

The Long View

Quarterly Magazine



Volume 4, Issue 4 - October 2022 / Rabi ul Awwal 1444

ISSN 2632-3168

£5 where sold

The Failing State: Visions of Now and Never



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Strategy: Putting
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the Heart of Policy

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The Muslim Triumph and
the Hindutva Anxiety:
The Theology of Political
Spectacles

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

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The Long View is a project
and publication of Islamic
Human Rights Commission
(a limited company no 04716690).

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Recent years have seen a proliferation of so-called think tanks turn their attention to defining the position Muslims, as a community, should occupy in Britain. While most of the headlines are usually hogged by the unabashed Islam-bashers in the Henry Jackson Society, others carry on their nefarious work behind the scenes, rarely coming into public view. The Tony Blair Institute is one such actor, as is the subject of our first offering in this issue of the Long View, Policy Exchange. Policy Exchange is often described as the most influential of Britain's right wing think tanks and criticised for being beholden to corporate interests, especially the tobacco industry. Although it is a registered charity, something that gives it a veneer of independence, information about its funding is very opaque and tightly guarded.

In fact, according to **Peter Osborne**, the think tank's most enduring achievement has probably been the reshaping of government policy towards its Muslim citizens.

Wedded to Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilisation" hypothesis, the think tank can be rightly blamed for the institutional discrimination Muslims suffer in Britain. In this issue, **John Holmwood** charts the slide of Muslims to subaltern status under successive Conservative governments since 2011, showing how a small group of politically motivated neo-conservatives have steered government policy towards a widely accepted securitisation of Britain's Muslims, including of course, the expansion of the authoritarian Prevent programme. Despite the hyper-focus on Muslims, Holmwood argues that Prevent in education spheres has undermined the agency of *all* parents.

The restrictive space given Muslims in the public sphere of several Western countries is a theme referenced in the second article in this issue by **Saeed Khan**. He places it in the context of a declining Anglophone West where the pretence to the primacy of rule of law, democracy, multiculturalism and equal rights has been lifted by the resurgent forces of neo-populism, racism and nativism. As much as Western countries espouse pluralism, free expression and tolerance, their increasingly visible absence in practice exposes an anxiety borne out of political decline.

Far from heralding the triumph of capitalism as Frances Fukuyama once exulted, the demise of the Soviet Union has seen the bipolar world order sheer away in multiple, often competing, directions. This has created challenges for Muslims living in the Islamicate and Muslims living in the West. In the latter, minority Muslim communities can expect to face more scapegoating and demonisation as a result of ideological animus, but also as a convenient diversion from state failures. For the Islamicate, there does not appear to be a ready-made antithetical alternative to the West available to the Muslim world. In the absence of an off the shelf ideology, could the Muslim world be forced to go it alone? "As the Western model predicated upon liberal democracy, market economy and the nation-state finds these pillars to now be wobbly, the Ummah might gain a sense of rejuvenated optimism that it can re-emerge as a coherent,

structured, even thriving polity as none of these features of the Western model are necessary for its success and survivability," opines Khan.

At present though, this option is not on the cards, argues **Zviad Jughashvili** in our third essay. While some Muslims yearn for a migration to Muslim-ruled countries, this is a reflexive impulse which raises more questions than answers. Migration played a crucial role in the life of the early Muslims with the two most famous instances occurring when a group sought refuge in Abyssinia to escape persecution in Makkah and later when the Muslim community uprooted to Medina. However, we would be wrong to romanticise these episodes and transpose them to the present. In Muslim countries such as Egypt, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, a zealous believer is likely to draw unwanted attention from the authorities. Where it might be easier to practise one's ritual obligations this has to be balanced against living in a society where one acquiesces in the authorities' glaring injustices. This carries huge negative spiritual and *fiqhi* ramifications. All things considered, as things stand, migrating to Muslim-ruled countries is a case of jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, argues the author. The traumatic upheaval that is migration forms the basis of many claims to statehood, such as that of Pakistan, which was hewn from colonial India at Partition. A huge number of Muslims in India, however, declined to leave their homeland for the new Muslim state and it is their worsening predicament that is the focus of our last essay by **Muhammed Nihad PV**. The features and rise of Hindutva, an extreme fascist ideology adopted by many Hindus and the current Indian government, have been well documented in this journal. Indeed, its spread through the Indian diaspora is fast becoming a national security priority for countries like the UK and Canada, both of which are witnessing a wave of Hindu supremacist assertiveness expressed in hostility to Muslims and Sikhs. This is a timely revisit to the subject as the last few weeks have seen Hindutva activists engage in mob violence against followers of these faiths.

Nihad analyses the ideational underpinnings of Hindutva, viewing it as an exceptionalised response to post-colonial anxieties. The absence of cultural or social homogeneity creates an ideological vacuum that is fertile ground for the projection of perpetual enmity rather than an inclusive ethos as the glue of statehood. Enemies, whether external or internal, are absolutely necessary for such a nation to survive. The antagonism towards colonialism gave way to the anti-Muslim/anti-Pakistan nationalism at the juncture of partition.

This issue has highlighted the lack of easy answers and made-to-fit solutions for world problems, notably for Muslims in whatever setting. However this uncertainty, if accepted, need not be one to be (solely) feared. Understanding that we need to work and think hard for ways to create better societies – in whatever context – is the beginning of the process of transformation. We hope you will join or even start the necessary conversations where they are needed.

Join the conversation by emailing us on info@ihrc.org, tweeting [@ihrc](https://twitter.com/ihrc) or find us on Facebook. We now also record podcasts and videos called The Long View Conversations looking into the deeper issues raised by multiple essays with some of our authors. You can find these at www.ihrc.org.uk/video-multimedia/ We are now also recording some of our essays so you can listen to them on the go. Find them in the same section.

The British Government's Prevent Strategy: Putting Religious Intolerance at the Heart of Policy

The focus of the British government and security apparatus continues to fall on Muslims. **John Holmwood** argues that the state's flagship policy 'Prevent', and the narrative of 'British values' has imbued policies and laws, particularly in education, that discriminate against all minority faiths and undermine the agency of all parents.

At the Munich Security Conference in 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron declared a new approach of 'muscular liberalism'. The approach, and its various iterations, were manufactured in think tanks close to the government, [Policy Exchange](#), in particular. It has directed public policy over the last two decades, with an increasingly authoritarian cast that calls into question its claim to be liberal.

Although 'muscular liberalism' begins with counter-terrorism policy directed at the 'Islamist threat', it has come to have a wider scope. It has been used most recently to describe 'anti racist' activists as extremist as part of government attacks on 'wokeness'. In this piece I will consider its impact on schooling and young people in England. Following devolution, publicly-provided services are the responsibility of the different jurisdictions, with the Westminster government, which sets British policy also determining how it is implemented in England.

Muscular liberalism lays claim to values that are held to unite communities, but it is divisive. The values that are invoked will be described as 'British', but they are truly expressing a form of English identity that scapegoats ethnic minorities.

An end to multiculturalism

Cameron's speech was directed at what he described as 'state multiculturalism'. In its place he called for a necessary intolerance towards those who live 'separate lives' outside 'our values'.

In doing so, he was laying the ground for a redirection of the [Prevent, counter-extremism strategy](#), delivered a few months later. This sought to address the 'ideologies' that might draw vulnerable individuals into violent extremism. These 'ideologies' could be either 'political' or 'religious'. Accordingly, the allegedly separate lives of British Muslims – primarily, those living in English towns and cities – identified them both as communities at risk and as risky communities.

The mainstream values Cameron was promoting seem straightforward enough.

They were principles of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for, and tolerance of, those with different faiths and beliefs. They are not so much 'values' as procedural commitments that facilitate living together with difference. They provide scope for the pursuit of different conceptions of a good life and provide means for resolving conflicts among them. Indeed, they had been outlined a decade earlier in the [Runnymede Trust's Parekh report](#) as the basis of multiculturalism. Now they were to be mobilised against it.

There was another tension in what Cameron outlined. The values were described as 'British' with the implication that they came naturally to white majority citizens, but less so to those who were first and second generation migrants. It would seem that they must be inculcated in them against their own traditions. This is something we will see was picked up by Ofsted, the body responsible for inspecting schools in England, when a [duty to promote fundamental British values](#) in all schools in England was adopted in 2014. Fundamental British values now underpin the [new Prevent safeguarding duty](#) set out in 2015 following the [Birmingham Trojan Horse affair](#).

There was (and is) no evidence that British Muslims do not embrace those values. Indeed, when defending the counter-extremism strategy against its critics, its advocates claim that British Muslims do endorse them and, in doing so, endorse Prevent. This was recently argued in [a report from Policy Exchange](#), which then went on to argue that Prevent was, nonetheless, rightly directed primarily at British Muslim communities. Moreover, they have argued that the much-delayed Independent Review of Prevent under William Shawcross should recommend increasing the focus on Islamist extremism and away from far right extremism.

Choice and belonging

There was always something ambiguous about the invocation of religious tolerance in Cameron's statement of muscular liberalism. In part, it reflected Britain's status as a coun-

try with a Christian heritage and history of conflict among its different denominations, where the Anglican church is the established church in England with constitutional privileges (in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the churches are disestablished).

It is precisely this 'settlement' that has been placed under threat by policy developments over the last two decades, notwithstanding that recognition of Britain's Christian heritage has been central to conservative political philosophy. Indeed, it is enshrined in the requirement on schools in England to teach religious education and have daily acts of collective worship. This is not restricted to faith schools, but applies to all state-funded schools. There are no secular schools in England, where there is an increasing proportion of children from religious minorities.

