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- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

In this issue

Local Events 2

Muslim Affairs 3

What Islamic hygienic practices can teach to counter coronavirus 4

Mosques, Islamic centres close down 5

Faces of Muslim women throughout history 6

Story: Enemy becomes friend 8

Abrar

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The coronavirus crisis exposed our weakness

The ongoing health crisis in the world, as exemplified by the onslaught of the coronavirus is causing fear and anxiety among the people. While China may have started its road to recovery after enormous governmental and public efforts, the world is still struggling to contain its spread. It is widely believed that the Western world has failed drastically to prepare for the disease despite having ample time to prepare for it after it had struck China. Most countries are struggling to stop its spread as thousands succumbed to this killer virus. The UK Government has been accused of proper management of the situation with deep reluctance to undertake drastic action such as the total shutdown of the system including closing down schools, banning gatherings of any size and breaking people's life to a standstill. Promises by the government of an active and effective policy have not materialised. As the number of victims escalated so is the anxiety of people and possibly the fear of fatal consequences. Large scare fear and anxiety contributes to reduced immunity against the disease while hope and positive attitude lead to more constructive approaches to the crisis.

It is probably one of the unique times that the world has experienced in modern history. Since the Second World War, there has never been a disaster at this gigantic scale. The world has experienced local or regional earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, rising temperatures, bush fires as has happened recently in Australia, hurricanes and serious downfalls. But it has not experienced anything like the ongoing episode of the coronavirus. As the world tries to come to a grip of the disease, life has almost come to a standstill. Airlines have stopped their journeys, airports closed or deserted, big events like football matches and smaller gatherings have all been stopped. The idea is to reduce the number of people exposed to the virus that has wreaked havoc on communities and threatened the lives of many especially the sick and the elderly. Businesses have stalled as more people either voluntarily or forcefully "self-isolate". Limiting contacts with others help reduce the risk of infection. Yet the num-

bers of the sick are increasing in an environment where there is no cure for the disease.

While history books contain horrific accounts of the plague (black death) in the 17th century and other strains of influenza especially the Spanish flu of 1918, the current situation has become pandemic according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). All individual and collective efforts must be directed to stop the spread of the virus. The experience of China has proven to be effective in halting it. The Chinese have started helping other countries with both experience and equipment. This positive approach reflects political and human maturity and deserves praise. The present human environment needs to be overhauled morally, scientifically and technologically. The hope is that after this episode has subsided new efforts will be made to cleanse the world of negative tendencies such as selfishness, exploitation, hatred, prejudice and political arrogance. The ongoing predicament is a serious challenge to humanity as a whole and must be addressed collectively with a good degree of responsibility and morality.

The religious authorities in the Middle Eastern region have done their part to ensure safer environment. They banned almost every religious activity that brings people together like mass daily and Friday prayers, seminars and any other congregation. They issued decrees making it compulsory for people to follow the instructions of the doctors and other medical authorities. This is in addition to special prayers for an end to this horrible disease. The public must rise to their responsibility and contributed positively to the efforts that aim to stop the disease. Everyone has a positive role and play and can contribute to the collective efforts by governments and professional bodies. It is a religious and human duty to undertake this role in the most serious way. The Chinese have taught the world lessons

in perseverance, tolerance, seriousness and cooperation. Furthermore their positive contribution to other stricken countries has set new high levels of humanity that has become a source of pride to the inhabitants of this planet.



Anniversary of 17th uprising

On Thursday 12th March the weekly meeting of Abrar was addressed by two speakers who presented their memories of the events that had taken place in Iraq in 1979. Abdul Karim Al Najjar and Ghanem Jawad remembered, for the sake of documentation, the events surrounding the detention in the holy city of Najaf, of the prominent scholar, Sayed Mahommed Baqir Al Sadr in June of that year.

Ghanem Jawad

kicked off the debate saying that our Arabic and Islamic culture is oral, not written; we do not master the art of written documentation. Secondly the memoirs of prominent figures were generally written after their death, not in their life. This depends on individual memories and probably short notes. We both lived that event and interacted with it. But there are no real studies of those events that were the beginning of the massive anti-regime campaigns that followed. Fear was one of the factors as people would be asked when they were detained about any book in their possession.

Abdul Karim Al Najjar said that the Islamic movement, headed by the Islamic Da'wa Party played a leading role in the 17th Rajab uprising (12th June 1979). The previous uprising was that the Safar uprising in 1979. On that day Ayatullah Sayed Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr was led away from his house in Najaf to Baghdad.

Ghanem Jawad said that following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 the political equations changed dramatically. Dictators became fearful for their own positions and lives. The Revolution had proven that change was possible and that a religious scholar could spearhead the change. There was also the fear that the sparks could move to other countries. Thus they took drastic precautions to stop any popular movement taking place.

