

# The Long View



Quarterly Magazine

Volume 1, Issue 3 - September 2019 / Muharram 1441

ISSN 2632-3168

£5 where sold

## From Al-Quds to Makkah: Refashioning the stories and models of resistance

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Since 1948

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

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The occasion of Muharram is a sobering period for Muslims in which the events of Karbala loom large and invite us to reflect on the tragic circumstances surrounding the murder of the Prophet's grandson Husayn. The holy month, coming as it does at the tail of a string of three sacred months, also marks the end of the Islamic calendar year, and is itself an opportunity for personal introspection and evaluating the condition of the wider ummah. For some members of the vast family of Islam, it is a time of intense mourning while for others it is a meritorious period in which to raise one's levels of devotion and piety. Regardless of where we sit we are all exercised in mind and spirit by the same motifs of light versus darkness, right versus wrong, authority versus power, mercy versus cruelty, thrown up by the Ashuran tragedy.

And yet there are those who, instead of seeing the martyrdom of Husayn as a unifying force, exploit the occasion to foment discord and sectarianism among the ummah. By accentuating and misrepresenting differences in scholarly historical and theological interpretation, they seek to advance their own political agendas, and in doing so strain further an already much-frayed unity. The aims of dividing and disuniting have been pursued by actors of various political/sectarian stripes through history with the result that sectarian attitudes have become deeply enmeshed in the mainstream religious fabric, to the extent that it is impossible even to speak about Islam without referencing these insidious prejudices. Imam Muhammad al-Asi, whose sermon we have transcribed to form the second article in this issue, explains how the ummah became hostage to *'asabiyya* (chauvinism or self/centredness based on familial and/or political allegiance) in the first few decades following the death of the Prophet (pbuh) and how these mental shackles continue to imprison us in our understandings of our history.

Arguably the chief protagonist in the explosion of sectarian discourse and conflict in recent times is the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Iranian revolution in 1979 which overthrew a monarchy to usher in an Islamic Republic, by its very occurrence, presented an existential and instant threat to a royal family whose religious claims to political legitimacy were increasingly being called into question by their policies and personal behaviour. Fearing a spillover at home and elsewhere in the region, Riyadh embarked on a delegitimisation programme at the heart of which was the sectarianisation of the revolution across the Persian Gulf and the promotion of anti-Shia propaganda around the world. The kingdom threw its petrodollars into publications, institutes and madrasahs with the aim of steering Muslims away from the "Shia" uprising and shoring up its own claims to legitimacy by stressing its Sunni credentials.

Our lead article by Hafsa Kara Mustapha sees that process continuing up the present day, but with some notable developments. The intervening years have seen the Saudi mask slip as its Western client-state status has led it to gravitate ever closer to Israel to the point that it has effec-

tively abandoned the Palestinian cause. Moreover, its repression of Islamic scholars and reformists at home, suppression of uprisings in the so-called Arab Spring aimed at instituting popular/Islamic participatory government and the devastating war it wages against neighbouring Yemen have served only to underline the autocratic, absolutist and self-serving nature of the monarchy. Controversially Kara Mustapha proposes that given that the massive Hajj and Umrah revenues generated for Saudi Arabia by pilgrims and which end up paying for the destruction of our own ummah, Muslims consider boycotting the pilgrimages to avoid being indirectly complicit in Saudi Arabia's crimes.

The Saudi rapprochement with Israel is all the more surprising in view of the fact that the Zionist state has not only strengthened its illegal hold on the Holy Land but has historically played a major role in perpetuating the global Islamophobia epidemic. Much of the media demonisation of Muslims we see today is generated by pro-Zionist organisations enjoying the implicit and explicit support of Tel Aviv. For Israel it is a way of garnering public sympathy in the face of growing international support for Palestinian self-determination and revulsion against Israeli war crimes. In our third article Robert Inlakesh explains the rise of modern-day Islamophobia as a natural outgrowth of the establishment of the Zionist state. After centuries of being treated as the "other", the founding and evolution of Israel into a western client state that would serve as an outpost for western political interests in the Middle East led to the replacement of Jewish anti-Semitism with Arab anti-Semitism. "Ultimately, as Muslims, if we wish to solve the problem of Islamophobia, we must recognize that our struggle against it, is also the struggle of the Palestinian people and of the liberation of the Middle-East," he argues.

The struggle for emancipation is also a theme of our fourth article by Zainab Siddiqui. Siddiqui provides a critical lens on materialist feminist narratives, arguing that they fail to take us – as Muslims and or people of colour the world over – towards their averred aim of liberation for women. This critique takes as a starting point the implication of liberal theories of feminism in racializing and colonial projects, past and present. However Siddiqui argues that materialist feminism – using the example of Palestine and the Israeli settler-colonial project – does little except reinforce the same or similar racialized narratives deployed in colonial hierarchies and projects. Referencing Franz Fanon's works on the Algerian war of independence, Siddiqui argues that Palestinian women's involvement in resistance is a revolutionary form of emancipatory politics – defying subjectification by an oppressor entity.

It is the spaces of defiance, whether in Palestine, Yemen or our own self-analysis of our sectarian identities that we may begin to find a way forward.

**Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali**  
Editors

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# Saudi Arabia – Out of the frying pan and into the fire

The accession of Prince Mohammed Bin Salman to the leadership of the Middle East monarchy has plunged the region deeper into conflict and intensified a divisive sectarian narrative, says **Hafsa Kara-Mustapha**.

**W**hen King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia died in January 2015 there was a sense of relief across much of the Arab world. The Saudi monarch who had engaged in so many failed enterprises finally met his maker and the oil rich kingdom now had the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and take the country in a new direction.

Much of politics and diplomacy relies on ego and it is very difficult for leaders to recognise their errors and make amends, but nature can provide that respite and offer a rare 'face saving' way out. Abdullah's brother Salman, who by all accounts was already too frail to rule adequately, was expected to usher in a new era in which previous mistakes would be laid to rest along with their now deceased sponsor.

Sadly, that precious opportunity was wasted and instead of taking Saudi Arabia down the route of peace, stability and increased prosperity, Abdullah's successor King Salman and his son Mohammed Bin Salman led the country into ever increasing depths of conflict instability and economic crisis.

## Syria

By 2015 it had become clear that Bashar Al Assad was not losing the war in Syria but very much winning it. Better still, many of those who had opposed his rule and took to the streets in 2011 were now backing him and his government. Within a few years of a well-oiled media campaign, led mainly by Saudi funded outlets, Syrians were now realising the nature of the project whose main objective was the viceration of the Syrian nation-state.

Like Iraq and Libya before it, Saudi Arabia, was once again backing the destruction of a fellow Arab and Muslim majority nation, serving both Israel and the US' interest in an increasingly weakened Middle East.

Sold for much of the early years as a sectarian conflict in which an Alawite leadership was supposedly targeting its Sunni population, it soon became clear that the only party promoting a sectarian agenda in Syria was the Wahhabi kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

From its countless satellite TV channels to its mosques across the Muslim world, Saudi rulers promoted the idea that Syrian Sunnis were being exterminated by the Alawite president and his Shia allies in Iran and Lebanon.

However, as the conflict entered its third year and Syrians, whose voices were muted for much of this time started speaking up, it soon became clear that much of the propaganda didn't stand up to scrutiny. The Syrian population, made up of 80% Sunnis, would not have supported a sectarian leader who up until 2011 had not displayed any animosity towards any Muslim or ethnic or religious groups. In fact, minorities had always praised the Syrian leadership for its ability to protect the nation's inspiring diversity despite the upheavals suffered by their region in the past century.

Syria proved therefore to be an own goal for Saudi Arabia after it emerged that regime change in Libya, in great part funded and supported by the Gulf monarchies, had transformed the once most prosperous nation in Africa into a safe haven for terrorists and slave traders.

This major failure in the country's foreign policy should have forced its leadership into retreat and much soul-searching. Instead the new 'custodian' of Mecca and Medina, King Salman embarked on a new conflict, this time against neighbouring Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Arab world.

## Yemen

Initially presented as a rapid conflict, in which victory for the Saudi-sponsored President Hadi would be a matter of weeks, the war has now been going on for four years. Humiliated on an almost daily basis despite its vastly superior military might and the support it has gathered from a coalition of Arab countries as well as covert alliances with Western superpowers, Saudi Arabia is yet to see victory.

Embittered by the resilience of Houthi fighters, Saudi troops have resorted to attacking civilian targets and infrastructure and inflicting maximum pain on the population in a bid to force it

to turn against the Ansarullah.

Mirroring Israeli tactics in Gaza, the Saudi army has been relentlessly attacking hospitals, schools, and neighbourhoods causing untold loss of life and destruction.

Although civilian casualties are without a doubt the more pressing issue in this disastrous war, there is a pernicious aspect to the targeted attacks that reveals a worrying trend in Saudi's foreign and domestic agenda.

## History and the Arabs

As leaders of the country of the two holy cities of Islam Mecca and Medina, Saudi rulers have endeavoured over the past two decades to destroy many of the cities' ancient historical sites known to have housed both the Prophet (pbuh) and his family and companions and many of the early Muslim believers.

