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We stand for:

- *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*

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To offset the decline of “Islamism” return to basics

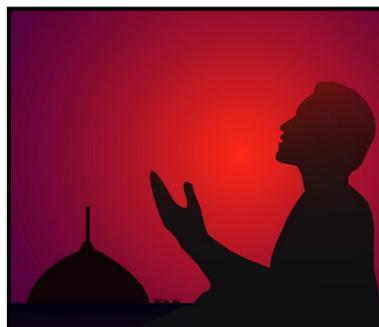
The religious phenomenon has always existed in the human society since the beginning of life. The philosophy of creation has baffled mankind ever since. The linkage between the creation and the Creator always existed in the human thinking. Mankind across the ages sought to find a viable explanation to universal existence and theories were suggested to deal with that. Within the context of Islam the followers of Mohammad ibn Abdullah have adopted the religion and framed their lives accordingly. Whatever happened in the past 15 centuries, religion has always existed in the lives of people, whether through worship, intellectual discourse, social and political dealings or spiritual experiences. It has always existed in the inner self of mankind and translated itself in social functions like marriage, divorce, inheritance and other forms of worship. These practices have never ceased in the past even under the most vicious regimes. Under the Soviet anti-religion doctrines Muslims did not give up their faith but continued to practice it in every possible form. Under Turkey's extreme form of secularism, people did not give up their Islamic credentials or functions. Tunisians also continued their religious attachment and practices under the now-defunct Bourguiba regime for decades.

The common religious practices cannot be quelled by any form of government. In France, for example, Emmanuel Macron repeatedly threatened the religion, but he could not stop them performing their daily religious duties. Several European governments were tempted to attack Islam when a terrorist act was committed by individuals, but they could not eradicate the culture among the populace. Religious practices will always be performed by Christians, Jews, Christians and other denominations. But there are cycles of rise and decline of these phenomena. The past few years have witnessed serious decline of the religious phenomenon among the Muslims although the core practices have continued. This is a source of concern as it indicates disenchantment with religion. The Islamic movements that had mushroomed in the seventies and eighties raising the banner of “Islam is the solution” are now in decline in most

countries. The three countries, Turkey, Morocco and Sudan which are governed by “Islamists” have led the way to “normalize” relations with Israel, causing alarm among Palestinians and most of the Arab people. In Iraq the performance of the “Islamists” has not been positive. They were associated with corruption and mismanagement.

The consequences of these tendencies are destructive both to the morale of the grassroots of the Islamic movements and to the image of Islam as a religion with a political system. So how to stop the decline of “Islamism”? How to regain the “return to religion” that was dominant in the seventies and eighties? How to reinvigorate the “Islamic project” that has declined rapidly in recent years. One of the most basic reasons to explain the failure of the various experiments is the weakness of faith in those who rose to senior political positions in those countries. The basic response is to suggest a “return to roots” approach, the rediscovering of the self and a speedy return to the mosque to fulfil various functions. A serious re-start to the project is necessary to stop the total collapse of momentum. Religion itself is not in danger of collapse. It has never done so in the past centuries and it is unlikely to do so now. What is at stake here is the gradual loss of the glare of the project and the spread of pessimism and ambivalence among the young “Islamists” who have been perplexed by the speed of the collapse of morality among those who assumed power.

There is a need to stop the rot in the 50 year-process that saw the mushrooming of what is often termed “Political Islam” followed by its gradual collapse. Iran appears to be the only functioning manifestation of that project. This partially explains why it has been under persistent attacks by those who view its Islamic credentials a threat to their ideological project. Going back to the mosque and working to start a programme of education with an eye to reinvigorate the Islamic movement again is the most basic step to stop the decline. This may seem symbolic but it is the necessary foundation for a more elaborate approach to enliven dynamic Islamism.



Tasawwif amd Irfan

Islamic mysticism was the topic of discussion at Abrar's weekly online seminar on Thursday 21st January. Two speakers dealt with the subject which takes two forms, tasawwuf and Irfan. Broadly speaking the first is the Sunni Muslim form of Islamic mysticism, the second is common among Shia Muslim scholars.

Dr Mazen Al Sharif, a Moroccan scholar presented detailed historical perspective of tasawwuf which was the subject of his doctoral thesis he submitted in Turkey last year. The term tasawwuf is a new term used for Islamic mysticism. The contents of this discipline are contained within the Quranic and prophetic traditions. The term was used by Abul Qassim Al Sufi in the first century of hijra; some historians say it was introduced by Al Hassan Al Basri. It has several roots but generally refers to the cleansing of the soul as a way to attaining wisdom and highest level of spirituality. It was adopted by early companions like Abu Dhar Al Ghafari and spread during the Umayyad and Abbassid caliphates. The spread of materialism at those times pushed some puritans to seek spirituality and enhanced morality. It involves knowing God as a source of beauty, adopting every good behaviour and abandoning the evil. The prophet sought to cleanse the hearts of his companions and enhance worship. Sufis sought to adopt the way of ihsan; observing good. Hassan Al Basri was a student of Imam Ali and learnt from him. Early Sufis like Junaid Al Baghdadi, Ibrhaim Al Adham, Abu Saeed Al Kharrazk, Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī and Ma'rouf al-Karkhi. Al Hallaj was a lover of Mohammad's household. He was killed in horrific way. Then came Mohammad bin Abdul Jabbar Al Nafri whose al-Mukhātabāt refer to a series of spiritual addresses from the divine presence addressed to His servant, i.e. the author. Then there was the structural movement which led to struggle with the rulers.

