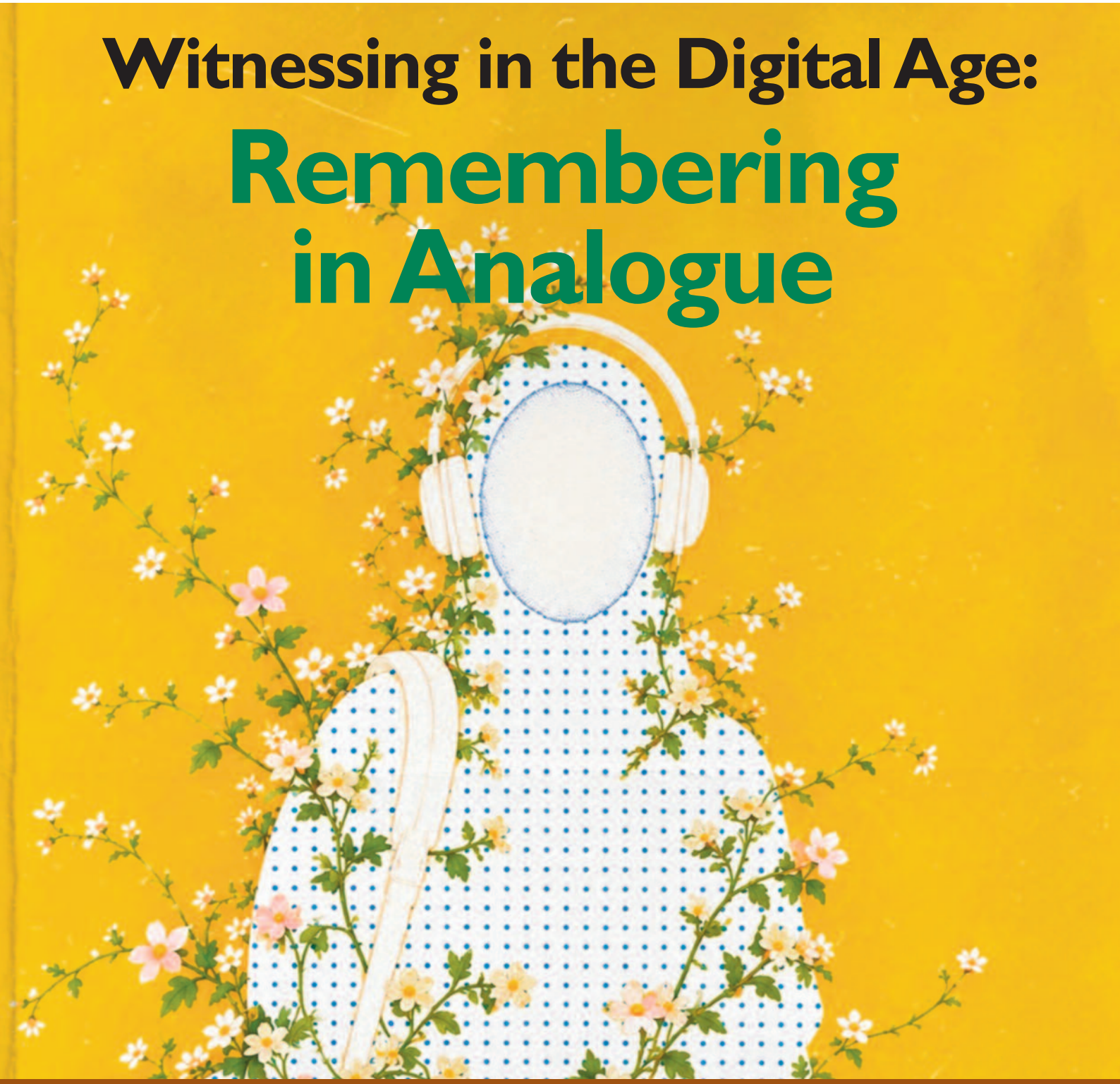
The Long View

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Witnessing in the Digital Age:

Remembering in Analogue



Saeed Khan
Artificial Intelligence and its Very Real Implications for Islamophobia and Beyond

Mogamat Reederwan Craayenstein
AI, Islamophobia and the Struggle for a Just Society

Enver Rizvo
"If It Weren't for Iran…": The Role of the Islamic Republic of Iran During the Aggression Against Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995)

Mohammad Javad Mohammadi
The Culture of Martyrdom in the Conduct of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him)

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

The rapid rise of AI throws up many questions and challenges. Its invisible integration into our already heavily automated lives advances apace leaving in its wake the regulatory frameworks and ethical constraints that should govern its course. Devoid of safeguards the field resembles a Wild West frontier where actors are driven by the basest human instincts such as greed, power and lust. Financial elites harness its vast capabilities to enrich themselves further at the expense of the poor and economically marginalised. Governments exploit its military potential to execute and enable a genocide and countless other egregious acts against their adversaries. Amoral business tycoons apply it for the purposes of monetising and debasing the natural human need for coupling.

Then there are the concerns about the dangers posed by so-called independent or autonomous AI systems, that is AI that has developed the ability to think for itself and act outside the limits set by its creators. The recent attack against Hugging Face is a case in point. Artists and authors have expressed alarm at AI companies seemingly bypassing copyright rules by buying physical books to scan for their knowledge reproduction models. When the acquired books are rare copies or manuscripts that are unnecessarily put out of circulation, it gives rise to anxieties about the monopolisation (and perhaps distortion) of information and knowledge. Equally worrying is the prospect that instead of being a net positive and egalitarian force AI will head down the same monopolistic proprietary route as the internet and be dominated by a few malevolent powerful individuals and corporations.

The first two essays in this issue of the Long View take a deep dive into the world of AI drawing out its potentialities as well as dangers. In the first which also forms the keynote speech for this year's IHRC Islamophobia Conference, **Prof Saeed Khan** maintains that Muslims must not allow AI to bypass them and end up becoming merely its consumers and victims. The awesome power of AI will transform the world in ways that we may not yet even be able to fully comprehend but we are already trailing in the race to develop and procure it. Just as progress in science in the West starting in the 15th century provided the physical engine and ideological motivation for colonialism and the industrial revolution, AI stands to play a transformative role in global political power dynamics and an accelerative automating role in the global economy.

Muslims must be at the forefront of that effort argues Prof. Khan: "The absence of the Muslim voice from AI will deprive the world of a legacy and tradition of science and humanity being in concert with, not in opposition, to one another. But equally, if not more critically important, is the need for Muslim involvement in AI to minimise its potential to target Muslims by amplifying, coding and further institutionalising Islamophobia."

The second essay by **Mogamat Reederwan Craayenstein** takes up the same theme. AI has not emerged from a vacuum. It is loaded with the body of assumptions, prejudices and practices that permeate the milieu in which it operates. This includes Islamophobia, more specifically institutionalised Islamophobia. Adjusting the algorithm isn't the answer because this doesn't address the human activity that goes into developing the AI model. Inputs are not value neutral. If a society is institutionally Islamophobic, automating its records and procedures is not going to generate anything but an Islamophobic output. Thus, AI has the terrifying power to supercharge discrimination. AI also has the disturbing propensity to undermine accountability distancing what are effectively human decisions from their authors, making socially produced judgements appear independent of the human beings who created them (the "sorry, computer error" scenario). The longing for a just society and the will to build a just society must precede the development of better algorithms for without them a post AI society will only end up reproducing injustice on a much bigger scale.

That justice does not stop at the boundaries of the nation state but extends to the responsibility of Muslim states to come to the aid of oppressed peoples everywhere. Our third essay by **Enver Rizvo** looks at the critical role played by the Islamic Republic of Iran in ensuring the survival of Bosnia-Hercegovina as an independent entity following its secession from the rump Yugoslavia. Under the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Iran approached its relationship with the nascent Bosnia from the standpoint of a constitutional and religious obligation. Against a punitive UN arms embargo which failed to distinguish between aggressor and victim and between the armed and unarmed, Tehran made it its business to supply hardware as well as personnel, technical knowhow and intelligence helping to turn the tide of an initially one-sided conflict.

Our final essay stays with Iran. Written by **Dr. Mohammad Javad Mohammadi** it elucidates the culture of martyrdom that has sustained the Islamic Republic and its leaders since inception. It is this culture, which grows out of faith, that was both inculcated by the late Seyed Ali Khamenei and in which he was immersed until his final breath. Using the life of the 8th Shia (Twelver) Imam, Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (AS), Mohammadi identifies the key components or pillars of this culture which he says must be imbibed and actualised by the martyr before his martyrdom: faith, sincerity, knowledge, striving, and steadfastness. The martyr is one who strives; they spend a lifetime labouring in the service of the Truth. Witnessing truth, in service of the Truth, is an aim shared across boundaries. Let's join together in this struggle to bring truth and justice to light.

Join the conversation by emailing us on **info@ihrc.org**, tweeting **@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.

Artificial Intelligence and its Very Real Implications for Islamophobia and Beyond

Setting out the concept for this year's IHRC, SACC & DIN Islamophobia Conference in the UK, **Saeed Khan** sets out the challenges, the possibilities and very real dangers faced by humanity caused by the development of artificial intelligence. Is this new technological age able to develop in an ethical manner, or are the horrors we have already witnessed portents of what is to come?

Author's Disclaimer: No artificial intelligence was used to write this article.

Artificial intelligence (AI), once the exclusive domain of science fiction, is approaching science fact and reality. And while some contend that AI is already here, AI with self-awareness approaches a scientific reality in the near future. Today, scientists and tech specialists at some of the world's finest universities and private facilities work energetically to advance the fields of robotics and AI development. Yet, the necessary debates regarding the consequences of AI's impact on humanity are woefully insufficient. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in faith communities, whose voice and discursive contribution borders on the non-existent., and more specifically the Muslim community, already and constantly under the siege of Islamophobia.

As technology advances at a pace that challenges the ability to discern its philosophical implications and consequences, it is critical for thought leaders to deliberate upon the myriad ramifications of artificial intelligence and its constitution. As efforts will be made to confer upon artificial intelligence greater agency, questions abound as to what its parameters and limitations will contain. With equal importance and in response, one will have to explore how human agency can be curbed from its impulses to use such transformational technology, human beings may have to reevaluate and redefine their own notions of personhood as they interact with AI and its incarnations. The last century bears testament to the misuse of technology by subjugating and exterminating humankind by those who created it and chose to use it as a force for harm instead of societal benefit. AI now provides that potential yet again, with its military, media and anti-ethical applications. In fact, it has already begun.

The May 2021 the Israeli assault on Gaza is regarded as the world's first artificial intelligence conducted war because of the Israeli Defense Force's (IDF) heavy reliance on AI during its onslaught. The IDF used algorithms for data collection and target selection. In the eleven-day campaign, United Nations and local Gaza Health Ministry reports estimated over 250 men, 40 women and 66 children were killed, and approximately 2,000 were injured. This particular conflict simply served as a prologue and a recce for what the IDF would unleash after October 7, 2023.

The actual number of Gazans killed since October 2023 will never be known, as Israeli forces have blocked access to the region and have embarked on clearing debris which ostensibly contains the human remains of untold thousands, not to mention the mass graves the IDF also established. Conservative, verifiable numbers estimate the Israeli military killed over 75,000 Gazans, a tenth of what is perceived to be the real quantity of carnage. The IDF destroyed every school, university and hospital, as well as Gaza's infrastructure, including water purification plants, electricity power plants and grids and other key installations.

For the past three years, Israeli forces have refined and incorporated more broadly the use of AI in Gaza. One such use is Lavender, a system that collects and mass surveillance data. Supposedly for the purpose of identifying militant groups, per Israel's definition of that term. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Israelis used Lavender to generate large, automated kill/target lists. America's National Public Radio (NPR) confirmed the IDF's use of an AI system called "The Gospel," stated similarly to use artificial intelligence to identify militants;

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the media outlet critiqued the efficacy of the AI, given the heavy civilian casualty count, leaving only two plausible conclusions to infer: either the IDF was less competent than previously thought despite multiple claims it took all possible measures to avoid civilian deaths, or they willfully and intentionally targeted civilians as well to maximise the extermination of Palestinians, thereby refuting the dubious claim that the IDF is the "world's most moral army."

Contrary to an extensive propaganda campaign denying its intentions and executions, the Israeli military and government is using an AI platform known as *Habsor* ("the Gospel") , which is specifically utilized to assess physical targets. Ostensibly claimed to be used only to find militant targets, like tunnels and weapons caches, *Habsor* has been used to locate, target and destroy crucial infrastructure that only has humanitarian use. This includes electricity grids and power supplies, water purification centers, internet and telecommunications facilities, schools, universities and hospitals.

Several sources have designated Gaza to be the most surveilled region in the world, and such use of AI technology facilitates the ability of Israelis to map the entire area, including any and all civilian sites. Again, the Israelis insist they do not target civilians, including women and children, a claim made even more specious given the sophistication and precision of AI to distinguish between combatant and civilian positions. Either AI is inaccurate or it is programmed and used to maximize destruction and killings.

Starting with the 2021 Gaza war, Israeli military and intelligence services, including its elite Unit 8200 Intelligence Corps, have been developing AI applications to surveil, securitize, monitor and target Gazans. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, programs such as "Alchemist" have been engaged in collecting data using signal intelligence (SIGINT), visual intelligence (VISINT), human intelligence (HUMINT) and geographical intelligence (GEOINT). No square foot, person or even animal is protected from this perpetual panopticon. It is tantamount to the predator hunting its prey with the most advanced technology available, even if it means creating that technology for such a bespoke purpose.

