Considering Relations between Islam and the West in Three “Discrepant Experiences”: From Invasion to Retribution

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Abstract: Following the events of 9/11, the military approach of ‘the War on Terror’ has resulted in the conflation of the mainstream vision of Islam with militant Islam with the result that some Muslim communities in the West are suffering from Islamophobia. The War on Terror approach has failed to ask why the West is targeted by Islamic fundamentalist groups. In this paper I draw upon the postcolonial ideas of Edward W. Said in his concept of “discrepant experiences” in order to explore, in a very condensed form, the processes of invasion, occupation and ultimately retribution. The discrepant experiences examined reveal a glimpse of how and why the West is deeply implicated in the causes of global terrorism. Heeding Said’s emphasis on dialogue, I then consider how dialogue may be used in connection to the discrepant experiences of the remembrances of the deaths of a suicide bomber and his victims in London on 7/7/2005. I also consider the limits to this dialogue.

Keywords: Islam, Postcolonialism, “Discrepant Experiences”, Terrorism, Retribution, Dialogue

“Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding”—Albert Einstein

1. Introduction

By taking as a point of departure the conflation of mainstream Islam with militant Islam, I discuss the transition from this conflation to civilizational struggle to Islamophobia against the background of the militaristic foreign policy actions of the George W. Bush Administration, specifically the way in which the Bush Administration responded to the events of 9/11 in the adoption of a military approach, the War on Terror. I suggest that it is our
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responsibility in the West to treat Muslims with ethical care and propose that we should critically ask ourselves why certain Islamic Fundamentalist groups use terrorist methods against Western targets. In order to gain more perspective about this question, I draw upon the ideas of Edward W. Said in his concept of “discrepant experiences”. This is a juxtaposing of experiences that are, in themselves, discrepant with the result that they are made more comprehensible. Correspondingly, three discrepant experiences are then examined. One involves Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt and another involves the American-led invasion of Iraq, these two, discussed by Said, bring into question the processes of invasion and occupation. The final one involves remembering the dead, a suicide bomber and his victims. This last experience, retribution, is seen to complete the cycle of processes begun in the former two experiences, i.e. retribution can be seen as a possible outcome of invasion and occupation and the colonial machinery that these involve. I urge that we try to translate the alien message of the suicide bomber, despite its horrific and lethal outcome, in order to do the most just thing – attempt to understand the meaning of the action.

In response to Said’s accent on opening up dialogue within discrepant experiences, I suggest a possible dialogue that has as its starting point the secularism of the West and how secularism might negatively impact on young Muslims’ search for meaning. The point is made through this analysis that we, in the West, must look inward to confront and acknowledge the contribution that our civilisation has made in the creation of the problem of global terrorism. Dialogue cannot be the antidote we want it to be until both cultures admit their respective responsibilities.

2. ‘A Veneer of Acceptability’

In 2003, US authors, Frum, former economic speechwriter for G W Bush and Perle, former assistant secretary of defense, presented a view, which has increasingly taken on, over time, a mainstream vision of Islam. Frum and Perle’s view was of militant Islam:

In militant Islam, we face an aggressive ideology of world domination. Like communism, this ideology
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perverts the language of justice and equality to justify oppression and murder. Like Nazism, it exploits the injured pride of once-mighty nations. (Frum and Perle, 2003: 42-43)

According to Frum and Perle, there is no ‘middle way’ in the fight against this evil; ‘it is victory or holocaust’ (Frum & Perle, 2003: 9). Islamic terrorists seek to remake our civilization into Islamic societies and impose their law upon us (Frum and Perle, 2003: 42). Frum and Perle did not stop there however. They conflated militant Islam with Islam in its entirety in their claim that ‘all the available evidence indicates that militant Islam commands wide support, and even wider sympathy, among Muslims worldwide, including Muslim minorities in the West’ (Frum and Perle, 2003: 42). Frum & Perle base this claim on an opinion survey of people in Middle Eastern countries as to their attitude to the 9/11 attacks. Since this time, the conflation of “Mainstream” and “Militant” Islam has become evidenced more frequently which is increasingly being recognised by theorists in the field (See, for example, Esposito and Mogahed, 2008; Amin-Khan, 2009; Gharib, 2008). It is shown in the following passages how easily the transition can be made from this conflation to the idea of a civilizational struggle to outright Islamophobia.

