

BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE:

THE POWER OF WORDS
AND IMAGES

A joint publication of the British Council's Our Shared Future project and the Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

ISBN: 978-0-9563743-9-4

A joint publication of the British Council's Our Shared Future project and the Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge



Our Shared Future
British Council
www.oursharedfuture.org



Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies
University of Cambridge
<http://www.cis.cam.ac.uk>



This publication was supported in part by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The essays in this collection reflect the personal views of the participants. The British Council, the Carnegie Corporation, and the University of Cambridge bear no responsibility for the content of the essays or the views expressed by their authors.

© Photo by Mat Wright

About the Publishers

These books were produced in conjunction with a conference titled 'Acknowledging a Shared Past to Build a Shared Future: Rethinking Muslim/non-Muslim Relations', convened at the University of Cambridge in March 2012 by the following partners:

British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide. We work in over 100 countries in the arts, education, society and English. The Our Shared Future project, based in the US, aims to improve the public conversation about Muslims and intercultural relations in the US and Europe. Our Shared Future is supported in large part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The related Our Shared Europe project, a partner in convening the conference held in Cambridge, creates opportunities to discuss and share perspectives on diversity, migration, community cohesion, inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue in contemporary Europe.

www.britishcouncil.org | www.oursharedfuture.org | www.oursharedeurope.org

HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge

The Centre of Islamic Studies is at the forefront of research and public engagement on the role of Islam in wider society. Working with partners across the University of Cambridge and beyond, from academic institutes to civil society organisations and the government, the Centre has developed a reputation for enriching public debate and knowledge through high-profile and innovative research projects about Islam in the UK, Europe and globally.

www.cis.cam.ac.uk

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Executive summary	2
Lies, damned lies, statistics and statistics about Muslims by Nabila Ramdani	4
Finding new perspectives on Muslim/non-Muslim relations by Laurina Strikwerda	6
Let's lose the religious labels by Simon Kuper	8
Nation and narrative by Hussein Rashid	10
Reframing public perceptions of Islam and Muslims by Jeremy Henzell-Thomas	12
The GOP's war on Islam: Misrepresentation and public perceptions by Sarah Wildman	14
Europe's Muslim communities: Creating a new narrative for integration by Shada Islam	17
Dealing with misleading images: Results from the case study on 'Muslims in the European Mediascape' by Jörg Heeren and Andreas Zick	19
The 'Facebook generation' and the movement of ideas by Dr Edward Kessler MBE	21
Humanisation: The necessary education by Stephen Shashoua	24
Endnotes	26

**IT'S TIME TO FILL THE
GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIC
EXPERTISE AND PUBLIC
KNOWLEDGE OF MUSLIMS
AND ISLAM.**



INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, debates on the role of religion in the public space, migration, social cohesion and other issues have revealed increasing social tensions and polarisation in public opinion. Misperceptions and misinformation often dominate public dialogue about relations between Muslims and others. Although they don't speak with the loudest voice, academics, scholars and thought leaders have a key role to play in helping to rebalance these debates by providing fact-based opinion and informed arguments.

In March 2012, the Our Shared Future and Our Shared Europe programmes in the British Council and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies (CIS) at the University of Cambridge invited seventy scholars, civil society leaders, journalists and other influencers to the University's Møller Centre for three days of discussion, training and collaboration in a conference titled 'Acknowledging a Shared Past to Build a Shared Future: Rethinking Muslim/non-Muslim Relations'.

One of the key objectives of this conference was to help fill the gap between academic expertise and public knowledge of cross-cultural relations involving Muslims. Participants broke into discussion groups around five themes to pinpoint new, more inclusive narratives to reshape the conversation about intercultural relations. They explored areas of research and partnerships among institutions in the US, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa that can help shed light on deep connections between Muslim and non-Muslim societies in the fields of culture, the arts, humanities and science. Rounding out these discussions, participants had the opportunity to work with media professionals to develop effective messaging and gain practical skills to improve their engagement with online, print and broadcast media.

The essays that follow reflect the ideas that participants arrived at the conference with as well as the conversations that ensued throughout its three days. We have produced four books covering each of the themes undertaken at Cambridge: *The Power of Words and Images*; *Islam, Knowledge and Innovation*; *Citizenship and Identity*; and *Religion, Politics and the Public Sphere*.

While those who came together in Cambridge strive to take forward the ideas and opportunities that arose from the conference, we invite our readers to take up new calls to action and engage in dialogue informed by the arguments set forth in the following pages. We owe deep gratitude to our partners in organising the conference: the Carnegie Corporation of New York; the Association of Muslim Social Scientists; the Woolf Institute; and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the University of Edinburgh.

To access the companion books in this series and explore further resources on improving the public conversation about civilisation, identity and religion, please visit www.oursharedfuture.org.

- *Dr Emmanuel Kattan, Project and Partnerships Manager, Our Shared Future, British Council*
- *Prof Yasir Suleiman, Founding Director, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge*

June 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The working group on 'The Power of Words and Images' focussed on misrepresentations and misconceptions of Islam, Muslims, Europe and the US that emerged after 9/11. On the one hand, the 'war on terror' provided frequent opportunities for stereotyping Muslim communities, including misguided debates around Shari'a law and the building of mosques that persist today. On the other hand, in several Muslim-majority countries, people hold misperceptions of the imperial ambitions, arrogance and fundamental hostility to Muslims of Europe and the US.

Since 9/11, Islam has been seen in the US and Europe through the lens of terrorism and extremism, reinforcing the 'clash of civilisations' narrative that Samuel Huntington introduced in the 1990s. Many of the essays that follow highlight evolving trends in anti-Muslim sentiment, including the role of 'Islamophobic' rhetoric among Republicans in the US and others who have introduced narratives about Shari'a law and 'stealth jihad' into the mainstream.

The prism of 'security' through which many Arab countries are portrayed in European and US media also restricts our understanding of this region. Europe has seen a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment, fuelling support for several far-right movements. However, the picture is not as grim as often portrayed. European governments are increasingly balancing security-focused approaches with strategies that combine integration measures and Muslim outreach programmes. Moreover, European Muslims' economic contribution is becoming more significant with the rise of new entrepreneurs. This is leading to a growing recognition that diversity can be a competitive advantage and a source of dynamism for European economies, thus having a positive impact on the public perception of Muslims. Furthermore, the spread of democracy through Arab countries and the accompanying increased free flow of information should also improve mutual perceptions on these issues.

In their discussions throughout the conference, the authors in this volume brainstormed additional ways to positively affect the public perception of Muslims by harnessing the power of communication in the many media available to us today. In doing so, they addressed a number of pressing questions. First, what can be done to develop a more nuanced understanding of these complex notions in the general public? What role do scholars, academics and opinion leaders have in helping to address misinformation and manufactured misunderstandings about Muslims and Muslim communities in the US and Europe? What is the potential of new media in changing and positively informing global public opinion about relations between Muslims and non-Muslims through personal testimonies, humour and innovative use of technology? What tools do journalists need for sensitive and balanced reporting on stories that go to the core of religious and cultural difference, and how can scholars and opinion leaders help in that regard?

The ensuing discussion focused on efforts to move away from binary narratives and language ('Muslim/non-Muslim', 'Muslim-West', 'Muslim world/western world'), since such narratives entrench divisive and polarising perceptions even when the intent is not to do so. Instead, binary oppositions should be discarded in favour of perspectives that recognise links among multiple faiths (beyond the three monotheistic faiths), multi-layered identities and shared concerns for human rights. Disentangling 'muddled terminology' can also help to improve public discourse on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Confusion over the meaning of 'multiculturalism', for instance, is particularly worrying, if it suggests that multiculturalism, understood as active intercultural engagement, is defunct.

Many contributors agree that media and public spokespeople can begin to change negative perceptions between Muslims and non-Muslims by focusing on positive stories featuring intercultural engagement.

Illustrating the diversity of opinion and worldviews among Muslim communities can help break down the monolithic view of Islam that often dominates media coverage, as can the use of humour and efforts to highlight ordinary stories of individuals creating change. The process of inclusion of Muslims can also be supported through cultural production: hip-hop, literature, theatre and television shows can help include Muslim communities in national narratives. As Hussein Rashid writes later in this volume, 'It is the stories that make the people part of the nation'.

Greater efforts should be deployed to highlight positive contributions of Muslims to the societies they live in, including in the areas of arts, entertainment, science and politics. Since prejudice relies on a process of 'dehumanisation', education and intercultural encounters should focus on efforts to 'humanise' Muslims in order to deconstruct misperceptions and confront anti-Muslim sentiments. Engagement should take place at all levels of society, involving teachers, parents, artists and sports personalities, and intercultural education should become an integrated part of educational systems. The following essays reflect on the potential of language, communication and both new and traditional media to begin to introduce these changes.

— *Dr Emmanuel Kattan, Project and Partnerships Manager, Our Shared Future, British Council*





LIES, DAMNED LIES, STATISTICS AND STATISTICS ABOUT MUSLIMS

BY **NABILA RAMDANI**

There is a famous old saying about untruths, which suggests that there are three types—lies, damned lies and statistics. For the purpose of this paper, I think it would be fair to add a fourth: statistics about Muslims.

