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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Parts of this work have been published as follows: 'Representing Islam at the Edinburgh International Book Festival', in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*, ed. Peter Hopkins (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 236-258; and 'Twelver Shia in Edinburgh: Marking Muharram, Mourning Husayn', *Contemporary Islam* (December 2018), 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0432-z>

Signed

Fayaz S Alibhai, 14 February 2019

**People, Places and Texts:
Re/presenting Islam in Edinburgh, Scotland**

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PhD Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

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Abstract and Lay Summary

Of Britain's 2.8 million Muslims, nearly two-thirds originate from South Asia, primarily Pakistan and Bangladesh, with the remainder from North Africa, East Europe and South East Asia. Much of the scholarship on Muslims in Britain tends, however, to be limited to Muslims in England, typically about Pakistanis, and focusing on cities such as London, Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham and Manchester. Within the field, the literature encompasses all manner of disciplines, tackling the obvious – gender, media representations, political participation, and Islamophobia – and the less common – architecture, conversion, and healthcare. A small number of studies have also examined the experiences of particular groups and communities such as Arabs, Iranians, Somalis, Turks, and Yemenis. Despite these developments, there remains a dearth of scholarship on three intersecting fronts: denominational, geographic, and thematic. Indeed, research on the Shi'a, Scotland, and Muslim spaces of worship and gathering in the West other than the mosque, continues to be under-represented in the field of Muslims in Britain. Additionally, the role that Muslims play in creating and contributing to the wider social, cultural and intellectual capital of the communities and societies within which they live, particularly in Western contexts, is often ignored.

With just under 77,000 Muslims in Scotland, this thesis examines the people, places and texts beyond the mosque which re/present Islam in the festival and

capital city of Edinburgh, home to about 12,400 Muslims. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2011-2013 and encompassing participant-observation, and visual and textual analysis from a variety of primary sources, the thesis additionally melds elements from human geography and Islamic studies. Through four case studies, it analyses, in turn, how Islam and Muslims generally are re/presented in Scotland as well as how Muslims in Scotland specifically re/present Islam and themselves. Across the people, places, and texts encapsulated by the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, two large-scale Sunni conferences and a smaller Shi'i ritual procession, the thesis explores several inter-related themes – the concept of space, notions of praxis, leadership and authority, the role of women, and the production of knowledge as a function of cultural endeavour. In so doing, the thesis provides an *auditorium* for fresh and 'thickly descriptive' new voices from an ethnography 'at home' for Islam in Scotland, and which underscores the importance of culture and cultural production. The public performance of Islam in this context includes and re/presents insiders as well as outsiders – to other insiders and outsiders, and from platforms and perspectives which have not previously been considered in the literature, and/or whose reach does not rely on long-standing traditional, institutional, or organisational foundations to be heard or considered seriously. As such, this research aims to contribute to and expand existing research on Muslims in Britain, and specifically Scotland, highlighting crosscutting themes insofar as notions of 'self' and 'other' re/presentations of

Islam bear upon other studies in the field vis-à-vis identity, praxis, gender, education, and authority.

To My Beloved Breeze, whose dizzying, heady fragrance

wafted in to my life one late summer day

(And to Mamaan Tahereh, who will be delighted to have her trolley back.

And to my mother: Phinally. Done.)

"It took me a while because I took some breaks."

Colette Bourlier in March 2016, awarded a PhD in geography, aged 90,

on why it took her 30 years to complete her thesis

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List of Abbreviations

EI2 – *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.* Ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth,

E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs

EIBF – Edinburgh International Book Festival

EIBF 2012 – Edinburgh International Book Festival: 11-27 August 2012. The World,

in Words. Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd, 2012.

EIBF 2013 – 08.2013 Edinburgh International Book Festival: Celebrating 30 Years.

Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd, 2013.

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Note on Transliteration

Transliteration and style in this thesis follows the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) and *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed., with minor modifications. Technical terms in Arabic and Persian are fully diacriticised, except for variations in direct quotes or where such terms have passed into common usage. ‘Ayns and hamzas, however, have generally been retained (e.g. Qur’an). Terms in Urdu follow transliterations used by the community and are generally not diacriticised (e.g. *jaloos*), with minor exceptions for cognate use to maintain consistency with Arabic and/or Persian.

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Introduction

For well over 1400 years, Muslims have represented a rich diversity of geographies, cultures and languages. Unsurprisingly, these differences have informed and continue to influence their multiple understandings and interpretations of Islam. Indeed, over the course of their long and varied histories, Muslims themselves have disagreed – often vehemently – with each other on competing concepts of leadership and authority, and various aspects of law, ritual, and expressions of piety. And yet in the popular Western imagination today, Muslims reside frequently as a homogeneous and monolithic mass of intransigent, self-segregating and threatening people.¹ Even neutral or positive representations are often exemplified by the use of the term ‘Muslim community’. This singular form is arguably congruent with the common, modern translation of ‘ummah’ to ‘express the essential unity of Muslims in diverse cultural settings’,² or ‘the Muslim community as a whole while admitting of regional, especially non-political expressions.’³ In practice, however, this translation tends to ignore its varied usage in the Qur’an and its historical development. As such, it not only

¹ See Karim H. Karim, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Black Rose Books, 2003); Julian Petley, and Robin Richardson, *Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2011); Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: IB Tauris, 2002); and for Australia, Nahid Kabir, “Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2006).

² Ahmad S. Dalal, Yoginder Sikand, and Abdul Rashid Moten, “Ummah.” *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, n.d., www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0818, accessed 2 January, 2019.

