

The Long View



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Liberation beyond the liberal and authoritarian



ZULKARNAIN BANDAY

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

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**Faisal Bodi and
Arzu Merali**

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Cover photo: Muslim families leave with their belongings following mob violence by Hidutva outfits over the new citizenship law, in Chand Bagh area of northeast Delhi, on February 27, 2020 (c) Zulkarnain Bandy.

As this editorial is being written, many in the West are several weeks into quarantine and isolation. Others, notably in China are tentatively emerging from the nightmare that the coronavirus pandemic has unleashed around the globe. This period of turmoil has brought to the fore questions of structural failure, accountability, responsibility and the future. What world will we all be emerging into once – God-willing – the pandemic eases, and eventually the virus is contained?

This issue's contributions address these questions in several ways. Our main article overviews the history of the current events in India. **Zulkarnain Bandy** argues persuasively that far from being a recent phenomenon, the anti-Muslim hatred being unleashed by the current right-wing Hindutva government finds its origins pre-independence in the RSS movement, and the failure of independent India to tackle the supremacist narratives that have seen many if not all minoritized communities faced with institutional discrimination and vigilante, paramilitary and state violence. Whether fashioned as secular, plural state or authoritarian Hindu(tva) nation, India has failed to deliver equality, citizenship and security to Indians. The modes of resistance being witnessed on the streets – before lockdown – and in civil society spaces must be where the future of India is salvaged from this cycle of violence and hatred.

Moving to Palestine, **Asa Winstanley** looks at the so-called deal of the century announced by Donald Trump in January this year. Whilst condemned as an exceptional move – and denounced even within some Zionist circles, the deal itself is not as controversial as first readings might suggest. Winstanley argues that successive attempts to bring 'peace' to the conflict, and the discourses that have supported these initiatives are themselves replete with the same prejudices, injustices and exceptionalism that have caused and perpetuated the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Put simply, nothing has changed, and nothing is different in this deal. It is only more crudely and violently put forth. The challenges for Palestinian resistance, solidarity and the ultimate project of liberation remain vast – the deal both exposes the failed two state solution option and makes the one free and equal state option that more difficult to express. But as Winstanley argues, the Palestinians have been through worse and they will overcome this also.

This limitation of the discourses around national being are brought into further sharp relief by the next two articles that tackle narratives of women's empowerment. Women's liberation movements,

ideas and policies are in these submissions, sites of colonisation, depoliticization and outright oppression. In failing to give voice to ideas of liberation from non-Western thinking, such movements are simply replicating colonial forms of control under the guise of women's freedom.

Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria and **Salina Khan** take the theoretical and practical policies of Western(ised) feminisms to task, both writers expressing warnings to movements for women's liberation in the Global South. Saghaye-Biria looks to the internal critiques of feminism by women's activists who call out the sexualization and objectification of women in Western culture. The pernicious impacts on women and girls and the effective institutionalisation of rape culture should be sounding louder alarm bells amongst feminist movements. However, when it comes to making policy and, in particular, promoting supposed egalitarianism in the South / developing / postcolonial world, this critique is little heard. Instead policies that propose an ill or more often sexually defined nature of 'freedom' are replicated. In so doing, these policies are not only neo-colonial but at best irrelevant for the women they are supposed to help and at worse dangerous for their welfare and the culture they replicate in their institutionalisation. Saghaye-Biria delves deep into the nexus between consumerism and the beauty industry, the money made from creating a culture of female self-loathing and the ultimate depoliticization and suppression of women as a result in Western(ised) settings.

Khan looks to the recent Aurat (Women's) March in Pakistan. Whilst acknowledging the very recent shift in the movement towards welfare support and advice in the wake of the pandemic, she notes it is influenced by the Women's March in the US and its wholesale adoption of slogans and ideas is not simply an ill-fit for Pakistani women but leaves them open to further abuses.

Both Khan and Saghaye-Biria look to ways that Islam has been used to reimagine liberation for women and society in the current era. Their arguments are surely part of the wide conversation that needs to be had that no longer looks to the failed binaries of political ideas from the North. In reimagining the world that we want, we need to be brave enough to look to those ideas, that have been maligned and excluded along with the people who espouse them if we really do want a new and better world to emerge. The West has been found wanting in this global crisis on an unprecedented scale. It's time to move on.

Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali
Editors

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From Nellie to Shaheen Bagh: India's inherent contradictions come to a violent head

The anti-Muslim violence in Delhi early this year is but one of a spate of anti-Muslim but also anti-minority pogroms and massacres that are the culmination of the decades long institutionalisation of Hindutva politics, groups and politicians. **Zulkarnain Banday** argues that the roots of India's anti-Muslim violence lie deep in its recent history and impact all minoritized communities.

“There were 360 idols inside the Kaaba when Muhammad destroyed them and made it a mosque. It was actually a Hindu temple and Muslims took it from us, and soon we (Hindus) will take it back,” screamed a visibly angry man surrounded by a group of his coreligionists at Chand Bagh, one of the localities in North East Delhi where a pogrom against Muslims was unleashed in February, killing at least 55 people, the majority of them Muslims. This statement is just one of the myriad fictions that circulated around India via various social media platforms at the height of the mob attacks.

The current wave of violence directed against Muslims intensified after the BJP regained power in the 2019 general election with a resounding parliamentary majority. Amongst its first acts was the amendment of 1995 Citizenship Act. The new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), made religion the primary criteria for acquiring Indian citizenship for the first time in the history of independent India. The Act offers refuge to persecuted religious minorities, *except* Muslims, from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This Act, of course, is discriminatory but it becomes dangerous when read in conjunction with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR). Read together, they mirror the Nuremberg Laws.

The alleged need for the NRC arose from the specific context of Assam, a border state in the north east of India. It deems as Indian citizens all those who can prove they were residents of Assam before 24 March 1971 - the day before the creation of Bangladesh. The process, which is riven with bureaucratic failure and arbitrariness, shifts the burden of proving citizenship onto the people and is based on the production of a series of documents. The results of the process were published in August 2019 wherein two million people, both Bengali Hindus and Muslims, were left out of the final list, thereby rendering them stateless. The alleged illegal immigrants risk being put into concentration camps and dispossessed of any property and rights that come with citi-

zenship. But here the CAA comes to the rescue of Hindus and other non-Muslims who are excluded from the list of Indian citizens in Assam. They will be granted Indian citizenship. What about the Muslims?

What happened between Assam and Delhi?

The state of Assam has six detention centres and the government is planning to build 10 more. It is here that “doubtful citizens” or “foreigners” are lodged in pitiable conditions. Harsh Mander, a prominent social activist in India described these detention camps as “worse than prisons”. “In the women’s camp, in particular, the inmates wailed continuously, as though in permanent mourning.”

In July 2019, the Indian Home Minister, Amit Shah, told parliament that the “government will identify illegal immigrants living on every inch of country’s soil and deport them”, signalling that the expansion of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to the rest of India is inevitable. In fact, during the 2019 general elections, the BJP claimed that “illegal immigrants”, or “termites” from Muslim majority Bangladesh as the Home Minister called them, have sneaked in and are sponging off Indian citizens.

Soon after the CAA was amended and passed in the Indian parliament, students from different universities hit the streets protesting against what they called a discriminatory law that goes against the very founding ideals of India. The police responded with force, entering university campuses and brutally attacking students. The assault on Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi left hundreds injured. Police stormed the campuses and chased protesting students through the libraries and corridors destroying everything in their way. As one of the students describes it, “it was not meant to disperse the protesting students, but to punish.”

Several sit-ins bloomed across the country, mainly led by Muslim women, to protest against the NRC and CAA. but even they were attacked and beaten, with state forces

placing several protestors under arrest, launching smear campaigns against prominent faces of the sit-ins, and engaging in rampant custodial torture of Muslims, especially of young boys. There were also murder attempts against protestors by gun-wielding men who identify with the right-wing Hindutva ideology, fuelled by fiery remarks by ministers bent on stoking violence.

The pogrom in Delhi followed the crushing defeat of the BJP in the state election that month. The election campaign, led by none other than the Home Minister, Amit Shah, saw deeply communal and divisive speeches designed to polarise voters on the basis of religion. The BJP’s main pitch, in contrast to the governance issues of the rival Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was that a vote for the BJP would be the defeat of the anti-CAA/NRC protests which had erupted across Delhi. These protests were labelled as a “conspiracy”, “anti-national” and an attempt to establish a “mini-Pakistan”.