You see these statistics everywhere nowadays, and—sadly—they are invariably negative. To quote a relatively recent survey by the Islamic Education and Research Academy on British perceptions of Islam, 75% of respondents believed Islam and Muslims had provided a negative contribution to society. Of all respondents, 70% did not disagree with the statement ‘Muslims preach hatred’, 94% did not disagree with the statement ‘Islam oppresses women’ and 85% did not disagree with the statement ‘Islam is irrational’.

80%

KNOW VERY LITTLE

All very damning, not to stay extremely disturbing, but then you look at a statistic produced in the same survey, and it pretty much sums the whole subject up: 80% had less than very little knowledge about Islam.

In these days of instant communication, of wall-to-wall rolling international news, of iPhones and personal communication, it is certainly worrying that people appear only too happy to express ignorant views while also admitting that these ignorant views are based on . . . absolute ignorance.

No news is good news, and there seldom seems to be any question of the western

media concentrating on positive aspects of Islam. Crass clichés range from bushy bearded radical preachers to unfriendly women wearing burkas, and all have stuck fast over the past few years. These simple depictions of ‘Muslim types’ fit neatly alongside reports about Islamic suicide bombers or oppressive Islamic regimes advocating Shari’a Law.

Irresponsible fiction
really does play a deeply
distressing part in
stigmatising Muslims.

The Islam we see portrayed by the news media is currently dominated by the fast-moving crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. Day in day out, we see images of Muslims blowing themselves to pieces—as in Syria—or else being ‘tamed’ by the western military—as in counties like Afghanistan and, until a few months ago, Libya. All the while, the public face of Islam is distorted into a kind of horror mask. How many people in the West can name a single post-Arab Spring leader? Very few, I would contend, while the names of pantomime villains like Khomeini, Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden can be reeled out by even the most uninterested schoolchildren.

One of the worst aspects of all this is the way that selective, unrepresentative aspects of Muslim behaviour—hands being cut off because of a theft in Saudi Arabia, or a young woman being killed for dishonouring a Muslim husband—are projected as if they were the norm.

It is not just the news media that is at fault either. Hollywood filmmakers are as notorious nowadays for making their Muslims as swarthy, distrustful and dangerous as they once made Mexicans and Red Indians. This might sound amusing, but

irresponsible fiction really does play a deeply distressing part in stigmatising Muslims.

My fear is that these perceptions are ones that go beyond any problems inherent within Islam itself. Just as the media concentrates on the paedophile priests of the Catholic Church, or the Anglican bishops who do not really believe in God, so it is that a vibrant and hugely influential religion like Islam is associated with bigotry, insularity and hatred.

Our reaction to this should not be to make the situation worse by walling in the negative stereotypes and bad publicity—it should be to get out into society and change them. As someone who works in the media, I am always astonished by the bright, articulate Muslims I meet around the world. They work in industry, in the professions, in the law and, of course, in journalism and politics—arguably, the two most important professions as far as changing perceptions is concerned.

Beyond their specific subject areas, it is up to Muslims, young and old, to affirm a faith that is peaceful, unifying and, above all else, positive. Just as there is no such thing as a Catholic or Anglican who has no other role in society beyond their faith, so it is with Muslims. Muslims play active roles in every part of society. They can be as proud of their nationality, or their job or their local sports team as they are of their faith. Once people start to realise this, then we will be well on the road to improving relations and fostering a deeper understanding between communities that are often viewed as being irrevocably distant.

As far as negative images are concerned, an obvious way forward would be for influential Muslims to start accentuating the positive—the part Muslim politicians play in changing society for the better, the Muslim arts and entertainment scene, Muslim sport, Muslim tourists . . . It sounds simple, but it really is incredibly easy to spend all your time concentrating on the violence, human rights abuses and oppression that have come to be associated with Islam, especially since the War on Terror started following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001.

So many of the debates and forums I attend and so many of the TV and radio discussions I take part in solely want to explore the extremes. Non-Muslims need to be made aware of a Muslim culture that is characterised by goodwill and decency and achievement. Few realise, however, that Muslims were making huge strides in science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy and literature while huge parts of Europe were still submerged in the dark ages. In the same way, few westerners who have a negative view of Islam appreciate its closeness to Christianity and Judaism.

Solely focusing on the fanatical and violent side of Islam is just like solely focusing on the perception that many westerners are immoral and greedy—these ridiculous simplifications do not take us anywhere. Islam has always been at the forefront of social and political development. As we are seeing in newly liberated Arab Spring countries, Islamic politicians are just as likely to offer democratic policies concentrating on social justice and equality as they are social conservatism and traditional values. Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson once described the Labour Party as a Broad Church—once Muslims and non-Muslims alike start using that metaphor for Islam, we will really be getting somewhere, and can even start forgetting about statistics about Muslims.

— *Nabila Ramdani is a freelance journalist.*



FINDING NEW PERSPECTIVES ON MUSLIM/NON-MUSLIM RELATIONS

BY LAURNA STRIKWERDA

Currently, the predominant images that characterise mutual perceptions between Muslims and non-Muslims are all too often based on a sense of ‘otherness’. While many individuals have moved past this narrative, it is one that is still perpetuated by members of the media and key analysts and leaders in the public sphere.

All too often, the media cover inflammatory events related to Islam or Muslim–non-Muslim relations without giving voice to legitimate, qualified Islamic scholars and mainstream Muslim figures. Mainstream Muslims do speak in favour of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, but their voices are largely absent in the media both in the West and Muslim-majority countries. As a consequence, mainstream Muslims’ commitment to integration, investing in their communities and combating extremism is not as widely known as it should be. This omission is exacerbated by the western media’s frequent preoccupation with questions such as ‘Is Islam a religion of violence?’, creating a narrative in which Islam is treated as ‘other’, separate and different from other religions.

Similarly, negative stories about the United States and Europe all too often dominate the media in Muslim-majority countries; such stories frequently focus on the US military or problematic aspects of foreign policy. Grassroots efforts in the West to promote dialogue, the diversity of faith groups and Muslim contributions to the West are less well known.

Many of the images of violence, human rights abuses and oppression are linked to concrete and legitimate questions about policy. However, it is possible to shift how such news is understood and what narratives it feeds into.

To begin to shift the narrative of Muslim–non-Muslim relations, we should envision what sort of future we want to see—one based on cooperation, on understanding; one where difference might be met with curiosity rather than fear and in which we are able to recognise the humanity in the ‘other’.

Media and public spokespeople can play a key role in fostering such narratives by promoting positive stories of Muslim–non-Muslim relations and demonstrating the diversity and depth within Islam and Muslim communities.

Demonstrating the diversity and depth of Muslim communities is essential.

The question of how the media specifically can be used to promote better Muslim–non-Muslim relations is addressed in a 2009 Soliya/Alliance of Civilisations study, *Media and Intergroup Relations: Research on Media and Social Change*, which sought to examine exactly how media can undo stereotypes and change attitudes.¹ What the study found was that concrete, explicit efforts to change people’s attitudes and behaviours do not fare as well as efforts to show that other people’s attitudes and behaviours have changed.² This research suggests that if individuals begin to perceive that those around them see positive Muslim–non-Muslim relations as ‘normal’, they may be more likely to emulate such perspectives and related behaviours. Perhaps, if we begin to see Muslim and Christian leaders together discussing the issue of religion and violence—rather than watching Muslims singled out and asked why one religion

promotes violence—we might begin to see such interreligious efforts as normal.

In addition to efforts to highlight positive intergroup relations, demonstrating the diversity and depth of Muslim communities is essential. Religions and religious communities are living and evolving. They are not static, nor one-dimensional. Too often, Islam and Muslim communities are seen in monolithic terms in both western media and in media in Muslim-majority countries: There is a perception that one can ask what Islam says about women, or violence or non-Muslims and find one answer. Such an approach, however, fails to acknowledge the diversity within any religious tradition.

Foster a new norm, one that is based on a shared sense of humanity and a sense of a mutual destiny

For this reason, it is essential to highlight contemporary narratives and stories from recent history that put a human face on Islam. For instance, when there is a terrorist attack committed in the name of Islam, there are usually media pundits who ask why Islam supports violence—and then experts who point out the problematic implications of such a question. We, as experts and practitioners trying to improve Muslim–non-Muslim relations, often point to verses in the Qur’an or examples from the life of the prophet Muhammad to demonstrate that Islam is not inherently violent. Such efforts are critical and should continue. In addition, though, we should also highlight contemporary narratives that show the diversity of how Islam is lived out as a faith. When it comes to violence and nonviolence, for instance, we should consider the stories of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a contemporary of Gandhi who drew on Islamic teachings to foster a nonviolent movement in what is now Pakistan, or Rais Bhuiyan, a survivor of a 9/11 hate crime who fought to have his attacker’s—a white supremacist—death sentence for a related crime overturned. Stories like these undo the misperception that Islam is inherently violent and demonstrate that peaceful, mainstream Islam is present and real. And for Muslims and

non-Muslims, they can help create new heroes, individuals who demonstrate the best values of our times.