These homes not only represent an important historical heritage for Muslims but are testament to the era in which the Prophet lived.

It is important from a religious but also historical perspective to be aware of what the people from among whom the Prophet (pbuh) emerged were like, how they lived and what they achieved and built.

By destroying these ancient sites, Saudi rulers have deleted much of Islamic but also Arab memory and contributed to the now widely held stereotype that Arabs are nothing but 'backward Bedouins' with no civilisation. Yet there are forts and houses mentioned in the Quran itself which provide invaluable context to Muslims as well as historians of the region.

Using the pretext of expanding Mecca and Medina to accommodate ever growing numbers of pilgrims, the houses of Khadija (*as*), Fatima (*as*) as well as many of the companions of the Prophet have been destroyed. Some commentators have argued that these measures were in large part aimed at Shia pilgrims who have taken to visiting these homes while performing Hajj or Umra. For others there is an equally sinister agenda to these 'regeneration' plans which have now turned the holiest sites of Islam into US style shopping and accommodation hubs.

Although the argument in favour of improving conditions for pilgrims has value, the level of destruction has reached unprecedented levels. There is a clear financial imperative behind these mammoth construction projects that have dwarfed the Haram al-Sharif amid gigantic high-rise buildings and shopping malls.

With oil prices in rapid decline, revenue from pilgrims is now Saudi Arabia's greatest source of income and expansion plans which involve redeveloping the old city aim primarily at beefing up the Saudi economy, once solely reliant on hydrocarbons.

Aside from the economic benefit the kingdom reaps from Muslim visitors the case for destruction is one that surfaces very often when Saudi Arabian politics is put under the spotlight.

When ISIS first emerged in Syria, embarking on killing sprees across the country, one of their first targets were archaeological sites that are testament to the rich history of the region. Under the pretext Salafist Muslims reject the idea of preserving historical sites -which may include statues- the destruction of places like Palmyra hit the headlines. It is worth noting of course that if those arguments are taken to their logical conclusion even the Kaaba which once housed idols from the Jahiliya era would suffer a similar fate. The holy Quran often mentions Pharaoh and the grandeur of his constructions as a reminder of the limited powers of mortals in the face of God's greatness. Should the early Muslims who took the message to Egypt have destroyed the Pyramids?

The answer of course is no, in particular as the Prophet (pbuh) gave clear instructions as to what should and shouldn't be destroyed in times of war.

And yet despite all the arguments in favour of preserving the region's heritage, Saudi rulers continue their destructive policies.

Whether ISIS in Iraq, Syria or now Saudi Arabia's official army in Yemen, all is done to meticulously target places of historical importance in the region.

Bombing raids on Sanaa have resulted in the destruction of houses that are testament to the Yemeni people's much celebrated archaeological prowess. Yemen is of course the birthplace of the Arab people and is now, like Mecca, Medina, Baghdad or Damascus gradually being emptied of its history.

Saudi Arabia is not just destroying the close bonds that should unite the entire Ummah, it is playing an instrumental role in deleting its history as well.

Sadly this is being done with the complicit silence of the entire Islamic ummah. While it is accepted the Al-Saud ruling family are currently administering the two holy cities it is difficult to accept the free rein they enjoy in deciding the future of places that are important to every single Muslim. Whether it's the inept OIC or Muslim majority nations, no one is speaking out in defence of the preservation of Mecca and Medina.

Some Muslims are now calling for a boycott of Hajj or Umra. This is a difficult decision, of course, considering the importance of Hajj for a believer. There is the undeniable risk that postponing a Hajj could result in a Muslim possibly never

fulfilling the fifth pillar of the faith. However, in view of the arrogance of the Saudi ruling family that continues to ignore the concerns of Muslims such a sacrifice becomes worthy of consideration. Furthermore, given that the funds derived from a pilgrim's monies will be spent on war in Yemen isn't there a case for abstaining from Hajj in these circumstances? It may be a difficult decision to be taken as a collective but Muslims who are well informed should be aware of their responsibilities when they know how their money is to be spent.

**After the Arab Spring in 2011, Saudi took it upon itself to routinely side against the best interests of the people in the region**

In 2017 Mohammed Bin Salman donated the eye-watering sum of \$100m to arch Zionist Ivanka Trump's organisation, a sum that could have been spent improving the lives of millions in Bangladesh, Chad or Mali. With that in mind, a boycott of Hajj and Umra, would be a wise decision and one which would force Saudis to confront their leaders and the political choices they have opted for. The decline in the number of pilgrims would dent the Saudi economy and force its rulers to realise that that source of income should no longer be taken for granted.

### Turning point

Much has been said and written about the rapid ascension of the Al-Saud tribe to the helm of the desert kingdom that now bears its name. Benefiting very early on from US and British support, for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Al-Saud clan had nurtured close links with the rest of the Arab world. The bizarre murder of King Faisal, a known champion of the Palestinian cause, at the hands of a supposedly demented nephew would push the ruling family in an entirely new direction. The accession of King Fahd to the throne in 1982, who renamed himself the 'Custodian of the two holy mosques' would usher in the era of ever closer links with the US coupled with a lavish and often un-Islamic lifestyle that has characterised Saudi royals ever since.

There is no doubt that the immense wealth Saudi Arabia and its ruling class came into in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, thanks to the country's immense oil reserves, plunged the desert tribesmen into a new lifestyle of unmatched luxury. Saudi royals became known throughout the 1960's onwards as money spending 'playboys' with little if no regards for basic Islamic morals. King Faisal's rule attempted to curb this trend. However his premature death in 1975 allowed the ever-increasing royal family to pursue its hedonistic lifestyle.

Their attitudes outside the country were all the more jarring with life in the kingdom, still led according to the Wahhabi creed which calls for a very austere and puritanical -if not distorted- view of Islam. Saudi royals were known to gamble away millions in the casinos of the French Riviera while returning home to legislate ever stricter codes of conduct at home. While alcohol is forbidden in Saudi, parties across their embassies in Western capitals were known to serve-albeit discreetly- the finest champagnes and wines. Throughout this era where television and newspapers offered limited information on the goings on in the Kingdom, the Al-Sauds still benefited from an aura of respectability. Part of the reason for this is that they had expediently instituted huge spending programs across many of the more impoverished regions of the Muslim world, building hospitals, schools and of course mosques in what appeared at the time to be charitable work for the benefit of the Ummah.

With the emergence of satellite TV stations followed by the internet it soon appeared that the conservative kingdom and supposed flag bearer of Islam was anything but conservative or even Muslim. High ranking royals were routinely embroiled in sex scandals involving drugs and prostitutes. The image of a respectable family holding the keys to Mecca and Medina was now in decline.

As this shameless behaviour coupled with its hypocritical conservative domestic agenda became more widely known both in the Muslim world and beyond, the Al-Saud's standing began to fall. When Fahd agreed to have American troops stationed across the peninsula in a bid to fight Iraq during the first Gulf War, opinions of Saudi Arabia rapidly turned.

After the Arab Spring in 2011, Saudi took it upon itself to routinely side against the best interests of the people in the region. It offered the much-hated Tunisian leader, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, asylum after he was ousted from power, yet armed and funded groups to ally with NATO in their war against Libya's Gaddafi. It then moved on to support politically, financially and militarily, Syrian opposition groups in a bid to bring down Bashar Al-Assad's government and then attacked Yemen. More recently it turned against one of its normally closest allies and fellow monarchies, Qatar, launching a campaign of isolation that is yet to yield any positive results for a Saudi Arabia whose foreign policy accomplishments read like a long list of failures.

If these catastrophic decisions weren't enough, Riyadh has been covertly attempting to normalise relations with the terrorist state of Israel and is openly supportive of war against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At a time when Israel is continuously violating international law and killing Palestinian civilians on an almost daily basis, the Saudi 'brother' is organising PR campaigns to sell the necessity of good relations with the 'Jewish state.'

Local hacks are roped in to argue in favour of regional peace with those from 'all faiths' while promoting war with Muslim Iran.

Trade fairs have been showcasing the opportunities of business with Israel while low ranking officials have been travelling to Tel Aviv to meet Israeli politicians and business personalities.

Israel, which has welcomed the sectarian turn taken in the war in Syria, has been keen to present this 'rapprochement' as a willingness by Sunni Muslims to engage with the Jewish state as if Saudi Arabia was a spokesperson for Sunni Islam.

Primarily aimed at Western audiences regularly spoon-fed anti-Iran propaganda, the subliminal message is that today Sunni Muslims want peace while Shia Iran doesn't.

Saudi Arabia of course does not speak for Sunni Muslims and Iran's stance on Israel is the one greatly admired across much of the Muslim world. However, with Israel being reliant on propaganda, facts become almost irrelevant.