Tasawwuf reached its peak at the hands of Imam Al Ghazali who brought it back to the people and was one of the most prominent and influential Muslim philosophers, theologians, jurists, logicians and mystics, of Sunni Islam. He was a jurist and revivalist. He transformed Sufism into an institution and was able to infiltrate into the structure of the state. Then came Abdul Qadir Al

Gilani in Baghdad and Hayat bin Essa Al Harrani in Turkey. There was Mu'in al-Din Chishti who went to RAjastan in India and attracted many to Islam. The speaker continued his historical journey to India, Bangladesh and Indonesia, tracing the roots of sufism. Then he came back to North Africa. He talked about Abd as-Salam ibn Mashish al-Alami, a Sufi saint who lived during the reign of the Almohad Caliphate in Morocco. He also referred to Abū Madyan who was an influential Andalusian mystic and a great Sufi master. Some even refer to him as the national figure of Maghreb mysticism as he was such a forerunner of Sufism in this geographical area. In Morocco there was Abu al-Hasan ash-Shadhili also known as Sheikh al-Shadhili who was an influential Islamic scholar and Sufi and founder of the Shadhili Sufi order. In Egypt there was 'Ibrahīm Bin 'Abd-EL-'Azīz 'Abu al-Magd, better known as El Desouki, who was an Imam and the founder of the Desouki Order. The speaker ended by talking about Ibn Arabi and Jalal Al Din Al Rumi. He was proud of Sufism which he said presented the true image of Islam as opposed to the Wahhabi Salafist version that led to bloodshed.

The second speaker was Sayed Mohammad Abdullah Fadhlullah from Lebanon who talked about "Irfan". He said tasawwuf appeared in the middle of the second century of hijra. Before that there were the ascetic tendency. When tasawwuf appeared people were of two opinions: one that criticized it arguing that it would isolate people from the reality and transform them into isolated beings. The others view it as a unique experience that aims at cleaning the soul. We believe that the acceptable tasawwuf is that which leads the person to adopt God's attributes in practice and works within the real world.

As for Irfan, it is a knowledge of God; His names, attributes and manifestation. It is knowing life and the hereafter, reality of life and how to relate it to the absolute reality which is God. Irfan is nothing but tasawwuf. There is a lot of similarities that many referred to them as one. The change from tasawwuf to Iran happened during the Safavid period. Tasawwuf is a way of ascetic life which aims to cleanse the would in order to reach out to self-perfection. Irfan is a

personal behaviour that makes people possess knowledge of God and wisdom. Irfan does not contradict reason. It involves knowledge of live and the hereafter in a way that moulds them together. It also seeks to unify existence in order to create perfect person who can know the essence of God, His attributes and names. If he couldn't reach this level he remains deficient spiritually and rationally. Irfan considers Islam as a direct way to self-knowledge that links existence to the absolute truth and melt in God through self-realisation. This divine beauty and love makes the person able to get rid of the multiplicity that leads to ignorance and superficiality. Irfan aims to relieve the human from internal and external chains to that he comes nearer to unification with God and reach the truth. God is all the things and but none of it. As Farabi says; Irfan is the end of multiplicity that prevents from reaching God. The better coordination between the personal belief and practice leads to deeper knowledge of God. This diverging behaviour leads to shirk (polytheism). Irfan is part of the persistent human search for the divine truth and existence and is a means of reaching to God. It is a means, not an aim. The speaker urged preachers to pay attention to the Holy Quran in order to grasp the idea of Irfan.

Fatima as a role model

* On the demise anniversary of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, Abrar dedicated its weekly programme on Thursday 14th January to re-visit her life and time. Mrs Alyaa Al Mouwsawi, an activist and social researcher from Iraq said that Fatima was a role model for Muslims, men and women, not just women. The second point was that our youths do not take her as a role model because we failed to present her as such. There are two ways of remembering historical charaters. The first is to present them within the context of their time. This limits them to those periods. The second is to retrieve history and make it part of our lives and observe how our predecessors dealt with its affairs. This can help.

* Sheikh Faisal Al Khadhimi talked about the attempts to westernize Muslim women and take her away from the religion. He asked: What did we provide as an alternative? Unless we are able to present Fatima and other prominent figures in a modern context, they remain absent from the public domain.



Archbishop of Greece attacks Islam

A group of global Muslim scholars on Tuesday condemned recent Islamophobic remarks by the archbishop of Greece. The remarks "do not serve humanity," said the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS) in a statement, adding that they stem "from hidden grudges and a policy of double standards."

"The archbishop of Greece is in complete ignorance of Islam," it said.