Some of our brothers had linked that event with the suspicious visit by the British foreign secretary, Lord Carrington, to Baghdad in the first week of June. The detention of Ayatullah Al Sadr happened few days later.

In the few months between February and June 1979 the regime released some prisoners, mostly Islamists. This was interpreted as an attempt to please the people and contain their emotions.

Following the detention of Al Sar, protests erupted in several places. Two places were prominent:

The first is Imam Al Kadhem Mosque at Al Thawra city (Al Sadr city now). It was led by Sayed Qassem Al Mubaraq and was attacked first by the Ba'athists, then by the security forces. I participated in the protest of Kadhemiyah where I prayed behind Sayed Hussain Al Sadr. I noticed the presence of large numbers of security personnel. When the prayers finished, one man shouted that Al Sadr has been released, so the people reacted with joy. The crowds left the mosque and were attacked by the security forces. There was also some shooting outside Al Murad Gate. I did not see the injured. Then I went with some friends to Dr Hassan Raja's house at Ameriya District. Abdul Karim Al Najjar (the other speaker) was driving the car and we were followed by the security forces. We managed to reach the house. Our meeting was attended by Dr Hussain Al Shahrestani and Mohammad Saleh Fakhri. We were discussing what could be done to maintain the momentum. My duty was to monitor the communications as I was working with the Post and Telephone Directorate. I managed to identify some telephones that were being monitored. I then informed their owners. The second duty was to inform Sayed Musa, grandson of Ayatullah Al Khomeini to tell and tell him what had happened and ask him to support the people. Then Abdul Karim Al Najjar, Dr Shahrestani, Dr Hassan Raja and Mohammad Saleh Fakhri were arrested. Al Najjar was released but the others were sentenced to death. Three years later I met Al Najjar in Abu Dhabi and he informed me that the brothers had asked him to throw responsibility on myself. He then left Iraq.

Dr Abdul Karim Al Najjar presented his version of the events that took place on 17th Rajab. He said that following the detention of Al Sadr the people erupted in anger and started protesting in several cities of Iraq; Najaf, Baghdad, Al Hurriyah, Grai'at, Kadhemiyah, AlNa'maniyah, AlKhaless and Jadidat Al Shatt. When the news of the arrest was confirmed by the BBC I rushed to the Kadhemain mosque where I saw hundreds of young people entering from AlMurad and Bab Al Qibla gates.

They were chanting:

Al Sadr lives, Islam is always victorious. The security members left the courtyard of the mosque and the uprising lasted for one hour. The protesters did not enter the inner part of the mosque, just the courtyard. When they heard that Al Sadr had been released they dispersed. Some were detained as they left the mosque. I left the place and went back to my office (of the national oil company). It appeared that they were not aware of what had happened, so I was not asked why I was late. Many groups went to visit Al Sadr to express solidarity. The regime's agents took photos of those delegations and arrested many of them in the following weeks. They were preparing for the eventual liquidation of Martyr Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr.

Coronavirus shutdown

The Coronavirus crisis forced the closure of almost every aspect of social and religious life in many countries. In UK before the lockdown had been announced by the government, the Islamic centres and mosques decided to cease their activities. Daily and Friday prayers were cancelled, but some religious lectures and teachings were held online. The churches and other worship places also closed down. The medical advice has been largely implemented. Religious scholars issued edicts banning anyone flouting the medical advice or endangering the lives of others through carelessness or reckless adventurism.

Abrar Islamic Foundation has closed down its headquarters completely and cancelled all events. But its online activities have continued, including the daily updating of its website, and the production and distribution of its Arabic and English bi-monthly newsletters. We pray that our society, and for that matter, the whole human community, come out of this unprecedented situation soon. May God bless you all.



UN chief expresses hopes on Nowruz



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his message on the occasion of Nowruz the international day, 21 March 2020, said he hoped that amid sadness over coronavirus, Nowruz

will bring harmony, celebration of common humanity.

Coronavirus has infected about 17,361 people in Iran, from whom 1,135 have lost their lives, according to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

Following is the full text of Guterres' message for the International Day of Nowruz, a copy of which was emailed to IRNA by the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in Tehran:

Every year, we mark Nowruz as a day of new beginnings, when we step into a new year with hope and joy. We celebrate the renewal of nature and the first day of spring.

This year, for many, Nowruz comes at a time of sadness and anxiety. The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, is casting a shadow around the world, including the regions that mark this ancient festival. I send my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my best wishes to all who have been affected.

I hope the festival of Nowruz will provide a welcome break to relax and spend time with close family, enjoy the beauty of the changing seasons, and to remember and celebrate our common humanity.