Since 9/11 Western media has increasingly represented Islam as fundamentalist and extremist. This is consistent with the direction that the Bush Administration took in response to the events of 9/11. George W. Bush, addressing a joint session of congress nine days after 9/11, called the fight to defeat terrorism, ‘civilization’s fight’ (Bush, 2001: 1). In this address Bush called upon the nations of the world to support a war against terrorism which has resulted in the so-called “Global War on Terror”, a highly contentious notion by international standards the highlights of which have involved the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, human rights violations in questionable interrogation methods at Guantanamo Bay detention camp and Abu Ghraib prison, extraordinary rendition, the concept of Pax Americana as exerting a US hegemonic control of the world and deepening suspicions that senior politicians in the Bush Administration deliberately and ambitiously misled the public in acting to
achieve the goals of certain hidden agendas. There is indeed a growing body of opinion suggesting that 9/11 was the pretext \(^1\) needed for the US to more fully embrace the neoconservative vision, which illicitly accords with a blueprint for US world domination in the waging of pre-emptive wars to remake the geopolitical map. Said (1994) had argued more than a decade ago that while the British and French empires of the early twentieth century had disintegrated, imperialism was still very much a reality with the United States shouldering the greatest burden of empire. Indeed US imperial design was nowhere more evident than in the determined and ruthless actions born of the ambitious foreign policy that characterised the George W. Bush Administration.

Against this background, the “official” fight for civilization was being played out in the frontiers of Afghanistan and Iraq, later Madrid, London and Mumbai, in the minds of those embraced by militant Islam. Two years after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly, reviving his earlier civilizational theme and claiming that ‘all governments that support terror are complicit in a war against civilization.’ This theme has served to drive an ideology of “us” versus “them”, a form of discourse that is extremely powerful and also manipulative in that it sets up a structure of society in which we, in the West, are heroic which is exactly what we want to hear. This communicative event reinforces an image of ourselves that is both positive and righteous. It does not stimulate any critical thinking on our part which surely is the hallmark of intelligent human beings. It does not make us question if the West has contributed in ways to the underlying causes of global terrorism. The “clearest of divides” to which Bush refers in this speech compares the terrorists to those seeking peace, arguably under the auspices of the War on Terror. It

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presents us with a profile of the terrorists: “those who spread chaos”, “those who adopt the method of gangsters” and “those who deliberately take the lives of men and women and children without mercy or shame”. It is known that USA military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan have often killed women and children and other civilians and not shown much remorse and regret. The terrorist profile is one-dimensional. It does not illuminate the motivations of the terrorists and portrays a human being whose basic drive is the pursuit of evil. What is omitted is some insight as to why a human being does take the lives of men and women and children. Are we to understand then that a human being chooses to kill because s/he is, in essence, evil and this is the modus operandi of his or her life? Can such a human being exist? It is unlikely. It is more likely there are grounds for the taking of human life in this manner even though such action assaults our mind and being.

A categorical denial of any political, social or economic cause to militant Islam not only demonizes adherents of this radical form of expression; it adversely affects the representation of Muslims in the media, creating a public panic around the word “Islam”. Connotations of Islam are placed in opposition to those of the West in this civilizational contest. Time and again communism and Nazism are grouped with Islam just as Frum and Perle above have done. For example, we read, ‘The literal translation of the Arabic word “jihad” is “to strive” or “struggle”. This is also the meaning of the German word “kampf” as found in the title of Adolph Hitler’s prophetic book Mein Kampf (ACT! For America, 2009: 9). Yet again in the same article we find, ‘Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and many Islamic states in the Middle East extensively used propaganda in their schools to shape the values, beliefs and attitudes of future generations’ (ACT! For America, 2009: 12). On the 5th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Bush gave an alarming speech before the Military Officers Association when he compared bin Laden with Hitler: ‘Bin Laden and his terrorist allies have made their intentions as clear as Lenin and Hitler before them. The question is: Will we listen? Will we pay attention to what these evil men say?’ (Bush, 2006: 4). Here Bush fails to acknowledge not only any understanding about
his adversary but any desire to gain an understanding. His stated certainty of the evil of bin Laden moves into the realm of dogma.