The pogrom against Muslims in Delhi lasted for 72 long hours in the latter half of February. I visited the most affected areas of Chand Bagh, Mustafabad, Jaffarabad, Gokulpuri, Bhajanpura, Maujpur, and Shivpuri. The violence unleashed by the militant Hindutva mobs was not sporadic but targeted and well planned. It is noteworthy that these communities were rendered vulnerable not only because of their religious identity, but also because most were from the lower-income social strata.

There was a pattern and precision in attacks against Muslims. For example, in a cluster of shops, those belonging to Muslims were either burned down or looted. Similarly, at least fourteen mosques, a *madrasa* (religious schools) and a cemetery were targeted. The charred Qurans and other religious texts in wooden racks, residual smell and charcoal on the walls of mosques, homes and businesses bore testimony to the magnitude of the violence. In Ashok Nagar, murderous Hindutva mobs vandalised a mosque and placed a saffron flag on its minaret amidst loud and passionate chants of “*Jai Shree Ram*” (Victory to Lord Ram). In the frenzy that unfolded, it was not merely property that was damaged or lives that were lost. An entire community was

scarred, violently evicted from their homes and deprived of their livelihoods.

A generation of young Muslim children were witness to a macabre decimation of their history, identity, and community, thereby leaving them scarred for life. Reports of sexual violence began to emerge from women who had to bear the double assault of the vulnerability of their identity as Muslims as well as women.

Back to beginnings: the foundation of the RSS

The violent disempowerment and disenfranchisement of Muslims and other marginalised communities of India did not begin with the recent authoritarianism of Narendra Modi-led BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) rule at the centre. It has a longer history and is a colossal project which has been underway since the foundation of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) in the early twentieth century. The RSS takes inspiration from Italy's Mussolini and Nazi Germany and strives for the Hindu Rashtra, a Hindu homeland.

The bloodiest episodes of violence against Muslims in 1993, 2002, and most recently, 2020, and against Sikhs in 1984, and against Dalit-Bahujan communities on an everyday basis are mere symptoms of an underlying disease, a rot that poses a danger to everyone who is not designated an upper caste Hindu in the imagination of the militant right-wing organisation. Their dream of Akhand Bharat (undivided India) is premised on neo-colonial, territorial expansion where several parts of the subcontinent are to pay allegiance to the supremacy of Hinduism. It is this idea that has accelerated the brutal occupation of Kashmir as well as unbridled militarised rule over India's north east. And it is this idea that propagates a system of disciplining Muslim bodies within the fold of the Indian nation state and punishing them should they transgress. Such punishment ranges from daily discrimination to systematic exclusion and even, as we saw recently in February 2020, a state sponsored pogrom.

As is clear from, but not limited to, the Nellie massacre of Muslims in Assam in 1983, the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi, the Hashimpur massacre of Muslims in 1987, the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, the 1996 Bathani Tola massacre of Dalits in Bihar, the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat and other violent episodes from independent India's history, state forces, including the police and the judiciary, have actively abetted and shielded murderous Hindu mobs or have been directly involved in propagating and legitimising violence against those targeted as the enemy. For example, in 2000 the Indian government set up the Justice G.T. Nanavati Commission to investigate the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. During that pogrom, over 3,000 Sikhs were massacred in the capital alone. The commission culminated in a 185-page report which found that the police pro-

vided indirect or direct assistance to mobs that were in many instances led by leaders of the Congress party.

The Commission observed: "There is enough material on record to show that at many places the police had taken away their (Sikhs) arms and other articles with which they could have defended themselves against the attacks by mobs. After they were persuaded to go inside their houses on assurance that they would be well-protected, attacks on them started. All this could not have happened if it was merely a spontaneous reaction of the angry public. The systematic manner in which the Sikhs were thus killed indicated that the attacks on them were organised."

"the kind of violence in which the RSS, and the Hindu nationalist movement it has cultivated, is implicated includes assassinations, bombings, and even pogroms against Christians, Muslims, and anyone who stands up against its xenophobic agenda."

In a subsequent separate official inquiry, around 72 police officers were indicted for their direct and indirect involvement in the violence against Sikhs. However, the battle for justice continues with some of the chief instigators of violence now enjoying key roles in the current ruling party. In fact, this cycle of impunity is so entrenched that after overseeing the murder of more than 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, then Chief Minister of the state, Narendra Modi went on to become the Prime Minister of India in 2014. This has parallels with the success story of BJP which saw an increase in membership after the 1992 violence in Ayodhya. By 1996 it had become the largest party in the Indian Parliament.

The RSS is the parent body of the BJP. It is the world's largest non-governmental paramilitary group boasting approximately six million members. The RSS acts as the sole fountainhead and an ideological source for various splinter groups which include Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing, founded in 1949, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the religious wing that was founded in 1964, the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing, founded in 1984. All of these organisations are collectively known as the *Sangh Parivar*. The RSS is not registered and does not have any bank account or registration records of its members. All these groups have for decades been involved in hate crimes against several minority communities in India.

The ideology that binds these ultra right-wing groups together is Hindutva.

Hindutva is described by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom as an ideology which holds non-Hindus as foreign to India, whereas Amnesty International defines Hindutva as the political ideology of an exclusively Hindu nation. It is this poisonous ideology that defines the hegemonic political, social, economic, and cultural networks in contemporary India. In fact, the first pogrom, in which the RSS, along with the army of Dogra Hindu ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, was directly involved, happened in the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947. A report in 1948 in the *London Times* estimated that 237,000 Muslims were systematically exterminated in this pogrom.

In an essay in *The Nation*, celebrated writer and public intellectual Arundhati Roy wrote: "RSS is no longer a shadow state or a parallel state, it is the state." She goes on, "Day by day, we see examples of its control over the media, the police, and the intelligence agencies. Worryingly, it appears to exercise considerable influence over the armed forces, too." Little has changed for RSS since its inception. Its current leader, Mohan Bhagwat declared in October 2019 that, "the vision and proclamation of the Sangh regarding the identity of the nation, social identity of all of us, and the identity of the country's nature are clear, well-thought-of and firm that India is Hindustan, a Hindu nation."

A cursory look at the Indian Parliament shows that nearly 75 percent of the ministers, including the Defence Minister and the Home Minister, have firm roots in the RSS. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi boasts about being a lifelong member of the group. A concerted effort by its members for decades has culminated in an unassailable control of the social and political realm. According to a US-based writer and political commentator, Pieter Friedrich, who has extensively written on the RSS and its affiliates, "the kind of violence in which the RSS, and the Hindu nationalist movement it has cultivated, is implicated includes assassinations, bombings, and even pogroms against Christians, Muslims, and anyone who stands up against its xenophobic agenda."

The BJP, the political arm of the RSS, is the present ruling regime in India. The potential dangers it poses for the country have been summed up by the former US ambassador to India, Joel Ehrenreich, in a Wikileaks cable: "The traditional muscle power of the BJP has always been the RSS. The RSS can survive without the BJP but the BJP cannot exist without the RSS. This inextricably links the BJP to the RSS's Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) agenda. If the BJP does not toot the Hindutva horn, the RSS will not mobilise Hindu voters." This poisonous nexus has, in fact, contributed to the rise of hate crimes and other grave violations of human and political rights of the minority communities in India. Not only do these acts go unpunished but are also rewarded with promotion, monetary gains,

heightened access to the corridors of power, and in the case of the BJP, a boost to the vote bank.

The BJP rose to prominence when it joined the VHP's campaign for the destruction of the Babri Mosque. The Babri mosque, an imposing place of worship for the Muslims in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, was a 15th-century mosque built during the times of Mughal emperor, Zahir ud-Din Muhammad Babur. In the early 1990's, the BJP could hardly win a seat in the state or send its members to Parliament. However, that drastically changed with the demolition of the Babri Mosque at the hands of Hindutva radicals.

India post-Babri Mosque

The forceful encroachment on Babri Mosque began just two years after the Partition of British India when Hindutva fanatics invaded the mosque and placed a Hindu deity there. They claimed that the Hindu deity Ram was born where the mosque stood. The dispute continued for decades until the VHP decided to launch a pan-India movement in the mid-1980s with the BJP formally joining it, led by LK Advani. Advani, a radical BJP leader known for making inflammatory speeches, led a road journey across India called "*Rath Yatra*" (journey on a chariot) to garner support for building a Ram Temple at the place where the mosque stood. The culmination of this journey, along with provocative speeches by various BJP leaders which include former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, resulted in the demolition of the Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992. It was followed by a nationwide wave of attacks against Muslims led by the RSS and its subsidiaries which killed at least 3000 people, and damaged or destroyed many Muslim religious and cultural symbols.