British anti-war body calls for ending sanctions against Iran

'Stop the War Coalition' in a statement referred to the unprecedented impacts of coronavirus on the world as well as Iran and called for ending inhumane sanctions imposed by US on the Iranian nation.

"The COVID-19 virus has had an unprecedented effect on the entire world and Iran is no exception," the statement reads.

"Iran is being ravaged by the virus and now has more cases than any other country in the world with the exception of China and Italy," it added.

"Millions in Iran are likely to die, not just because of the virus but because US imposed sanctions are preventing countless innocent people from accessing vital medical care."

"Write to your MP to force the British government to put public pressure on Trump's administration to end inhumane

sanctions at this desperate time." Meanwhile, an electronic petition created on UK Parliament's website reiterated that under the current conditions, removal of the sanctions is a humanitarian move.

In the meantime, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview with Brazilian media 'Folha de S.Paulo' that the US Medical Terrorism impeded Iran's effective reaction against corona pandemic.

The US maximum pressure against Iran blocks exports "so, we have less resources for investment", he added.

Prayers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque suspended



All Muslim prayers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound will be suspended from Monday until further notice in an effort to prevent the spread of coronavirus, religious officials said on Sunday.

"It was decided to suspend the arrival of worshippers to prayers through all the gates to Al-Aqsa Mosque starting Monday," said a statement issued by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in Jordan, which acts as custodian of the site, the third holiest in Islam after Makkah and Madinah.

The new edict suspends the outdoor prayers as well. Those sessions usually draw large crowds, though the numbers have dwindled in recent weeks.

Palestinian Director of the Mosque Sheikh Omar Kisawni confirmed the decision to Reuters.

Religious leaders at other holy sites in Jerusalem's walled Old City, such as the adjacent Western Wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, have also set precautionary limitations. The compound's religious workers and guards will continue to be allowed entry and the Muslim call to prayer will continue as normal, said the Waqf Council, which oversees Jerusalem's Islamic sites.

UN Chief warns against water limitations by 2050

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his message on World Water Day, 22 March 2020, announced that by 2050, between 3.5 and 4.4 billion

people will live with limited access to water, with more than 1 billion of them living in cities.

Guterres' message released on the occasion of the World Water Day was emailed to IRNA by the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in Tehran.

The full text of his message reads as follows:

The world's water resources are under unprecedented threat. Today, some 2.2 billion people lack safe drinking water and 4.2 billion people live without access to adequate sanitation. Unless we act with urgency, the impacts of climate change are projected to exacerbate these figures. By 2050, between 3.5 and 4.4 billion people will live with limited access to water, with more than 1 billion of them living in cities.

This year's World Water Day focuses on water and climate change. With 2020 a make-or-break year for climate action, this focus is timely. Water is the primary medium through which we see the effects of climate disruption, from extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, to glacial melting, saltwater intrusion and sea level rise.

EU will support Iran to receive loan from IMF: Borrell

High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said that Brussels would support Iran's request from the International Monetary Fund for assistance in fighting coronavirus.



"We are going to support this request because these countries are in a very difficult situation mainly due to the US sanctions that prevent them from having income by selling their oil," Borrell said after talks with EU foreign ministers.

The bloc is preparing to send 20 million euros' (USD 21.5 million) worth of humanitarian aid to Iran and Venezuela in the coming weeks, he said.

Tehran and Caracas are both under swingeing US sanctions aimed at starving their regimes of income, Borrell said, stressing that shipments of food, medicine and medical equipment should not be affected.

"This has to be reaffirmed because many believe that if they participate in this kind of humanitarian trade they can be sanctioned," he said.

"This is not the case but it has to be reaffirmed in order for everybody to understand that they can participate in this kind of humanitarian help."

What Islamic hygienic practices can teach to counter coronavirus

Rose S. Aslan*

As outbreaks of the coronavirus spread throughout the world, people are reminded over and again to limit physical contact, wash hands and avoid touching their face. The recent Netflix docuseries "Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak" illustrates how the Islamic ritual washing, known as "wudu," may help spread a good hygiene message.

The series focuses on Syra Madad, a Muslim public health specialist in a New York hospital, who takes a break to say her prayers at the Islamic Center of New York University. Before entering the prayer room, Madad stops to perform wudu, and washes her mouth and face as well as her feet.

Islamic law requires Muslims to ritually purify their body before praying. As a scholar of Islamic studies who researches ritual practices among Muslims, I have found that these practices contain both spiritual and physical benefits.