Furthermore, it's fair to note that much of the sectarian discourse promoted by Saudi Arabia around the issue of Syria has worked in parts of the Sunni world. Oblivious to the betrayal of all Arab and Muslim causes by Saudi Arabia, it appears that some across the Muslim world still view Iran as the greatest threat to the Middle East despite the fact it has not

started a war in over 150 years and even opposed the war on Iraq in 2003 when it had valid reasons to support the ousting of Saddam Hussein who had launched a war against Tehran in 1980.

Given this context the sectarian narrative that has dominated Middle Eastern news over the past decade makes sense. Imagine a united Muslim world that would speak with one voice in defence of Palestine or against unnecessary conflicts? Imagine an Arab-Iran alliance in which wealth and know-how could be brought together for the greater good of the entire region? Whether in Palestine or in Kashmir, a united Muslim front would present a force to be reckoned with. Instead Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have erected a barrier to any attempts to unite the Ummah and shelter it from further aggression.

### Benefits of sectarianism

It is obvious why the sectarianism that has blighted the region serves the sole purpose of maintaining the fractures in the region by which Israel and imperialist nations control and dominate it. Ironically however it is this very sectarian discourse that will inevitably lead to Saudi Arabia's inevitable demise.

History has shown that Western powers don't have friends but interests. This is all the more obvious for a region seen as 'alien', if not 'enemy', for over 1400 years. With this in mind it is hardly surprising that Saudi Arabia and its royal family, like many former allies in the past, will face the West's wrath sooner or later. Already we see regular denigrating campaigns against the working conditions of migrant workers, women, homosexuals etc...which Saudi money promptly engages to rectify through costly PR campaigns. This gives Western powers the opportunity to 'rock' Saudi Arabia's boat reminding it

where it stands and how dependent it is on Western beneficence. It also allows Western governments to milk the Saudi cow whenever it sees fit. US President Trump famously said that getting Saudi to hand over money was like getting rent, thus humiliating the Saudi rulers, all the while obtaining more funds from them which Washington in turn passes on to Israel in the form of a \$4bn annual grant.

All this has made Saudi hugely unpopular across many parts of the Muslim world. The Kingdom is now one of the most despised countries, not just among Westerners who still view it as backward and barbaric, but by millions across the Muslim world who consider it sold out and craven to US interests. Saudi Arabia has therefore to pay for its friends and can no longer rely on Islamic and Arab solidarity.

Ironically, in promoting a viciously anti-Shia discourse over the war in Syria, Saudi Arabia has rallied many Shia Muslims in support of Iran. Should Iran be attacked it would be easy to imagine Shia Muslims from Lebanon, Syria but also Pakistan or beyond to travel in support of their Shia Muslim brothers. When Saudi Arabia is finally earmarked for regime change, it's fair to say that very few if any Sunnis would take it upon themselves to defend what is now seen as one of the most morally bankrupt and corrupt monarchies in the world.

Saudi sectarianism has at least served a purpose – the hardening of support for one Islamic Republic: Iran.

### • Hafsa Kara-Mustapha

is a journalist, political analyst and commentator with a special focus on the Middle East and Africa. She has worked for the FT group and Reuters and her work has been published in the Middle East magazine, Jane's Foreign report and a host of international publications. A regular pundit on TV and radio, Hafsa can regularly be seen on RT and Press TV.

FORTHCOMING

## The New Colonialism: the US Model of Human Rights

Publication date 16 October 2019.

With contributions from: Saied R. Ameli, Ramon Grosfoguel, Mary K. Ryan, Saeed A. Khan, Sandew Hira, Tasneem Chopra, Rajeesh Kumar, Laurens de Rooij and Sohail Daulatzai.

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# Challenging our sectarianised histories

The blight of sectarianism has its roots in a chauvinism that has permeated our understandings of Islamic history. Eradicating it requires us to challenge these received histories and the language in which they are presented, argues **Muhammad al-Asi.**

**D**ear committed Muslims, brothers and sisters. As you all know, I'm sure you who are here and most of you who tune in, some of you might not know but there's about 50 other individuals who tune in on a daily basis after this *ḥum'a*. So, in the course of the week, there are about 300-400 other individuals who listen to this *khutba*. Some of them are listening because they are sincere. Some of them are listening because they are trouble-makers but especially you who are out here, you understand what is taking place in the real world around us. We have exerted our mental and our physical capacity in trying to expose the stratagem, the master plan of these *shayateen*, and towards that end we will continue with Allah's help and with his guidance.

We mentioned earlier, many times, that '*asabiyya*, this self-centeredness, whether it's a tribal self-centeredness is or whether it is a nationalistic self-centeredness or whether it's a racist, self-centeredness... comes in many forms. Whatever it is, it is an enemy to the committed Muslims because it plays itself out in warfare, just like we are seeing in today's real world.

These *khutbas*, you can place them in the context of the killings that are going on; explosions, pass-by shootings, throwing hand grenades, opening fire randomly in certain areas just because they belong to Sunnis or Shi'as or whatever, all of this is meant to resuscitate this '*asabiyya*. So we're going back to the formative years, the years that are cited by today's '*asabiyya* people. That's what they cite. They go back and they say, this is what Imam 'Ali did or said and this is what Mu'awiya did or said and that's what 'Ayesha did or said. So they go back there to try to fuel their own social egos, in other words for '*asabiyya*.

So this has been in the course of these *Jum'as* with the *Taqwa* of Allah, our number one concern. We're not here to play politics. Some of these *masajid*, they want to play politics. Some of these *masajid*, they just want numbers. Some of these *masajid*, they are just status quo, live and let live. Some of these *masajid* are the mercenary types and it goes on and on. We thank Allah we don't fall into that category and I think we attest to the fact that just by being here we have broken loose from these '*asabiyyat* we are

here, Sunnis and Shi'as, we are here, black and white. We are here, males and females. We are here, rich and poor, in any which way you want to look at it we've broken through these '*asabiyya* barriers.

Now .... the major '*asabiyya* in this country, is the racist '*asabiyya*. That's the major one. The sectarian '*asabiyya* is a newcomer and it's not as prevalent as the racist '*asabiyyat* here. So we're going to go back and deconstruct this sectarian '*asabiyya*. We're going, we've been, and we have continued to be in the process of deconstructing it. Most agree, most Muslims agree and other objective thinkers agree, that much of today's sectarian polarization, the sectarian misunderstandings can be traced to the time when Mu'awiya (at that time he wasn't king) was a governor in As-Sham.

Mu'awiya spread the notion that he and his clan and those who agreed with him were the only ones who qualified to address the assassination of 'Uthman. They were seeking revenge for the assassination of 'Uthman, outside of law and order; they're supposed to be the law and they're supposed to be the leaders. They're supposed to be a type of authority. They're supposed to be an organized civic society as today's words would have it. But he (Mu'awiya) broke with all of that. If all the Muslims had given (and this is what happened), all the Muslims gave *bay'a* to Imam 'Ali, why didn't this person in that context agree with all the rest of the Muslims and place this responsibility in the hands of the central government in Al-Medina? He didn't do that. Had he done that, we probably would not have been struggling with the history that we have, but that's what happened. This is a fact. We're stating something that actually happened.

So he forced Imam 'Ali to take the position of bringing into the context of law and order this breakaway Mu'awiya. Mu'awiya, he was the one who broke from *Al-Ḥama'a*. There are some either ignorant or some mercenary Sunnis who give the impression later on and it lives up until today that Shi'as broke away from *Al-Ḥama'a*. This is absolutely wrong. It was Mu'awiyah who broke away from *Al-Ḥama'a*. He broke away from the *Imama*, the leadership of Ali-bin-Abi Talib, and thus he broke away from the rest of the Muslims' *bay'a* to Imam Ali. He took this province of *As-Sham*, the Levant, he

took it under his firm control and from there he began to say that he was the one who was going to level off this issue of the killing of 'Uthman.

So we had two right opposite positions. I don't care how you look at this or how you read it or how you explain it, this overall history belongs to all of us. It's very unfortunate that in today's world we have those who are the majority Muslims who have inherited the description of Sunnis. They don't even know what it means....When I say they don't know what it means, what I mean by that is they don't know what it means in the political context. Of course, any Sunni would know what it means to be a Sunni as far as offering his prayers, his rituals, et cetera, et cetera. When it comes to this political context that we are trying to throw light on, they don't know what it means. If they did know what it means, they would not be today fuelling their own '*asabiyya* by saying that the Shi'as, they are a breakaway sect from Islam. If we understood our own history, no one would say that, but that's the mainstream information about this subject. So as these positions hardened, it was that *al-Ḥamal*, *as-Siffeen* and *an-Nahrawan*, the three major political, military battles that took place. As these positions hardened, there are some people, they might be in the right camp or they may be in the wrong camp, but in themselves, they're sincere....So there's a person who comes up, the person's name is Shab'ath bin Rabi'. He comes up to Imam 'Ali, when he sees that this is becoming a very serious military division, it's going to have the potential of splitting the Muslims probably forever. It's a life and death issue. He comes up to him and he says, "*Ya Amir al Mumineen*"; those words, all Muslims know, "*Ya Amir al Mumineen*, would you not win over Mu'awiya by giving him some type of authority and also give him some type of status so that he can be, he can appreciate what you do to him for him?" I mean raise the person, give them some status; he's already the governor of *As-Sham*. Okay? Everyone knows that, but right now he is in a renegade position. This person is saying to Imam 'Ali, try to contain this guy. Give him something, add a little more to what he has and have everyone know that you here are not in a position to fight him, but you're in a position to contain him. Of course, Imam Ali knew Mu'awiya much better than this (maybe) person of goodwill. He knew him better than that, so decided he need not give him anything.

