

The Long View

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Rebuilding Resistance, Liberating the Future

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My Journey from
Marxism to
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Theory

Afroze F. Zaidi
The Shrinking
Space for Dissent
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In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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The push for a new world has perhaps never been stronger in the last 500 years than now. Over a century of turmoil is littered with examples of both the struggles and victories for liberatory movements, and onslaughts and regrouping after the defeat of those forces dedicated to upholding the status quo ante. What lessons can be learned from this period, and where should those of us committed to justice and transformation critique ourselves in the effort to bring permanent change?

João Silva Jordão's essay sets out the stall for an Islamic politics in the West, one that rejects the requirement to internalise the contradictions of liberalism as a pre-requisite for participation of Muslims or other minoritized groups. This is perhaps best exemplified by the alliances between Muslims and the European left, which has exposed a fault line with regard to the expression of Islamic cultures, morals and ethics e.g. the instrumentalisation of Islamic values regarding sexuality as a stick with which various commentariat tried to beat the Qatari government during the football World Cup, or the knee jerk reactions to claims of inequality due to the wearing of hijab in Iran and elsewhere. The internalisation of such mores amongst Muslim diaspora leadership and even in some Muslim movements and governments in majority settings has become a hindrance to transformation.

This politics is not completely an act of imagination. According to Jordão the possibilities of such praxis exist already in alliances with Christian Democratic politics. It also exists deep in the cultural imagination of Europe, with Jordão highlighting the anti-fascist messaging of Fritz Lang's classic film 'Metropolis'. Having the courage to lead change by standing up for values that are labelled Islamic but which cut across human divides – for a freedom that is fair and just, is a theme that runs through our second essay, based on extracts from **Sahib Mustaqim Bleher's** book 'Conceptual Islam: Escaping False Paradigms'. Looking at an imminent Messianic end of times, Bleher argues that the returning Mahdi must not simply be recognised by those of us claiming to be awaiting him, but that those followers must be competent. This competence, currently lacking in Muslim organisation and at the individual level, requires us to look beyond the economic and social structures that currently exist. Reformulating these, he argues, though difficult, is the essential goal of Muslims, to bring about a world where justice for all can prevail.

As with Jordão, Bleher is cognisant of the role of the city – in this case however providing one of the barriers to a blanket self-sufficiency for individuals and small communities. Likewise economic solutions like returning to the gold standard, take us nowhere in the current age, where the vast majority of gold reserves are controlled by those in whose interests it is to continue the current economic order in all its grotesquery.

Our third essay, from **Sandew Hira**, is a deeply personal yet pertinent account of his ideological journey. From a young die hard Marxist inspired by the student movements and agitations of 1968 and the revolutionary fervour of the mid-20th century, he finds himself troubled by the unbending authoritarianism of thinking as well as its failure to materialise further revolutions after the Russian revolution of 1917. This journey – from member of communist movements in Holland to decolonial thinker and scholar reflects a sea change in thinking. His courage to question Marxist claims as the only alternative to capitalism and the crises caused by it, is an exemplar for young activists. Part of his journey comes through his exposure to other ways of thinking, specifically movements with religious world-views. Other parts come from the political movements and crises of Suriname from where he originally hails, and where at great cost he has tried to bring about reconciliation and compromise between factions, hitherto at war with each other.

Hira's rejection of the sectarianism that characterised his experience in Marxist movements is reflected in the divide and rule fomented by the UK government between various sections of British society. Our fourth essay by **Afroze F. Zaidi**, looks at the controlling mechanisms whereby the British government has closed down political space and effectively depoliticised the masses. Having written last year about the processes of closing down dissent from Muslims, Zaidi argues that the same processes are being used against the majority population. As the UK moves painfully through a cost of living crisis, Zaidi forensically picks apart the collusion of mainstream media in creating divisions – highlighting how strikers are depicted as ruining both the annual Christmas holidays (even with exaggerated or patently false accusations), but also conditions for other (low paid) workers. This pitting against each other of sections of society mirrors all too well the way Muslims in the UK have been divided and ruled for decades by a government and compliant media and institutions, with the notions of the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim.

As with the depoliticization of Muslims through programs like Prevent which simultaneously socially engineer and scare adherents of Islam into silence or worse still a belief in an assimilationist and or assimilated Islam, wider British society now finds its politics of protest, dissent and even mild opposition criminalised (as Zaidi explains through the new policing laws), and their dissent subject to an ever shrinking media and civil society space, and indeed the work of think tanks and bodies like the Commission for Countering Extremism, that have for some time now identified left wing, environmental, trade union and other political movements as inimical to the notion of a cohesive society and British values.

There are many lessons to be learned from these essays. We hope you will continue the conversations they raise as we try and make the now palpably different future, one that liberates all of us.

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.

Questioning Liberalism, Evoking Metropolis (1927) and Making New Paths for Islamic Political Action in the West

The need for political alliances in the quest for a new and just world has never been more urgent. **João Silva Jordão** argues that Muslims in the ‘west’ need to critically evaluate and discard their unquestioning alliances with an increasingly Islamophobic left. For Muslims in diasporic settings, reaching out to people and politics of faith is the natural way forward, one the author finds inspiration for in the cultural imaginings of Fritz Lang’s masterpiece ‘Metropolis’.

“...and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, ‘We are Christians’. That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant” – *The Holy Quran, 5:82*

Introduction

Despite its many detractors, who oddly enough are more often than not hard-left Communists that rely on ideological abstractions to fuel their stinging critiques, it can be argued somewhat easily that Social Democracy is one of the most successful political models in recent history, especially in so-called “industrialized” Western nations. At its foundation we find Christians who coined what is often referred to as *Christian Social Democracy*. Despite its many intricacies, the most potent manifesto for Christian Social Democracy is, I argue, not a book nor a manifesto as such, *it is a film*, namely, Fritz Lang’s 1927 classic *Metropolis*.

The film *Metropolis* (1927) is simultaneously the best manifesto for Christian Social Democracy, and historically, also served as its melancholic swan song before being temporarily Blitzkrieged by Nazism, only to be reborn from its ashes to become the most powerful political force in Europe in the second part of the 20th century, slowly but surely overcoming the more rigid, aggressive and collectivist ideologies of Fascism, Nazism and Communism. *Metropolis* has some incredible insight into all manner of political, cultural and religious dimensions, and can serve as both an inspiration and illustration for how Christian Social Democracy thinks, operates, and views society. Perhaps most importantly, it also beautifully embodies how Social Democracy as a whole manages to stoke fears regarding more radical ideologies to slowly but surely, through patience and resilience, overcome its more abrasive rivals. Muslims urgently need not only to find better ways to organize politically in the West, but to do so need also to build a clear political identity that has the ability to represent and galvanize Western Muslims. This piece ar-

gues that Christian Social Democracy should be its most eloquent source of inspiration and potentially, that its adepts are our most natural political allies in our particular historical context. And despite the fact that Christian Social Democrats would normally be averse to any such alliance due to a distrust of Islam and Muslims, the rise of extravagant forms of Liberalism are making this alliance all the more likely in the near future.

The need that Western Muslims have for new political alliances are all the more urgent and necessary because of two elements—firstly, the difficulties, discrimination and defamation that Muslims continue to endure entail the need for political organization and action, and secondly, its most natural allies, the Left, have evolved, or perhaps one should say, have *regressed* quickly and spectacularly over the last few years, namely by adopting a degenerate, unpragmatic and even somewhat fanatical form of Liberalism to the degree that it has come to defend, especially in the areas of family-planning, natality and marital issues, values (or lack thereof) that are diametrically opposed to the core tenets of Islam. This means that the divorce between the Left and Islam, as we shall discuss in great detail, looks inevitable at this point, and in hindsight it is possible that any past alliance was always doomed to be temporary, superficial and precarious.

Liberalism- a Dominant Force in Crisis

There is some degree of consensus around the idea that Liberalism is the hegemonic philosophy of the West. There is also a growing consensus that Liberalism is becoming not only self-contradictory but also quickly steering away from its (supposed) foundational principles of freedom and equality, which in turn has thrown it into an existential crisis. “The disillusioned Liberal” is now a political force to be reckoned with— and these are increasingly turning either more radical ideologies such as the neo-reactionary right or towards more moderate, centre-left or centre-right affiliations, while some become so disillusioned that they instead replace their left-

wing liberal sensitivities with outright political alienation. The rise of populism in Europe, Brexit, Donald Trump’s election, the increasing pervasiveness of the themes and tensions that characterize the “culture wars” and the Left’s inability to serve as a force of real political resistance, indeed, not even serving a platform for basic civic engagement during the pandemic - all of these events represent, in one level or other, different facets of Liberalism’s crisis.

But even though many have noticed the simultaneously fascinating and daunting spectacle that is Liberalism’s demise, some have not. Unlike disillusioned Liberals, who are increasingly distancing themselves from Liberalism, there are some that are doing the exact opposite, doing everything in their power to appear as Liberal as they possibly can. Amongst these are the Liberal Muslims. The main paradox of the Liberal Muslims is that even though they think they are the vanguard of the Islamic world, they are at least in one particular way somewhat backward looking, because what they see as Liberalism is an idealized vision of what Liberalism once was or thought itself to be— a force for equality and freedom, whereas the Liberalism of today is precisely the opposite— an inconsistent and arbitrary defence of the status quo that seeks to validate the dominant political forces rather than to question them, whilst offering up a bizarre and often visibly contradictory philosophical cocktail, a strange mix of the sacralization of base individual will together with misappropriated Marxian concepts of equality.

Islam and Liberalism

Liberalism is usually seen as a political ideology focused on liberty and equality. However, a deeper study of its inherent philosophy will demonstrate that Liberalism’s central idea is that of the importance of the individual, and in particular, *the sovereignty of individual will*. Liberals believe that human desire is a legitimate ethical compass. Islam on the other hand, like most religions,

goes somewhat deeper, and asks us to question whether what we want at any given moment is always in our best interests. In this sense, Islam leads us to question and transcend our personal desires in the interest of the collective good as well as our own individual spiritual quest, or as the Quran simply, beautifully and eloquently states:

2:216: “...And it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know.”

Although this may seem obvious, for some, it isn't. Just because we want something does not mean that pursuing it is legitimate or even in our own best interest. But that is only one of Liberalism's many problems. Engulfed by its own emptiness and profound contradictions, modern Liberalism has taken an authoritarian turn, arbitrarily picking concepts which it considers to be absolute, and then seeking to repress views which it sees as a threat to those concepts. This inherent contradiction of Liberalism is often referred to as the “paradox of tolerance”, and Liberals increasingly tend to adopt the view that ideas and actions that are deemed to be contrary to freedom and equality should be marginalized and censored. It has also been noted that a lot of the discrimination against Muslims in the West has not come by the hands of the conservative Right, but from the Liberal left. As Daniel Haqiqatjou brilliantly puts it, alluding to the increasingly arbitrary and contradictory contours of Liberalism:

“Ought a democratic government ban political parties not committed to democracy? Ought a liberal legal system, otherwise committed to freedom of belief, proscribe illiberal beliefs? In a phrase, is a “discriminatory tolerance” truly tolerance?”

“Many of the religious bans against Muslims in Europe are done using this type of rationale. The his-

torical banning of Islamist political parties in countries like Egypt and Turkey are also done on this basis. The argument is often made that Islamic practices and beliefs are uniquely antithetical to a free, democratic society, and, therefore, for the sake of the public good, must be prohibited. Yet, by secularism's own lights, what is inherently good, evil, beneficial, or harmful is not definitively knowable and certainly is not for the state to set in stone. The implication is that liberalism and secularism's appeals to the public good are fundamentally unprincipled and often serve to manipulate the populace so as to serve the interests of power.”

Liberalism has been used thusly as a basis to ban Islamic practices. Not only that, it is becoming ever more aggressive towards believers of all kinds, especially towards Christians. Or as Sohrab Ahmari wrote in a Wall Street Journal article called “[Liberalism: Believers need not apply](#)”:

“Progressives have triumphed spectacularly over faith and tradition. Now they are targeting conscience itself.”

“Does liberalism have any room left for Christians and other believers? The question has been posed countless times, and each time liberals answer more decisively than the previous: No.”