Data collection and target selection are just two elements of AI's military applicability. AI also allows for the enhancement of non-human weaponry, such as drones and AI-assisted missiles. Each of these weapons systems depends on algorithmic technology, as is utilized in other military capacities. One can assume that countries like the United States employ such technology for their missile telemetry systems. Despite the claims that such technology minimizes, not increases, precision and thus, arguably reducing civilian deaths as "collateral damage", on February 28, 2026, the first day of the US-Israel War against Iran, American missiles struck an Iranian girls' school in Minab, killing over 168 people, including more than 120 little girls. Similar high causalities have occurred by American AI facilitated munitions, including in Afghanistan, when several Afghan wedding parties have been hit, killing hundreds, in 2002, 2008 and 2019.

Drone warfare has marked a decided, irreversible shift from the era of military warfare when soldiers could see their adversary eye to eye. The impersonal and anonymous nature of war today allows for detachment of human emotion from the calculus. This departure is widened when AI is used for decision-making, and with it, a critical component of ethical involvement for the user of such technology. Leaving the crucial judgments in the hands of the algorithm assuages the human supervisor of culpability and perhaps even criminal liability should there be an error or even a foreseeable action. Moreover, international law, already addled by contempt and defiance by its very creators, appears woefully inadequate in addressing the prospect of war crimes, genocides and crimes against humanity being outsourced to non-human actors, where militaries and governments alike can claim that it was "machine error" to blame.

The awesome power and capability of artificial intelligence merges with a similar phenomenon in contemporary society to create a perfect storm for the potential of misuse, manipulation and distortion of the truth and reality. The media have become a conduit and creator for AI in a variety of fields and applications. Many newsrooms in print and broadcast media rely upon AI for generating content. Sports results, financial markets reportage and even weather and traffic reports have become deeply infused with AI technology and in some cases, operate with a consistency akin to autopilot feature on aircraft. Predictive AI, for example, employs meteorological forecasts and models to determine weather changes in advance of its development, greatly improving upon human analysis due to the speed by which such data is processed. In some ways, this technology has proven to be a lifesaver, especially when plotting the course and trajectory of natural disasters like tornados, cyclones and hurricanes. AI monitoring of traffic patterns can aid drivers, especially commuters and emergency vehicles, avoid long delays due to accidents, congestion and/or construction. And now that the global financial markets operate in a 24/7 macro-ecosystem, AI can collate information from stock exchanges and other institutions to provide real-time updates and even future projections and trends. But as efficient and effective as AI may be in these important arenas of social engagement, it is not a perfect science. AI models still miss storms, with damage and destruction still occurring, though human casualties are often mitigated with early warnings. So-called black swans- rare, unpredictable events that carry a massive impact- elude AI prediction models based on their statistically low levels of occurrence, though they can wreak havoc on the financial sector, as evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. While AI can be "forgiven" for its limitations, the concomitant concern is the extent to which human reliance makes critical decisions based on "faith" in the reliability of the technology, particularly when such technology is seemingly visible yet invisible at the same time.

Media use of AI models for weather, traffic and markets carries certain risks which may be argued to be similar to direct human agency in these areas. But the media is also responsible for establishing the lens through which we gain access to and process information. Hyper corporatization of major media outlets has subsumed journalistic integrity to the interests of shareholders, special interest groups and governments, even those in whose countries such outlets are not headquartered. In the pursuit of higher profits, most media outlets have drastically cut their international bureaus and network of on-the-ground correspondents, relying instead on bundlers and AI to fill in the gaps in their reporting. AI is thus a poor substitute for the painstaking work that journalists invest by embedding themselves in local communities, building trust and becoming privy to the nuances and intricacies that make a story more vibrant and accurate. AI, irrespective of how well populated the algorithm might be, can never capture those subtleties. It is thus telling and beyond irony to note that the person absorbing media accounts is called the consumer.

But beyond imprecision based on logistical deficiencies and gaps is the greater danger that AI brings to an already dubious discursive landscape created by the media: the editorial bias that AI can create and reinforce. Media reporting suffers from the twin related sins of bias and willful omission. There is a multitude of research and scholarship that focuses on this phenomenon, especially as it pertains to and foments Islamophobia. Coverage of Gaza since 2023 is just one small example of how western media outlets manipulate and shape public opinion. Studies show how prominent and highly influential sources like *The New York Times* routinely use passive voice and elide naming Israeli military and government personnel that murder Gazans while emphatically invoking active voice when Palestinians are the actors. Additionally, *The New York Times*, as is the case with the BBC, shows its scepticism as to the accuracy and probity of casualty counts reported by Palestinian agencies or individuals, claiming such numbers are inherently unreliable because they may be Hamas propaganda. By contrast, any estimates provided by Israeli voices are accepted as dictum, even when refuted by independent sources. As this matrix of misinformation becomes merged with AI, the danger increases exponentially of distortion and deception becoming further mainstreamed because of the logistical nature of the technology.

AI currently operates and thrives through the almighty algorithm. This is achieved by those who program it to filter the vast corpus of information available on the internet. Programmers can "tell" the algorithm what information is acceptable for

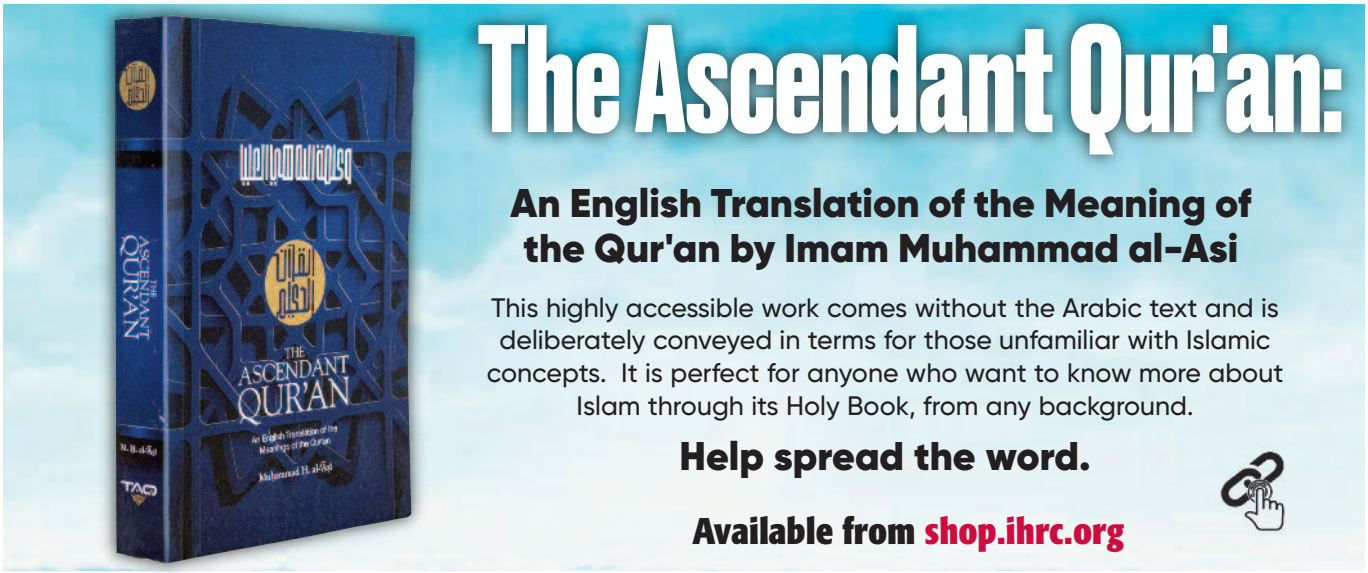
it to process, replicate and then report with its imprimatur, allowing the bias of the programmer to become embedded in the system. In addition, the algorithm may then be utilizing its limited range of acceptable sources further with the pool of information from which it draws its "expertise," ones that are already skewed, yet regarded as authoritative because of their origins from leading media outlets. The illusion (or delusion) of the media being a democratized space is deepened when an algorithm can discount and dismiss counternarratives furnished by alternate media outlets and independent sources, effectively erasing them from the public record. These dangers of this process are further exacerbated by the fact that AI appears to make its users passive participants. It is one thing to resist the urge to question every weather report or traffic update that AI provides; doing so in real time might become cumbersome, if not frustrating, both for that particular person and those who are inadvertently involved, including other drivers, for example. But engagement with the media is never healthy as a passive exercise; journalism should be questioned, critiqued and challenged for its biases, inherent and otherwise. The ease by which society "trusts" AI in so many time and labor-saving sectors will seep into the calculus of media consumption, making unhealthier an already toxic public space.

If AI is changing the complexion and coverage of traditional media, the relatively new frontier of social media is where the impact of artificial intelligence is being felt profoundly as well. Initially heralded as a welcome departure and rejoinder to so-called mainstream media at its inception nearly a generation ago, social media was intended to allow for the democratization of the public discursive space, where anyone with an opinion could have greater and easier access to the marketplace of ideas, rather than the increasingly filtered ecosystem dominated by broadcast and print media. Anyone with an email address, a website or simply an account to one of a growing number of platforms and apps could enter the arena in ways that overcame conventional and long-established barriers to access. Blogging pages allowed for people to become diarists, commentators and even citizen journalists. Just as critically, it opened up a way for people trapped in media voids to present their voice, not only to add to the discourse, but also to refute biased media accounts that claimed impunity and authority absent other coverage. This has been the reality in Gaza, for example since well before 2023, but gained greater currency and credibility after October 7th.

The Israeli narrative is fond of emphatically claiming to be a thriving ("only one in the Middle East") democracy, with respect for the rule of law and freedom of press and speech. This, of course, is being severely challenged with calls for the Israeli producers of the new documentary, NAZA, to be stripped of their Israeli citizenship for chronicling the confessions and admissions of Israeli military personnel recounting the atrocities they were ordered to commit in Gaza. In addition, so committed to a free press is Israel that the state holds the dubious distinction, according to Al Jazeera, of killing more journalists in Gaza than the number of reporters killed in all major 20th and 21st century wars combined, including World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, the 1990s Balkans Wars and the American war in Afghanistan. Those journalists the IDF did not kill, and overwhelming evidence suggests such killings were deliberate and intentional, not incidental as Israel contends, were barred from covering Gaza on the ground, due to severe censorship protocols. The IDF, with no sense of irony, claimed it could not guarantee the safety of journalists in an active warzone as its justification for restrictions. Of course, it prevented western journalists from entering Gaza, leaving the risk and eventual targeting for other media members, as demonstrated by the disproportionately high death toll among Al Jazeera correspondents. But Israel did allow in some western journalists when it suited its narrative, as evidenced by its demand that any reportage first be cleared by its own censors before it could be broadcast. The acquiescence and complicity of these media outlets was affirmed by their willingness to agree to such restrictions and procedures, while happily boasting about their moral superiority as purported bastions of free expression. Intrepid and courageous Gazans risked their lives and lives of family members to overcome unimaginable odds and obstacles, including the Israeli destruction of Gaza's internet grid, to send the world images and information to bear witness to and prove, especially to the International Court of Justice, of a genocide underway, in real time.

Social media is often ascribed the metaphor of being the "Wild West" of the public sphere, by virtue of its accessibility of ideas and information ignored or blocked by traditional media outlets. But the efforts to bridle or rein in social media are coming from those interested in control instead of an earnest interest in distilling the space of distortion and deception. Some of the world's most powerful social media platforms are hypocritically employing the very tools of censorship they claim to be defying. When Elon Musk purchased Twitter, he pledged to restore the site to its "pre-woke" openness. In reality, Musk gauged "wokeness," conventionally described as political correctness that seeks to stanch discussion on topics that are deemed inappropriate. Instead, Musk allowed "anti-woke" postings that included sexually explicit content and racist, bigoted rhetoric. Musk also instructed his website administrators to police and block content, even suspending user accounts, of people posting pro-Palestinian messages and content showing the truth of what was occurring in Gaza, in full refutation of Israeli distortions. These administrators use AI to search for objectionable content to efficiently hit back decisively and swiftly. Musk also allows his website to be saturated by AI "bots," preprogrammed responses to any targeted content, in this case, pro-Gaza posts, with an avalanche of anti-Gaza lies and bigoted replies.

Elon Musk is not alone in controlling



critical social media platforms using AI and bots to counter information determined to be by them appropriate. Marc Zuckerberg's Meta is the parent company to Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. In 2020, Zuckerberg appointed Emi Palmor, the former director-general of Israel's Justice Ministry, to Meta's Oversight Board, a body tasked with ruling on content ethics. Previously, Palmor had set up a cyber unit in charge of monitoring and censoring Palestinian social media posts, on the orders of the extreme right-wing minister Ayelet Shaked. Palmor is now the gatekeeper over three prolific and extensively used social media platforms to prevent users from posting questionable content; here, that translates to pro-Palestinian information. Meta is also a major player in the AI industry, seeking to develop the cutting-edge technology for the next generation of AI and its further integration over all aspects of social engagement. These "gatekeepers" of AI and social media have used the Gaza war and the public outrage it has generated to workshop ways to censor expression and conduct an assault on democratic principles, both with and without state cooperation and complicity.

AI does not only stand for "artificial intelligence." With this technology and its pernicious and potential dangers, it could just as easily mean "accountability immunity." There is the prospect that AI could be used to conduct activity that would otherwise be illegal, not to mention immoral were it done by humans. In essence, AI could be a mechanism to outsource criminality under the guise that a non-human entity committed it or, equally, problematic, that AI acted on its own accord because it had developed its own "consciousness" and autonomy. Of course, the human being(s) responsible for developing the original algorithm and parameters for the AI's action would and should be held culpable, but there is certainly the probability that such actors would launch a defense that their involvement was too attenuated from the crime committed. Moreover, the die has already cast whereby non-humans escape the form of criminal liability that human beings do. Corporations are notorious in evading punishments that people experience. At most, they are subject to monetary penalties and perhaps some relatively nominal injunctions to prevent future, repeated action. Such consequences invariably pale in comparison to the toxic impact of what corporations have done and hardly serve as a sufficient deterrent to another occurrence. At a time when public discourse is focused on the misuse of AI by so-called "bad actors," the negative effects will be exacerbated if no one feels afraid of being held accountable, a reality that already exists with the impunity by which genocides are conducted in full defiance of the rule of law.