Cameron's speech also indicated that tolerance should extend to minority religions whose presence 'at home' derived from the history of Empire. Here we perceive an ambiguity in the liberal credentials of muscular liberalism. This concerns the status of what we can think of as [religious communities of belonging, distinguished from communities of choice](#). In secular Britain, Christian identity has become a matter of choice (rather than belonging). This is evident in declining church attendance alongside expressions of personal spiritual belief.

Most secular Britons are 'post-Christian', while mainstream Christian Britain – whether Anglican or Roman Catholic – now also expresses its religious identity under liberal ideas of choice. In contrast, many ethnic minority Britons express their religious identities within communities of belonging. Their religious identity is not only found in 'beliefs', but also in practices – devotional, ritual and charitable – undertaken collectively. This includes British Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews.

This may seem a long way from counter-terrorism policy, but it provides a context for some of what has taken place in Britain in the period since David Cameron's speech. As Jewish history shows, minority communities of belonging are easily 'othered' and persecuted. It is evident now in authoritarian

regimes such as Orbán's Hungary, Modi's India, or Xi Jinping's China.

Worryingly, it also occurs under secular liberalism of the muscular kind. This arises in the representation of the 'nation' as an imagined community of belonging. It is apparent in claims that the nation is threatened by immigrant outsiders and that 'racial self-interest' is not racism, but a legitimate expression of the identity of 'white majority' members of the population against foreign-born or 'immigrant-descended' others. Such ideas are also fuelled by claims that some ethnic minorities – those associated with minority religions – are living self-segregated lives, the core idea of 'muscular liberalism'.

It is precisely because these arguments are increasingly part of mainstream right-wing discourse that Policy Exchange and other right-wing think tanks argue that Prevent should be re-directed away from right-wing ideologies and concentrate instead on what they call 'Islamism'. They are also involved in claims that while individuals need to be protected against discrimination, religion, as such, is a legitimate object of criticism. This is the basis of refusals to adopt a definition of Islamophobia.

Participation denied

It follows from what I have argued that participation within a community of belonging is not a barrier to involvement in other forms of public life, including struggles for social justice and equalities of participation. Praying, or praying differently, need be no obstacle to equality in education or employment. An injunction to marry within a religious community is no barrier to friendship and other relationships across groups. Or what meaning is there to living together with difference?

One answer to perceived separation might be to encourage greater participation in public life, including through their own organisations. After all, the British values that the government promotes must include that citizens can associate and organise to promote their faith.

There can be no requirement that liberal values be held as the ultimate grounding of all values. If religion can be criticised, it can also be promoted. Members of communities of belonging within a liberal society are at liberty to regard their belief in God, and the obligation to live in a way that is pleasing to God, as the transcendent values that guide their actions.

It is enough that a Muslim organisation criticises government counter-extremism policies for Policy Exchange and their friends in government and the media to describe them as 'extremist' and as 'enabling terrorism'

In this context, then, associations representing Muslims – for example, the Muslim Council of Britain, which is an umbrella organisation of over 500 groups – quite properly describe their values as *Islamic*.

Why, then, does the government, and its supporters in think tanks like Policy Exchange, insist on calling Muslim organisations which express Islamic values, 'Islamist'; and, by that token, also describe them as potentially 'extremist'?

Civil society organisations have the protection of the interests of those they represent as one of their aims. This may involve the criticism of government policy – whether domestic or foreign. There can be no requirement that civil society organisations must support the government of the day.

Yet Policy Exchange insists upon this for Muslim organisations, while having no sim-

ilar requirement for other non-Muslim organisations.

It is enough that a Muslim organisation criticises government counter-extremism policies for Policy Exchange and their friends in government and the media to describe them as 'extremist' and as 'enabling terrorism'. Significantly, David Cameron made this claim in his introduction to their latest report.

Policy Exchange also accuses Muslim organisations of being 'unrepresentative' of British Muslims, but who does Policy Exchange represent? They uphold their own right to lead and form public opinion (rather than represent it), but it is not a right they will defend for Muslim organisations. Liberal values, properly understood, do not regard majority opinions as more valid than minority opinions.

This must entail that Policy Exchange's agenda is at odds with the 'British values', or 'liberal values', they claim to defend or espouse. It is neither liberal, nor democratic, to defend only those organisations that support government policy.

Moreover, it is explicitly authoritarian to argue, as does Policy Exchange, that Muslim organisations should be subject to scrutiny by a special department of the Home Office. And it is discriminatory to insist that Muslim organisations be subject to regular 'certification' to determine whether they are worthy partners in dialogue.

These arguments should be of concern to all those liberals who believe in religious liberty, as something applying not just to private individuals, but also to groups and organizations. However, it is a particular concern to religious communities and their organisations who are the focus of government scrutiny.

From the big society to the big state

The tipping of muscular liberalism into an illiberal position is also associated with an expansion of government powers. Around the same time that David Cameron

THE PREVENT CONFERENCE 2015

"...we now live in a police state with a supposed democratic mandate in which all Muslims, regardless of demographic profile, are viewed as at risk of radicalisation."



As UK law changed to make the Prevent duty statutory, IHRC and CAMPACC organised a conference to discuss the ramifications. Watch the videos here ihrc.org.uk/preventing-violent-extremism-conference/

delivered his Munich speech, he also re-launched the 'Big Society'. This was designed to supplant bureaucratic government by empowering local communities.

One major policy was the academies (and free schools) programme which removed schools from local authority control, but it did so by placing them under the direct authority of the Department for Education, as are all the bodies associated with the oversight of schools in England – the Education Funding Agency, Ofsted, and the Teacher Regulation Agency.

In the past, the religious education curriculum and determinations were the responsibility of local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). These are organised under the auspices of the Anglican church, but with representation of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian. The SACREs are a locally democratic forum for the representation of different faiths (they also include elected members from the local Council and local teachers).

Around three quarters of secondary schools and a quarter of primary schools in England are currently academies, but a new [Schools Bill](#) has declared that all schools will be incorporated into Multi-Academy Trusts by 2030, with local SACREs being made devoid of all functions.

Under the Academies Act 2010, academy schools do not have to follow the locally agreed curriculum and the responsibility for determinations lies with the Department for Education. This is handled by the default Memorandum of Agreement signed by an academy school and the Education Funding Agency. This specifies adherence to the 'default' position of Christian collective worship, with responsibility for granting determinations for other forms of worship lying with the Department for Education, rather than a local SACRE.

In this context, religious education and determinations are monitored only with regard to minority religions where a determination is required. Evaluation by local

religious groups, teachers and politicians, then, is replaced by scrutiny from the DfE's Department of Due Diligence and Counter Extremism.

These are all developments associated with flagship policies of Policy Exchange. They [actively promoted the academies programme](#) which was pursued by its former chair, Michael Gove when he was Secretary of State for Education. They also [raised concerns about faith schools](#) – especially, those recently established to cater for children from minority religious communities – identifying risks of extremism. The setting up of the Department for Due Diligence and Counter Extremism in 2010 was one of the consequences of this report.

Conclusion

Schools were given the incentive that converting to academy status would mean that they would be free of the requirements of the national curriculum. In a short space of time, a new 'national curriculum' has been introduced by the backdoor, that of the requirement to promote 'fundamental British values'.

This is part of the Prevent counter extremism strategy and it is significant to note that the requirement is incorporated under Section 78 of the Education Act 2002. This requires maintained schools to provide, "a balanced and broadly based curriculum which, (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society."

It is extraordinary that the moral and spiritual development of children is now subordinated to a national security agenda, Prevent, and one that is radically unsympathetic to religious liberties (especially those of minority faiths).

The Anglican and Catholic churches are nationally organised and have good relations with government. Indeed, the Chief Inspector of Schools and Head of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, has made frequent speeches, [including at Policy Exchange](#), to indicate that any strictures are directed at

minority religions.

[Her comments are chilling](#) and indicate an illiberal inclination to treat government as *in loco parentis* and to set the interests of children against those of their parents. She argues that, 'most children spend less than a fifth of their childhood hours in schools and most of the rest with their family. And so if children aren't being taught these values at home, or worse are being encouraged to resist them, then schools are our main opportunity to fill that gap ... This, I believe, was where the so-called Trojan Horse schools failed. Not only were there issues with promoting British Values in many of those schools, but in some cases members of the community were attempting to bring extreme views into school life. The very places that should have been broadening horizons and outlooks were instead reinforcing a backward view of society'.

She is careful to state that the problem does not lie with religion as such. Mainstream Christian religion was exempt from her strictures: 'one of [the] values as articulated in the definition of British values is "mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith". It is a happy fact that almost every Church of England school we visit takes that value seriously'.

There was and is no evidence that this value is not also endorsed by minority religious communities in Britain. It is extraordinary, however, that the DfE through Ofsted should regard the values of parents as potentially hostile to the values of schools. In truth, it is muscular liberalism that is hostile to the values of parents from minority religions. At the same time, parents and local communities more generally are denied access to any local democratic means of representing their own interests in the schooling of their children.