The article goes on to demonstrate how politicians are being increasingly pressured to adopt Liberal stances, namely on issues such as homosexuality, and thereafter pressured to resign when they don't comply. Sound contradictory? Well, perhaps one can say that staunchly “Liberal Muslims” find themselves in an even greater quagmire. These adopt the same aggressive stance, but from within the Islamic community. Seeking

to appease both Western Liberals and more generally those who criticise Islam, the Liberal Muslims not only distance themselves from practices that are frowned upon by Liberals, they now have taken it upon themselves to open their own spaces which go out of their way to please their Liberal overlords, often either shrugging away criticism or even worse, parroting accusations of “extremism” and “religious fanaticism” towards any Muslim that dares adhere to any semblance of orthodoxy and actual belief.

Appeasing the Liberal Masters

Perhaps the most blatant examples of the contradictions of Liberal Muslims are the Liberal Mosques and the case of Berlin's “Liberal Mosque”. Though the project is bathed in progressive lexicon, and despite having one or two good elements, namely the concept of trying to bridge the divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims, it is a great example of how Liberal Muslims will actively seek to ban certain practices in the name of freedom and equality- generating an interesting case of arbitrary Liberal intolerance. It also becomes quite clear that they seem to market the Mosque according to whatever Liberals seem to like at the moment, no matter how whimsical, ridiculous or unimportant these concepts may be for the majority of the global Islamic contingent.

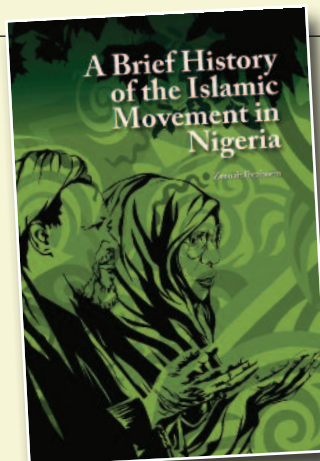
So for example, the Berlin mosque bans burqas and niqabs. This comes after [Germany itself banned the burqa and the niqab](#). The problem is that no one knows how many Muslim women in Germany actually wear them. [Some even say](#) that less than 300 women wear the niqab, with those who wear burqas at about the same number. So there about 600 women in a country of 80 million that wear the niqab or the burqa- hardly making it an endemic problem that needs any sort of regulation whatsoever. So, if practically no one wears them, why should the Liberal Mosque even care to ban it, and then go out of its way to announce it from the rooftop like it's something to be proud of?

NEW PUBLICATION

A Brief History of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria

By Zeenah Ibrahim

Available from shop.ihrc.org



As a senior member of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Zeenah Ibraheem's history of it is a first-hand account, not just of its ideas, and their fruition, but some of the many turmoils and persecutions it has faced in the last four decades.

This book covers some of the key incidents in the movement's history, including the Funtua Declaration, as well as the Zaria Massacres of 2014 and 2015.



Well, the answer is simple- the ban itself is hardly the point, because the probability of anyone who wears the niqab or burqa ever showing up to enter the mosque is extremely low. The main objective is to signal to other Liberals that they, as Liberal Muslims, will fight against signs of “extremism”, even if this means chasing ghosts, or in this case, fighting against the non-existent burqa threat. The founder of the Liberal Mosque even went as far as to cite “security concerns” to legitimize the niqab and burqa ban. This ban also seems all the more ridiculous after the pandemic, in which the same Liberals that abhor the burqa, claiming security concerns, were paradoxically those who most fanatically defended the wearing of the mask, regardless of what actual scientific studies say about their efficacy. There is also a bizarre emphasis on the fact that this Liberal Mosque allows LGBT Muslims. Why? Because the defence of LGBT rights has become an absolute priority for Liberals. Whether this is something that Muslims actually care about does not matter. It matters to Liberals. The same goes for gender segregation in mosques. Gender segregation is another obsession for Liberals, and some take it so seriously that they now see it as a political imperative to end gender segregation in rest rooms. Any Muslims who goes to the mosque frequently will know that it is generally women who insist on having women-only spaces. And yet Liberal Muslims claim that by opening non-segregated mosques they are defending women’s rights. Again. Truth does not matter, the opinion of Muslims does not matter, the real problems afflicting the Muslim community as defined by Muslims themselves simply do not matter. Appeasing and imitating Western Liberals is the main and only goal.

In the case of the Berlin Liberal Mosque, it is also clearly an attempt to follow direct instructions provided by the German government. In the Telegraph piece advertising the mosque we can read:

“Ms Ates said Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany’s finance minister, once told her that liberal Muslims should band

together, which helped inspire the idea.”

So according to the founder of Berlin’s “Liberal Mosque”, Sheikh Schäuble will have been one of the main inspirations for this mosque’s purpose and rules.

As a result, these Liberal mosques will appear to many Muslims as nothing more than cheap public relations stunts that only reinforce negative stereotypes about the Islamic community. It is demeaning and somewhat embarrassing for everyone involved.

Furthermore, Liberal Muslims are ready to reinforce negative stereotypes about the Islamic community so as to make their Liberal reformist efforts seem more urgent than they actually are, even sometimes allying themselves with Islamophobes, fraudsters or even neo-Nazis in the process.

The same Telegraph piece also says:

“Muslim students who are from more liberal environments deny their religion, so as not to be harassed by conservative Muslims. We have to address this and counter it.”

“You can only achieve change through setting an example, opening doors, in a space where every question can be asked.”

This on the other hand, is an excellent point. Muslims do need spaces where they can discuss issues freely. But who is the main culprit here? Should we only look at conservative Muslims as being to blame for a lack of openness in mosques, whilst failing to criticize government surveillance programs which illegitimately target Muslims, or Western governments’ support for Saudi Arabia, the main supporter of the retrograde form of Islam that is now found all over the world? Again, Liberal Muslims generally fail to address these issues, choosing to side with the powers that be instead.

Let’s not Jump onto the

Sinking Boat of Liberalism

The main problem with these “Liberal Mosques” and their founders, the “Liberal Muslims”, is that they don’t seem to want to reinterpret Islam along any rational or coherent lines, they just want to dishonestly pretend that Islam is inherently Liberal just to please the dominant ideology of today. One of the main problems with this is that Liberalism itself is increasingly unstable, contradictory, and at times, simply ridiculous. Liberalism is imploding, it is failing to address the concerns of the masses, and increasingly receding to pseudo-radical struggles that appeal to upper-middle class cosmopolitans, petit-bourgeois teens, academic elites and opportunistic political figures. More and more people are turning away from Liberalism because it simply does not represent them. So why should we as Muslims be seeking to compromise our beliefs to join a political ideology that is sinking, while Islam itself is in clear ascendancy?

The Left’s Aggressive Colonial Feminism and LGBTQ Penchant Puts a Wrench in the Left-Islamic Alliance

Historically, colonialism has always been perpetuated and justified by the belief that the colonizers are superior to the colonized. Until today, the myth that the economic exploitation of Africa, America, Asia and Oceania by European powers (and later by the United States), and the genocides that accompanied it, brought cultural and social gains is used to justify military invasions and the physical and mental aggression to which their indigenous peoples are subjected. The human mind works in such a way that a hypothetical invader will simply not find the necessary contingent to carry out the project of neocolonialism without convincing its “troops” that they are, in invading and attacking a foreign people, in fact being virtuous and undertaking a necessary set of actions. Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s

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Burden” is perhaps the best example of this mix of paternalism, racism, condescendence and attempt to justify the unjustifiable- in this specific case, it is commonly accepted that the poem was written to incentivize the United States of America to invade the Philippines.

In recent times, one of the most commonly used pretexts to legitimize military invasions whose main objective is the subjugation of foreign peoples and subsequent theft of their natural resources (a process that has the same purpose as colonization, but which uses somewhat different methods and what is therefore called ‘neocolonialism’) is the argument that the invaded peoples are being “liberated” or “democratized”. This pretext depends on the view that the peoples who are invaded are culturally, socially and politically backward and inferior. Without this sentiment, the justification for the neocolonialist project is deprived of its foundation, because without the belief that the colonizing people are superior to the colonized, the process is therefore exposed for what it truly is - a campaign of subjugation and systematic theft. Therefore, the belief that the colonizing people is superior, be it social, cultural, political or economic superiority, is a central pillar of the entire neocolonialist project, just as the dehumanization of colonized peoples is vital for the colonization project itself to succeed.

However, the western population is increasingly immune to the argument that military invasions are meant to impose freedom and democracy, as they increasingly see that this is nothing more than a pretext for legitimizing invasions that neither democratize nor liberate, and which, on the contrary, bring even more destruction, misery and injustice to targeted countries. We see, therefore, even now, and increasingly, the emergence of a new pretext to continue with the neocolonialist project: the alleged defense of the rights of women and homosexuals. One of the best examples of this was the cover of Time magazine on August 9, 2010, one of the preferred vehicles for neocolonialist and imperialist ideology, which showing the image of an Afghan woman deeply disfigured as a result of physical abuse, claims to demonstrate “What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan”.

This photograph shows a woman who has suffered serious and reprehensible abuse, and of course that the abuse of women is an urgent issue that we need to address and solve, but the idea that the US military’s presence somehow improves the condition of women in Afghanistan is not only incorrect: *it is offensive and contradictory*. The section of the population that suffers the most from the war are precisely women. Defending a military invasion by saying that it aims to improve the condition of women in the invaded country is a grievous lie. Furthermore, invading troops have historically tended to rape local women, sometimes on a massive scale, many of whom are very young and rendered even more vulnerable by the inevitable horrors of

war. There are many cases where troops supposedly coming to liberate a *de facto* nation have been found guilty of rape and sometimes even of violations that end in murder. In Afghanistan, [a girl died of wounds resulting from a brutal rape in the province of Farah, while in Iraq a girl aged just 14 died, along with three of her family members, after being raped by three US soldiers before being shot down](#). These will be the rare cases where such atrocities are reported, and the actual number of women who have suffered such horrors as a result of invasions that claim to “democratize” Southern nations will be very difficult to determine.

These cases illustrate how feminism and

Seeking to appease both Western Liberals and more generally those who criticise Islam, the Liberal Muslims not only distance themselves from practices that are frowned upon by Liberals, they now have taken it upon themselves to open their own spaces which go out of their way to please their Liberal overlords

the purported struggle to defend women’s rights is often perverted to legitimize actions that actually lead to even more violence and abuse of women. There is also an increasing insistence on ‘defending gay rights’. This is clearly one more instrument that is being added to the vast arsenal of pretexts to perpetuate neocolonialism and dehumanize the peoples of the South. [In December 2011, Hillary Clinton promised that the United States of America will actively defend gay rights through diplomacy and economic ‘aid’](#). This statement was interpreted as being directed at certain African countries, which is somewhat confirmed by [statements by Ban Ki-moon, who in January 2012 declared that African leaders should respect gay rights](#). What we have seen since is the steady rise of the alleged importance of the defense of LGBT rights within the global left, leading to the apex of the culture wars, starting from Donald Trump’s election as US President in 2016 to this very day.

The right to liberty and the right to defend against oppression must, of course, be defended through reasoning, debate and diplomacy. However, what is increasingly taking place both on the political and cultural dimension is the perpetuation of neocolonialist policies and its inherent mentality, which, despite having the same objectives as the processes of old colonialism is ultimately and undeniably *the theft and subjugation of foreign peoples*, only now under a veneer of increasingly complex, dis-

honest and cynical pretexts. Furthermore, from a cultural point of view, the Western population, especially those who see themselves as part of the “resistance” and alternative thought circuits, and staunch Liberals in particular, are demonstrating a decreasing capacity to think critically and rationally when it comes to their analysis of different cultures and religions. Above all, it is increasingly understood that in the name of tolerance, cultures that have opinions, customs and religious practices that diverge from Western Liberal thinking, particularly relating to their views and practices regarding homosexuality and the role of women in society, are targets of absolute and relentless intolerance themselves. In short, the processes of dehumanization of people who have different cultures and religions seems to have increased and is now fundamental not only to the West’s own ability to oppress the rest of the world, but is also a clearly key cog in the Western’s incessant military incursions.

These are just some examples that demonstrate the extent to which the Left’s, and in particular the Liberal Left’s new ideological axioms and priorities are diametrically opposite to both Islamic beliefs as well as the interests of the majority of Muslims.