Ritual purity

The Prophet Muhammad left detailed guidance for Muslims on how to live their lives, including how to pray, fast and stay ritually pure. This guidance is available in collections called the Hadith. According to Islamic law, there are minor and major impurities. Minor impurities involve urinating, defecating and sleeping, among other practices. A person of Muslim faith is supposed to perform a ritual washing of their bodies before praying to get rid of these minor impurities.

Wudu is to be performed, as was done by the Prophet Muhammad, in a specific order before praying, which takes place five times a day. Before each prayer, Muslims are expected to wash themselves in a certain order – first hands, then mouth, nose, face, hair and ears, and finally their ankles and feet.

While washing with water is required when it is available, if a person has limited access to water, then a Muslim is permitted to symbolically "cleanse" their hands and face with dust or sometimes sand or other natural materials.

A Quranic verse says: "And if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]. Indeed, God is ever Pardoning and Forgiving."

A hadith from the prophet also describes the Earth as a purifying agent if there is a scarcity of water for washing.

Major impurity is defined in Islamic texts as occurring after sexual activi-

ty or when a woman completes her menstrual cycle. A Muslim woman should not pray during her menstrual cycle. To purify oneself after such an impurity, a Muslim is required to take a shower, called "ghusl." A person needs to wash their entire body, from head to toe, including their hair.

Spiritual actions

Preparing for prayer by washing one's body using water can be a deeply spiritual act for Muslims. Islamic studies scholar Paul Powers argues it isn't "empty ritualism," but an embodied practice that helps the individual center on an inner religiosity.

Similarly, another Islamic studies scholar, Marion Katz, explains in her 2002 book "Body of Text" that the importance of wudu lies in its symbolic cleansing. It does not always cleanse the parts of the body that are "physically involved in the pollution act."

Ritual purity is different from hygienic practices, although Islam also emphasizes good hygiene. Muslims take care to wash often, including using water after going to the bathroom.

Aligning with public health guidelines

In view of the coronavirus risk, Muslim leaders around the world, including in the U.S., have aligned their religious opinions with public health experts.

Muslim institutions have begun to recommend that people make sure to wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap before doing wudu. Emphasizing that wudu alone cannot prevent the virus from spreading, other Islamic institutions recommend that mosques supply extra soap and hand sanitizer near the washing area.

They have issued rulings to cancel Friday prayers, urged Muslims to wash their hands with soap regularly, refrain from touching their face and practice social distancing.

While people have cleared local store shelves of hand sanitizers, wipes, cleaning supplies, gloves and masks, basic hygiene practices remain the best way to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and other viruses.

At this time, Islamic practices that emphasize purity of body could help reiterate the importance of hygienic practices along with the use of soap or hand sanitizer, to reduce one's vulnerability to the virus.

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Muslim protesters ordered to sign 'good behaviour' pledge

Thousands of Muslim men have been forced to sign "good behaviour" bonds by police or face arrest as part of a crackdown on protests.

Officers in Uttar Pradesh, northern India, have ordered youths to sign a pledge not to join demonstrations for at least six months. A handful of Hindus have also been told to sign but the scheme has overwhelmingly targeted Muslims, who have also borne the brunt of a crackdown in which at least 25 people across the state have died.

Uttar Pradesh is governed by Yogi Adityanath, a radical Hindu cleric from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. The region has experienced violence since Narendra Modi, the prime minister, passed a law in December that is said to discriminate against Muslims. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act led to nationwide protests, and retaliation by the security forces and Hindu mobs. More than 50 people were killed in Delhi last month in religious riots.

Mr Adityanath ordered police in Uttar Pradesh to clamp down on the protests. There have been reports of torture and police brutality, which the authorities have denied.

Since December the Adityanath administration has increased pressure on Muslims, issuing court orders threatening to seize the property of those accused of violence. Billboards were also used to publish the names, photographs and addresses of alleged protesters.

The courts told the governor to take down the hoardings, saying that they incited mob attacks, but he refused.



Mosques heed MCB's call to suspend activities, including prayers

17 March 2020

The Muslim Council of Britain has issued a strong recommendation for Muslim communities across the UK to suspend all congregational activities, given the latest advice on the coronavirus (COVID-19).

This unprecedented step comes after public health advice of stopping "non-essential contact" with others and the Chief Scientific Advisers advising the public to avoid gatherings "big or small". The obligation for Friday prayers is very important to Muslims up and down the country. Given the overwhelming majority of Muslims identify with their local mosque, its centrality to communal activities should not be understated. The choice therefore to suspend all congregational activities, is not one that has been taken lightly.

The Muslim Council of Britain has taken into account views from all key sources:

- The UK's Chief Scientific Advisers, who have called for extraordinary social distancing measures.

- The British Islamic Medical Association, representing Muslim medical and health professionals, who bring together a knowledge of communities as well as medical expertise, and who have said it is "unsafe and harmful to continue business as usual, or even with significant adjustments".