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British Muslims' Expectations of the Government (BMEG)

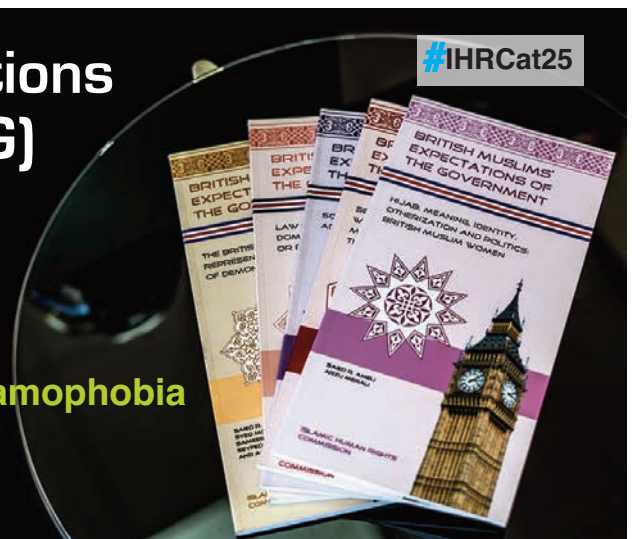
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Is the Sun Setting on the Western Empire?

Exploring Shifts in Global Power and Islamophobic Thinking

Looking at the current world-wide turmoil, and the rise of the multi-polar world, **Saeed Khan** sets out the questions and conversations that will inform this year's IHRC Islamophobia Conference.

Geographically, the sun sets in the West. But has the time now come that the sun is setting, geopolitically, on the West? Western countries defined and distinguished themselves from other nations and regions by a set of self-describing values, often presented as cardinal virtues. These include liberal democracy, adherence to the rule of law and social tolerance. Yet, each of these so-called virtues appears to be at risk with recent transformations. Manipulations of elections and voter suppression schemes place in doubt the primacy and legitimacy of democratic processes. Immunity of the elite and leadership from accountability or even criminal prosecution contradict the claim that Western nations represent fidelity to an open, transparent and fair judicial system. And the restrictive space given Muslims in the public sphere of several Western countries exposes the hypocrisy of societies that purportedly promote freedom of expression

for all.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s was heralded as a vindication of the West and its nearly half-century conflict with the Soviet bloc. The dismantling of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact caused such noted scholars as Francis Fukuyama to exultantly declare the end of history, invoking Hegel's famous conclusion to a historical dialectic. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama contended that the collapse of the so-called east confirmed once and for all the primacy, superiority and eternity of liberal democracy market economy and perhaps some form of secularity. To characterize Fukuyama's assertions as being premature would be a gross understatement. The rise of China, as well as other economic, military and political counterpoints such as Brazil, India and even a revamped Russia, refute the notion that the world was somehow destined to 1000 years of peace as defined, directed and even dictated by the

West. While Fukuyama has conceded that perhaps his exuberance of predicting the overall victory of the West was misguided, there are many within that geography and ideology that are in denial of any decline within the West. They are also defiant in engaging in any exercise of self-reflection that the Western project is either failing or is systemically flawed.

Who is the West?

While the West is often characterized as being a conglomerate of Europe, North America north of the Rio Grande River, Australia, New Zealand, and perhaps begrudgingly Japan, the West has essentially come to be defined by the Anglophone world. This suggests that most of Europe would not fit into this convenient schematic. If one is to acknowledge the dominance of the Anglophone world, in particular, the cultural, economic, political, military and social



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reach, then the United States and postcolonial Great Britain in and of itself and through its Commonwealth of Nations must be seen as forming the current Western zeitgeist. But the Anglophone world has suffered a decline in its dominance, especially over the past two decades.

For Great Britain, it is difficult to place a positive spin on its seemingly shocking departure from the European Union in 2016 by way of its own self-inflicted agency of putting that fateful decision to a referendum. More recently, even British influence through the vehicle of its relationship with Commonwealth nations has become less fortified than ever before. Calls for the possibility of removing the British sovereign as head of state have now gained traction in countries like Barbados, the world's most recent republic. While the Queen (now King) of England is still the head of state of 15 countries, the majority being island nations in the Caribbean and in Oceania, it is now an open question whether these countries will seek to follow the lead of Barbados, and perhaps even the previously unthinkable, i.e. the departure of Canada, Australia and New Zealand as the transition in the monarchy has arrived. Already, the United Kingdom has been overtaken by India as the largest economy in the Commonwealth. Arguably the presumption that Great Britain once had of wielding its influence, assertiveness, amongst Commonwealth nations is no longer one that it can enjoy, facing now the reality of acquiescing to economic gravitational forces that reside elsewhere.

For the United States, arguably the premier hegemonic force globally, there has been a retraction of its presumptive power, authority and influence on the world stage. Domestically, it faced three major stress tests within approximately the past two decades. The first was the 9/11 attacks. Rather than uphold freedom and civil liberties, the oft professed defining principles of American life, the government and civil society collaborated in a project of securitization that disproportionately impacted Muslim Americans. As was perhaps inevitable, more than 20 years on, the spectre of being a

country under attack has remained part of the new American narrative. In addition, the US had to cope with the financial meltdown of 2008. The Great Recession was a trauma that still affects the national consciousness and continues to enervate millions in their economic well-being, while income disparities have reached unprecedented levels, suggesting that not everyone was adversely impacted by the episode.

Both of these traumas then played pivotal roles in the development of the third challenge: the rise of neopopulism, best exemplified by the election and birth of the cult of Donald Trump in 2016. America has entered a "post-truth" phase, where data and incontrovertible truth are inconvenient and irrelevant at best, rejected and refuted at worst. With the zealous and now open efforts to subvert the democratic process, as showcased on January 6, 2021 at the US Capitol in Washington, DC for all the world to see, and continuing pledges by Trump's acolytes to fortify their chosen election outcomes, America's experiment with democratic institutions and process is on the endangered species list, with the possibility that it could embolden other regimes, especially in the West to follow suit.

Pride comes...

The past, it is said, serves as prologue. Many of the West's current maladies have a recent history which arguably could have been altered to prevent what is the situation at hand. The Ukraine invasion has been cited as a possible illustration of the decline of Western hegemonic influence. Yet, the Russian aggression could easily be predicted were one to take a broader historical perspective over the past 25 years. Steady Western encroachment into former Soviet spheres of influence and even former Soviet republics had cast the die for retribution from Moscow. That the West had become complacent, even hubristic about its self-proclaimed mission of spreading democratic and or neoliberal influence into Eastern Europe was bound to result in a backlash. The current crisis in Ukraine has also exposed

Western vulnerability to energy dependency, despite all of its indignation to the developing world regarding climate action. The spectre of double standards vis-à-vis military intervention is in concordance with other contradictory Western policies and actions regarding the selective and circumspect promotion of democracy, while suppressing democracy movements with impunity including support for dictatorial regimes to satisfy economic gain and political leverage. In addition, emerging non-Western powers like China and India have openly defied Western sanctions on Russia by allowing Moscow to circumvent barriers on its oil sales.

The erosion of the rule of law and even constitutional and judicial integrity, purportedly hallmark features of Western values, have been on full display over the preceding three years. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a stress test for the ability for Western notions of liberalism to be applied at times when these societies have been facing some of their most comprehensive array of challenges. The conduct of outgoing Prime Minister Boris Johnson and members of his cabinet in flouting Covid restrictions that they had in fact imposed on the general population is but one example of the hypocrisy of selective Western legal adherence. Of course, the 2020 US election further demonstrates the efforts to subvert democracy and free and fair elections with former President Donald Trump and several high-ranking members of the Republican Party openly seeking to disenfranchise voters and questioning without evidence the propriety of election results that do not suit or satisfy the outcome they seek. Public confidence in the political system, political institutions and politicians has been shown to be at historic lows on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. For a region that touts the primacy, if not superiority of liberal democracy, adherence to that particular pillar of Western society is no longer a certainty.

Divide and conquer no more?

The West is currently the rather

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What's Going on Here?

US Experiences of Islamophobia between Obama and Trump

By Saied R. Ameli and Saeed A. Khan



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crowded landscape of identity politics. Individuals and entire communities are reduced to one side of a particular binary, which could be political (oftentimes, a function of varying degrees of partisanship), or even cultural in nature. It is in this latter area where a wide array of identity markers provides arenas of contestation, including sexual orientation and socio-economic status (i.e. class). But religion is also more than a mere belief system; it is a category of identity that exists unto itself, but it can also subdivide within a faith tradition in the form of sectarianism as well as bind to other identity factors to create phenomena such as religio-nationalism. In doing so, religion may become synonymous with, and indistinguishable to an ethnicity, leading to ethno-nationalism, often deployed with a concomitant religious rhetoric.

As, the West is currently embroiled within a new dimension of identity politics, one may argue that it is a victim of its own creation. But it would be erroneous to assume that Western constructs of identity are a new phenomenon; it has been the tragic experience of colonized and subjugated peoples at the hands of Western powers who were the recipients of new forms of categorization as part of the imperial objectives of divide, conquer and rule. While ethnic, sectarian and even socioeconomic lines of demarcation existed prior to the colonial period, Western intervention created an inorganic recalibration of these demographic differences, without either concern for discord or the agency of those being redefined to object to these efforts.

The identity politics that pervade the West currently may best be placed into two major categories: political/ partisan and cultural, especially with sexual categories. Ironically, the rigidity and perceived lack of permeability of many identity categories today seem to be absent in this latter area, where the greatest level of fluidity seems to exist. Today, individuals, groups, and even entire geographic regions, whether American states or provinces and territories, are reduced to a colour that corresponds to a political or ideological affiliation. Similar re-

ductivism sadly has come to dominate religion, religio-national identity, socioeconomic levels, and the ethno-national, in particular, in matters of migration and immigration, where a mere pair of words may define a binary, itself an oversimplification of complex processes.