By 2019, the entire site where Babri Mosque once stood was handed over to Hindus, gouging a permanent scar in the psyche of the Muslim community. The judge who pronounced the judgment was later given a seat in parliament as a quid pro quo by the BJP.

Faizan Mustafa, a senior law professor and jurist of constitutional law in an interview with *The Indian Express* remarked: "Based on the operative parts of the judgment it looks like the Supreme Court gave importance to belief over other concerns. The court, even while observing that faith is limited to individual believer and that it cannot determine a land dispute, eventually gave the disputed land for the construction of a Hindu temple. This means that belief of a section of people was given prominence over the rule of law even though the latter should have ideally determined a property dispute."

Such an absolute surrender of the judiciary to the whim of the hegemonic Hindutva forces was also witnessed in the execution of Afzal Guru in 2013. He was

framed on false charges of carrying out an attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 and was placed in solitary confinement in New Delhi's notorious Tihar Jail for 12 years. In 2013, the Government of India hanged him secretly, without informing even his wife or his son, despite a glaring lack of evidence against him. The judiciary pronounced that the decision was taken to "satisfy the collective conscience" of India.

'Anti-Romeo squads', beef lynchings and other majoritarian vigilantisms

Another way in which this hate-filled collective conscience is manufactured is by moral vigilantism under campaigns such as the so-called "Love Jihad", and "Anti-Romeo Squads". In vogue in India for the last decade, these campaigns are aimed at "saving" Hindu women from "sensuous Muslim men". Their danger lies not only in the obvious patriarchal control exerted on the choices women make, but also in normalising the demonisation of Muslim men.

Chetna Devi, one of the right-wing leaders, a lawyer and head of a Meerut-based outfit called Akhand Hindustan Morcha (United India Group) and a campaigner against "Love Jihad", said in an interview recently that, "Muslim men are sensuous and are better at satisfying a woman's desires." She goes on to say that, "if a Hindu girl experiences intimacy with a Muslim boy, she falls madly in love with him and even the honour of her family becomes a secondary consideration."

These are not fringe expressions, instead they are mainstream, inspired by constant state backing. "Anti-Romeo Squad" was, in fact, launched by Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. This was the first initiative he undertook after being elevated to the highest seat of power in the state. These squads would patrol streets and force couples to do sit-ups if spotted together. The state mandate for the squads did not merely give them immunity from the law but *made* them the law. These saviour missions, rooted in the chronic yet manufactured victimhood of the majority community, reproduced by declaring a permanent war against the marginalised.

Infringement on personal space does not stop at women. The state also decides what one should eat, wear or speak. Muslims and Dalits are increasingly lynched by mobs on suspicion of cow slaughter or consuming beef as the ruling regime weaponises the popular beliefs of the majority community which considers the cow to be "Ma" or mother. The cruel irony remains that India is one of the world's largest exporters of beef.

The first victim of lynching after the BJP came to power was 58-year-old Mohammad Akhlaq from Uttar Pradesh who was killed in September 2015. Cow vigilantes barged into his house and attacked him with knives, sticks and bricks for allegedly storing beef in his refrigerator. This set off a chain of lynch-

ings across India, mostly in BJP governed states, where the victims were Muslims and Dalits. Lynching is not just violence against the Other or death due to violence, it is a public spectacle designed to terrorise whole communities. In an article in the *New York Times*, writer and journalist, Aatish Taseer elucidated, "A lynching is much more than just a murder. A murder may occur in private. A lynching is a public spectacle; it demands an audience."

This was evident in a case in 2017 in the state of Rajasthan where Pehlu Khan, a 55-year-old dairy farmer was accused of smuggling cows and lynched by a radical Hindutva mob. The incident was filmed and videos of the gruesome crime were circulated across social media to be consumed by millions of people. The practice of filming and circulating such videos became a model for subsequent lynchings wherein the videos acted as a tool for instilling fear within the Muslim community on the one hand and giving Hindutva extremists a sense of power and dominance on the other. Not surprisingly however, these murderers are often left to roam free or are bailed out swiftly to be garlanded by ministers of the ruling regime upon their return from prison.

The history of modern India is replete with examples of horrendous crimes committed against Dalits (formerly untouchables) and Adivasi (indigenous) communities. Massacres, social exclusion, everyday discrimination and systematic oppression apart, mobs of upper caste Hindus have lynched males from the oppressed caste for growing a moustache, riding a horse or building a two-storey residential house - all characteristics reserved for the upper castes as symbols of honour and wealth.

Since 2014, concerted efforts to consolidate the Hindu Rashtra project through cultural, political and judicial paraphernalia have seen stunning success backed by a majoritarian sanction. However, in 2019 the country witnessed unprecedented mass protests not only against discriminatory citizenship laws but which brought in an entire gamut of issues. The protests led by the Muslim community, notably women, also witnessed cross-community solidarity with other marginalised groups. The Modi regime had not anticipated such a large countrywide response. However, it seems the thrust of the majoritarian project is still strong and popular enough to forge ahead undeterred by the protests. There are enough people in the country who see Modi as a messiah anointed by God to lead India to the promised land of an exclusivist Hindu state.

Zulkarnain Bandy

is an independent journalist and researcher based in New Delhi. He holds a first class Master's degree in international journalism from the University of Bedfordshire, UK. He has previously worked with Hindustan Times, Delhi and has been published in *The Statesman*, *Caravan Magazine*, *The Dawn* and *Project India Magazine*.

Donald Trump's "peace plan" for Palestine is no aberration

Whilst world-wide criticism of the 'ultimate deal' announced by Trump has abounded, **Asa Winstanley** argues that rather than the exception, this so-called deal is in fact more of the same in the history of treachery against the Palestinian cause. Realising this is key to the project of Palestinian liberation.

The "[Peace to Prosperity](#)" document released by Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner in January had long been trailed in the media as the "Ultimate Deal" between the "sides" in the "conflict" over Palestine. Over the course of 181 pages, the US administration laid out in black and white a detailed plan for the liquidation of the Palestinians as a people and as a nation. That the document was sold as a "peace plan" was a cruel joke. In a nutshell, the plan gives everything to the Israelis and nothing to the Palestinians. It is no coincidence that not a single Palestinian was involved in the planning or unveiling of the document. In historical terms, that was quite an accomplishment in ineptitude on the part of Kushner and Trump.

Most empires and settler-colonial enterprises manage to recruit token individuals from among the native populations of the countries they seek to exploit and occupy as useful agents, compradors and puppets. In North America, the European settlers recruited indigenous trackers and even in some cases whole nations and tribes to set against other first nations' peoples in the course of their wars of extermination and conquest. In South Africa, the white supremacist regime in the 1970s and 80s set up the bantustans – the black "homelands" where the indigenous people were corralled and relocated. There, they lived under the control of corrupt and dictatorial regimes run by black figureheads, who were in fact the agents of the apartheid system.

In Palestine too, the Zionist project has, over the course of its 130-year-long history, consistently managed to recruit native agents and collaborators to serve its settler-colonial agenda. The current manifestation of this trend is the Palestinian Authority. Since its inception in the early 1990s, the only purpose of the PA has been to serve as an agent of the Israeli occupation. The PA's budget is almost entirely given over to the "policing" of the Palestinian population. The PA's only reason for existence is to prevent and thwart Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation – both armed and unarmed. In 2014, former PA president Mahmoud Abbas [infamously declared](#) that the "coordination" of his security forces with Israeli occupation troops was, for him, a "holý" principle. Abbas also

infamously declined his right to return to live in his home of Safad – the Palestinian city in present-day Israel from which Zionist militias expelled him and his family when he was a child in 1948.

But native collaborators with the occupier can only work within certain politically expedient bounds, if they wish to survive in the long term – as the PA clearly does. So preposterous and unjust was the "Peace to Prosperity" plan, and the "Ultimate Deal" negotiations which led to it, that not even the collaborationist PA took part in it. Abbas responded to its launch in January by declaring that he was giving it, "A thousand noes."