Thus, it can be seen that mainstream reportage often confuses the majority view of Islamic militancy with truths about the nature of Islam in its entirety, thus presenting a partial view as the whole view, and simplifies the complexities that a world religion like Islam inherently possesses. In short, this is a very myopic view of the Islamic world, which provides little chance for exploring alternative perspectives. The word for this view is “Islamophobia”. Kofi Annan commented in a press release in 2004 that Islam’s tenets are often misrepresented and not put in an appropriate context and that too many times offensive remarks about Muslims are passed without reproach, with the result that ‘prejudice acquires a veneer of acceptability’ (Annan, 2004: 1). Annan also stated that ‘when the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry (Islamophobia), that is a sad and troubling development’ (Annan, 2004: 1). This viewpoint is reflected in the following passage written six years after the events of 9/11 by Muslim, Abdus Sattar Ghazali, who is the Executive Editor of the online magazine *American Muslim Perspective* and who, like other Muslims in the United States (US), is still weathering the collective fallout from that tragic day:

There is a rising tide of Islamophobia, intensified by the war in Iraq and U.S. government measures at home. Americans’ attitudes about Islam and Muslims are fuelled mainly by political statements and media reports that focus almost solely on the negative image of Islam and Muslims. The vilification of Islam and Muslims has been relentless among segments of the media and political classes since 9/11. Politicians, authors and media commentators are busy in demonizing Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world. Six years after 9/11 attacking Islam and Muslims remains the fashionable sport for the radio, television and print media (Ghazali, 2007: 1)

It appears that members of the Muslim American community inhabit a culture which regards them with suspicion and not
as citizens with equal rights. Seven years after the 9/11 events, Ghazali (2008: 1) claimed that Islamophobia was ‘not only more widespread but more mainstream and respectable’. With this destructive mainstream vision of Islam facing American Muslims, we, in the West, have to be vigilant in treating Muslims with ethical care in searching for the common humanity that binds us. In doing this we must critically ask ourselves why certain Islamic Fundamentalist groups adopt terrorist methods against Western targets. In order to gain insight into this question I will draw upon the ideas of Edward W. Said in his use of discrepant experiences. What is the value in using this approach? Insight can be gained if we consider a related concept, the concept of the “discrepant event”. The discrepant event is widely used in science teaching. It is a phenomenon, which has a paradoxical outcome. The incongruity between the physical observation and what the students think should occur disturbs their intellectual equilibrium and gives them motivation and impetus to try to solve the problem (Chin, 2005: 51). It therefore promotes enquiry. In the same way the discrepant experience has a paradoxical outcome and when we are confronted with it, it challenges us not only to explain how such a contradictory outcome can occur but also sets us thinking about its genesis, justice and ultimate result.

3. Three Discrepant Experiences between Islam and the West

Among his many achievements, the late Edward Said, the Arab-American public intellectual, is commonly regarded as an advocate for Postcolonialism. His ‘tireless defence of the exiled, the homeless, the dislocated, seeing himself too as it were out of place’ (Nair, 2007: 78) underscored his inclusive humanist vision. For Said, the European encounter with the Orient, especially with Islam, turned Islam into the
very epitome of an outsider’ (Said, 1995: 70). This has provided European civilisation with a system of colonial “knowledge” which has greatly affected the relations between these two representative groups of civilisation in adverse ways. In a bid to open up the potential for dialogue in Postcolonialism, Said posits that the uniqueness of the various extractions of the human community can be preserved if we ‘think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others’ (Said, 1994: 36). Thus in juxtaposing experiences with each other, those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other can be made more comprehensible (Said, 1994: 37). In other words, exposing discrepancy highlights the cultural significance of the ideology of those experiences (Said, 1994: 37). This fosters an understanding of their power and influence in order to provide perspective to those experiences thus making them intelligible in their entirety.

