



Editor:

Dr Saeed Shehabi
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Published by the
45 Crawford Place,
London W1H 4LP

Tel: 020 7724 3033

Email:

abrarhouse
@hotmail.com

Website

www.abraronline.net
Charity no. 293802

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- *Respect for the human race and rights*
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- *Moderation*
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Abrar

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The “New Normal” without pilgrimage or Eid

A “New Normal” is almost certainly to dominate people’s lives in the coming months and possibly years, until the current pandemic can be wiped out or countered with effective vaccines and treatment. For the past six months at least, many people on this planet have adapted to new norms of daily lives in self-isolation. This would have been almost impossible without the new technology that enable people to remain in contact with the world outside their homes. The extent of change in people’s habits will impact their attitude towards office work, education, social activism, cultural work, religious worship and rituals including those related to death, marriage or other social engagements. But the ability of mankind to adapt to “New Norms” is beyond imagination. When the idea of the “cashless society” was flouted in the seventies, the generation of the time could not comprehend such an eventuality. How could people go around markets and shopping centres without cash in hand or pocket? It would also be un-imaginable that the democratic societies would become more intrusive and embracing of dictatorial policies. George Orwell’s book “1984” appeared pure fiction when he envisaged the “Big Brother” controlling people’s lives in the future. Yet modern statehood in today’s “free world” is gradually sliding towards this notion. When The main headlines of The Times declares “MI5 to get more powers” this notion appears to be loitering on the fringes of democracy.

Nonetheless it is unlikely to transform mankind away from the developed norms of social interaction. It is also not easy to change the people’s eagerness for freedom, open society and self-realisation. Anyone who attempts to take society towards absolutism and dictatorship will encounter strong resistance that could herald the end of peace and security of that country. The New Norm that is often mentioned by the media refers to the curtailment of people’s movement in response to the spread of the pandemic. The religious world has been adversely affected by social-distancing. Until today, churches, mosques and other places of worship remain closed since last March to avoid

spreading the coronavirus further. Priests and Imams have conducted online prayers but the spirit of prayers cannot be easily lived through technological barriers.

In the past two weeks the pilgrimage season (hajj) passed with a totally different spirit. Few pilgrims were allowed to perform the rituals in person. The three million pilgrims who often go to Mecca were not allowed this year. It was a painful experience to see the House of God almost empty of worshippers who brave the distances to feel the spiritual ascendance in the vicinity of the holy Ka’ba. Covid-19 had such a powerful deterrent that not many would have made the journey even if they were allowed. Religious scholars are guided by religious teaching to issue edicts (fatwa) forbidding people flouting the health rules in common circulation throughout the world. People were praying that this pandemic goes away sooner than later so that worshippers may enjoy returning to the House of God in order to perform prayers in person rather than form a distance.

Then came the Eid Al Ad’ha which has historic and religious links to hajj. Muslims would refer to the traditions linked to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) who was asked by God Almighty to sacrifice his son, Isma’il. As an obedient servant of God he obliged, but Isma’il was saved by God who sent a sheep to be slaughtered instead. Sacrifice in the way of God is a noble practice according to the religious traditions. Every noble cause is sacred and deserves personal sacrifices in terms of time, money and effort. This is how humanity is served. These lessons are abundant in the real hajj where physical efforts are exerted. The hope is that the New Normal will not extend to the years ahead and that pilgrims will be able to resume the fascinating journey to the holy shrines in Mecca and Medina. History and religion are intertwined to provide meaningful experiences to Muslims and

other people of religion that will enhance their faith and enable them to ascend spiritually, morally and intellectually. In the New Norm it is hoped that mankind will return to their old Norm and enjoy life within their religious traditions.



Israeli annexation of Palestinian land

A seminar on the Israeli annexation of Palestinian land was held on Zoom on 22nd July. Three speakers presented their analysis on the situation in the occupied territories.

Professor Richard Falk said that the root of the problem is establishing a state on other people's lands. The new structure became repressive and racist. This led to what amounts to be an Apartheid situation. The other aspect is quasi-historical one. Israel established a colonial state at a time when colonialism was ending. One had this issue of how do you maintain a colony in post-colonial era. Inevitability of resistance is linked to the anti-colonial historical development. To crush this Israel used force against Palestinian people. The resistance to Israel was minimized in its impact on the balance of forces because of the feeling of guilt for their failure to protect the Jewish people felt by the liberal democratic countries especially US. The Holocaust provided exemption from accountability. This was reinforced by US as partner of Israel.

It has features of apartheid which is international crime of great severity. This made resistance to colonial project more difficult than any form of resistance. It is against this background that one can understand why Israel pursued this project. The word occupation is about territory. Israel's sense of entitlement of homeland comes from bible not international law. One has to understand that occupation is not intended to end so long as Israel continues to use pressure with help of the US.

