

MUSLIM REFORMERS VS. FUNDAMENTALISTS

The Victor Dictates Islam's
Contribution to Diversity & Western
Civilization

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CHAPTER 1

AN ISLAMOPHOBE LEARNS FROM IMAMS

They snatched me from the subway car and threw me face down on the platform. I turned to avoid a faceplant. One cop pressed his knee on the back of my thigh; the other cuffed my wrists tight behind my back. This is one of the many minor incidents of my odyssey.

It has brought me to a place where I now more deeply understand not Islam but the fight taking place within the Muslim community. Not the community in Yemen, Qatar, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia or Iran, but the Muslim community living and thriving in Canada and all of Western civilization

Most are not aware this fight is being fought, let alone its significance. Yes, you may have heard whispers that something is going on within Islam. But between driving the kids to soccer practice, paying the mortgage, and putting food on the table, who has time or energy to care about a “foreign” religion?

Once in a while we all need to sit back and relax, recharge our batteries. “Me time.” Some people do this by watching combat sports. That is what we have here for you. But this is much more exciting because the stakes are as high as they can get. The victor wins it all. The loser does not come back to play another day.

Team Reform

Professor Irshad Manji and Dr. Zuhdi Jasser are highly touted Muslim reformers who argue that the original Islam was progressive, liberal and democratic. They tell us that mainstream Islam, as practiced in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Malaysia, Afghanistan and Pakistan and preached in over 90% of mosques in the West, is perverted, false and wrong. Meanwhile, the mainstream Muslim leadership, who preach in those mosques, label Muslim reformers misguided perverts and apostates.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser is a social conservative, married with children. He served in the American Navy as a surgeon. He currently specializes in internal medicine and nuclear cardiology. He has been a staff internist to members of Congress and Supreme Court justices and also President of the Arizona Medical Association. He is the author of *A Battle for the Soul of Islam*, a filmmaker, and founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy. Since 9/11, he has given numerous interviews which have helped cement his reputation as a leading Muslim reformer.

Irshad Manji began her career as a speech writer in the early 1990s for Audrey McLaughlin, leader of the Canadian NDP party. She is the founder of the Moral Courage Project. She assists major corporations

and institutions, private and public, to instill in the workplace a sense of moral courage to speak out against social injustice and to actively promote equity and inclusion. She has authored several books: *Allah, Liberty and Love*; *The Trouble with Islam*; and *Don't Label Me*. Professor Manji has given lectures and interviews throughout the world. She is a social progressive who identifies as a lesbian Muslim. From 2008 to 2015 she was a professor at NYU. Since 2015, she has been teaching at USC in California.

Many champion the Muslim reform movement in the hopes that it will succeed in bringing Islam “into the 21st century” to live in peace and harmony with Western civilization, including the LGBTQ+ community. Others deride the leaders of the Muslim reform movement as well-meaning individuals spinning a fantasy that benefits them enormously by affording them the means to live in ivory towers and ignore certain realities. These skeptics say that living in towers puts the reformers safely above the many consequences of their attempted reform that affect people living closer to the pavement.

Jerk on the Subway

I am one of those people who live close to the pavement. Between 2010 and 2015, I was in jail for a total of three years for misdemeanors relating to Islam, such as “hate crimes,” “causing disturbances,” “breaching bail,” “mischief,” and “harassment.” One of the crimes I committed during my five-year crime spree took place on a Toronto subway car. I spoke to a Muslim man who had engaged me in interfaith bridge-building dialogue. As he was leaving, he repeated the perfunctory, “I am glad we had this conversation and it was good to meet you.”

I responded, “Not nice to meet you and I hate Islam and Muslims.” This could be considered not a “nice” thing to say. Some will interpret this as me simply being an ass. But that would be incorrect. At the time, I was of the opinion that asserting “Western” values such as freedom of association and free speech was paramount. But to be so publicly rude! People on the subway who heard this were in shock. As the trial judge remarked, “You could hear a collective gasp.” For some strange reason, Canadians are profusely polite, acquiescent and apologetic.

Several times in a line for coffee, I’ve bumped into someone who then apologized. With a smile, I asked, “Why are you apologizing when it was I who bumped into you?”