In illustrating discrepant phenomena, Said (1994: 37-38) contrasts two relatively contemporary early 19th century texts: the Description de l’Egypte, a twenty-four volume account of Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, produced by a team of French scientists which he took with him and a slender volume ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti’s ‘Aja’ib al-athar. Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti was an Egyptian notable and religious leader. The contrast is stark: On the one hand, there is Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 in all its military grandeur with the reverberation of great names and the imposition of foreign conquest within the cultural context of European existence, while on the other hand, there are Jabarti’s distressed and perceptive reflections on this conquest and on the destruction of his homeland. As a conquered Egyptian of French power, Jabarti could not but reveal the French army’s unchecked ability to do whatever it wanted in following its imperatives, imperatives that Jabarti’s comrades were powerless to change. The discrepancy between the politics producing these two responses accentuates the inequality so eloquently. Said (1994: 39) concludes that it is not difficult to extrapolate the
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results of Jabarti’s attitude: a profound anti-Westernism that is an enduring theme of Egyptian, Arab, Islamic, and Third World history; the birth of Islamic reformism; the beginnings of national self-consciousness and contemporary movements of Islamic fundamentalism. Thus in order to pursue a course for the opening up of dialogue, it appears necessary to widen and deepen our awareness of the way the past and present of the imperial encounter interact with each other.

A rough parallel can be drawn in the contemporary invasion/liberation of Iraq by US-led forces. Iraq occupies the plain between Euphrates and Tigris rivers where some of the world’s greatest ancient civilizations once stood. The region is sometimes called “the cradle of mankind”. This country, replete with culture and steeped in history, was subjected not only to the loss of its infrastructure in the invasion but was also looted and burned. The US military, busy liberating the country from the clutches of a ruthless dictator and paving the way for an unasked for democratisation of that country, could not maintain public law and order. Said (2003: 3) provides the following example in the context of this intervention. While Baghdad burned, a seventy-year-old widow who used her house to run a cultural centre had the house wrecked in the US raids. The widow understandably and vociferously expressed her rage about the loss of her house and possibly the income that she derived from it. New York Times reporter Dexter Filkins subsequently censured her for having had ‘a comfortable life under Saddam Hussein’ and then disapproves of her outburst against the Americans (Said, 2003: 3). This is also an example of discrepant phenomena. In the immediacy of the loss of her livelihood and her house can it be understood that the widow might not have appreciated that benevolent goal of democratisation. While Dexter Filkins appears to be imbued with the spirit of democratic freedom and the desire to promote it, he does not appear to be able to see the woman whose world had been destroyed. This is an imperial encounter of the modern kind. Only a widening of consciousness of both people involved can make the encounter intelligible. Who knows what diverse forms of resistance this encounter and countless others like it in Iraq have spawned. It is true that Iraqi resistance has come from all quarters of Iraqi society. Michael Schwartz, author and
professor, claims that it is not too bold ‘to suggest that at all levels of society, usually at great sacrifice, the Iraqi people frustrated the imperial designs of a superpower’ (Schwartz, 2008: 1).