³ F. M. Denny, “Umma.” *EI2*, 2012, http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1291, accessed 2 January, 2019.

erases the aforementioned differences amongst Muslims, but also inadvertently reinforces stereotypes of a single undifferentiated religious body.

Certainly, ever since the events of 9/11 and subsequent attacks in Madrid, London and Mumbai, it has become increasingly difficult for discourse on Islam and Muslims to be 'analytically discriminating' because '[t]hese events have become iconic tropes that organise much of the debate about Muslim identities.'⁴ As Archer points out, where individual Muslims are solicited for their views, these are tightly circumscribed and inevitably framed as the general Muslim position for or against the issue in question.⁵ Set against the backdrop of an evermore secularised environment, and yes, that old chestnut, a media hungry for headlines, such recourse to essentialist views is perhaps unsurprising when speaking about religious groups. Indeed, as Siddiqui observes, they are often '... judged on a single issue, such as terrorism, clerical sex abuse or the ordination of women.'⁶

Such essentialism is compounded by a wider problem of religious illiteracy, 'the inability to conceive of religion as a cultural phenomenon intricately embedded in complex cultural matrixes', such that people are 'unable to appreciate the significant role that factors such as poverty, social status, gender,

⁴ Peter Hopkins, and Richard Gale, eds. *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 2.

⁵ Louise Archer, "Race, 'Face' and Masculinity: The Identities and Local Geographies of Muslim Boys," in *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, ed. Peter Hopkins, and Richard Gale (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 74-91.

⁶ Mona Siddiqui, "Islamic Scholar Mona Siddiqui Offers a New Form of Inter-Religious Dialogue." *Rome Reports*, 6 June 2010, www.romereports.com/palio/Islamic-scholar-offers-a-new-form-of-inter-religious-dialogue-english-2226.html, accessed 1 March, 2012.

and political ideologies can play in shaping what are overtly perceived as purely religious expressions.⁷ Religious illiteracy can be manifested in two ways – ‘the tendency to associate a religion solely with its devotional practices, such as rites, rituals, and religious festivals’ as well as ‘the propensity to attribute the actions of individuals, communities, and nations exclusively to religion.’⁸ In the case of Islam,

it results in the perception that the faith is chiefly responsible for all the actions of anyone who is a Muslim. It also leads to the assumption that everything that happens in a predominantly Muslim country can be attributed to religion. Thus many people commonly assume that Islam is the principal cause of a variety of ills that plague some Muslim majority countries, such as the lack of democracy, economic underdevelopment, unjust treatment, and marginalization of women.⁹

It is important to note, however, that Muslims themselves are not necessarily immune to this intertwined trio of ills – dismissing or discounting differences amongst themselves, taking essentialist positions, and being oblivious to the challenges of religious illiteracy. Together, they form the touchstones for how Islam is defined and understood by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Written against the backdrop of these broad points of reference, and in the relatively understudied context of Scotland, the central research question of this thesis is: How are Islam and Muslims re/presented in Edinburgh, particularly in the arena of culture and cultural production?

⁷ Ali S. Asani, “Enhancing Religious Literacy in a Liberal Arts Education Through the Study of Islam and Muslim Societies,” in *The Harvard Sampler: Liberal Education for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jennifer M. Shephard, Stephen M. Kosslyn, and Evelyn M. Hammonds (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1. See also the ‘secular incomprehension’ discussed by Dennis Sewell, *Catholics: Britain’s Largest Minority* (London: Viking, 2001).

⁸ Asani, 4.

⁹ Asani, 4.

This introduction begins with a survey of the field of Muslims in Britain before highlighting the research on Muslims in Scotland. In this context, it further examines the importance of Edinburgh for a study of the re/presentation of Islam. Edinburgh has largely been neglected not only in the literature of the field but also in its status as a Festival City. The introduction then signposts the four core chapters of the thesis followed by a section on fieldwork, sources, and methods. It then goes on to discuss the dynamics of public space, the notion of spatial practice, and what constitutes 'Islam' before concluding.

Muslims in Britain

Britain has a long history of diverse Muslim immigration and settlement, in large part because of its imperial history and geography.¹⁰ Although generations of Muslim immigrants have arrived in the country to avail themselves of the opportunity to improve the safety and quality of their lives, this migration has not been without its challenges.¹¹ Chief among these has been the threat of a rupture, over time, between their own value systems and that of the West. How these various Muslim groups have drawn upon their faith and transmitted its ethics to a new generation, and simultaneously engaged with all that is best in their new environment and encounters here, is an important aspect of the study of Muslims in Britain.

¹⁰ Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd, 2004), 24.

¹¹ See, for example, Bashir Maan, *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992); Yasmin Alibhai Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000); and Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain Since 1800*.

Of the country's 2.8 million Muslims,¹² nearly two-thirds originate from South Asia, primarily Pakistan and Bangladesh, with the remainder from North Africa, East Europe and South East Asia.¹³ Much of the scholarship on Muslims in Britain tends to be about Muslims in England, typically about Pakistanis, and focussing on cities such as London, Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham and Manchester. Where the spotlight has fallen on this majority and their urban settlements in England, different aspects of their identity – religious, social, and political – often take centre stage, particularly as they relate to concepts of citizenship and loyalty to the nation state. In this regard, Muslims have had 'to bear disproportionately the burdens of nationhood'¹⁴ at a time, ironically, when wider 'national sentiment is eroded by commodification, devolution, relations with Europe, cultural diversity, globalisation, even by a collective failure of the imagination'.¹⁵ But the literature has also encompassed all manner of other disciplines, tackling the obvious – gender, media representations, political participation, Islamophobia – and the rather more subtle – architecture, conversion, and healthcare.¹⁶ And while there

¹² Census 2011. See also Bailey, "Pakistanis in Scotland: Census Data and Research Issues"; Khadijah Elshayyal, *Scottish Muslims in Numbers: Understanding Scotland's Muslim Population Through the 2011 Census* (Edinburgh: The Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, 2016). too.