Iran, Anti-Hijab Obsessions and other Orientalist Shenanigans

The ultimate confirmation that the increasingly prominent place that the fight for LGBT rights as well as the adherence to a particularly aggressive form of colonial, Western-supremacist feminism among the Western Left is the West’s recent reaction to Mahsa Amini’s tragic death, and the subsequent protests in Iran. This event was met by a flurry of commentary pointing to Iran’s brutality and alleged cultural backwardness, straight out calls for revolution and even foreign invasion, complemented by political cartoons depicting the brave Iranian woman ridding herself of the hijab and the pressures of Iran’s religious State element. It really is quite shocking the extent to which these narratives go unquestioned, and perhaps one of the reasons for this is that it is the left, whose jurisdiction it usually falls under to question and criticize the West’s Imperialist tendencies, is actually leading this wave of clearly hypocritical, counter-productive and mainly performative, theatrical false moral outrage. The left of course completely fails to follow-up on the cases in which it has done exactly this in the past, that is, using unquestioned, visceral moral outrage to call for foreign intervention in Islamic-majority countries, such as in the case of Libya and Syria. Were they to do this, they would surely notice that they were, in hindsight, little more than the useful idiots of the Western Imperialist machine, providing it with public support for campaigns of destruction and pillage of nations that were otherwise doing quite well.

The exact circumstances of Mahsa Amini's tragic death is still contentious and the amount of actual, direct blame to be placed, or not, on Iran's Morality Police, is unclear. However, this simply does not matter neither to the Western Left nor to the Western general public- the strength of the West's feeling of unquestionable cultural supremacy over the rest of the world, and the Islamic world specifically, is so strong and visceral that no real thought or analysis is seen as necessary, in effect making it virtually impossible to have any real debate with anyone, on any platform, in any circumstance. The knee-jerk reaction that followed Mahsa Amini's tragic death is a testament that this feeling of cultural supremacy is simply non-negotiable, and in turn, this forces the Islamic world into adopting an equally intransigent and forceful opposite reaction- to defend its cultural and political independence knowing that there are very few, if any, "on the other side" willing to listen or question their feeling of absolute cultural supremacy, and even less negotiate any degree of rational political resolution or compromise.

The Islamic and Christian Alliances of the Past Must be Revived

In 1494 Portugal and Spain arrogantly signed the Treaty of Tordesillas thinking they could split the world among themselves. This was of course ridiculous and impracticable.

Islam and Christianity however, whether consciously or not, seem to have done something similar, with great success, splitting large parts of the Western Hemisphere and Africa's population amongst themselves. The rise of a particularly nihilistic and aggressive Liberalism which pathetically seems to have aspirations for global domination as well as the enduring appeal of the highly mediocre modern atheism has made it necessary for a temporary alliance between Christianity and Islam.

Liberalism in its classic form was not so much a religion, but was certainly inspired by Christianity- the elevation of individual will to a higher plane of significance is based on the sacred nature of the individual soul as conceptualized by Christianity. However, Liberalism is itself increasingly acting more like a religious faction of its own, though its positions are usually inverse to that of most classic, older global religions- it is anti-marriage, as opposed to for it, while it is anti-natalist, in clear contradiction to the Abrahamic religions. Its power has grown, and specifically,

The rise of a particularly nihilistic and aggressive Liberalism which pathetically seems to have aspirations for global domination as well as the enduring appeal of the highly mediocre modern atheism has made it necessary for a temporary alliance between Christianity and Islam

its grasp on the mind of the Western global youth has proceeded relatively unchecked, with the exception of the American culture wars which at long last seem to mark a mass pushback against what is increasingly seen as the excesses of modern Liberalism.

The fact that Liberalism itself has come to adopt positions that are diametrically opposed to Islam in many cases results from its own disdain of Christianity, and in turn, the similarities between Christianity and Islam make it so that in attacking Christianity, modern Liberalism ends up attacking Islam as well. The fact that Muslims have been, in recent times, mostly tac-

itly allied with the Left means that any tension, divergence and eventual animosity entails the need for new political allies- progressive and tolerant Christianity and Christians, namely, rational and eloquent Christian Social Democrats would perhaps be the most fitting allies for Muslims in the near future.

A Strategy for Muslim Political Action in the West

Though I certainly do not mean to insult or provoke anyone who does not deserve it, I really must be quite blunt in my assessment of the general state of Western populations- they have been infected with equal amounts of cynicism and cowardice. The levels of indifference and individualism are also worryingly high. This also means that even though they still do enjoy as of yet relatively high levels of prosperity and political freedom, both are quickly being undermined and the Western population seems either to have no fight left in them whatsoever, or even to invite these changes, which are ultimately against their interests, in a sort of Freudian death drive (Todestrieb), a yearning for self-destruction and humiliation with high doses of sadomasochism. The stereotype of the rich, pampered aristocrat, debased by decades of decadence and easy-living, an image that could formerly be considered a go-to trope for both novels and movies, has now become a sad reality for large parts of its population who are stuck in a state of dazed stupor, cowering beneath their bedsheets, hoping that a hero comes to rescue the day and save them from the afflictions which they dare not even consciously recognize exists. Muslims must become those heroes.

Metropolis (1927) as an ideal Representation of Key Political Ideas

The German expressionist classic masterpiece "Metropolis" (1927) is perhaps one of the most under-studied and underappreciated films of all time- it is also usually overlooked for what it also is, aside

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from a brilliant cinematic work- a brilliant and visionary political manifesto. One can safely say that Metropolis is the most beautiful and eloquent representation of the ideas that underpin Christian Social Democracy, making it indeed a Christian Social Democrat manifesto that can and should be studied and dissected to this day and for decades to come.

Though its story is complex and somewhat labyrinthine, one can precis its plot thus: a highly stratified society, living in a huge, rising metropolis, is on the brink of disaster and revolution as its oppressed working classes gain consciousness of their condition, spurred on by the leadership of Maria, a charismatic and compelling leader who calls to both patience, resilience and courage. The working class live underground and are forced to do back-breaking work, while the upper classes live above ground, enjoying all manner of luxuries and engaging in sports and frolicking. The mayor's son, Freder, ends up finding out about the working classes' plight, and joins their cause, while the mayor himself finds out about the possibility that the working class might revolt under the influence and leadership of Maria. With the help of Rotwang and a mad evil scientist, Maria is kidnapped, and a doppelganger robot infused with her spirit is built. This robot then takes Maria's place- however, instead of calling for the working class to capitulate, it actually convinces them to revolt violently, destroying some of the city's infrastructure.

Muslims have come to be depicted in the Western mainstream media as if they were Maria's doppelganger- an evil saboteur and agent provocateur which advocates for violence and the destruction of key infrastructure. Muslims however must fashion themselves as the real Maria, steadfast and yet simultaneously calling for patience, but also emancipation and liberation from the shackles of oppression. But Muslims must be simultaneously Freder, the mediator, insofar as we have the ability to analyse and act upon problems that arise in society. In short, the movie Metropolis offers key insights not only into our society's ills, but also the hidden dynamics that underpin political movements and their complex relationships with both the powerful entities they seek to challenge and the oppressed groups they claim to represent.

And whilst it is Muslims that have been consistently depicted in the Western mainstream media as Maria's doppelganger, a nihilistic, evil force calling for destruction and mayhem, it is actually Liberals who in a fascinating way have come to themselves behave much like this, and proudly so- taking legitimate concerns regarding inequality for example, and yet acting upon them in confusing and counter-productive ways which often border on the insane, and in particular, calling for the destruction, or more accurately in Liberalism's case, calling for the *deconstruction* of each and every pillar of modern society- regardless of whether they work well or not, regardless of how funda-

mental they may be for the very survival of our civilization, much like Maria's calls for the destruction of the Metropolis itself leads the working class to its own ruin.

In this regard, strangely enough, Mus-

Muslims are increasingly confronting the modern Western Left, and should increase in their efforts to do so. We should, and indeed I argue that it has become an absolute moral imperative, as well as probably politically expedient, start to visibly and vocally challenge the Left on key issues.

lims are actually very well placed to come to, or at least to try to, serve as a reference point for sanity, pragmatism and a belief in higher principles that are increasingly lacking in the West. The nature and history of the Islamic religion also makes it and its contingent particularly able to be simultaneously a force that endures and thrives when met with opposition and oppression whilst also being able to attract large amounts of followers with its simple, rational approach to both life, philosophy and existentialism.

Conclusion

Muslims are increasingly confronting the modern Western Left, and should increase in their efforts to do so. We should, and indeed I argue that it has become an absolute moral imperative, as well as probably politically expedient, *start to visibly and vocally challenge the Left on key issues*. Muslims must also understand that we currently occupy, in the West as well as globally, the so-called "Arena of Resistance" (see Silva Jordão, 2021 and Silva Jordão, 2021ii) in which political opponents to the hegemonic powers and alternative visions for what society should be battle each other for attention, adherents, and ultimately, a shot at the title, as it were- an opportunity to be the main challenger, the main voice of the oppressed, the main alternative to the current system, a position that if occupied for long enough, should eventually secure a position of power in the medium to long term. We should take into account that *today's (successful and patient) revolutionaries often become tomorrow leaders*.

I would like to end with a more controversial idea that could very well be erroneous, or even morally detestable and strategically ruinous, though I am willing to incur in that risk. Without the war between Byzantium and the Sassanid empire, and the destruction and fatigue that it provoked in both, Islam and Muslims specifically as a geopolitical

power would not have been able to expand as fast as it did, as soon as it did, into the Levant, Turkey and Persia (modern-day Iran). Perhaps we should do the same when it comes to the culture wars and the increasing polarization between the Western Left and Right- patiently stand by as they tire each other out, before ultimately seeking to become ideologically dominant ourselves.

Proposing a temporary, strategic alliance with Christian Social-Democrats and other like-minded theists seems to me to not be a contradiction with this idea, since Social Democrats don't occupy neither the left-wing nor the right-wing so much as they occupy the centre, much like the image of Freder the mediator, who sits in the middle of State/Bourgeoisie and the general population, or as the Metropolis film poetically puts it- "There can be no understanding between the hand and the brain unless the heart acts as mediator". Islam can perhaps become that heart.

João Silva Jordão

is a Muslim convert, political activist and PhD candidate in urbanism. He has a particular interest in trying to analyse modern problems using the timeless paradigm that is Islam. In his activism he takes a particular interest in studying mechanisms that allow for the generation of more just cities and develops mechanisms for the incremental verticalisation of city centres.

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Escaping False Paradigms: Ways to Reimagine an Islamic World

Sahib Mustaqim Bleher argues that the utopia of an Islamic future requires conceptualising Islamic solutions to the political, military and economic woes the world faces.

Most textbooks on Islam tell us that Islam is a way of life. The briefest of reality checks will tell us that Muslims' way of life is today shaped by a plethora of other influences with Islam as an add-on. This apparent discrepancy has relegated the notion of true Islam into either the past as a praised, but lost historic example from the days of the prophet and his companions or into the future as a utopian dream of a return to the golden age "when the Mahdi comes". Neither offers much solace or hope for the Muslim struggling with the here and now.

In trying to re-establish Islam as a living concept, we need to deal with paradigms. The concept remains true, but the paradigms change. Paradigms are patterns or models of how things are, theoretical frameworks within which we operate. They are derived from concepts. One definition of paradigm is that of a framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology commonly accepted by members of a specific community. Both concepts and paradigms are therefore ways of making sense of the world around us. Concepts deal with the larger picture and paradigms with the interactions within a given framework. To benefit us, the two must agree, which is exactly the problem of why Islam does not "fit in" in the globalised society around us no matter how hard we try to adapt.

My analysis postulates that we are trying to hold on to an Islamic paradigm whilst having willingly surrendered to non-Islamic (secular) concepts. Examples for these are heliocentricity, relativism or evolution. We inertly resent some of their teachings, because they challenge the divine origin and destiny of all that is, and that is exactly what they intend to do. Yet we have become unable to assess their merits and shortcomings since we have accepted "science" as the benchmark of truth, adding a little bit of "Islamisation" at the frills, instead of measuring its claims against the yardstick of revelation.

Transitional Dilemmas

Given the technological advantage of the Dajjal system, a confrontation is futile for the time being, although its downfall will

likely be due to its over-reliance on technology.

Qur'an: The likeness of those who adopt protectors besides Allah is that of the spider adopting a dwelling, and the most feeble of dwellings is the dwelling (web) of the spider if they only knew. (29:41)

In the meantime, withdrawal and preparation, as advised to the Children of Israel during the time of Musa (Moses) and as practised in Daru-l-Arqam during the time of the time of our prophet, is needed.