Professor Munir Nuseibah

I want to show on the ground the results of the new annexation, now it will affect the life of people and where will it fit within the context of this apartheid state. This situation in Palestine started with the British mandate on Palestine when it had great majority of non-Jewish population. The mandate came from 1920s. By 1948 the Jews were only 30 percent. The two-state solution was given in 1948. West bank and Gaza were not occupied

until 1967 when Israel occupied all Palestine. In both wars Palestinians were displaced. In 1948 Israel annexed a lot of the areas beyond what UN decided. It also annexed Golan heights of Syria. Since 1967 Israel treated all land as its own territory. It meant also that Israeli law was applied to these areas. People under occupied land were treated by military laws. In 2003 Israel introduced new structure to separate east Jerusalem from West Jerusalem. It treated Palestinians as only residents not citizens.

This legal status means that residency is easily revocable. Another problem is family unification. For spouses from West Jerusalem they must apply for permission from Israelis. Maximum they get is a permit to live in the city. The other problem is child registration. Children from east Jerusalem do not become citizens. Many parents failed to register their children so they will never be able to have residency status. They cannot go to schools or get medical care. They won't be able to have ID cards or open bank accounts.

There are problems with Absentee property law and Civil society organisations. The Trump Plan is basically that of apartheid, which was created by Israel. Your Jewish neighbour will have different rights than yourself. We live under apartheid system that US and Israel are trying to cement.

Professor Kamel Hawwash said that Israel is a threat to stability. It has been attacking Syria, Iraq and may attack Iran. It is also a threat to security. When Israeli government was formed annexation was at the heart of its agenda. US says if you want to negotiate with Israel it has to be within the Trump plan not the international law. There were few protests against this mainly in Gaza. Jordanian FM said that if two state solution is not possible then Jordan will not object to one state. UAE has expanded relations with Israel.

If this had happened a few years earlier much louder protests would have happened. But this time no serious actions have been taken by the Arab or Muslim worlds. The American ambassador is within the committee drawing the lines along annexation. This is like Sykes-Picot

Other reaction: France FM said that an-

nexation cannot happen without consequences. Germany said peace cannot be achieved with such steps. The Vatican called the Israeli ambassador to protest. Many international bodies condemned annexation. EU needs 27 countries to issue statement, but only 24 agreed to sign. They still consider settlements illegal but there is no action. No sanctions have been announced.

In UK the opposition Labour Party is against the Trump plan. 140 MPs issued letter with the word sanctions in it. This is quite significant. It also calls for a ban on settlement. That is good. The government took a defensive position. Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote an article in Yedioth Ahronoth saying that annexation is not in Israel's interest but did not condemn them. he did not condemn annexation but he was worried about

What is being given to Palestinian is statelet. Although there is condemnation there is no threat of action. Board of Jewish deputies said there are some who are not happy with annexation and some who are with it.

They sat on the fence. It was left to 300 British Jews to write letter to the departing ambassador saying how, for them, this was beyond the pale, they do not agree with annexation. The impact on the Palestinians is huge. To live with occupation on daily basis is too difficult. The world must take stand similar to the one on Russia in the case of Crimea. They could impose sanctions on settlers. They could freeze assets. They could ban goods coming to UK. They could freeze agreements with Israel. They could stop cooperation with Israeli universities. But, instead, they say a threat won't help with peace process. We look forward to the ICC which says it has legislation over the land

Abrar webinars

*On Thursday 24th July Abrar's seminar dealt with Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Two speakers addressed the meeting: Sayed Hassan Al Nouri spoke from Najaf about the pilgrimage to Mecca which is one of the fundamental duties on Muslims. Sheikh Dr Murtada Faraj spoke about previous times when the pilgrimage was not possible due to pandemics or other forms of impediments.

On Thursday 17th July two speakers addressed Abrar's weekly meeting to remember Ayatullah Sayed Mohammad Hussain Fadlullah who passed away on 4th July 201. This tenth anniversary of his demise presented an opportunity to debates his contributions.



Iraq PM says won't allow threats to Iran from Iraqi soil



Baghdad and Tehran sought on Tuesday to ease bilateral political tensions, as Iraq's prime minister said it would not allow any threat to Iran coming from its territory.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi, visiting

Tehran and speaking at a news conference alongside Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, alluded to Iraq's concern not to become a battlefield between Iran and the United States, who are arch-enemies. "The people of Iraq want good relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of both countries," he told the conference, carried live by Iranian state television.

The Iraqi premier faces a tough balancing act between Tehran and Washington, which have come close to open conflict in the region, particularly on Iraqi soil, over the past year.

At home, Kadhimi faces increasing pressure from Iran-aligned parties and paramilitary groups who perceive him as siding with the United States because he has indicated he wants to curb the power of Iranian-backed militias and political groups.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, during a later meeting with Kadhimi, praised the Popular Mobilisation Forces, an Iraqi state-controlled institution that is an umbrella grouping of militias, many backed by Iran.

Khamenei also said Iran would not interfere in relations between Iraq and the United States, according to his official website.

Senior European politicians reiterate call to support UNRWA

Thirty-one senior European politicians came in support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on Monday through a letter that reiterated the essential role the Agency plays in a highly volatile region.