¹³ Tahir Abbas, ed. *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 17.

¹⁴ Yahya Birt, "Islamic Citizenship in Britain After 7/7: Tackling Extremism and Preserving Freedoms," in *The State We Are in: Identity, Terror and the Law of Jihad*, ed. Aftab Ahmad Malik, and Tahir Abbas (Bristol: Amal Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁵ Birt, 9.

¹⁶ See, for example, Justin Gest, *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West* (London: Hurst, 2010); Richard Gale, "Representing the City: Mosques and the Planning Process in Birmingham," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 6 (2005); K. Humayun Ansari, "The Working Mosque: A Case Study of Muslim Engagement With British Society Since 1889," *Immigrants & Minorities* 21, no. 3 (2002).

are also detailed studies of particular groups and communities like the Arabs, Turks, Yemenis, and Iranians,¹⁷ the full diversity of Muslim communities in Britain and their engagement with one another remains largely unexplored.¹⁸

Muslims in Scotland

Far less scholarship on Muslims in Britain has, however, centred on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a reflection of the fact that the vast majority of Muslims (95.5 per cent), live in England, followed by Scotland (2.8 percent), Wales (1.6 percent) and Northern Ireland (0.1 percent).¹⁹ Kabir's study is a recent notable exception for including Cardiff as well as a remarkable diversity of Muslim ethnic and national groups.²⁰ With regard to the island of Ireland, while Scharbrodt et al. discuss the historical presence of Muslims in the whole island during British rule, the focus switches exclusively to the Republic of Ireland after its independence in 1922. Where Scotland is mentioned in the field, this is only in passing. Where there is a somewhat fuller treatment, it is Glasgow that gets the bulk of this attention, complemented by many more shorter studies and journal articles on

¹⁷ See, for example, F Halliday, *Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (London: 1992); R. I. Lawless, *Ta'izz to Tyneside, an Arab Community in the North-East of England during the Early Twentieth Century* (Exeter: 1995); Caroline Nagel, and Lynn Staeheli, "British Arab Perspectives on Religion, Politics and 'the Public,'" in *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, ed. Peter Hopkins, and Richard Gale (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); and Reza Gholami, *Secularism and Identity: Non-Islamiosity in the Iranian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸ Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2014) is a welcome work for delving into the ideological differences between a variety of influential Muslim groups in Britain.

¹⁹ Elshayyal, *Scottish Muslims in Numbers: Understanding Scotland's Muslim Population Through the 2011 Census*, 14.

²⁰ Kabir, "Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001-2005."

Glaswegian Muslims, and which outstrip those on Edinburgh by far.²¹ A notable exception of an academic book-length study of Muslims in Edinburgh is Wardak, prior to the events of 9/11.²² And again for both Scottish cities, the subjects are overwhelmingly of South Asian, and specifically of Pakistani national origin and background.

A 2011 report by Scottish Government Social Research highlighted this dearth of research into the experiences of Muslims in Scotland, and particularly 'research that considers the diversity both within and across Muslim communities.'²³ Indeed, even as the *Experiences of Muslims Living in Scotland* report acknowledges the need to extend the research on Muslims in Scotland to other groups and communities, it simultaneously admits to not being able to do this itself in examining issues of identity, religious intolerance and racism against Muslims in Scotland.²⁴ This is all the more surprising given that there are acknowledged differences in the literature vis-à-vis identity and belonging

²¹ For a breakdown demonstrating the lower representation of Edinburgh compared with Glasgow, see Sara Kidd, and Lynn Jamieson, *Experiences of Muslims Living in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research/Crown Copyright, 2011), Appendix E. Asifa M. Hussain, and William L. Miller, *Multicultural Nationalism: Islamophobia, Anglophobia, and Devolution: Islamophobia, Anglophobia, and Devolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) engage in a wider study of Scottish Pakistanis, although not of Muslims per se.

²² Ali Wardak, *Social Control and Deviance: A South Asian Community in Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

²³ Kidd, and Jamieson, *Experiences of Muslims Living in Scotland*, vi.

²⁴ Kidd, and Jamieson, 7.

between the two national contexts of England and Scotland.²⁵ Hopkins' numerous studies are the most salient in the context of Scotland, the bulk of which are based on interview data collected between 2002 and 2003.²⁶

There is a general perception that Scotland is more tolerant than England, but the reality on the ground is more complex. Firstly, the relatively smaller numbers of minority communities in the equation has, as Hopkins notes, 'often led to suggestions that racism is not a Scottish problem.'²⁷ Other factors that have contributed to this perception include the glossing over of fundamental differences relating to migration and labour patterns between the Scottish and English contexts,²⁸ as well as a long-standing focus on Catholic-Protestant relations, which 'displaced the racisms at the centre of English political affairs from Scottish affairs, producing what is now recognized as unwarranted complacency among Scottish decision-takers.'²⁹ Despite these important distinctions 'in Scotland as in England there is an all-too familiar catalogue of insults, assaults, damage and harm, effected through both personal racism and political

²⁵ See, for example, Hussain, and Miller, *Multicultural Nationalism*; Peter Hopkins, and Susan J Smith, "Scaling Segregation: Racialising Fear," in *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*, ed. Rachel Pain, and Susan J Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 103-116; and Bashir Maan, *The Thistle and the Crescent* (Glendaruel: Argyll, 2008).

²⁶ Including Peter Hopkins, "Responding to the 'Crisis of Masculinity': The Perspectives of Young Muslim Men From Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland," *Gender, Place and Culture* 16, no. 3 (2009), 299-312.