With a perplexed expression: “I don’t know why. Habit I guess.”

In another incident, I was walking out of a locker room and ended up in front of a newly arrived 40-year-old man from Africa. As he and I stepped aside, he apologized. I asked him, “What are you apologizing for?” We had a twenty minute conversation. His understanding was that “apologizing is the Canadian way.”

The final reason: I was on a city bus having a cell phone conversation about Prophet Mohammad *PBUH* and his child bride. A man sitting several seats in front of me kept turning around. We were both getting off at Sheppard and Bathurst. He was a bit younger than I and similar in size. On the sidewalk, I approached. I was very aware of his legs and hands. I asked why he kept looking at me.

He looked into my eyes. “Are you not afraid?”

“Afraid of what?”

“The police.”

I offered to buy him a coffee.

He was a Christian Copt who had only been in Canada for six months. He told me that speaking about Mohammad on a bus in Egypt would get me killed by a mob. If I was lucky, I'd be arrested, tortured and ten years later freed. I explained that in Western civilization we have a right to speak our mind about any subject, including Islam or Prophet Mohammad *PBUH*. He said he would be too afraid to criticize or raise any question about Islam, especially in public. I felt sad that this simple humble Christian man in Canada was living under the fear of Islamic rule and the Muslim mob.

The other reason for my comment on the subway was that I wanted to “stir the pot.” I prefer not to go along to get along.

Making the Best of Being in Jail

Since when is being a shit disturber a crime? In Canada in 2015, I was convicted and sentenced to five months for mischief, five months for causing disturbance and ten months for breaching probation. “Keep the peace and be of good behavior” – a total of twenty months’ imprisonment. The judge made sure everyone got the message. He made the three sentences consecutive. Violent gun-toting bank robbers who are sentenced to four years for each of ten bank jobs serve them concurrently. That is a total of four years, not forty.

Originally the Crown was seeking AGO consent to lay a hate crime charge, but had to settle for a lesser pound of flesh named “cause disturbance.” The disturbance was using language such as “I hate Islam” that disturbed the sensitivities of the passengers, three of

whom the prosecutor pointed out were young women wearing the hijab.

One of the biggest challenges in jail is boredom. I had, in the past, tried reading the Quran but found it a boring torture, if there can be such a thing as a boring torture. Other than playing chess, cards and walking in a circle, there is not much to do in jail. So, on a previous stint in the Toronto South Detention Centre (I was there for distributing insulting fliers about Muslims in 2013), I obtained a Quran. This particular Quran was translated by Abdul Yusuf Ali in Lahore, Pakistan in 1948, and was approved by the education ministry of Saudi Arabia. Today, most Qurans, particularly the ones used in schools or by interfaith bridge-building organizations, have softened the language. One Quran introduction stated that they substituted the word “torture” for the word “punish” because “punish” implies meting out a deserved and necessary disciplinary action, whereas “torture” implies inflicting pain on the innocent.

I read this Quran for three to four hours almost every day for eight months. On weekends, the Toronto South Detention Center was in lockdown. I read and copied the Quran for eight to ten hours on those days. I copied the Quran verses with a golf pencil. In prison, a pen or full-sized pencil can be used as a weapon. They are prohibited, as are plastic forks and knives. One jail that I was in briefly, Penetang in Penetanguishene, gave out orange-colored soft rubber spoons. The first time I used one, I thought I was hallucinating.

I lengthened the golf pencil with paper using toothpaste as glue. Then I copied the verses that are or could be considered violent or insidious. I went through the Quran this way three times from

beginning to end. Each time, I filled thirty pages on both sides. I discovered that when you carefully and neatly write something out, it gets etched into your mind.

I Was Like Bambi

Many have asked why I have dedicated my life to this cause. It began in 2003. After my bi-weekly hockey game at the downtown Toronto YMCA, I would take a sauna and shower, and usually leave by 11:30 pm. The only restaurant open nearby at that hour was on Parliament Street just south of Dundas on the west side. I did not realize that this establishment catered to local Muslim taxi drivers.