As UNRWA continues to face financial and political challenges, its health, education, social and other

services offer 5.6 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and



Syria, predictability in an otherwise very unstable environment, the Agency said in a statement published on its official website on Tuesday.

"In a region rife with conflicts, and now battling the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, UNRWA stands as a vital source of regional stability," says the letter. The Agency managed to quickly shift the way it works in the initial weeks of the pandemic to help prevent a much dreaded outbreak and outspread of the virus in densely populated Palestine refugee camps. By switching to distance-learning, telemedicine and food delivery, among other measures, the virus remained largely contained.

But UNRWA, whose mandate was renewed for another three years last December by an overwhelming majority at the United Nations General Assembly, is struggling to raise the funding it needs to continue running all its programs. In a recent meeting with donors and host governments at the Advisory Commission, an advisory body to UNRWA, the Agency's Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, appealed for support to what he described as "a source of stability in a highly unstable region."

Jordan arrests leaders of teachers union in crackdown

Jordanian security forces arrested leading members of the opposition-run teachers union on Saturday, raided its offices and shut it down for two years, escalating a confrontation with a group that has become a leading source of dissent.

Prosecutors charged Nasser Nawasreh, the acting head of the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, with incitement over a speech to supporters last Wednesday that criticised Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz's government. State media said other charges related to allegations of financial and administrative wrongdoing.

Riot police reinforcements were deployed on Saturday near the seat of government in the capital and in other areas where teacher activists were planning protests. Security forces raided the union's headquarters in the city of Karak. Saturday's crackdown on the union would "only further aggravate political tensions by the government at a time people are choked under hard economic conditions," said Murad Adailah, head of Islamic Action Front, the largest opposition party.



Children in Nigeria endure 'horrendous violations'

Girls and boys in northeast Nigeria are continuing to endure brutal abuse at the hands of Boko Haram, and are also being deeply affected by military operations taking place to counter the terrorist group, despite noteworthy efforts, according to the UN latest report on children and armed conflict.

"The children of Nigeria and neighboring countries continued to endure horrendous violations by Boko Haram," said Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in a statement on Thursday, adding that the group's expansion across the Lake Chad Basin region is "a serious concern" for Secretary-General António Guterres.

Between January 2017 and December 2019, the report described 5,741 grave violations against children in Nigeria. Moreover, incidents in neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger were also reflected in the spillover of Boko Haram's activities beyond Nigeria's borders. In September 2017, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) group, that supports Nigerian forces locally against Boko Haram, signed an Action Plan with the UN to end and prevent violations. The group had recruited more than 2,000 children.

No return to 'old normal', says WHO chief

Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesu on Thursday warned that there will no return to "the old normal" as COVID-19 cases worldwide have surpassed 15 million, and nearly 620,000 deaths.

According to the UN health agency, most cases, or 10 million, were in just 10 countries, with the United States, Brazil and India accounting for nearly half. On 23 July the US passed the milestone of four million infections.

Speaking from Geneva, the WHO chief urged people everywhere to play a part in preventing further spread of the coronavirus pandemic. "We're asking everyone to treat the decisions about where they go, what they do, and who they meet with, as life-and-death decisions – because they are," said Tedros.

"It may not be your life, but your choices could be the difference between life and death for someone you love, or for a complete stranger," he added.



Would the Prophet Muhammad Convert Hagia Sophia?

By Mustafa Akyol, July 20, 2020

The recent decision by the Turkish government to reconvert the majestic Hagia Sophia, which was once the world's greatest cathedral, from a museum back to a mosque has been bad news for Christians around the world. They include Pope Francis, who said he was "pained" by the move, and the spiritual leader of Eastern Christianity, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who said he was "saddened and shaken." When contrasted with the joy of Turkey's conservative Muslims, all this may seem like a new episode in an old story: Islam vs. Christianity.

But some Muslims, including myself, are not fully comfortable with this historic step, and for a good reason: forced conversion of shrines, which has occurred too many times in human history in all directions, can be questioned even from a purely Islamic point of view.

To see why, look closely into early Islam, which was born in seventh century Arabia as a monotheist campaign against polytheism. The Prophet Muhammad and his small group of believers saw the earlier monotheists — Jews and Christians — as allies. So when those first Muslims were persecuted in pagan Mecca, some found asylum in the Christian kingdom in Ethiopia. Years later, when the Prophet ruled Medina, he welcomed a group of Christians from the city of Najran to worship in his own mosque. He also signed a treaty with them, which read:

"There shall be no interference with the practice of their faith. ... No bishop will be removed from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no priest from his parish."

This religious pluralism was also reflected in the Quran, when it said God protects "monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is much mentioned." (22:40) It is the only verse in the Quran that mentions churches — and only in a reverential tone.