With the Constitution of Medina in the year 622, Islam is the first religion that laid the foundations for Muslims and members of other faiths to live together, the group stressed.

The group called on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to do its part to defend the religion of Islam and urged Muslim countries to condemn such provocative statements.

In a televised speech on Saturday 16h January, Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and Greece said Islam is not a religion but a political party and its followers are people of war.

The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) expressed concern over the provocative remarks made by Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and All Greece about Islam during a televised interview.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the OIC General Secretariat said such remarks offend the feelings of all Muslims and are contrary to the spirit of dialogue, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence which should be promoted by religious leaders of all faiths.



Cleric calls for promotion of Islamic culture across globe

Secretary General of World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought has met with representative of the Supreme Leader in Hajj affairs stressing importance of promoting Islam and its rich culture in the international arena.

Hujjat-ul-Islam Hamid Shahriari, from the Islamic unity center stressed mutual cooperation between the two organizations could contribute to materialization of unified Islamic nation, reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

He said, "Cooperation between the sibling organizations can promote formation of unified Islamic nation in the international arena."

The cleric provided a report on activities

of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought and announced preparation for cooperation with the office of the Supreme Leader in Hajj Affairs in the international arena.

Hujjat-ul-Islam Seyyed Abdul Fattah Navvab, representative of the Supreme Leader in Hajj Affairs, in this meeting highlighted importance of mutual cooperation between similar organizations in a bid to increase the cultural activities worldwide.



"Shia identity should serve Islamic unity, Muslim nation"

Prominent Iranian cleric defined Shia identity as an Islamic identity which should serve the nation of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and solidarity in the Islamic nation.

Ayatollah Ahmad Moballeghi, member of the Assembly of Experts, in his remarks in a meeting of experts at Shiaology Journal held on Saturday called the Shia community to redefine its identity in the modern world and boost its presence in line with teachings of holy Qur'an and Ahlul Bayt (AS), reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

He stressed that Islamic proximity is subsidiary to existence and respect for the different Islamic denominations.

"The Islamic identity is dependent upon Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)" said the cleric and added, "if the Islamic nation is demolished or weakened then the Shia identity and any other Islamic identity is doomed to be ruined."

Top cleric warned of repercussions of converting communities to Shia or Sunni, either overtly or covertly, although an overt conversion would lead to sectarian war, waste of assets in the Islamic nation.

According to the cleric the covert conversion of the Islamic nation would translate to hypocrisy in the Islamic nation imposing heavy outcomes on the Muslim nation.



UN officials urge U.S. to revoke blacklisting of Yemen's Houthis

Three top United Nations officials all called on the United States on Thursday to revoke its decision to designate Yem-

en's Houthis a foreign terrorist organization, warning it would push the country into a large-scale famine and chill peace efforts.

U.N. Yemen mediator Martin Griffiths, U.N. aid chief Mark Lowcock and U.N. food chief David Beasley issued their warnings during a U.N. Security Council meeting on Yemen. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres backed the call by his officials for Washington to reverse the designation, a U.N. spokesman said. "We fear that there will be inevitably a chilling effect on my efforts to bring the parties together," Griffiths told the 15-member body. "The decision will contribute to the prospect of famine in Yemen and should be revoked based on humanitarian grounds at the earliest opportunity." The United Nations describes Yemen as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the people in need of aid. Yemenis fear the U.S. decision could further isolate them from the global financial system.

Turkey decries Islamophobic attack on Denmark mosque

Aabenraa Mosque suffered attack on



Friday 22nd January when someone spray-painted anti-Muslim slurs on its walls

The head of the Diyanet, Turkey's religious affairs directorate, on Sunday denounced an Islamophobic at-

tack on a Turkish mosque in Denmark near the German border.

"We expect the activities of racist groups with an Islamophobic mentality, which are increasing day by day, to end and their perpetrators to be brought to justice as soon as possible," Ali Erbas said on Twitter.

On Friday at 6 p.m., Aabenraa Mosque suffered an attack when someone spray-painted anti-Muslim slurs on its walls.

Hursit Tokay, the president of the mosque association, told Anadolu Agency that when he arrived at the mosque around 11 a.m. on Saturday, he noticed insulting writings about the holy book of Islam, the Quran, on the wall. The mosque, which operates under the umbrella of the Danish Turkish Islamic Foundation, was partially closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. He said mosque officials reported the incident to the police and authorities opened an investigation and would examine surveillance cameras in the area.

Mariam al Astrulabi: Muslim woman behind 10th-century astrolabes

Between the 8th and 15th centuries, Muslim scholars made an immense contribution toward science, inventing sophisticated tools in the fields of medicine, astronomy, physics and chemistry, which inspired the scientists to make ground breaking advances during the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery.

From Ali al-Qushji to Ulugh Bey and Al-Biruni to Ibn Sina, works of dozens of great Muslim minds in the Middle Ages opened new avenues for the following generations of polymaths. In terms of astronomy, the Muslim scholars also improved and refined the Ptolemaic system, a mathematical model of the universe formulated by the Alexandrian astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy in 150 CE. The extensive contributions of Islamic astronomy also exposed some weaknesses in the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian systems.