Two events carrying the common theme of remembrance occurring on the anniversaries of 7 July 2005 could also be considered as discrepant experiences. While thousands gather to mourn the deaths of 52 people killed in the 7/7/2005 suicide bombings in London on each anniversary of that date, villagers gather at Chak 477 in the Punjab to offer prayers and celebrate the life of Shehzad Tanweer who was one of the suicide bombers (Gardham, 2008: 1). On the occasion of the third anniversary on 7/7 2008, the London Mayor and the Minister for London laid flowers outside King’s Cross station at 8.50 am, the time the first bomb went off (Neale, 2008: 1). A memorial card was placed which read: “We honour the memory of those who died on 7/7/ 2005, we salute the courage of those who were injured and our thoughts and prayers are with all victims and their families” (Neale, 2008: 1). In Shehzad’s ancestral village, one villager, Muhammad Asghar, said on the third anniversary of Shehzad’s death: “Dozens of people recited the Koran at a small mosque in the village for eternal rest of Tanweer followed by distribution of salted rice by Tanweer’s maternal uncle among the people” (Gardham, 2008: 1). One resident said Tanweer was described as a “shahid” or martyr at the gathering (Gardham, 2008: 1). Both events provide a sharp contrast and work to provoke a deep emotional response on the part of the witness or reader.

The friends of Shehzad Tanweer described him as ‘a nice, quiet person’ who worked part-time at his parents’ fish and chip shop (Booth, 2006: 1). Shehzad’s uncle Bashir Ahmed said, ‘he was respected by everybody and respected everybody in return’ (Booth, 2006: 2). Ahmed claimed that Shehzad was ‘proud to be British’ and that his parents, who had no financial worries, were ‘loving and supportive’ (Mail Online, 2005: 1). Shehzad was an outstanding sportsman, studying a sports science degree at university, and a person, according to his cousin Safina Ahmad, who did not seem interested in politics (J7, 2009: 1). Yet Shehzad Tanweer detonated a bomb on a train between Aldgate and Liverpool Street stations killing himself and seven people and injuring
more than 100 (BBC News, 2006: 1). In fact, it was clear to Shehzad’s extended family in his ancestral village in Pakistan that political awareness and religious zeal was stirring in Shehzad’s being; Shehzad had visited them ‘boasting of wanting to die as a “holy warrior” and praising Osama bin Laden’ (Booth, 2006: 2). In Pakistan, Mr Saleem, Shehzad’s cousin, supported the bombing, saying: “Whatever he has done, if he has done it, then he has done right’ (McGrory and Hussain, 2005: 1). A video released 6 July 2006 under the imprimatur of Al-Qaeda’s media group in which Tanweer is seen condemning the West, suggests that Shehzad had some contact with fugitive al-Qaeda leaders (McGrory and Hussain, 2005: 2). Although Al-Qaeda had claimed responsibility for the 7/7 attacks, this is still held in doubt by the British authorities (Townsend, 2006:1). Shehzad’s message was this:

What have you witnessed now is only the beginning of a string of attacks that will continue and become stronger until you pull your forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq, and until you stop your financial and military support to America and Israel. (Global Jihad quoting Tanweer, 2007: 1).

Asked what may have driven his nephew to commit the bombing, Bashir Ahmed, not knowing the contents of Shehzad’s video at the time, replied: “There is no explanation I can come to” (Mail Online, 2005: 2).

Indeed, even with the evidence that the video presents, it remains extremely difficult to imaginatively place ourselves in the situation, as we must, in order to gain some understanding of Shehzad’s actions. We do not know all the reasons why this likable and affluent youth took his life and others with him. All we really know is that his belief in what he was doing transcended his innate instinct for his own survival. He seemed to have lived a double life, allowing his immediate family in Leeds to see him as a loving, well adjusted son and his extended family in Pakistan to see him as a committed radical, a jihadist. Whatever he felt, in the final analysis he identified with militant Islam. His allegiance lay with the marginalised peoples of Islam. In this identification was there surely not rage, an enormous rage.
that had as its target all imperialistic designs on the Muslim world? What is required is that we do not label his actions as mere fanaticism, that we see him as Gayatri Spivak says of the 9/11 hijackers, as a human being with grievances and to try to understand the significance of his action (Spivak, 2004: 93). Trying to imagine the message contained in his action is not endorsing that action for, in the name of the victims, such action cannot be condoned. However, if we do not try to translate this message we do no justice to the event because law in the form of the War on Terror is not the same as justice.