Beyond the technical capabilities of AI and the dangers of its manipulation and misuse, there is the equally, if not greater concern about what artificial intelligence will do to the human condition itself. Some will claim that the Industrial Revolution ushered in a brand (brave?) new world of scientific progress and human advancement, thanks to the time and labor-saving benefits of the knowledge and devices it produced. Notwithstanding the fact that the Industrial Revolution was launched on the backs and with the blood of countless millions who were exploited, subjugated, occupied, maimed and murdered through the scourge of the colonial project, industrialization changed human nature. The science and development of the 18th and 19th centuries engendered a hubris amongst its creators who felt they had now been able to control and even conquer the natural world. It is little wonder that such a process compelled German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche to declare that "God is dead," lamenting that secular reason and scientific advancement had stripped humanity of the morality and human purpose that other ethical constructs like religion furnished.

The Industrial Revolution augured a mass delusion for its purveyors, that somehow, they could conquer nature and be sophisticated and "civilized." The West's subjugation of most of the planet was sufficient refutation of that conceit. But the West did not spare itself of its own, newly refined brutality. The systematic efficiency of the new science and mechanical progress simply enabled the West to use such knowledge to exterminate peoples more effectively, as evidenced by two world wars. There is little indication that the West used its experiences during those conflicts to engage in any self-reflection, let alone contrition. As such, it is doubtful that effort will be made to ponder, even at this relatively preliminary stage, what and how AI may change humanity.

As transformative as the Industrial Revolution may have been to impact society and humanity, AI has the potential to provoke deeper questions about the human condition, including what and how does AI relate to concepts like the human soul (*nafs*) and one's intrinsic state of being (*fitra*). Unlike the Industrial Revolution, AI may challenge human beings to reexamine, or perhaps for some examine anew, what does it mean to be human as a means of distinction from AI. The Enlightenment philosopher Rene Decartes declared, "Cogito, Ergo Sum," i.e. "I think, therefore I am." If AI develops "consciousness" and autonomous thinking, then it could conceivably claim to "be" because it, too, thinks. Until now, human beings could presume the definition of personhood as self-evident, perhaps being confined merely to distinguishing humans from other animal species. AI will require a deeper deliberation on what makes humans unique if the ability to produce knowledge is no longer a monopoly they enjoy.

Historically, the custodians of the definition of personhood have been theologians. They have been imbued with the ability and task to interpret the divine imperative for human beings, including the parameters and purpose intended for creation by the Creator. Now, perhaps more than ever, they need to affirm and assert what it means to be a conscious being with a conscience. It will require them to engage

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with the creators of the new technology, not all of whom are gorged with sinister intent. In fact, many are displaying a humility by acknowledging the dangers of AI running amok. Those that have decried the unpredictable results of AI models and scenarios have rightly sought to place curbs on AI research until certain safeguards can be implemented. They have also implored engagement with theologians, ethicists and philosophers who can discuss and define guardrails and regulations on AI's capacity and capabilities. The questions that remain unanswered are whether such engagement will in fact occur and just as significantly, whether there is still time to learn from and apply the prescriptives from that interaction.

The ability for AI to emulate and in some cases surpass human intelligence is remarkable to say the least. Predictive AI allows for medical science to delve into areas previously unimaginable and with its depth of exploration, capable of saving lives and offering therapeutic treatment more quickly and successfully than ever before. It is quite possible that people will begin to rely on the efficacy of AI in its medical application to approach the level of faith. Such a prospect allows for a rather tantalizing possibility, beyond the obvious scenario of people transferring faith from the divine to that of the *deus et machina*. Faith in AI could have another, unintended casualty as well: atheism. If people who eschew belief in a divine presence start to place their faith in AI, the choice of non-belief disappears as a matter of course.

Irrespective of the myriad inquiries that remain as to the various consequences and impacts of AI on humanity, be they beneficial or otherwise, a few indisputable realities exist. The awesome power and potential of AI will transform the world in ways that may yet be outside our comprehension or level of comfort. But the future of AI, at its elemental level, will be decided by who has agency in not just its development, but also in its procurement. The Industrial Revolution offers a history of scientific and technological triumph, but it also chronicles some of the darkest eras of human history in the violence and brutality it yielded and also required as oxygen for its own nourishment. The destinies of hundreds of millions were determined and dictated by a precious few; AI has the prospects for a similarly disproportionate ratio between the impactors and the impacted. Current debates about the fears that AI might fall into the hands of "bad actors" is both poignant, yet somewhat hypocritical. The proverbial hand wringing is coming from some of those countries that may well be among those bad actors. There is also the presence of selective indignation; while the United States warns of the dangers of AI being misused by China, Iran and Russia, it conveniently exempts countries where AI is already being used, and in nefarious ways, such as India and Israel. The only consistency that can be discerned is the potentially and disproportionately dangerous impact on the Muslim community as Islamophobia can become deeply embedded into AI, especially if Muslims are excluded from how AI is crafted and deployed.

A thousand years ago, Muslims ushered in not only the so-called Golden Age of Islam with a plethora of knowledge generation; they also made an indelible mark and contribution for humanity. Such knowledge was in part a religious imperative and served to affirm divine inspiration, not, as occurred in the West several centuries later, a mission to marginalize or disprove the divine. Islamic knowledge was the culmination of the contributions of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, whether the absorption of the "zero" from Hindic civilization or the scholarship of Musa bin Maimon (Maimonides), the great Jewish Cordoban. New innovations were painstakingly considered for their societal impact, weighing costs and benefits as well as risks and harms. Inventions and discoveries were for the betterment of humankind, not intended for its destruction or domination over others. Muslims showed, time and again, that knowledge, science and innovation could and should be a force for good and a benefit to humanity, not a source of exploitation and destruction. That ethos must be at the cornerstone of how one must approach AI. The absence of the Muslim voice from the future of AI will deprive the world of a legacy and tradition of science and humanity being in concert with, not in opposition, to one another. But perhaps equally, if not more critically important is the need for Muslim involvement in AI to minimize its potential to target Muslims by amplifying, codifying and further institutionalizing Islamophobia.

AI is an unavoidable reality that certainly has a host of beneficial applications, some that are currently occurring, with many more to come. But it would be improper to assess a new technology even if it has a net positive benefit to humanity, if its negative impact is high, heavy and irreversible. AI has that latter potential even without nefarious actors trying to fulfill that outcome, but the prospect of greater harm through intentional action must be prevented at all cost. The vigilance and input of a fourth of humanity, especially a segment of humanity that contends with Islamophobic or Islamophobically motivated deployments of AI, is vital not only for its own future, but that of humanity as a whole. A millennium ago, Muslims introduced the world to the word, *algorithm*. It is incumbent upon the world to allow them to be fully involved in determining its scope, scale and service for the future.

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AI, Islamophobia and the Struggle for a Just Society

Mogamat Reederwan Craayenstein's central proposition in this piece is thus: we must fight for better outcomes from AI and public institutions, but we cannot confuse a fairer algorithm with a just society. Moving beyond this paradigm is essential not simply for justice, but survival.

This contribution will show that the problem is more than a fairer algorithm. Yes, we have to fight for more just AI outcomes. We are asked to celebrate those small victories. But, we are asked to fight for more than that, a just society.

In this essay, I shall refer to anti-Muslim racism (Islamophobia) and to how it intersects with anti-black racism, a feminism broader than that in the global north, class struggle, and xenophobia. Islamophobia = racism + power. The Muslim covers all these categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and national origin. It is also epistemological, as our brother Ramon Grosfoguel has argued. Other decolonial thinkers concur with him.

Our starting point is the ordinary lives that existed before racist institutions classified them, and the ways AI can amplify inherited injustices, moving towards a practical programme of community investigation, organisation and democratic control. Its destination is the longer struggle to make justice, not suspicion, exclusion or administrative convenience, the organising principle of social life.

In grassroots struggles, every immediate victory matters. A corrected decision, a restored livelihood, or the withdrawal of a discriminatory system is never insignificant. But those victories must also create opportunities to question and change the rules themselves. They must help us further to conscientise, organise and mobilise for a bigger struggle.

BEFORE AI, THERE WAS THE RULE

I begin somewhere unusual for a discussion about artificial intelligence.

Before the machine, the computer, the algorithm, the police database, the facial-recognition camera, and the employment-screening system.

"In the beginning was the Word" (Gospel of John 1:1). In this context, the Word is not AI. It is the human being (al-Insan). A mother preparing breakfast before leaving for work. A father wondering whether there will be enough money at the end of the month. A child struggling with a school assignment. A young woman walking down the street, wearing a hijab she has chosen freely. An older man on his way to the mosque. A student trying to understand the world, beginning to discover that things are not always as they appear. These are ordinary people living ordinary lives. They have families. They love. They quarrel. They laugh. They worry. They sometimes make mistakes. Some are struggling with their faith. Others are discovering its depths. Some are arguing about politics. Others are debating whether to wash or wipe their feet during wudhu. Some are caring for elderly parents. Some are hoping to have children. Some are wondering how they will pay the rent. They are not waiting for an institution to certify that they are human.

They were (are) human long before an institution decided that their appearance, religion, language, neighbourhood, or political opinions might make them suspicious. An institution that said they are less than human. WEB du Bois wrote a celebrated text on the importance of the colour line. Every decolonial theorist stood on that line and decoded some of its worst implications. Fanon cuts deep because it goes to the heart of modernity. It is the line between the human and the non-human. Islamophobia instantiates the horror of that fracturing of the human as a category. But we are to start there and feel the painful weight of history.

That human being was coded, judged and classified by people in power. People who were descendants of Iblis. They had the power to shape, stimulate and constrain the daily lives of the human beings we started with. Class, gender, ethnicity, religion and national origin are some of the indices they used to code and judge. That is institutional racism because it is a basic social structure that determines how a society functions. It is beyond the goodwill or ill-intent of individuals.

The human being was coded, prodded and judged by people in power within institutions. The human being runs into a wall of institutional racism.

First came the human being, then institutional racism, which created the rules that govern us. And now, there is AI.

The child before the security file

In Lancashire, in December 2015, a ten-year-old Muslim child wrote that he lived in a terrorist house. He had meant to write *terraced house*.

His family subsequently described the police visit to their home as a deeply distressing response to a child's schoolwork. Police said the homework raised other safeguarding concerns, beyond the spelling mistake. No further action was taken.

No artificial intelligence was involved in that incident. The precise circumstances surrounding the referral were disputed. This is likely because the referrers were embarrassed to have been caught out. It was not a mistake on their part. This is how institutional racism is meant to operate. The good intentions of those involved in the referral are irrelevant.

Consider what the controversy reveals.

Words written by a child had passed from a classroom into an institutional process involving teachers, a head teacher, police and social services. Someone had interpreted the words and decided they required attention. That person had judged the threshold at which ordinary schoolwork should become an official concern.

That is the world that AI enters. AI does not arrive in an empty room.

We begin with a society that has already developed ways of seeing, categorising, and responding to people. The work of Sivanandan and the Institute of Race Relations gives us a valuable history of the earliest struggles. Earlier than that, we have the struggle against the UK's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave trade, which is constitutive, not supplementary, to UK society.

AI enters this institutionally racist society. The stance of those in power on the genocide, ethnic cleansing and Apartheid between the river and the sea tells us about racism, power and Islamophobia in the UK.

Institutional racist interpretations are translated into computational rules, distributed across thousands of decisions, and presented as objective assessments of risk.

How does a parent discover why their child has been classified in a particular way? Then they find armed police surrounding the house, banging on the door. A child's slip of the tongue. That parent is told that the system is neutral. It is nothing personal. Entirely objective. People are merely doing what the data tell them to do. The teacher, the principal, the governing board, the police and social services were only doing their jobs.

We have questions to ask.

Who produced the data?

Who decided which information was important, wrote the rules, defined the risk, gave the machine its authority and will answer when the machine is wrong?

Institutional racism on steroids

Proponents argue that AI will speed up administration, make policing more effective, reduce human error, make recruitment more objective, and improve decisions. Sometimes it may.

We should welcome genuine improvements that protect people and expand their opportunities.

Efficiency is not justice. A public institution can become more efficient at doing something fundamentally wrong. A system can classify people consistently and still classify them unjustly. And an algorithm can be mathematically accurate in reproducing relationships that should never have been accepted as legitimate.

In 1999, the Macpherson Inquiry confronted institutional racism in British policing. In 2023, Baroness Casey's review identified institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia within the Metropolitan Police.

In 2025, Amnesty International published *Automated Racism*. Its report was supported by many NGOs. Its investigation found that at least thirty-three British police forces had used predictive profiling or crime-risk technologies. Amnesty warned that the archival records and institutional practices feeding these systems could reproduce and intensify racial inequality.

The mechanism. A community is heavily policed; therefore, it generates more police records, which feed into a system that predicts where police attention should be concentrated. The system may then direct more attention towards the same community. More policing. More records. More predictions. Underpinning this process is institutional racism.

The institutionally racist past begins to justify its own reproduction. The results for the people under surveillance are usually catastrophic.

A neighbourhood becomes a problem. A young person becomes a risk. An association becomes a possible indicator of future criminality. Practising of Islam is flagged as a risk of radicalisation.

Now I ask you:

Where is the human being in this process? Where is the opportunity to challenge the basic assumption? Where is the community's democratic authority? Who benefits from the increased efficiency?