One night, I was in the restaurant chatting with a couple of guys about something or other. Many might need reminding that in 2002, the Ontario provincial Liberals of Dalton McGuinty were considering instituting Shari'ah family courts. It was a big political story at the time. I blurted out as a joke – or so I thought – “But no one really wants Shari'ah to come to Canada.”

One of them replied, “All Muslims want to live under Shari'ah.”

Another added, “Shari'ah is the law of God. It is the duty of Muslims to bring Shari'ah law to Canada.”

I replied, “Come on, guys. You're making a joke. Right?”

The mood in the small dining room changed. These men, who moments ago had been affable and jovial, became somber, almost menacing. One said, “We do not joke about the law of Allah.”

I smiled nervously and said, “Okay then.” There was no more chit chat.

The next morning, I woke with the same feeling I had gone to bed with. It was worry, perhaps more like foreboding. It kept running in my mind: “Do Muslims really want to turn Canada into a Muslim country? “

My Montreal days in the mid nineties came flooding back. I was receiving chain emails about the brutal plight of women in Afghanistan. Those were the days of dial-up. It was slow and annoying. But I could not remove myself from the chain. I was conflicted with guilt. Here I was living my easy life in Canada while these women were being tortured and I could do nothing. So I put it out of my mind.

Having a Mental Breakdown

I, like most Canadians, did not spend time thinking about Islam or Muslims. That changed in a big way after this restaurant incident in the winter of 2003. Since then, I have had an interest in Islam bordering on obsession.

Looking back, I see I went overboard. “Off the deep end,” as they say. Was I using this to compensate for some shortcomings in my life? Sometimes I wonder about that. We all have multiple motives for what we do. That’s for a future self-help book.

In the years leading to my crime spree, I radicalized myself. I’d been watching YouTube videos of Imams preaching about how Islam will take over and destroy Western civilization. They said their main weapon was demographics. Imams openly boasted that Muslim women typically have five babies – European women have less than two. “We will replace them.” Imam Karim AbuZaid says that demographers predict that by 2050, Islam will be the majority

religion in France. Driven further, I read anti-Islam books: Brigitte Gabriel's *Because They Hat*; Ibn Warraq's *Why I Am Not a Muslim*; Paul Sperry's *Muslim Mafia*; Tarek Fatah's *Chasing a Mirage*; Wafa Sultan's *A God Who Hates* and *They Call Me Infidel* and *The Devil We Don't Know* by Nonie Darwish.

Then the world erupted. In 2012, a Christian Copt in California named Sam Bacile expressing his art and opinions - made a 14-minute movie about Islam and the Prophet Mohammad PBUH that portrayed the Prophet in a less than flattering light. He called the film "Innocence of Muslims" and posted it on YouTube. Muslims the world over began calling for his death. Muslims in Egypt, Kenya, and Sudan attacked Western embassies. Muslims protested and rioted in Western capitals.

Did the West finally take a stand and categorically defend Western civilization and its non-negotiable value of free speech? NO! This was driving me out of my mind. I was constantly talking to everyone. "People, are you blind? Don't you see what is happening? We are losing our civilization."

The response was, "Eric, you need to relax," or, "Eric, you need psychiatric help." Then a spike was driven into my heart. Hillary Clinton, then America's Secretary of State, made an official announcement:

We absolutely reject this content and message... To us and to me personally, this video is disgusting and reprehensible. It appears to have a deeply cynical purpose to denigrate a great religion and provoke rage.

Islamophobe on Fire

I went into full kamikaze mode. With the help of a graphic designer, I made the most offensive fliers I could. One side had a cartoon of a pregnant Muslima wearing a full burka. Her hands over her belly were skeletal, and the caption read: “The other Islamic bomb. *‘They are here & breeding. Kill them wherever you find them. 9:5’*” On the other side was a depiction of Mohammad with his nine-year-old wife; a man wearing a turban defecating on blank paper: *“Mohammad Writes the Quran.”*

I handed these fliers out in downtown Toronto’s Dundas Square, at mosques, and at Ryerson Campus. I was calling out, “Mohammad was a pedophile; Islam is a satanic religion. I am an artist; this flier is my art.” About a week later, I was in handcuffs. So began my journey into the dark criminal world of hate crimes. The Crown did not get AGO consent for “incitement to commit genocide” so I was charged with your garden variety “willful promotion of hate,” as well as “incitement to hate.” I was released from jail eleven months later, time served. I was serving the last three weeks of a probation order during the subway incident I described above.