Maintaining a racist supremacy

The document is quite staggering in its racist treatment of the Palestinians and the aid it gives to the decades-long Israeli takeover of Palestine. The maps in Appendix One of the document give an immediate impression of why this is so. The supposed "vision for peace" gives the Palestinians (who now form about half the population in historic Palestine, and may in fact be once again a narrow majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea) a series of non-contiguous scraps of land to live on, while large portions of the West Bank will be annexed to Israel. (It is worth remembering that even the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip form only 22 percent of historic Palestine. This is not a compromise but a total humiliation.) Current Jews-only settlements in the West Bank would not only remain intact but would be fully legitimized and annexed to Israel. The Jordan Valley, including the entire border of the West Bank with the state of Jordan, would be annexed to Israel. The map drew widespread, and justified, comparisons with the South African apartheid regime's bantustans. Supposedly independent "homelands" for the "Bantu people", these scraps of discontinuous land were con jobs which were in reality intended to increase the white supremacist regime's control of the native black population by forcibly removing them from "white" areas from in and around urban centres (not coincidentally, the only state in the world to

recognise the [bantustans](#) as legitimate was fellow apartheid state Israel).

The second map in the Appendix details what it calls "A Future State of Palestine". But earlier in the document the authors make it plain that what they desire to create is a Palestinian state in name only, with none of the usual powers of a sovereign state. That much is clear from the map alone, lacking as it does any border with a state other than Israel. In the introduction, the document approvingly cites the precedent of previous Israeli plans for the West Bank, which sought to introduce "Palestinian civil autonomy" which nonetheless would be something "less than a state". The plan claims this is one of the necessary "limitations of certain sovereign powers" to keep the murderous Palestinians in check.

Under the plan, the occupation, Israel's current military dictatorship in the West Bank, would remain. This is cynically referred to in the document as the "maintenance of Israeli security responsibility". What is most commonly referred to as the Israeli occupation of the West Bank should perhaps be better understood as a military dictatorship. While Israel grants its Jewish citizens relative democratic freedom, the millions of Palestinians it rules in the West Bank have lived under a system of unadulterated military rule since 1967. Furthermore, this military dictatorship is a racist military dictatorship. Due to the racial rules of Israel's apartheid regime, the Jewish settlers who live in the same territory are not subjected to the military laws that rule Palestinian life. Israelis living in the West Bank charged with any crime (rare as such charges are) are subjected to Israeli civilian law and have the right to access to lawyers and civilian judges. Palestinians in the same territory on the other hand are subject to military courts, whose [conviction rate is 99.7 percent](#). In this kangaroo court system, both prosecutor and judge are uniformed Israeli army officers. Until relatively recently, they need not even have had any legal training. This is the racist system of injustice that the Trump-Kushner plan intends to entrench permanently.

Also, according to the plan, the Gaza Strip should be reconquered by Israel's puppet regime, the Palestinian Authority "or

another body acceptable to Israel". The plan also raises the spectre of stripping Palestinians living in present-day Israel of their (inferior under law) Israeli citizenship, and forcibly transferring them to the "Palestinian [non-] state" – in an almost identical fashion to apartheid South Africa.

Finally, the millions of Palestinian refugees from 1948, forcibly living outside of Palestine today, will not be permitted to return to their homes. Despite attempted abrogations by collaborationists like Abbas, the right of refugees to return to their homes after a war is an inalienable human right which cannot be nullified or traded away. Despite internal division within the Palestinian body politic, the right of return is one of the few unambiguously agreed areas of Palestinian national consensus. Over the course of more than 70 years, all genuine Palestinian political currents have made the right of return the primary demand of the liberation struggle. And the Palestinian people themselves have never given up or conceded this right, despite enormous international pressure to do so.

In whose interest two states?

The reaction to the Trump-Kushner-Netanyahu plan among liberal elites in the West was overwhelmingly hostile. But it is worth noting the narrow terms of such opposition, some of which I will review in what follows below. In a nutshell, such criticism was not based on principled support for Palestinian rights. Rather it was couched in terms of the threat the Trump-Kushner "peace plan" posed to the so-called "two state solution" and to Israeli "interests". It is worth remembering that this supposed solution is in fact an apartheid solution, one also intended to lead to the dissolution of the Palestinians as a people.

In the 1970s and 80s, Fatah, the leading faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, began to give up on its proposal for the liberation of Palestine, and on a just settlement of the war between the Zionist movement and the indigenous people. Instead, under US pressure, it moved towards the so-called "two-state solution". This supposed solution would have in fact been no solution at all for the Palestinian refugees expelled between 1947 and 1949, and successively ever since then by, at first, the Zionist militias and later the Israeli military. The refugees and their millions of descendants (who are also refugees under international law) form the majority of the Palestinian people; they have been systematically denied return to their homes because of one reason only, one thing deemed a crime in the eyes of the Zionist movement: they are not Jewish.

Prior to this capitulation by Fatah (which was opposed by some leftist factions, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and by the newer Islamic factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad) the PLO had been united in a just compromise to redress the Zionist

movement's crimes against the Palestinian people. The contours of this compromise were always clear: full return of the refugees, the end of Israeli military occupation (including of the Arab territories of Syria and other neighbouring countries) and full equality in a unitary democratic state comprised of everyone living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Zionist settlers would be allowed to remain, but their settler-colonial privileges

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of the West Bank
settlements, not to
the end of occupation**

would end. The democratic state of Palestine was long smeared in Israeli propaganda and in the West as "pushing the Jews into the sea" – when in fact it was quite the opposite. With the dawning end of the cold war in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa at around the same time, the more far-sighted among the Zionist movement knew they would have to adapt if their settler-colonial regime were to survive. And so some among them began to adopt the language of the "two state solution" and even in some cases of a "Palestinian state" – even while in practice, and sometimes explicitly, they actually meant something "less than a state," strikingly similar to the Trump-Kushner plan (a matter to which we will return).

This turn by Fatah (with the acquiescence of the leftist factions, some of whom in theory opposed it) ultimately ended up in the dissolution of the PLO, except on paper only. After the Oslo Accords, it was transformed into a new body, the Palestinian Authority. The PLO's armed cadres – who had won several important guerrilla victories against Israeli forces over the decades – were either dissolved or absorbed into the new police forces of the PA, who worked under the jurisdiction of the Israeli military in order to suppress Palestinian resistance in the West Bank and Gaza – especially that of the new Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

Illusions aside, the Oslo Accords never once committed Israel to anything: not to a Palestinian state, not to sovereignty, not to the dismantlement of the West Bank settlements, not to the end of occupation. The PLO essentially agreed to dissolve itself in exchange for a flag and some of the

trappings of power, so that its leaders and bureaucrats could pose as the rulers of a fake government, petty tyrants of an "authority" which has no real authority outside that which Israel decrees. This is a fact that the more foresighted among the Palestinian intellectuals long recognised, almost none sooner than the late Edward Said. He began speaking and writing against the unjustness of the Oslo Accords almost immediately after they were signed on that Whitehouse lawn in September 1993, calling the agreement "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles."

It is worth bearing all this in mind as we turn now to some examples of that reaction by liberals in the West in January. In its [leading editorial](#), *The Guardian*, the UK's leading liberal newspaper had this to say about the "Peace to Prosperity" document when it was finally unveiled: "Donald Trump's Arab-Israeli peace plan rests upon the absurdity of the Palestinians accepting a state in name alone." This was a true enough statement on its own, but the piece continued to describe Trump's position on the "Ultimate Deal" as some sort of outlier, something totally new to a US which had until then honestly sought to make peace. *The Guardian* claimed that "a two-state solution was the result of American peacemaking within a rules-based world order." In reality, this supposed "rules-based world order" promoted by the US had actually armed Israel to the teeth for decades to the tune of untold billions of dollars' worth of free American arms, not to mention the immense political and diplomatic support for Israel by every US President and Congress. All of this has only grown in recent years, including under liberal champions like the former US President Barack Obama who, until succeeded by Trump, was the most pro-Israel US president in history. One of Obama's last acts in office was to sign off a ten-year military aid deal worth \$38 billion. Yet *The Guardian* continued lying to its readers, claiming that "Mr Trump detests" the supposed rules-based order "because it is inimical to the raw power that he prefers to govern global affairs" – as opposed to his predecessors, we were intended to think.

Other liberal commentators in the West spewed out similar self-regarding deceptions. Noted *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland [lamented](#) that Trump was moving "the conflict" away from "the two-state solution that has long been the international consensus and towards an arrangement that will allow Israel to annex all the bits of the West Bank it wants." He sardonically noted that Trump probably supposed that "if only Obama, Bush Jr, Clinton, Bush Sr, Reagan or Carter had realised that success meant simply giving one side all it wanted, why, they could have negotiated a historic breakthrough decades ago." All this again frames the Trump-Kushner deal as an outlier, and an aberration to the well-intended wishes of Western imperialism to act as an "honest broker" when in fact the US, the UK and Europe

have been anything but. In Israel too, liberal Zionists echoed such self-congratulatory illusions. Chemi Shalev, a veteran correspondent for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, [described](#) the plan as “a dramatic, pro-Israel shift in US foreign policy.”