- Many Muslim scholars, consulted through groups such as the British Board of Scholars and Imams, as well as a number of institutions and international bodies, believe that the individual obligation to perform Friday prayers in mosque congregations be temporarily lifted.

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, stated:

"Muslim communities up and down the country, like others, have been carefully considering how best to continue with our regular social and religious activities, whilst trying to minimise the spread of the coronavirus. With the increasing rate of transmission and the number of deaths, medical and scholarly advice all points towards the limitation of social contact as the key towards reducing the spread.



"We all have a public duty to protect one another from harm, and it is evident the most effective way to do this now is to avoid social contact as much as possible. This includes all walks of life, whether social, work or the mosque.

The response to this appeal was good.

Over 375 mosques and prayer facilities suspend congregational activities to safeguard Muslim communities

Ahead of Friday congregational prayers today, over 375 mosques, community centres and prayer facilities in the UK had confirmed the suspension of congregational prayers. This comes in the week that the Muslim Council of Britain called for the suspension of all congregational activities in Muslim communities, in-

cluding prayers, events and weddings.

The decision has not been taken lightly, given the centrality of prayer and congregational prayer to Muslims.

Among these are some of the biggest mosques in Britain, including East London Mosque, which holds 7,000 worshippers, London Central Mosque which sees over 5,000 people, and Birmingham Central Mosque which regularly hosts over 2,500 people on Fridays. This figure is based on those that have been identified by MCB Britain as having suspended services but is by no means the total. There are expected to be many more mosques and prayer facilities who will have also suspended congregational activities.

Prayers and Coronavirus

Craig Considine

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing governments and news sources to provide the most accurate and helpful advice to the world's population, as the disease is indeed global in reach. Health care professionals are in high demand, and so too are scientists who study the transmission and effect of pandemics.

Experts like immunologist Dr. Anthony Fauci and medical reporter Dr. Sanjay Gupta are saying that good hygiene and quarantining, or the practice of isolating from others in the hope of preventing the spread of contagious diseases, are the most effective tools to contain COVID-19.

Do you know who else suggested good hygiene and quarantining during a pandemic? Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, over 1,300 years ago.

While he is by no means a "traditional" expert on matters of deadly diseases, Muhammad nonetheless had sound advice to prevent and combat a development like COVID-19. Muhammad said: "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; but if the plague outbreaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place." He also said: "Those with contagious diseases should be kept away from those who are healthy."

Muhammad also strongly encouraged human beings to adhere to hygienic practices that would keep people safe from infection. Consider the following hadiths, or sayings of Prophet Muhammad:

"Cleanliness is part of faith."

"Wash your hands after you wake up; you do not know where your hands have moved while you sleep."

"The blessings of food lie in washing hands before and after eating."

And what if someone does fall ill? What kind of advice would Muhammad provide to his fellow human beings who are suffering from pain?

He would encourage people to always seek medical treatment and medication: "Make use of medical treatment," he said, "for God has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, with the exception of one

disease—old age."

Perhaps most importantly, he knew when to balance faith with reason. In recent weeks, some have gone so far as to suggest that prayer would be better at keeping you from the coronavirus than adhering to basic rules of social distancing and quarantine. How would Prophet Muhammad respond to the idea of prayer as the chief—or only—form of medicine?

Consider the following story, related to us by ninth-century Persian scholar Al-Tirmidhi: One day, Prophet Muhammad noticed a Bedouin man leaving his camel without tying it. He asked the Bedouin, "Why don't you tie down your camel?" The Bedouin answered, "I put my trust in God." The Prophet then said, "Tie your camel first, then put your trust in God." Muhammad encouraged people to seek guidance in their religion, but he hoped they take basic precautionary measures for the stability, safety and well-being of all.

In other words, he hoped people would use their common sense.

Dr. Craig Considine is a scholar, professor, global speaker, and media contributor based at the Department of Sociology at Rice University. He is the author of *The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View* (Blue Dome Press, 2020), and *Islam in America: Exploring the Issues* (ABC-CLIO 2019), among others.



These are the faces of Muslim women throughout history

By Rafia Zakaria

Thomas Roe, Britain's envoy in India during the 1620s, wrote of Empress Nur Jehan's power over her husband, the Mughal emperor Jehangir, that she "governs him, and wynds him up at her pleasure."