We should not only respond to and oppose negative coverage in Muslim–non-Muslim relations with counterarguments, but also actively make our vision of the future heard. We must be proactive as well as reactive. In doing so, we can draw both on recent history and contemporary narratives that can overturn stereotypes while demonstrating a positive vision of what Muslim–non-Muslim relations should look like. We can also use humour, bringing some lightness into what is all too often an intense and heavy debate, and highlight ordinary stories of individuals creating change—the showcasing of a community organisation, for instance, which happens to have Muslim, Christian and Jewish volunteers.

By changing the narrative presented about Muslim–non-Muslim relations in the media, we can help foster a new norm, one that is based on a shared sense of humanity and a sense of a mutual destiny.

— *Laurina Strikwerda is the programme coordinator for the Muslim-Western dialogue programme at Search for Common Ground.*



LET'S LOSE THE RELIGIOUS LABELS

BY SIMON KUPER

You'd almost think Muslims really do control the world. Certainly, the American and French elections seem to be mostly about them. After Mohammed Merah killed seven people in Toulouse in the name of Islam, Nicolas Sarkozy has tried to turn the election into a referendum on who can best protect the French from Muslims. In a curious echo of medieval controversies in Europe, he also wants to protect the French from halal meat, which they have belatedly discovered they're all eating. In that other Enlightenment nation, Newt Gingrich is warning of Shari'a law being imposed on the US through 'stealth jihad'. That won't surprise the many Americans who already believe they are ruled by a Muslim. I had the impression in recent years that the US and France had other problems, but clearly, I was wrong.

We'd get a better take on Iran if we stripped away religious labels and just interpreted its behaviour through old-fashioned realpolitik.

The words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' are overused and have lost almost all meaning in western discussion. They have become catchall terms to explain everything. I'm not calling for a moratorium on the use of 'Islam' in public debate, but nearly. Once the word is used as sparingly as, say, 'Shinto', the volume of daily nonsense talked will plummet.

'Muslims' were discovered in the West only on September 11, 2001. Riem Spielhaus, an expert on Islam (not a self-appointed one) at Copenhagen University, says that in the 1990s, 'Muslims' usually appeared in European surveys under rubrics like 'Turks' or 'former guest workers'. Only after 9/11, and subsequent

terrorist attacks in Europe, did researchers start calling them 'Muslims'. Instead of national origins, or social class, suddenly only religion mattered. This was true even if the 'Muslims' didn't have any religion. Only a small minority of France's five million nominal Muslims attend mosque each Friday. This begs the question of what makes the others 'Muslims', but no matter. Since 9/11, 'Islam' explains everything from the French riots to Saddam Hussein.

Of course, if politicians, media and researchers keep telling nominal Muslims that they are 'Muslims', that that is their prime identity, and that they are unlike everyone else, then these people will tend to start thinking of themselves as 'Muslims'. That has happened in Europe and the US. This is good news for a small set of professional Muslims, who proclaim themselves leaders of the non-existent 'Muslim community' and then 'build bridges' with other 'communities'. In doing this, they are duplicating the language of crusaders such as Gingrich. Like him, they see two separate groups: Muslims and everyone else.

But as the economist-philosopher Amartya Sen points out, people have multiple identities. Sen writes, 'I can be at the same time an Asian, an Indian citizen, a US resident, a British academic, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry', etc. Similarly, for most Muslims in the West, 'Muslim' is only one of their identities, and not always a very prominent one. This is how most of them live: They wake up, take the kids to school, do mundane work or errands, watch bad TV and then collapse asleep. It's hard to distill the essential Muslim component here. A French Muslim once told me the key difference: 'We have a barbecue, some people don't eat pork'.

The one thing all religious Muslims have in common is a book written fourteen hundred years ago. That hardly explains the gamut of them from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Zinedine

Zidane. As the French scholar Olivier Roy says, 'Islam is whatever Muslims say it is', and with one billion 'Muslims', you'll get quite a range of views.

True, Merah considered himself Muslim. Most terrorists in the Irish Republican Army considered themselves Catholics. However, using Catholicism (let alone Christianity) as a tool to understand them doesn't help much. Rather than wielding Islam as the great explanatory device, we could class Merah with other young men drawn to death cults: Anders Breivik in Norway, the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, and One Goh who is charged with killing seven people in Oakland on Tuesday. After all, Muslim Merahs are pretty rare: Of the 12,996 murders in the US in 2010, Islamic fundamentalists committed zero.

starts talking about Islam, he's generally up to something. And—probably deliberately—he's missing what's going on in his country.

— *Simon Kuper is a journalist for The Financial Times. This essay was originally published in The Financial Times on April 7, 2012.*

The words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' have been contaminated.

'Islam' cannot explain the world. I hesitate to say this in the FT, but: bring back Marx! He reminds us that people act on economic motives. Alternatively, we could understand nominal Muslims in the West as 'immigrants' who have typical immigrant problems. For instance, they tend to have high unemployment rates. Well, so do Christian immigrants from Africa.

Banging on about 'Muslims' is boring and misleading. Nobody calls David Cameron the 'Anglican prime minister' or Paul Simon the 'Jewish singer'. Similarly, we'd get a better take on Iran if we stripped away religious labels and just interpreted its behaviour through old-fashioned realpolitik.

In any case, the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' have been contaminated. For the purposes of western public debate, they are still owned by Osama Bin Laden. That being so, when a western politician



NATION AND NARRATIVE

BY HUSSEIN RASHID

Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, talks about the way in which print capitalism helps to craft a sense of national identity. In the twenty-first century, the idea of belonging is extended beyond print into what I refer to as 'media capitalism', the multitude of ways in which information is consumed to create a group identification. This media capitalism constructs narratives of belonging to the nation-state. Competing narratives, as much as legal instruments, are integral to understanding how different communities forge a common identification. This paper will consider various popular cultural interventions in the US as they relate to the integration of recent Muslim communities.

Individuals like Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, helped to popularise a story of America that incorporates the voices of people written out of history. However, the story of a nation is not the same as its history. That story is one of integration of various sub-national communities. The transition of American immigration theory from a subsuming 'melting-pot' model to a broader 'mosaic' model reflects the fact that many communities want their stories to be part of the American story.

With respect to Muslims, we must recognise that they have been present in America since the founding of the country. However, as history is written to exclude the contribution of slaves, many of whom were Muslim, the Arab migration of the nineteenth century is similarly written in a way that minimises their contributions, including those who were Muslim. In the modern period, Muslim-ness is being written out of American history through Orientalist fantasy, as described by figures like Edward Said (*Covering Islam*) and Jack Shaheen (*Reel Bad Arabs*), or by active processes of Islamophobia. For our purposes, the writers of history and the current Islamophobic actors are not our concern. They

are constructing a narrative of exclusion, and our concern is constructing a narrative of inclusion.

In recent American popular culture, the mechanism of inclusion via cultural production can most clearly be seen in hip-hop. It is a sub-culture that is initially heavily identified with African-American resistive discourse. The sub-culture was outside and in opposition to the mainstream, generally understood as White culture. It was met with counter-resistance from this mainstream, but consumer culture brought rap, the music of hip-hop, into mainstream cultural production. On one hand, this incorporation has allowed the reification of the stereotypes of African-Americans as poor, criminally inclined and hyper-sexualised. However, that imagery has been matched by increased awareness of issues facing the Black community in America, including many of the structural causes amongst the White listening audience. In other words, the work of the Civil Rights Movement was to create a legal basis of equality, but hip-hop created a narrative of actual equality. I do not mean to suggest that this equality has been reached. Rather, it is part of a larger process, where one element cannot exist and succeed without the other.

It is incumbent to find the stories that help clarify our meanings.

In terms of production outside of the realm of music, literature seems to be the logical place to talk about the idea of stories. Although so-called ethnic literature is a mainstay of the American landscape, the stories that I am most interested in are the ones that demonstrate a comfort with both a Muslim and an American identification, rather than being self-conscious about either. I believe part of the success of hip-hop is the navigation of multiple identifications as being

authentically American. G. Willow Wilson's *Butterfly Mosque* is a memoir of her conversion to Islam, a religion she says she 'inhabits'. While she is conscious of the conversion process, and what it means to those close to her, it is also natural, and her national identification is never seen in conflict with her religious one. Recent Muslim immigrants, meaning first- and second-generation immigrants, are also creating stories that relate to an American experience, flavoured with Muslim specifics. Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* is a play of three generations of a family of Pakistani descent. Although there are elements that are unique to the family, in its broad outlook, it speaks to multiple issues of what it means to be American, including how to raise children. Ali is also co-editor of the second book in the *I Speak for Myself* series, anthologies of American Muslim women (vol. 1) and men (vol. 2)³ writing about their experiences. A similar anthology is *Love, InshAllah*, about the love lives of American Muslim women. These anthologies are at their best when there is no awareness of the multiple identifications at play, just stories that resonate with other readers.

It is stories that make the people part of the nation. When the story is compelling, the way individuals see themselves with respect to one another and to the nation changes.

As a scholar of Islam who sits in both Study of Religion and Theology, I must say that it seems that part of the education project is exposing our students to the lived voices of Muslims. Theological norms are the *idée fixe* around which the symphonies of religion are constructed. These symphonies are created in culturally and temporally bound conditions and express those realities. In all aspects of education, whether in the formal classroom setting or in more public gatherings, I believe it is incumbent to find the stories that help clarify our meanings. It is also important to help those seeking information to

find the stories that help them realise the gaps in the history they have.