Qur'an: And We revealed to Musa (Moses) and his brother: dedicate houses in Egypt for your people and make them a prayer location and keep up prayer and give good news to the believers. (10:87)

Hadith: A time will soon come when the best property of a Muslim will be sheep which he will take on the top of mountains and the places of rainfall (valleys) so as to flee with his religion from afflictions. (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Having been disarmed, dispossessed of land and deprived of sound Islamic education, it is difficult for the Muslim Ummah to find its feet. Some individuals or groups may be more fortunate in being able to limit the effects of the system around them, especially those living in rural areas, however for most Muslims living in cities this is extremely difficult. Since our scholars, mostly bought or blindfolded, have let us down, we need to rely on our own resources and mutual support. In attempting to do so, paradoxically, we depend on the very structures provided by the system which we are trying to evade or escape: the internet, smart phones, digital payment methods etc. Alternatives such as barter trading, are limited to a locality. Resolving this contradiction appears an almost impossible task and must be given high priority. Meanwhile, the available system must be used to equip individuals and groups with sound materials of guidance in the sense of "survival kits".

Using the analogy of building construction for the edifice of Islam, it is always easier

to maintain an existing building than to erect a new one, but there may come a time where, due to neglect or environmental impacts, maintenance is no longer a feasible option due to, let's say, the roof having collapsed or the walls having caved in and bramble taken over the formerly inhabited space. As long as there remains a solid foundation, however, re-building remains possible and also affords the opportunity to adapt to new requirements, doing away with obsolete features and introducing new relevant conveniences. To do so, however, a knowledgeable labour force is required, from the architect via the structural engineer to the builders and fitters. In addition, planning permission may be required.

This is the situation we find ourselves in; the foundations of Islam remain strong, but the knowledge base and pool of competent individuals to involve in the building project is weak. And we are governed by authorities who would not like to grant permission for such a project to be underway.

The first requirement, therefore, is that of a site survey, followed by drawing up plans, and both may require training in order to be accomplished successfully. In Surah 29 (al-Ankabut), Allah mentions the three pillars of the pyramidal society:

Qur'an: And Qarun (Korah) and Pharaoh and Haman... (29:39)

representing the economic, political/military and educational/religious pillars on which the society is built. Like a three-legged stool, all three need to be in place for it not to fall, and the order given in this ayah suggests that the economic control is the most powerful in the arsenal of Pharaoh's society, followed by the military and then the ideological. The strongest control in today's secular society is exerted through the interest-based economy which grants private, unelected bodies to issue the people's money supply without having to put up any collateral. This power is protected by the police and military and further re-enforced by the education system and media.

In Suah 40 (Ghafir), however, the order is altered:

Qur'an: And We sent Musa (Moses) with Our signs and a clear authority.

To Pharaoh and Haman and Qarun... (40:23-24)

suggesting that when reforming a society, the political and ideological/educational environment may need to be addressed first before being able to also alter the economic model. An alternative economy probably cannot be sustained in a vacuum or in a hostile political environment.

Muslims, therefore, need to first counter the coercive effect of the dominant oppressive political system and remove themselves from the reach of its enforcement power (police/military), then start the process of re-education, followed by re-organising their economy or basis on which they transact with each other.

Parallel society

Where the dominant system does not have global reach, developing a parallel society is a viable alternative to the prevalent order. Ideas can be exchanged over a distance, the practicalities of a functioning community, however, require localisation. This poses a real problem in that when resources are pooled into a specific location and it begins to grow and prosper, it will inevitably be noticed and attacked without having the means to defend itself.

The development of an alternative society thus largely depends on the collapse of the dominant system. Being built on shaky foundations

Qur'an: Those who consume interest will not stand other than the one whom the devil has struck with madness... (2:275)

it is ultimately bound to implode and self-destruct. It does not require a degree in economics to understand the parasitical and cancerous nature of interest, which will inevitably take down the host it lives off: They lend you what they haven't got (since they have given themselves the right to create money out of nothing, for nobody realistically

has more wealth than all the governments or nations of the world combined, all of them being in debt). Then they compel you at penalty of losing whatever else you have to pay it back with an add-on from what you haven't got (since you are denied the option to create money out of nothing). Where is the extra amount going to come from unless you lose all that you own or borrow more, in order to repay an earlier loan, which is what most people do nowadays. After all, if you had spare money to pay the interest, you wouldn't have had to borrow in the first place.

like a fish flapping violently out of water, those holding the strings of power will not go quietly

Qur'an: ...Allah has permitted trade and forbidden interest. So when someone receives admonition from his Lord and stops, what is in the past remains his, and his affairs belong to Allah, and those who persist are inmates of the fire, where they will remain.

Allah destroys interest and gives increase to charity, and Allah does not love anyone ungrateful and sinful. (275-276)

However, like a fish flapping violently out of water, those holding the strings of power will not go quietly. There will eventually be a power vacuum, but the period until then will most likely prove the most challenging for any attempts at rebuilding a sound Muslim community.

In the intervening time, Muslims must work to rid themselves of false beliefs and concepts in order to become more reliant on Allah, as well as free themselves of control and support mechanisms which prevent them from being independent in order to become more self-reliant.

Qur'an: If Allah helps you, then nobody can overcome you, and if He abandons you, then who is there to help you afterwards? And on Allah let the believers rely. (3:160)

This effort must be undertaken from as many angles as possible.

Qur'an: And he (Jacob) said: oh my children, do not enter from a single gate but enter from different gates, and I will not benefit you in any way against Allah, for the judgement is only for Allah, on Him I have relied, and on Him let all those rely who want to rely on something. (12:67)

In education, revealed knowledge must once more take centre-stage and become the source of research instead of a mere citation supporting theories derived from elsewhere. It must be matched with empirical knowledge from observing the world around us. The rational conclusions drawn using logical reasoning must not contradict either. Since mankind has been deceived for generations, separating truth from falsehood has become an enormous challenge.

In economy, the debt- and interest-based exploitative system must be replaced with a charitable system of mutual support. For decades already, Muslims have tried to compete in the market place of financial instruments and derivatives, looking for novel legalistic interpretations to make the haram halal, such as alleged Islamic mortgages which are usually more expensive than others available from high street banks. If standard mortgages are taking advantage of the need of the poor, then "Islamic mortgages" do so to an even greater degree by charging them even more overall. The prophet of

British Muslims' Expectations of the Government (BMEG)

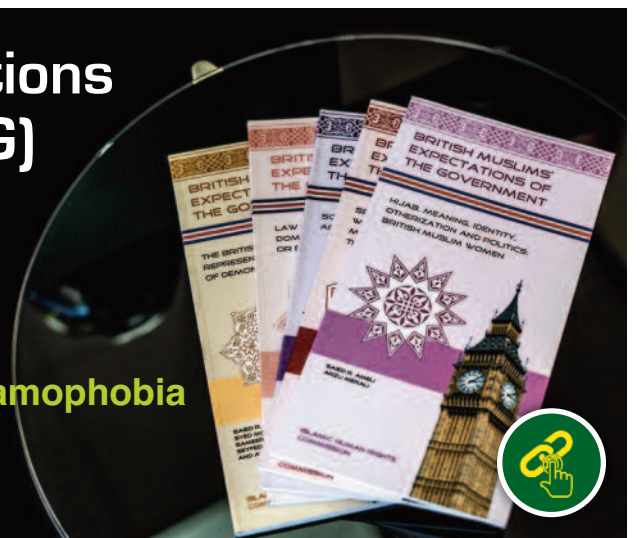
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Islam was not sent as a lawyer or accountant, he was sent with justice. An economic or financial model which is not just is not Islamic, no matter how fancy the construct and how many fatwahas were bought in its favour.

There has been much talk of returning to gold and precious metals as the only acceptable currency for Muslims. This is a fallacy, leaving aside the fact that most of the reserves of gold and precious metals are most certainly not owned by Muslims and a return to the “gold standard” would thus create a new dependency. Traditionally, any commodity could serve as money, in other words as a measure of value, as long as it was different by nature from the very item traded in a transaction. Thus, we are not allowed to sell dates for dates at a profit, but you could sell dates for barley and barley for bricks. There is no valid Islamic objection to using artificial currencies as measures of value provided they are not interest-based and are backed by a government or a sufficiently large community. Whilst they have no intrinsic value, neither do sea shells. The key to maintaining a non-exploitative economy is to separate the various functions of items serving as “money”: commodity, store of value and measure of value.

In politics, there needs to be as much decentralisation and autonomy as possible, with mutual alliances for the purpose of organising infrastructure and defence. State actors must once more become the servants of the people, not their masters.

At present, we try to stand on a stool with three wobbly legs and it is no wonder that we feel the ground shake under our very feet. Cut the legs off, however, and we fall unless we have first built a new stool on stable legs to step onto. This task, at times, seems an impossible one. Unless attempted, however, we will go down with the system on which we so heavily rely once it collapses.

Recent events have shown us the power that, in spite of its inherent vulnerabilities, the dominant system exercises over the individual. People can be ordered to stay in their homes for extended periods of time, they can be forcefully medicated, they have

their freedoms of movement, assembly, speech – all allegedly inviolable human rights – removed. They have their energy and food supply interrupted and their communications and movement monitored and curtailed at any time and are generally at the mercy of policies over which they have no influence at all, notwithstanding the pretence of democracy.

An “Islam” where Muslims merely try to save their own skin is contrary to the teachings of the Qur’an and the prophetic example

Growing your own food might be feasible if you own land, for most people residing in cities it is not an option. For communication we rely on the devices which are simultaneously used to monitor and control us. We earn our livelihoods by being paid in an interest-based currency which can be devalued at any time. We spend it on unhealthy food and useless “luxury” items. Overall, we place our trust less in Allah and mostly into the kufir system which impresses us with both its real and perceived achievements. We have fallen for its propaganda wholeheartedly. How then to extricate ourselves from the web in which we are caught without entering free-fall as soon as the “safety net” has been removed?

Finding answers to those questions will mark the beginning of a true Islamic revival. An important point to remember is that Islam is not just for Muslims. Non-Muslims not entirely duped by the system struggle just as much as we do, maybe more, because they do not have a firm belief

system to hold onto. Assisting them to extricate themselves from the trappings of modern slavery is the best way of opening their eyes to the truth of Islam. An “Islam” where Muslims merely try to save their own skin is contrary to the teachings of the Qur’an and the prophetic example.

* * * * *

A sound analysis of a problem or correct diagnosis of a disease is a mandatory requirement prior to prescribing a course of treatment. It does not mean that a treatment is readily available or even that a cure exists or will be found. Yet, once a problem is known, solutions tend to present themselves over time. I have no doubt that after a final show of fireworks the technology on which the current global empire is built will collapse, since this dynasty is already in its final stages of decadence, run by people used to its luxuries but lacking both the mettle and the knowledge of its earlier pioneers. I am also convinced that the Mahdi, the latter-day saviour and final leader of the Muslim Ummah, will make his debut in a period of less than a generation from now. What is required of us is to be prepared to both recognise and follow him when he does so, and the above thoughts and observations are intended as a means of preparation to this end. For whilst it is true that a battle cannot be fought without a leader, a leader is no use without competent followers. Wishing for change is not adequate; we have to do our part in bringing it about.

*The above are extracts from ‘Conceptual Islam: Escaping False Paradigms’ by **Sahib Mustaqim Bleher**. He was a founder member of the Islamic Party of Britain and served as its general secretary and education spokesman as well as editor of the party magazine ‘Common Sense’. He is a professor of applied linguistics and translation and works as a commercial translator and interpreter through his own translation company in the UK. He is a member of Chartered Institute of Linguists and of the Chartered Institute of Journalists in the UK. Amongst his work are the adaptations of the Qur’an translations of Muhammad Pickthall and Yusuf Ali into modern English and his own Qur’an translation into “plain English”, all published by IDCI in Birmingham.*

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My Journey from Marxism to Decolonial Theory

Sandew Hira's profound recounting of his political and spiritual journey from Marxist to Decolonial thinker and activist, across several decades, challenges those in the current time, who claim that the only challenge to capitalism comes from the left.

Introduction

On January 15th, 2023 I will present my book *Decolonizing The Mind - a guide to decolonial theory and practice*. In 600 pages, I deal with many aspects of the current colonial world civilization (philosophy, world history, economic, social, political and cultural theory, mechanisms of colonizing the mind, decolonizing mathematics and the natural sciences) and the idea of a new world civilization of the future. That idea explores the concept of a pluriversal world civilization that incorporates contributions of old world civilizations, including the Islamic one, and the development of a new philosophy of liberation: decolonial theory. In this article I will discuss my journey to decolonial theory and practice.