The story of Nur Jehan, who was born to migrant parents and rose to a position where she unofficially ruled jointly with her husband, is just one of the intriguing tales that make up Hossein Kamaly's eminently readable collection "A History of Islam in 21 Women." Besides Nur Jehan, we hear of the Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadija, who saw the promise of an orphaned young man and was the first to accept Islam, and the Sufi ascetic Rabia Al-Adawiyya, who insisted that women were the spiritual equals of men. Later on came the Yemeni queen Arwa, who ruled for seven decades and even issued coinage in her own name, and also Noor Inayat Khan, the Sufi-Muslim British spy who went into Nazi-occupied France to radio enemy movements back to Britain.

Indeed, the Muslim women recounted by Kamaly (who teaches Islamic studies at Hartford Seminary) are a feisty and intrepid bunch. Collectively, they constitute a foil against the persistent myth that Muslim women are simpering sorts awaiting rescue. This Western "rescue" fantasy and the would-be saviors it creates were duly debunked by the Columbia professor Lila Abu-Lughod in her book "[Do Muslim Women Need Saving?](#)" But while Abu-Lughod's work provides a theoretical critique of Western insouciance and obstinacy in holding on to the myth of Muslim helplessness, Kamaly's book hands up the lived examples. Here in all their gutsy glory are women whose voices have not received the prominence that is their due within the story of Islam.

This is a pity because, as Kamaly demonstrates, women have been crucial players in some of the most defining moments of the faith. There is the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, who chastised his feuding followers after his death: "You have left the body of the Apostle of God with us and you have decided among yourselves, without consulting us, without respecting our rights." It turned out to be a consequential sidelining; the schism between those who believed the Prophet's male heirs should inherit leadership of the faith (Shia) and those who believed that Fatima should (Sunni) remains pivotal



to this day. Similarly, the Prophet's wife Aisha, nicknamed the "ruddy-cheeked one," was instrumental in questioning patriarchal sayings attributed to the Prophet. In later life, it was Aisha's rising power that prompted a man named Abu Bakra to recount that he had heard the Prophet say, "Those who entrust power to a woman will never know prosperity."

It is a saying that has haunted Muslim women and Muslim feminists — including Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist, who points out that "Abu Bakra must have had a fabulous memory" because he didn't recall this line until a quarter century after the Prophet Muhammad died. Still, it has been a handy tool for the patriarchy. Hundreds of years after Abu Bakra's revelation, the 16th-century Safavid queen Pari Khanum was removed from power because the new king believed that a woman handling the affairs of state is "demeaning to the king's honor." As recently as 1986, Is-

lamists who [opposed the rise](#) of Pakistan's prime minister Benazir Bhutto trotted out these possibly apocryphal words as a rationale.

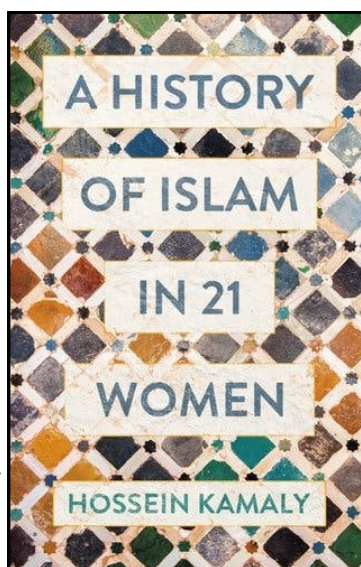
"A History of Islam in 21 Women" is an act of reclamation on several fronts. For Muslim women, it provides an empowering and exhilarating genealogy of strong forebears whom they can connect to their contemporary journeys of empowerment. For Western readers, it exposes the untruths that have characterized Muslim women as deferential beings in need of rescue.

There is still more work to be done. "A History of Islam in 21 Women" provides the substance of a feminist narra-

tive that has always existed within Islam. The question remains: Will Kamaly's book will be relegated to the margins, shelved away under "other" feminisms, or will it be integrated into the larger history of feminism, now dominated by white and Western women?

Rafia Zakaria is the author of "The Upstairs Wife." Her new book, "Against White Feminism," will be published next year.

A HISTORY OF ISLAM IN 21 WOMEN
By Hossein Kamaly



'Shaheen Bagh Was Not an Event or a Tent, it Made Indian Muslim Women Partners in National Affairs'

The women of Delhi's Shaheen Bagh locality are aware of the threat of novel coronavirus. So they modified their mode of protest to ensure social distancing as they were wary of withdrawing completely with their demands remaining unmet.

The Delhi police on Tuesday evicted the protesters, and removed every art installation put up by the demonstrators over the period of three months.

Gone are the tall map of India rejecting the CAA, NRC and NPR, the library at the bus stop, the detention centre model, the India Gate image, portraits of freedom fighters and makers of modern India, and the stage from where the women spoke and resisted the controversial changes by the Centre in the country's citizenship rules.