We must be very careful about what we claim. Not every algorithm discriminates, and not every racial disparity is evidence of Islamophobia or anti-Black racism. Public institutions have legitimate duties to protect people from violence. The same people who claim to protect the citizens of the UK from violence are the same people who export violence abroad. National security and manufactured fear are often invoked to keep power and its apparatus beyond transparency and accountability.

But none of those national security qualifications justifies placing consequential technologies beyond scrutiny. We have seen recently cases where MI6 and MI5 have been in the news, one interfering with court processes and the other deliberate lying in court.

If a society is institutionally racist, it would be astonishing if we assumed that automating its records and procedures would, by itself, create an anti-racist society.

AI has the potential to put institutional racism on steroids and turbocharge its capacity to classify and manage populations. Perhaps most dangerously, to make socially produced judgements appear independent of the human beings who created them.

These concerns are grounded in the valuable work of the Institute of Race Relations, Runnymede Trust, Amnesty International, Liberty (before she became a baroness), and, of course, the inimitable work of the IHRC (especially on Islamophobia and Genocide).

The world that the machine cannot see

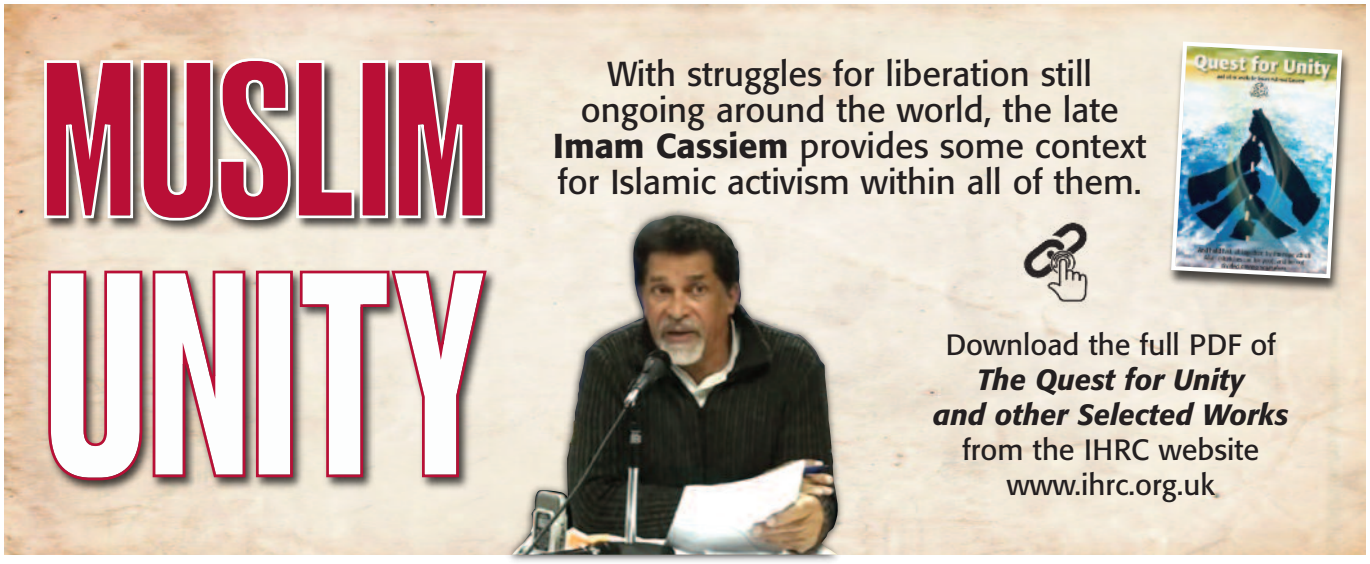
If we subject the patterns of behaviour that emerge from these reports to the scrutiny of writers like Toni Morrison, Hilary Mantel, Arundhati Roy, and Ali Shariati, and then to decolonial scholars familiar with the people who work in and with IHRC, we gain further insights which might be useful. For the sake of the flow of the argument I shall speak as if these writers are looking at the topic. I am not claiming that they had examined the subject before.

Toni Morrison helps us grapple with what we may lose even in our own criticism. We can become so absorbed in investigating the machinery of racism that human beings disappear from our account. They become victims, case numbers, complainants, research participants. Yet they have lives beyond the injuries inflicted upon them. What does the official account, and sometimes our own perspective, leave out?

A Muslim woman does not become a complete human being when a court rules that she may wear her headscarf at work. She was already a complete human being. A young Black man does not become a person when his name is removed from a police database. He was a person before anyone placed it there. No machine can know a person's full life from an assemblage of administrative records.

This is the danger Toni Morrison warns us about through her work on language, representation and the recovery of human life.

Frantz Fanon might ask what happens when a person begins to anticipate how a racist institution will interpret them? Imposed rules shape, constrain, and stimulate their sense of who they are and their place in the world. The student becomes hesitant to speak in class. The young person thinks twice before joining a lawful demonstration. The worshipper wonders whether ordinary religious observance will be



misunderstood. The person learns to see themselves through the lens of someone else's suspicion.

The institution has entered the inner life. Artificial intelligence may now extend that possibility. Even before the system reaches an adverse decision, people may begin to change their behaviour because they fear how their actions will be interpreted or recorded.

This is one reason our struggle cannot be reduced to correcting computer errors.

We are fighting for the freedom of human beings to live full lives without continually having to anticipate the suspicions of institutions.

The people who inhabit the institutions

Hilary Mantel teaches us something equally important.

Institutions do not make decisions without people. People inhabit them. This is a well-argued position in Institution Theory. People write the policies, approve the budgets, appoint the consultants and sign the contracts. They determine the operational requirements and choose which safeguards will be accepted.

Mantel's historical literary imagination takes us into those rooms.

What if we enter one? A committee is considering facial-recognition technology. The experts explain that a particular setting produces fewer incorrect matches affecting certain demographic groups.

But there is a problem. The revised setting yields fewer leads for investigations. Some officials argue that this undermines operational capability. Others bring up concerns about unequal risks imposed on innocent people.

What happens next?

In Britain, a December 2025 report described police forces lobbying to keep a facial-recognition system despite evidence of demographic bias.

A change intended to reduce bias had also reduced the number of potential investigative matches.

The conflict was not simply technical. It concerned which consequences the institution considered acceptable. Whose inconvenience mattered? Whose safety mattered? Whose rights were negotiable? Who was represented when those decisions were made?

We should ask these questions before every public authority purchases consequential AI systems. We must know who was in the room.

But as Arundhati Roy reminds us, we must also ask who built the room, who owns the machinery, and who gets paid.

Follow the money. Follow the power.

Artificial intelligence does not exist outside a political economy. Technology companies develop systems. Public institutions purchase them. Consultants establish technical specifications. Managers define performance requirements. Contracts distribute money, control and authority. Ordinary people frequently appear within these transactions only as data.

A person working in a technology company may never meet the neighbourhood residents whose lives its product affects. A procurement officer may never meet the family whose livelihood depends on the resulting decision. But they meet through the contract. They meet through the training data. They meet through the algorithmic classification. Arundhati Roy urges us to keep those connections visible. She would also suggest that we keep track of the borders drawn by institutional racism that underpins AI. Class, gender, ethnicity, religion and national origin are the fault-lines that structural racism weaponises and AI amplifies. We have to be aware of the borders, for they will point to where the crimes are being committed. At the same time, we have to build solidarity across these borders.

Aníbal Quijano's account of coloniality points to the older history of racial classifications through which modern relations of power were organised.

Walter Mignolo asks whose knowledge has become the apparently neutral standard.

Ramón Grosfoguel asks whether Muslim intellectual traditions are treated as legitimate ways of knowing, or merely as subjects to be interpreted by someone else.

And Nelson Maldonado-Torres asks what happens when the credibility and humanity of racialised populations are persistently placed in question.

These questions belong together.

Institutions decide what counts as knowledge. Its experts design a system. The system classifies a population. The population may have little meaningful authority to challenge either the information or the purpose for which it is used.

This is not simply a problem of poor representation. It is a problem of unequal power. We should scrutinise every company entrusted with consequential public decisions. We should scrutinise government departments as rigorously as private contractors.

We should demand to know what these systems cost, what they achieve, what alternatives exist, and who bears the burden of their failures.

We should also ask why such advanced technology is available to identify risks in impoverished communities while resources to address the social conditions that contribute to insecurity remain inadequate. Why is there money for AI and everything else, yet no money for public housing, better education, a fully funded NHS, and socially funded utilities and public transport? We don't have money to spend on the causes of precarity, but we do have money to increase surveillance of those whose precarity is socially, politically, economically, and technologically manufactured.

These questions take us beyond technology, into the political economy and the moral and spiritual economy of "our" decisions about technology.

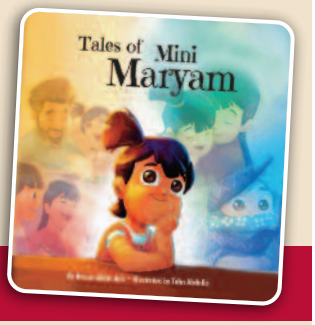


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Who gets to define the Muslim?

Our classic grounded theory has made an important discovery. Islamophobia is not only the portrayal of Muslims as dangerous.

It also operates through the exceptional conditions imposed on Muslim participation in society.

The Muslim woman may be told that her religious dress is incompatible with a professional appearance. The Muslim charity may be required to demonstrate exceptional political loyalty to the Charity Commission. A pro-Israel charity is exempt from almost any oversight. The Muslim scholar may find that their intellectual tradition is not regarded as a legitimate contribution to a wider debate. The Muslim activist may find lawful political dissent portrayed as dangerous. The solicitor who represents a client deemed to be a terrorist now also becomes a threat to national security. That solicitor is arrested, and lawyer-client privilege is deemed irrelevant.

Sometimes Muslims are invited into an institution, but only on the condition that they accept the institution's existing understanding of what makes a Muslim acceptable. The good Muslim. The bad Muslim. The moderate Muslim. The extremist Muslim. The compliant Muslim. The troublesome Muslim.

Who created these boxes? Why should Muslims be required to organise their lives around them?

Gayatri Spivak teaches us to examine the language itself. She draws critically from de Man and Derrida. Spivak shows the importance of close reading, recognising the instability of apparently settled meanings and attending to what a text excludes.

When an institution calls itself neutral, we must ask what it regards as normal. When it labels a religious practice an exception, we must ask who set the ordinary standard. When it invites community representatives to speak, we must ask whether it is prepared to listen.

And we who claim to speak for Muslim communities must also examine ourselves. Which Muslims have we heard? There are some Muslims who do not want to touch some of us with a bargepole.

Which women? Which young people? Which poor communities?

Isn't it our responsibility to engage with people who disagree with our religious or political interpretations? Our task is to persuade permanently.

María Lugones shows how race, gender, and colonial power become entangled. Institutional racism shapes how society understands and operationalises class, gender, ethnicity, religion and national origin.

There is no single experience that exhausts the meaning of being Muslim. Our movements must be vigilant about the silences in our own discourse as we are fighting Islamophobia.

Spivak's engagement with European deconstructive philosophy creates a productive tension with decolonial thinkers who question European claims to universal knowledge.

We need not hide that tension. It can teach us intellectual humility. We must learn to surrender to the text, listen to the person, examine the institution, and remain prepared to recognise that our own understanding was inadequate.

A fairer algorithm is an unqualified good.

I want to make something absolutely clear.

We must fight for every possible improvement in the lives of people harmed by discriminatory systems. If a worker has been wrongly excluded from employment, we should fight to restore their livelihood. If an algorithm has misidentified somebody, we should fight to correct the error. If a public database has unjustly classified people, we should challenge it. If independent audits can reduce racial disparities, we should demand those audits.

If a technology can be redesigned to provide a fairer outcome, we should fight for that redesign.

These are not minor reforms. They matter to people with mortgages, rent, children, parents and ordinary responsibilities.

In 2024, Pa Edrissa Manjang reached a settlement following legal proceedings over Uber Eats facial-verification checks that had prevented him from accessing work.

The proceedings raised allegations of racial discrimination. The settlement did not establish such discrimination through a court finding.

But the case demonstrates that an individual can challenge a consequential automated process and obtain a remedy.

In 2024, the Metropolitan Police also discontinued its Gangs Matrix after years of investigation, criticism, and calls for accountability. This was one of the more shocking uses of IT. The lives of black people, including Muslims, were turned upside down by The Matrix. Stopping the Met Police from trapping lives in The Matrix was an important victory. These are meaningful developments.

We should learn from them and build upon them.

For the person whose livelihood is restored, the victory is not small.

For the family relieved of an unjustified classification, the victory is not small. For a community gaining an enforceable safeguard, the victory is not small. We must never become so absorbed in the language of structural transformation that we

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dismiss the immediate needs of people living under injustice.

But there is another question.

What happened to the rule? Did it change? What happened to the institution? Did its decision-making authority become more accountable? What happened to the relationships through which inequality was produced?

Can the same injustice reappear through another technology, another classification, another administrative procedure?

This is where our struggle must deepen.

A just algorithm may still not be justice.

Suppose we create an algorithm that treats every person consistently according to its instructions. Suppose we eliminate measurable discriminatory error within the chosen task. Suppose it becomes transparent, independently audited and subject to valid appeal. All of this would be welcome.

But imagine that the algorithm is administering an institution whose underlying purpose remains unjust. It may fulfil that purpose fairly according to the institution's own measures.

Yet the purpose itself may need transformation.

That is why a just algorithm, understood simply as one that applies its rules fairly, may still fall short of justice.

We need to distinguish between making a decision fairer and deciding whether the decision ought to be made at all.

Enrique Dussel urges us to start with the people harmed or excluded by existing institutions and consider building alternatives.

Fanon warns that changing an unequal institution's personnel or procedures need not transform the social relationships that keep its power.

Quijano reminds us that historical structures can survive dramatic changes in political form.