The road to Marxism

I am one of those tens of millions of people who moved from the global south to the global north in mass migrations. I was born in 1955 in the former Dutch colony of Suriname in Latin America. The country became politically independent from Holland in 1975. In 1970 I moved with my parents and eight of my siblings to the Netherlands, like 100,000 other Surinamese. Their tenth and oldest child stayed in Suriname where he started work as a lawyer. My family has a Hindu background. We celebrated the Hindu festivals like Diwali and Holi and had regular Hindu functions for different occasions.

In 1970 I began high school in Holland. During high school I became involved in solidarity work with the national liberation movements of the global south, specifically the movement against the war in Vietnam. In 1974 I enrolled at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam for the study of economics. The universities of those days were heavily affected by the May 1968 student movement in Paris and in general the anti-war movement against the US military intervention in Vietnam. The dominant ideology of those times was Marxism. Ernest Mandel, a Belgian Marxist economist and a leading member of the Trotskyist Fourth International, was a popular speaker at student rallies. As a student of economics, he impressed me with his arguments about Marxist economic

theory. I started studying Marxism and joined the International Communist League, the Dutch branch of the Fourth International.

Within the socialist movement the Trotskyites were on the extreme left. The goal of the struggle was clear: a worldwide socialist revolution. The way to reach that goal was also clear: the building of a revolutionary cadre party that recruits and trains its members to prepare for a revolution. A revolution will come when a revolutionary situation arises in a country. A revolutionary situation is a situation in which the ruling class is unable to rule the way they were used to and the oppressed classes refuse to accept their oppression. Those situations arise during the periodic economic crises of capitalism. In these crises the capitalists drive down the wages of the proletariat. The working class reacts with mass strikes and mass demonstrations. The ruling class uses violence to suppress the resistance. In such a situation the working class needs a revolutionary party of trained cadres who can lead the oppressed classes to bring down the capitalist state by arming the workers and peasants, paralyze the security apparatus from within (workers in uniform who refuse to obey the orders of their officers), and at the right moment seize the army barracks and police headquarters, take over the communications infrastructure, set up a revolutionary government and proclaim the socialist republic. This will inspire oppressed people in other countries to follow this example. Therefore, in all these countries you need a branch of the Communist International so that a world revolution can be realized. For Trotskyists the model of a successful revolution is the Russian Revolution. Trotsky played a leading role in that revolution. The Bolshevik party led by Lenin was the model for building a party.

What did this mean for my daily existence as a university student? I studied Marxism and Leninism in a really intense way. With my student loans and work I bought piece by piece all the books in the series of the Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the Collected works of Lenin and the works of Trotsky. At one point I was a member of the Central Committee of the Dutch International Communist League. Political education, discussions and debates in the party and in social move-

ments were a major part of our work.

Marxism is a science, not an ideology. That is what we learned. It is called scientific socialism, because it has an indisputable scientific analysis of society and history. Historical materialism argues that the driving force of world history is the material interests of the upper classes. Look around and you will see how greed is a driving force in capitalist society. Capitalism and the market economy are the evils of modernity. Look at how the military industrial complex and the multinationals operate. Their profits come first. The solution is nationalization and a planned economy that put people first, not profits. This felt right. It was science, not just a particular moral philosophy. You cannot argue against science.

At that time, we did not care about religion. We knew the slogan "*Religion is the opium of the masses*". Our reference was Christian theology. In many countries the Church was supporting the ruling class, so the slogan made sense. We looked at religion through the lens of science. And science taught us that God does not exist, so the world is not created by God. Christians were against pagans and superstition, but how does one believe an ideology that tells you that a man, Jesus, is born out of a virgin, changed water into wine, healed the sick, brought dead persons back to life, drove out demons, made blind men see again, made crippled people walk, healed lepers, fed 5,000 families with loaves and fish that he multiplied, and ascended into heaven 40 days after he had been resurrected. For a Marxist this is superstition.

Another part of our work as a vanguard party was participating in demonstrations. There were always demonstrations: against wars in the global south, in support of national liberation movements, for women's liberation, against austerity measures by the government or the celebration of the International Workers' Day on the first of May. There was a certain culture with demonstrations. The most touching part was the singing of songs of liberation: *The International*, Italian songs like *Bella Ciao* and *Avanti Popolo Bandera Rossa*, the anthem of the South African liberation movement *Nkosi Sikelel'i Africa* and *Un Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido* from Chilean Singer Victor Jara who was brutally murdered in the 1973 fascist coup in Chile. These songs

are ingrained in my heart and I still cherish them today. Even now they invoke in me deep emotions of international solidarity.

The rhythmic shouting of slogans were a way to express anger, solidarity, messages of what are we fighting for and sometimes just fun.

In our Marxist philosophy the demonstration could - under the right circumstances - be the spark to ignite something bigger: a revolution. Sometimes there were confrontations with the police. They could be provoked by the police - just to test us and break the spirit of the demonstrators - or they could be stoked by the demonstrators. The anarchists were eager to engage in physical confrontation with the police and often the Trotskyites joined them. Occasionally these confrontations ended with arrests and a few hours in a police cell.

Demonstrations and mass strikes would create a revolutionary situation in which the vanguard party could act and seize the initiative for an insurrection. It never came to that stage in my lifetime. Usually, after the demonstration we went home, had something to eat, watched television and fell asleep.

Our socialist culture has the Russian revolution as a reference point. It was the dawn of a new world, free from oppression and exploitation. In 1921, a young revolutionary, Victor Serge (1890-1947) went through the archives of the tsarist secret service and wrote a guide for revolutionaries in the world "What everyone should know about repression". He wanted to share this knowledge so that revolutionaries in the whole world would know how the security services worked. The Russian revolution established the Communist International in 1919 to promote world revolution, international solidarity and the liberation of mankind. Revolutionaries from different parts of the globe came to the annual international congresses in Russia and sang the song of hope in different languages. The revolution brought massive gains for women: the constitution guaranteed equal rights for men and women, abortion was legalized, women got universal suffrage, maternity leave was legalized, child-care centers were established

in all parts of the country, social dining rooms and social laundries would relieve the burden of household work for women. Homosexuality was legalized. Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), the first female member of a government in the world, wrote about how the revolution would change the relationship between men and women in areas of love and sexuality.

Demonstrations and mass strikes would create a revolutionary situation in which the vanguard party could act and seize the initiative for an insurrection. It never came to that stage in my lifetime.

Friedrich Engels explained in his book on *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that the family is a unit of oppression. There was a phase in history where women had mother rights through the institution of matriarchy. "The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."

I was a member of the International Communist League. My partner in life and love, Sitla Bonoo, was a leading member of a collective of Surinamese feminists, Ashanti, that published a feminist newspaper. We were against the bourgeois institution of family. Marriage was not an arrangement between families, as was common in our Indian culture, but a bourgeois institution. When we expected our first child we needed a marriage contract to take care of all the judicial aspects of child bearing and family obligations and rights. During a political meeting, we took a break to go to the

city hall to marry. Our families were there to witness it, but they were not amused. After signing the contract, we went back to the meeting.

This is the culture and environment we grew up in. It was secular. It was militant. It was principled and did not know compromises.

Every student-activist enters a new phase in life, when (s)he graduates. A few might find a job at an NGO that enables them to see their work as part of the liberation struggle. But most of them have to enter the labour market as a wage-slave or a private entrepreneur (petite bourgeoisie). I had acquired the technical skills to conduct social research. I could not work under a boss, so I started a private company that offered research and project management services: surveys, desk research, interviews, brainstorming and the management of projects. I fared reasonably well. But there was a Chinese wall between my political work and the way I earned a living. Just like a worker goes to a factory to earn a living and after work can engage in political activities, so in my work time I did what I had to do to earn a living, and after work I would get involved in political activities. There was no connection between work and politics.

There were two projects in my work that brought me into contact with politics, and more specifically, with religion and Islam.

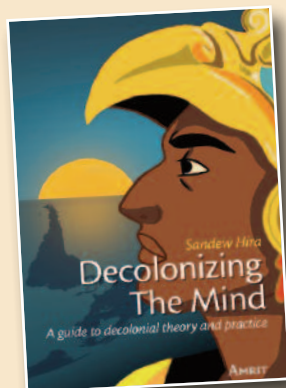
In 1996 I got an assignment to conduct a study of the Turkish Alevi community in the Netherlands for the publication of a book for the Dutch audience about Alevism. There I got a chance to do an in-depth study of Islam and in particular of Shi'ism. I saw that there were two schools of Shi'ism in Turkiye. The classical school that followed the life and teaching of the prophet Muhammad (570-632) and the fourth caliph Ali Ibn Abu Talib (600-661) and the school of the Bektashis, followers of Haji Bektash Veli (1209-1271), a mystic from Khorasan (Iran), who lived and worked in Anatalia (Turkiye). I carried out field work in Turkiye and in the Bektashi communities in Holland. The Bektashis don't have mosques. They have cems. A cem is a ritual in which men and women join in singing

NEW FROM AMRIT PUBLISHERS

Decolonizing Mind - a guide to decolonial theory and practice

By Sandew Hira

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In different parts of the world a new decolonial movement is growing that challenges long time narratives in knowledge production and social struggle and transforms activism and social movements. It is driven by key factors such as the fall of the west and the rise of the rest, the collapse of the socialist bloc and in general the crisis of Western civilization.

Hira develops a comprehensive, coherent and integral theoretical framework that draws on different contributions in the decolonial movement, and deals with the practical implication of decolonial theory for decolonial activism.

and dancing. The research equipped me with some basic knowledge of Islam.

A second assignment was closely linked to politics and in some ways also to Islam. When Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Oslo Accords 1993 (Oslo I) and 1995 (Oslo II), a consequence was that from the Palestinian side there needed to be a practical plan of how the future of Jerusalem would look. Orient House in East Jerusalem, led by Faisal Husseini, served as the headquarters of the (PLO) in the 1980s and 1990s. They hired consultants from around the world to get involved in developing a vision for the future of Jerusalem. Through a contact from our network I became part of a research group that wrote a report titled *Envisioning the Future of Jerusalem*. Together with my Palestinian counterpart, the economist Dr. Samir Hazboun, we wrote the economic chapters of the report. I made three visits to Palestine for this project: Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The report was published in 2003².

The Oslo Accords became a disastrous failure for the Palestinian people. The hope for peace is now gone. I witnessed the daily harassment of Palestinians by the Israelis and now believe that there is no way that the occupation will last forever. In my book I devote a paragraph to the argument that Israel will cease to exist in 2-3 decades. The occupation and oppression is just not sustainable in the long term.

During my trips to Palestine, I visited the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock and was impressed by their beauty and historical and cultural significance for the world.

From Marxism to Decolonial Theory

During my membership of the Fourth International (FI) I began to doubt some basic tenets of Trotskyism and Marxism. How is it possible that the FI, that was founded in 1938, was not able to lead a revolution, although since then, there have

been many successful revolutions? If they have the best theoretical analysis and the best cadre formation, why did they not succeed in turning the theory of revolution into practice? I met some great people in the FI, very smart and intelligent, very committed to the struggle and courageous in their attitude. But there is a culture of sectarianism that just did not resonate with me. There is no room for compromise. It is all about principles. There is constant infighting. A comrade from Latin America once told me jokingly: *“Un trotskista una facción, dos trotskistas un partido, tres trotskistas una Cuarta Internacional.”* In English it means “one Trotskyist one faction, two Trotskyists a party, three Trotskyist a Fourth International”. Often it seems as if the main enemy was not capitalism or imperialism, but Stalinism. My instinct and political analysis of struggle tells me that unity in struggle is the key for victory. Creating unity in social movements is not a tactical question. It is not about signing joint declarations against imperialism. It is about a culture of respect, dialogue, creating friendship and giving room to others to develop and excel. It is about acknowledging that you might be wrong and others might be right, but finding a way to work together and when mistakes are made correcting them together. It is not a scientific analysis. It is a moral principle.

I apply that principle in practice. I am a huge supporter of the Cuban revolution. I am an admirer of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and those courageous revolutionaries that conducted the struggle for liberation in Cuba. And if there was no Trotskyist involved, than that is a problem of Trotskyism, not of Castro. When an honest history of the world is written, then the contribution of the Cuban revolution to the struggle outside Cuba will not be over-exaggerated. The liberation of South Africa was in part possible because of the Cuban military struggle against the South African army in Angola where they dealt a decisive blow to South Africa in the battle of Quito Canavale in 1988. Cuba's support for social movements in Latin Abya Yala (America = Abya

Yala) has brought the continent to where it is now. And that happened despite the enormous costs of the economic boycott by the US.