To be sure, these theological affinities did not prevent political conflicts. Nor did they prevent Muslims, right after the Prophet's passing, from conquering Christian lands, from Syria to Spain. Yet still, the early Muslim conquerors did something uncommon at the time: They did not touch the shrines of the subjugated peoples. The Prophet's spirit was best exemplified by his second successor, or caliph, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, soon after his conquest of Jerusalem in the year 637. The city, which had been ruled by Roman Christians for centuries, had been taken by Muslims after a long and bloody siege. Christians feared a massacre, but instead found aman, or safety. Caliph Umar, "the servant of God" and "the commander of the faith-

ful," gave them security "for their possessions, their churches and crosses." He further assured:

"Their churches shall not be taken for residence and shall not be demolished ... nor shall their crosses be removed."

The Christian historian Eutychius even tells us that when Caliph Umar entered the city, the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, invited him to pray at the holiest of all Christian shrines: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Umar politely declined, saying that Muslims might later take this as a reason to convert the church into a mosque. He instead prayed at an empty area that Christians ignored but Jews honored, then as now, as their holiest site, the Temple Mount, where today the Western Wall, the last remnant of that ancient Jewish temple, rises to the top of the Mount, on which the Mosque of Umar and the Dome of the Rock were built.

In other words, Islam entered Jerusalem without really converting it. Even "four centuries after the Muslim conquest," as the Israeli historian Oded Peri observes, "the urban landscape of Jerusalem was still dominated by Christian public and religious buildings."

Yet Islam was becoming the religion of an empire, which, like all empires, had to justify its appetite for hegemony. Soon, some jurists found an excuse to overcome the Jerusalem model: There, Christians were given full security, because they had ultimately agreed on a peaceful surrender. The cities that resisted Muslim conquerors, however, were fair game for plunder, enslavement, and conversion of their churches.

In the words of the Turkish scholar Necmeddin Guney, this legitimization of conversion of churches came from not the Quran nor the Prophetic example, but rather "administrative regulation." The jurists who made this case, he adds, "were probably trying to create a society that makes manifest the supremacy of Islam in an age of religion wars."

Another scholar, Fred Donner, an expert on early Islam, argues that this political drive even distorted records of the earlier state of affairs. For example, later versions of

the aman given to the Christians of Damascus allotted Muslims "half of their homes and churches." In the earlier version of the document, there was no such clause.

When the Ottomans reached the gates of Constantinople in 1453, Islamic attitudes had long been imperialized, and also toughened in the face of endless conflicts with the Crusaders. Using a disputed license of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence they followed, they converted Hagia Sophia and a few other major churches. But they also did other things that represent the better values of Islam: They gave full protection to not only Greek but also Armenian Christians, rebuilt Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city, and soon also welcomed the Spanish Jews who were fleeing the Catholic Inquisition. Today, centuries later, the question for Turkey is what aspect of this complex Ottoman heritage is really more valuable. For the religious conservatives who have rallied behind President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the past two decades, the main answer seems to be imperial glory embodied in an absolute ruler.

For other Turks, however, the greatness of the Ottomans lies in their pluralism, rooted at the very heart of Islam, and it would inspire different moves today — perhaps opening Hagia Sophia to both Muslim and Christian worship, as I have advised for years. Another would be reopening the Halki Seminary, a Christian school of theology that opened in 1844 under Ottoman auspices, went victim to secular nationalism in 1971, but is still closed despite all the calls from advocates for religious freedom.

For the broader Muslim world, Hagia Sophia is a reminder that our tradition includes both our everlasting faith and values, as well as a legacy of imperialism. The latter is a bitter fact of history, like Christian imperialism or nationalism, which have targeted our mosques and even lives as well — from Cordoba to Srebrenica. But today, we should try to heal such wounds of the past, not open new ones.

So, if we Muslims really want to revive something from the past, let's focus on the model initiated by the Prophet and implemented by Caliph Umar. That means no shrines should be converted — or reconverted. All religious traditions should be respected. And the magnanimity of tolerance should overcome the pettiness of supremacism.

Mustafa Akyol, a contributing Opinion writer, is a senior fellow on Islam and modernity at the Cato Institute and the author of the forthcoming book "Reopening Muslim Minds: A Return to Reason, Freedom, and Tolerance."



Harrowing treatment of Uyghur Muslims by China

The Islamic Human Rights Commission has called on China to treat the Uyghurs as equal citizens after it released a damning report on Beijing's policies towards its largest Muslim minority.

The report, which is based on the personal testimonies of Uyghur refugees in Turkey, said China had chosen to treat its Uyghur population as a threat, whose ethnic and religious identity is out of sync with the majority Han Chinese.

But the report concluded that in order to find a harmonious way forward China must adopt a policy of equality and integration based on acknowledging cultural and religious diversity.

Those interviewed in the IHRC report included individuals who had been repeatedly arrested and tortured, who had been held in so-called "re-education camps," as well as those who had fled following the persecution of family members.

The most consistent grievances included: The creation of a police state wherein Muslims are monitored everywhere they go in Xinjiang.

The systematic targeting and persecution of anyone who displays an Islamic identity.

The routine use of torture to extract confessions as well as persuade individuals to provide names of others practising Islam.