History is written to explain the nation-state and its structures. However, it is stories that make the people part of the nation. When the story is compelling, the way individuals see themselves with respect to one another and to the nation changes. One of the key tools in any marginalised community's collection is that of cultural production that changes the national narrative. This particular pathway should not be discounted simply because of the generational change that it engenders.

— Hussein Rashid is an adjunct instructor of religion at Hofstra University, an activist and a lecturer.



REFRAMING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

BY JEREMY HENZELL-THOMAS

Reframing perceptions of Islam and Muslims depends to a large extent on the development of a more nuanced understanding of complex notions in the general public. Central to the accomplishment of this aim is the long-term impact of better education in producing well-informed, enquiring, critically minded and insightful individuals who are not taken in by discourses that perpetuate persistent myths and ingrained prejudices.

This process needs to encompass not only better and more balanced information within the school curriculum and the media, but also the development of independent critical thinking, philosophical enquiry, aesthetic awareness, ethical values, empathy and spiritual insight. The progressive marginalisation of the humanities and the arts in the education system, as well as the unremitting intrusion of a debilitating testing regime and the drilling of 'right answers', can only work against a more nuanced understanding of complex notions as well as a more sensitive appreciation of 'the other'.

It is vital that any restoration and revitalisation of history within the curriculum is not politicised and disproportionately motivated by the desire to impose a 'dominant narrative' based on a selective reading of history, but reaches out to all communities by recognising the pervasive eurocentric and occidental biases in much western historical writing.

The inclusion of present-day contributions to a shared future is important. True, Islam once inspired in the West an intellectual enlightenment and scientific revolution through the spirit of enquiry fostered by the Qur'an, but the contribution of Muslims to the development of western civilisation should not be confined to the annals of history and to nostalgic reminders of

a golden age of Islamic civilisation. Through the excavation of authentic Islamic principles and values, Muslims have much to contribute to the renewal of British society.

Development of critical thinking skills and philosophical enquiry during the educational process needs to begin at an early age.

Better education also depends crucially on the valuation of open dialogue and discussion as a means of developing dialectical skills. Genuine learning depends on the capacity of human faculties to assimilate new input and modify existing cognitive structures. Conversely, prejudice; bigotry; confirmation bias; and the fixed, prescriptive and authoritarian ideas associated with the foreclosed mind proceed from rigid schemata, frames and scripts that tend to dichotomise reality into diametrically opposing views, competing dogmas and irreconcilable differences.

Skill in engaging in discourse requires an understanding that schemata are not typically dislodged by adversarial confrontation, but by approximating new information as far as possible to an existing schema. In other words, the possibility of moving forward depends on finding common ground, an area within the landscape of discourse where there is some intersection of ideas, framed in language that is accessible to both sides. In such a way, new ideas are assimilated and perceptions reframed. Whole paradigms of thought can be shifted in this way.

Ideally, development of critical thinking skills and philosophical enquiry during the educational process needs to begin at an early age. The experience of many philosophers and teachers working with young children supports the view that children benefit from philosophical enquiry even in early primary school. The best thinking skills programmes not only go beyond the sharpening of a narrow set of functional thinking skills and develop many higher-order cognitive faculties, but also create a community of enquiry committed to developing a range of ethical values essential to participation in a plural society.

The established academic tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is based on the premise that discourse is an instrument of ideology as well as a means of perpetuating social and political inequality. Ideological discourse, whether openly extremist or masquerading as 'rational debate' and 'open discussion' based on supposedly 'superior values', sustains many forms of bigotry and continues to exert considerable influence on debates about national values, multiculturalism, immigration and the formulation of policy to restrict the rights of minority groups. The unpicking of such discourse is an essential discipline that can contribute much to improving the quality of public debate and thereby establishing greater social justice.

Improving the quality of public discourse also depends on reclaiming amongst journalists a culture that reveres the disinterested pursuit of truth, respects evidence and rejects the fabrication of 'pseudo-events'. The same applies to those who do research and compile reports for think tanks. A succession of reports produced by some think tanks has been criticised as being ideologically motivated with 'findings' not based on the methodological integrity that should govern fair and balanced research and the gathering of credible evidence.

One of the chief causes of muddled thinking in public discourse is poor definition of key terminology. This takes various forms, including lack of distinction between different meanings of the same word. Poor understanding of foreign terms is also a major problem, represented in a strikingly repetitive way by misuse of terms such as fatwa and jihad. Sometimes terminology is

also deliberately manipulated to reinforce power relations.

A topical example of muddling different meanings of the same word is the use of the word 'multiculturalism' without explaining what is meant by it. The word might refer to at least three different notions: the existence of plurality or diversity ('multiculturality'); the model of multiculturalism that promotes tolerance between separate communities within plural societies (sometimes referred to as 'plural monoculturalism'); and pluralism as an active process of constructive engagement between different communities (sometimes called 'interculturalism'). While some might legitimately argue that social cohesion and the building of a shared narrative is not facilitated by mere tolerance between isolated encampments within society, it is profoundly misleading to appear to suggest that multiculturalism in its critically important sense of active intercultural engagement is dead. Lack of care in distinguishing such concepts can have profoundly negative consequences not only for minority communities but also for wider society.

Another example is the use of the word 'radicalisation'. We have in Britain an honourable 'radical' tradition of reforming liberalism, intelligent social activism and legitimate dissent, which has historically guided our national evolution towards a free, just and tolerant society, but the word 'radicalisation', when applied to Muslims, invariably has the connotation of extremism, and even violent extremism.

It would be most useful to draw up an expanded glossary of terms that are vulnerable to confusion and distortion (whether by non-Muslims or Muslims), with particular attention to examples that impinge on the quality of public discourse about Islam and Muslims in contemporary contexts.

— *Jeremy Henzell-Thomas is a Visiting Fellow at the Prince Alwaleed Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge and a member of the Advisory Board of the Prince Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the University of Edinburgh.*



THE GOP'S WAR ON ISLAM: MISREPRESENTATION AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

BY SARAH WILDMAN

The 2012 primary race for a Republican presidential candidate has been marked by gaffes and missteps, flip-flops and obfuscations, foreign policy misunderstandings and aggression towards women's reproductive rights. In the melee, it would be easy to downplay what is perhaps one of the nastier components of the season: the exposure of a base strain of xenophobia in the Grand Old Party, a distinctive swing towards a virulent Islamophobia so rampant among, and so contagious between, the candidates for president it can become difficult to cover as journalists without inadvertently (or, at least, unnecessarily) airing stereotypes and falsehoods. The slights are so common they have become commonplace. The narratives are borrowed from those we have heard over the last few decades in Europe. While they are newcomers to these shores, they are no less ugly in American English. And with this election cycle, they have entered mainstream American thinking.

The master, and perhaps originator, of this new hate speech is the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, whose targets tends to be the bogeymen of Shari'a law and 'jihad', terms wielded rhetorically in ways familiar to the Front National in France, the Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the FPÖ in Austria. 'I believe Shari'a is a mortal threat to the survival of freedom in the United States and in the world as we know it', Speaker Gingrich boomed in a 2010 speech to the American Enterprise Institute. 'Stealth jihadis use political, cultural, societal, religious, intellectual tools; violent jihadis use violence', Mr Gingrich proclaimed that day. 'But in fact they're both engaged in jihad, and they're both seeking to impose the same end state, which is to replace western civilisation with a radical imposition of Shari'a'.

The juxtaposition of western civilisation as the antidote/antipathy of Islamic law is purposeful and clear: One is Right, and one is Wrong; one is darkness, one is light. And while rational-thinking Americans may understand that the 'radical imposition of Shari'a' is neither wanted by the Muslim population of this country nor remotely likely, that doesn't much matter to the populations to whom Gingrich speaks. It is a Manichean sentiment increasingly present in the new GOP's rhetoric.

Running for president did nothing to soften the former history professor's views: 'I'd support a Muslim running for president, only if they would commit to give up Sharia', Mr Gingrich told voters in South Carolina. He later won that primary.

For close followers of the former congressman, this rhetoric comes as no surprise. Mr Gingrich was an early and outspoken critic of Cordoba Mosque (Park51)—the so-called Ground Zero Mosque. In similar language to his general speeches elsewhere, he criticised the organisers, claimed they had ample opportunity to build mosques elsewhere and offered a faux-academic critique of the effort; in an op-ed published at the time, he opined:

[Most] don't understand that 'Cordoba House' is a deliberately insulting term. It refers to Cordoba, Spain—the capital of Muslim conquerors who symbolized their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world's third-largest mosque complex. Today, some of the Mosque's backers insist this term is being used to 'symbolize interfaith cooperation' when, in fact, every Islamist in the world recognizes Cordoba as a

symbol of Islamic conquest. It is a sign of their contempt for Americans and their confidence in our historic ignorance that they would deliberately insult us this way.

This election cycle has done nothing for the American image abroad in the Muslim world, let alone for the domestic Muslim population of the United States.

It's a brilliant piece of twisted history: It was effective, it sounded correct and it was endlessly repeated.