Contra the primacy supposedly conferred upon the individual, every individual by Western platitudes on liberalism, people from outside the Occident are apparently ineligible to enjoy the rights of full person-

The West continues to exert its influence by way of identity politics in very significant ways that then greatly affect the rest of the world and certainly much of the Islamicate.

hood. As much as Western countries espouse pluralism, free expression and tolerance, the discourse on refugees and migrants over the past decade has exposed the contradictions and limits of these conceits. Several European countries have either closed their borders to those seeking asylum per the laws Western nations have themselves enacted. Great Britain has even pursued policies that will deport asylum seekers to third countries like Rwanda as if the refugees were an errantly purchased item from a retailer. In the United States, the pertinent debates among xenophobes vacillate between those who demand severe curbs to legal immigration at one end to a categorical moratorium on all forms of immigration, legal or illegal, at the other.

The subversion of Western notions of liberalism continues to the fundamental aspect of citizenship. The government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson proposed the

revocation of one's citizenship if the regime determined the individual poses a "threat" to the state without even requiring notification to be given to the affected person. This provision simply adds to existing laws that can strip someone of British citizenship if the government determines such action is "for the public good" and would not make the individual stateless. Within the American context, deliberations to consider the abolition of birth-right citizenship, a core feature of the US Constitution's 14th Amendment, have now gained traction on the politically conservative side of the aisle.

Western-created and imposed constructs of identity upon much of the rest of the world, particularly during the colonial and imperial eras, still exist and in fact have been exacerbated in countries like India, China, various African nations and in South America as well. At the same time, newly established identity markers in the West have also made their way to non-Western regions, thanks to technology, telecommunications and the continuing influence of the West as a producer of mass culture. Some of these identity markers are an artificial encroachment on these societies; yet the West will use them as barometers as to how "modern" these communities are. This is the latest contradictory, even hypocritical oeuvre of the West, redolent of the British dismantling of sexual and gender mores in the colonies, while maintaining Victorian values in the metropole.

The West continues to exert its influence by way of identity politics in very significant ways that then greatly affect the rest of the world and certainly much of the Islamicate. First, the new categories of identity construction affect Western societies by creating moral panics which affect Muslims through scapegoating, discriminatory and exclusionary policies as well as demonization. The inability for the West to come to terms with its own systemic and self-created deficiencies and crises leads to the reflexive and convenient focus on the so-called *other*. Sometimes, this scapegoating proves to be a diversion to underlying faults within a social and political milieu and championed by the

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ambitious and opportunistic. Former British chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak invoked the need to combat Islamic extremism as a chief priority in his bid to become both head of the Conservative party and the presumptive Prime Minister. Similarly, despite the indisputable rise and threat of right-wing extremism and white Christian nationalism in the United States, there are many politicians and opinion makers who still stubbornly cling to the hackneyed trope of the Muslim menace.

Exporting the 'other' by social media

Social media is often touted as being the paragon of democracy in practice. Arguably, the individual has access to the marketplace of ideas that might be deprived by corporate media outlets and similarly scaled platforms. One can place an opinion or argument into the fray via one's "app" of choice and evade the obstacles to publication caused by economic and/or ideological motivations of conventional media outlets. Yet, the democratization of voices that is facilitated by social media has also been perverted by some to mobilize the tyranny of the majority against vulnerable minority communities.

The sanction for identity politics in the new Western model is finding a safe haven within certain developing nations with a similar impact on Muslims, the difference being a far more dangerous, violent and lethal expression of othering. India perhaps offers the most structuralized form of religio-national identity construction through Hindutva and the policies of the BJP government. The collaborative efforts between state and civil society to otherize, marginalize and persecute Muslims and other minorities in India has been coordinated in large measure over social media platforms. Companies that operate these outlets, many based in the West, have been reluctant to police and prevent toxic conduct lest they lose access to one of the world's largest consumer markets.

Similar demonization campaigns

against Muslims based on the exploitation of communal difference have been seen in Myanmar and the Central African Republic. Arguably, identity politics and their focus were test-driven by problematizing Muslims in the West as a particular and distinct category by which to exercise nefarious government policies including securitization, but also allowing civil society to be complicit in this endeavour through the cultural otherization of Muslims.

A commonly asserted Western "virtue" and the glorification of its development is the discourse of human rights. Muslims are often either impugned for their purported avoidance of application of human rights or face neglect and ambivalence when their own human rights are violated, whether from Western agency or otherwise. The assertion of human rights violations is largely ignored when Muslims are the target (the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Muslims of the Central Africa Republic, the Palestinians, the Kashmiris and Muslims in India more broadly bear recent testament to that), except when the West seeks to find a convenient ideological cudgel against an enemy that allows it to trumpet its indignation. Case in point, the tepid invocation of the policy of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang Province. Despite incontrovertible evidence, according to several international entities, of a genocide under way in Western China, the West has been nearly impotent in its championing of human rights beyond a few rhetorical flourishes and minimal symbolic overtures, such as when the US government declined to send an official representative to the opening ceremonies of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. The Western response was far weaker than the broader boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer games. In a rebuke to purported Western unity, the United States and Canada were not joined by Western European allies in the protest of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the case of the Beijing games, the Chinese government was unfazed by Western rants, a further sign that Western posturing is taken less than seriously now.

Reimagining the Ummah

An increasingly pervasive question in the Islamicate focuses upon what the decline of the West portends for the *Ummah*. First, it may be beneficial to assess the impact of this condition without using the entirety of the Muslim world as a collective point of reference. Given its diversity, its divisions and how those divisions are exploited by external forces, perhaps it may be more helpful to maintain two different focal points: Muslims living within the so-called West, as minority communities, and Muslims living within the so-called Islamicate. For those living in the latter, there may be a sense of impending amelioration of their situation, ostensibly based upon the conceit that their condition is due to Western agency, and that an alternative may improve their situation. They may indeed welcome the prospect of a weakened West and the emergence of a new *Wali* (custodian/benefactor/patron) to help them repel and resist the West and possibly be their benefactors, as self-reliance and self-determination would realistically still remain elusive. There is much uncertainty and speculation about whether the intended outcome could occur. In high-level geopolitics, there is in fact the underlying realization that subaltern states, a category in which Muslim countries can be placed, would simply be subjected to the whims, strategies and priorities of a new force, i.e. "meet the new boss, same as the old boss." In that scenario, it is difficult to predict whether those Muslim societies would in fact experience any qualitative improvement of their condition.

A common alternative being considered within current global configurations is the purported counterweight that a country like China may offer vis-à-vis the West. While China has emerged as an economic superpower, soon to become the world's largest economy, boasting a formidable and military presence that can clearly allow it to resist Western efforts to bully it and even assert its own influence regionally and globally, it is doubtful that China will be a model for political organization that would be



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 more than 2000 killed over the last six years. 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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palatable to Muslim countries. While some Muslim regimes are certainly authoritarian, even totalitarian, communism is inherently antithetical to Islamic and Muslim sensitivities. Additionally, while China certainly is the world leader in manufacturing, the West remains the global dominant force in culture production. It is highly unlikely that this will either change or will even be welcomed by Muslim countries. Although some Western cultural tropes may be disdained by Muslim societies, e.g. sexual identity and orientation matters, the inclination overall toward a Western cultural paradigm will continue.

There may be the convenient, even reflexive tendency for Muslims to look toward countries like Russia, China and India as much needed counterweights to Western hegemony. But to view these countries salvifically as the “anti-West” as a welcome alternative is highly dangerous, especially given the dubious interaction each country has displayed toward its own Muslim population. The Chechens, Uyghurs, Kashmiris and other Indian Muslims can attest to this through their own legacy of blood and suffering.

In some ways, this poses an intriguing dilemma for Muslim societies. While the West and its historical legacy and engagement with the Islamicate has been contentious, disruptive and destructive, there does not appear to be a complete antithetical alternative available to the Muslim world. That leaves it with the choice of a hybrid form of external influence upon it, one where cultural hegemony and political models remain originating from the West while economic and military influences shift eastward. As such, it would create the atmosphere where the Muslim world would indeed be stuck in the middle of two competing and contesting paradigms. Would then the Muslim world seek to maintain the status quo by orienting itself toward the West? This would pose two important potential consequences. One would be the continuation of existing exploitation, marginalization and targeting. The other consideration is that the Islamicate would be hitching its proverbial horse to a declining centre of power. While tactically perhaps a prudent decision, the strategic impact of affiliating with an empire collective on the wane is wrought with uncertainty and possible adverse impact from whatever force rivals the West.

Diasporic Dilemmas and the Decline of the West

For Muslims living in the West, there are a myriad complex challenges facing them. First, despite the fact that they may well be scapegoated, targeted and the recipients of marginalization and discrimination, they are nonetheless part of the West and either inadvertently or intentionally stakeholders within that project. Therefore, they are agents that may help shape the future of

the West. Ironically, they may well find themselves helping to salvage and even reinforce mechanisms of oppression, both for themselves and for Muslims elsewhere.