Until the 15th century, during the medieval period, Muslim scientists also made various contributions to the field of astronomy. Their works were mainly based on ancient sources from Greece, Iran, and India. They however took them to new heights by inventing new tools to measure and calculate the movement of stars and planets.

Since Muslims pray five times a day, the timings are determined by the position of the sun. Muslim worshippers, wherever they are in the world, have to pray facing the Holy Kaaba in Saudi Arabia's Mecca city. These requirements informed some of the crucial scientific feats during the Golden Age of Islam.

In the 10th century, a Muslim woman named Maryam al-Ijliya, also known as Mariam al Astrulabi, took the craft of

building astrolabes to the next level. An astrolabe is an ancient device used to measure time and the position of the sun and stars.

Mariam is known for her academic brilliance and an exceptionally focused mind that lay the foundation for managing the transportation and communication using astrolabes.

Born in Syria during the 10th century, her proclivity in developing astrolabes was inspired by his father, known as Al-Ijliyy al-Asturlabi, who was apprenticed to an astrolabe maker in Baghdad.

The design of an astrolabe also required Mariam to work with complex mathematical calculations and precision, but she gradually mastered the designs. This impressed Sayf Al Dawla, the founder of the Emirate of Aleppo that encompassed most of northern Syria and parts of western Jazira. He reigned from 944 to 967 AD.

Al Dawla found Mariam's works very intricate and innovative. As her fame started to grow, he decided to employ her in the court in Aleppo. Besides this, she also helped develop navigation and timekeeping techniques during that time.

How do astrolabes invented by Mariam help astronomy? An astrolabe is a device that uses astral bodies like the sun and stars to either tell your position in latitude, or tell the local time. It can also be used to measure celestial events like the wobble of the Earth's axis.

It consists of a disk of metal or wood with the circumference marked off with degrees. There was also a movable pointer pivoted at the centre of the disk called alidade. They were useful in determining the position of the sun, moon, stars and the planets which would be

used to find the Qibla, determine prayer times and the initial days of Ramadan and Eid.

On the other hand, they were also used in the subjects of astronomy, astrology and horoscopes.

With an astrolabe, astronomers could calculate the position of celestial objects, the time of day (or night), the time of year, the altitude of any object, the latitude and much more.

The significant contributions of Mariam in astronomy were officially recognised when the main-belt asteroid, 7060 Al-Ijliyye, was named after her following the discovery of Henry E. Holt at Palomar Observatory in 1990.

Some academic works showed evidence which points out that the astrolabe made by Mariam could be used to precisely establish the mathematical positions of the stars and other celestial objects despite her not having a class in mathematics. In linking mathematics with fine craftsmanship, coupled with excellent metallurgical knowledge, she demonstrated her skills and high level of intellect, which was evidence of her contributions to modern astronomy and to the Islamic religion as well.

It is imperative to note that the astrolabe was invented by the Greeks who used it to measure the latitude.

In 2016, science-fiction writer Nnedi Okorafor's novel called 'Binti' in which the central character was Mariam received the Nebula Award. Mariam was the inspiration behind the protagonist in her science fiction novella, Binti.

Okorafor stated that she learned about Mariam at a book festival in the UAE. The eponymous main character in Binti becomes a young woman who is an expert at crafting astrolabes.



Condemnation of France's new charter to counter Islam

A special commission in the French National Assembly approved the "charter of republican values" which was announced earlier by the nation's president as the fight against Islamist separatism.

The bill was introduced Oct. 2 by Emmanuel Macron to fight so-called "Islamist separatism."

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on Twitter that the draft law, which advocates consolidating principles of the republic, was widely accepted by the special commission.

Darmanin said that France is making a law for the future, not only to resist today's difficulties but to defend the values of the republic.

He also said that rising far-right and leftist structures in the country are also a threat. The bill is expected to be submitted to the National Assembly in February. The draft law is being criticized because it targets the Muslim community and imposes restrictions on almost every aspect of their lives.

It provides for intervening in mosques and the associations responsible for the administration of mosques, as well as controlling the finances of associations and non-governmental organizations belonging to Muslims.

A 2004 law prohibits the wearing or open display of religious symbols in French schools, but it does not apply to universities.

It also restricts education choices of the Muslim community by preventing families from giving children home education. The bill, which prohibits patients from choosing doctors based on gender for religious or other reasons, paves the way for the evaluation and suppression of dissenting views under the name of "posts that incite hatred" with a new mechanism. The bill also requires "secularism education" for all public officials.

Three French Muslim organizations have condemned the "charter of principles" of Islam stressing that some statements in the charter are "prejudicial to the honor of Muslims." "We believe that certain passages and formulations in the text submitted are likely to weaken the bonds of trust between the Muslims of France and the nation," said the three groups -- which make up the nine-member French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM).