²⁷ Peter Hopkins, "'Blue Squares', 'Proper' Muslims and Transnational Networks: Narratives of National and Religious Identities Amongst Young Muslim Men Living in Scotland," *Ethnicities* 7, no. 1 (2007), 64.

²⁸ See Hopkins, 'Blue Squares', 64; and Peter Hopkins, "Introduction," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*, ed. Peter Hopkins (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 11.

²⁹ Hopkins and Smith, 105.

extremism, undermining health, welfare and wellbeing, and contributing to the separation and segregation of social life.³⁰

According to the 2001 Census, there were just under 42,600 Muslims in Scotland.³¹ Maan states, however, that this was inaccurate not only because many Muslims did not fill in the relevant religion question on the Census form, but also because many forms were not completed or returned due to carelessness and a lack of proficiency in English. Consequently, he had estimated this figure to be more than 46,000.³² In the specific case of Edinburgh, the 2001 Census had just under 7,000 Muslims in the city.³³ Online fora of Muslims in Edinburgh in 2011 put this figure closer to 10,000, which was corroborated by Archambault who additionally asserts that 'at least three quarters are ethnically Pakistani.'³⁴

The Scottish Muslim population has grown considerably since 2001. Just before the 2011 Census, the estimated number of Muslims in Scotland was 75,300, most of whom lived in urban areas.³⁵ The results of the 2011 Census showed that there were just under 77,000 Muslims in Scotland, with Edinburgh home to about 12,400. This remarkable growth has been accompanied in recent years by increasing academic attention to the Scottish context. Aside from various

³⁰ Hopkins and Smith, 105. For a recent example, also see Stefano Bonino, "Visible Muslimness in Scotland: Between Discrimination and Integration." *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(4) 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1066978>, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1066978>.

³¹ Hopkins, and Gale, *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, 5.

³² Maan, *The Thistle and the Crescent*, 208.

³³ Hopkins, and Gale, *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, 8.

³⁴ Hannah Archambault, "A Community United? Going in Search of Community With Edinburgh Muslims," *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies* 23 (2007), 8.

³⁵ Kidd, and Jamieson, *Experiences of Muslims Living in Scotland*, 1.

journal articles and book chapters, this is exemplified in the last two to three years by the publication of the following: a monograph by Stefano Bonino, a demographic analysis by Khadija Elshayyal based on the 2011 Scottish census, and a new generation of scholarship as showcased by the contributors to a volume on Muslims in Scotland edited by Peter Hopkins.³⁶ Together with a number of unpublished doctoral dissertations, these studies engage with citizenship, education, health, identity, integration, media, representation, and sexuality.

While quantitative data is important because it invariably sparks assertions about justice, equality, representation and other kinds of needs that are tied to state services, qualitative data has an equally important role in contextualising the day-to-day experiences of the groups under study. On the one, quantitative hand, for example, the national and linguistic origins of Muslims in Scotland may be derived and extrapolated from the Census data, as can their socio-economic backgrounds.³⁷ As Elshayyal observes, Muslims in Scotland reside 'even in the most remote of Scottish regions',³⁸ bucking the wider UK trend, especially in the north of England. This distribution therefore challenges the perception of self-segregation. Elshayyal's report further discusses features of Scotland's Muslims

³⁶ Stefano Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland: The Making of Community in a Post 9/11 World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Elshayyal, *Scottish Muslims in Numbers: Understanding Scotland's Muslim Population Through the 2011 Census*; and Peter Hopkins, ed. *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

³⁷ See, for example, Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, 24-35.

³⁸ Elshayyal, *Scottish Muslims in Numbers: Understanding Scotland's Muslim Population Through the 2011 Census*, 17.

such as 'an increasingly highly educated population, high student numbers, lower unemployment figures than those for England and Wales, and a more independent employment profile'.³⁹ On the other, qualitative hand, however, such census data cannot reveal the experience of the migratory histories, literary and legal traditions, and 'communities of interpretation'⁴⁰ of Muslims in Scotland. In this regard, significant research on the Shi'a, Sufis, as well as on converts in Scotland is practically non-existent. As such, what might otherwise be fruitful and important arenas of research on the organisation of these individual communities of interpretation and the structures of their leadership and authority are also seriously lacking. Scotland's Shi'a, for example, comprise not only the Ithna'ashari (or Twelver) Shi'a but also the Ismaili Shi'a as well as the Alawi and Alevi communities, all of whom remain neglected in, if not invisible to, the field.

Equally, spaces of worship and gathering other than the mosque, and as additional arenas for religious, civic, social, commercial, leisure, cultural and intellectual activity remain invisible to the field. Indeed, throughout their history, wherever they have lived and settled, Muslims have always come together in a variety of public religious and non-religious spaces. In the religious sphere, *masjids* (mosques) are invariably the best known and most studied. As that most iconic of symbols in and of Islam, mosques might appear an obvious starting point, if not the primary site to conduct any number of studies on Muslims. Being the object of so much attention in the West since the Rushdie Affair and then

³⁹ Elshayyal, 34.

⁴⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978).

again 9/11, followed by 7/7,⁴¹ it is perhaps understandable that discussions about Muslims in Britain or indeed elsewhere, are limited largely to the religious sphere and specifically as represented by the mosque. But Muslims do have lives beyond the mosque.