"We didn't know that the government considers us also as some kind of a virus. Every piece of art and installation has been removed but they don't realise the attack has been made on the symbols of idea of India," said Shaista Bano, who has seen the visuals of police evicting the protesters and packing away or whitewashing every article of protest.

She has participated in most of the demonstrations in the past three months.



Arab Political Thought: Past and Present

Georges Corm

Published in Association with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

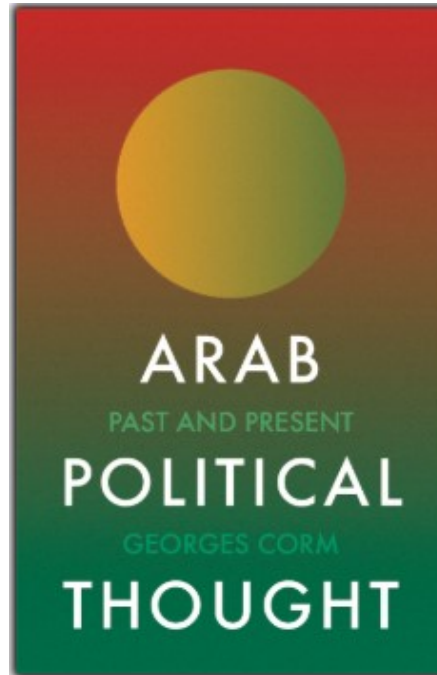
This book demonstrates the vitality of Arab political thought and its major controversies. It shows that the key players involved, far from being constrained by a theological-political straitjacket, have often demonstrated strong critical thinking when tackling religion and philosophy, anthropology and politics. Setting these thinkers and their works within two centuries of upheaval in the Arab world, Georges Corm demonstrates how Arab critical thought has been marginalised by powerful external forces: the military, the academy and the media. In its place has risen a hegemonic Islamist thought, used cannily by certain Arab regimes and their Western protectors. Closely tracing the successive transformations of modernist Arab nationalism, Arab Political Thought offers a blueprint for understanding the libertarian Arab Spring, as well as the counter-revolutions and external interventions that have followed.

This invaluable guide comprehensively distils the complexity of Arab intellectualism, which is both critical and profane, and a far cry

from the outdated politico-religious image it has acquired.

Author

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Minister of Finance. He has published extensively on the contemporary history of the Middle East and relations between the Arab world and the West.

Reviews

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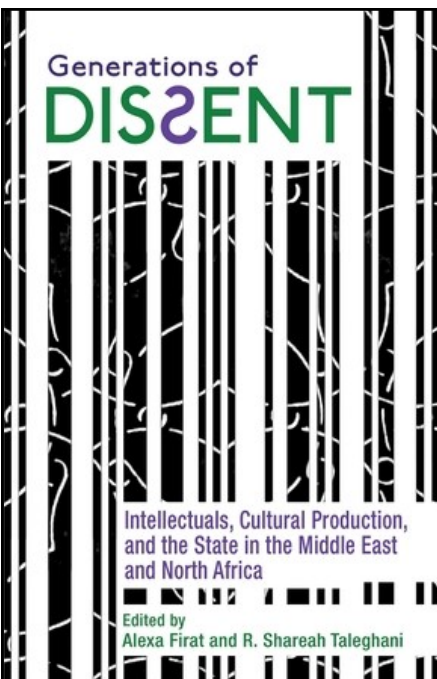
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Generations of Dissent

Intellectuals, Cultural Production, and the State in the Middle East and North Africa

Edited by Alexa Firat, R. Shareah Taleghani

Situated in the fields of contemporary literary and cultural studies, the ten essays collected in *Generations of Dissent* shed light on the artistic creativity, cultural production, intellectual movements, and acts of political dissidence across the Middle East and North Africa. Born of the contributors’ research on dissidence and state co-option in a variety of artistic and creative fields, the volume’s core themes reflect the notion that the recent Arab uprisings did not appear in a cultural, political, or historical vacuum. Rather than focus on how protestors “finally” broke the walls of fear created by authoritarian regimes in the region, these essays show that



the uprisings were rooted in multiple generations and various acts of resistance decades prior to 2010–11. Firat and Taleghani’s volume maps the complicated trajectories of artistic and creative dissent across time and space, showing how artists have challenged institutions and governments over the past six decades.

Alexa Firat is assistant professor of Arabic studies at Temple University. She has published articles and reviews on Arabic cultural productions. Her translations can be found in *The Book of Gaza*, *Beirut 39*, *Words without Borders*, and *New Voices of Saudi Arabia*. **R. Shareah Taleghani** is an assistant professor and director of Middle East Studies at Queens College, City University of New York.