Shariati invites us to consider how knowledge becomes socially responsible action.

Their observations converge. We must seek better outcomes and seek equitable inclusion.

But ***our struggle cannot finish with admission into arrangements that continue to reproduce structural inequality. The people affected must gain meaningful power over the purposes and rules of the institutions that govern their lives.***

That is a larger project. It is not simply technological. It is political, intellectual, ethical, educational and social.

That is a struggle over generations. It will necessarily be slow and suffer many setbacks.

The Qur'an calls us to go beyond administering injustice.

For Muslims, this struggle has a deep moral foundation.

The Qur'an declares in Surah al-Isra, verse 70, that Allah has honoured the children of Adam. Not simply those who belong to our religion. The children of Adam.

In Surah al-Hujurat, verse 13, Allah reminds us that humanity has been made into peoples and tribes so that we may know one another.

Li-ta raf .

To know one another. Not to reduce one another to permanent suspicion.

Not to build systems in which difference becomes a reason for exclusion. To know one another.

In verse 12 of the same surah, Allah warns against unjustified suspicion and spying.

In Surah al-Nisa, verse 135, we are commanded to stand firmly for justice, even against ourselves, our parents, and those closest to us. Justice even when it requires us to challenge our own interests and prejudices.

Our own institutions.

Our own movement.

In Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 8, we are instructed not to let hostility toward others lead us into injustice.

And Allah tells us that justice is closer to taqwa. Be just, for it is closest to taqwa.

These injunctions impose a responsibility upon us. We cannot oppose discriminatory treatment of Muslims while condoning discriminatory treatment of others.

We cannot demand a fair hearing for ourselves and deny it to people with whom we disagree.

We cannot condemn the abuse of institutional power outside our communities while refusing to confront abuse within them.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, taught that we must help the person who is oppressed.

But when asked how we should help the oppressor, he explained that we help by preventing the oppression.

What an extraordinary ethical principle.

It directs us to restrain wrongdoing rather than celebrate the humiliation of those responsible.

In Sahih Muslim, we are taught to respond to wrongdoing according to our ability: by action, by speech, and, at the very least, through moral rejection.

Our response must remain principled and organised. Power does not concede unless the demand can hurt.

We need to develop institutions that do not depend on humiliating others.

We need a public morality in which justice is desired, defended and practised.

There is law.

And there is justice.

Law is indispensable. It can protect the weak against arbitrary power.

But law is not the same as justice.

A law may perpetuate injustice. A formally neutral procedure may yield unequal consequences.

A court victory may remove a particular harm while leaving its social causes intact.

If we want a just society, we must do more than train machines.

We must develop a desire for justice among people.

Not justice for ourselves alone.

Justice for everyone.

From knowledge to collective power

And this brings us to Ali Shariati.

Shariati's socially responsible intellectual, the *roshanfekr*, is not simply someone who possesses academic qualifications. It is somebody who understands their historical circumstances and accepts responsibility for changing them. That responsibility cannot remain confined to universities, professional associations or research institutes. Our communities possess knowledge that institutions frequently overlook.

A mother knows how a school interacts with her family.

A worker knows how an employment decision affects their livelihood.

A community activist knows which neighbourhoods receive constant police attention.

A trade unionist understands how organisational power can be challenged.

A student may know how to test an AI model.

A lawyer understands the remedies available to people wronged by public or private decisions.

Each possesses something the others need.

What might become possible if we brought these forms of knowledge together?

Imagine a community hall.

Around the table sit teachers, unemployed matriculants, mothers, fathers, students, researchers, trade unionists, lawyers, religious scholars and people with no religious affiliation.

Some have encountered discriminatory institutions.

Some possess technical expertise.

Others have years of experience organising communities.

They begin with a question.

What public systems make consequential decisions about people in our area?

Which institutions use them? Who approved them? What data do they rely upon? What happens when they make mistakes?

And who can challenge those mistakes?

From those questions, something begins to grow.

Not simply a research project.

A community acquiring the capacity to

understand and hold institutions accountable.

This is what our work should help build. IRR, Runnymede Trust, and IHRC's work must be part of our communities' grassroots vocabulary. This meeting should take place in our mosques.

Let us form the structures.

I propose that we begin creating a grassroots observatory for AI, institutional racism and Islamophobia, working in solidarity with other communities affected by discriminatory systems. The Counter-Islamophobia Kit (covering eight European nations, including the UK, Germany and France) can begin that discussion in our communities.

It should not be a prestigious institution whose reports are produced above the heads of the people it claims to represent. The CIK discussed at higher levels is an unqualified good. It makes the case. It holds those in power to account. However, we should go below our NGO structures.

It should belong to the communities whose interests it serves. Let us begin in schools, mosques, community halls, libraries, universities and trade-union offices. Let us create study circles to understand artificial intelligence. Let us train volunteers to document incidents carefully and protect the privacy of those who come forward. Let us build relationships with technical experts prepared to work with people rather than merely write reports about them.

Let us use freedom-of-information legislation, where available, to investigate procurement, risk assessments and institutional decisions. Let us demand independent audits of consequential AI systems. Let us demand accessible explanations, meaningful appeals and remedies. Let us challenge the use of predictive policing and biometric surveillance that cannot be justified under human-rights standards.

And let us insist that affected communities have meaningful roles in decisions about whether to develop, purchase, deploy, modify, or withdraw systems.

Not merely a ceremonial consultation.

Not merely an invitation to comment after the contract has been signed.

Real authority.

The authority to ask whether the system is necessary.

The authority to challenge its assumptions.

The authority to examine alternatives.

And where the evidence demands it, the authority to insist that a harmful system must not be used.

But our structures must remain democratic.

They must include women, youth, workers, migrants, different religious traditions, and people who challenge our own assumptions.

We must develop the capacity to investigate, not merely the confidence to denounce.

We must be as careful with evidence as we are passionate about justice.

A claim that cannot survive scrutiny weakens the struggle.

A negative case is not an embarrassment. It teaches us where our explanation must change.

A safeguard that succeeds should be studied.

A reform that fails should be studied.

We must hear people who disagree with our proposed solutions.

We are not trying to replace one unaccountable authority with another.

We are trying to create a public capacity for justice.

The struggle must change us, too.

We must confront something else.

Our fight cannot be directed only at machines, corporations or the state.

It must also change how we see one another.

We have inherited societies organised through divisions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and nationality.

Some divisions were deliberately constructed to sustain unequal power.

Others have accumulated through centuries of social conflict and institutional practice.

They shape the lives of people who may never have met one another.

Our task is not to erase human difference.

The Qur'an gives us another possibility: to know one another across difference.

A society in which difference enriches human life instead of determining whose humanity is doubted.

A society in which Muslim and Jewish, Christian and Hindu, believer and nonbeliever, Black and white, migrant and citizen, women and men, can demand justice without first asking whether those being treated unjustly belong to their own group.

Justice cannot be any community's private property.

It must become a public aspiration.

Something people desire not merely when they are harmed, but when they see others harmed.

We must develop a popular will for a just algorithm.

But we must also recognise that a just algorithm is not enough.

The deeper task is a popular will for a just society.

That is the long epistemological and moral project.

Changing how people know.

Changing what people regard as normal.

Changing whose knowledge counts.

Changing which forms of suffering are considered tolerable.

Changing what institutions regard as success.

And changing the relationships through which people exercise power over one another.

There will be setbacks.

There will be failures.

We will sometimes make mistaken



judgements.

Some reforms will prove inadequate. Some institutions will resist. Some technologies we believed harmful may prove improvable. Some safeguards we thought adequate will fail.

We must learn.

We must correct ourselves.

We must begin again.

Samuel Beckett gave us the extraordinary instruction: *Try again. Fail again. Fail better.*

We need that willingness to persevere without pretending that failure is victory.

Failure must teach us something.

We should return from each unsuccessful campaign knowing more, more effectively organized and better able to recognise what we previously failed to see.

This struggle will require patience.

But patience must never become an excuse for passivity.

The poetry of the future

Karl Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that the nineteenth-century social revolution could not draw its poetry from the past, only from the future.

He understood something important.

A movement seeking a different social order cannot live indefinitely on inherited slogans.

It must discover forms of thought and action equal to the world it hopes to create.

What, then, is the poetry of our future?

Is it a society in which every child is assigned a risk score before discovering what they might become?

A society in which every neighbourhood is predicted, watched and managed?

A society in which poor people are processed efficiently but remain poor?

A society in which Muslims receive more favourable labels while the institutions defining their legitimacy remain untouched?

Surely not.

Our poetry of the future must begin with another vision.

A child walks into school and is encouraged to learn without being reduced to a possible threat.

A worker receives fair treatment and has a meaningful way to challenge an unjust decision.

A woman walks down the street wearing a hijab without her religious identity becoming a reason for hostility.

A community is protected from violence without unjustified surveillance.

A public institution understands that its authority comes with responsibility to the people it serves.

A technological system is introduced because credible evidence shows it can advance legitimate public purposes, and because those affected have meaningful means to hold it accountable.

A society knows that its people are more than the sum of their data.

And a movement understands that the machine cannot grant human beings dignity.

This is the poetry of the future we must begin writing in the present.

Not merely through speeches.

Through institutions.

Through schools.

Through research.

Through patient community organisation.

Through the willingness to face powerful institutions with evidence, courage and collective resolve.

By creating new forms of public accountability.

Through the struggle to change both the rules and the social relationships from which the rules arise.

Our final responsibility

The issue before us is not whether we should welcome artificial intelligence or reject it outright.

The issue is who controls it, what purposes it serves, what histories it inherits, and whether people possess meaningful authority over its consequences.

We have every reason to fight for better algorithms.

We have every reason to demand fairer public institutions.

Every reason to insist upon accountability, transparency, independent scrutiny and effective remedies.

Each of these is an unqualified good.

But we must not allow those gains to become the limits of our imagination

Our aim is not merely for Muslims to receive a better deal within institutions whose foundations remain unjust.

Our aim is justice for all.

Justice across differences of class, gender, ethnicity, religion and national origin.

Justice that can withstand the test of our own interests and pre-existing commitments.

Justice that is popularly desired by ordinary people and not merely written into institutional policies.

Justice that changes how we recognise and treat one another.

We must organise.

We must learn.

We must challenge.

And we must build.

Let the student bring their knowledge.

Let the mother bring her experience.

Let the worker bring their understanding of institutional power.

Let the teacher bring their love of learning.

Let the researcher bring evidence.

Let the lawyer bring the instruments of accountability.

Let the community bring its capacity for solidarity.

And let every one of them remain willing to learn from the others.

These are the lives before institutional racism.

Lives exist beyond the categories institutions impose.

Lives no machine can adequately contain.

Those lives have never required permission to be human.

They require justice.

They require freedom.

They require the opportunity to flourish.

And they require us to take responsibility for the kind of society we are building.

Before artificial intelligence, there was the rule.

Before the rule, human beings made it.

Now human beings can challenge it, change it, and build something more just in its place.

That is our work.

That is our struggle.

And if we are serious about justice, that work begins with us.

What do we do with AI that poses an existential risk not only to black people, to Muslims, but to the human species as a whole? We have AI engineers who are blowing the whistle on technology that could wipe out all of us.

What does it mean to be Muslim in that catastrophic context? What does it mean to be human?

Before AI, there was an institutionally racist rule. We must fight the rules and the institutions that make them.

After AI, democracy might not exist, and all these implications we are considering would be deemed irrelevant. The Tech Republic and Techno-feudalism offer insights into that debate. Moreover, the Tech Republic might even be a post-human society. This fight against AI and Islamophobia is important. The organisers are commended for this programme.

As we unfold the AI programme's implications across multiple arenas of struggle, we must also prepare for the post-AI dystopia. There might not be any human beings left. Who will organise that conference and the grassroots conscientising, organising, and mobilising?

Our struggle around AI and Islamophobia is an important step in the movement that we need to save the human species from extinction.

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"If It Weren't for Iran…":

The Role of the Islamic Republic of Iran During the Aggression Against Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995)

Enver Rizvo argues that the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the war in Bosnia of 1992 – 95 was crucial in preventing greater catastrophe and genocide. Why then, is this support being written out of Bosnia's history?

Relations between Iran and Bosnia and Herzegovina are complex and multifaceted, encompassing political, economic, cultural, and religious cooperation. Despite their geographical distance, the two countries share a history of relations shaped by developments over several decades. These relations date back to the period when Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of Yugoslavia but gained particular momentum during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s and continued to develop in the post-war period. Viewed from the perspective of historical distance, it can be argued that the course of Bosnia and Herzegovina's history would undoubtedly have been different had it not been for the assistance provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran during the aggression against the country.

Prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, relations between Iran and Bosnia and Herzegovina were conducted within the broader framework of relations between Iran and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Yugoslavia maintained good relations with monarchical Iran, particularly during the era of the Non-Aligned Movement. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, both countries were active members of the Movement, which promoted independence from the great powers and emphasized cooperation among developing countries. During this period, the two countries established substantial economic ties, which continued to expand following the visit of Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić to Iran.

However, the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was not particularly well received in Yugoslavia. Following the outbreak of the Revolution, a number of Yugoslav journalists, correspondents, reporters, and political scientists sought to explain the emerging phenomenon in Iran to the Yugoslav public. Initially, their analyses focused primarily on the social causes that had led to the Revolution, while subsequent accounts increasingly examined its theological foundations. Ultimately, the Islamic Revolution was viewed unfavourably in socialist Yugoslavia, where it was perceived as reactionary and anachronistic. Of particular concern to Yugoslav observers was the prospect of its ideological and political *export* beyond Iran's borders.