Such commentators, however, either seem not to have read the Trump-Kushner document itself or, what is worse, are intent on covering up its true nature. For in fact the “Peace to Prosperity” plan has a great degree of continuity with successive Israeli-American plans for the liquidation of the Palestinian people, especially those put forward by the “peacemaking” heroes of liberal Zionism, such as Israeli Labor Party Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In fact, the Trump-Kushner document itself explicitly makes such links in its introduction, drawing on the precedent of the Oslo Accords. To be fair to Trump and Kushner, they very much have a point here. If the Trump-Kushner plan represents the endorsement of “a series of extreme-right ideas” (as SOAS’s senior lecturer in Israeli studies [argued](#)) then the earlier Oslo Accords – championed by the so-called “Israeli left” – in fact also represented a series of extreme-right ideas: such as the inherent inferiority of “lesser” races like the Palestinians. And if that is indeed the case (which it is) that is because the entire edifice of Zionism (from its supposed “left” wing all the way to its right wing) is in reality a reactionary, anti-socialist, racist settler-colonial movement for the dispossession, expulsion or eradication of the indigenous people of Palestine.

A ‘state’ of dispossession

As we have already noted, the “Peace to Prosperity” document makes it clear in its introduction that when it uses the phrase “Palestinian state” in what is to follow, what it actually means is something “less than a state,” leading to “the limitations of certain sovereign powers in the Palestinian areas (henceforth referred to as the ‘Palestinian State’).” It is worth now quoting this passage at greater length (my emphasis):

“In 1993, the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization reached the first of several interim agreements, known collectively as the Oslo Accords.

“Prime Minister Yitzhak [sic] Rabin, who signed the Oslo Accords and who in 1995 gave his life to the cause of peace, outlined in his last speech to the Israeli Knesset his vision regarding the ultimate resolution of the conflict. He envisioned Jerusalem remaining united under Israeli rule, the portions of the West Bank with large Jewish populations and the Jordan Valley being incorporated into Israel, and the remainder of the West Bank, along with Gaza, becoming *subject to Palestinian civil autonomy in what he said would be something ‘less than a state.’*” Rabin’s vision was the basis upon which the Knesset approved the Oslo Accords, and it was not rejected by the Palestinian leadership at the time.”

The document is entirely correct to argue for this continuity. Liberal-left Zionist plans for the gradual annexation of the West Bank vary strategically from right wing Zionist plans for the gradual annexation of the West Bank, and not in principle. The [map of the Allon Plan](#) of 1967, for example, drawn up by leading Israeli Labor Party minister Yigal Allon, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of the West Bank, bears a striking resemblance to the maps in the Appendix of “Peace to Prosperity”. In fact, the latter’s maps are arguably slightly less extreme than the vast Jordan Valley annexation proposed by the supposedly “leftist” Israeli leader. In reality, Rabin and Allon were both major war criminals and murderers of the indigenous Palestinian population. During their military careers, both directly participated in the ethnic cleansing of 1948, when their forces expelled 800,000 Palestinians. Rabin personally signed the order for the expulsion of the Palestinian Arab civilians of Lydda, which

resulted in the infamous Lydda Death March of Palestinian refugees driven at gunpoint into the West Bank, with many dying of thirst in the July heat. Israel later built a major international airport in Lydda, and renamed the town in Hebrew as “Lod”. This is today’s “Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport”.

Not a conclusion but clarity

If such continuity between liberal Zionist plans and the current right-wing Trump-Kushner-Netanyahu plan exists in reality, what then explains the vehemence of the liberal Zionist opposition to the “Peace to Prosperity” document? For a hint towards the answer, we can turn to an opinion piece in *The Independent* by [Maya Ilany](#), the deputy-director of Yachad, a liberal Zionist group in the UK. She wrote that “true friends of Israel” would not support the “dangerous plan” that “does not serve” any of Israel’s “interests”. In this conception, then, the plan does not serve Israel’s “interests” because it, in its very open anti-Palestinians frankness, exposes the hollow sham that the “two state solution” has always been. It also reveals the deceptions that lie behind successive decades of the Israeli-American “peace process”.

In exposing and in accelerating this process, Trump has once again proven himself to be the leader of a world empire in slow but terminal decline. Not through his own design, but through his sheer incompetence and corruption, the sham is being laid bare for all to see. The Palestinians will go through harder times yet to come. But they have been through much worse and stood up to higher foes than this empty document. They will defeat this enemy too.

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Sex and sensuality: The sexual objectification of women and girls and the dilemma of Western feminisms

As women and girls become both more affected by and more vocal against over sexualization, **Hakimeh Saghaye-Biri** argues that a reckoning must be had within Western(ised) feminisms regarding the policies and programs that often promote objectification whilst claiming to promote gender equality and liberation.

The issue of objectification of human beings has long been criticized as a problem in Western societies especially as it relates to the treatment of women. Scholars from different disciplines have identified objectification as a dehumanizing process whereby human beings are treated as objects rather than people. “Specifically, when a person’s body parts or functions are separated from the person, reduced to the status of instruments, or regarded as capable of representing the entire person, he or (most often) she is said to be objectified.” (Gervais et. al, 2013)

The “legs-it” incident is a perfect illustration of objectification in action. When Theresa May, the former British prime minister, and Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of Scotland, met on March 27, 2017, to discuss the ramifications of Brexit for Scotland, the Daily Mail decided it was their legs that deserved more attention. “Never mind BREXIT, who won legs-it?” the newspaper’s headline read. The incident which became the subject of [much public scorn](#) and criticism is yet another plain evidence of the issue of women’s sexual objectification in Western culture in an era

when talk of women’s empowerment is everywhere to be heard.

In recent years, the pervasiveness of sexual objectification of women and girls in Western culture – and through its globalization, all over the world – has received much scholarly attention and has made policymakers concerned, especially as it relates to children. Critics of sexual objectification argue that such treatment reduces the power and activism of women in society and greatly jeopardizes their physical and psychological health (Calogera, et. al, 2010). In essence, issues related to women’s sexualization and objectification have become the newest conceptual battleground in Western feminism. On the one hand, scholars across social science disciplines believe the flood of mediated sexualized content has brought about a psychological health crisis for women and girls while on the other, campaigns such as Topfreedom, for example, push for society’s tolerance of even more self-sexualization.

What is objectification?

Objectification is the process by which something that is not a thing is regarded

as one (dehumanization), devoid of independent judgement and action, so that its vision, character, and behavior are controlled by external factors. In sexual objectification, individuals, most often women and girls, become sexual objects whose existential worth is measured only by their sexual attractiveness (Frederickson & Roberts, 1992). Using social learning theory and cultivation theory, experts have found that sexualization of girls occurs in three related and intertwined areas.

First, it occurs through socialization, or in other words, through the norms, expectations, and cultural values that are passed on to girls in various ways, including through the media. When sexualized representations of women and girls are institutionalized in the cultural fabric of a society, sexualization will be seen as an accepted norm. Interpersonal relationships are the second venue for sexualization in society, when family members, peers, and others treat girls and women in sexualized ways. Thirdly, sexualization becomes an entrenched part of a society when self-sexualization or self-objectification becomes part of women’s lived experience so that it turns into an inseparable aspect of their



Nigeria Appeal

Currently there are thousands of children, women and men suffering as the result of the violence of the Nigerian police and army. Members of the Islamic Movement have been routinely targeted, with over 1500 killed in the last three years alone. They have left behind dependents who are often destitute and shunned. Families are left without enough income for basic necessities like food and clothing, children loose out on education.

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identity and self-image (Smolak & Murnen, 2011).

In other words, when girls learn that not only are sexualized appearance and behavior approved or accepted by society and important people in their lives (such as their peers) but also are rewarded in important ways (such as in job success), the likelihood of the internalization (or cultivation) of such a value system increases. This is where self-sexualization or self-objectification also occurs.

In a [special report](#) on the problem of sexualization of girls, the American Psychological Association considers the cultural factors that affect the occurrence of this problem in the United States to be very comprehensive so that women and girls are far more sexually objectified than men in all kinds of media (including television, magazines, news media and music videos). Likewise, this is found to be a pervasive feature of commercial advertising and commodity markets, especially those of clothing, toys, and cosmetics. For example, the report states, "Given that girls may be developing their identity in part through the clothing they choose, it is of concern when girls at increasingly younger ages are invited to try on and wear teen clothes designed to highlight female sexuality. Wearing such clothing may make it more difficult for girls to see their own worth and value in any way other than sexually." Similarly, the cosmetics industry is increasingly looking at children as a target group, with toy stores supplying cosmetics to younger girls.