Firstly, there exist many other spaces, sometimes independent, other times overlapping, for the ritual practices of the faith. These include *khanqahs*, *tekkes*, *zawiyas*, *ribats*, *husayniyyas*, *imambargahs* and *jamatkhanas* found across various parts of Africa, the Middle and Far East, South Asia and the West. Each of these spaces and institutions has evolved as a function of the different geographies, histories, and needs of their particular communities of interpretation and authority. Although the influence of some of these spaces and institutions has waned in their original contexts as a result of state pressure or the kind of normativity imposed on them by fundamentalist or puritan forms of Islam such as those espoused by the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, others have enjoyed a quiet resurgence or, indeed, continuity in the West.

Secondly, and in Edinburgh certainly, Muslims also gather in schools and universities, churches, libraries, individual homes, gardens, restaurants, etc. In other words, and as with all religious traditions, there have always existed spaces that are necessarily, structurally, set apart from the business of the sacred. Often, the reasons for gathering in these spaces are not circumscribed solely and

⁴¹ See, for example, Abbas, *Muslim Britain*.

explicitly by religion and religious motivations.⁴² This is not to say that Muslims become irreligious in these contexts, but rather that they are not *self-conscious* about their religious identity or perform deliberate social acts that would be considered manifestly and unnecessarily, if not oddly, pious in these contexts. The increasing use of phrases such *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, *shukran li-llāh*, and *ʾinshāʾa-llāh*, for example, is a recent marker of the need to be seen to *perform* religion where it would not usually be necessary and/or so self-conscious. Yet, in their own original contexts, these spaces provided a civic and cultural arena of social action where they were not consciously – and did not have to be – ‘Muslim’ all the time. In other words, they were free from the burden of relentless re/presentation, reflected most strikingly in ongoing calls for Muslims to speak up or out or take a stand for or against one thing or another.⁴³

Consequently, while mosques remain important sites for research and may well function as future case studies for the diversity and organisation of Muslims in

⁴² For a fascinating case study on this issue of identity, see Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁴³ See, for example, Sheila Musaji, “Muslim Voices. Part 1. Fatwas & Statements By Muslim Scholars and Organisations.” *The American Muslim*, 13 May 2015, http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim_voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_part_i_fatwas/0012209. For a more regularly updated list, see Charles Kurzman, “Islamic Statements Against Terrorism.” 1 August 2018, <http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism/>, accessed 2 January, 2019. Both resources provides links to other similar collections.

Edinburgh, they are not the focus of this thesis.⁴⁴ Because of the gaps in the research, the locus of this study on the re/presentation of Islam is fixed firmly on Edinburgh's status as a festival city and in spaces other than the mosque. Quite aside from the considerations of making a modest yet original contribution to the field, this was also a practical choice dictated by field considerations, as outlined in a later section of this chapter.

Significance

Discourses on Islam in the contemporary public sphere are often negative, exemplified by Muslims' supposed propensity to violence and terror, the politics of the veil and reactions to the representation of the Prophet Muhammad. The role that Muslims play in creating and contributing to the wider social, cultural and intellectual capital of the communities and societies within which they live, however, particularly in Western contexts, is often ignored.⁴⁵ The importance of space and the role of culture, therefore, are overarching themes of this study.

⁴⁴ In earlier work, Bonino notes the existence of eleven mosques in Edinburgh (Stefano Bonino, "Scottish Muslims Through a Decade of Change: Wounded By the Stigma, Healed By Islam, Rescued By Scotland," *Scottish Affairs* (2015); and Stefano Bonino, "Visible Muslimness in Scotland: Between Discrimination and Integration," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49, no. 4 (2015). Later, following Mehood Naqshabandi, "Muslims in Britain: Uk Mosque/ masjid Director." <http://mosques.muslimsinbritain.org/index.php>, accessed 20 June, 2016, however, he revises this to twelve, with the caveat that 'these numbers often vary as mosques open and close to cater for the needs of a changing Muslim population' and contentions as to what criteria constitute a mosque. See Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland*, 38.

⁴⁵ For an exception in the context of Scotland see, however, Omar Shaikh, and Stefano Bonino, "Feeling Scottish and Being Muslim: Findings From the Colourful Heritage Project," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*, ed. Peter Hopkins (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 171-197.

Edinburgh, Festival City

In the context of Edinburgh, nowhere is this more evident than in the establishment of the Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama in 1947. In her remarkable study of the development of Edinburgh as a festival city, Angela Bartie not only provides a historical treatment, but also contextualises and locates the festivals within a wider economic, social, and political context.⁴⁶ A work of considerable scope, it deserves to be much more widely known, illustrating how the festivals became fertile ground for Britain's 'culture wars' in the mid twentieth century.

As Bartie notes, this inaugural festival 'encapsulated many of the new values given to culture in the immediate post-war world: a means of spiritual refreshment, a way of reasserting moral values, of rebuilding relationships between nations, of shoring up European civilisation and of providing "welfare" in its broadest sense'.⁴⁷ Furthermore, not only did the festivals ignite the 'cultural explosion' of the 1960s, but 'the very landscape of the city' also shaped their continuing growth, development and experimentation.⁴⁸ Indeed, the

need for groups to improvise with different types of performance spaces due to the lack of theatres in Edinburgh helped to give the Fringe Festival its distinctive identity, influenced other theatre companies and Fringe theatre groups, and played a part in the broader shift away from traditional proscenium arch theatre spaces in Britain.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Angela Bartie, *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁴⁷ Bartie, 2.

⁴⁸ Bartie, 216.

⁴⁹ Bartie, 216.