Second, the Muslim community might not be aware of the subtle ways the discussions and debates outside it may be affecting it in a rather profound manner. The Western world is undergoing demographic shifts and loss of presumption of hegemony, whether internationally or within the domestic context of each respective constituent country. Narratives of nativism and xenophobia are common spasms of experience faced by Muslims. But these sentiments and their corresponding action have a causation which is rooted in anxiety, insecurity, confessions of inadequacy and the resulting moral panics that pervade societies no longer safe and secure within their own perceived protective values. Muslims face scapegoating and demonization both as a result of ideological animus, and also as a convenient diversion by state deficiencies from their policies, be they economic or social and political.

In Muslim countries, the current anxieties in the West manifest themselves with the further exploitation of Muslim resources, often due to the inability for the West to control or exert its influence to make these regions acquiesce to its wheel. Often, provocations of war and military intervention serve as cynical means to distract their own publics from failed policies on the domestic front. But war is also a profitable enterprise and oftentimes serves a corporate and neoliberal agenda.

In many ways, the West is oblivious to, or unable to ascertain the causal factors that inform its own decline. To be fair, this is not a unique phenomenon; other dominant powers have followed a similar tract. The Ottoman Empire, for example, was not able to fully appreciate the signs that augured its eventual decline and ultimate demise. Usually, by the time the decline has begun, it is too late to rectify, reverse or repair deficiencies that precipitated the downward slide. Denial and defiance are common responses to those who may bear the prescience of the fall from a hegemonic apex. This is due in part to being held victim to past success, which impedes the impetus to adapt to new and emerging shifts in social, economic and political realities. It is natural to obstinately “double down” on unfamiliar templates that had worked in the past and had produced prosperity and power, in lieu of novel, uncertain, unpredictable ameliorative models.

The *Ummah* is a fluid, mutating and yet sustained concept within the Islamicate. As the Western model predicated on liberal democracy, market economy and the nation-state finds these pillars to now be wobbly, the *Ummah* might gain a sense of rejuvenated optimism that it can re-emerge as a coherent, structured, even thriving polity as none of these features of the Western model are contingent upon its success and survivability. The *Ummah* is by definition transnational, perhaps even transcen-

dent. In fact, it may be seen as the first true exemplar of globalization. And yet at the same time, it suffers from the same kind of impact and trauma as one may find in the anti-globalist agenda. Hyper nationalism, tribalism and sectarianism plague Muslim societies, either from within or from external sources, be they Western origin or elsewhere. Social media, another transnational phenomenon, has proven to be particularly weaponized to demonize and target Muslims. Under the guise of another purported Western virtue, i.e. free expression, Islamophobia runs rampant in the virtual world, with its concomitant violence deployed in the physical space.

While the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the near unbridled assertion of Western power through colonialism, imperialism and hegemonic imposition, the 21st century has shown a retraction, even deterioration of such unchallenged hubris. The emergence of counterforces like Russia and China have confronted the presumption of Western superiority, spreading their influence in areas once perceived to be the exclusive province of the West. In some ways, the current Ukraine crisis is a case study in real time of the West being confronted with its own limitations and contradictions.

Some will welcome this development, given the history of exploitation and suppression at the hands of Western powers. At the same time, questions abound whether a metaphoric or actual tilt of the earth's axis away from occidental dominance will augur a better geopolitical future for various regions, especially those within the Islamicate.

The West will not concede to the new shifts and their potential for the loss of power and influence. Will it respond by realizing its deviation from its own professed, defining values, or will it further alienate, marginalize and target vulnerable groups, like Muslim communities, through an intensified hypernationalism? Likewise, will Muslims, whether those living in the West as minorities or in majority Muslim countries, fall prey to greater tribalism and division, and will such disunity be exploited, both by the West and its emerging counterweights? And finally, will the new competition to Western dominance approach the Islamicate in a spirit of equity and justice or will it merely approach the Muslim world with its own expressions of Islamophobia? These questions take on a critical priority for consideration as the light of the setting sun appears to be fading.

Saeed Khan

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Romanticizing Hijra - Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire?

Zviad Jughashvili poses some critical questions regarding hijra in the current era.

Today most pressure points against Islam and challenges to Muslims are practical. Fortunately, Islamic scholarship of the past three decades produced phenomenal philosophical and [intellectual responses](#) to modernist and post-modernist attacks on Islam. It is the practical side of things which challenges Muslims the most today.

Overall, the practical challenge to Islam and Muslims boils down to the following old question: **If Islam is so amazing, where is a functioning Islamic polity with empirical results similar to... insert any developed nation (Scandinavian countries?)**

When one responds to the question above via books or academic papers, the simplistic nature of the question is easy to expose. However, it is still a very real and legitimate question.

Muslims today want a practical response to the challenge presented by the above question. Why? The mechanics behind the question at stake are practical and produce practical [challenges to Muslims](#) of today, primarily to those Muslims who live as a minorities in non-Muslim societies and especially in Western countries. Resorting to Kalam, Fiqh or Philosophy does not fully respond to the posed question.

Therefore, facing the practical pressure of the above question, Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries resort to Hijra (migration) as a practical response.

More and more Muslims facing various anti-Islamic bans and [racist attitudes](#) in non-Muslim countries are leaving their established homes for a life in a Muslim ruled country.

One of the common locales which Muslims choose to abandon and has been quite a focus of various media outlets is France. A widely read article on the London based Middle East Eye website titled [‘I love](#)

Every time in the past 50 years Islamic parties won elections, they were sabotaged or overthrown by radical forces backed by NATO member nations

[France, but I left: The Muslims who decide to emigrate](#)” summarises well the broader sentiment of many Muslims living as minorities in a [hostile environment](#) which regularly demonizes their religion.

Prior to delving deeper into this question, the author of this piece wants to make it very clear, that it is not trying to argue for or against Hijra, but it is an attempt of an average Muslim to broaden the discussion on this issue and eliminate some serious blind spots.

Also, before moving further into discussing this topic, it is crucial to note that

the central question posed above is rooted in politics, thus, a brief political response to the question must be given prior to moving further in discussing the romanticization of Hijra as an Islamic concept by many Muslims today.

People who pose the central practical question to Muslims highlighted above are often unaware, purposefully or not, that every time in the past 50 years Islamic parties won elections, they were [sabotaged](#) or overthrown by radical forces [backed](#) by NATO member nations. The [so-called](#) “free world”.

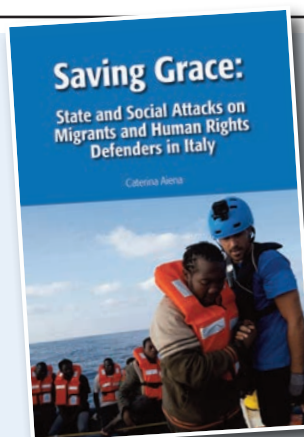
In [Algeria](#), [Egypt](#) or [Iran](#), the temporal [success](#) of Islamic governance in recent times was never allowed to evolve organically and master governorship. Any fair-minded person who conducts objective research on this issue, will be able to see this phenomenon quite quickly. **In all three cases, foreign interference destabilized internal conditions on economic, political, and social levels.**

Returning to the growing Muslim response to the central question posed above - migration to countries ruled by Muslims - it highlights a deep misunderstanding of Islam among many Muslims.

This is partly natural, as for the past 100 years, Islam has been marginalized in the Muslim world, as there has been an ideological remodification of Islam along the lines of an external geopolitical agenda. Muslim societies were **forcefully pushed towards a social and political framework that was not suited** to Muslim societies. This is [not](#) some conspiracy theory, but a very real external agenda. As pointed out in [Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Em-](#)

IHRC PUBLICATION

Saving Grace: State and Social Attacks on Migrants and Human Rights Defenders in Italy



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pire: *The Politics of Islamic Reformation*, by Saba Mahmood (pages 330-331), the White House National Security Council since 2003, spent \$1.3 billion on advancing its agenda in the Muslim world via soft-power projects (contrast this with when Russians manipulate social media and Washington screams interference).

By now, many readers are probably asking themselves what is wrong with going and living in Muslim countries? Nothing is wrong with living there, but this is in no way the Hijra which Islamic tradition advocates, unless one is migrating to safeguard the credal practices of Islam, and these are very rare and are to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Let's be fair, as the Quran says - "*O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate from justice. If you distort the testimony or refuse to give it, then know that Allah is certainly All-Aware of what you do.*" {S4:135}

Even in most Islamophobic Western societies, fundamental credal practices can be practiced, in some cases far better than in many so-called Muslim countries. If you have a hard time believing this, ask Muslim men who have had their beards forcefully shaven by the police in Uzbekistan or Azerbaijan. Talk to women in Muslim countries who **cannot wear hijab** to work or to schools. Speak to Islamic scholars who languish in Saudi jails simply for presenting alternative Islamic theological perspectives.

So, **what are some of the issues with doing "Hijra" to Muslim ruled countries?** How many of us ask ourselves about the immense negative spiritual and Fiqhi ramifications of praying Juma prayers behind the state appointed "imams" in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan or Egypt? Have we ever thought what damage, legitimizing the so-called "Islamic" façade of Egyptian or Saudi regimes does to Islam and the spiritual state of our hearts? At least in non-Muslim countries, most congregations of the mosques are free to elect their own Imams, based on certain merits, not for being mouthpieces of despots. Do we ponder about the intellectual and spiritual damage, when we talk about how great it is to hear Adhan in Jordan, but have minimal to no concern about how the royal family of Jordan **persecutes** its opponents and uses the state treasury as a **private bank** account?