Back to the ten-month sentence for breach. Breaching probation is usually fifteen days to one month. I appealed the sentence. At this point I had served twelve of my twenty months. The High Court Crown agreed to bail, pending the appeal.

Three months later, Friday November 13, 2015, France was attacked. Muslim terrorists blew themselves up in the packed Bataclan Football Stadium in Paris, then roamed the city, shooting at random. Five hundred were shot, 140 killed.

That night, I went to Dundas Square. After two hours of raging and howling and debating, and being punched and kicked by the mob, I was in handcuffs again.

A witness told the police that I said, "I want a gun to shoot and kill all Muslims." I was charged with breach of bail and cause disturbance. The AGO soon gave consent to charge me with incitement to commit genocide.

After ten months, we finally had the preliminary hearing. A prelim takes place only for indictable offences. A judge hears witness testimony and views all the evidence. All this is done under cross examination by the defense lawyer. The judge then rules whether to dismiss or commit to trial.

The judge said, "It seems to me that the Crown is 'shoe-horning' Mr. Brazau into a crime. I find the witness very unreliable." He went on to explain that a preliminary judge cannot base his decision on the credibility of the witness, and that other than this one witness, the Crown had no case. In his opinion, the judge stated, "This case has no merit." However, because of this one witness, he had to refer the case to trial.

Wind on My Face

In ten months, I had been denied bail three times. This judge gave me hope. Five days later, I appeared before him. Two hours after he heard the arguments, I was summoned from the basement dungeon of Toronto Old City Hall. As he started to go through his decision, my heart began to sink. My lawyer gave me a look. The judge went through all the reasons why he should deny me bail. I was feeling

despondent. But then he gave the reasons why he should grant me bail. I willed myself not to hope. And then it happened; he granted me bail. The Crown, which was personally invested in this case, was very upset.

Three weeks later, my lawyer told me the presiding Superior judge wanted this case to go away. He suggested the Crown come to a resolution, a deal.

Oddly, the Crown told my lawyer that if I did not take the deal – time served – and opted for trial, she would bring a motion to revoke my bail on the grounds that the preliminary judge had made an error, and that I was a danger to public safety and should be incarcerated... So if I pled guilty, I would not go back to jail, but if I took it to trial to prove my innocence, I would become a danger to society and the Crown would attempt to pull my bail.

The thought of going back to jail for another six months until trial... In February 2017, I pled guilty to breach of bail and cause disturbance. The judge sentenced me to ten months' time served plus one day. I was taken into custody and strip searched. I waited in a bull pen for six hours. I was then driven to the Toronto East Detention Center, processed, then released I continued to engage in certain anti-Islam activities, but I was very careful to stay far away from crossing any lines. In 2018, however, my life took a drastic turn.

On July 22, in a place known as Greektown on the Danforth, a Muslim man shot fifteen females, killing two of them. A feature of Greektown is the Alexander the Great parquet, which is similar to a European plaza. It has an ornate water fountain and a statue of Alexander the Great, and is bordered by an ice cream store, a café

and a souvlaki shop. In the immediate vicinity are 25 restaurants with sidewalk patios. Most girls wear flowing summer dresses. Ten-year-old Juliana Kozis came with her family to eat ice cream. She was killed, as was 18-year-old Reese Fallon. Another woman was left a paraplegic.

It was obvious to me that this was an Islamic jihadist attack. The shooter took a bus from his 90% Muslim neighborhood, Thorncliff Park, to a 90% white Christian neighbourhood that is surrounded by five churches.

Within twelve hours of the shooting, the media was promoting the narrative that the shooter was suffering from “mental health issues.” This mental health theory came from a highly polished press release put out by Mohammed Hashim, who is known in Canada as the preeminent Muslim media relations specialist. The mental health narrative was solidified by many interviews with the shooter’s parents.