Sexualization of children via commodity markets is worrying because it can be considered the source of social acceptance of child sexual objectification, endangering children's growth and development. Based on the cultural models theory, some experts argue that marketers provide children and adolescents with schemas of life events with which they have no or little experience. These schemas are gradually formed in the minds of children as cultural patterns (Bachen & Illouz, 1996).

In addition to social factors such as media and commodity markets, girls' interpersonal relationships (including with parents, teachers, and peers) also play a role in their sexualization (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). In other words, due to the influence of the sexualized conditions of society on parents, teachers and peers, we may see the growth of the problem of sexualization in girls in two steps. This impact occurs when these individuals, in their relationships with children and adolescents, explicitly or implicitly endorse culturally constructed sexualized norms, or in some cases, sexually harass children and adolescents. Therefore, parents' internalization of sexualized cultural schemas would negatively affect their parenting style.

For example, parents may do this by "entering their 5-year-old daughter in a beauty pageant in which she and the other contestants engage in behaviors and prac-

tices that are socially associated with sexiness: wearing heavy makeup to emphasize full lips, long eyelashes, and flushed cheeks, high heels to emulate adult women, and revealing 'evening gowns.'" Another clear example is parents' 'agreement with their children's, most often girls', plastic surgery to increase their attractiveness. In 2015 alone, [more than 226,000](#) plastic surgeries were performed on adolescents 19 years of age and younger, according to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons.

Sexualization is also seen in the behavior of children with their peers, a problem that is compounded by the growing sexual harassment of peers in Western schools (Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). A meaningful statistically significant relationship has been found between the internalization of sexualization in girls and the reduction of their motivation, effort, and academic success in schools (McKenney & Bigler, 2016).

Hating herself

Self-sexualization, otherwise referred to as self-objectification, is a gradual and long-term effect of living in socio-cultural conditions in which the sexualization of women and girls is abundantly present in symbols and behaviors. Self-objectification negatively affects women's formation of self-image and worth. In this case, a woman or a girl looks at herself as a third person who is always watched and judged for sexualized correctness. A woman's lived experience becomes part and parcel with sexualization. Scholars have found self-objectification to be prevalent among adolescent girls in Western societies (Slater & Tiggeman, 2002). According to Fredrickson and Roberts, "objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring, which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states."

Concerns about the sexualization of women and girls have gone beyond the level of parents and social activists and have attracted the attention of social scientists and policymakers. These include the following:

- The 2010 UK Home Office report "[Sexualisation of Young People Review](#)" prepared by Dr. Linda Papadopoulos. In this report, sexualization is defined as the process through which the worth of a person is measured based on his or her sexual characteristics.
- The 2006 report [Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia](#), prepared by the Australia Institute. The Australian

Senate made a national inquiry in this regard in 2007. The original report concentrates on the status of children's sexualization in Australian media especially in the form of commercial advertising.

- The 2010 "[Let Girls Be Girls](#)" campaign sponsored by the Mumsnet Website. The campaign was officially supported by the UK Home Office.
- The 2007 report of the American Psychological Association on "[The Sexualization of Girls](#)" which was prepared by a special working group with the same name.

These works mostly focus on the negative effects of sexualization on girls, although some also take such effects on boys and men into consideration as well. They mostly discuss the destructive effects of sexualized advertising and the toxic media environment on the identities of women and girls. "The trickle down of adult fashions into the children's market" in forms such as inappropriate clothing and sexually explicit toys has been cited as examples of constructed sexualization. "Media targeting young people –teen soaps, music videos, and girl's magazines – have been accused of glamorizing casual sex and cultivating a 'throwaway' attitude to relationships." (Buckingham, 2011) "The beauty industry," specifically, looks at teenagers as "a lucrative market, with growing amounts being spent on cosmetics, slimming products, and plastic surgery." For younger kids, concerns centre around their being targeted for cosmetics, perfume, false nails, and the popular Bratz dolls with a sexualized appearance.

Dangerous sensuality

The issue of sexualization of women and girls became increasingly prevalent in Western capitalist societies when in the face of the women's movement they turned many cultural taboos into norms using the framework of freedom. Taking a historical look at the sexual revolution and feminism in the United States, Dr. Bonnie Traymore says that this process has led to the production of "a dangerously sensual" brand of women's empowerment and "feminist sexualization." (Traymore, 2003) According to experts, the predominance of the sensual approach to women's freedom is due to its utility for the capitalist system. From this perspective, promoting women to see their participation in society in necessarily sexualized ways has served as a tool to control the women's movement at the service of capitalist goals.

A glance at the 1920s cigarette advertising campaigns targeting women in America well illustrates the capitalist instrumental use of the women's liberation movement. Freud's nephew, Edward

Bernays, first implemented the idea of using the framework of freedom to promote the smoking culture among American women in 1929. “Bernays hired women to march while smoking their ‘torches of freedom’ in the Easter Sunday Parade of 1929, which was a significant moment for fighting social barriers for women smokers.” Framing female smoking with equality and freedom was instrumental in breaking the taboo. In recent decades, tobacco companies have used the same tactic to target Third World women, framing smoking as a sign of progress, freedom, and equality.

Since 1979, Dr. Jean Kilbourne, in a series of lectures entitled “[Killing Us Softly](#),” has criticized the Western media’s sexualized harassment and violence against women, especially in commercials. She argues that “the advertisers are America’s real pornographers.” Kilbourne, who was once addicted to alcohol, quit alcohol after the ups and downs of her life in 1976 and began a campaign against the destructive effects of the capitalist system on women’s identity. She also gave up smoking in 1983. She says in this regard, “What finally led me to quit smoking wasn’t the threat of cancer or of wrinkles or even my morning cough. What got to me was that I was giving a couple of bucks a day to an evil industry. I understood that this had nothing to do with liberation; it had to do with slavery.” (Kilbourne, 2012) Making her own “rebellion” against the advertisers she says, “We are all encouraged to confuse addiction with liberation, enslavement with freedom.” Kilbourne’s campaign is about freeing women of these wrong equations.

What have corrupt commercials done to people? Kilbourne’s words speak to the question:

“... Advertising often turns people into objects. Women’s bodies, and men’s bodies too these days, are dismembered, packaged, and used to sell everything from chain saws to chewing gum. But many people do not fully realize that there are terrible consequences when people become things. Self-image is deeply affected. The self-esteem of girls plummets as they reach adolescence partly because they cannot possibly escape the message that their bodies are objects, and imperfect objects at that. Boys learn that masculinity requires a kind of ruthlessness, even brutality. Violence becomes inevitable.”

In service of consumerism

This process is the product of an industry that spends more than 200 billion dollars yearly. In essence, female sexualization and consumerism are two related conundrums.

In her book, *Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*, Naomi Wolf argues that in Western societies women are pressured to conform to the rituals of “a cult of female beauty and youthfulness,” which commands them for a lifetime struggle to attain an unattainable standard of a beauty myth. In this cult salvation is reserved for “the woman who dies thinnest, with the fewest wrinkles.” With regard to the negative effects of the beauty myth on women’s advancement, she writes:

“The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us. ...

“During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical specialty. ... Pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined ... More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers.”

The sexualization crisis has become so serious that it has been considered a serious psychological pathology. The American Psychological Association designated a specialized Task Force in 2005 to analyze the state of the sexualization of girls in America. The Task Force published two reports, in 2007 and 2010 respectively, and gave the following definition to delineate the different aspects of female sexualization:

Sexualization occurs when any one or more of the following features are present:

1. A person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
3. A person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.

Studies suggest that women’s continued exposure to sexualized content leads to self-objectification so that they see their worth in terms of the level of their sexualized attractiveness. Girls self-objectify when they “internalize the sexualizing messages of cul-

ture.” The APA report warns that in this case “sexual objectification of female bodies” becomes “the cultural milieu in which girls exist and develop.” In short, while the media are the main venues through which sexualization is institutionalized in society, it is the overall culture that normalizes and rewards sexualized standards of beauty and pressures young people to adopt those standards. The authors of the APA report use socialization theories, cultural studies, cognitive and psychoanalytic theories to discuss the process of sexualization in girls.

Hating / suppressing the female self / other

Studies show that girls who immerse their lives in sexualized media content are more likely to objectify women as a whole and are more apt to suffer from cognitive fragmentation, body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Self-objectification reduces cognitive ability so that girls often do not perform as well as they could in math and science classes for example. In cognitive fragmentation, “chronic attention to physical appearance leaves fewer cognitive resources available for other mental and physical activities.” As a result, self-objectified girls do poorly in school.