These developments were accompanied and influenced by massive changes in ideas about culture in society, epitomised by state funding for the arts for the first time, rather than private patronage. As Bartie notes, this 'Widening access to the arts...conceived of as a means "improving" individuals, a "civilising process"...had its roots in nineteenth-century attitudes to arts and society.'⁵⁰

Beautifully capturing the atmosphere of Edinburgh as a Festival City,

Alexander McCall Smith has observed:

The growth of the Fringe and the spilling over of all sorts of artistic events into all sorts of venues has made the whole occasion a triumphant flowering of the artistic spirit. And this flowering is open to all; this is no solemn rehearsal of the accepted canon, this is a riotous explosion of all forms of art, offering something for virtually everybody. ...celebrated conductors rub shoulders with frothy celebrities; street artists perform outside while inside audiences enjoy opera or ballet; families enjoy the slick pageantry and display of the Tattoo, while student thespians entertain their audience with perhaps not the best rehearsed contemporary drama.'⁵¹

In this way, Edinburgh's festivals have functioned as important spaces for public debate and discourse. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, particularly, 'has played a crucial role in the democratisation of arts festivals' not only because the city itself gave birth to the genre of fringe theatre but also because it has ever since 'provided a model for the arts festivals that are now ubiquitous in the modern world.'⁵²

For all its importance as a wellspring of culture, however, Edinburgh has been marginalised by historians in the field. Bartie notes that 'Collectively, the

⁵⁰ Bartie, 224.

⁵¹ Alexander McCall Smith, "Foreword," in *Festival City: A Pictorial History of the Edinburgh Festivals* (Derby: The Breedon Books Publishing Company Limited, 2009), 7.

⁵² Bartie, *Edinburgh Festivals*, 224.

Edinburgh festivals form a crucial – and curiously overlooked – site for the historian of cultural change in post-war Britain.⁵³ Indeed,

For too long, Edinburgh has been marginalised, ignored or glossed over in cultural histories of post-war Britain. Even when Edinburgh is cited in relation to the art in society or the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, it is largely seen as marginal. It is often seen as peripheral in histories of modern Scotland too, viewed more as an annual ‘invasion’ of outsiders than as a vital part of national cultural history. When scholars have explored the art in post-war Britain and the cultural revolution of the 1960s, they have tended to draw attention to London and the metropolitan arts.⁵⁴

This cultural marginalisation of Edinburgh both parallels and reinforces the city’s academic marginalisation in the field of Muslims in Britain. In this context, it is not that Islam and Muslims have not been represented in Edinburgh’s various festivals or public spaces over the years. From the Tattoo which has often featured military bands and parades from Muslim-majority contexts, to the National Museum of Scotland, which has permanent exhibitions on art from the Middle East, or which hosts large-scale events in its main hall for the biennial Edinburgh Iranian Festival, or the National Gallery of Scotland which has run exhibitions and talks on migration, to the Edinburgh International Festival, which has performed *1000 Nights* or invited musicians, actors, artists, and academics who are Muslim or come from Muslim-majority contexts to participate in its programming, or the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which is home every year to edgy, subversive, critical and wildly funny stand-up comics who are Muslim, to the Usher Hall which has hosted musicians from Iran, Qatar and Syria – all these have provided and produced remarkable spaces to behold Islam and Muslims in ways that have yet

⁵³ Bartie, 3.

⁵⁴ Bartie, 3.

to garner serious academic attention. Still, and for practical reasons of space and selection, none of these examples made it into the thesis. In this context nonetheless, Edinburgh's status as a year-round, internationally renowned festival city – in contrast to festivals and events in other cities, UK or elsewhere, where the scale and impact is significantly smaller overall economically, socially, culturally and politically – is vital to broader understandings and conversations about Islam and Muslims. This is because they are carried and transmitted much further afield in at least three ways.

The first is that the city is transformed by visitors and tourists, and what they get exposed to in this cultural wellspring arguably influences and impacts how they think about what they have heard, or seen or read in attending any number of events, including those about Islam and Muslims, whether that discussion is narrowly about Scottish Islam and Muslims or more broadly about Islam and Muslims elsewhere in the world. The second mode of transmission is often in the form of festival reviews and news and media coverage from events that get copied or syndicated from the Edinburgh Evening News, for example, to daily newspapers in Cairo, Jeddah or Tehran. Thirdly, it can also take the form of successful debuts and performances at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Edinburgh International Festival or the Edinburgh Festival Fringe becoming commercially viable for tours, circuits and audiences more internationally.

Focused on the festivals and on spaces beyond the mosque, the case studies of this thesis, therefore, provide a fresh take with a variety of new voices on the representation of Islam and Muslims in Britain. These voices re/present insiders as well as outsiders – to other insiders and outsiders, and from platforms and perspectives which have not previously been considered in the literature, and/or whose reach does not rely on long-standing traditional, institutional, or organisational foundations to be heard or considered seriously.

The *Edinburgh Festivals Impact Study* of 2011 articulates for the first time the contribution that the Festivals make to the social, cultural and civic life of Scotland and its capital city.⁵⁵ Drawing from 15,000 survey responses, the results indicated that 85 per cent of all respondents agreed that the 'Festivals promoted an outward looking, positive Scottish national identity.'⁵⁶ Eighty-nine per cent of Edinburgh respondents stated that the Festivals increase local pride in the city.⁵⁷ A similar number, 85 per cent, agreed 'that the Festival is an event that showcases Edinburgh's diverse culture.'⁵⁸

Such expressions of culture, therefore, have the potential to transform how we understand ourselves and others. Where Islam and Muslims are concerned,

⁵⁵ An earlier economic-impact-only study was undertaken in 2004/2005.

⁵⁶ Ulrike Chouguley, Richard Naylor, and Christina Rosemberg Montes, *Edinburgh Festivals Impact Study* (Edinburgh: BOP Consulting, May 2011), 43.

⁵⁷ Chouguley, Naylor, and Montes, 40.

