increased demonisation and isolation of Muslims continues as more young men turn to crime and small groups perpetrate acts of terrorism. Family breakdown increases mental health problems rise, substance addiction unravels communities. Existing government security policies fail despite ever encroaching state surveillance and the policing and incarceration of Muslim communities intensifies. Political pressure grows to match continental trends that have enforced draconian anti-immigration policies that deport Muslims, refugees and asylum seekers. Some politicians openly talk about concentration camps and genocide, citing the cases of Bosnia, Myanmar and China as effective examples of dealing with Muslims.

Each of these three represents future possibilities with the proviso that there are other unexpected scenarios that may materialise depending on choices are made in the here and now.

Starting with the End in Mind

In our globalised world, discussing the future of Islam in Britain cannot take place without considering the idea of the Muslim

ummah. British Muslims are composed of diasporic communities that are globally networked and are in constant conversation and shaped by events all over the world. It is not possible to disconnect these ethnic, tribal and national linkages. Furthermore, British Muslims’ futures will be affected by ongoing American military interventions in Muslim majority states, the continued repercussions of the failed Arab Spring, sporadic terrorist attacks, worsening economic conditions which triggered a “turn to the Right” in many Western states. Muslim communities in Britain, Europe and America stand at a historical turning point. They can choose to carry on business and usual and remain indifferent to what is taking place inside communities and remain passive to the rapidly changing political environments in which they live or they can actively shape more positive futures.

A starting point would necessitate a mapping of all of the diverse communities that make the British Muslim community and conducting an honest, critical self reflection of their collective condition. Once these consultations and conversations have taken place and a broad consensus and agenda would need to be agreed. Thereafter, tools from Future Studies could help to identify possible, probable, and preferable futures. This would allow Muslims to envision better futures and take practical steps needed to realise them in manageable ways. This of course is easier said than done as it would require the transcending of sectarian, ideological and political differences, strategic leadership, increased inter-community alliances, development of a pro-active, problem solving mindset and creation of networks that coordinate more effective collaborative responses.

An initial list of priorities could include; maximising existing community institutions – particularly mosques and making them accessible to young people and women and including them in leadership and decision making positions. Supporting the struggling voluntary sector and creating new infrastructures and services to deal with social challenges and needs of the youth. Greater collaboration with other faiths and minority communities would increase peaceful co-existence and efforts to tackle social justice issues. How British Muslims collectively respond to the challenges before them in the next few years will define how Islam is perceived and accommodated within British society. Ultimately, building preferable futures will be shaped by both individual Muslims, community organisations and other stakeholders taking responsibility for the decisions that are made today.

• Dr Sadek Hamid

has written widely about Islam in Britain. He is the author of *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, co-author of *British Muslims: New Directions in Islamic Thought, Creativity and Activism* and editor of *Young British Muslims: Between Rhetoric & Realities*.

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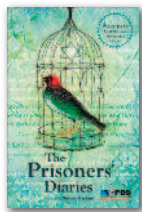


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