The year 1979 was a pivotal year in world history. On January 7 the People's Army of Vietnam and Vietnamese-backed Cambodian insurgents ousted the Pol Pot regime from power in Cambodia. On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from his Paris exile after a revolution led by clerics had brought down the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. On March 13, 1979, the New Jewel Movement (NJM) of the 110,000 Afro population of the island of Grenada overthrew the government of Eric Gairy in a bloodless coup and started a socialist revolution. The NJM was led by the charismatic Maurice Bishop. On July 19 the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the 46-year-long Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua after decades of struggle.

The Grenada revolution was of huge significance for the people of the Caribbean and the Black population in the US. Its impact went beyond the size of the island and its small population. It was the first black revolution after the Haitian revolution of 1804. It was a big inspiration for the socialist and anti-imperialist movement in the Caribbean and the Caribbean communities in the US and Europe.

I was heavily involved in the solidarity movement in the Netherlands in support of the Grenadian revolution. I was president of the Grenada Solidarity Committee. With a group of supporters we visited the island on July 1983, three months before the dramatic split in the NJM occurred when a faction under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard arrested Maurice Bishop on 16 October 1983 and placed him under house arrest. Mass demonstrations against the coup succeeded in freeing Bishop. He was eventually captured and murdered by a firing squad of soldiers, along with his partner and several government officials and union leaders. The US seized upon this opportunity and on October 25 it launched a large-scale mil-



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 lose out on education.

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itary invasion that had been years in the planning. It put a swift and final end to the revolution. Bernard Coard was captured and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released in 2009.

The failure of the Grenada left a lasting impact on me. It made me question the basic tenets of Marxism and socialism. Is there no ethics in Marxism? How is it possible that somebody like Bernard Coard who has grown up with Maurice Bishop since early childhood could end up being involved in his murder? Is there something in the theoretical construct of Marxism that enables such horrendous crimes to be committed in the name of socialism?

There was another political event that impacted my life dramatically. On February 25th, 1980, a group of non-commissioned officers of the army in Suriname staged a coup d'état. The group was led by Desi Bouterse. The group was diverse in its political orientation. There were left-wing and right-wing forces in the group. I did not support the coup. The left gained influence, which led to counter reactions from US and Dutch imperialism. The insurgents installed a civilian government under the leadership of president Chin A Sen, a right-wing nationalist. His government did not last long because the left wing of the army did not like him. Several efforts at a counter coup climaxed on December 8, 1982 in the arrest, torture and execution of 14 people. One of them was my brother, who had stayed behind in Suriname when our family left for Holland. A military government was installed.

I studied in Rotterdam but was in my parents' house in another city when the news came through about my brother's execution. I still remember how my mother cried out loud and couldn't stop crying. My father was a broken man. Their first-born child had been tortured and shot like a dog. To witness my parents, who I dearly love, in such inconsolable grief was very painful for me.

A few days later a high official of the Dutch Ministry of Interior Affairs called

me. He invited me for a meeting with former president Henk Chin A Sen. Chin A Sen explained to me that he had gone to the US, where he met with the CIA. They planned an invasion of Suriname, similar to the contras in Nicaragua. They tried to enlist the support of left-wing activists who were opposed to the coup. He asked for my support. I flatly refused. I could never join

Over the course of their life, many activists might come to a point when they evaluate their struggle. What are we fighting for? What have we achieved? Was it worth it? You can approach these questions in two ways: theoretically and personally. In both cases, you need time to think.

a CIA coup, although I saw the pain of my parents and their wish for revenge. It brought some strain in my relations with my parents, which hurt me a lot, because I love them so much. The CIA coup plan was aborted.

In Suriname there was another left-wing force against the military government and against foreign invasions. It was led by Fred Derby, the most important trade union leader at that time. His trade union federation controlled the most important sectors of the economy. From Holland I joined his efforts to build a campaign to get the military back to their barracks and reinstate civilian rule. At the end of the day the military agreed to civilian rule. In 1987 the first elections after the coup were held. The trade unions formed a political party:

the Suriname Labour Party. I was involved in drafting the founding document. The party did not do well at the elections. They did not get any seats. The old parties won at a canter. In 1991 they joined the old political parties and entered the government. They became part of the establishment. I left the party.

Over the course of their life, many activists might come to a point when they evaluate their struggle. What are we fighting for? What have we achieved? Was it worth it? You can approach these questions in two ways: theoretically and personally. In both cases, you need time to think.

After my experience with Suriname, I dropped out of politics. My mother died in 2011 and my father a year later. They had never found happiness again after December 1982. I develop my consultancy business and in my free time became involved in culture, notably in writing books on history. In 2009, I was invited to present a paper on the history of slavery in Suriname at a conference in Amsterdam, where I met Ramon Grosfoguel. Ramon introduced me to decolonial theory. In 2012 he invited me for a conference on Decoloniality in Europe. There I met Arzu Merali and Raza Kazim from the Islamic Human Rights Commission. Out of this encounter the Decolonial International Network arose. Through IHRC, I got re-acquainted with Islam. I started to work on decolonial theory, specifically on Decolonizing The Mind, and re-engaged in activism. In 2010 I began a weekly column on a popular Surinamese news site where I dealt with issues of decolonizing the mind. Many things had changed in Suriname. Shortly before the first elections in 1997 reactionary Suriname groups located in Holland managed to finance a group of rebels in the interior of Suriname that led to a bloody war that left 450 people dead out of a population of 500,000. Army leader Desi Bouterse had gone into politics. His National Democratic Party, with an anti-colonial and progressive platform, steadily grew support in successive elections. In 2010 his party formed a



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coalition government with Bouterse as the president. In 2015 his party won the absolute majority of the parliamentary seats and he became president again. Bouterse always held that the December 1982 executions took place without his consent and that it was an act that had happened while he was not at the actual scene. The December killings had caused a deep split in Surinamese society, both in Suriname and in the Surinamese community in Holland. There were differing opinions on how to heal the divisions: amnesty, truth and reconciliation, court cases. In my columns I made the link between the December killings and the Interior war and argued for dialogue and truth and reconciliation. This position came from decolonial theory and the way to overcome colonial traumas. It brought me back to politics and activism. Since 2015 I have been involved in a trajectory of truth and reconciliation in Suriname with president Bouterse. In this [podcast](#) with Arzu Merali I deal with this [whole episode](#).

In the coming years I will spend time to build the Decolonial International Network. I will do book tours in different countries and meet academics and activists who are working on decolonial theory and practice. I will travel a lot in my political work. But things have changed.

In my Marxist period I always had a problem with how Marxism dealt with love, family and friendship. Class struggle was devoid of these topics. It is all about economics and politics. I always felt that there is more to life than that. Alexandra Kollontai had discussed how the Russian revolution changed the love life of people. In her short stories titled *Love of Worker Bees* she recounts how the revolution had changed relations between men and women and introduced the notion of free love³. That does not resonate with me at all. I am a revolutionary and a romantic. I believe that every revolutionary is a romantic. We fight for a world in which there is an end to oppression and exploitation. We dream of a world in which people live in peace, love, welfare and harmony. We are revolutionaries, because

we believe that this world will not come about without a fight, without dedication and without sacrifices. We are romantic, because love is the basis on which we act in our daily life.

As a young boy I always dreamt that I would fall in love with a beautiful girl, who would love me as much as I love her, with whom I would walk hand in hand for the rest of our lives and who would start a family with me. I don't regard family as a unit of patriarchy and oppression, but as a unit of love, care and happiness. I was twenty and she was eighteen when we met. We were deeply involved in activism and political struggle. We pledged to spend our lives together. Ten years later our daughter Pravini was born. Seven years later our son Amrit was born. They are the suns that light our life. Two years ago our granddaughter Diya was born. She is the supernova in our life. Marxism does not have a theory of love. I think decolonial theory should have one, which teaches us that family, friends and love are the bedrock of our existence as human beings.

Over the past ten years I have been invited to discuss decolonial theory at conferences, lectures and workshops in Belgium, Curacao, England, Finland, France, Malaysia, Mauritius, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Suriname, Venezuela and the United States. A certain pattern characterises during my journeys. Before I board the plane I phone Sitla to tell her I am boarding. When I land, I tell her that I have landed. When I arrive in the hotel I call to say that I have settled. My days are filled with meetings, presentations and discussions. When I am back in the hotel, we talk, gossip and kiss each other good night over the telephone. When I embark for Holland, I let her know. All the time I miss her, until I land, and we hug and kiss.

There was nothing abnormal in this routine, until my daughter, who is an activist and singer, produced a musical documentary titled *The Uprising*, that deals with decolonial theory through music. She did a tour of different countries. Her mother went

with her. We kept the same routine, but when I woke up, I felt lonely. I work from home. When I had lunch, I felt lonely. When I had dinner, I felt lonely. When I went to sleep, I felt lonely. When she returned from her first tour with Pravini I asked her: "How come you never complained about loneliness when I was on tour? Were you glad that you had some time off from me? I think I love you more than you love me." She laughed and said: "I am as busy here as you are abroad. Life is about being together. So I would love to travel with you, because I miss you just as bad as you miss me." That is when we decided that in the future we will go together on tour. And so I hope that when we are abroad we start our day with a good morning kiss, fulfil our political and social obligations, Facetime with our granddaughter and end our evening with a good-night kiss. I dream that we can walk hand in hand in love till eternity.

Sandew Hira's⁴

latest book *Decolonizing the Mind: A guide to decolonial Theory and Practice* will be published on 15 January 2023 and will be available on various platforms including [the IHRC Bookshop](#). He has worldwide tours scheduled. For more information visit [Hira's website](#) or the [IHRC pages](#). He is secretary of the [DIN Foundation](#) based in The Hague in The Netherlands. He is a well known activist, author and researcher. He heads the editorial board for [Amrit Publishers](#), and is the founder of the [International Institute for Scientific Research](#). You can find many videos of his lectures on *Decolonising the Mind* and related topics on the [IHRC website](#) and [IHRC TV](#).

¹ Engels, F. (1962), p. 30.

² The International Peace and Cooperation Center (2003): *Envisioning the Future of Jerusalem*.

³ Kollontai, A. (1978): *Love of Worker Bees*. Cassandra Editions. Chicago

⁴ Sandew Hira is the penname of Dew Baboeram. He is secretary of the Decolonial International Network Foundation.

PALESTINE APPEAL



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The Shrinking Space for Dissent in Neoliberal Britain

The process of depoliticising Muslims has now been rolled out to the wider UK population, argues **Afroze F. Zaidi**. Whilst different sections of wider society are pitted against each other by government narratives that stigmatise, divide and rule, Zaidi argues that enough space still exists for dissent despite division, and argues for a united politics of opposition to oppression.

In December 2021, I wrote about ‘race’ as a protected characteristic in US and British law, and the associated limitations of legal systems in delivering justice. I had concluded: “Rather than falling in line, disruption, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, is the only recourse. Demanding the justice to which we are entitled, not just within the bounds of the laws that exist but in spite of them. In order to do so requires constant critical engagement with, rather than uncritical acceptance of, the power structures that govern us.”

A year on in the UK, parliament has passed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act and is currently debating the Public Order Bill, both of which will serve to throttle disruptive protest and criminalise protesters. This forms part of a wider culture of shutting down dissent, not just in the form of protest but also in the form of organised workers’ movements and views critical of the establishment.

Protest, freedom of thought, and the right to withdraw labour are widely considered to be cornerstones of democracy, and yet the leaders of an ostensibly democratically led nation are attempting to crack down on these. They’re normalising a focus on individual responsibility rather than collective wellbeing, and by closing in on the space to critically engage with the neoliberal narrative and visualise alternative solutions, they are effectively depoliticising the population. In this article, I argue that the UK, in service of an insatiable neoliberal hegemony, is executing an “episodic shift” towards en masse depoliticisation of its citizens. This process is situated within the context of empire and white supremacy, so that those othered by the empire are immediately and pre-emptively recognised as a threat to the neoliberal status quo and are therefore disproportionately silenced. It’s also taking place as a multi-pronged operation in which several arms of the state are working in concert to serve its agenda. To evidence this multi-pronged operation, this article will examine how the police, media, and the Charity Commission in consort with other state institutions, are all contributing to the shrinking space for dissent in Britain.