On 7 July of every year, the families of the victims and the families of Shehzad all grieve their loss. In London the lives of the victims are celebrated while in Chak 477 in the Punjab, Shehzad Tanweer is celebrated as a martyr. The victims and the suicide bomber are remembered. There seems to be, however, an unbridgeable gulf between these events and this gulf is symbolic of the rift between Islam and the West. All three examples of discrepant experiences discussed, illustrate this rift so eloquently. The first experience that of the 24 volume account of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, Description de l’Egypte and Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti’s slender volume Aja’ib al-athar provides a stark contrast between the viewpoints of those inhabiting the two worlds. The second experience, that of a widow whose house was lost in the US invasion of Iraq and a Western journalist who failed to see her plight is another imperial encounter which exposes the Western inability to see past its Eurocentric roots. These first two discrepant experiences underscore the processes of invasion, colonisation, occupation and humiliation. They silently show why a violent response might be sought. The third experience, that of two remembrances taking place each year, one, a suicide bomber and the other, the victims of that suicide bomber, highlights the delicate complexity that the imperial encounter has visited upon the relationship between the peoples of the West and the peoples of Islam. It shows one outcome of this ungodly visitation: Militant Islam in action in the loud articulation of “No” to the Western world, “No” to imperialism and the consequences of this imperialism to Islamic culture and religious beliefs.
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How Said’s critical analysis can be brought to bear on this analysis means interrogating how dialogue might facilitate relations between Islam and the West or more particularly in this case between Islamic peoples living in Western Europe and the general public in their home countries. A consideration of the limits to such dialogue needs also to be made.

4. Dialogue and the Limits to Dialogue

There is already dialogue in existence which has wide-ranging aims such as the West-Islamic World Dialogue, set up by the World Economic Forum and headed by Lord Carey of Clifton, former Archbishop of Canterbury, England (World Economic Forum, 2010). This is an eminent dialogical initiative and promotes a broad dialogue across different segments of society in the West and Muslim world. It will not be further considered here as its efforts are generally well recognised. What will be considered here is something that is somewhat more relevant to the local case at hand, Shehzad Tanweer and the suicide bombing of 7/7/2005: The secularism of the West.

The West including Western Europe in particular is still largely dominated by the legacy of the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a uniquely European phenomenon, a phenomenon that ushered in modernity. While modernity offers many benefits for humankind, there are also shortcomings. One of the principal downsides is that its cultural order presented Western civilisation as the model for all cultures to follow. In many ways it became the sole repository of truth. What was not modern was, by consequence, inferior. Apart from the rise of capitalism, aspects of European modernity included the idea that progress involved an embracing of rationalism, empiricism and eventually secularism, i.e. the universe can be understood through reason alone. So although there has been resurgence in the monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in the last several decades (Bowden, 2005: 14), secularism is still a powerful force.

Into this setting comes Shehzad Tanweer, a Muslim, who on the surface appears well adjusted and satisfied with his life. But it appears life in his father’s fish and chip shop
was not enough to sustain his inner need for meaning. Viktor Frankl who was a leading European psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor and who wrote extensively about depression and suicide claimed ‘Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life’ (Frankl, 1984: 121). Tanweer’s surrounding secular culture was not an environment to nurture his particular search. It is not certain if he was originally a secular Muslim or whether he embraced Islam to some degree before he took a path that led to his becoming militant. It appeared nevertheless that he was reaching out for a deeper engagement with his faith. This matches Gallup World Poll’s findings that Muslims exhibit strong religious identity. In the cities of Paris, Berlin and London, strong majorities of Muslims – 68% in Paris, 85% in Berlin, and 88% in London – say religion is important in their daily lives. These figures stand in stark contrast to those found among the general population: Only 23% of French, 36% of British, and 41% of German respondents overall consider religion to be important in their lives (Gallup World Poll, 2007: 2). How difficult it must be to be a Muslim in a European culture searching for religious meaning yet dealing with the secular world? By its very nature the secular world cannot affirm the urgency or the drive of the spiritual quest nor can it validate the insights of a spiritual experience. Yet it is crucial of course that that spiritual experience does not find its way on a path that leads to militancy. How does a community encourage the young Muslim’s spiritual explorations whilst dissuading her/him against becoming involved in a militant fringe? Dialogue 1 sheds light on what maybe some promise in this direction.