"Furthermore, some statements are prejudicial to the honor of Muslims, with an accusatory and marginalizing tone," they added in a Friday statement, referring to the text of a so-called anti-extremism charter pushed by the country's President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron has enraged Muslims world-wide by publicly supporting publication of a derogatory image of Islam's Prophet Mo-

hammad (PBUH) and describing the Abrahamic faith of nearly 1.8 billion people as a "religion in crisis."

"We obviously agree with the demand for non-interference by States, the non-instrumentalization of religions and respect for the Constitution and the principles of the Republic," the joint statement added.

Only five out of nine groups that make up the CFCM, a body set up nearly 20 years ago to supposedly enable dialogue between the French government and the country's large Muslim community, have signed up to the charter after weeks of internal disputes and occasionally bitter debates.

The three institutions -- the Coordination Committee of Turkish Muslims in France (CCMTF), the Millî Görüş Islamic Confederation (CMIG) and the Faith and Practice movement -- declared on Wednesday that they decided against signing the charter that was approved and submitted to Macron.

They said it was approved without obtaining the full consensus of other integral components of the CFCM, including the regional and departmental councils and imams who will be impacted by the decision.

The development came days after dozens of civil society organizations called on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to open formal infringement procedures against the French government for entrenching Islamophobia.

In a complaint to the UNHRC, nearly 36 groups from 13 countries outlined the "clear violation of a number of basic rights that are protected in legislation that is ratified by Paris."

The signatories of the 28-page complaint included the Strasbourg-based European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion, the Muslim Association of Britain and the US-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

The document cited the anti-Islam remarks by Macron, including his October 2020 speech in which he defended the republication of blasphemous cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by the French weekly Charlie Hebdo.

The speech sparked protests across the world and called for the boycott of French goods.

It said such a stance "goes beyond the permissible limits of an objective debate" and "could stir up prejudice and put at risk religious peace," citing the UN Human Rights Committee's own comments on depictions of Islam's Prophet.

The groups also said the French government exploited the murder of a school teacher that followed the speech

"for racist and Islamophobic purposes," including the raiding of several Muslim homes and organizations.

Meanwhile, the approval of the Macron-backed charter -- dictating how Muslims in France should practice their faith -- would pave the way for the establishment of the National Council of Imams that will have powers to authorize and shape the practices of imams across the French Muslim communities.

The council will also control and restrict the entry of imams from Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, and 300 imams may be expelled, according to reports published by France's mainstream media outlets.

The joint statement further noted that the Great Mosque of Saint Denis de la Reunion, which is one of the founding components of the CFCM, has also refused to sign the charter.

They further demanded amendments to the text of the 10-point charter that the French president boasted as a "foundational text for relations between the State, Islam and France," as part of his purported efforts to safeguard the country's secular system in wake of violent incidents sparked by repeated publication of cartoons depicting the prophet of Islam.

The dissenting Muslim groups also underlined that although they are convinced that the imam's council is beneficial, it should derive its legitimacy from the Muslim population. They further emphasized the need for "a broad, democratic and participatory consultation" instead of customarily signing the text that the "community cannot calmly accept."

Meanwhile, the complaint to the UNHRC also accused France of acting "out of proportion" and "unreasonably" applying exceptions to restrictions on fundamental freedoms in order to protect national security. It pointed out that there was no effective remedy within the French legal system to stop structural Islamophobia, and therefore a formal infringement procedure against the government was necessary.

"France has seen shocking levels of state-sanctioned Islamophobia in recent months. This has precipitated the closure of mosques, Muslim schools, Muslim-led charities and civil society organisations," said Muhammad Rabhani, managing director of Cage, which co-signed the complaint.

"As a signatory to the UN, France cannot be allowed to infringe upon its international rights obligations so openly, and yet present itself as the land of 'liberte, egalite, fraternite'."

Hijabi Runners provides a safe, encouraging space for Muslim women

By Taylor Dutch

“Muslim women are not represented in mainstream media in regard to sports and athletics,” she tells *Runner’s World*. “I had few role models to look up to.”

The 24-year-old podiatrist from Leeds, U.K., also worried about standing out as a novice: “Would I be too fast or too slow or not running properly?”

But Khan needed an outlet to relieve stress. While working on her dissertation for graduate school, she was inspired by her friend Namrah Shahid, 26, who at the time was one of the few visibly Muslim women at local races. Her friend’s enthusiasm gave Khan the courage to finally run too. “If she’s doing it, so can I,” Khan remembers thinking.

Now Khan is proud to be one of nearly 50 women in Hijabi Runners, a Leeds-based group for Muslim women founded by Shahid in 2019. In the past year and a half, running once a week with fellow Muslim women, some who wear the traditional hijab head covering, has given Khan a community, one that’s increasing representation and building confidence for its members along the way.

“Running in a group with other women who are proud of the way they look—we are all different shapes and sizes and [come from] different walks of life—is really empowering. It made me proud of who I am and where I come from,” Khan says.