Females being subjected to rape which is being used as a weapon to humiliate and blackmail women.

Family members disappearing into the "re-education" camps.

Being forced to undergo many hours of state propaganda, repeating mantras that extol the virtues of the Chinese state and Han identity while denying their own Islamic/Uyghur identity.

The incarceration of large numbers of children in the camps.

The western media has spoken of anything between one million and three million Uyghurs being held in camps, while China has talked about hundreds of thousands. Beijing has stated that it has established "vocational education" centres to stave off terrorism in the country.

Commenting on the report, IHRC chairman Massoud Shadjareh said: "What the headlines overlook is the history of persecution faced by China's Uyghur Muslims. This is a history in which the Chinese government has sought to erase their ethnic and religious identities through acts of persecution, surveillance and where that has failed, by killing those who refused to bow to their dictates.

"The camps are the latest in a long history of persecution: Uyghur women forced to marry Chinese men to change the demography of Xinjiang, imprisonment and torture of Uyghur activists, the repression of all expressions of religious and cultural identity, and the murder of those who were deemed dangerous by the state...

"As each repressive policy fails to disabuse the Uyghurs of their cultural and religious heritage, China responds with newer and more repressive measures. The 're-education' camps in Xinjiang are a sign of desperation: having failed to scare Uyghurs into adopting a Han identity through arrests, torture, surveillance and murder, China is now resorting to forcefully brainwashing the Uyghur community in order to teach it how to be more Chinese and less Uyghur.

"The Chinese authorities should know that repressing an entire population will not work – from Palestine to Kashmir, Chechnya or the Rohingya of Myanmar,

the modern world is replete with examples of states failing to break the will of oppressed minorities, irrespective of how monstrous and barbaric their assaults on those peoples.

"If China hopes to resolve its Uyghur question, it needs to start viewing them as equal citizens of China. It needs to protect their ethnic and cultural identity and allow them to worship freely. A free, prosperous Uyghur population will be an asset to China. Failure to turn away from its current course will only cause instability in Xinjiang as the Uyghurs seek to free themselves from the repressive policies of Beijing."



International Forum for Religious Leaders

The International Virtual Forum "Role of Religious Leaderships in the Face of Crises," held on Tuesday 22nd July by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), in cooperation with the Muslim World League (MWL) and the International Muslim Communities Council, under the theme "Towards global moral solidarity of religious leaderships", with high-level participation.

The opening session was presided over by Chadian President Idriss Déby, who stressed in his address the importance of religious leaderships during crisis and times of conflict to restore peace and security. He added that the Muslim Ummah and humanity are in dire need of enlightened scholars, and all the monotheistic books call for the values of coexistence and sharing.

President Déby congratulated ICESCO on holding this forum and choosing such a key topic. He highlighted that this indicates the Organization's advanced vision in countering crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic has spread horror among millions of people and threatened the social

fabric and economic future of humanity while stressing the need for sharing opinions to overcome this crisis.

In his address, ICESCO Director-General Dr. Salim Mohammed AlMalik reaffirmed the growing role of religious leadership towards achieving the aspirations of humanity as a whole, including global moral solidarity to achieve the lofty objectives and establish international peace and security.

He also stated that "since the outbreak of the pandemic, ICESCO has launched many initiatives, which were largely welcomed as part of the efforts to counter the repercussions of COVID-19 in the educational, humanitarian, psychological, and spiritual fields. This Forum will allow the various leaderships to highlight their role in addressing crises and agree upon the guidelines of the common ethics to deal with these crises".

Afterward, MWL Secretary-General Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa gave a speech, wherein he reaffirmed the great role of religious leadership, particularly

during crises when the religious and spiritual values get stronger, and people resort to their religious leaderships, which stress the importance of holding such forum.



Naqvi: About 82% decline in triple talaq cases since law enacted by Indian government

PTI, New Delhi, JUL 22 2020

There has been about 82 per cent decline in triple talaq cases since the law against the "social evil" was put in place, Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said on Wednesday, terming August 1, when the legislation came into being as, "Muslim women's rights day". He also asserted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, has taken its course whenever such a matter has been reported. Read more at:

In an article 'Triple Talaq -- Big Reform, Better Result' which was posted by Press Information Bureau, Naqvi said triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat was neither Islamic nor legal."

"August 1, 2019, is a historic day in Indian parliamentary history when the bill against triple talaq was made a law despite the obstacle by so-called 'champions of secularism', including the Congress, Communist Party, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Trinamool Congress," Naqvi said.

August 1 became the day which ensured gender equality and strengthened constitutional, fundamental and democratic rights of the Muslim women, he said, terming it the 'Muslim women's rights day'.

That day will remain a "golden moment" in Indian democracy and parliamentary history, the minister said in the article. "One year has passed since the law against triple talaq was passed and there is a decline of about 82 per cent in triple talaq cases thereafter," Naqvi said, without elaborating on the figures of such cases.