Dialogue 1

A primary dialogue is to be found from within the Muslim community in the traditions of the Muslim faith. The mosque and Islamic associations are places where Islamic youth can connect up with the representatives of mainstream Islam which embraces the principles of justice and the higher good. Parvez Ahmed, US Fulbright Scholar and Associate Professor, claims that successful extremist recruitment occurs because individuals are badly informed of or they lack access to accurate religious knowledge.
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(Ahmed, 2010: 2). Although Ahmed was speaking for American Muslims, it is not difficult to apply this view to European Muslims. So addressing the issue from inside the mosque is a prudent initiative. However, there are many youths who are not responding to this mainstream approach. In Europe as well as in the US, a central factor in this situation is the method of Islamist recruitment. While real-world relationships are still important in recruitment, the internet is fast becoming the tool of choice for militants to recruit the socially alienated, youths who are conflicted by the interplay between Western society (of which secularity is an active feature) and the cultural Islam their parents espouse (Neumann and Rogers, 2007: 1). It is likely that playing a part in jihadist web forums gives individuals the feeling of being part of a global movement; the internet so ably communicates the sense of ummah which underlies Islamist militant theology to a great extent as well as allowing recruits to network with the like-minded enabling them to reach beyond their core group of friends (Neumann and Rogers, 2007: 51). Through the Internet, some young Muslims have succumbed to an appealing narrative of Islam as constructed by those behind 9/11 and 7/7 (Amanullah, 2009; Bari, 2008).

Aversion to Western, particularly US, policy abroad (e.g. Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan) in addition to social alienation causing identity problems appear to be two major factors which play a leading role in radicalisation (Amanullah, 2009: 2; Asian Voices, 2009: 3). This is apparent in Tanweer’s message where he condemns the West. As Amanullah suggests, a possible antidote to Muslims becoming swayed by extremist thought is to create and disseminate a persuasive Muslim (in this case European) narrative that inspires purpose in vulnerable minds and to connect them to mainstream attempts to deal with Western policies in Muslim countries. It is optimal therefore for mainstream Muslims to engage the extremist ideologues on internet forums where there is a great need to resist radicalization. The Muslims exploring violent strategy need to be persuaded that it is more Islamic to defend Muslims overseas through lawful means. This education needs to occur where they spend the most time searching for answers to the
bewildering array of problems that beset them – the internet (Amanullah, 2009: 2).

There are limits to this kind of dialogue, however. Firstly, for mainstream Muslims it is difficult and dangerous work and we are asking a lot from them to put themselves at risk both from extremists and from law enforcement authorities who might confuse them with extremists. However, it is possible that a far more engaging online mainstream Muslim presence than exists at the present time, might still be made available to Muslims who are searching for answers online, a presence that addresses both Muslim identity and Western policies in the Muslim world through lawful means. Ahmed (2010: 1), in speaking of the American situation suggests that the Muslim community should make efforts to improve relations with the law enforcement community by mobilising young Muslims to join the ranks facilitating a much improved engagement with that community. This again could be applied to European Muslims. If there were better relations between Muslims and the law enforcement agencies, besides the obvious gains that would bring, dialogue between these two groups would aid in minimising risk to mainstream Muslims who were willing to engage extremist ideologues on the internet.