Shahid’s path to founding Hijabi Runners arose out of her desire to dispel stereotypes within the South Asian community around women exercising. Growing up in Leeds, 200 miles north of London, Shahid loved to participate in team sports and ride her bicycle around the city. But as she got older, she became more aware of gender norms in her British Pakistani community, which discourage women from exercising. This, coupled with the need to keep modest in accordance with Islamic beliefs, made finding fitness outlets challenging.

In her third year at the University of Leeds, a friend invited Shahid to participate in parkrun UK, which organizes a weekly 5K race in town. In April 2016, she toed the line with hundreds of local athletes for her first race. It was also the first time she had ever run.

“It was the hardest 5K of my life,” Shahid says. “I had to walk three times, I was out of breath...people would walk past, cheer you on, they’d clap at you. Every time I walked someone would say, ‘come on, you can do it!’”

Still, Shahid was disappointed by the lack of

diversity at parkrun. “Not a single person looked even remotely like me,” she says. “It made me sad.”

Shahid wanted to return for the next race. Her goal was to run the entire distance—no walking—and improve on her time of 34 minutes. She also wanted to increase her fitness as a form of self-defense in response to increased hostility toward Muslims in the U.K. “The rise in Islamophobia and the rise in racism, particularly since Brexit, is when tensions heightened,” Shahid says.

According to a 2018 report from Tell MAMA—an organization that monitors anti-Muslim hate crimes in the U.K., attacks against Muslims rose 475 percent following the Brexit referendum result in June 2016. And in February 2020, *The Independent* reported that the rise in hate crimes against religious minorities has caused an exodus of British Muslims, as “harmful discourse in the media, politics and places of power continues to contribute to an increasingly hostile environment.” Some 720 Muslim women experienced street-based attacks in 2018, 480 of whom were visible targets because of their religious head covering or face covering.

“You hear stories of people being attacked and abused just walking down the street,” Shahid says. “It made me think I need to have some form of self-defense, and for me that is being able to run.”

After that first 5K at parkrun, Shahid continued to train on her own and sign up for longer competitions. In May 2017, she ran her first 13.1-mile race at the Leeds Half Marathon, where she finished in 1:59:29. She also improved her 5K to 25 minutes.

The group’s first run included four women who agreed to do 4 kilometers around the local park, a distance that felt doable for all of them. Shahid remembers the run as a bonding experience. They shared stories about their lives, learned about running, and even enjoyed fruit at the end, thanks to one runner who brought snacks for everyone. “It was lovely,” Shahid says. They all returned the following week.

This fall, Shahid secured funding to purchase team kits and virtual race entries for the group, which aligns with her goal of making running more accessible and inclusive for Muslim women. Along the way, Shahid has developed a social media presence for Hijabi Runners with the hope of raising awareness and encouraging more Muslim women to take up running even if they can’t join the group in person.

Shaiba Afzal, 25, is one runner who participates virtually by following the group on Instagram and receiving the team’s weekly email. A podiatrist who lives southwest of Leeds in the town of Halifax, Afzal learned of the group through Khan, her friend and fellow foot doctor. “I wasn’t keen on joining a [running] group,” Afzal tells *Runner’s World*. “I was self-conscious because I’m a hijabi runner. And then I met this group on Instagram, and I thought, there are people like us that go out and run.”

Aisha Begum, 38, started running in 2012 to cope with stress related to her son’s health. “Even though I go running on my own, once a week it’s nice to have a group that is almost like a family of runners,” Begum tells *Runner’s World*. The mother of three works in finance, and in the spring of 2020 she signed up for her first race, scheduled for October. It was canceled due to the pandemic, but Begum is still hoping to compete in 2021.

“If you asked me a couple of years ago, would I even consider [racing]? Absolutely not, but [running with the group] has given me the confidence to say, well, why not?” Begum says. “I think anything is possible. And when you have a passion, it’s good to have that drive and motivation from people on the same level of understanding. The group gives me confidence.”

While Hijabi Runners has not been able to meet in person for months, Shahid hopes to organize a form of virtual race participation and meet again once it’s safe.

Over time, her local community has been incredibly supportive of the Hijabi Runners’ efforts. “It’s chipping away at that stereotype,” Shahid says. “I’ve shown the South Asian and Muslim communities that it can be done modestly without compromise.”

And she loves that the group has not only introduced Muslim women to the joy of running, but the group itself is empowered by a community of Muslim women who are breaking barriers together.