Depoliticisation

Henry A Giroux [has written about](#) de-

politicisation within a neoliberal context, saying “the depoliticizing conditions of our social order... strip individuals of critical thought, self-determination and reflective agency”. He explains:

“Operating under the false assumption that there are only individual solutions to socially produced problems, neoliberal pedagogy reinforces depoliticizing states of individual alienation and isolation, which increasingly are normalized, rendering human beings numb and fearful, immune to the demands of economic and social justice and increasingly divorced from matters of politics, ethics and social responsibility. This amounts to a form of depoliticization in which individuals develop a propensity to descend into a moral stupor, a deadening cynicism”

Giroux also talks about the role that repression via state institutions plays in causing this depoliticisation:

“Increasingly, education both in schools and in the wider cultural apparatuses, such as the mainstream and conservative media, becomes a tool of repression and serve to promote and legitimate neoliberal fascist propaganda.”

This article aims to provide evidence of the British establishment’s repression of spaces for questioning and protesting against neoliberal hegemony. It further suggests that this repression doesn’t just serve a neoliberal agenda, but rather, in service of empire, it extends to a wider and more pervasive homogenisation of thought that leaves no room for criticism of the establishment. In the British context, while depoliticisation leads to silencing, silencing further contributes to depoliticisation by shrinking the space for discourse, dissent, and critical engagement, thus forming a vicious cycle.

Militarised policing

Police forces have a long and brutal history of working to protect the state rather than citizens. When traced back to their role

in the British empire as well as the slave patrols of the US empire, police forces also have a history that’s inextricably linked to white supremacy. Their current function, therefore, is simply a continuation of their historic role. And against this backdrop, the findings in Netpol’s 2020 [report](#) on the policing of Black Lives Matter protests come as no surprise. These findings directly support the notion that the police are working on behalf of the state to silence protests, and moreover that they continue to be agents of white supremacy by disproportionately targeting Black protesters.

The report added:

“Vitaly, this racism and intimidation is likely to have broader effects [on] anti-racism and protest in Britain eroding the legal and democratic rights enshrined in Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights.”

This supports the argument that the police’s institutional racism, observed not just during BLM protests but time and again through various reported incidents, isn’t simply ‘discrimination’. Rather it plays the possibly deliberate role of eroding the right of Black people to protest and organise against racism and empire. Indeed, the report comments on how “intimidation” from the police has the effect of shrinking the space for anti-racist organising and agitation:

“Through their potential intimidation and further marginalisation of those who seek to challenge racism through protest, *these draconian policing tactics and rhetoric deployed by the state have the potential to sap life and momentum from anti-racist activism and broader protest movements*” [emphasis added]

The report also confirms that rather than reflecting on the justified reasons for protests and acknowledging their legitimacy, politicians, police, and the media collectively portrayed protesters as violent, antisocial miscreants:

“We also witnessed an increasingly stereotypical and racist por-

trayal of Black Lives Matter protests as violent from politicians, including Home Secretary Priti Patel describing the anti-racist activists as ‘thugs and criminals’. The police were also quick to highlight the allegedly violent nature of the protests and they were joined by much of the press, helping to justify the police tactics scrutinised in this report.”

It’s safe to assume that this was intended to turn public opinion against BLM protests and protesters, while not giving legitimacy to the fact that the protests were both justified and lawful.

Other clear examples from 2021 of the police’s role in shutting down dissent include heavy-handed policing at a vigil for Sarah Everard and protests against the PCSC Bill before it became law. At both the vigil in London and the Kill the Bill protests in Bristol, the police physically attacked and arrested protesters. Eye witness accounts in [both instances](#), as well as an [inquiry](#) by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, confirm how the police were the ones to instigate violence. Yet when it came to Kill the Bill protests, once again the media and then-Home Secretary Priti Patel [framed protesters](#) exercising their right to free speech and assembly as thugs and hooligans.

Similar is the case with [environment activists](#) such as those from Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil. In November 2022, the Met Police’s Assistant Commissioner [said](#) on BBC News about an action by Just Stop Oil: “This isn’t protest, this is crime”. Furthermore, Netpol has [published a report](#) titled *Respect or Repression*, extensively documenting police repression during COP26 protests in Glasgow in November 2021. The report states that protesters found the police’s behaviour to be punitive, disproportionate, intimidating, and aggressive. Particularly relevant is that the report cites Neil, Opitz and Sebrowski (2019) to explain how ‘kettling’ at protests – widely practised by police in the UK – has the effect not only of “sti-

fling dissent” but also of “exhausting... political energies” which can be put towards dissent, thus having “a deterrent effect on protest”. As one legal observer noted:

“It was telling that when the kettle started the chants were about climate change and social justice. After 2 hours in the kettle it turned to I want a pee and a cup of tea. [This was a] deliberate tactic to get people to go home.”

We can therefore see in real time the way in which policing tactics have a depoliticising effect on protests. Moreover, the report cites guidance from the Venice Commission and details the ways in which police officers contradicted this guidance. When it came to surveillance, for example, the report describes how, in contravention of Venice Commission guidelines:

“Police Scotland consistently filmed crowds, speakers, protesters, Legal Observers and locals intrusively, with one evidence gathering officer ominously telling kettled protesters “we have plenty of time to get your faces”. This was particularly targeted at racialised groups, including a group of Muslim protesters who appeared particularly uncomfortable and one woman of colour speaking at a migrants’ rights demonstration, while police ignored her white counterparts.”

The report goes on to explain how the Venice Commission guidelines emphasise that use of digital recording devices during a protest can have “a **‘chilling effect’ on freedom of assembly and curtail the exercise of this right**” [emphasis in original]. Again, it would appear that curtailing protest is indeed a deliberate aim of the police. Moreover, this “chilling effect” and depoliticisation disproportionately affects people of colour.

The state’s neoliberal agenda is particu-

larly evident when it comes to the crackdown against climate protesters. In particular, climate protesters have been using the tactic of ‘locking on’, i.e. attaching themselves to a structure or to other protesters, as a form of direct action to disrupt business as usual and call attention to the climate crisis. But the Public Order Bill, if passed, would [make it an offence](#) not only to lock on but also to carry equipment that can be used to lock on. A look to the fossil fuel industry will explain why, in a neoliberal state, cracking down on protests against fossil fuels and climate inaction is high on the agenda. Especially since [lobbyists for fossil fuel companies](#) are operating in Westminster without needing to declare their involvement in official parliamentary transparency records.

The aforementioned examples, combined with the PCSC Act and the Public Order Bill, support the claim that while the police are working in the service of the state, the state is working to expand police powers, thus forming a coordinated effort to curb the right to protest and consequently close in on the space for dissent. Alongside legislation, a report by Campaign Against Arms Trade and Netpol released in August 2022 highlights the extent of [militarisation of police](#) in the UK. So the police are being empowered not just in the legislative sense but also in terms of equipment, resources, and militarised modus operandi.

British establishment media

While police are working to actively curb the right to protest, this isn’t the only aspect of the British state’s depoliticisation project. We saw, for instance, with wall-to-wall coverage of Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral in September 2022, particularly on the BBC, there was little room for views that were critical of the monarchy – or indeed any other reporting. This was particularly evident on social media where any response that was less than approving of the late monarch was greeted with a great deal of public contempt. Black women, in particular, such as aca-



Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit (CIK)

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IHRC alongside 5 academic partners across Europe was part of the Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit team that looked at narratives and counternarratives to Islamophobia in 8 European countries: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary and Greece.



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demics Uju Anya and Zoe Samudzi, received a barrage of abuse for expressing views that were critical of Elizabeth II's colonial legacy. While misogynoir made them easy targets, several individuals, all white, have also since been arrested for anti-monarchy protests.

Meanwhile, prominent British Muslim organisations went out of their way to express their condolences and portray themselves, and British Muslims by extension, as loyal subjects. It's difficult to say whether this response was motivated by a need to mark these organisations, and all Muslims, as safe and non-threatening in the eyes of the establishment, or whether it was down to perceived pressure to appear as such, or whether narratives around 'good' and 'bad' Muslims have been internalised to the extent that this response was a true reflection of the views of these organisations.

While Prevent and anti-terror legislation has worked to depoliticise British Muslim civil society, militarised policing and a brazenly pro-establishment mass media are working to depoliticise British society at large. As such, depoliticisation of the population serves not only a colonial agenda, such as through Prevent, but also a neoliberal one. The response to views critical of the monarchy on the occasion of Elizabeth II's death exemplified the limits on both freedom of speech and freedom of thought in the UK. The media narrative works perpetually in service of empire and leaves little room for critical thinking. Looking at the BBC in particular, analysis of its coverage of striking workers can demonstrate its role in providing a singular narrative to depoliticise the general public for the sake of a neoliberal agenda.

During the twentieth century, unions and the right to strike became a cornerstone of working-class political organising in the UK. But the BBC's coverage of strikes in the latter part of 2022 could be interpreted as an undermining of workers' right to strike and provides a snapshot of the BBC's neoliberal leanings. Upon examining forty-five articles on the BBC website covering strikes between 1 November and 8 December 2022, several similarities emerge. These articles covered rail workers, other transport workers, healthcare workers, teachers, university staff and Royal Mail staff.

A recurring trait of these articles was that they mentioned how much workers in each respective sector earned. This information was always presented without any acknowledgment that [wages haven't risen](#) in line with inflation for at least the past thirteen years. Despite the cost-of-living crisis being among the prime motivators for the recent strikes, only twelve articles (27%) mentioned cost of living, of which five articles also mentioned the effects of the pandemic and rising overheads for employers. With the minimum wage being £9.50 an hour, and without accompanying context on wage stagnation, it's easy to see how, for example, a teacher's starting annual salary of over £25k might appear generous to many people and diminish in their eyes the necessity of striking for teach-

ers.

Articles often also mentioned pay offers that had already been made but were rejected by unions. But alongside this, none of the articles mentioned the profit margins of private companies where workers were striking, or, for instance, pay rises and benefits received by MPs and ministers in comparison to public sector workers. While there was an appearance of 'balance' as articles generally mentioned the views of both workers and employers, several articles also talked about "both sides". This framing implies that the struggle of workers to get paid a wage on which they can afford to live is equal to the struggle of employers who are profiting from lower wages. Describing the strikes as a conflict where 'both sides' have legitimate grievances and simply can't come to an agreement erases the power imbalance at play, thereby fundamentally undermining the justification for strikes.

neoliberalism pits people against one another through "hyper-competitiveness", which inhibits "the ability to act politically, responsibly and with civic courage"

Aside from these, two major, related themes stand out in the BBC's coverage of strikes. The first is disruption to customers or service users, and the second is the impact the strikes, because of their timing, will have on Christmas. Out of seventeen articles reporting on transport strikes, 16 mentioned 'disruption' or effect on travellers; 16 out of 17 also mentioned 'Christmas'. Out of ten articles reporting on Royal Mail strikes, 100% mentioned Christmas, while 80% mentioned disruption to customers and retailers.

Media narratives about 'cancelling Christmas' and 'saving Christmas' exemplify the moral panic regularly created around what is the single most important holiday for most of the UK population. It would seem that framing something as a threat to Christmas is a tried and tested way of turning the British public against it. The narrative pushed by the BBC on strikes disrupting Christmas plans has been no different. Mention of how the strikes are happening in the Christmas period, and will disrupt people's plans during this time, is a prevalent theme. One headline, referring to RMT head Mick Lynch, [read: I'm not the Grinch, says union boss ahead of Christmas train strikes](#). Two articles on Royal Mail strikes also mention one of the com-

pany's top executives saying the union was "holding Christmas to ransom".

But a handful of articles, in particular, stand out for their 'strikes are anti-Christmas' narrative. One of them, titled *Train strikes: Pub boss warns walkouts could ruin Christmas plans*, features concerns from pub owners about how the strikes will affect business during "a 'vital' Christmas period". Pub chain owner Simon Emeny urged the RMT to cancel strikes to ensure the hospitality sector "can have the Christmas it deserves". Emeny, whose company employs 5,000 people, went on to pit striking workers against lower paid hospitality workers, saying:

"these train strikes are going to impact the hospitality sector - but more importantly, hospitality workers... They will probably have hours cut, see tips significantly reduced if these train strikes still happen."

This divide and rule tactic continues as the article goes on to feature Charlie Baker, owner of two pubs. The article says Baker "estimates about £200,000 of business has been cancelled" since strikes were announced. It goes on to point out that Baker is "a smaller business owner" and losing this much business was "scary" for him. As Giroux [says](#), neoliberalism pits people against one another through "hyper-competitiveness", which inhibits "the ability to act politically, responsibly and with civic courage". He adds:

"This predatory culture furthers the process of depoliticization by making it difficult for individuals to identify with any sense of shared responsibility and viable notion of the common good."