⁵⁸ Chouguley, Naylor, and Montes, 43. The report also notes that the Festivals encourage and widen access to the arts, with 77% of audiences saying that the Festivals had enabled them to discover new talent and genres, and nearly two-thirds saying that the Festivals encourage them to take risks and see less well-known performances, events or films (39). Ninety-three per cent of parents agreed that attending Festival events as a family increased their child's imagination (30).

they can break through tired clichés, in the media as well as by established Muslim groups who remain circumscribed either by the prevailing narratives about them or by the majority traditions and positions that they invariably have to re/present. This ‘democratisation of culture’, as Bartie would put it, allows people to speak for themselves, and tell their own stories as individuals who also *happen to be Muslim*, rather than *as Muslims* per se. Where these personal narratives and stories are shared in a format people are familiar with, and open to for its novelty, interest, and price point, amongst other elements, can make a big difference to perceptions. Bartie demonstrates that as battlegrounds for ‘culture wars’, ‘the Festivals give us an unusual insight into the forces of secularisation in Scottish society, the responses of Scotland’s national church to these, and what Hugh McLeod refers to as “the gradual loosening of the ties between church and society”’.⁵⁹

In this intersection of religion and the festivals in Edinburgh, Islam and Muslims do not form any part of Bartie’s analysis. In siting this research within an established and highly regarded cultural wellspring as the Edinburgh Festivals, this thesis aims, therefore, to extend those ideas and analyses in the way it addresses its central research question of how Islam and Muslims are re/presented in Edinburgh through culture and cultural production.

⁵⁹ Bartie, *Edinburgh Festivals*, 225.

The Case Studies

In addressing the central research question of how Islam and Muslims are represented in Edinburgh, the thesis presents four case studies, each constituting a core chapter of the thesis. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the re/presentation of Islam and Muslims at two of Edinburgh's most iconic summer festival offerings. Drawing from the seminal theoretical framework of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and Marshall Hodgson's equally pioneering *The Venture of Islam*, the first chapter analyses the highbrow Edinburgh International Book Festival as a site for the production of an Islamicate space. The second chapter explores a one-woman comedic performance about love and marriage in Saudi Arabia at the popular Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In so doing, it demonstrates how Islam is refracted through the lens of a specific and normative Islamic context in unexpected and surprising ways.

It is important to note that both these chapters focus on re/presentations of Islam and Muslims by non-Scottish 'others', even as they feature Muslim 'selves'. As counterpoints to these analyses, therefore, Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on re/presentations of Islam and Muslims by Scottish 'selves' and Muslim 'others'. The third chapter thus dissects the public performance of Islam at two large-scale Sunni conferences in the city, with the fourth and final chapter doing the same for considerably smaller Ithna'ashari Shi'a ritual processions. Visible and authoritative, these two 'self' re/presentations of Islam and Muslims actively engage with and respond to re/presentations by the 'other', particularly where

they are negative or stereotypical. The spatial boundaries here are fuzzier, with the public, civic and educational spaces under study often simultaneously functioning as mediums for outreach and understanding as well as opportunities for *da'wa* or religious dissemination. All together, the chapters explore several inter-related themes – the concept of space, notions of praxis, leadership and authority, and the role of women.

Fieldwork, Sources, and Methods

At a dinner party in December 2011, I met Ismat⁶⁰ – barrister, female, Muslim, unveiled. 'Perfect interviewee,' I thought, happily ignoring that she was of Pakistani origin and only visiting Edinburgh. This despite my inclinations to actively recruit a more nationally and ethnically diverse pool of Muslim informants – in light of both the aforementioned literature in the field as well as the need to speak to those who actually lived in the city. She asked about the PhD I had just begun. I ran through the now well-rehearsed script: Muslims are perceived as always angry, self-segregating and threatening, constantly thinking about Islam. 'But they can't be!' I exclaimed, 'It's exhausting to be "Muslim" all the time. We have other aspects to our lives – worrying about the economy, getting our kids

⁶⁰ Unless specified, the names of informants have been changed to protect their privacy.



Fig. 1 Googling 'British Muslims'. A screenshot in October 2013, overwhelmingly depicting veiled women and bearded men as angry, isolationist, and obsessed with Islam.

into good schools, and wondering about how we were going to vote in the Scottish independence referendum.' As Ismat nodded encouragingly, I ended, perhaps a little too dramatically, 'We can't just be – are not – angry all the time!' Then, without missing a beat, Ismat leaned closer, looked at me kindly and said, 'But you know what? *We are!*' (Fig. 1)

Those were early days of multi-directional snowballing as a methodology. Subsequent encounters, in-depth conversations, and attendance at various events during fieldwork revealed glimpses of rather more complex dynamics, themes, and narratives about the re/presentation of Islam in Edinburgh, only some of which are recorded here. The fieldwork itself took place primarily between 2011 and 2013, and so the analysis is similarly delimited. Wherever possible, however, I have taken into account later developments that took place during unexpected and extended periods of interruptions of study.

A confluence of factors resulted in the decision to ultimately take a primarily ethnographic approach to the central research question of how Islam and Muslims are re/presented in Edinburgh. The first of these was my previous research background in social anthropology. Second was the evergreen, yet usually irrational, concern common to many PhD students – that someone somewhere is doing the same research that they are. In the case of Muslims in Edinburgh, the period of my fieldwork coincided with what appeared to be a sudden explosion of PhD candidates also undertaking research in the field. And we all knew of each other. While this never posed a fundamental problem in terms of our specific research agendas, it became evident that some of us had already fatigued the now-professional interviewees because we were all seeking the same initial background information from the same pool of individuals introduced to us by the same and obvious gatekeepers. In this regard, one of these students only half-jokingly advised against conducting any interviews from individuals recruited via the Central Mosque until he himself had left the field in May 2012 and, for good measure, to wait a few more weeks before I ventured there! Happily, this restriction resulted in the discovery of alternative groups and spaces and new events and lenses through which to understand the re/presentation of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh.