Accidental Baptism

Within 24 hours, Toronto police announced that the shooting was not terror related. How could they know this so quickly? It seemed this was a political announcement to quell the anti-Islam sentiment that was beginning to grow. The anti-Islam sentiment became especially rampant when it was revealed that the mosque the shooter attended in Thorncliff Park had recited verses and prayers about killing Jews and Christians.¹ Many people suspected that the police had quickly

¹ <https://news.acdemocracy.org/thorncliffe-mosques-supplication-slay-them-one-by-one/>

suppressed this statement to maintain public order and inter-religious cohesion.

The Alexander parquet became a makeshift memorial. Over the next five days, it was packed with people. The mainstream media was in constant attendance. On the ledge of the fountain people placed pictures of the girls, flowers and stuffed animals, and messages about peace and love. Some messages called for sympathy for the shooter and his family. In attendance from day one was a group of twenty or so Ahmadiyya Muslims, who wore matching blue T-shirts and carried large signs that read *“Love for all – Hate for None.”* I decided to attend holding a sign that brought attention to the Islamic element that for some mysterious reason was being ignored. People did not like my sign. “You are not welcome here,” they were yelling. A scuffle ensued and I was pushed into the fountain. The crowd applauded and laughed. The police, who saw the incident, told me that if I did not leave the vicinity, I would be arrested. I asked why the man that had pushed me into the fountain was not being arrested. They said if I insisted on pressing charges against him, they would press charges against me for causing a disturbance. I was still on probation and would definitely have been made to appear the next morning in bail court. So I left.

The next day, the media from Europe to the Middle East was buzzing with this story. One media outlet had captured a picture of me in the fountain on my back still holding my sign, which read *“CBC Presents Little Mosque on the Prairie/Two Dead Girls in Greek Town.”* Ninety percent of the comments supported and even advocated for violence against insensitive, boorish people like me.

I had thought free expression was a non-negotiable pillar of Western civilization. But no civil rights group came to my defense. I am not saying they should have defended my statement, but they should have defended my right to make a statement. I was very confused and deeply saddened by this reaction. Was I losing my sanity, or was the population going insane? After a few moments of doubt, I concluded it was they and not me who were insane. If we do not have absolute freedom to express our thoughts, we are not a free people. Why did Canadians sacrifice their lives in WW1, WW2 and Korea to defeat communism and fascism, if not to defend our way of life? It crept into my mind that maybe they were not insane, but cowards.

The next day, I was alerted to a tweet by NCCM (National Council of Canadian Muslims):

Violence is not the answer. Islam forbids vigilante justice. This man's views, while repugnant, are permissible in a free democratic country that values free speech.

Hum?? The Canadian Civil Liberties Association had not issued any statement. But a Canadian Muslim organization was defending the rights of Eric Brazau, notorious Islamophobe and convicted hatemonger? I, as well as others on the right, associated NCCM with CAIR in America, an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trial.² Was I wrong about NCCM? Was I wrong about Islam? At least, was I wrong about the Islam in Canada? I pride myself on my ability to think rationally and critically. I am a harsh critic of those who do not.

² <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2008/november/hlf112508>

That fountain was my baptism, my rebirth. I erased from my mind everything I thought I knew about Islam.

From that time on, I dedicated myself to learning what North American Imams, scholars and literature are teaching about Islam. No longer would I learn about Islam from “radical” Imams in Iran or Saudi Arabia. That included my understanding of the Quran.

This book is my effort to make amends for my past indiscretion, or as some will say, foolish, harmful behaviour. I highlight and juxtapose the voices of the two sides of the Islam debate in an effort to understand and appreciate how these voices – reformer and mainstream fundamentalist – are contributing to the cultural enrichment of Western civilization.

This book will help Christians, Jews, agnostics and atheists sitting at interfaith bridge-building tables gain a contextualized understanding of the richly conceptualized tapestry that underpins the ethos of Islam.

This book will also be of immense value to people suffering from Islamophobia. How? After reading this book, they will more likely accept the reality that there are strong, definitive leading Muslim voices that clearly state not what Islam could be but what it is. It will also help them understand the motives of those who are “perverting” the *true* message of Prophet Mohammad *PBUH*. Finally, those who advocate increasing support for the Muslim community now have access to vital insider knowledge that will clarify their understanding.

A wise man once said,
what people do not want to talk about,
for that reason alone, is what we must talk about.