Interestingly, in single-sex classrooms, girls do much better cognitively. “This may not be solely because boys would otherwise dominate the classroom (one popular explanation for the success of single-sex math classes for girls) but also because without boys, girls can literally take their minds off their own bodies and think more effectively.”

The most important danger of the sexualization of girls in society lies in the domain of attitudes and beliefs regarding femininity and female sexuality. “The sexualization and objectification of women in the media appear to teach girls that as women, all they have to offer is their body and face, and that they should expend all their effort on physical appearance.” Diminished cognitive ability and the belief that physical appearance is the best way to gaining power in social settings compared to academic success or good performance in extracurricular activities put girls’ future opportunities in life in danger.

Rape culture and the depoliticizing of women

Self-objectification also has consequences for women’s social activism and political participation. According to research, self-objectification results in less engagement in gender-based social activism. After all, “objects don’t object,” as Calogero says.

It is important to note that because Western media are now in fact global and have a presence in homes all around the world, the problem of sexualization of

women has become a global problem as well. This is especially so in the case of societies and people who passively accept the superiority of and adopt Western lifestyles and cultural patterns. This situation is very alarming given the fact that some critics of the current state of affairs in the West suggest that Western societies are grappling with rape culture. Statistics on rape in the West and the collapse of the family system are indicative of the problem.

Olfman, in her book *The Sexualization of Childhood* says the following in this regard:

“To say we live in a rape culture means that we live in a culture in which rape is pervasive, prevalent and normalized through societal attitudes about gender, sex, and sexuality. ... For example, in the United States, researchers predict that one in four women will be raped by a man in her lifetime. Leaving statistics aside though, most women understand what it means to live in a rape culture because of their lived reality of doing so. ... One way of thinking about this is to realize regardless of how many women experience a rape or attempted rape within their lifetime 100 percent of women experience the *threat* of rape within a rape culture. This means that all women’s lives are impacted.”

The pornography industry makes use of sexualization of children as well. According to Olfman, “A new pornographic video is produced every 39 minutes in the United States. Worldwide, pornography is a \$97 billion industry, 10 times the size of Hollywood box office revenues. The industry is larger than the combined revenues of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, Netflix, and EarthLink. But it’s strictly an adult thing, right? Wrong.”

To wrap up the whole sexualization problem in a few words, it is the product of “unreasonable and unbridled lust” at the service of economic greed. These are some

of the features of “the modern mode of ignorance (*jahiliyah*),” to use the words of Ayatollah Khamenei.

Islam in a world beyond objectification

What the present article aimed to do was to show how the sexualization of women and their objectification is criticized in Western societies. It is important to note, however, that such concerns are limited to the material dangers of sexual objectification of women and overlook any assessment of the related spiritual problems. The intra-discursive war within Western feminism shows the flaws of imitation of the Western approach to women’s empowerment. The critiques overviewed here are indicative of the calls for a movement beyond a sexualized notion of women’s empowerment in the world.

In this process, Islam has much to offer. In Islam’s view, prevention is the best cure. Islam offers a system of human-to-human relations in social life that is devoid of sexualization. Prevention of sexual objectification in society, according to Islam, includes the forbidding of any lustful, sensual gaze among men and women, men and men, and women and women. Other measures include dress code, which is known as hijab in the case of women. Men and women are also advised to avoid casual relationships and keep all social intimacy among close relatives. Sexual relations are strictly limited to marriage. These commandments together offer a holistic system that ensures the health of society so that men and women can both perform their functions and have the opportunity to reach their potential.

The role of the hijab in keeping men and women away from sexual objectification shows that it is not a hindrance to women’s empowerment. Rather, it is a necessary aspect of such empowerment. Historically too, practising Muslim women have played an active role in society, standing up against colonialism and later forms of foreign domination of their countries.

What gave them the power and resilience to play such a role was an identity that did not self-objectify.

Lack of sufficient attention to Islam’s approach to women and a passive stance against the Western approach to women’s issues will further fuel Muslim countries’ sexualization crisis. The Islamic Revolution of Iran emphasized the Islamic approach to women’s issues and the fact that Islamic rulings on male-female relations in society promote their sexual health, provide a healthy atmosphere for social activity for both, and provide psychological security for all. As a result, it has provided the grounds for women’s activities in various fields. The words of Imam Khomeini best encapsulate such a perspective:

“Islam has saved women from what was the norm during the era of ignorance; God knows that Islam has served women much more than it has served men. In Islam’s view, women have a sensitive role to play in the building of the Islamic society, and Islam has elevated women to the point that she is able to regain her humane status in society and come out of the state of objectification. Only with such growth can she overtake responsibility in the Islamic government.”

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Forcoming publication

Political Islamophobia at American Policy Institutes: Battling the Power of Islamic Resistance

by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

Available in June 2020 in paperback and digital download from shop.ihrc.org and amazon.co.uk



Looking at the RAND corporation, the Brookings Institute and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Saghaye-Biria overviews these three think tanks’ obsession with Islam and Muslims since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. She discusses the implications for Muslim societies of the direction of travel proposed.

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Under which the colonized fall: Some notes on the Pakistan Aurat March

Salina Khan argues that women's rights movements in Pakistan need to re-evaluate their modus operandi and their logic when seeking liberation and justice for their sisters. Without a culture and religion specific orientation, she argues, they are doomed to fail in all except the continued exploitation of Pakistani women at the hands of their fellow countrymen and colonial powers.

As my sister bluntly put it, "The only good thing about the coronavirus is the Pakistani media isn't talking about the Aurat March anymore."

For the third consecutive year, Pakistani feminists organized protest marches across the country on International Women's Day March 8 to demand "rights" for Pakistani aurat (Urdu for women), a term that includes "trans sisters, gender non-conforming individuals or the larger queer community," according to their manifesto. One of the themes this year was Khudmukhtari (autonomy), including women's "right to control over economic resources, our bodies, the justice system, health and education."

While the Pakistani public supports many of the Aurat March demands like establishing living wages, ending sexual violence, and upholding the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, it's their demands under the slogan "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi", (My Body, My Choice) that women be able to wear whatever they want in public, have sex with whomever they want (male or female, married or unmarried) without legal or social repercussions or judgment, and abort the resulting baby if they want, that has stirred controversy in the conservative Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

This year the government, courts, religious groups, and even celebrity artists let loose their views on such dictates of the Aurat March, and women from the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat-Ulema-Islam and Lal Masjid even organized what they referred to as the 'Haya (Modesty) March.' The media circus covered it night and day. That is, until the coronavirus went global, bringing the world to a halt and reminding everyone how little control we really have over our body or its effect on others.

Whose bodies?

So just like the microscopic virus turned the world topsy-turvy, it knocked down the "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi" argument in one fell swoop. The deadly virus demonstrated how our bodies are interre-

lated and we cannot do whatever we want with them because our decisions affect others in society. The virus has forced us to be more conscious of our bodies while in public, doing whatever we can to protect them by washing hands, social distancing, and covering our nose and mouth in order to not transmit the coronavirus unknowingly.

Still, there is no guarantee we will not be infected by the virus, mildly, severely, or fatally. It is a reminder that it is all in Allah's hands. As the world turns to the Almighty in prayers of protection from the virus, the renewed realization is it's: "Tera Jism, Teri Marzi" (Your [Allah's] Body, Your [Allah's] Choice).

Failure to realize this is what misguided the Aurat Marchers from the get-go. Surely, their commitment to improving the conditions of their countrywomen is praiseworthy, but their fatal mistake is in trying to do it by following the West and not Allah.

Failed revolutions

Sadly, seventy years on, organizers of the Aurat March in Pakistan are following in the footsteps of the failed sexual revolution of Western feminists. Aurat March organizers have no qualms about shamelessly copying their Western counterparts to a T, from the date and name of the demonstration to the placards, lingo, manifesto provisions, and activities on display.

For starters, American socialists first commemorated Women's Day on March 8, 1907, and it was picked up later by the feminist movement in 1967 and then the United Nations in 1975. Even the name Aurat March is the Urdu translation of Women's March, which was organized by American women in 2017 in response to the election of U.S. President Trump. The slogans "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi" is from the mouths of American abortion rights organizations like Planned Parenthood and therefore repulsive to most Pakistani women. Even the characters on Aurat

March placards, like Rosie the Riveter who is an American cultural icon of WWII, were stolen from the West. Couldn't the organizers find any inspiring Pakistani heroes to display on their posters?