A second limit to this kind of dialogue is that while it has been the argument of this paper that the secularism of Western society has been a contributing cause to the identity conflicts of young Muslims, I am by no means suggesting that Europe should not continue to remain recognisable through the expression of her own philosophy and ideals. The tradition of secularism has become embedded in the majority of European states, as fruit of the Enlightenment. This helps to define the identity of European society and it must be accepted by Islamic peoples. However, it is true that the Muslim world has suffered under the yoke of European colonialism in the past. This was highlighted in Said’s first discrepant experience, the invasion of Egypt. The Western world was not only presented to the colonized as the model to follow but the culture of the colonized was either transformed or modified releasing forces within the colonized societies which abruptly altered their cultural formation. This colonialism of the past and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and consequent practices there today bring forth
many difficult questions that implicate the West in imperial policies as referred to in the first part of this paper. We in the West have to think about these imperial policies, understand and acknowledge how the West itself can be seen by Islamic cultures as being implicated in the causes of global terrorism. Deep introspection and honesty on our part will allow us to see more clearly why global terrorists choose Western targets. Such critical awareness could result in dialogue that would be both meaningful and revolutionary.

**Dialogue 2**

Then there is the final, silent dialogue between the families of the loved ones who have died. Initially there is hatred and outrage toward the Other as the wounds cut hideously into the psyche. The unspeakable enormity of the loss to each family is unable to be expressed outwardly. Eventually a sense of paralysis overwhems, to be ultimately replaced by sorrow. The sorrow demands an explanation so that sense can be made of the agony. But any explanation is empty solace.

There is talk of the need for forgiveness. How can there be forgiveness when forgiveness is beyond ability, when it would betray the dead? They had divided themselves into the two camps: the good and the evil, the right and the wrong. These attempts to escape the suffering through ideation do not alleviate the suffering; they lead the mind further away.

There is a need to stay with the suffering and not move away from it. Staying there leads to a gradual awareness of the suffering of the Other. It is this awareness which fosters a possibility of the light of understanding. This brings, over time, an opening for transcendence. Such transcendence is a hope of acknowledging a common humanity.

The suffering and pain of a parent who has lost a child fighting for an armed force whether rebel or conventional is the same pain, the pain of a common humanity. This pain spells out the urgent need for human beings to try to transcend violence in order to deal with ideological differences. Dialogue promises a unique opportunity worth cultivating and growing. Yes, it has limits and we must try to
work with these limits with our minds and voices and not our weapons.

5. Conclusions

Mainstream Islam has been conflated with militant Islam with the result that some Muslim communities are experiencing Islamophobia. This has largely been the result of how the West has responded to the problem of global terrorism. The War on Terror has been a military response to this problem. It has not asked the question “why”: Why certain Islamic Fundamentalist groups adopt terrorist methods against Western targets. Is this because the West is deeply implicated in the causes of global terrorism? The discrepant experiences examined in the body of this paper subtly show this to be the case. The West cannot colonize and marginalize Islamic peoples over centuries nor can it mount modern imperial wars and expect no retribution. Retribution finally comes. It came to London on 7/7/2005 with the death of fifty-two people. A death I no more condone as worthwhile, in the same way as I do not condone as worthwhile the wars on terror in Afghanistan or Iraq where thousands of innocents are killed in the process.

Considerations of possible dialogue themes suggest that it might be productive if mainstream Muslims engaged Muslim youths and extremist ideologues on the internet, the internet becoming the place where radicalization of young Muslims is occurring more frequently today. This has limits in that it can be dangerous for mainstream Muslims. I acknowledge it is quite presumptuous for a Westerner to say what mainstream Muslims can do. It is also about what we, as Westerners, can do and that firstly means acknowledging that we in the West are part of the whole problem of global terrorism and are not above it or separate from it. Indeed we need to be aware that we are not the only victims in this violent retributive interaction. Recognizing our common humanity is perhaps the next thing to do. And then we must imagine what it would be like to lose our own son or daughter in another 9/11 or 7/7 or in some lonely, distant place in Afghanistan or Iraq in the name of the War on Terror whether as a radical or part of the military. Then we might ask ourselves: Are we really so different from the
people who are trying to kill us and the people we are trying to kill? Is there really any way other than talking to one another in an effort to understand one another that will fundamentally resolve the problem?
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References


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