While the former Speaker has staked a claim in the Islamophobic territory, his noxious grandstanding hardly stands alone; indeed, it would seem his fellow Republicans worry that if they don't advance a similarly xenophobic position, they might not be taken seriously in the party.

Senator Rick Santorum quickly, and easily, veered into the realm of Muslim bashing in the debates. In November, asked by CNN's Wolf Blitzer about ethnic profiling for terrorists, Santorum replied that searching for terror began with searching for 'the folks who are most likely to be committing these crimes . . . Obviously, Muslims would be someone you'd look at', he said, concluding, 'the radical Muslims are the people that are committing these crimes, by and large, as well as younger males'. Though soon after those statements were made, the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security published a thorough study showing that, in fact, 'Muslims [pose] a miniscule threat to public security' and the *New York Times* duly reported that radical Islam had not, in fact, emerged as a domestic or home-grown threat to the United States, the damage was done. The ideas were already out there. It had permeated into the mainstream conversation on Islam.

Santorum continued to campaign on an Islamophobic platform. 'Where do you think the concept of equality comes from?' Santorum said at a campaign stop in January. 'It doesn't

come from Islam. It doesn't come from the East and Eastern religions. It comes from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'. Never mind that Islam is an Abrahamic religion.

When President Obama apologised for the accidental burning of Qur'ans in Afghanistan, an act that sparked riots and deaths, Santorum called the move 'appeasement' and was joined by his fellow candidates in condemning the White House apology.

And it wasn't just putative frontrunners in the race for the White House who joined in this new war on Islam. Just before he dropped out of the race, former Texas Governor Rick Perry added his own, added, contribution, with a means of fear mongering that should be easily recognisable in a European context. Egged on by Fox News host Bret Baier, who wondered aloud whether the current conservative 'Islamist' government and worsening relationship with Israel should preclude Turkey from remaining a part of NATO, the Governor replied:

Obviously when you have a country that is being ruled by what many would perceive to be Islamic terrorists, when you start seeing that type of activity against their own citizens, then . . . not only is it time for us to have a conversation about whether or not they belong to be in NATO but it's time for the United States, when we look at their foreign aid, to go to zero with it.

At first blush, the comment seems a simple case of crass falsehoods—'Islamic terrorists' obviously do not run the government of Turkey. But the idea of expelling Turkey from NATO, of isolating the Muslim nation at the edge of Europe, is one that is championed by some of the more virulent and prolific Muslim bashers peddling their ideas today. Indeed, a compilation of statements published on the left-leaning Center for American Progress blog Think Progress this past fall showed from whence Governor Perry's idea had hailed—from the blogs of Daniel Pipes, Pamela Geller and the like. Words like jihad, Islamist and domination abound. Last fall, Daniel Pipes wrote an essay boldly stating that, with the military under their control, 'A second republic headed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Islamist colleagues of the AK Party (AKP) . . . [can] now pursue their ambitions

to create an Islamic order'. Pamela Geller, on her blog 'Atlas Shrugged', wrote Istanbul was 'dreaming of Ottoman domination and Turkish imperialism', and Robert Spencer added similar statements on his blog 'Jihad Watch'. And at the Investigative Project, Steve Emerson wrote, 'The struggle against Israel is one facet of the Muslim nation's new Islamist foreign policy under the leadership of Erdoğan and his AKP party. Turkey has distanced itself from membership in the European Union, a former goal of the nation, in order to pursue better ties with terror-supporting nations like Syria and Iran'.

The juxtaposition of western civilisation as the antidote/antipathy of Islamic law is purposeful and clear: One is Right, and one is Wrong; one is darkness, one is light.

As one State Department official told me off the record, this election cycle has done nothing for the American image abroad in the Muslim world, let alone for the domestic Muslim population of the United States. More worrisome, it has mainstreamed a rhetoric once associated only with the far right, and once quite anathema and distanced from these shores.

— *Sarah Wildman is a writer, journalist and blogger.*



EUROPE'S MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: CREATING A NEW NARRATIVE FOR INTEGRATION

BY SHADA ISLAM

Europe is currently home to an estimated 44 million Muslims, with the number expected to increase to more than 58 million by 2030.⁴

About 11 million live in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and other Eastern European countries with long-established Muslim communities; 16 million live in Russia and over 18 million live in Western and Northern Europe.⁵ Of the latter group, a large majority are immigrants from Muslim nations who were either invited to come and work in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s or have made their way to the continent in recent years to look for jobs, seek asylum or join their families.

The presence and expected rise in the number European Muslims in the coming decades, because of high fertility rates and through increased immigration from North Africa and the Middle East, has prompted an increasingly acrimonious debate about Islam and Muslims' place in European society. In addition to the furore over the publication of caricatures of Prophet Mohammed and other similar controversies, over the past year, David Cameron, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy—the centre-right leaders of the UK, Germany and France, respectively—have given speeches proclaiming that multiculturalism in their respective countries has proven a failure, and populist, xenophobic and anti-Islamist parties are now represented in legislatures from Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy to Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. Anti-Muslim sentiments are partly responsible for the rise in popularity of Marine Le Pen's Front National as France prepares for elections in May. In Germany, Thilo Sarrazin, a former board member of the Bundesbank, one of the nation's most venerated institutions, caused a furore in 2010 with a best-selling book that portrayed

German identity under threat from Muslim immigrants.

Europe is uneasy about its future, its mood soured by the economic slowdown, the euro sovereign debt crisis and public anxieties about the impact of globalisation on European jobs. However, more than ever, Europe's response to the challenge of integrating its Muslim minority will define the continent's international reputation, global credibility and social profile in the coming years. European Muslims, meanwhile, face the daunting choice of becoming full-fledged and active European citizens or living on the periphery of society and Europe's economic and political structures.

The current picture is not as grim as often depicted. The last ten years have actually been marked by transition and change in the lives of European Muslims as both mainstream society and Muslim communities have confronted difficult issues of integration and multiple identities that had been neglected and overlooked for decades. European governments are slowly combining a security-focused approach with a more balanced view that includes an integration agenda and Muslim outreach programmes. Government and business recruitment policies are being gradually changed to increase the employment of Muslims and minorities. In fact, business leaders are demanding an increase in immigration, including that from Muslim countries, to meet Europe's skills shortage, and in the most recent Lisbon Treaty, the EU adopted a new anti-discrimination directive that strengthens existing rules on combating racism. For their part, European Muslims are becoming significantly more active in demanding equal rights as fully fledged citizens, organising themselves into pressure groups and

emerging as influential politicians, entrepreneurs and cultural icons.

However, this slow but steady recognition that all Europeans—whatever their religion, ethnic origins or cultural background—share a common space has not been translated into a rallying and attractive narrative that can dispel misperceptions between European Muslims and non-Muslims.

Developing a new discourse on Islam and Muslims requires the joint efforts of politicians and policymakers, scholars as well as thought and religious leaders, civil society organisations, business representatives and the media. It means highlighting that Europe is a truly diverse continent that celebrates all its citizens, regardless of race and religion, and recognises that if it is to compete on the global stage, it needs to capitalise on the talents of all its citizens.

The Way Ahead

The ingredients of such a new narrative are not difficult to identify. Here are some options:

European policymakers face the task of highlighting Europe's integration agenda rather than allowing security and immigration concerns to take priority. EU anti-discrimination policies should not be lost in the maze of measures to combat radicalisation, especially of young men of Muslim descent.

As European economies continue to stagnate, there is an interesting story to be told about European Muslims' economic contribution to their host nations, especially the fact that many 'new European' (immigrant) entrepreneurs are actively fostering the revitalisation of impoverished urban neighbourhoods, creating jobs and prompting innovation in products and services and account for 10% of overall self-employed businesses in Germany, 11% in France and an impressive 14% in Britain.⁶

A recent European Commission study stresses that diversity brought about by migration can be a competitive advantage and a source of dynamism for the European economies,

whose workforce is expected to decline by approximately 50 million between 2008 and 2060.⁷

European politicians face the challenge of engaging in an intelligent debate on immigration and integration, which is not about accusatory interventions over minarets and the sartorial choices of Muslim women but about real questions of discrimination.

Given the present sorry lack of representation of Muslims and other ethnic minorities in national governments, parliaments and EU institutions, some form of affirmative action (e.g. support for higher education, facilitation of job promotion) is needed that will encourage minorities to become active social participants.

Business leaders, for their part, must become less timid in pointing out that ageing and skills-deficient Europe needs foreign labour.

European Muslims meanwhile must further switch attention from the defence of Islam to the uphill struggle to gain more political power, to move up the employment ladder and gain professional renown.

Europe's struggle to build a society that accommodates Muslims and other minorities is challenged by uncertainty about what it means to be 'European', suggestions that national identities should be replaced with a single European one and the struggle between religion and secular beliefs.

There is a need to develop a new lexicon that refers to 'European Muslims' rather than 'foreigners' and 'immigrants'. The stakes of meeting these challenges are high: Failure to accept difference and diversity will foster further fear and unease, sap Europe's vitality, exacerbate social tensions and erode European influence on the global stage. Europe's ability to punch its weight in a rapidly changing global stage depends on its capacity to celebrate diversity, not fear and denounce it.