Many of us, are rightfully fixated on practicing our obligatory acts in the age of YOLO ideology, but how many of us think about what it does to the spiritual state of Muslims when they see their scholars kiss the hands of corrupt tyrants and when mosques are turned into dens of informants and manipulation in favor of despots. These sins, which are often not seen as sins by many, also have immense negative spiritual and mental impact.

If reading the above paragraphs, a reader is thinking, these are some secondary matters, let's look at the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) life even prior to his announcement of his Prophethood. There is an episode in the Prophet Muhammad's life when prior to the announcement of the Islamic message, the last Messenger of God formed the **Hilf al-Fudul** with other non-Muslims, a part of his life, which after his public announcement of Prophethood, he used to remember with very positive mem-

Have we ever thought what damage, legitimizing the so-called "Islamic" façade of Egyptian or Saudi regimes does to Islam and the spiritual state of our hearts?

ories. **Hilf al-Fudul was not an institution busying itself with ritualistic aspects of Makkan life but restoring the rights of the oppressed. There is a lesson in the fact that the last Messenger of God was pioneering this phenomenon prior to addressing the theological and intellectual deviance of the Hijaz.**

Reading the above should make it clear that by migrating to a Muslim ruled country today, presents a set of other Islamic challenges. Sure, it is easier to find halal food and pray at the mosques, but is this the ethos of Islam? Muslims need to ask some self-critical questions and provide an honest response to them. If we do not, others will ask them and frame responses outside of the Islamic paradigm and impose those upon Muslim societies as it has been done with other crucial issues. **Take feminism as an example. The dogma of feminism infiltrated some Muslim societies because for far too long Muslims were ignoring the oppression of women in Muslim societies based on non-Islamic customs and attitudes.**

The author of this piece, who lived in several Muslim and non-Muslim countries, is yet to hear from the broad spectrum of Muslims what they are going to do when they migrate to the UAE or Turkey when faced with anti-Islamic challenges there. We all have great responses about maintaining our ritualistic Islamic obligations in non-Muslim societies, but do we have a plan what to do when we move to the Las Vegas on steroids called **Dubai** or Sisi's Egypt? As a community, we belittle these issues, as it is easier to remind a colleague to perform daily prayers than explain to

your manager that paying a Pakistani employee a non-living salary simply based on his or her passport is outright sinful and criminal.

To briefly touch a theological point, it should be remembered that spiritually speaking, no place on earth is as spiritually blessed as Makkah. Primary Islamic traditional sources **highlight** Makkah's special position. Yet, after its liberation, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) never moved back to Makkah. The fourth Khalif of the Muslims, Ali ibn Abu Talib (RA) moved his government's capital away from Makkah. Why is this being mentioned? The ritual aspect of things is at times put on a back seat when strategic issues are at stake. Overall, Islam does not assign a preferred place of presence, unless a specific case requires such resolution.

Let not colonized minds read this piece and entertain the assumption that *we had it right all these years, the West is more moral than Muslim countries*. The matter is far more complex to give this simplistic answer. Just ask **over a million dead** as a result of the so-called War on Terror launched in 2001 **by the US and its surrogates**. The despots ruling Muslim countries are often sustained in power by the very free world granting political asylum to Muslims fleeing those countries, often for brain drain purposes.

The intent of this essay is not to praise the West or criticize the East. It is to get Muslims to begin thinking collectively that immigration to Muslim countries is often a case of jumping from the frying pan into the fire. It is not always the solution people assume it to be.

Hopefully, this essay broadens the horizons of readers, and we can understand that until the Muslim world is set in order, we will have a hard time answering the central question posed at the beginning, even if at times we have positive results to show in **scientific** or other areas as is the case with Iran, Turkey or Malaysia. Naturally, some will ask a simplistic question, well, why don't you all move to Iran then? Taking the economic conditions of Islamic Iran into consideration, if Muslims were to mass migrate to Iran, they would create problems for Iran which Western sanctions have **not achieved**. A similar case would apply to most other Muslim countries. Of course, this is just part of the answer, the in-depth answer would require a separate essay.

Thus, what choice do those have who choose to immigrate to Muslim countries? Have a solid practical plan on how to improve the society you are moving to, don't just look forward to halal food and tarawih prayers. The same applies to Muslims moving West as well.

Zviad Jughashvili

has been writing about issues about Muslim geopolitics mainly covering the former Soviet Union, for over eight years. He has studied International Relations and taught Business Studies at college level.

The Muslim Triumph and the Hindutva Anxiety: The Theology of Political Spectacles

Connecting the colonial past to the Hindutva present, **Muhammed Nihad P V** delves into both the current crises facing Muslims in India, as well as their reliance on Allah and ultimate justice in their struggle.

The Politics of Spectacles

Grand performances to proclaim the possession of power had always been integral to the political spaces of tyranny. No matter what form it takes the need to invoke fear among the subjects through staging spectacles remains part and parcel of its political action. The British colonisers took control of Delhi at the start of the nineteenth century, reducing the Mughal emperor in power to a largely ceremonial role. In retaliation, the 1857 revolt against the British erupted. With the suppression of the uprising, the British likely brought about the city's most significant character change since Nadir Shah took it over in the seventeenth century.

The British evicted Muslims from the city, believing them all to be rebels and hence criminals, and executed anyone who might be thought to have had a part in the rebellion. As a measure of punishment, the British seized a sizable quantity of property from people who had no chance to return to it. In their words, "as the bulk of the prize was taken from the houses of Musulmans and their owners being executed from the Town as Outlaws, they have no opportunity of claiming their property." The two sons of the exiled emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar were killed in front of him before he was banished to Rangoon. The execution of "such men" (Emperor Bahadur Shah

Zafar's sons), according to a colonial officer, "will strike terror and produce a salutary fear through the Mohammadan population." The poems of Ghalib clearly depict the suffering imposed on the Muslim inhabitants and the atmosphere of fear and anguish created by the British colonial forces. Some of the famous lines written in the context go like:

*bas ki fa.āl mā-yurīd hai aaj
har silah shor englistān kā
ghar se bāzār meñ nikalte hue
zohra hotā hai aab insān kā
chauk jis ko kaheñ vo maqal hai
ghar banā hai namūna zindān kā
shahr-e-dehlī kā zarra zarra khaak
tishna-e-khūn hai har musalmān kā*

*"Surely today every English Tommy is
Almighty God
Now every man going from house to the
bazaar is panic-stricken
The marketplace has become a slaughter-
house and the house
looks a prison
The very particles of dust in Delhi thirst for
the blood of
Muslims"*

The sense of loss and the magnitude of suffering are epitomized in a melancholic representation of the situation by Mir Taqi Mir:

*dillī jo ek shahr thā aalam meñ intikhāb
rahte the muntaqhab hī jahāñ rozgār ke
us ko falak ne luuT ke barbād kar diyā
ham rahne vaale haiñ usī ujDe dayār ke*

*"Delhi was a chosen city of the world
Where only the select lived
The cruel fate looted and ruined it
We are natives of that ruined city"*

Heinous acts of the Colonisers left the community shattered and the result was a gruesome spectacle, a spectacle of grandeur for the perpetrators and a spectacle of distress for the Muslims of Delhi. The praxis of domination here emerges out of the will to establish a system that in totality has a propensity to totalise itself, centre on itself, and eternalise its current structure forever. Spatially, it makes an effort to contain all exteriority that is conceivable. On earth, the Leviathan eliminates as many "others" as it can while obstructing any forces that would oppose its advance. As Ghalib rightly puts it, "the very particles of the dust in Delhi" are bloodthirsty. The city of Delhi didn't reach this state on its own, but it's the fetish of the British to trample over the lives of Muslims that made it into a "slaughter-house".

Mir, lamenting over the loss of the city, sheds light on the other side of the spectacle. Domination is also an act of power and



ROHINGYA APPEAL

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pressure. Domination is when someone forces someone else to engage in a system that they find abhorrent. They are forced to carry out deeds that go against who they are and what they stand for historically. Delhi, which hosted a large number of eminent literati, artists, architects, soldiers and religious scholars from different parts of the world has now become a barren land devoid of any scope for prosperity. Once a home for the “*muntakhab*” (the selected ones) it has been now conquered and occupied by the ruthless British invaders. Muslim soldiery and the intelligentsia were forced to either serve the new “godheads” or leave the city.

What is most intriguing in the narration of Ghalib is the phrase attributed to the British in the opening line. “*Fa'aalul lima yurid*” (85:16) is a Qur'anic usage (*wasf*) that describes the sovereignty and authority of Almighty God. It means ‘*the one who does whatever he wishes*’ or the one who really facilitates whatever happens. Hence, the analogy might seem like a mere exaggeration. But on the contrary, it could be a witty attack on the arrogance and audacity of the British. By exercising performative violence and facilitating a temporary spectacle, they assume themselves to be in the supreme position of “the divine sovereign”. While drowning in the contingency, they vaunt themselves for their self-assured permanence and the ability to give and take lives. Following the verse in the Qur'an which contains the aforementioned phrase, the ends of several tyrants and persecutors who claimed divinity and sovereignty are mentioned in brief. They were deceived by the splendour of the spectacles they staged. They were hypnotised by the mere appearances of their political actions that sought dominance. Active agency in the temporary performances delivered them a false sense of entitlement to the real control of affairs. Little do they know that God, the one who holds the absolute dominion, “*surrounds them*” (85:20) and their spectacles with his permanent power. It is from the vantage point of this firm belief that “the other” views the world and sets out on the path of resistance.