Once again, what is at work here is '*asabiyya*. They had this '*asabiyya*, and from there this '*asabiyya*, right now has transformed itself into a political party, which has nothing to do with the words that

we use nowadays. People exchange these words, Sunnis and Shi'as; what we're looking at here has nothing to do with today's average person's understanding of those calling themselves Sunnis and those calling themselves Shi'as. So Imam 'Ali addresses this 'asabiyya. Now before I quote Imam 'Ali, let me remind some of you of the 'asabiyya that's mentioned in the Qur'an. The children of Prophet Ya'qub (upon whom be peace), ... Ya'qub had 10 or 12 or so many children.

They expressed 'asabiyya, Yaqub's children, children of a prophet, they expressed 'asabiyya. The reason they could not get along with their brother, Yusuf; this is their brother, the reason they couldn't get along with him and his brother is because of 'asabiyya. They said to him, "We see that our father is inclined more towards our brother Yusuf and in his inclination to our brother Yusuf he's like sidelining us being

that we are an 'usba among ourselves, put together, we are the members of an 'asabiyya. From there on they are called Bani Isra'eel because of their 'asabiyya. They become the Israelis and today they have explained their racist, discriminatory, militarist, murderous nation state on the basis of this 'asabiyya and then they said "certainly our father (Ya'qub) he is in a manifest obscurity."

The Prophet (pbuh), when this 'asabiyya presented itself during his time, he said "part with it because it has a foul odour to it." Now we come to Imam 'Ali, what did he say about this 'asabiyya that is now roaring? The 'asabiyya before was sort of managed in a concealed manner; oh, it's in a family, it's in the family of Ya'qub. There was no propaganda to it. The 'asabiyya that was about to break out in the time of Allah's Prophet in Medina between the Muhajireen and the Ansar... was smothered because of

the Prophet's strict wording. Now this 'asabiyya has taken on a military proportion. It has the thunder and the roar of the military. So Imam 'Ali said the following in this context: "extinguish what has been concealed in your hearts of the combustion of 'asabiyya and put out the bad feelings of Jahiliyya. (because this 'asabiyya could be traced all the way to the pre-Islamic times) for this fire in the belly, when it happens within a Muslim, it is because of the influence of as-Shaytaan. It's because of the influence of as-Shaytaan."

Now you can read this 'asabiyya in history. I'm giving you the historical context, but you can also read it today, in today's world, ...you go to a certain masjid and you begin to sense there's a sectarian 'asabiyya in this masjid, or you begin to sense that there's a racist 'asabiyya in this masjid or you begin to sense there's a nationalist 'asabiyya in that masjid. It's all 'asabiyya.

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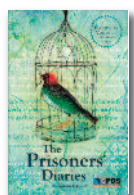
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*Asabiyya* was so pronounced that when Islam was there in the time that we are speaking about, remember this is the first century of Islam, during that time, there were tribes, one tribe that was split. Some of that tribe was with the Umawis and some of that tribe was with the Alawis. One tribe, and you can put together a bunch of these tribes and you'll find some of them on this side and some of them on the other side. We're taking right now a statement from a particular person who expressed the way he felt about this. He saw he was on one side with some of his tribe fighting against some of his tribe who belonged to the opposite side. They're fighting, this is a war. He comes from the tribe of Azd and that Azdi tribe, part of it was in Iraq and part of it was in *As-Sham* and this person's name was Mihnaf ibn Saleem. Here he's expressing how he feels about this because now Islam, Islam meaning the commitment to Allah absent the *'asabiyya*, has forced the Muslims to be divided... He says, "one of the most serious and damaging problems is that we have been forced to face off against our own people. By Allah, what we are doing is we are cutting off our hands with our own hands and now we are clipping our own wings with our own sword."

Let me be more to the point. You see part of your family on the other side of the firing line and you're shooting and they're shooting; both of you are shooting at each other. A person who still has an *'asabiyya* in him, this is the way he'll think about it. And he expressed himself and this is just one expression of many that come to us or should come to us and inform us today so that we are not put in the same position to think of these affairs within an *'asabi* mind.

When Imam 'Ali made up his mind to go to *Siffin*, one of the individuals around him in his camp came to him protesting. He said, "Do you want to take us to our brothers from the people of *As-Sham* so that we kill them, the same way you took us to fight against the people of Basra, the ones we took on in warfare?" Another expression of how this thing was not an easy thing. This meaning, this military encounter between two sides was not an easy decision that was implemented by all who were involved.

There is a person whose name is Shimr ibn 'abd al-Khath'ami - don't confuse one Shimr with another Shimr. This Shimr was from the people of *As-Sham*. He attacked another person, his name is Abu Ka'ab. Abu Ka'ab was the leader of the Khath'am *'asabiyya* in Al-Kufah. I want you to go to the heart of the issue. The heart of the issue is this *'asabiyya* confrontation. So he strikes him and he kills him. They belonged to the same extended family and (this happened) because of the *'asabiyya* that was fuelled by Mu'awiya.

So he turns around, he walks away and he's crying, because he did this, not to any individual from his extended family. This was a noble person, a chieftain of his own Khath'am tribe. Remember this person, the killer, comes from *As-Sham*, meaning that

he's in Muawiyah's camp, he killed another one of his extended family in Imam Ali's camp and he felt very sad, remorseful, very bad that all of this had happened. Then he said this, 'May Allah have mercy on you Abu Ka'ab. I killed you to obey people and you are dearer to me than these people.' Who's the people he's referring to? He's referring to Muawiyah's camp. "But I don't know what to say, the only thing I can see is *Shaytaan* has managed to place this sedition between us and among us. And I could only see Quraysh now playing with us." Remember Quraysh is that argument that Mu'awiya had to justify his political position in taking revenge for the assassination of 'Uthman. A person like this saw through what he was doing.

Amr ibn al-'As counsels Mu'awiya in the Battle of *Siffin*, tells him the following: "We raised the *Masahif* (Qurans) on our swords and we say, whatever is in these *Masahif* is to judge our differences, the differences we have between each other, these *Masahif* serve to adjudicate the disputes that we have." This was a move. This was a ploy to instigate within the camp of an Imam 'Ali, another form of *'asabiyya*; the holier than thou phenomenon. So when this happened in the camp that was on the right side of the issue because of this, a self-centeredness among certain elements in that camp, we had (arise) a new *'asabiyya* that Imam 'Ali would deal with later on in the Battle of *Nahrawan*. Nope. I'm going to stop here for a moment and ask you, can any one of you with the decades of your lifetime with you, can any one of you listening to all of this, can any one of you churn out this *'asabiyya* today that has Muslims killing Muslims? You've heard the narrative. What makes a Muslim, I asked you, what makes today a Muslim able to kill another Muslim citing the history that we are covering? Obviously, it is a wrong reading of this history. Otherwise if you're just reading this like, like facts, try to cover this territory like your facts; gravity is a law of physics. When someone speaks about gravity, does anyone feel *'asabiyya*? Anyone feel charged against someone else? No, because it's a fact and if we can revisit these events as facts minus this *'asabiyya*, we will clear this charged atmosphere that right now is fuelling civil wars. So when this new ploy was used, raise these *Masahif*; some people thought that there was goodwill on the other side. Right now they want to arbitrate these differences using the *Masahif*; the Qur'an, Allah's words themselves, the *ayaat* and the *surahs* of the Qur'an. What more do you want?

So when Imam 'Ali realized that some people right now are beginning to form a new *'asabiyya* for themselves. He said to them, "Woe to you. They don't raise it for the purposes that you see. They are not even versed in its own meanings." Its own meanings, meaning the meanings of these *Masahif* that they are raising.

What would cause anyone to feel *'asabiyya*, when we, when anyone mentions this, unless there's some type of person who is covering this history, he himself is emitting

*'asabiyya*. He himself is not able to present these issues as facts. So what he does, he talks through the subject matter verbally but non-verbally his gestures, his movements, they emit this poisonous *'asabiyya*. And here we go, that's another fuel that's high octane for this civil strife and these civil wars that these *shayateen* are planning. Imam 'Ali goes on to say, "The only reason that they raised this for you is to fool you, to outmanoeuvre you and to trap you." Some of his followers said to him, "Those folks, they're calling us to Allah's book and you are calling us to the sword. You will recall al-Ashtar (a military commander in one of the battles), and withhold him from killing other Muslims or else we're going to do to you what we did to 'Uthman."