— *Shada Islam is head of policy at Friends of Europe.*



DEALING WITH MISLEADING IMAGES: RESULTS FROM THE CASE STUDY ON ‘MUSLIMS IN THE EUROPEAN MEDIASCAPE’

BY JÖRG HEEREN & ANDREAS ZICK

The study

The following quotations and estimations result from an empirical project on ‘Muslims in the European Mediascape’.⁸ The project primarily aims to get an impression of the images, stories and production modes of Muslim and non-Muslim journalists. At the same time, it aims to get an impression of how consumers of media perceive the images of Muslims and the issues related with Islam and Muslims in media. The empirical approach has three empirical parts: interviews with journalists in Germany and in the UK (i.e. participants whose media output is consumed by the general public and participants whose media output is consumed to a large extent by consumers with a Muslim background); focus groups with Muslim and non-Muslim German citizens; and an online survey of Muslim and non-Muslim media consumers. Analyses are based on Grounded Theory and content analysis. The current report sketches some of the most relevant results.

Findings

Journalists and media consumers frequently refer to the term ‘Muslims’ and its understanding in the German public. Participants criticise a misperception of Muslims by non-Muslims and state that established media tend to create an image of ‘Muslims’ that identifies individuals of that religion as ‘solely Muslims’ with no other identities and that lets Muslims appear as one homogeneous group.

The majority of journalists sense the lack of an authentic and heterogeneous image of Muslims in mainstream media, criticising the stereotyping of Muslims by the use of extremist images. In

mainstream media, they observe a conflation of marginal Muslim groups with the majority of Muslims. Another problem, which is addressed significantly, is that the term ‘Muslims’ is often used synonymously with the term (im)migrants, excluding that there are migrants who are not Muslims and that there are individuals of German origin that are Muslims.

Several interviewees believe that Muslims are disproportionately depicted as not being integrated within Germany:

*What image has the individual as a Muslim?
[...] Unsuccessful, not integrated, criminal—
those are the images we have in mind. And
that has to change. (radio producer)*

Interviewees notice that, by associating the Muslim religion with terrorism in media, a chain of associations emerges that conflate the term ‘Muslim’ with the term ‘terrorist’. Such images emphasise a threatening otherness of people of Muslim background.

Misleading images?!

Participants in our study see journalists as agents being able to change predominating and misleading images in public. One way to make journalists aware of their influence on the everyday life of Muslims and on their chance to contribute to a fairer perception of Muslims is the development of a public ‘Code of conduct on coverage on minorities and their members’, initiated jointly by Muslim and non-Muslim journalists. Such a code can function as a supplement of the *German Press*

Code.⁹ With focus on coverage on Muslims and Islam, interviewees in our study named several strategies for journalistic enquiry and coverage that could be used as a starting point for such a guideline:

- Involve more people of Muslim background as sources when it comes to societal topics beyond religion in order to show and treat Muslims as ordinary members of society and in order to depict their—diversified—perspectives more extensively in media.¹⁰
- Break with predominant images by also showing the efforts of Muslims seeking to lead successful, independent lives. However, an exaggeration of this strategy can produce the additional (positive) stereotype of ‘the successful Muslim’.
- Do not hold on mainly to extreme opinions of Muslims who represent an insignificant share of the inhabitants of Muslim background—include more moderate opinions of Muslims.
- Seek not to narrow one’s perspective on a person by simply focusing on his or her religion (as well as nationality or tradition).
- Cover more about individuals than about groups—the individual Muslim and not ‘the’ Muslims in general; be cautious with categorising and marking groups in any way.

While such a code of conduct aims at providing constructive strategies, an online ‘*black book of misleading coverage*’ could list publicly examples for articles and reports that convey delusive images of Muslims and Islam. One example is the website ‘BILDblog’¹¹ that acts as watchblog for German media and documents factual errors in coverage, distorting and deceptive articles and reports.

Another instrument to support a more nuanced coverage can be an inclusion of more journalists of Muslim background who are willing to cover issues relating to Islam and Muslims in established media.¹² This would for example require media bodies to invest in internship programmes that help talented journalists

of marginalised backgrounds to enter their organisation.¹³

Another suggestion is to involve more experts on Muslims and Islam in editorial staffs—experts not necessarily because of their own religious affiliation but by qualifications and studies (especially Islamic Studies).¹⁴

The interview material shows clearly that most consumers understand and value the importance of ‘critical media use’. Journalists believe that, in the end, the consumer filters or assimilates notions and images conveyed by media, but this can be misleading in itself, since media are not without responsibility for misleading images. The acquisition of media competence is one instrument to empower children and teenagers to reflect on media content.¹⁵ Projects and institutions to improve critical use of media therefore need to receive continued political and financial support.¹⁶

Interim conclusions

Our study refers to a disproportional coverage on Muslims and Islam. One way of dealing with that would simply be less coverage. However, this goal appears to be a pious hope due to the trend in media to maintain and raise the audience reach via the occupation with a subject like Muslims and Islam that has become a hot topic and stayed this way by emotionalised, pointed and exaggerated coverage. Thus, change in coverage and its perception needs to be achieved by addressing journalists individually, by making them aware of their impact and the potential damage and by helping them to access new sources that differ from the stereotype and the often self-appointed speakers of Muslim communities. Change also needs to be achieved by helping media consumers stay alert towards misleading images, deal critically with media content and intervene in coverage as sources of journalists or as active users who share their divergent opinions in letters to the editor and comments.

— Jörg Heeren and Andreas Zick
are based at the Institute for
Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict
and Violence of Bielefeld University.



THE 'FACEBOOK GENERATION' AND THE MOVEMENT OF IDEAS

BY DR EDWARD KESSLER MBE

A seismic shift has taken place since 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist, invented the World Wide Web and helped it become operational. There have been, so far, in the lifespan of the Internet, three stages of evolution in the movement of information and ideas: from the One-to-One connections of the 1980s (e.g. e-mail); to the One-to-Many connections of the 1990s (e.g. websites); to the Many-to-Many connections or 'social media' of the 2000s (e.g. Facebook (established 2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006)).

This third and most recent phase, the social media, is still only about five years old,¹⁷ yet it has generated global attention partly because of its contribution to societal upheavals, including the Arab Spring as well as the UK riots last summer. At the time, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, raised the possibility (August 11, 2011) of seeking to ban the use of Twitter, Facebook and Blackberry Messenger, all of which were used by rioters. He sensibly decided against taking this course of action, which would have followed the attempts by (former) Middle Eastern rulers to block the Internet (for example, Egypt blocked the internet on January 27 but re-opened it on February 2, 2011).

Social media sites have grown exponentially in the last five years, and control has moved from website owners (dominant in the 1990s) to website users (dominant today). This means the social media is not just a communication tool; it is also a connection tool. It enables affiliation, interest group formation and solidarity in new ways, ways that do not conform to existing social groups or geographic locations.

This means that 'everyone is a publisher and everyone is a critic'; in other words, we are witnessing a massive and revolutionary

democratisation of information. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have no editors, and users are expected to edit inappropriate or inaccurate content. This collaborative process demonstrates the challenge to traditional hierarchies: Individuals communicate their own interpretations (of events and texts) rather than rely on the accounts of their leaders. This transformative development has massive implications for religious as well as political authority.

Philip Clayton, in an article entitled 'Theology and Church after Google' in the *Princeton Theological Review*, explores some of the implications. He argues that a couple of generations ago, in the West at least, the priest was not only the moral and spiritual authority—the representative of the 'true religion' and its 'true scriptures'—but also probably the most educated. He (almost certainly it was a he) spoke with authority on a wide variety of issues that were important to the society of his day. Contrast that with today's situation. Rarely are priests approached as figures of authority, except perhaps within their own congregation. The Internet and the social media are primary authorities for information. According to Clayton, Beliefnet.com ('Your Trusted Source for Free Daily Inspiration & Faith') is for many American Christians a bigger authority on matters of Christian belief and practice than a priest: 'Online blogs which congregants choose to follow are a far greater influence'.¹⁸

Social Media and Faith

Arguably, social media holds much potential in the context of faith and interfaith relations. There are more than 800 million active Facebook users, of whom more than 50% log on every day. Or, for example, many churches use Facebook to build a sense of community within the parish,

providing updates on the community and a forum where members can reach out to one another for support. Although online communication is of a less personal nature and a virtual world will only ever be 'virtual', social media can connect users with those with whom they cannot physically communicate. I cannot call the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Chief Rabbi every day and ask him for his views on a certain event and theological conundrum, but I can follow them on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/#!/lambethpalace> and <http://twitter.com/#!/chiefrabbi>). Equally, social media can provide a powerful tool to broadcast debates, lectures and documentaries on a global scale. In 2010, the debate between Tony Blair and Christopher Hitchens, *Is Religion a Force for Good?*, provided a worldwide topic of online debate and discussion.

Social media has also proved an important tool for providing a voice for faith groups who have suffered marginalisation. In the United States, many Muslim websites have emerged to confront the harmful anti-Muslim stereotypes that followed 9/11. For example, in 2001, the website AltMuslim.com was established to promote awareness amongst Muslims and non-Muslims about issues regarding the Muslim world, and it is now at the forefront of an emerging independent Muslim media in the West. More recently, 30mosques.com was launched for Ramadan in 2011. The idea was to blog about visits to thirty US mosques over the course of the thirty days of Ramadan so as to de-mystify the mosques as well as Islam. I should also mention the Centre for Muslim-Jewish Engagement (University of Southern California), which has developed an online resource centre for materials on Jewish-Muslim relations as well as a compendium of Muslim and Jewish scriptures (<http://cmje.org>).