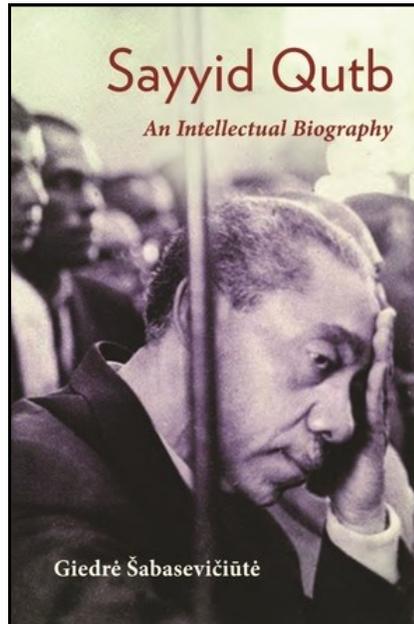


Sayyid Qutb: *An Intellectual Biography*

Giedre Šabasevičiute

No Arab historical figure is more demonized than the Egyptian literati-turned-Islamist Sayyid Qutb. A poet and literary critic in his youth, Qutb is known to have abandoned literature in the 1950s in favor of Islamism, becoming its most prominent ideologist to this day. In a sharp departure from this common narrative, Šabasevičiute offers a fresh perspective on Qutb's life that examines his Islamist commitment as a continuation of his literary project. Contrary to the notion of Islam's incompatibility with literature, the book argues that Islamism provided as Qutb with a novel way to pursue his metaphysical quest at a time when the rising anti-colonial movement brought the Romantic models of literature to their demise. Drawing upon unexplored material on Qutb's life—book reviews, criticism, intellectual collaborations, memoirs, and personal interviews with his former acquaintances—Šabasevičiute traces the development of Qutb's thought in line with his shifting networks of friendship and patronage. In a distinct sociological take on Arab intellectual and literary history, this book unveils the unexplored dimensions of Qutb's involvement in Cairo's burgeoning cultural scene.

"An excellent manuscript which sheds new light on an extremely important figure. It is highly original, and based on an extremely impressive synthesis of a large corpus of literature, both Qutb's own writings and those of his contemporaries."—Walter Armbrust, author of *Martyrs and Tricksters: An Ethnography of the Egyptian Revolution*



"Is it still possible to say something new and meaningful about the well-studied Islamist Sayyid Qutb? Apparently yes. Hidden in this modest book is a fresh, sober and holistic reappraisal of Sayyid Qutb's entire intellectual life. Stitching together Qutb's misunderstood early career as a "failed" literary critic and romantic poet with his later occupation as a "successful" ideologue of fundamentalist Islam, Dr. Šabasevičiute presented the most complete intellectual biography to date. A massive contribution to Egyptian intellectual history."—Yoav Di-Capua, University of Texas at Austin

"Coming from the French tradition of the sociology of knowledge and combining it with critical intellectual history and a careful understanding of the anthropology of Islam, Šabasevičiute goes beyond these deconstructions to explain to us in detail the Egyptian literary world and the visions of its protagonists after 1945 and the new shifts within this world after 1952"—Bettina Gräf, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Giedre Šabasevičiute is research fellow at the Oriental Institute in the Czech Academy of Sciences, specializing in Egypt's intellectual past and present.

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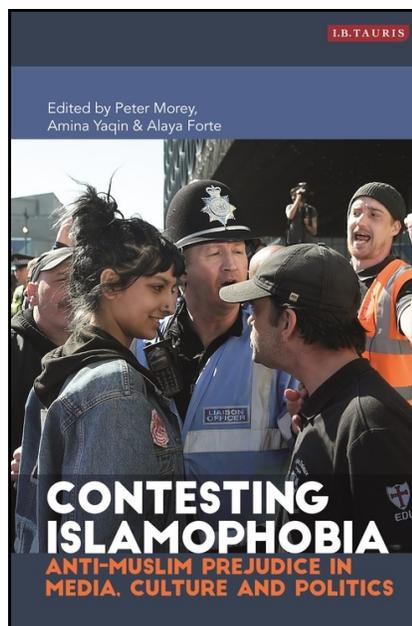
Contesting Islamophobia

Anti-Muslim Prejudice in Media, Culture and Politics

Editor(s): Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin, Alaya Forte

Islamophobia is one of the most prevalent forms of prejudice in the world today. This timely book reveals the way in which Islamophobia's pervasive power is being met with responses that challenge it and the worldview on which it rests. The volume breaks new ground by outlining the characteristics of contemporary Islamophobia across a range of political, historic, and cultural public debates in Europe and the United States. Chapters examine issues such as: how anti-Muslim prejudice facilitates questionable foreign and domestic policies of Western governments; the tangible presence of anti-Muslim bias in media and the arts including a critique of the global blockbuster fantasy series *Game of Thrones*; youth activism in response to securitised Islamophobia in education; and activist forms of Muslim self-fashioning including Islamic feminism, visual art and comic strip superheroes in popular culture and new

media. Drawing on contributions from experts in history, sociology, and literature, the book brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from culture and the arts as well as political and policy



reflections. It argues for an inclusive cultural dialogue through which misrepresentation and institutionalised Islamophobia can be challenged.

Reviews

"Both a primer for those new to the topic and a source of sophisticated conceptual advances for those already immersed, the range of topics covered by authors at the top of their game will provide insights for all. From literary fiction to Donald Trump, from superhero comics to real life military cultures, and from classroom toolkits to fantasy in the *Game of Thrones*, this collection informs and inspires challenges to the poisonous pervasiveness of contemporary Islamophobia." — Reina Lewis, Centenary Professor of Cultural Studies, London College of Fashion, UAL, and author of *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures.*

"Contesting Islamophobia is a very rich and distinctive collection that will be of interest to a broad international audience. A must read for students and scholars alike." — Nasar Meer, Professor, University of Edinburgh,

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2. A BOOK REVEALED UNTO THEE SO LET THY HEART BE OP-PRESSED NO MORE BY ANY DIFFICULTY ON THAT ACCOUNT THAT WITH IT THOU MIGHTEST WARN (THE ERRING) AND TEACH THE BELIEV-ERS.