What do you do when you're put in a position like this? Imam 'Ali knew right now that we have a new *'asabiyya*, now this *'asabiyya* has come to his own camp. How are you going to deal with this? He had to deal with it in the best possible way. What you're going to have right now, it's not enough to have one civil war you're going to have right now another internal civil war. You can't have that happen. So he acquiesced not because he didn't know the truth, not because he was weak and not because he was playing politics, he was doing this to as much as possible shrink, collapse the *'asabiyya* that has shown its face in his own camp.

Now both sides have accepted the arbitration, there's a person who is going between both sides. The person who's going between both sides is al-Ash'ath and we notice one of the decisions that was a very major difference between him and Imam 'Ali. Remember both of them are in the same camp. Imam 'Ali wanted 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas to represent his side in this arbitration. This Ash'ath did not want that to happen because of *'asabiyya*. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas is the cousin of an Imam Ali. So he preferred Abu Musa al-Ash'ari and he eventually filled in that role. But the way the decision was made was to avoid complicating an internal *'asabiyya*, not to feed this *'asabiyya* anymore. And from here on, we knew how history developed, there was this class of people called al-Qurra in Iraq, they were the first ones who agreed with Imam 'Ali to go to this *tahkeem*. They had to see the gimmicks and the shenanigans of the other side (because) they wouldn't listen to what Imam 'Ali when he was advising them. They had to suffer, meet the other side and realize that they were being fooled, that they were tricked. And then they turned to an extreme that manifested an *'asabiyya* known as Khawarij.

And they hid under that word, "there is no governance except that which belongs to Allah." And Imam 'Ali said "they're saying there shouldn't be any type of governorship, but there has to be some type of governorship whether it is in the right direction or in the wrong direction". Or else we'd rather be living in a jungle. When you don't have an *amara* (governorship) go to a jungle and live



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there, there's no *amara* there. But if you have civil society that civil society needs decision makers and those decision makers, whether they are making their decisions in a way that is in the virtue of Allah or whether they are making it in the way that is in the vice of *as-Shaytaan*, society requires it.

We've dealt with *'asabiyya* when it was beneath the surface. We dealt with *'asabiyya* when it was in transition and from here on this *'asabiyya* became what we call in today's world political parties, and when we speak about political parties, we mean political parties that are, that have as their engine and as their fuel and as their transmission this *'asabiyya*.

Now, to try to give this a finishing touch, the word *Shi'a*, in today's world because we've inherited 14 centuries of *'asabiyya*, in today's world, the average person says, oh, *Shi'a*, anyone who uses the word *Shi'a* then automatically what comes to mind is those who in one way or the other, to one degree or the other, with whatever explanation or the other, say that they are followers of Imam 'Ali. There are so many versions and so many interpretations of this that it goes beyond numbers. But anyone who says the word *Shi'a* today, they automatically think, okay, these are the followers of Imam 'Ali. This understanding today is a result of an accumulation of these *'asabiyya*, because the word *Shi'a* doesn't mean that, it doesn't mean that in the linguistic depth of the word and it doesn't mean that in the political definition of the word. In the Qur'an and in the Sunnah it doesn't mean that.

I'm going to tell you what I mean by this. First of all, let me quote for you the *tahkeem* when both sides, the side of Imam

'Ali and the side of King Mu'awiyah, when they decided that they are going to arbitrate this whole affair, the following was written: "This is what both agreed to adjudicate. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan, Ali on behalf of the people of Iraq and whoever is included in their partisanship inclusive of Muslims". Okay. Up until here you say, okay, yes, this proves not what you're saying. It proves that the *Shi'a* of 'Ali are the people of Iraq. So he has his *Shi'a* but it doesn't stop here. The following sentence says "the adjudication of Mu'awiya on behalf of the people of As-Sham and whoever is of their *shi'a*, Muawiya had his *shi'a*, in the wording of the *tahkeem* that was agreed upon between both sides. The same wording for the two different political and ideological positions, the same wording that Imam 'Ali had his *shi'a*, Mu'awiya had his *shi'a* and no one said, oh there's something wrong with this wording, omit that and say Mu'awiya and his *ansaruhu*, his supporters or Mu'awiya and his *ashabuhu*, his companions. No one said that. This is the way the wording of the *tahkeem* was put together by both sides and when you review the word *shi'a* in the Qur'an it doesn't have the meaning that was gained throughout these 14 centuries of a growing *'asabiyya*.

I know I'm going to be a little maybe too harsh for some of you. Does it matter? Bear with me. There's something called tough love. The Prophet, because of the *'asabiyya* that we have, the Prophet, the people around the Prophet, are called the *Sahaba*. That's also worth looking at the word *sahaba*, just like we're looking at, the word *shi'a*. Does it mean something peculiar

to Sunnis?

It doesn't mean that linguistically, it doesn't mean that when you follow it in the Qur'an and even in the hadiths, it doesn't mean that. So if *shi'a* doesn't mean what it means to us today and *sahaba* doesn't mean what it means to us today, if we can liberate ourselves, go back to the origin, go back to the source, linguistically and Qur'anicly, who of you will feel comfortable? This is going to strike your own personal *'asabiyya*. Who of you will feel comfortable even though the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* validates what I'm going to say? Who feels comfortable to say *shi'at Rasulillah*, instead of saying *ashabu Rasulillah* you say *shi'at Rasulillah*. That throws a monkey wrench in the *'asabiyya* way of thinking. Instead of saying *shi'at al-Imam 'Ali*, you say *ashabul Imam 'Ali*. That also throws a monkey wrench in the *'asabiyya* mind because you've grown conditioned and accustomed and engineered to say certain things in certain ways without even thinking through what you said. You just inherit that. You hear a scholar you have confidence in or any person you have confidence in and you take it for granted. We think these issues have to be rethought so that we're not out there killing ourselves.

### • Imam Muhammad al-Asi

is currently working on the first-ever English Tafsir of the Qur'an titled: The Ascendant Qur'an: Realigning Man to the Divine Power Culture. He is based in Washington D.C. This article is the edited transcript of one of his Friday khutbahs delivered on 6 September 2013.

The full khutbah can be heard at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_koh9G5puQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_koh9G5puQ&feature=youtu.be)

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# Islamophobia is the 'new anti-Semitism'

With the emergence of Israel as a western client state, the age-old prejudice against Jews was replaced by a corresponding hatred of Arabs that has fed the rampant Islamophobia we see today, explains **Robert Inlakesh**.

The current climate of widespread Islamophobia in the 'Western World', is increasingly becoming more hostile and as it does, in order to combat it, we must meet its ideological origins and, as Muslims, come to terms with the way it has become.

There should be little dispute amongst Muslims, regardless of our differences and schools of thought through which we understand Islam, that Islamophobia is rampant in Western society, both at a micro and macro level. Whether it be through the education system, the dialogue of political leaders, the mainstream media, Hollywood, TV shows and much of the literature we read, we see that both Muslims and Arabs are represented in a way that reflects an agenda to demonize us and to mis-educate the public on the complexities of our communities.

Just about everyone in the West has an opinion on Muslims and Arabs, yet many do not even know there is a difference between a Muslim and an Arab. Furthermore, most people in the West do not generally understand that Persians and Arabs are two different groups of people and are separated by uniquely different histories, languages and cultures. The reason I use this as an example is because it points out a lack of understanding that has, in my analysis, come about by design. For if this wasn't the doing of those who have an agenda to engineer the minds of the Western public in order for them to come away with a specific impression of what Islam is, why else would Islam and Muslims be a near daily point of discussion on mainstream media channels? And why would audiences still lack a basic understanding of both?

There is little doubt that due to wars imposed upon Muslim majority countries, animosity towards the West exists. Western nations pursue wars of aggression which result in displacement, something that again is not taught in an honest manner to most in the West. This is of course because the mainstream disseminators of information are part and parcel of the war machine and consistently perpetuate its lies.

To unravel Islamophobia, we have to understand that what is known as the elite in the West, is hostile towards any group of people that poses a threat to the way they

wish to maintain control and go about their imperial ambitions. This is one of the main reasons why the Jews of Europe became such a target in the West; they were perceived to be a challenging group who possessed a different ideology to that of the predominantly Christian elite class.

Jews became targets of what became known as anti-Semitism - a type of hatred that you can see shares much in common with today's targeting of Muslims. From the way we are depicted in propagandistic artwork and throughout popular culture, to the attacks upon our customs and practices, to the supposed great threat we pose to the now "Judeo-Christian" values of the West, we are the biggest threat to their way of life and we need to be changed or destroyed. This is the message communicated to Muslims.

But how do the terms Semite or Semitism prove a connection between the hatred of Jews and the hatred of Muslims? Well, firstly this requires a definition.

Semitism was a term created in the 18th Century by French philologists to denote a linguistic category. The term Semite meant someone who was a native speaker of a Semitic language (Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic etc.). But later, in the 19th century, the term Semite came to describe someone racially, with the likes of Ernest Renan categorizing a Semite as taking two forms, the Islamic (Muslims) and Hebraic (Jews). The Semites were separated by the likes of Renan from their opposite, the Aryans. The Semites were branded as being monotheists who possessed an "inferior nature" coupled with backward ideas and who did not have the ability to create in the way that the Aryans did. This wave of thought has been investigated in great detail by the likes of Edward Said, the late prominent Palestinian academic, in his writings on Orientalism, and is crucial to understanding how today's hatred of Muslims and Arabs has evolved.