The Yugoslav authorities' fear of a potential *export* of the Islamic Revolution became particularly evident during the Sarajevo Trial of 1983, in which Alija Izetbegović, the future Chairman of the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stood trial alongside eleven other Muslim intellectuals on charges of counter-revolutionary activity and seeking to establish an Islamic state. The indictment linked contacts with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the visit of five defendants to the country in January 1983 to the group's alleged political objectives, while Alija Izetbegović's Islamic Declaration was presented as one of the key pieces of evidence. In this way, connections with revolutionary Iran became part of the authorities' broader narrative concerning the alleged threat of Islamic political influence in Yugoslavia.

During the war imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran by Saddam Hussein's regime, Yugoslavia tended to favour the Iraqi side, with which it shared a greater degree of ideological affinity than with the increasingly influential Islamic Revolution. However, a certain shift occurred by the end of the decade. In February 1989, Ali Khamenei, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, paid a three-day official visit to Yugoslavia, during which he met with Yugoslav officials to discuss the strengthening of political and economic relations. The talks focused on expanding economic cooperation, including increasing Iranian oil exports to Yugoslavia, and a memorandum of cooperation was signed. During his visit, Khamenei also travelled to Sarajevo, where he met with representatives of the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia, led by Reis-ul-Ulema Husein ef. Mujić.

However, in 1989, events both around the world and in Bosnia and Herzegovina began to change rapidly. A few months after his visit to Yugoslavia, Ali Khamenei became the Supreme Leader (*Rahbar*) of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Bosnia and Herzegovina, meanwhile, embarked on the path towards independence. In September 1992, under entirely different circumstances for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recalled his visit and his "walk through the streets of Sarajevo" in a speech delivered during a meeting with participants in a seminar for imams and khatibs leading Friday prayers.

Bosnia and Herzegovina gains independence

By the mid-1980s, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) had entered a deep political and economic crisis, accompanied by growing tensions among its republics. Under Slobodan Milošević, Serbian leadership increasingly sought to centralize power, while the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), where Serbs were disproportionately represented, expanded its political role and challenged the authority of federal institutions. The disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia became evident at its 14th Extraordinary Congress in January 1990, effectively ending its existence as a unified political organization. By the end of that year, multiparty elections had been held across Yugoslavia. In the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the nationalist parties representing Muslims, Serbs, and Croats—the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)—won a landslide victory over other political options at all levels of government.

Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991, following referendums in which the majority of voters supported independence. After a three-month moratorium, both republics formally implemented their declarations on 8 October 1991, marking a decisive step in the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

The political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was also deteriorating. On 15 October 1991, the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a decision on the republic's sovereignty. This was opposed by Serbian forces, led by the Serb Democratic

Party (SDS), which had already begun organizing separate Serbian political institutions and structures in order to effectively resist steps such as the declaration of Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence. They established the Assembly of the Serbian People, which, on 9 January 1992, proclaimed the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in parts of the country, with the intention of remaining within Yugoslavia, which at that point consisted only of Serbia and Montenegro.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the republican authorities in Sarajevo, in accordance with the position of the European Community, moved toward holding a referendum in which citizens would decide whether they supported an independent and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina. Throughout this period, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) continued deploying its forces across the territory of the republic, which was moving toward independence, and increasingly placed itself at the service of Serbian forces.

The referendum and Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to independence were accompanied by a series of incidents and obstructions by the aforementioned Serbian side, which opposed them. These incidents became increasingly frequent following the announcement of the referendum results. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) applied the same doctrine it had employed in Croatia: arming the Serb population and seizing key positions. This led to a series of minor clashes, which culminated in early April 1992 with the seizure of the city of Bijeljina by Serbian paramilitary formations. Following these tragic events, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared general mobilization in municipalities where it was deemed necessary, and on 4 April 1992, general mobilization was officially proclaimed. On 6 April 1992, the very day the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina began, the European Community recognized the statehood and legal sovereignty of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, on 21 May 1992, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was admitted to the United Nations.

Despite international recognition and admission to the United Nations, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina faced serious challenges in organizing its defence. The arms embargo, introduced by UN Security Council Resolution 713 in September 1991, restricted the country's ability to legally procure weapons, further deepening the military imbalance between the Bosnian defenders and the significantly better-armed forces of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serbian formations. At the same time, the Bosnian authorities had to establish organized defence structures, secure weapons and supplies for their units, and protect the population and the country's territorial integrity. These challenges were compounded by a rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis, marked by mass displacement, shortages of food and medical supplies, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the growing number of civilian casualties. Although UN membership strengthened Bosnia and Herzegovina's international standing, it did not entail automatic military protection, the lifting of the arms embargo, or an immediate and effective response to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

As it struggled for survival, the nascent Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina sought support from every possible ally on the international stage. Among those that emerged as significant partners was the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose assistance would prove crucial to Bosnia and Herzegovina's survival, despite the geographical distance separating the two countries and the fact that Iran itself had only recently emerged from a devastating war of Iraqi aggression.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Enters the Scene

"I consider it my religious duty to defend the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that is precisely what I will do. To the extent that we are able to support them, we will continue to support this oppressed nation. They are on the front lines, and the enemy has deployed all its strength and might against them." - Address by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a meeting with the public on 21 October 1992.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the attainment of independence by the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina led to the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, which lasted from 1992 to 1995. During this period, Iran emerged as one of the key international actors supporting the legitimate authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their struggle against Serbian rebel forces. Diplomatic relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Islamic Republic of Iran began on 31 March 1992, when Iran recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina, placing it among the first countries to take this step. However, official diplomatic relations were not established until 25 January 1993.

Before the outbreak of the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran had hosted Alija Izetbegović, then Chairman of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He received a ceremonial welcome at Tehran Airport, where he was greeted by formations of the Iranian military, and the warm reception itself left him surprised. In his memoirs, written much later, he recalled:

> "In Iran, whose military deliveries during the war would play an important role in the defence of Bosnia against aggression, I was given an extraordinary welcome. At Tehran Airport on that day in May 1991, large units representing the three branches of the Iranian armed forces—the infantry, navy, and air force—were drawn up in formation, while a long line of more than fifty diplomatic representatives and other officials stood under the scorching midday sun. I was somewhat taken aback, and I am not sure I handled the situation particularly well."

This visit was of great importance to the Bosnian side. A year later, when the massacres of Muslims in northeastern and eastern Bosnia, as well as in Herzegovina, were already well underway in the summer of 1992, the Islamic Republic of Iran responded to the appeals that Bosnian and international media were sending out to the world. A particularly important figure in this regard was Iran's Supreme Leader (Rahbar), Ali Khamenei, who, through his speeches and public statements throughout the summer of 1992, actively mobilised the Iranian authorities, institutions, and society to provide Bosnia and Herzegovina with unconditional assistance.

It should be noted that the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the first crises in the Islamic world to emerge at the beginning of Ayatollah Khamenei's leadership. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution did not limit himself to calling for assistance to Bosnian Muslims. Through his speeches and addresses, he also sent clear messages to international institutions, which had failed to respond adequately to the atrocities committed by the Serbian aggressors. In August 1992, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, speaking at a meeting with workers from the cultural sector, stated:

> "You have seen what international organisations are doing! You have seen what the Security Council and the United Nations have done in Bosnia and Herzegovina! Moreover, one of these organisations bears the name Amnesty International. On the surface, this organisation has no political motives—for example, it is not hostile towards certain individuals or peoples. Yet now Amnesty International has fallen silent! Several thousand Muslims are being killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, falling to the ground like autumn leaves, while those from Amnesty International are nowhere to be seen!"

Although Iran's Supreme Leader regarded providing assistance to Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an obligation and called for such assistance to be delivered through all possible means and methods, this was not merely a political stance or a purely reflexive response to the circumstances at hand. To better understand this, it is necessary to consider the ideals brought forth by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In

his book *Iran and Contemporary Strategic Issues*, Ruhollah Qaderi Hangavari writes that the Iranian Islamic Revolution, although "distinctly anti-despotic and anti-imperialist" in character, was not concerned solely with overthrowing the oppressive monarchical regime. From its very beginning, it also "raised the banner of the struggle against global imperialism and support for the oppressed throughout the world." He further argues that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran itself "represents a clear expression of the life-giving spirit of Islam, explicitly insisting on such ideals while, of course, also taking into account the capabilities and necessary prerequisites for waging such a struggle on a global scale."

Hangavari writes that the revolution's anti-tyrannical and anti-imperialist character derives precisely from Islamic teachings. In this regard, Article 3, Clause 5 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which outlines the republic's objectives, states that one of its principal goals is the "complete rejection of imperialism and the prevention of foreign interference." Clause 16 of the same article defines the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran as follows: "The country's foreign policy is determined on the basis of Islamic criteria and entails fraternal solidarity with all Muslims, as well as unconditional support for all the oppressed."

In this regard, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in his speech at the international conference on "Islamic Unity," held in the city of Sanandaj on 10 September 1992, called for Islamic unity in providing assistance to Muslims around the world who were facing persecution. He stated:

> "Under these circumstances, Muslims must reflect carefully and assess events wisely. If the Muslims of the world were united and possessed great strength, would anyone dare to strike so mercilessly and cruelly against an oppressed people simply because they are Muslims? Anyone who seeks to sow discord and divide Muslims, anyone who incites Muslim brothers to belittle one another, and anyone who, out of narrow-mindedness and ignorance, or out of hostility and prejudice, declares followers of Islamic schools of thought to be unbelievers, must understand that they are complicit in the tragedy in Bosnia and similar tragedies. Such people are equally worthless, irresponsible, or hostile accomplices in the bitter fate of our Muslim brothers."

During the summer of 1992, numerous institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran became more actively involved in providing assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bosnian Muslims. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the representative of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution for the Balkans, arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1992. During his visit, he travelled to Mostar, where he met with Bosnian political representatives and representatives of the Islamic Community in the city. Another example of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's particular attention to the issue of assisting the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the subsequent appointment of Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati as the Leader's special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Throughout the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ayatollah Jannati travelled to the country on several occasions, meeting and holding talks with its highest-ranking officials in his capacity as the Leader's special representative. On several occasions in the summer of 1992, following Iran's provision of unconditional assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, President Alija Izetbegović stated that Iran was Bosnia and Herzegovina's best friend.

Since the summer of 1992, Iran had gradually become one of the key drivers of military assistance to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly at a time when the international community, through United Nations Security Council Resolution 713 (UNSC 713), had imposed an arms embargo on all parties involved in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Although the embargo was formally neutral, in practice it disproportionately harmed the Bosnian government, which had neither its own military stockpiles nor access to legal channels for acquiring weapons, unlike the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and, later, the Army of Republika Srpska. In this context, Iran emerged as a strategic ally of Bosnia's political and military leadership. In addition to seeking to supply weapons to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran also sent military equipment, instructors, and intelligence operatives to the country. Military training camps operated by Iranian military advisers and members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were also present on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These deliveries and operations were very often carried out under the strictest secrecy.

Some of the first camps of this kind had been established by the autumn of 1992 in Pazarić, near Hadžići, in the vicinity of Visoko, and at several other locations in Central Bosnia. On 17 November 1992, the 7th Muslim Brigade was formed in Zenica, where its headquarters were also located. It was established by bringing together several smaller units of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina operating in Central Bosnia. It is important to distinguish between the establishment of the brigade and its broader organisational structure: the First Battalion was based in Travnik, the Second in Zenica, and the Third in Kakanj. This brigade played a very important role in the defence and liberation of numerous territories of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. By a decision of the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina dated 11 May 1995, the brigade was awarded the honorary title "Viteška" (Knightly). Iranian instructors, alongside instructors from several other Islamic countries, played an important role in the development of the brigade. It was equipped with a large number of Heckler-type rifles, as well as RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launchers supplied from Iran. Of particular importance are the accounts of the brigade found in American sources



from 1996. According to *The Washington Post* article published on 8 July 1996, which discussed foreign mujahideen in Bosnia, and citing Bosnian security sources, the training of the 7th Muslim Brigade was conducted under Iranian supervision and modelled on Hezbollah in Lebanon. Despite various claims regarding the training of this unit, it was, like all other units of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), and remained loyal exclusively to the legitimate authorities of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the struggle for its independence and freedom.

One of the key logistical routes for Iranian arms shipments ran through the Republic of Croatia. However, on these occasions, the Croatian authorities also retained part of the weapons for their own use. In addition to bilateral channels, Iran remained active throughout the war on the multilateral front. Through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iran spearheaded efforts to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Alija Izetbegović's memoirs, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia jointly lobbied Muslim countries and international institutions to secure assistance for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Iran's Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, and Saudi Prince Salman held important meetings in this context.

Throughout the war, Iran also provided humanitarian assistance in the form of food, medicines, mobile hospitals, and logistical support for the civilian population. Iranian humanitarian organisations, such as the Iranian Red Crescent Society, operated on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the collective memory of the population of Central Bosnia, the recollection persists to this day that, among the various food supplies they received as part of humanitarian aid, only the Iranian food was fresh. Iran's efforts to assist the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were consistently encouraged throughout the aggression through the speeches of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In a Friday prayer sermon delivered on 26 February 1993, he emphasized that the burden of responsibility regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina had not been lifted from the shoulders of the Iranian people:

"These developments (the issues concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina) are not over. Officials and the people should not think that, by taking measures regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have lifted the burden of responsibility from our shoulders. No! As long as we can—as much as we can—we must continue to support them. I do not mean financial, monetary, or logistical support—although these may also be necessary to some extent—but rather political support. We must make an effort. Popular groups, our intellectuals, various social strata, students, writers, the national daily press, experts and scholars, as well as all our religious workers and officials—all groups capable of raising their voices before the world—must continually and consistently keep this issue alive."