3. FOLLOW (O MEN!) THE REVELATION GIVEN UNTO YOU FROM YOUR LORD AND FOLLOW NOT AS FRIENDS OR PRO-TECTORS OTHER THAN HIM. LITTLE IT IS YE REMEMBER OF ADMONITION.

4. HOW MANY TOWNS HAVE WE DE-STROYED (FOR THEIR SINS)? OUR PUNISHMENT TOOK THEM ON A SUDDEN BY NIGHT OR WHILE THEY SLEPT FOR THEIR AFTERNOON REST.

5. WHEN (THUS) OUR PUNISHMENT TOOK THEM NO CRY DID THEY UTTER BUT THIS "INDEED WE DID WRONG."

6. THEN SHALL WE QUESTION THOSE TO WHOM OUR MES-SAGE WAS SENT AND THOSE BY WHOM WE SENT IT.

(AL A'RAF, HEIGHTS)

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This is our website. Have visited it: It will put you face-to-face with an alternative world, full of spirituality, morality coupled with modern outlooks and perspectives. We want to hear your views on its contents, layout and general quality.

Join us in our Noon
and Afternoon
prayers
Everyday
at 12.00

The sin that led to repentance

A righteous man was once asked to tell the story of the pivotal moment of his life, the moment in which he first began to apply the teachings of Islam, and the following was his answer: When I was a young man, I would not hesitate to perpetrate any sin that was made available to me. Then, one day, I saw a young woman who was perhaps the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Much tempted by her, I indicated to her that I wanted her to approach me. She seemed nervous, but I thought that she would probably agree to satisfy my sexual desires for money. She approached me with what seemed to be a great deal of apprehension, and when she actually stood before me, she looked extremely terrified.

Feeling sorry for her, I said, 'Do not fear, for I will not harm you.'

But my words did not lessen her terrible fright in the least; in fact, her situation worsened. She began to tremble like a palm tree leaf trembles with the wind.

I said, 'Tell me your story.' She said, 'By Allah, o my brother, never before this day have I offered my body in this way. Dire need is what has driven me to this, for I have three daughters who have not eaten a single morsel of food for three days now. It was pity for them that brought me to this low point in my life.'

For the first time in my life, I felt pity; her story moved me, and I no longer entertained the intention of taking advantage of her. After she told me where she lived, I took a great deal of money, clothing and food to her house. When I returned to my house, I told my mother what had happened.

My mother knew that I had a book in which I would record all of my evil deeds, and so she said to me, 'My son, you are a man who has never performed a good deed except for the good deed that you performed today. I know that you have a book in which you record your evil exploits, go now and write in it your good deed.'

I stood up, went to my book, opened it, and found that all of its pages were blank- except for the first page on which was written a single line.

"...Indeed, good deeds remove the evil deeds..." Surat al-Hud [11:114]

At that very moment, I raised my hands to the sky and said, 'By your Might and Majesty, never again will I disobey You.'

From this story we learn that a person can change at any point in their life, even if they seem to be some of the worst of people, hope should always remain in our hearts for them.



The Other Doors

Our 4 year old son has some fairly serious health problems, so we are "frequent fliers" at the local children's hospital. Two weeks ago, our son was there for several days having surgery.

As stressful as that was for us, my visits to that hospital almost always leave me feeling grateful. Why? Because of "the other doors."

As I walk the corridors of that hospital, I pass doors leading to many different departments. I pass the department where surgeons reconstruct children's faces. I pass the department where specialists treat children who have been tragically burned. I pass the department where children with cancer spend their childhoods battling a disease that terrifies most adults. Every day, people walk through those doors. I keep walking.

Occasionally, I walk through a ward, past the room of a dying child. I look in at the child, unconscious amid a mass of tubes and machines. I see the family, staring blankly into space, grieving for what is to come. I keep walking.

On the fourth floor, I pass the "catacombs" where parents with children in ICU watch their days and nights stretch into weeks and months, hoping against hope for good news. I keep walking.

It's late one evening, and I walk to the waiting room. Only one family remains, and their doctor arrives from surgery. He begins to tell them about the patient's injuries....a shotgun blast, self-inflictedmassive facial damage.... a dozen more operations to come....a lifetime of disfigurement...a lifetime of asking "why?" I sit, half-listening, considering the doors, this family will face in the years ahead. I stood up. I walk back to the preschool ward, to the one door I seek. Behind this door, our son is slowly recovering from surgery. And in a strange way, I am grateful for the "situation" that we live with.

Because there are a hundred other doors in this place that are far worse. And we could just as easily be in one of those rooms. As you pray for strength to open the doors you face, be sure to thank Allah Ta'ala for the doors he has spared you.

If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.

OPRAH WINFREY