Back then however, Muslims didn't pose the great threat that was perceived in the Jewish communities of Europe. Jewish people were seen to carry ideologies hostile to the status quo. They were seen to have too much power through successful individuals and were looked at in a very similar way to how Muslims are viewed today.

Jews were forced to look for a solution to what was then known as the 'Jewish question'. A small group of people then eventually found the solution in setting up a settler colonial state away from Europe. It is important to note that Theodore Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, had famously proposed to the Pope a mass baptism of European Jews to Christianity, the proposal coming just three years prior to his launching the Zionist project, and the formation of the first Zionist Congress in 1897.

Interestingly, all the main European supporters of the Zionist project, were also rabid anti-Semites. This included the likes of Lord Arthur Balfour, a man held in high acclaim in Israel today, and who was the author of the infamous 1917 Balfour Declaration, which promised Palestine to the Zionist movement for the establishment of a Jewish state. Lord Balfour was also the author of the Balfour's Alien Act and intended to solve the 'Jewish Question' by removing Jews to Bolshevik Russia.

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the battles which ensued between British and Zionist forces, the West remained somewhat ambivalent in its support of Israel. For Britain specifically, there was bad blood with the new Zionist State, as around 500 Brits had been killed in Zionist terrorist attacks. It wasn't until the 1956 Suez Crisis, a war in which Israel, France and the UK fought together, that Britain abandoned its plans to bomb and destroy Israel's air-force.

As the years went by, Israel grew closer in its partnership to the West, specifically with the United States. Then came the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the beginning of the big shift of hatred from Jews to Muslims. This illegal war that Israel waged, in which it occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, proved to be a turning point in Israel's relationship with the rest of the Western world.

The reason why this war brought Israel closer to the West and ultimately closer with Jews living all around the world was because of the way the war was perceived. Israel had just beaten what was portrayed as the evil Soviet-backed Egypt and the rest of the surrounding Arab countries. It had proved itself as a strategic ally for the rest of the West and also a Western outpost in the fight against the Soviets and Arab Nationalists. Israel was now a fully-fledged and justified part of the Western war machine. Note that at this time, Muslims did not yet form a specific target.

Eventually, the Soviet Union fell and the Cold War ended. It was then that the target

specifically became the people of the Middle-East, the other type of Semite that was now the new enemy and fixation of empire. With the establishment of Israel, we have not seen the abolishment of hatred, we have just seen the hatred of the Western Empire move in a different direction. Whoever is seen to be a threat to the status quo, is targeted and made to be the other. Today that target is the Islamic Semite.

The Arab and Muslim peoples of the Middle-East began to be spoken of in a very different way. The fixation of cinema and the media on the Arab world became rife. At the same time the lionizing of the Israelis came to prominence. Still today, in a world where we claim to have standards and boundaries when it comes to discussing minority groups, when it comes to Muslims it's open season. I cannot count the number of movies which, without any link to the plot of the film, inject into the script negative stereotypes about the Middle-East and Muslims.

As the new enemies of empire became countries in the Middle-East, the Israelis became the closest ally of the rest of the West and pushed Islamophobia more than anyone else. The rampant Islamophobia from Israel is used to bolster the country's usefulness to the West in the face of widespread recognition that it is a rogue settler colonial state.

Fast forward to September the 11th, 2001. This is the point at which the West and Israel got their justification for their recent interventions in the Middle-East and that is also when the all-out dehumanization of Muslims and everything Middle-Eastern, went into overdrive.

With the huge rise in Muslim immigration to places like Europe and elsewhere (after years of programming the populations of the countries into which these newly immigrated Muslims and Arabs settle) we witnessed a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobic hate crimes. The media and politicians, for the most part, will not openly endorse this sort of hate, but at the same time they refuse to admit their role in it and continue with their atrocious stereotyping.

The stage was then set for the rise of the far right. These Islamophobic groups are sometimes portrayed as small, and some of them may well be, but the less active support base they draw from is indeed a larger portion of the population than we would like to think. If we are not careful in the way we confront this problem, we could well see some extremely horrific actions taken against Muslims in the future. Someone like Donald Trump serving as US President, for example, has not exactly put us at the point where we will be placed in concentration camps. But despite this, we must see that the reason people like him exist is because what they are saying resonates with a very large group of people. Islamophobia is not the doing of Donald Trump, Nigel Farage and others like them, it is manufactured primarily by those in the mainstream media

**We also must see that Islamophobia inside the West, as horrible as it can be, is not nearly as lethal as it has been in the Middle-East, where it has been used to justify what has/is being done to our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters**

who today claim to be against the Islamophobic comments of these leaders.

It is also interesting to see that the Western right wing, which was historically always against gay rights, women's rights and Jewish groups, is now claiming solidarity with these groups in order to use them as a cudgel with which to attack Muslims. This can be explained by the rise of liberalism as the predominant concept in the West. Liberalism has now surpassed Christianity in being the West's primary marker of identity. Yet still, regardless of the change in ideology, the power structure seeking to dominate and exploit is very similar to what it was previously. There have been no revolutions recently and the ultra-rich and the power blocs in government have not changed dramatically since the 20th Century.

### **So how can we solve Islamophobia?**

Ultimately, as Muslims, if we wish to solve the problem of Islamophobia, we must recognize that our struggle against it is also the struggle of the Palestinian people and of the liberation of the Middle-East.

If we want to work to prevent Islamophobia, the best way is to have our views represented more widely. This does not mean however, changing our individual cultures or practices so that we will be accepted - this is what the Western elite would ultimately love the most. The reverse engineered Muslim is the Muslim they love, the Muslim who doesn't fight for justice or stand up for the oppressed is a Muslim they can tolerate. But a Muslim who does stand up for his beliefs and values is a Muslim that must be destroyed in order to set an example to the rest of us. Conform and live comfortably, or rebel and face the power of the state. We saw the very same thing when both the British and French colonized the Arab world.

For example, the West has no problem

with the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, and for very similar reasons, they do not have a problem with Muslims who do as they say. The problem they have is with Muslims who do not obey and who stand up to tyranny.

We must also see that Islamophobia inside the West, as horrible as it can be, is not nearly as lethal as it has been in the Middle-East, where it has been used to justify what has/is being done to our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. The mass murder, occupation, theft and various forms of oppression against Muslims overseas, is the ugly result of Islamophobia. Whilst the people of the West claim to have learnt from the lessons of past genocides, in fact they have learnt little. Right now, the transformation of Muslims into an inferior and a foreign other, is turning into something a lot more lethal. That's why our fight to combat Islamophobia here matters so much because outside the West it is being used to exterminate people as if they were rats.

Right wing groups, consisting of extremely ill-educated and angry people, are on the rise and we cannot combat them through censorship, nor can we combat them through changing our views to suit what is described as "Western culture". We are forced to create allies, through educating people on the history that got us to this point in time, the conflicts the West has started and the colonization of Muslim majority countries.

Many, but not all, will become allies when they are more familiar with Muslims, Middle-Easterners and what Islam is. Therefore, there needs to be a push for schools to educate the populations of the West about Muslims and also how colonialism and Western-inspired conflicts have affected the world. We live in diverse and multicultural societies in the West, yet we do not get taught in school about why countries like the United Kingdom became so ethnically diverse and what role Britain played in causing this. People fear what they do not understand much more easily than something with which they are familiar.

We also have to pressure the leaders of our own communities to actually confront the wider problems we face and to properly represent us. If our leaders refuse to stand up for the Palestinians for instance, they are not committed to fighting Islamophobia, they are simply looking to make themselves and a small group of Muslims accepted and this does nothing for the rest of us. Spreading our message, having dialogue and boldly exercising our freedom of speech is how we are going to get the good-hearted public of the West on our side, because what we stand for is essentially what any other good-hearted person stands for.

#### **• Robert Inlakesh**

is European correspondent for Press TV and special contributor to 21WIRE and other publications. He has reported from on the ground in occupied Palestine.



# Provincializing materialist feminism: Gender, capital and reproduction in Occupied Palestine

In debunking liberal feminism as complicit in neo-liberal regimes of oppression, materialist feminism itself requires scrutiny. Its own underpinnings when discussed particularly in the light of the occupation of Palestine, find it just as guilty of reproducing colonial and racialized hierarchies argues **Zainab Siddiqui**.