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Enemy becomes a friend

67. WHEN DISTRESS SEIZES YOU AT SEA, THOSE THAT YE CALL UPON - BESIDES HIMSELF - LEAVE YOU IN THE LURCH! BUT WHEN HE BRINGS YOU BACK SAFE TO LAND, YE TURN AWAY (FROM HIM). MOST UNGRATEFUL IS MAN!

68. DO YE THEN FEEL SECURE THAT HE WILL NOT CAUSE YOU TO BE SWALLOWED UP BENEATH THE EARTH WHEN YE ARE ON LAND, OR THAT HE WILL NOT SEND AGAINST YOU A VIOLENT TORNADO (WITH SHOWERS OF STONES) SO THAT YE SHALL FIND NO ONE TO CARRY OUT YOUR AFFAIRS FOR YOU?

69. OR DO YE FEEL SECURE THAT HE WILL NOT SEND YOU BACK A SECOND TIME TO SEA AND SEND AGAINST YOU A HEAVY GALE TO DROWN YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR INGRATITUDE, SO THAT YE FIND NO HELPER. THEREIN AGAINST US?

(ISRA', THE NIGHT JOURNEY)

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In the sixth year after the hijrah, the Prophet, peace be upon him, decided to expand the scope of his mission. He sent eight letters to rulers in the Arabian peninsula and surrounding areas inviting them to Islam. One of these rulers was Thumamah ibn Uthal.

Thumamah was one of the most powerful Arab rulers in pre-Qur'anic times. This is not surprising since he was a chieftain of the Banu Hanifah and one of the rulers of al-Yamamah whose word no one dared to challenge or disobey.

When Thumamah received the Prophet's letter, he was consumed by anger and rejected it. He refused to listen to the invitation of Truth and goodness. More than that, he felt a strong desire to go and kill the Prophet and bury his mission with him.

Thumamah waited and waited for a convenient time to carry out his design against the Prophet until eventually forgetfulness caused him to lose interest. One of his uncles, however, reminded him of his plan, praising what he intended to do.

In the pursuit of his evil design against the Prophet, Thumamah met and killed a group of the Prophet's companions. The Prophet thereupon declared him a wanted man who could lawfully be killed on sight.

Not long afterwards, Thumamah decided to perform umrah. He wanted to perform tawaf around the Ka'bah and sacrifice to the idols there (The people of Makkah, before becoming Muslims, placed hundreds of idols in the Holy Ka'bah. These idols were later destroyed by the Prophet). So he left al-Yamamah for Makkah. As he was passing near Madinah, an incident took place which he had not anticipated.

Groups of Muslims were patrolling the districts of Madinah and outlying areas on the lookout for any strangers or anyone intent on causing trouble. One of these groups came upon Thumamah and apprehended him but they did not know who he was. They took him to Madinah and tied him to one of the columns in the mosque. They waited for the Prophet himself to question the man and decide what should be done with him.

When the Prophet was about to enter the mosque, he saw Thumamah and asked his companions, "Do you know whom you have taken?"

"No, messenger of God," they replied.

"This is Thumamah ibn Uthal al-Hanafi," he said. "You have done well in capturing him."

The Prophet then returned home to his family and said, "Get what food you can and send it to Thumamah ibn Uthal." He then ordered his camel to be milked for him. All this was done before he met Thumamah or had spoken to him.

The Prophet then approached Thumamah hoping to encourage him to become a Muslim. "What do you have to say for yourself" he asked.

"If you want to kill in reprisal," Thumamah replied, "you can have someone of noble blood to kill. If, out of your bounty, you want to forgive, I shall be grateful. If you want money in compensation, I shall give you whatever amount you ask."

The Prophet then left him for two days, but still personally sent him food and drink and milk from his camel. The Prophet went back to him and asked, "What do you have to say for yourself?" Thumamah repeated what he had said the day before. The Prophet then left and came back to him the following day. "What do you have to say for yourself?" he asked again and Thumamah repeated what he had said once more. Then the Prophet turned to his companions and said, "Set him free."

Thumamah left the mosque of the Prophet and rode until he came to a palm grove on the outskirts of Madinah near al-Baqi' (a place of luxuriant vegetation which later became a cemetery for many of the Prophet's companions). He watered his camel and washed himself well. Then he turned back and made his way to the Prophet's mosque. There, he stood before a congregation of Muslims and said:

"I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger." He then went to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and said:

"O Muhammad, by God, there was never on this earth a face more detestable than yours. Now, yours is the dearest face of all to me."

"I have killed some of your men," he continued, "I am at your mercy. What will you have done to me?"

"There is now no blame on you, Thumamah," replied the Prophet. "Becoming a Muslim obliterates past actions and marks a new beginning."

Source: "Companions of The Prophet", Vol.1, By: Abdul Wahid Hamid.