During the difficult days of the war, the Islamic Republic of Iran opened its embassy in Sarajevo, in the besieged city itself, representing a powerful symbolic act of solidarity. It was the first embassy of an Islamic country to open in war-torn Sarajevo, demonstrating Iran's political and humanitarian support for the legitimate authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was officially opened on 8 May 1994. The opening was attended by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović, symbolising Iran's continued diplomatic engagement with Bosnia and Herzegovina despite the ongoing war. Ali Akbar Velayati's visit to Sarajevo in 1994 is considered one of the most significant events of its kind. During his visit to Sarajevo and the opening of the Iranian Embassy in the city, he expressed the Iranian government's full support for the Government and people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasising the necessity of international intervention to put an end to Serbian attacks and massacres.

The first ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Bosnia and Herzegovina was Mohammad Ibrahim Taherani. In his memoirs about Hasan engić, who during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the key figures responsible for the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina's military logistics and the procurement of weapons from abroad, Taherani writes:

> "One of the most extensive relationships established by the late President Izetbegović and his former associate Hasan engić was with the Islamic Republic. Iranian officials stated that visits were undertaken to provide both hardware and software support, which played an effective and vital role in achieving their objectives. Naturally, they travelled extensively to various parts of the world, including our country."

Further in the same text, he states:

> "Given that I held the official position of ambassador at the Embassy of the Republic of Iran, I had numerous meetings with him and other figures in order to facilitate and identify the forms of humanitarian assistance that the Iranian people could provide to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The assistance provided by the Iranian people to Bosnia and Herzegovina was similar to the assistance that the Iranian people had devoted to their own sacred front of defence."

Throughout much of 1993 and 1994, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, called on the international community to be held accountable and accused Western powers of bearing responsibility for the genocide against the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through such statements, efforts were made to mobilize a broader international Muslim response to the continued aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly with regard to arming the Muslims and improving their capacity for self-defence. Already during this period, he used the term "genocide" to draw attention to the atrocities taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his sermon on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr on 25 March 1993, he stated, among other things: "The history of Muslims should remember for the future that the genocide against Muslims in Europe was perpetrated by the present-day Western powers, both European and American."

Despite numerous warnings to the international community about the ongoing crimes and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Bosnian Serb forces, as well as calls from Iran and other Islamic countries for more decisive international intervention to protect the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 1995 marked the culmination of genocidal violence against Bosniaks. After having been disarmed and placed under the protection of the United Nations, the so-called "safe areas" of Srebrenica and Žepa fell to the Army of Republika Srpska: Srebrenica on 11 July and Žepa later that month. Following the fall of Srebrenica, more than 8 000 Bosniak men and boys were systematically murdered, while women, children, and the elderly were forcibly expelled. The fall of Žepa was likewise followed by the forced displacement of its Bosniak population. The genocide in Srebrenica was subsequently established as a legal fact by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice.

The Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who, as previously mentioned, had repeatedly warned about the events unfolding in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1993 and 1994, was outraged by these developments. It should be noted that on 15 May 1994, Khamenei delivered a speech at the Grand Hajj Congress, during which he strongly condemned the Serbian forces for the genocide and mass atrocities committed against the Bosniaks. He emphasized the international community's moral duty to stop the violence and protect innocent civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ayatollah Khamenei also expressed Iran's solidarity with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once again calling on Muslims around the world to support the Bosnian Muslims in their struggle for survival. Following the events surrounding the July 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addressed the issue in a speech delivered during a meeting with commanders of the police forces on 12 July 1995. On that occasion, he stated:

> "Anyone who wishes to see with their own eyes the falsehood of

> claims that the United States and certain other countries are committed to human rights should look at the events in Srebrenica, Sarajevo, and other cities. Anyone who wishes to witness the incompetence of the UN Security Council, supposedly established to ensure the security of nations, should look at Srebrenica and these catastrophic events."

The following day, at a meeting with the same group, he stated:

> "At present, there is no reaction whatsoever to the events unfolding in Bosnia and Herzegovina (this genocide and the Mongol-like advance of Serbian forces into Srebrenica, which is unfortunately taking place on a scale of unprecedented catastrophe, before the eyes of the materialistic governments and peoples of the West). They claim to be concerned about human rights violations in one region of the world! Is this true?! Is the killing of thousands of women and children, the exposure of a city of several thousand inhabitants to wholesale slaughter and genocide, the destruction of homes, and the displacement of families not an obvious violation of human rights?!"

What is particularly important to emphasize is that, during this period, Iran had no ambitions to establish religious influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, impose particular values, or exert control over the country's foreign policy. Iran's assistance to the Bosnian Muslims was unconditional and stemmed from genuine altruism, guided and inspired by the ideals upheld by the Islamic Revolution and its leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. To understand Iran's role during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is best to cite the words of President Alija Izetbegović, spoken on 7 May 1994, during the historic visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati and the ceremonial opening of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Bosnia and Herzegovina the following day. On that occasion, Izetbegović stated: "Although we cannot reveal all the details at this time, we must understand that our struggle for freedom... would have been less successful without Iran and its assistance." The same sentiment was expressed by Professor Mahmut ef. Karalić, a commander in the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and recipient of the Golden Lily, the army's highest wartime decoration: "If it weren't for Iran, Bosnia would never have been able to defend itself."

Iranian Popular Activism in Support of the People of Bosnia and Herzegovina

A particular form of Iranian support for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people during the war was popular activism, expressed through public demonstrations and gatherings in solidarity with the Bosnian people. These protests served as a means of expressing public condemnation of the crimes committed against Bosniaks, drawing attention to the suffering of the civilian population, and calling for a stronger international response to the war. They also reflected a broader expression of solidarity among sections of Iranian society with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina during their struggle for survival.

In September 1992, Iran organised gatherings across the country to condemn Serbian crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Particularly memorable and well-documented was the demonstration held in Tehran on 4 September 1992, when thousands of people marched to the University of Tehran, where prayers were held and a speech was delivered in support of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On 23 April 1994, Iranian students demonstrated in front of the United Nations office in Tehran, protesting against the UN's policy in the former Yugoslavia and attacks by Serbian forces against Bosniaks. During the demonstration, protesters damaged the UN building's premises, sending a strong message from the Iranian people to the international community.

In the final period of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 2 August 1995, thousands of Iranians demonstrated in the streets of Tehran, with the gathering concluding in front of the United Nations office. The demonstrators condemned what they regarded as the betrayal of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the West and the UN. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati subsequently called on Islamic countries to establish an international military force to protect the Bosniaks.

Instead of a Conclusion: Towards Some New Conclusions

Based on everything presented above, it can be concluded that throughout the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), Iran provided various forms of assistance, including humanitarian aid, food, medicine, medical equipment, mobile hospitals, logistical support, and military assistance to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Beyond material support, Iran also offered diplomatic backing, advocated for the Bosnian cause in international forums, and mobilised public solidarity with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These efforts reflected a combination of humanitarian commitment, political support, and practical assistance during one of the most difficult periods in the country's modern history.

All of this demonstrates the strength and breadth of the ideals that emerged from revolutionary Iran. The assistance Iran provided to Bosnia and Herzegovina during its most difficult moments, in the form of military, humanitarian, and diplomatic support, speaks not merely to political pragmatism, but also to a sense of Islamic solidarity and fraternal responsibility. This responsibility, as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei repeatedly emphasised, was nothing less than a duty. It all reflects the same spirit that inspired millions of Iranians to rise up in 1979 and change the course of their country's history.

The speeches of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei played a significant role in mobilising Iranian society to support Bosnia and Herzegovina during the aggression. His speeches were often inspired by and shaped by the immediate context of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They followed developments from the first months of the aggression in the summer of 1992, when Khamenei particularly criticised the lack of a meaningful international response to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He frequently referred to his visit to Yugoslavia in 1989, the awakening of religious sentiment among Bosnian Muslims, and their suffering, which he directly linked to their religious identity. Throughout these speeches, Ayatollah Khamenei approached the issue from a humanitarian and, subsequently, a religious perspective. Drawing on Islamic political doctrine, he called upon other Muslim countries to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina and emphasised Muslim unity and solidarity in providing support at the international level. His speeches also revealed a strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse, inspired by the Islamic political ideas and principles that emerged from the Iranian Revolution. He was particularly critical of the international community and various Western-led international organisations, which he regarded not merely as irresponsible in the face of the suffering of Bosnian Muslims, but as bearing primary responsibility for it. Numerous historical examples lend weight to his criticism.

Following the end of the war in 1995, relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to develop through various forms of cooperation, including political, economic, cultural, and educational initiatives. Cultural cooperation has been reflected in the activities of the Iranian Cultural Centre in Sarajevo, which organises various cultural events, including exhibitions, film screenings, and the promotion of Persian language and literature. Educational cooperation has also been fostered through the activities of the Ibn Sina Research Institute and several educational institutions. Although economic cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iran has yet to reach its full potential, efforts to strengthen it have been ongoing since the end of the war.

Despite everything discussed above, a persistent and multifaceted anti-Iranian narrative has developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war, promoted by various political and ideological actors. It has emanated from Serbian and, paradoxically, Croatian circles, despite the

fact that Croatian-controlled territory served as a route for assistance reaching Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war. It has also been reinforced by certain Sunni Muslim groups that emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the conflict, facilitated by assistance from Arab and Western countries. Iran has frequently been associated with terrorism and terrorist activities, a tendency that intensified after 2001, particularly following the US designation of Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil." Pro-Israeli and other anti-Iranian actors have since continued to contribute to the stigmatisation of Iran in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another important dimension is sectarianism, particularly anti-Shiite rhetoric promoted by certain Salafi-Wahhabi groups, which has contributed to portraying Iranian religious and cultural influence as a threat. As early as 2005, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly noted, during a meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts, that a strong propaganda campaign against Iran was being conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This complex and sensitive subject deserves more extensive examination in a future study.

It should not be forgotten that on 23 May 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran voted in favour of the United Nations General Assembly resolution designating 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica. Proposed by Germany and Rwanda, the resolution was adopted with 84 votes in favour, 19 against, and 68 abstentions. Iran thereby reaffirmed its support for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the recognition of the Srebrenica genocide, despite political pressures and its close relations with states that opposed the resolution, such as Russia. The decision to support the resolution was made by the late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian just days before his tragic death.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, like his country, remained a friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina until his death on 28 February 2026, when he was killed in American and Zionist aggression. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will always remember and cherish the assistance Iran provided during the darkest days of their history. May Allah, the Most Merciful, grant him the highest station in Jannat al-Firdaws, unite him with the Prophet Muhammad and his purified Ahl al-Bayt, and reward him among the righteous and the martyrs. May his soul rest in the eternal mercy of Allah, and may his memory live on in the hearts of those who remember his solidarity with the oppressed.

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The Culture of Martyrdom in the Conduct of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him)

Dr. Mohammad Javad Mohammadi outlines five facets of the culture of martyrdom from an Islamic view. He argues that we must understand the constituent components of faith, sincerity, knowledge, striving, and steadfastness, as foundational to this culture.

The central thesis of my presentation is the necessity of distinguishing between the event of "martyrdom" and the "culture of martyrdom." While martyrdom is, undoubtedly, a radiant event occurring at a specific moment and place, we must recognize that it is rooted in a culture; a paradigm of life that finds its ultimate culmination in martyrdom. What we seek to examine in the life of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) are the constituent elements of this culture; those factors that mold a believer's way of life and guide them toward this ultimate apex. In essence, the culture of martyrdom serves as the intellectual and spiritual foundation upon which martyrdom stands. Therefore, martyrdom is neither an accidental nor a random occurrence.

One who attains the status of martyrdom has lived a life that necessitates such a grace. As the late General Qasem Soleimani observed: "One must live the life of a martyr in order to die as one." To live as a martyr is to embody the culture of martyrdom. We find this paradigm manifest in the conduct of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him); a synthesis of the highest human and Islamic virtues that shapes the individual we designate as a martyr.

This culture of martyrdom is composed of several distinct yet interconnected pillars. Its principal components are faith, sincerity, knowledge, striving, and steadfastness. In my view, these five are the essential and foundational elements of the culture of martyrdom.

First: Faith

Martyrdom must, under no circumstances, be reduced to a mere heroic feat or a dramatic death. It is the manifestation of profound conviction and faith: "Indeed, those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then remain steadfast..." (Quran, 41:30)1. This steadfastness is rooted in the foundational affirmation: "Our Lord is Allah." Consequently, martyrdom is a deeply spiritual and ontological reality; the culture of martyrdom is, fundamentally, a monotheistic culture.

Our late Shaheed Imam (may Allah sanctify his soul) elucidated the profound meaning of the Silsilat al-Dhahab (the Golden Chain) tradition. In this narration, Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) states: "The phrase 'There is no god but Allah' is My fortress; whoever enters My fortress is safe from My punishment". The Shaheed Imam explained that the segment "whoever enters My fortress" is not merely a descriptive statement of fact, but rather a divine summons: "Enter My fortress; O people, seek refuge within the fortress of Divine Unity." In other words, it is an invitation to embark upon this transformative path.

From my perspective, the Imam's statement encompasses two essential dimensions: theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism. The assertion, "The phrase 'There is no god but Allah' is My fortress," establishes the theoretical foundation. However, the command, "whoever enters My fortress," demands the practical application; to live in such a manner that one truly inhabits this fortress of Divine Unity. He emphasized that this is an invitation, not a report. "Indeed, those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then remain steadfast, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear and do not grieve, but receive the glad tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.'" (Quran, 41:30) As my esteemed brother previously noted, Imam al-Ridā's words serve as a profound invitation to Jihad and spiritual striving. This call is inextricably linked to the declaration of "There is no god but Allah"; the very essence of this struggle is grounded in the first pillar of faith; monotheism.