**D**ecades of academic scholarship and political commentary have exposed the structural role of liberal feminism within modern imperialist domination. Presently, consensus over the Eurocentric and ahistorical character of many mid-20th century accounts of patriarchy (and their contemporary ideological descendants) spans a wide array of academic disciplines and political trajectories. Myriad voices within Black feminist thought, post-colonial studies, and decolonial studies in particular have emphasized the importance of grasping the mutual imbrication of gender, coloniality, and race. Cognizant of such contestations, some prominent voices within Marxist feminism have sought to address the problem of historico-racial difference. These contributions, however, have underemphasized racial antagonism, citing the totalizing nature of the wage-relation as the basis for its waning significance (James & Dalla Costa 1972; Gonzalez 2011). The frequent theoretical erasure of coloniality and race, and *simultaneous rejection of liberal feminism* within materialist accounts of patriarchy raise important questions: Where do these two frameworks actually depart? To which kind of political praxis is (neo)Marxist feminism conducive, vis-à-vis dark bodies and anti-colonial subjects? Is a materialist account of historical-racial difference possible within its theoretical coordinates?

In this article I explore how the Zionist occupation of Palestine is an important site at which to evaluate the blind spots of materialist-feminist accounts of the family. Indeed, the Israeli settler-colonial project—sustained through genocidal technologies, practices of geographical displacement, widespread incarceration, and politically motivated killings—forcibly transforms the

Palestinian ‘family’ into a precarious and unstable formation. Engaging critically with “The Power of Women and Subversion of the Community” by American autonomist feminist Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and more recent writings by communization theorist Maya Gonzalez, I argue that the homogenizing tendency of settler-colonialism—which constantly lays bare the immediate antagonism between colonizer and colonized—may disrupt formulations that posit sexual difference as the most fundamental division within a global underclass. I will argue that by obfuscating the *originary* violence of colonialism, assuming the wage-relation as its primary subject, and overlooking the *racial* logic of power in the current global order, particular trajectories within materialist-feminism not only provide an inadequate description of the colonized world but also remain ideologically complicit with the pacification and disembodiment of anti-colonial subjects.

## Marxian Analysis and the Zionist Occupation of Palestine

Palestine—a site structured by the violence of colonial encounter—illuminates important contradictions between the broad tendencies of capital on one hand, and the logic of settler-colonialism on the other. Indeed, the generalization of the capitalist mode of production in Israel, a process dependent on the utilization of cheap Palestinian labor, has at times conflicted with the systematic marginalization and elimination of Palestinians central to the Zionist project. While the West Bank and Gaza grew increasingly integrated within the Israeli

economy under the Labor Party, the ‘proletarianization’ of Palestinians gave way to the revival of pre-1948 calls for “Jewish labor only” (Kanafani 1980) following the Likud Party’s electoral victory in 1977. Despite the internal logic of capitalism, within which cheapest sources of labor are readily exploited, after 1977 the Israeli state systematically prioritized the hiring of Jewish workers over Palestinians, despite the fact that Jewish labor cost over twice as much on average (Tamari 1980: 91). Low and unskilled positions previously deemed undesirable by Jewish workers and held by Palestinians were increasingly awarded to dark, non-Ashkenazi Jews. This pattern demonstrates a disjuncture between the logic of capital and that of Israeli settler-colonialism, in which territorial expansion and the total marginalization of the Palestinians become more immediately consequential than economic exploitation or extracting the most value from workers in a given time.

The apparent divergences between the compulsions of capital and the racism of the settler-colonial state disturb the economic determinism foundational to materialist feminism. Early in “The Power of Women and Subversion of the Community,” James and Dalla Costa assert, “the way the ruling class robs the exploited of their labor is unique to each historical epoch, and *all other social relations in the society, beginning with the family...reflect that form*” (emphasis added). This class reductionist approach echoes the manifestos of Jewish settler-socialists in Palestine prior to the peasant revolts of 1936-1939. One such statement issued in 1920 proclaims, “[The Jewish workers] are ready to fight on your side against the capitalist enemy, be it Jew, Arab or British... the Jewish worker, who is a soldier of the revolution, has come to offer you his hand as a comrade in resisting British, Jewish and Arab capitalists” (Kanafani 1980). Though written prior to the establishment of the Zionist state in 1948, the manifesto makes no direct mention of the extant tensions between Jewish and native *workers*, rooted in nearly forty years of Palestinian displacement by settlers. By overlooking early colonial realities, this approach—and indeed that of James and Dalla Costa—fails to

acknowledge how the mechanisms of colonialism may act in apparent *contradiction* with the totalizing tendency of capital.

### Sexual Reproduction and the Palestinian Family

Perhaps the clearest point at which the Zionist occupation of Palestine troubles central claims in materialist feminism is with regards to childbearing and sexual reproduction. In “Communization and the Abolition of Gender,” Gonzalez details the significance capital assigns to differences in sexual constitution as she asserts, “Class society thus gives a social purpose to bodies: because some women ‘have’ babies, all bodies that could conceivably ‘produce’ babies are subject to social regulation. Women become the slaves of the biological contingencies of their birth”. While in Gonzalez’s formulation sexual reproduction becomes a compulsion of capital to be resisted, the narratives of Palestinian women, Palestinian nationalist discourse, and even Israeli state policies situate childbearing in relation a different set of questions.

To this day the struggle over land and bodies remains central to both the Israeli state project and Palestinian resistance to it. The constant enumeration of Palestinians and settlers by international agencies and internal actors alike reveals the terms of this competition: numbers. In her observations on pronatalism in Galilee, a territory within historic Palestine, anthropologist Rhoda Kanaaneh details this dimension of the anti-colonial struggle. She notes how despite the attempts of Zionist state agencies to use the depoliticized language of “family planning” and “crowd alleviation” to reduce the natural population growth rate among Palestinians, more than fifty years after the establishment of Israel, this rate remained twice as high as that among Jews. To this day Palestinians continue to have more children than settlers, despite restrictive Israeli state policies that aim to reverse this ratio. Zionist attempts to curb native population growth and achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine appear in the

incentives the health care system provides for Jewish mothers, or policies like the prohibition of polygyny among Arabs. And indeed, it may not be a coincidence that heavy exposure to Israeli tear gas has frequently resulted in miscarriages among pregnant Palestinian women. These strict means of regulation attest to the Zionist state’s anxiety over the reproduction of the colonized Other.

Despite the growing trend among upper class Palestinians of birthing fewer children, an overwhelming number of non-elites continue to view childbearing as a defiant act. In *Birthing the Nation* (2002), Kanaaneh recalls her conversation with a Palestinian woman in Galilee who declares, “The Jewish doctor wishes he could tie all our tubes. I told him, ‘I’m going to have another baby and name him Muhammad and you can’t stop me’”. This politicization of reproduction reconfigures the resisting woman’s body as an asexual “military womb that gives birth to fighters,” shattering basic materialist feminist conceptions of gender. Contrary to Zionist narratives that frequently portray Palestinian women as passive bystanders in the national struggle, Kanaaneh notes that anti-colonial women were highly invested and involved in the popular resistance of the First Intifada – *particularly* at the level of “[outbreeding] the Jews”, as one woman in Kanaaneh’s work describes. The politicized character of childbearing under occupation remains indisputable, and perhaps impossible to divorce from a broader conception of the family as a potentially revolutionary unit.

Specific imaginings of the family have played a prominent role in both the Palestinian resistance against Zionism and the broader history of Third Worldist anti-colonial politics. In Fanon’s account of the Algerian independence movement in *A Dying Colonialism*, the colonized family represents the most basic cell of the anticolonial resistance. Fanon suggests it may be this family’s inherent instability—or perhaps *impossibility*—that recasts it as a site of struggle. He notes how the movement for national independence and the severity of its accompanying repression

inflict “grave traumatism upon the family group: a father taken into custody in the street in the company of his children...a husband arrested, dragged away, imprisoned”. In Palestine, a similar pattern of incarceration, home demolitions, and daily violence impact the intimate lives of countless Palestinians, rendering the family a deeply precarious formation. This fragmentation of the family unit echoes Fanon’s account of Algeria during the anti-colonial struggle, in which he describes the many “children scattered to the winds, innumerable orphans who roam about, haggard and famished.” He continues, “It is not possible to imagine that the Algerian family can have remained intact”. Fanon’s observations relate to occupied Palestine, where the objective dissolution of the family—*spearheaded not by feminists but occupation forces*—has been underway since the late 19th century. In this context, Marxist calls for the ‘abolition’ of the family appear ideologically *complicit* with the genocidal technologies of settler-colonialism.

The effort to preserve the family—or more precisely, to *cultivate* it—has been a central facet of anti-colonial struggle in Palestine. As in the case of anti-Zionist politics, even the *language* of the Algerian revolution relied upon an expansive notion of family that sharply contrasted with the predominantly nuclear model in Europe. Fanon notes how, through the fight for independence, “the young girl was replaced by the militant, the woman by the *sister*” He continues to describe the militant husband and wife in struggle as the “fertile nucleus of the nation” who are crucial to the anti-colonial resistance movement. In contrast, James and Dalla Costa conceptualize the family and home mainly as formations that naturalize and uphold the wage-relation, ‘imprisoning’ women within the role of reproductive laborer. They describe the domestic sphere as the “maternal cradle always ready to help and protect in time of need...the best guarantee that the unemployed do not immediately become a horde of disruptive outsiders”. Rather than a potentially



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revolutionary unit, for James and Dalla Costa, the family represents one of the most consequential obstacles in achieving freedom from capital. These contradicting accounts illustrate how the colonial encounter destabilizes foundational assumptions in the neo-Marxist framework. Perhaps even the most basic designations of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ misrepresent the reality of life under settler-colonialism.