Hindutva's Politics as Performance and a Site of Anxieties

In India, there is no pre-defined nation, but a state that sustains itself with the state apparatuses. Post-colonies tend to accept and employ the territorial ideology and spatial order once established by the colonial masters. The case here is no different. While evaluating the idea of a nation in India through the lens of the mode in which it is imagined, it becomes clear that there is no decisive cultural or social homogeneity present to elicit a shared feeling. Due to the lack of a social mechanism that can crystallise and create a collective entity, the creation of a “we” depended on the an-

tagonism directed towards the colonisers until their retreat. The withdrawal of the British resulted in a void which was later filled at the juncture of partition. The establishment of Pakistan got projected as the birth of an enemy against whom the diverse population could again unite. Moreover, the partition rhetoric strengthened the hostility towards Muslims and the formation of the Indian state turned into the inaugural moment of a new anti-Pakistan/Muslim nationalism which proclaimed the end of tolerance towards Muslim political demands. Thus in India, Muslims who are a religious minority got chained to the nominal status of a mere cultural identity. Si-

Masjids are predominant symbols of Muslimness and they provide a congregational space for the community. By disrupting prayer gatherings and attacking the structures of the Masjid they wish to prevent Muslim mobilisations

multaneously, Muslim political agency was rubbed out and their existence was made subservient.

The rise of Hindutva and its project of “centrifugal ideologisation” (Malesevic, 2010) got strengthened with the ascension to electoral power. They continued the project utilising the state apparatus, and in the background the fabrication of a singular national history aimed at boosting the enmity against Muslims gained great momentum. The Hindutva intelligentsia's sophistry in carrying out the saffronisation of history often failed in beautifying the ugly face of the mission. The final attempt was to jump onto the decolonial bandwagon. The Hindutva idea of decolonisation on one hand is all about devaluing the Left/communist as well as the Dalit discourses for having a clear Western orientation and terming Muslims as the “foreign” other. On the other hand, they are in search of an exceptionalist narrative of past Hindu glory thinking within the frames set up by colonial knowledge. To distinguish the “other” from the natural citizens of the land, a sense of “us” and “them” is created through icons, stories, and narratives. These narratives translate into spectacles staged to exhibit power and routinise dominance.

The violence of Hindutva is performative to its core and it seeks to establish its organisational strength as a spectacular

public force. At the core of such performances lie certain anxieties. They address those anxieties effectively with a strategy of staging a series of violent public spectacles using the rhetoric of ethno-religious unity against the internal threat of Muslims. This year's *Ram Navami* celebration distinctly illustrates the pattern. Large-scale violence was reported in many states including Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Bihar West Bengal, Goa, Mumbai, and Delhi on the occasion. Several Hindutva organisations staged processions with thousands of people wearing saffron shawls, carrying weapons and loud DJ sets blasting songs with lyrics spewing anti-Muslim hatred.

Apart from the physical assaults that even took lives, in the majority of the sites, the Hindutva mobs had an urge to vandalise localities in the vicinity of masjids. In Khambhat of Gujarat, the procession organised by the Ram Sena started from the Ram temple at Shakarpur village. When the procession came near the mosque which is close to the Ram temple, the participants started raising slogans like “*Jai Shri Ram*”, “*Jai ranchod miya Chor*”, “*Topi valo ko bulvayenge, Dadi walo ko bulvayenge jai shri ram, jai shri ram*”. These slogans carried a tone of threat to the “disloyal” Muslims; if they wish to live in this country they will have to chant “*jai shri ram*” or mould their lives according to the Hindu will. In Muzaffarpur in Bihar, Hindu groups waved swords and danced in front of a masjid. They also desecrated the masjid by hoisting a saffron flag on the top.

Masjids are predominant symbols of Muslimness and they provide a congregational space for the community. By disrupting prayer gatherings and attacking the structures of the Masjid they wish to prevent Muslim mobilisations. This very motive is apparently visible in the targeting of Muslim-owned businesses and buildings as well. By hoisting a saffron flag on the premises of a masjid the desire to impose Hinduness on the Muslim subjects is fulfilled. The hijab ban in the educational institutions of Karnataka is another crystal clear instance of how the sites of Hindutva performances are actually sites of anxiety. Although the “front stage” justifications of the ban used tropes like “uniformity” and “secularism”, the unhinged goons inside and outside the campuses loudly enacted the anxiety. The indigestible element there was the visibility of Muslim women in the educational spaces.

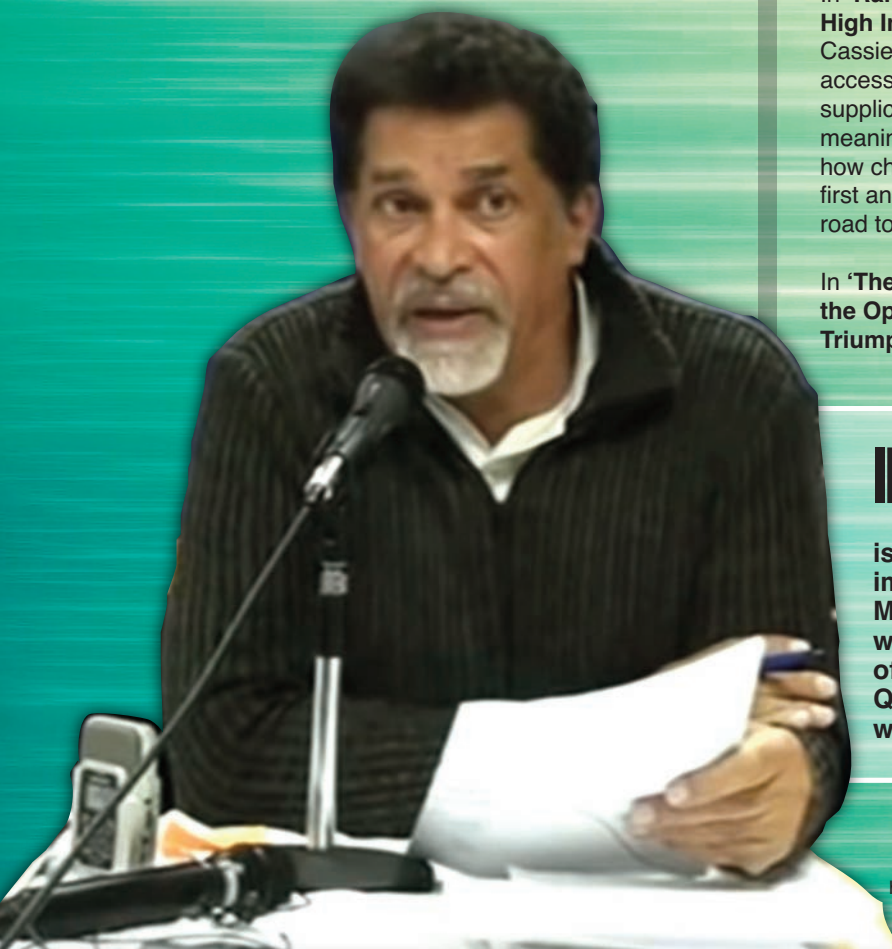
Similar is the case of “Friday”, which is a day of importance for Muslims everywhere. Demonstrations and protests could be easily organised by Muslims on Fridays since there is no separate effort needed to mobilise people. After the BJP spokesperson, Nupur Sharma's [derogatory remarks on Prophet Muhammad](#), Muslims of the country gathered outside Masjids after Jum'ah prayers demanding action against the culprit. The police and paramilitary

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Cassiem argues that the end of the apartheid era is near and cites Islam as the 'lost property' of the Azanians and all oppressed peoples, drawing on his explanation of Islamic justice.

In **'Islam's Triumph Over Apartheid'** Cassiem expands on the idea of Ummah. His explanation of the concept centre the Islamic community at the centre of the ongoing struggles against oppression in its many forms including racism, nationalism and dehumanisation.

This book is interesting for many different audiences: from the transnational activist, to the historian of the anti-apartheid struggle and other liberation struggles.

IMAM ACHMAD CASSIEM

is a veteran anti-apartheid activist who was imprisoned on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela for two terms, the first of which when he was only seventeen years old. An active member of the Pan African Congress, Cassiem headed Qibla, the Islamic movement that fought apartheid with the many comrades of different movements.

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forces deployed by the state along with the local foot soldiers of Hindutva brutally attacked the peaceful protestors. A few Muslim protesters were killed after police opened fire in some places and many sustained severe injuries. Many more got arrested in different parts of the country. In many major cities including Hyderabad, there were huge deployments outside masjids during jumuah prayers for the next few weeks. The anxiety, here is about the potential of organic uprisings that Muslim congregations hold. Hence, the performance requires men in uniform to stabilise fear.

In most of the places affected by the Ram Navami violence, after the rampage of the Hindutva mob, the state machinery furthered the spectacle by demolition drives. In Madhya Pradesh's Khargone, anti-Muslim violence that emanated from Ram Navami processions left a trail of destruction for the Muslim community. Dozens of Muslim houses were set on fire by Hindutva rioters. A day after, the Madhya Pradesh BJP government demolished several homes and shops belonging to Muslims citing reasons like "pollution" and "illegal construction". The national media smoothed the process by conforming to anti-Muslim myths and presenting the whole chain of events as mere Hindu-Muslim "clashes". Myth is a cultural mechanism that creates order and coherence in any social universe through spectacles. Every nation accumulates a collection of myths to support its historicity, strengthen its cohesion, and justify its actions. In that sense, as Irfan Ahmad argues "Media are narrators par excellence of a nation's myth" (Ahmad, 2014).