Even Pope Benedict XVI has talked about the opportunities of positively engaging with social media, while recognising its limitations, in his message for the 45th World Communications Day (June 5, 2011) when he addressed the impact of social media as follows: 'The clear distinction between the producer and consumer of information is relativised and the communication appears not only as an exchange of data but also as a form of sharing. This dynamic has contributed to a new appreciation of communication itself, which is seen first of

all as dialogue, exchange, solidarity and the creation of positive relations. On the other hand, this is contrasted with the limits typical of digital communication: the one-sidedness of the interaction, the tendency to communicate in some parts of one's interior world, the risk of constructing a false image of oneself, which can become a form of self-indulgence'.¹⁹

Opinions on social media also tend to align with their generation and area of expertise. For example, younger faith leaders tend to view new social media more positively, as a tool for initialising, building and maintaining positive relations, and tend to be more adept at using facilities such as online forums or videoconferencing. Older leaders often believe that the 'impersonal' nature of online communication significantly limits the potential for substantive dialogue, stressing the importance of being able to physically see and hear 'the other' in an offline context.

Whichever approach we take, it is undeniable that the democratisation of information and the increase in user-generated content do make it easier for misinformation and negative content to proliferate online. A coarsening of debate and increasing polarisation in the 'real' world have grown alongside a fashionable political incorrectness on websites where anonymity is guaranteed. Indeed, there is even a temptation among mainstream websites that moderate posts be cut in favour of the extremes, for the sake of generating controversy and greater publicity. This 'one-way conversation' is becoming the norm, and examples of genuine public dialogue have diminished significantly.

Anonymity and 'Individuation'

It is my view that the disinhibiting effect of anonymity is a key part of an on-going process that harms society. Psychologists have applied the Jungian term, 'Individuation', to this process, which refers to the concealment of identities when social norms are withdrawn. Individuation occurs when we sit behind the wheel of a car and abuse the driver in front of us; it is what motivates football supporters to shout abuse or even hatred at matches. And it is why under the cover of an alias—surrounded by 'virtual strangers'—individuals act in a less restrained manner than they might in the real world. The

ordinary rules of behaviour are suspended when people believe they are anonymous and no longer take responsibility for their words.

The trend for anonymity, as well as the less personal nature of online communication, affects interfaith relations by confusing the very meaning of the word 'dialogue'. A casual conversation (face-to-face or online) that may add up to no more than a loose restatement of entrenched positions is sometimes claimed to be dialogue. It is not! Equally, any communication between persons of differing points of view is sometimes also described as dialogue. It is not—dialogue is not simply synonymous with 'communication'. For dialogue to take place, there must be a genuine hearing of 'the other'. This is not always a concern amongst users of the social media, and once a message is posted online, control is lost.

The trend for anonymity, as well as the less personal nature of online communication, affects interfaith relations by confusing the very meaning of the word 'dialogue'.

And yet social media is also used as a tool to promote greater transparency and the movement of ideas: creating channels to bypass traditional state control (as well as religious hierarchies) so others in their countries (as well as their co-religionists) and the outside world can see what is going on. Social media has enabled people to break state censorship and intrinsically has the infrastructure to disseminate far, fast and wide. Social media has no respect for borders or doctrines. What happens in Morocco, Egypt and Libya is heard in real time and emulated in Syria, for example. Social media enables ordinary people to tell their story to others in their country, to the wider community, to the world.

Although these changes are astonishing and even revolutionary, social media does not create physical revolutions. People create revolutions; technology enables ideas to be spread, no

matter the ethics or values behind the sentiment. The web is neutral. It is nothing more than a machine, a tool that can be used for positive or negative purposes.

Conclusion

Social media, in itself, has no inherent positive or negative influence on interfaith relations. The impact of the social media depends solely on the people who use it—and how they use it. In other words, it is not the medium itself but the motives of its users that are important.

Although social media provides an excellent opportunity for learning from those who have perspectives that differ from yours, in reality, does it happen very often? When virtual communities are formed, how often do we include those who we disagree with? How often do Israelis and Palestinians follow each other on Twitter or 'friend' each other on Facebook? Studies indicate that a majority of people tend to join social networks of like-minded individuals. The overall trend is that people talk to people with whom they agree. There is not much interaction between the Salafis, the Sufis and the Shias. The technology may exist, but you still need someone with the will, curiosity and empathy.²⁰ It is this that makes social media such a powerful tool for the movement of ideas; leaders need only find ready-made groups of likeminded people and persuade them into action.

In the context of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims, this leads me to the conclusion that the movement of positive ideas for interfaith, including successful interfaith relations, depends less on the medium and more on the substance of the conversation. Online tools themselves do not make people more or less tolerant. Their impact depends on the people who use them—and how they use them.

— Dr Edward Kessler MBE is Founding Director of the Woolf Institute.



HUMANISATION: THE NECESSARY EDUCATION

BY STEPHEN SHASHOUA

The issue of reconciling relations between faiths and communities took on a new urgency after September 11, 2001. Not long after the twin towers had fallen, the rational fear of terrorism performed by a small group of individuals began to turn into an irrational fear of Muslims and Islam in general.

Building understanding and stronger connections between our communities cannot just be part of a security agenda.

These anxieties have brought into sharp relief some of the deeper fissures of our societies, highlighting questions about identity, values and perception of loyalty. We have seen tensions increase between and within communities. Tackling problems related to Muslim communities has become a focus for many governments and well-intentioned civil society organisations, but less close attention has been paid to building relationships between communities.

Community relationships, as well as public education about Islam and Muslims, will form the basis of this essay, which will use the education programmes of 3FF, the Three Faiths Forum, in the UK as its reference point.

The past decade has given us an opportunity to take a closer look at our society and how people of different faiths, beliefs and cultures get along or—as is often the case—don't. There is often a distinct lack of knowledge and understanding of each other, especially about Muslims. While there are frequent calls for education from political leadership, there is surprisingly little of this kind of activity in schools, nor in the 'public square'.

Ultimately, building understanding and stronger connections between our communities cannot just be part of a security agenda; it has to be an on-going, integral part of any healthy, functioning society. We need to ask ourselves, *Are communities equipped and willing to engage with each other for the benefit of all?*

Addressing this means embedding intercultural initiatives at different levels of society and giving many more people opportunities to engage. If everyone had chances to learn from, and work closely with, people of other faiths and beliefs, they would see a more nuanced picture, far from any scare stories or cultural stereotypes they may have grown up with.

Failure to adequately address the differences between people may lead to *infracommunitarianism*, 'an unconscious bias that one's *in-group* is more human than an *out-group*'.²¹ While this sounds extreme, much of what is being recorded by 3FF and other organisations tackling racism or prejudice seems to point at a degree of *infracommunitarianism*, often compounded with *ethnocentrism* where judgments are made about others only through the lens of one's own culture.

Statements 3FF have recorded from both pupils and teachers include comments such as:

'Why are Jews always trying to conquer Muslims?'

'Why are all Muslims terrorists?'

'Muslims think it is a blessing to kill Jews.'

These assumptions suggest the individuals consider the other to be lacking in morals and values or less human. While we know that ignorance of the other is what needs countering directly, there is much debate on the most effective methods.

Religious Education is a statutory requirement in all state-funded schools in the UK; however, 3FF's experience in classrooms shows the curricula and teaching are often insufficient to address the emergence of inhumanisation. The materials used by teachers are often self-generated (typically from Internet searches), and materials are 'often compromised by inaccuracy, imbalance and lack of depth in their portrayal'.²² Lessons often ignore the importance of demonstrating the plurality of belief or practice within communities. They do not adequately explain when laws or customs are seemingly transgressed by an individual or group (e.g. people who do not follow dietary requirements or who kill others in the name of their religion). Pupils are often offered an idealised version of a religion, one that is quickly shown to be false. Pupils find these inconsistencies between belief and action confusing, and the true learning may be lost, whilst stereotypes are reinforced.

With scarce space within the public square where balanced and informed learning about Islam and Muslims can take place, we must find methods in which to make sure the correct sort of social education occurs. For example, there is a greater need to teach about how to engage with 'Muslims' rather than 'Islam'. In a recent blog in the *Harvard Business Review*, entitled 'Diversity Training does not Work', Peter Bregman writes, 'People aren't prejudiced against real people; they're prejudiced against categories . . . Categories are dehumanising. They simplify the complexity of a human being. So focusing people on the categories increases their prejudice. The solution? Instead of seeing people as categories, we need to see people as people. Stop training people to be more accepting of diversity. It's too conceptual, and it doesn't work'.²³

Within 3FF activities, speakers are trained to connect with their audiences, to avoid generalisation and to try to give a variety of views from within their traditions. They always present next to people from different faith/belief traditions to show the importance of working with others identifying both similarities and differences in a culture of enquiry and respect. Speaking side by side contextualises the speaker so that the person is not simply speaking about

Islam but about their 'integrated' faith. It is essential to show the uniqueness that is Islam, but also make the population relate to it, by humanising it.