A law against the "social evil" of triple talaq could have been passed in 1986 when the Supreme Court had given the historic judgement in the Shah Bano case, he said.

The Congress had an absolute majority in Parliament with more than 400 out of 545 Lok Sabha members and more than 159 out of the 245 Members in Rajya Sabha, but the then Rajiv Gandhi government used its strength in Parliament to make the judgement ineffective and deprive Muslim women of their constitutional and fundamental rights, Naqvi said. "The then Congress government had bowed down before the illogic of some 'narrow-minded fanatics' and committed a criminal sin to deprive the Muslim women of their constitutional rights," Naqvi said.

The Congress' "mistake of the moment" became a "punishment of decades" for the Muslim women, he said.

"The Congress was worried for 'vote ka udhaar' (the loan of votes), while our government was worried for 'samajik sudhaar' (social reform)," Naqvi said India runs on a Constitution, not on Shariat or any other religious textbook, the minority affairs minister asserted. Noting that earlier various legislations had been brought in the country to abolish social evils such as Sati and child marriage, Naqvi said the law against triple talaq has nothing to do with religion and was made purely to ensure gender equality by...

"Instant divorce by verbally saying Talaq thrice is illegal. There were several incidents coming where women had been given talaq through a letter, phone or even through messages and WhatsApp. Such incidents are unacceptable in a sensitive country and to a government committed to inclusive development," Naqvi said.

Several Muslim-majority nations of the world had declared triple talaq illegal and un-Islamic such as Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria and Malaysia.

However, it took 70 years for India to get rid of this inhuman and cruel practice, Naqvi said.

The minister said the month of August is recognised as one of revolution, rights and reforms in the Indian history -- Au-



gust 8, Quit India Movement; August 15, Independence Day; August 19, World Humanitarian Day; August 20, Sadbhavana Diwas; and August 5, the abolition of Article 370

The Narendra Modi government made the law against triple talaq to make the Supreme Court's judgement of May 18, 2017, effective.

By enacting the triple talaq law, the Modi government has strengthened socio-economic, fundamental and constitutional rights of the Muslim women. The government is committed to social reforms and empowerment of all sections, Naqvi said

Dewsbury careers expert to help other women

Ms Ladha used to work on raising aspirations amongst Muslim women in the UK prior to heading out to the Middle East. She said: "If we look at the key Government reports, Muslim women are finding it much harder to find a job than the national average."

Rehana Ladha, originally from Dewsbury, recently returned from Saudi Arabia and is now looking for a fresh challenge.

Ms Ladha added that Muslim women faced multiple issues that were holding them back ranging from a lack of confidence to language barriers.

The career counsellor, who has spent the last four years in the Middle East, also suggests that name blind recruitment may be a solution addressing the imbalance to a certain extent.

Families also have a part to play in encouraging women to pursue their career ambitions, says Ms Ladha.

"A large part of it is they are seen as a homemaker," she said. "The encourage-

ment is not there from a young to say go and pursue your dreams, go and study."

Ms Ladha, who grew up at an Islamic boarding school, says the greatest challenge for her was not having the right mentors. "Everybody amongst my friends and family network didn't have any connections and didn't know anybody," she said.

Her advice to other women from a similar background is to seek out mentors from the very beginning.

She said: "Look for role models. Who do you aspire to be like? Is there anybody who you like, whose career you can map?"

"Find these role models on LinkedIn, watch talks that inspire you and then take out bits to learn from these talks. What have you learned? What can you implement the things that you have learnt."

Ms Ladha is herself open to mentoring women from ethnic minority backgrounds. "Being a female Muslim, I've had to do double at work," she says.



Political repression in Bahrain

By Marc Owen Jones

Exploring Bahrain's modern history through the lens of repression, this concise and accessible account work spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, looking at all forms of political repression from legal, statecraft, police brutality and informational controls. Considering several episodes of contention in Bahrain, from tribal resistance to the British reforms of the 1920s, the rise of the Higher Executive Committee in the 1950s, the leftist agitation of the 1970s, the 1990s Intifada and the 2011 Uprising, Marc Owen Jones offers never before seen insights into the British role in Bahrain, as well as the activities of the Al Khalifa Ruling Family. From the plundering of Bahrain's resources, to new information about the torture and murder of Bahrain civilians, this study reveals new facts about Bahrain's troubled political history. Using freedom of information requests, historical documents, interviews, and data from social media, this is a rich and original interdisciplinary history of Bahrain over one hundred years.