Baker laments how pubs, cafes, and restaurants are on a "cliff edge" because of rising energy prices, and goes on to say:

"I totally understand the cost of living is going up, and empathise with the rail workers, but it's really tough for us too"

This is immediately followed by comments from UK Hospitality, the trade body for the sector, warning that "strike action will cost the sector about £1.5bn". Only 9% of the article (77 out of 843 words) featured comments from RMT, with the rest being from business owners, UK Hospitality, and Transport Secretary Mark Harper.

Another prominent example was an article [reporting](#) Tory Chairman Nadhim Zahawi's comments, in a TV interview with the BBC, that strikes at Christmas are "unfair" and "damaging" to people's lives. Later that morning on Sky News, he infamously [said](#) strikes 'play into Putin's hands' and that nurses should accept a lower pay offer to "send a very clear message to Putin" - but the BBC article makes no mention of these particular comments from Zahawi. While it says

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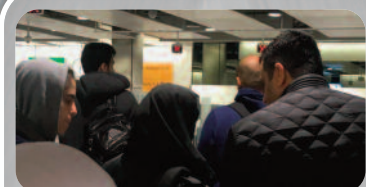
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Zahawi told the BBC that strikes are “what Putin wants to see”, the video clip included at the top of the article doesn’t include Zahawi’s reference to Putin. The article also mentions demands for pay rises to match the rising cost of living, but immediately follows this with the caveat that cost of living “is increasing at its fastest rate in 40 years, largely as a result of rising food and energy prices”. This latter statement entirely absolves the Tory government of at least three things: its role in failing to increase wages in real terms for public sector workers; its role in refusing to effectively regulate or subsidise energy prices and energy production; and the role of Brexit in rising food prices. It also frames pay demands as ‘unaffordable’ and, consequently, striking workers as unreasonable for making these demands.

Finally, among the most blatant examples of the BBC’s anti-strike coverage was an article published on 8 December, [initially titled ‘Rail strikes mean I won’t see my son over Christmas’](#). The headline was a quote from Owen, whose picture also featured as the article’s main image. The article, written by BBC reporter Michael Race, claimed Owen wouldn’t be able to visit his 12-year-old son on 27 December because of rail strikes. It went on to say:

“Having supported strikes earlier in the year, Owen says he’s now against them due to the festive strikes ‘ruining’ his Christmas.”

But as many, many Twitters users pointed out, there were in fact alternative routes that Owen could easily have taken if he did indeed want to visit his son. The [original tweet](#) from the BBC, which was later deleted, got quote-tweeted at least 1,637 times (compared to only 110 retweets), with many of the quote tweets picking up on Race’s [poor journalism](#) and the BBC’s [anti-strike bias](#). Sports journalist Jay Motty described it as “The BBC doing the Tories propaganda for them”. Writing for the Canary, Steve Topple also [described](#) the BBC article as “anti-RMT propaganda”, saying: “Overall, it shows the entrenched pro-government bias of the supposed ‘public service’ broadcaster.”

Topple also pointed out that the original article didn’t feature comments from anyone who supported the strikes, and Race’s failure to verify Owen’s claims contravened the BBC’s own reporting guidelines. The BBC later changed the headline and main image and removed Owen from the article, with a note at the end [saying](#) “This story has been updated to remove a case study whose travel plans are unlikely to be affected by the strikes”. The note, added as an ‘update’ rather than a ‘correction’, was then changed again to replace “a case study” with “an interview”.

Mainstream media outlets in the UK have, for the most part, consistently pushed ‘strikes vs. Christmas’ reporting. The BBC’s contribution, however, demonstrates its role as a propaganda tool for a government that appears to be trying its best to narrow the

range of acceptable views and stifle critical thinking, thereby depoliticising the public. One measure of this is a YouGov poll that showed 45% of people supporting striking rail workers in October 2022 against 42% who are opposed, which had changed to 41% in support and 47% opposed in November. As Topple [pointed out](#) in another article for the Canary, “it seems that the media narratives around striking and Christmas may have swayed some people’s opinions”.

Systematic disempowerment and silencing of racialised minorities

Examining the cases of the police and the BBC shows their role in narrowing the space for dissenting opinions in the UK, thus contributing to a depoliticisation of the general population in service of an all-encompassing neoliberal hegemony. However, as discussed with regard to the policing of protesters, racialised communities disproportionately face the effects of this stranglehold on dissenting voices. With the silencing impact of heavy-handed policing on protesters of colour, it’s important to recognise that this harm isn’t just caused by the police as an institution. Rather it forms part of a systematic targeting, silencing and disempowerment of racialised communities.

Writing for Tribune Magazine, Jason Okundaye talks about the [criminalisation of BLM protesters](#) and, in particular, the role of the Home Office and the PCSC bill (still a bill at the time of writing) in facilitating this. He also mentions in the same vein the criminalisation of Black youths following the London riots in 2011. While the Tories in general, and Priti Patel in particular, have often been painted as caricatured villains when it comes to issues such as immigration or racism, Okundaye’s article brings home the point that a Keir Starmer-led Labour party is no less complicit in upholding the white supremacist, neoliberal status quo in the UK. He mentions Starmer’s role in expediting prosecutions for young Black people with no prior criminal records who were arrested at the riots, thereby denying them due legal process.

The state and media narratives around the riots likely contributed to a documented [rise in racist attitudes](#) in the UK. As in the case of the BLM protests, there was little recognition by the state or the general public of the [justified frustration](#) of rioters or the [social and political causes](#) that directly [created the circumstances](#) in which people felt the need to riot. Okundaye goes on to add:

“The Home and Justice Secretaries are deliberately seeking to antagonise Black families, many of whom are still living with the long-term consequences of the cruel legal proceedings which followed arrests of their young family members.”

What Okundaye alludes to here is the

long-term impact of systemic racism. More specifically, the [impact of the riots](#) on Black people’s mental health reflects the broader idea of ‘black fatigue’ as discussed by Mary-Frances Winters. [Described as](#) “the toll of living with racism”, it’s not too far-fetched to conclude that the emotional and psychological weight of black fatigue can have a disempowering effect, reducing collective capacity for political dissent.

This concept of a collective fatigue in response to racism could also be applied in varying degrees to other groups affected by racism. A [study](#) by Billy Wong et al, published by the Cambridge Journal of Education in April 2022, examines the effects of “racial battle fatigue” specifically on “minority ethnic students in UK higher education”. The study notes the fatigue caused by repeated instances of racism among the students interviewed. While this causes a desensitisation and “tolerance” to racist incidents as a coping mechanism, crucially, the authors note:

“The emotional work, namely detachment and desensitisation, as practised by our minority ethnic students, seem to grow out of frustration and resignation that the status quo can be meaningfully challenged.”

Where this “resignation” can be seen as having a depoliticising effect on people from racially minoritised groups, it can be argued that this effect is the desired outcome of the state’s racist targeting of people of colour. Another, deeper [study](#) which supports this assertion was published by Julien Talpin in the Ethnic and Racial Studies journal in February 2022. The study is titled *Why French racial minorities do not mobilize more often. Disempowerment, tactical repertoires and soft repression of antiracist movements*. Focusing on six French towns, it notes a “collective disempowerment” among working class people from racial minorities. Importantly, Talpin says:

“Rather than apathy, French working-class neighbourhood residents seem marked by a deep sense of powerlessness. While they frequently interpret their situation as unjust, they see few ways of transforming it, since politics or collective action rarely appear as effective means.”

It’s particularly significant that Talpin identifies “repressive” practices of public institutions as one of the factors which cause the “demobilization” of racial minorities in France and “fuel collective disempowerment”. He adds that along with “violent forms” of repression, such as the police:

“the collectives studied in our research... face more ordinary forms of soft and symbolic repression and disqualification (Marx Ferree 2004), which, although less violent, have a

direct impact on their mobilization capacities.”

Meanwhile, one of the manifestations of the British state’s repression of mobilisation against racism is the criminalisation of BLM protesters. Moreover, following the toppling of slaver Edward Colston’s statue in Bristol, it also manifests in the criminalisation of damage to statues via the PCSC Act – a move that disproportionately impacts anti-racist protests, given this country’s colonial legacy. And when it comes to repressing support for Palestine – one of the cornerstones of anti-racist struggle – repression takes violent forms, such as counter-terror policing, as well as more subtle forms. The latter include mass surveillance via Prevent and the systematic, multi-institutional targeting of organisations supporting Palestine.

In November 2021, UK parliament passed an amendment to the Terrorism Act of 2000 proscribing Hamas’s political wing as a terrorist organisation. At the time, Muslim leaders in the charity sector raised concerns regarding how the legislation would “hinder charity work inside the besieged Palestinian territory,” but their calls made no impact. However, with the military arm of Hamas being proscribed in 2001, Muslim charities had consistently come under scrutiny from the Charity Commission long before the 2021 amendment. A 2009 BBC Panorama programme on Interpal prompted a Charity Commission investigation into the organisation’s possible connections to “the militant or terrorist activities of Hamas”. Other charities the Commission has targeted for their work in Gaza and/or alleged links to liberation groups in Palestine include Education Aid for Palestinians, Medical Aid for Palestinians, Muslim Aid, and Human Aid. Investigations invariably led to either a threatened or actual loss of funding for the respective charities. At least one of these charities, Human Aid, publicly raised concerns about the Commission for “being excessive in its approach and effectively acting as an exten-

sion of police and security services harassment policy” [emphasis added].

In June 2022, the Commission also opened an inquiry into the National Union of Students’ (NUS) charitable arm due to antisemitism claims against NUS president-elect Shaima Dallali, a vocal pro-Palestine activist. The inquiry was prompted by a letter sent by Tory MP and Education Select Committee Chief Robert Halfon in collaboration with Campaign Against Antisemitism. A working paper titled *Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia – United Kingdom* published by Arzu Merali in 2018 calls attention to the toll of these Charity Commission inquiries, which happen to affect Muslims disproportionately. As one respondent notes:

“this has resulted in the very least, charities against whom no wrong doing has been found finding themselves... bogged down in endless rounds of correspondence with the Charity Commission caused by repeated complaints by the same members of the commentariat. At worst they have trustees removed and replaced by trustees chosen by the Charity Commission and or had assets frozen.”

In particular, Merali notes:

“Muslims are not only denied the ability to define Muslimness in any of its diversity but also are defined by state and institutional discourse and praxis that is a form of violence against them. *It disempowers them from having any role in the development of wider society.*” [emphasis added]

As noted earlier, this disempowerment manifests in a lack of critical engagement within the Muslim community and particularly Muslim civil society organisations. And following the systematic clamping down of minority-run organisations and

movements, as Talpin noted in the case of France, either fear of, or fatigue caused by, state repression can lead to a mass silencing and depoliticisation of racialised minorities in the UK.

An irresistible force

This article provides a mere snapshot of the level of repression, silencing, and establishment propaganda being normalised in the UK. However, amidst these tactics and despite them, the so-called cost of living crisis has mobilised workers in particular to an extent not seen this century. Possibly, and entirely in keeping with the trajectory laid out in this article, these developments will lead to what PM Rishi Sunak has described as “new tough laws” to restrict strike action. But along with the rising cost of living, the climate crisis will continue to worsen and colonialism will keep fuelling the need for anti-racist struggles. As such, the population’s urgency to protest and the state’s authoritarian control over dissent may reach an impasse.

If the state insists on becoming an immovable object, rigid and unrelenting in its establishment of a neoliberal, colonial hegemony, then the only recourse for dissenting voices is to become an irresistible force. Awareness-raising movements and alternative media narratives could help to counter the state’s depoliticisation project, as long as these are made accessible across social divides and particularly at the grassroots to working class communities. Crucially, we need a radical rejection of the “hyper-competitiveness” and hyper-individualism Giroux mentions. Collectively embracing a commitment to the common good is the ultimate antidote to neoliberalism’s economic imperative – the fact that it raises the hackles of those in power is just an added bonus.

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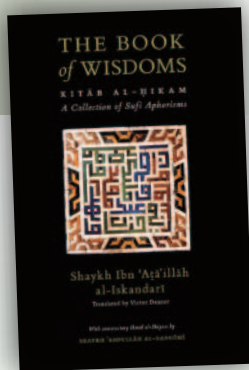


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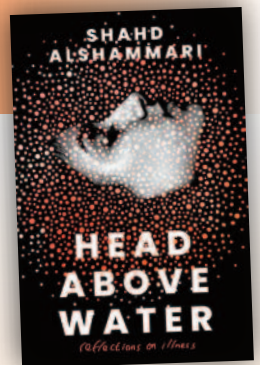
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