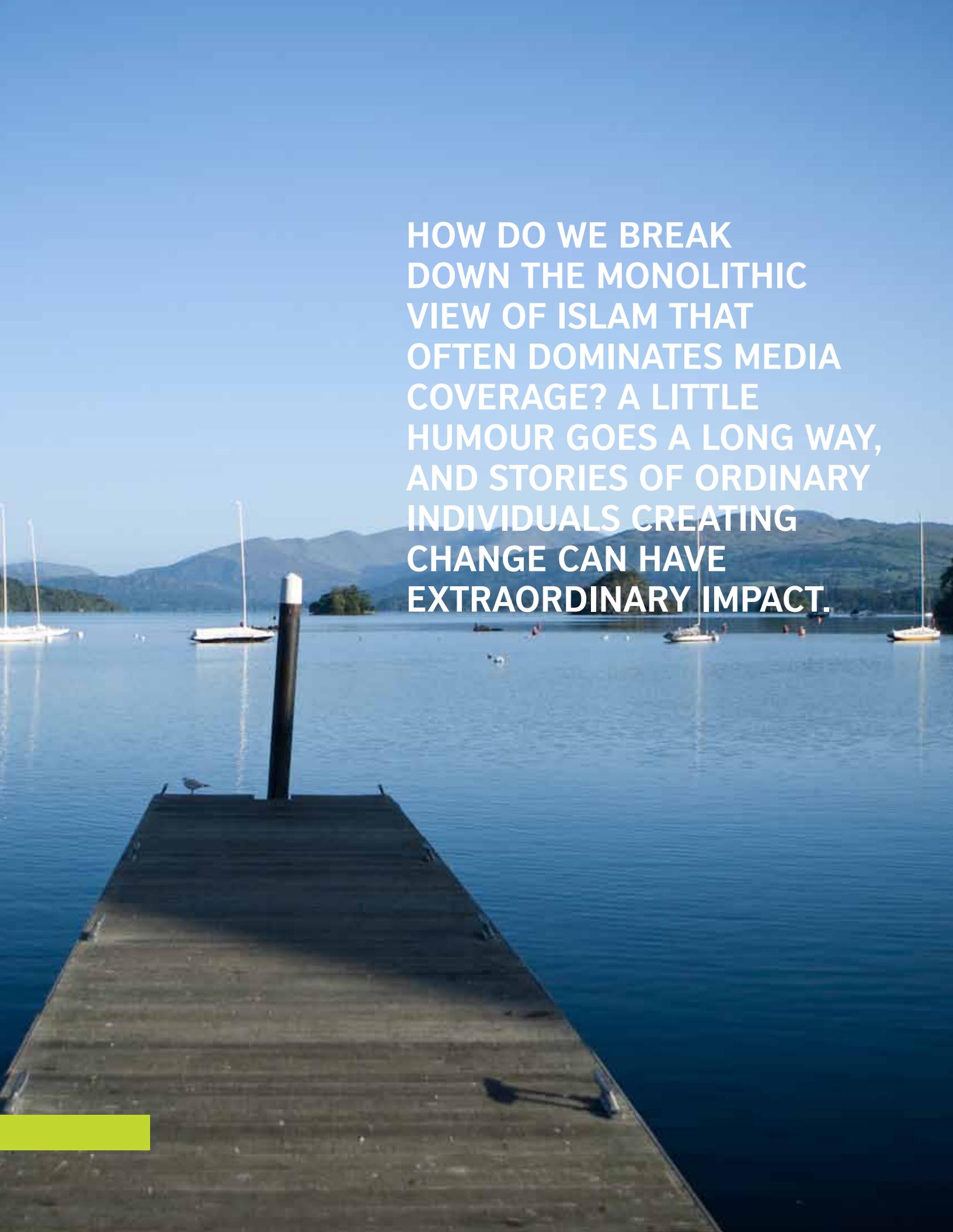
Conclusion

Together, education and encounters are the most effective tools to confront assumptions and improve attitudes towards Muslims. The focus must be on development of the self as well as the group.

There is a great need for programmes to work towards the humanisation of Muslims, which should not simply rely on a knowledge-centred educational approach. We must be conscious of the barriers to engagement, being flexible to the needs of participants, but ensuring there is authenticity and purpose in the engagement.

There is a great need for more individuals from different communities to engage, including teachers, parents, artists, sport personalities etc. and not merely religious/communal leadership. The importance of understanding what works in different contexts is imperative.

— *Stephen Shashoua is director of Three Faiths Forum.*



**HOW DO WE BREAK
DOWN THE MONOLITHIC
VIEW OF ISLAM THAT
OFTEN DOMINATES MEDIA
COVERAGE? A LITTLE
HUMOUR GOES A LONG WAY,
AND STORIES OF ORDINARY
INDIVIDUALS CREATING
CHANGE CAN HAVE
EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT.**

ENDNOTES

1. Nichole Argo, Shamil Idriss, and Mahnaz Fancy, *Media and Intergroup Relations: Research on Media and Social Change* (Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund and Soliya, 2010).
2. Ibid., 21.
3. Disclosure: I am a contributor to this volume.
4. PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life. "The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030." (PEW Research Centre, January 27, 2011). <http://pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-europe.aspx>
5. Ibid.
6. European Policy Centre. "New European Entrepreneurs: Creating Jobs, Breaking Stereotypes." (October 27, 2011). http://www.epc.eu/prog_details.php?cat_id=6&pub_id=1032&prog_id=1
7. European Commission. "European Agenda for Integration: Well Integrated Migrants Enrich the EU Economically and Culturally." (July 20, 2011). <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/911&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>
8. The study was conducted by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (Bielefeld University, Germany), Staffordshire University (UK) and Keele University (UK), in cooperation with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (UK). The research was funded by Vodafone Foundation Germany and the British Council. For more information, see <http://www.euromediascape.com>.
9. The Press Code summarises journalistic principles. It was drawn up by the German Press Council in collaboration with the Press associations (<http://www.presserat.info/service/english/press-code.html>).
10. A print magazine editor stated on that issue, 'Minorities are minorities because their voices are not heard. That means the media could take on the task by reporting on minorities, reporting on their statements. So that these groups are appreciated and incorporated into coverage'.
11. 'BILDblog' can be found at www.bildblog.de. The website is visited by one million readers per month.
12. One press producer stresses the high probability of gaining more nuanced stories by insider perspectives of journalists: 'Distance is important but proximity and familiarity can help an author to explain things better. A journalist should be able to illustrate his topic and break it down into a personal, everyday level. Otherwise there is danger of staying abstract and theoretical'.
13. One project that works in involving more journalists of a diverse background is the talent development programme 'Grenzenlos' by the German public-broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR, West German Broadcasting). The programme advances young journalists of immigrant families in media professions. Most of them continue later at WDR as authors or trainee-journalists.
14. One way to foster a more nuanced understanding of critical notions in the general public would be to support organizations that gather experts who specialise in coverage on Muslims and Islam. In Germany, the journalists' organization 'NEFAIS' (Netzwerk Fachjournalisten Islamische Welt; 'Network of Journalists Islamic World') brings together experts on the Islamic world.
15. Dieter Baacke's concept of media competence includes inter alia media critique as the ability to deal with media analytically, reflexively and ethically and media development as the ability to change the current pool of media and to create one's own media content. (See Dieter Baacke, "Medienkompetenz—Begrifflichkeit und sozialer Wandel," in *Medienkompetenz als Schlüsselbegriff*, ed. Antje von Rein (Bad Heilbrunn, 1996), 112–124.
16. One project that generates a critical approach of young consumers involves dialogue groups that bring together young adults of German backgrounds and young adults of immigrant backgrounds in the project *Interkultureller Dialog zur Aktivierung und Partizipation von Jugendlichen in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft* [Intercultural dialogue for activation and participation of adolescents in the immigrant society].
17. The term 'social media' refers to the use of 'web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue'. This definition is provided by the well-known Wikipedia—an example of the second phase of the Internet—established in 2001. Today, Wikipedia provides users with 19 million articles from 91,000 contributors in over 200 languages.
18. Philip Clayton, "Theology and Church after Google," *Princeton Theological Review* 43 (2010): 7–20.
19. Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age.
20. Bridging Babel: New Social Media and Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding. <http://repository.berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/UGFNewSocialMedia.pdf>
21. J.Ph. Leyens, M.P. Paladino, R.T. Rodriguez, J. Vaes, S. Demoulin, A.P. Rodriguez, and R. Gaunt, "The Emotional Side of Prejudice: The Attribution of Secondary Emotions to Ingroups and Outgroups," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4(2) (2000): 186–197.
22. R. Jackson, J. Ipgrave, M. Hayward, P. Hopkins, N. Fancourt, M. Robbins, L. Francis, and U. McKenna, *Materials Used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England* (Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, 2010).
23. Peter Bregman, "Diversity Training Does Not Work" *Harvard Business Review*, HBR Blog Network, March 12, 2012. <http://blogs.hbr.org/bregman/2012/03/diversity-training-doesnt-work.html>: 2012.