Reviews

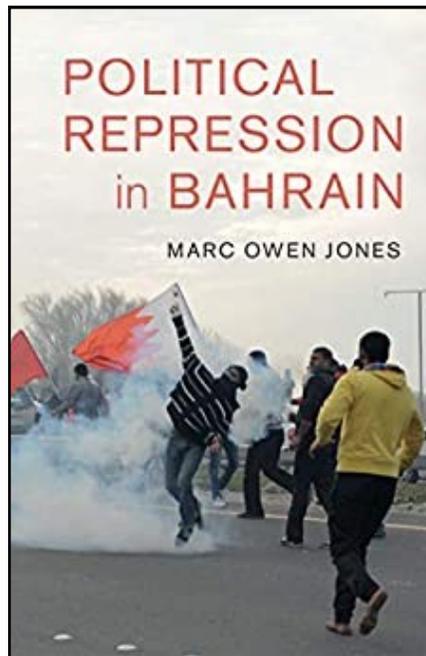
'A meticulously researched and troubling historical account of political violence in the small island of Bahrain. Jones captures the many dark sides of state repression, inflicted on individuals, activists and communities. A rich study of how policing citizens, spreading fear, and extracting consent operate

in a context where there is no accountability and justice. A must-read.'

Madawi Al-Rasheed - London School of Economics

'Little understood, often ignored, and with unwavering support from Western powers, Bahrain is home to one of the most oppressive regimes in the world. Jones' fascinating and troubling study is a must-read for those concerned about violence, human rights, and the obstacles to justice in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.'

Toby C. Jones - Rutgers University



'A must-read for those interested in understanding the resilience of colonial legacies in the Arabian Gulf. This is a well-documented analysis of dynamic relationship between various forms of repression and resistance. Jones skillfully positions his narrative of Bahrain's modern history within academic accounts of subordination and domination.'

Abdulahdi Khalaf - Lund University
'Original, thoroughly researched, theoretically framed and utterly compelling, this is the only systematic scholarly examination of the nature, tools and uses of repression as a key feature of Bahrain's politics over the past century. A key point of reference for further work on Bahrain, on the politics of the Gulf states more generally, and for the comparative study of repression and autocratic rule.'
Gerd Nonneman, Georgetown University
'Marc Owen Jones breaks new ground in this fascinating study of how the nature and pattern of political repression in Bahrain has evolved over time and in response to changes in circumstance. The result is a book that adds greatly to our understanding of the survival strategies of authoritarian regimes.'

Kristian Ulrichsen - Rice University

Marc Owen Jones has BA in Journalism, Film and Broadcasting from Cardiff University in 2006, and a CASAW-funded MSc in Arab World Studies from the University of Durham in 2010.

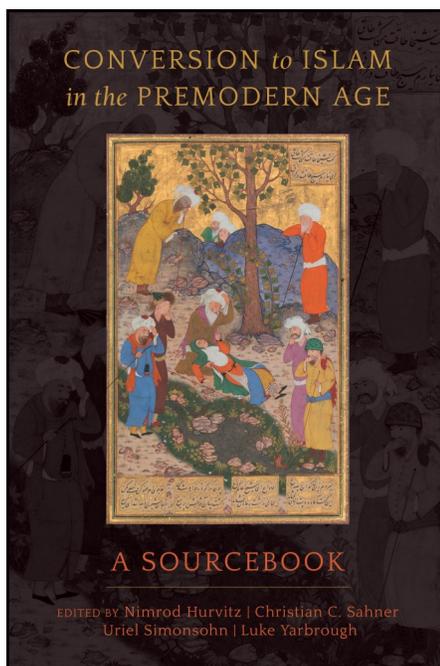
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Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age



by Nimrod Hurvitz (Editor), Christian C. Sahner (Editor), Uriel Simonsohn (Editor), Luke Yarbrough (Editor)

Conversion to Islam is a phenomenon of immense significance in human history. At the outset of Islamic rule in the seventh century, Muslims constituted a tiny minority in most areas under their control. But by the beginning of the modern period, they formed the majority in most territories from North Africa to Southeast Asia. Across such diverse lands, peoples, and time periods, conversion was a complex, varied phenomenon. Converts lived in a world of overlapping and competing religious, cultural, social, and familial affiliations, and the effects of turning to Islam played out in every aspect of life. Conversion therefore provides a critical lens for world history, magnifying the constantly evolving array of beliefs, practices, and outlooks that constitute Islam

around the globe. This groundbreaking collection of texts, translated from sources in a dozen languages from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries, presents the historical process of conversion to Islam in all its variety and unruly detail, through the eyes of both Muslim and non-Muslim observers.

Reviews

"Any reader interested in interreligious relations and conversions will take great pleasure in discovering this diverse collection of texts, many translated into English for the first time from various languages. There is no doubt that this work, edited by renowned historians, will quickly become a standard reference."—Anne-Marie Eddé, Professor of Medieval Islamic History, Panthéon-Sorbonne University

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An academic's account of lockdown in Tokyo

.SBEHOLD ! THEY FOLD UP THEIR HEARTS, THAT THEY MAY LIE HID FROM HIM ! AH ! EVEN WHEN THEY COVER THEMSELVES WITH THEIR GARMENTS, HE KNOWETH WHAT THEY CONCEAL, AND WHAT THEY REVEAL : FOR HE KNOWETH WELL THE (INMOST SECRETS) OF THE HEARTS.