Media also add to the grandeur of the spectacle. In Uttar Pradesh, the anti-Muslim demolition drives carried out by the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were applauded on national television. His acts were eulogised as "Bulldozer Justice" and he was given the name "Bulldozer Baba" which was effectively utilised in the recent assembly election campaigns. During the celebration of India's [75th anniversary of independence held in New Jersey, USA](#), the Indian Business Association displayed a bulldozer adorned with posters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath. On the same day, the 11 convicts who gang-raped [Bilkis Bano](#) in her village in Randhikpur during the [Gujarat pogrom of 2002](#) were welcomed home with garlands and sweets by their families and members of Sangh Parivar after they were released by the state government. Both the instances of symbolic violence glorifying the violence at work are actually part of an "insatiable cannibalism" entrenched in the psyche of the oppressor (Dussel, 1985).

When it comes to the question of the complicity of the judiciary as a catalyst in these performances, we could see that it wavers between active and passive participation. On one hand, as in the case of the

[Hijab ban in Karnataka](#), the judiciary even employs hermeneutics to interpret the religious texts and practices of Muslims, and render the Muslim existence docile to the Hindu state. On the other hand, it couples with the collective conscience, as in the recent judgment in the Ahmedabad blasts. A special court designated for the speedy trial of the [2008 Ahmedabad serial bomb blasts](#) case sentenced 38 of the 49 convicts to death and 11 others were sentenced to life imprisonment until death. All 49 convicts are Muslims and this is the highest number of convicts to be sentenced to death in a single case in India's legal history. The judgment was mainly based on circumstantial evidence that is generally discarded by the court. The unusual nature of the verdict that reduced Muslim lives into mere numbers didn't trigger the usual anger over capital punishments among "progressive

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permanence.**

circles". The sentence testified to the fact that the collective psyche of the majority in India has given legitimacy to the "killability" of Muslims. All these incidents make the reality of Indian courts discernible to Muslims. Like Joseph K in Kafka's novel "The Trial" opines, "It is an aimless institution from any point of view. A single executioner could do all that is needed." Joseph in the story was quoting his own experience (Kafka, 1925). In other words, the judiciary here is not a justice system but a legal system that caters to majoritarian legality. The court meets a Muslim subject not in response to his or her quest for justice, but to meet its own yearning to justify itself.

Altogether, as how Thomas Blom Hansen observes, "the entire show" becomes a "classic illustration of media and politics as permanent performance and spectacle." Throughout this process of performance, the ethos of the dominator is rooted in hatred and envy. The other's mobility and steadfastness disgust the dominator; even the other's presence or existence, are intolerable to the dominator. How fragile the dominator is?

The Theology and Triumph of

Counter-Spectacles

"But this cry—Allahou Akbar!—terrorizes the vain, who see in it a project of decline. They are right to fear it, for its egalitarian potential is real: to put men, all men, back in their place, without any form of hierarchy. Only one entity is allowed to rule: God. No other entity is granted this power to exercise against one's peers or against God."

-Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*

"But We wished to favour those who were oppressed in that land, to make them leaders, the ones to survive (triumph),"

- The Holy Qur'an - 28:5

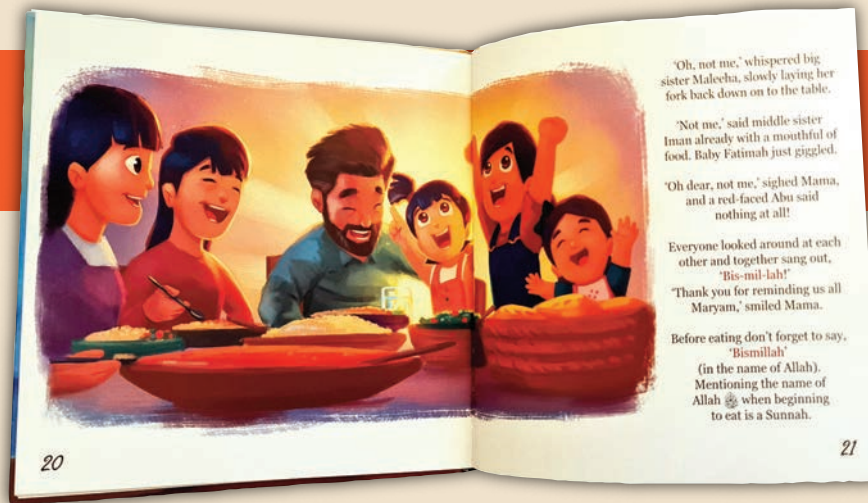
What reaction must a person resort to when surrounded by a mob that reeks of sheer arrogance and brutal inhumanness backed by the state-given impunity to use violence over others and stage it as a spectacle? They intend to impose fear and create a world where humans are supposed to fear and bow down in front of fellow humans. While the humanist suggestions to deal with the situation might once again ask you to remain peaceful and submit yourself to the powers already trying to enslave you, a person with a more humane understanding of this world would think of ways to crush the arrogance and hit right on the psyche of those overwhelmed by the sense of dominion.

Muskan Khan, a Muslim student in Karnataka's Mandya who was heckled by a group of men with saffron scarves in front of her college for wearing a hijab, chose to respond in this humane way. Her organic will to expose the contingency of the power those goons hold and proclaim her faith in the permanence of divine rule and power took the form of a chant, "Allahu Akbar". Let's say that it wasn't a well-thought action, but the Muslim self in motion is in a perpetual state of thinking and this "thinking in motion" is well guided by an undertone of subservience to the divine command. It is at the same time based upon a phenomenological experience that is processed through the lens of particular epistemological predilections. Just like the metaphysical obedience to the rule and will of God which is characterised by the reliance on divine revelations, believers engage in the act of **metaphysical disobedience** against all the pretentious godheads claiming the absolute position of divine permanence. This disobedience is also inspired by a source of knowledge and power in exteriority, from outside all regimes of knowledge. The manifestations of this disobedience don't always appear as belated actions, they sometimes also erupt in spontaneity. The "Allahu Akbar" moment in Karnataka was one of those spontaneous eruptions.

After her house was demolished by the Uttar Pradesh government and her father

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arrested as a vengeful act against their active involvement in political issues related to the Muslim community, Afreen Fatima, a Muslim student leader, told [Maktoob media](#) in an interview: “For Hindu supremacists, it is a fetish to see Muslim houses crumbling, Muslims going to jails, and Muslims getting demonised and dehumanised on national television daily. That is their idea of fun. I think we are not willing to give that to them. We are not going to shed a single tear. As far as the entire Muslim community is concerned, we are strong and we will survive whatever will come. Islamic history shows that we have survived situations way worse than this.”

Raihanath Kappan, the wife of Siddique Kappan, a Muslim journalist who was wrongfully arrested by Uttar Pradesh police for attempting to meet the family of a Dalit girl who was gang raped and killed by a group of upper caste men in Hathras, similarly responded to [Maktoob media](#): “My husband set out for a good cause... There are many people who want to see me in tears, and I am stubborn not to show them.”

What we find common in both of their words is the courage and the will to exercise the power to act as a subject rather than an object in the entire “spectacle of misery” that the oppressor plots to stage. The political space that emerged here is community-centric. The strong faith anchored in the sovereignty of God enables the believers to remain steadfast and triumphant. On a larger level, it triggers a dynamic communal movement that is organic and transparent, the occurrence of which swallows all dominant performances. Both the spectacle of the state and other pretentious displays of sovereignty—the ability and will to take life and to punish—are destroyed at that moment. Exactly as how Guy Debord views it, “Religion is the only trend in which humanity attributes power and responsibility to a source outside ourselves” (Debord, 1992). The omnipresence of spectacles and the spectacular technology and tactics they use have not disproved or diminished this

trend. When Afreen invokes Islam and the history of Muslim societies, she gives meaning to her suffering, and gains an overpowering confidence against the Hindutva plot to repress her. By recalling the historical roots, her memory of belongingness resists all attempts to dehistoricise Muslim existence and hinder the communitarian becoming of Muslims.

When a Muslim confronts Hindutva on a theological plain, he or she discovers the shallowness of the opponent. The discovery begins with a realisation that what Islam provides to the Muslim self is a potential triumph

Beeyyumma, mother of Zakariya, a Muslim youth who was falsely accused and imprisoned in the 2008 Bangalore blasts case once said, “There is a *sarkar* (government) above all *sarkars* (governments), and above all courts, there is the court of divine justice”. For Beeyyumma, a decade long fight for her son’s return in the court rooms is not an end in itself. Her strong conviction in divine justice outstrips the fear and alienation that the Indian juridical machinery provides.

All of the above reactions convey an im-

portant principle. Liberation is not an intrasystemic action. It is a practice that subverts the oppressive phenomenological order and carves out a path for metaphysical transcendence. When a Muslim confronts Hindutva on a theological plain, he or she discovers the shallowness of the opponent. The discovery begins with a realisation that what Islam provides to the Muslim self is a potential triumph. It is from this radical comprehension that we must think of our praxis of resistance. Every passing moment is painful, therefore liberation is also the suffering of the old for the triumphant birth of the new, the just.

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ISSN 26323168



The Long View is a project and publication of Islamic Human Rights Commission (a limited company no 04716690).

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