In February the Aurat March team released an Urdu version of a Chilean protest song called "A Rapist In Your Path" and performed it in Karachi with the same style and movements done in the Americas and Europe. It would have been more relatable and impactful to come up with their own original anthem.

Nothing can explain this self-destructive aping other than that these women suffer from a severe case of Stockholm syndrome, where the oppressed fall head-over-heels in love with their oppressor. Educated in American or European schools and colleges, many Aurat Marchers emulate everything related to their Western dominators, who not only once ruled, exploited, and raped their lands but continue to colonize their minds through education, language, and multimedia.

Colonising activism

In addition, Western institutions have been recruiting Muslim women, including those in Pakistan, to steer them towards their own version of social activism. In recent years, elite institutions have been convening conferences on empowerment, offering education, technical training and social media awareness while also providing seed money, jobs and networking to influence the paths that awakened Muslim women take around the world. Not only is this aimed at preventing true and radical changes that bring justice and prosperity to women and their societies, but it is also used to persuade activists to rally for "changes" that ultimately give even more power and riches to Western imperialists.

For example, in September 2019, the U.S. State Department launched the second phase of the U.S.-Pakistan Women's Council with Texas A&M University to address "the barriers women and girls face to

achieving gender equality and empowerment” in Pakistan.

Several years ago, American President Donald Trump’s daughter Ivanka Trump held a meeting with mostly American-educated Saudi women in Riyadh as part of her job to “to help empower women in the United States and around the globe.”

Also in the US, Muslim women influential in their communities from around the world were invited to a “Women and Countering Violent Extremism” conference to learn how to “build a better world.” It was hosted by the Center for International and Strategic Studies, a think tank aimed at “finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world.”

“We need to engage the women so that they are raising their children in the way we want,” declared Farah Pandith, who was born in Kashmir and is the former first-ever Representative to Muslim Communities appointed by the Obama Administration. Pandith is currently an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

All that glistens...

Years later, their work is bearing fruit in Pakistan. But these activists should realize that all that glistens from afar is not gold. In fact, organizers of the Aurat March promoting Western solutions to Pakistani women’s problems should be required to watch popular American tabloid talk shows from the turn of the century.

These (addictive!) talk shows like Maury and Sally are available on the Internet and explore the horrendous problems that began seriously afflicting American families just a generation after the 1960’s and 1970’s women’s liberation movement succeeded in mainstreaming miniskirts, sex outside of marriage, and abortion as part of their struggle for equal rights.

Some of the episodes are “Five Men DNA Tested For My Daughter... Who’s Her Dad?” “I’m Only 12... and I’m Pregnant,” “Mom Stop Lying To Me... Is This Man My Father?” “Woman Needs Child Support, Man Insists He’s Not the Child’s Father,” and “Abortion Survivor Meets Her Birth Mother” to name a few.

Western feminist solutions will only add new and extreme problems for Pakistani women

Of course, these issues are as old as time but they’ve become widespread now and guess who’s suffering the most: women. Articles like “Liberated and Unhappy,” “Gains In Women’s Rights Haven’t Made Women Happier,” and “Has Modern Feminism Failed Us?” in the Western media reflect this reality.

No doubt, like all women around the world, Pakistani women suffer tremendous difficulties that need proper solutions. But Western feminist solutions will only add new and extreme problems for Pakistani women. If Aurat Marchers focused on offering organic fixes to issues afflicting the common Pakistani woman, they would gain more respect, support, and long-term success. One of their own, Pakistani feminist and poet Kishwar Naheed, made that same suggestion when she criticized last year’s march for not reflecting Pakistani “culture and traditions.”

The way forward for Pakistan

Indeed, solutions issues facing Pakistani women are right under their noses: they are in the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), which incidentally are supposed to be the basis of the Pakistani constitution. Allah repeatedly promises prosperity and success if we turn to His framework of guidance. On the other hand, he also warns not to ignore His gift of guidance whilst turning to false gods, like Western feminists in this case, lest our societal situation worsens.

“And Allah has configured a parable for you (that parable is) a civil society that was living securely with its sustenance flowing to it from all places; then it denied Allah being the source of (such) bounties. So Allah had it experience an engulfment of hunger and fear due to what they manufactured (mentally and materially).” (Surah An-Nahl: 112)

Indeed, the fear and hunger spreading around the world due to the coronavirus is a consequence of our collective failure to turn to, understand, and implement the system of life delineated by Allah, a system that balances the needs of all his creation in the best way. In fact, the running joke is that coronavirus has forced everybody to adopt “shariah law” all over the world by closing pubs and casinos, discouraging handshakes and close physical contact, and encouraging use of water for personal hygiene instead of paper. American President Donald Trump even suggested everyone wear a “scarf” when in public.

What Pakistani feminists failed to understand when advocating for less clothing, unrestricted sex, and abortions is that the limitations put on us by Allah are for our own good as well as the public good. Just like a foreign body infecting a person can damage it while also spreading physical ailments to others, exposing one’s body to

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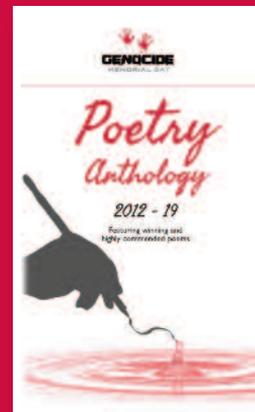
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Western ways can also damage it and spread spiritual diseases like lust and dissatisfaction. How a person dresses (whether male or female), their looks, their gestures and actions, and their scents all have an effect on other people. If Covid-19 has reminded us of one thing it is that we are all interconnected, interdependent, and at the Mercy of Allah.

In a welcome turn of events, ever since the Coronavirus hit, Aurat Marchers have turned their attention from dancing on the streets and lesbian and abortion rights to the pressing problems of Pakistani women, such as lack of education, healthcare, and nutrition.

Some examples:

Hygiene: Aurat March made an Urdu version of a Vox video demonstrating the importance of washing hands with soap and water.

Medical Kits: Aurat March collected

money to assemble Personal Protective Equipment kits for medical professionals which include gloves, shoe covers, face masks, hair caps, and disposable body suits.

Food: On March 29 “Aurat March Lahore distributed rations to 45 households... These are home-based, domestic and daily wage workers who haven’t received any meaningful government support to financially counter the devastating economic effects of coronavirus pandemic.” The food packages included flour, lentils, oil, sugar, tea, soap, face masks, gloves, Panadol, dry milk, salt, and chili powder.

Hopefully, the coronavirus has awakened Pakistani women activists out of their mesmerization of all things Western, and they will continue to work on issues that affect the common Pakistani woman.

It is awakened, enlightened, and brave women who can bring about a just and fair society. Imam Khomeini, the architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran that

uprooted a 2,500-year-old monarchy said: “Women have shown that they stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their menfolk in the struggle; one could even go so far as to say that they lead the way.”

If you look, you’re sure gonna find
Throughout mankind’s history
A Colonized Mind
The one in power makes law
Under which the colonized fall
Without God, it’s just the blind leading the blind

—“Colonized Mind” by Prince

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IHRC Legal are here to help you understand your employment rights during the Coronavirus pandemic.



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RAMADAN 2020

**Reclaim the
Spirit of**

BADR



رمضان كريم

**“Remember when you all cried out for help from your Lord,
and so you were answered thus: “Indeed, I will reinforce you
with a thousand angels, rank after rank.””**

[Quran 8:9]

IHRC understands how difficult these times are for everyone.

As stressful as this is, we need to remember that Allah subhana wa ta'ala promises us that he will never test us beyond our ability. We have an opportunity to reflect, realign ourselves with our spirituality and reimagine a better and more just future for all.

Let us think how we can move forward with hope.

We all experience the impact of crises more acutely due to the increasing levels of social injustice. Imagine then what it

must be like in places like Gaza or Kashmir or a refugee camp in Lesvos or Bangladesh. Imagine what it must be like right now, to be imprisoned for your faith and beliefs.

It can seem that the odds and the unjust are against us but in this special month, where we come closer to Allah and His unimaginable compassion, mercy and power, we can see the examples of history in the Battle of Badr in the ayah above [Quran 8:9].

Please visit the IHRC Ramdan 2020 page www.ihrc.org.uk/ramadan2020 to find a list of things that IHRC can provide to support you at this difficult time including advice about your work, and lesson plans and resources for educating your children at home. There are also some suggestions as to how you can continue to help the oppressed during this period of full and or semi-isolation and quarantine wherever you are in the world.

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May Allah swt reward you. Ameen.

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