.6THERE IS NO MOVING CREATURE ON EARTH BUT ITS SUSTENANCE DEPENDETH ON GOD : HE KNOWETH THE TIME AND PLACE OF ITS DEFINITE ABODE AND ITS TEMPORARY DEPOSIT : ALL IS IN A CLEAR RECORD. .7HE IT IS WHO CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH IN SIX DAYS—AND HIS THRONE WAS OVER THE WATERS— THAT HE MIGHT TRY YOU, WHICH OF YOU IS BEST IN CONDUCT. BUT IF THOU WERT TO SAY TO THEM, “ YE SHALL INDEED BE RAISED UP AFTER DEATH ”, THE UNBELIEVERS WOULD BE SURE TO SAY, “ THIS IS NOTHING BUT OBVIOUS SORCERY ! ”

(HUD)

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prayers
Everyday
at 13.00

Christian Hess, Associate Professor of Chinese History at Sophia University, Tokyo, I am spending the pandemic at home, a detached house in a residential neighborhood in suburban Western Tokyo. The university I work for is closed and will offer online instruction this term. We are scrambling to set this all up. Those of us with kids are wondering how we will teach from home while also homeschooling our own kids (and keeping them quiet while we Zoom, record lecture segments, etc).

May and June are usually frantic months for academics in Japan, as most schools around the world are on summer break, while we teach until late July. We usually have lots of visitors coming to town, giving talks, and meeting up, and there are June conferences like the Asian Studies Japan Conference. This has all ground to a halt.

Like many places, my children's (elementary and junior high) schools are closed. This happened on Feb. 28. My son is waiting to enter his new school, a private junior high. Because it is private, he will have some online lessons on an adjusted schedule. Although Japan is one of the richest countries on earth, public schools here have no such resources. My daughter goes to the local public elementary school and gets a homework packet every few weeks. It is up to us to get her through this. The wealthier private schools/ international schools here have much better access to online resources and teaching. These are far out of reach even on a professor's salary. We have no idea how long this situation will last and there is great anxiety among parents about what this disparity will do in the rigid, testing-based school system.

The Japanese government lacks the legal authority to enforce the kind of lockdowns we see in other places. So, they can shut down institutions like schools and basically pressure restaurants and small businesses to shut, while larger companies keep forcing their workers to come to work. Most of the parents in my neighborhood are working from home, though several have to go to their offices in central Tokyo. This is a very dodgy situation.

Each day, at 10:30 am, the public address emergency speakers in our town blast a recorded message telling us to stay at home. Many neighborhood children are out playing, while some families are strictly following the lockdown. This has led to some tensions among neighbors. Since the government cannot enforce the stay and home orders, they rely on moral suasion. About 3/4 of the families with kids on my street decided to let their kids play outside, mine included. This of course led to tension with the few families making their kids stay inside. It kind of blew up one day and we had a kind of neighborhood meeting, but it worked out and now people communicate better.

Travel

The Japanese government has shut its borders to many countries. It has also said that those foreigners living here essentially can't freely exit

and re-enter Japan. People are strongly discouraged from visiting elderly relatives, and this appears to be holding. With so much time off school we would have usually gone to visit my wife's family in Osaka, but we have not. I do feel anxiety because of travel restrictions. Even though I am a lawful permanent resident, I am not allowed re-entry to Japan if I leave the country. This is especially worrisome since my elderly mother in California is high risk (age and existing health issues).

At the time of writing, the Japanese government has not released any believable figures about the outbreak, something that most people in my middle-class suburb are in agreement on. This is a city of 13 million, in an urban region of 37 million and the reported cases are often under 100 per day... Yet we also hear stories of people presenting with symptoms being turned

away from 5 or 6 hospitals, and sometimes never getting in. I do not know anyone who has been sick, though a number of my neighbors (including myself and daughter) were hit with serious colds that lingered for some time right about the time the numbers started increasing. Travel and commuting within Tokyo has been dramatically reduced by the government's emergency declaration, which has just been

extended until the end of May [note: the emergency was lifted on 25 May]. Most people I know are doubtful things are going to change much come June. There is considerable anxiety and growing pressure from parents and educators to hit the reset button on the school year, which starts in early April here in Japan. There is growing debate about starting the year in September, because so many children will have missed a significant portion of the school year.

We still have good deliveries and the supermarkets are well-stocked. There are some interesting shortages, but the toilet paper panic has ended. There are brisk sales of bleach. Pasta is very hard to come by. There are no masks and no hand sanitizers, unless you line up an hour before the market or drug stores open, and even then you might not get any.

About a week ago, the state of emergency was lifted in Tokyo. Things are cautiously moving toward "normal" and with social distancing practices in restaurants and cafes. Schools too are reopening slowly. Our kids go to school two days a week now for half days, and then five days a week on a shorter schedule starting next week. Universities remain closed and are teaching online. No word yet on the Fall semester.

The Japanese government, after receiving criticism for being the only G7 nation that would not allow permanent residents to return from abroad, has softened its stance. However, significant travel restrictions remain in place. Relations between families in our neighborhood are better than at the start of the pandemic (they were never bad but are now closer).