While colonialism enmeshed with patriarchy impacts women and men in specific, often disparate, ways, the very category ‘gender’ may preclude an analysis of how settler-colonialism necessarily reduces the colonized into bodies, or mere economic units of labor. In her discussion of *sumud* (*Sumud* refers to the politicized concept of ‘steadfastness’ within the Palestinian struggle, particularly the practice of keeping silent during prison interrogations. Meari describes it as a “Palestinian mode of anticolonial being/becoming that constantly engages a process of de-subjection”) and rape as a colonial technology, anthropologist Lena Meari describes the Israeli interrogation room as an important site of resistance and sexual politics. Despite the gendered character of torture and other methods of political repression, however, the practice of *sumud* in the face of interrogators may in fact *destabilize* notions of the sex-body. One former political prisoner ‘Aisha explains, “I did not perceive my position as being a female. For me the interrogator was [not a man but] an enemy to confront”. Clearly, the harsh conditions of the interrogation room concretize divisions between colonizer and colonized, as they simultaneously blur those between ahistorical conceptions of ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ The feminist branding of the Zionist project and the prevalence of women serving in the Israeli occupation forces—and more generally, the woman-centered language of modern military interventions—further highlight the incoherence of colonizer and colonized uniting on the basis of shared sex. Indeed, the settler-colonial situation forces us to

rethink key distinctions foundational to materialist feminist readings of sex, capital, and race. The materialist-feminist call for the ‘abolition of the family’ conceptualizes it as a historically specific social formation that facilitates the domination of capital over people. Within this framework, the nuclear family becomes a central site of consumption, reserve labor, and conditioning at which labor power as commodity is reproduced. The geographical coordinates of this family are rarely specified in neo-Marxist accounts of patriarchy, but the ‘freedom’ to bear children is generally framed as a compulsion of capital to be resisted.

Although neo-Marxist accounts of patriarchy may not be conducive to the same colonialist tendencies as liberal feminism, their central focus on the wage-relation understates how colonialism, white supremacy, and anti-blackness are structurally foundational to capitalism. James and Dalla Costa’s analysis instead stresses the absolute centrality of gendered divisions as they write, “when we say that women must...begin to move out of the home, we mean their point of departure must be precisely this willingness to destroy the role of the housewife, in order to begin to come together...reconstructing a real solidarity among women”. While James and Dalla Costa write specifically in opposition to the modern rise of the “privatised female,” their conception of solidarity—which appears reliant on liberal concepts of an undifferentiated global sisterhood—erases real differences between women; specifically, it denies white women’s ongoing role within the historical-racial structure of colonialism.

In his account of the Algerian revolution in *The Wretched of the Earth*, anti-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon suggests the structural impossibility of solidarity between female French settlers and Algerians when he refers to the colonizer and colonized as “two different species”. Fanon’s historical-ontological account of First and Third World subjects disrupts any notion of abstract solidarity based on the loose grounds of (reified conceptions of)

sex. He writes, “The ‘thing’ that has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself”. In other words, it is only through revolutionary violence that ruptures colonial logics in their totality that it even becomes possible for the colonized to become ‘men’ or ‘women,’ i.e. (gendered) subjects. For Fanon, it is from this initial state of *nonbeing* and the economic structure that fosters and depends upon it, that new humans become possible. This historical-ontological dimension of colonization remains unaddressed in materialist feminist accounts of patriarchy.

Marxist feminism requires stretching, if not a radical rethinking to grasp the historico-ontological dimension of colonialism. Its central focus on the wage-relation as a mechanism that globalizes value forcefully positions non-white women in solidarity with white women, erasing the racial structure of colonialism, and revealing a blatant continuity between liberal conceptions of female solidarity and the ‘materialist’ unity posited by (neo)Marxist feminists. The universalizing tendency of liberalism undoubtedly resurfaces in such accounts of patriarchy—but in a modified form that references the propensity of capital to totalize, rather than the misogyny of dark men. Given that the economic structure and immediate realities of modern racial antagonism disrupt any possibility of solidarity grounded purely in sexual constitution, the politics of some trajectories within materialist feminism appears to be based on *constructing* such a unity. Indeed, its foundational logic not only dismisses racial-colonial difference, but *relies* upon its de-signification. The theoretical-political challenge of the present moment may not be the unfeasible task of reconfiguring materialist feminism to encompass questions of race and colonialism, but rather, to critique and dismantle the reproduction of coloniality in all of its forms.

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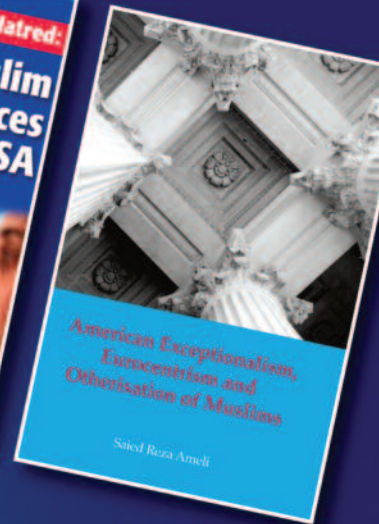
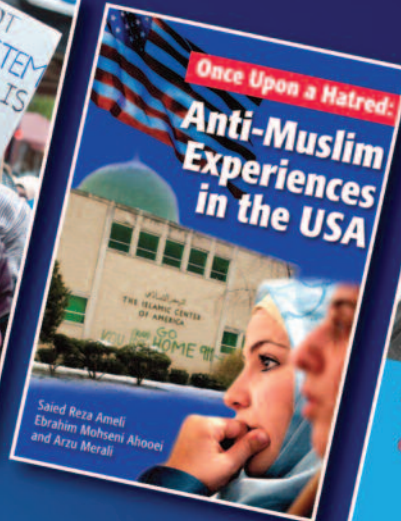
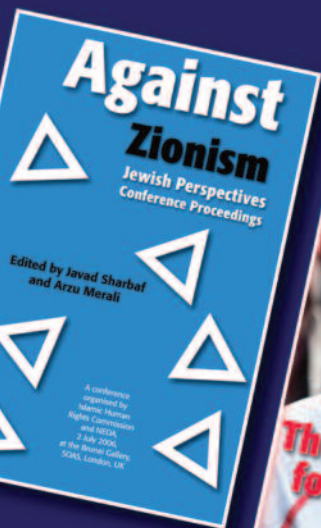


## Nigeria Appeal

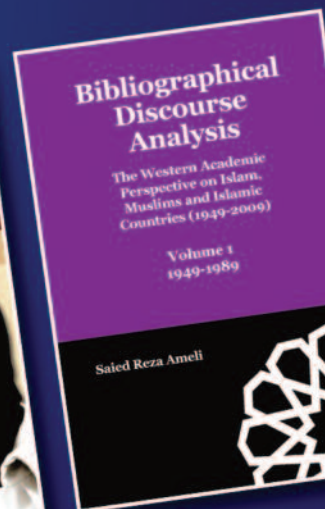
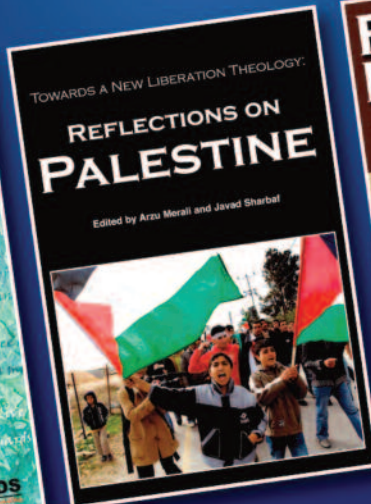
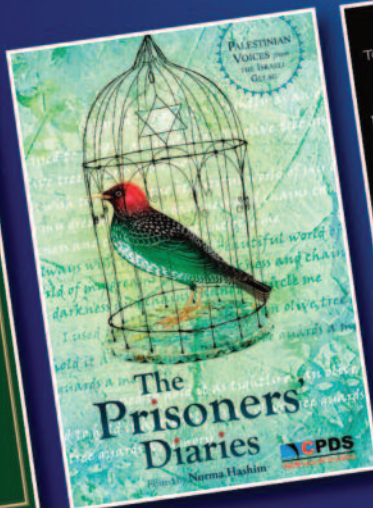
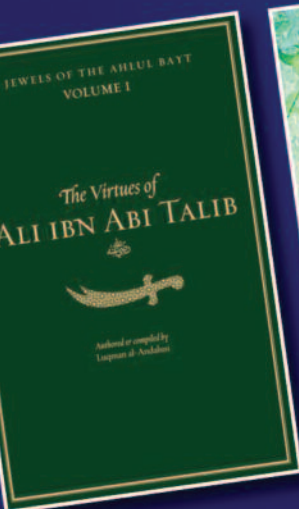
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