Thus, martyrdom is inherently a culture of faith; it is an outgrowth of belief. While many cultures throughout history have honored death as an act of courage, martyrdom is distinct. It is not merely an honorable death pursued for ephemeral or illusory worldly causes. We must, therefore, recognize this quintessential element: the culture



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of martyrdom is built upon the bedrock of faith. This constitutes our first fundamental pillar.

Second: Sincerity

The second component of the culture of martyrdom is sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*). The Qur'an states: "I advise you to do one thing: stand up for God, in pairs or individually" (Qur'an, 34:46)[1] A martyr's life is marked by pure sincerity, which leads him to this pinnacle. We often speak of "martyrdom in the path of God." Yet for an act to be considered martyrdom in the fullest sense, it must be qualified as being *fī sabīl Allāh* (in the cause of God), as in the verse: as in the verse: "Never think of those who have been killed in the cause of God as dead" (Qur'an, 3:169)[2]. Courageous people can be found in every culture, and people may sacrifice their lives for many different reasons. But the highest degree of sincerity belongs to those who do so solely for God's sake.

There is a narration about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) in which, after a battle, he looked upon the fallen and said that one of them was not a martyr. When asked why, the Prophet explained that the man had not fought for God's sake, but for the sake of gaining war booty (*ghanīmah*). Thus, true martyrdom is defined by sincerity.

I recall a story that I heard directly from the Leader and have also heard from others. The Shaheed Imam used to recount that, before the Revolution, when the late Ayatollah Bahjat (may God have mercy on him) visited Mashhad, the two men came to know one another. He said: "In one of my conversations with the late Mr. Bahjat, we spoke about the struggle and my intention in undertaking it. I told him: 'My intention is such that when I enter a prison cell, I see God in its corner.'"

The Leader's words moved the late Ayatollah Bahjat deeply. His son— and I have heard this from others as well—later recounted that Ayatollah Bahjat spoke of the remark at home throughout his life. He would say: "One day, this person told me that, in the corner of the prison cell, he saw God. When I reflected on his words [as a mystic who perceives people's inner realities] I realized that he was speaking the absolute truth."

Ayatollah Bahjat also spoke of another person he had encountered in Najaf. This man had a disability, and when Ayatollah Bahjat met him in the street and asked how he was, the man replied, "I am content with God's will." Ayatollah Bahjat said that he could see the truth of those words in the man's whole being. He then added that the second person whose words he had found to be equally sincere was the Leader, who had told him before the Revolution: "I see God in the corner of the cell."

Third: Knowledge and Cognition

The third component of the culture of martyrdom is profound spiritual knowledge and cognition (*ma'rifah*). The path of a martyr is a deliberate and enlightened journey; it is neither an emotional reaction nor an impulsive act. Rather, the martyr advances within a framework of profound *ma'rifah*. The movement of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) was, at its core, a catalyst for both generating and disseminating knowledge. As the scholars and researchers in this assembly are well aware, the Imam's migration to Iran had a transformative impact on the nation's intellectual landscape. We are profoundly grateful to God for the blessing of the *wilāyah* (guardianship) of the Ahl al-Bayt in Iran; the establishment of the school of Ahl al-Bayt in this land is, above all, a testament to the presence and influence of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him). His arrival introduced these teachings to the region, and the fact that we are engaged in these intellectual discourses centuries later is a direct result of the *ma'rifah* imbued by his journey. All martyrs, in their own capacity, have followed this same principle.

The Shaheed Imam, as you are aware, was a prolific reader. One of his favorite engagements was the study of memoirs of martyrs; he would read their biographies with profound diligence, author his own commentaries (*taqrīẓ*), and share his insights at home to encourage others, recognizing that the life of a martyr is inherently educational. In essence, long before a martyr sacrifices their life, they have already engaged in a "Jihad of Clarification" (*jihād al-tabyīn*) through their very way of life.

Therefore, we must seek guidance in the lives of the martyrs and in the life of our Shaheed Imam. This is consistent with the Qur'anic guidance. When we recite, "Guide us to the straight path" (Quran, 1:6), we find that the Qur'an further defines this path in Surah an-Nisāʾ: "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger—those will be with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favor: the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth (*Siddiqīn*), the martyrs, and the righteous" (Quran, 4:69). Thus, the "Straight Path" is paved by the footsteps of the Prophets, the Imams, the martyrs, and the righteous. Consequently, the martyr, through their life, establishes a framework of *ma'rifah* and spiritual clarity for us. By studying the lives of Shaheed Imams, we discover the paradigms necessary to navigate our own paths. This, then, is the third essential element of the culture of martyrdom: the component of knowledge and cognition.

Fourth: Relentless Struggle

As our dear brother stated, our Shaheed Imam viewed Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) as a tireless *mujāhid* (striver). There is a profound narration attributed to the Imam, stating: "Whoever asks Allah for success (*tawfīq*) but does not exert the necessary effort (ijtihād) is merely mocking himself."[3] In the Islamic tradition, Jihad and martyrdom are inseparable; martyrdom is the culmination of a life defined by sustained struggle. Thus, these two concepts are inextricably linked. The life of a martyr is one of persistent effort, unyielding perseverance, and constant struggle.

Our Shaheed Imam once described his own struggles spanning nearly fifteen years, particularly during the zenith of the revolutionary movement. He reflected: "There was never a day I left home with the certainty of

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returning, nor a night I rested with the assurance that I would not be taken by morning." This was the reality of his existence. Thus, the martyr is one who engages in a long, tireless crusade.

Consider the conduct of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him): if martyrdom had been the sole objective, and if the culture of martyrdom did not necessitate the arduous journey that precedes it, the Imam could have easily been martyred in Medina. He could have refused the summons of Ma'mun, and they would have martyred him there. Instead, he chose *mujāhadah*—a rigorous, deliberate struggle. He chose to leave his homeland, to depart from his family, and to confront the tyranny of the Abbasid apparatus; he consciously embraced hardship.

Likewise, if the objective for Imam Hussein (peace be upon him) had been martyrdom alone, he could have met this fate in Medina, or if not there, then in Mecca. Yet, had Imam Hussein been martyred in Mecca or Medina, we would have been deprived of the historic event of Karbala and the profound awakening that the Ashura incident ignited. Similarly, we would not have witnessed the immense intellectual and spiritual greatness that Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) achieved through his migration.

Therefore, the martyr is one who strives; they spend a lifetime laboring in the service of the Truth. As the Holy Qur'an states: "Say, 'Do you await for us except one of the two best things?'" (Qur'an, 9:52). Either one achieves the ultimate goal of victory, or one attains martyrdom, which is itself a supreme felicity. Thus, the fourth component—and one of vital importance—is *mujāhadah* (relentless struggle) within the culture of martyrdom.

Fifth and Final Element: Steadfastness

The final component is steadfastness (*Istiqāmah*). As the Qur'an states, "Indeed, those who have said, 'Our Lord is Allah' and then remained steadfast…" (Quran, 41:30). In the context of the culture of martyrdom, a concept frequently emphasized by the Shaheed Imam himself, steadfastness means never growing weary, never yielding, never losing hope, and maintaining a sense of duty until the very last moment.

The Shaheed Imam once recounted an encounter from the early days of the Revolution. Only months after its victory, Mr. Qotbzadeh asked him, "If this revolution were to fail, what would you do? Where would you flee?" The Shaheed Imam replied, "I told him: If this revolution is ever in danger, I will be in the very heart of the fray, weapon in hand. I am not going anywhere; I will remain in the thick of the battlefield." He recalled that Qotbzadeh replied, "This revolution will never fail. When someone possesses such a spirit, someone who does not flee but remains in the heat of the battle, such a revolution can never be defeated." And as history has witnessed, even after more than forty years, he remained true to his word, eventually attaining martyrdom in the midst of that very struggle. This is the essence of the culture of martyrdom.

My intention is to convey that our Shaheed Imam achieved martyrdom because he had lived his entire life immersed in this culture, learning it from the school of Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him). He once remarked that throughout his years of struggle—amidst the hardships of the movement, the repeated imprisonments, and the tortures—the thought would occasionally cross his mind that he had fulfilled his duty and perhaps it was time to return to his academic pursuits and personal life. However, he described that experience in these exact words: "A sense of duty would immediately seize me by the collar, and that thought would instantly vanish, driven away by the necessity of the cause." This is *istiqāmah*: an unwavering steadfastness for the cause and a relentless persistence in reaching the ultimate destination.

Thus, from Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him) and his prominent disciple, we learn not only about the act of martyrdom itself, but about the profound culture of martyrdom—a culture built upon these five fundamental elements.

May we offer a Salawāt for the pure souls of all the martyrs, especially our Shaheed Imam, and as a gift to the blessed and heavenly spirit of the Eighth Proof, Imam al-Ridā (peace be upon him).

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He has authored and translated several books, including *History of France from the Beginning to the Renaissance* and *Religious History of Europe*, and his articles have appeared in esteemed academic journals. He is the son-in-law of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. On February 28, 2026 (Esfand 1404), his wife, Bushra Khamenei, and their 14-month-old daughter, Zahra, were martyred in the US-Israeli strike and act of aggression against Iran in the same operation that claimed the life of Ayatollah Khamenei. In the aftermath of this loss, Mohammadi has publicly emphasized that his daughter is equal to other innocent children killed in Gaza and Minab, stating that these innocent children are "proof of the righteousness of the resistance front and the front of Islam".

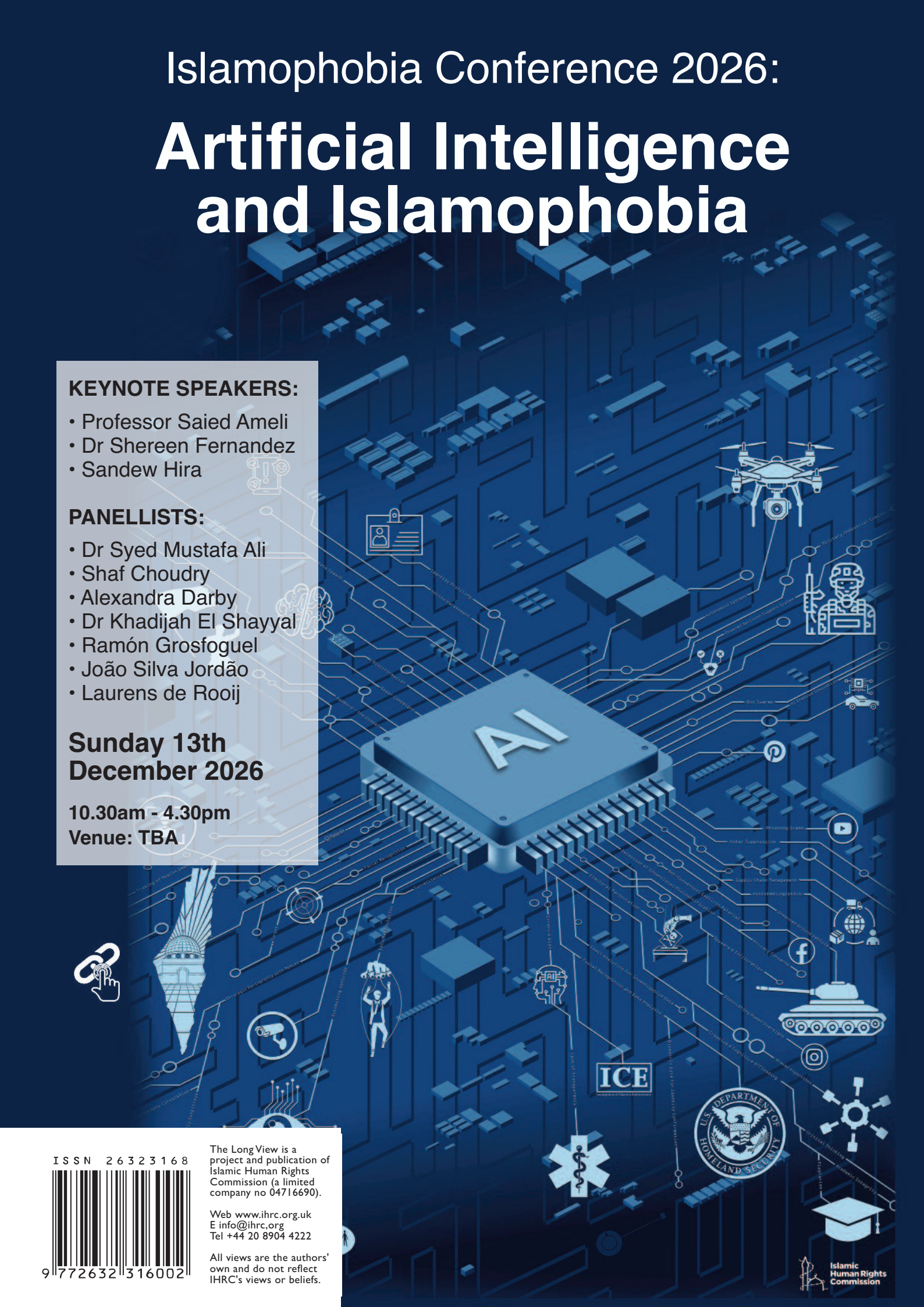
Dr. Mohammadi has given use permission to reprint the text of this speech.

[1] "Say, 'I admonish you only to do one thing: stand up for Allah, in pairs or individually, and then reflect. There is no madness in your companion. He is only a warner to you before a severe punishment.'" Surah Saba 34:36
[2] "And never think of those killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision." Sura Aale Imran 3:169
[3] Bihar ul Anwar, vol 75, p 356



Islamophobia Conference 2026:

Artificial Intelligence and Islamophobia



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- Professor Saied Ameli
- Dr Shereen Fernandez
- Sandew Hira

PANELLISTS:

- Dr Syed Mustafa Ali
- Shaf Choudry
- Alexandra Darby
- Dr Khadijah El Shayyal
- Ramón Grosfoguel
- João Silva Jordão
- Laurens de Rooij

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