As I found out, Muslims in Edinburgh created, gathered in, and invited others to a variety of public spaces and events, both formal and informal, many of which were not explicitly religious in form or function. These included 'open

gatherings' geared primarily for the needs of converts, recent or well-established, and formal lectures, film screenings and events, including those which were part of various Edinburgh Festivals, and those which raised awareness and funds for humanitarian causes in the Muslim world. Private homes, café basements, gardens, libraries, churches, streets, concerts, museum exhibitions, university auditoriums, and conference centres are just a few key general examples. Specific examples include the Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, as well as the Edinburgh Iranian Festival.

Some of this is captured in a compilation of numerous events relating to religion, faith and spirituality at the various Edinburgh Festivals in 2013, a significant expansion of the scope from a compilation by the Alwaleed Centre in 2012.⁶¹ These festival events explicitly or implicitly invoked Islam and Muslims either in Scotland specifically, or the rest of the UK and Europe, as well as in many parts of the Islamic world, across Edinburgh's summer festivals – the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF), the Just Festival, and the Festival Fringe. Over two randomly selected days in August 2013, for example, Islam or Muslims had been the subject of conversations at Book Festival events on the Virgin Mary, on feminism, on the third instalment of the *Chocolat* trilogy, and on Somalia; at the Just Festival, on events about the role of faith organisations in creating the Good

⁶¹ See, for example, Fayaz S Alibhai, "Religion, Faith and Spirituality At the Edinburgh Summer Festivals 2013: A Compilation of Islamicate and Other Events." 2013, <https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.759605.v1>. There were fifty-three events identified as Islamicate within the EIBF in 2013 out of about 120 in total. In 2012, the Alwaleed Centre compiled a list of twenty-four at EIBF out of about forty-three in total.

Society, and the shared heritage of Judaism and Islam; and at the Fringe at performances like *The Cardinals* and *Between Empires*.

Friends and fellow researchers often ribbed me for recounting the difficulties of fieldwork in the festivals. 'Festivalling, more like', neologised one, which then stuck. But these really were challenging. Timings varied throughout the day, with some taking place quite late at night. And so these were long days of fieldwork and research. Sometimes, similar events took place across festivals and I had to choose what I could attend so that there was enough time to get to another event much further away or, often, avoid an outright clash between events within the same festival. This regularly resulted in surreal juxtapositions of choices – attend EIBF's *Amnesty International Writers Series*, 'Love is a Human Right', or the Just Festival's 'Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Abuse - Scotland's Secret Shame'⁶² (Religiously-sanctioned violence against women is discussed in Chapter 3). Other times, popular events would sell out very quickly. At EIBF in 2013, events featuring Salman Rushdie, Nadeem Aslam, Rowan Williams, Shereen El-Feki, A.C. Grayling, Sahar Delijani, Nadifa Mohamed, Shani Boianjiu Jérôme Ferrari, and Richard Holloway were all such examples, as were certain Blueprint Debates like the Ethics of Dying.

The sheer volume of events I attended made it clear that I would have to take an ethnographic and case study approach. This would allow a closer examination and analysis of key events and groups that had yet to be studied in

⁶² On 14 August 2013, from 6:00-7:30pm.

the Scottish context, with a particular emphasis on their knowledge production as a function of cultural and intellectual endeavour. It would also enable an understanding of how communities and groups could come together without sacrificing the expression and preservation of their distinct identities.

In the handful of interviews I undertook before abandoning them as a research methodology, all the interviewees pointed out that Edinburgh was essentially a small village. In every group or community, everybody knew everybody else – and what they were up to. While this is a common anthropological problem, it posed an interesting dilemma for my ethnographic approach – I would not be ‘returning home’ afterwards. Indeed, ‘home’ was the site of my research, parts of it have already and necessarily had to be made public here in seminars and presentations, which some of the subjects and social actors of this research sometimes attended. Some of this research has also been published, which may impact future access to gatekeepers and the willingness of individuals to participate in discussions.⁶³

Nonetheless, interviews have been extensively and successfully used by a number of researchers such as Qureshi, Hopkins and Bonino, all of whom provide a valuable understanding of the lived experiences of particular groups of Muslims in Scotland. As noted earlier, however, these have focused on Pakistani communities for the most part. Often, Muslims in Edinburgh are perceived not in

⁶³ See, for example, Caroline B. Brettell, ed. *When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography* (Westport, Conn; London: Bergin & Garvey, 1993).

explicit religious terms, but as ethnic minorities from a particular part of the world. So they are Pakistani, Saudi, Iranian or Somali. In this sense, it is important to recognise that their 'Muslimness' might be almost incidental and it would be a disservice to conflate their ethnicity or national or linguistic origin with being Muslim. Complicating this further are Archambault's findings that 'institutional divisions and sectarianism exists among Muslims' in Edinburgh.⁶⁴

The ethnographic approach in this study is based on the overlapping approaches articulated by a number of scholars. Brewer, for example, notes:

Ethnography has often been understood very narrowly as a method of data collection, even more narrowly as equivalent to participant observation. It is more properly understood as a style of research which utilizes several methods of data collection – participant observation; unobtrusive measures; documentary analysis; studies of natural language; in-depth interviewing – the purpose of which is to explore social meanings and behaviours in a specific field or setting which gives these meanings substance and context. It is thus clear that ethnography is also simultaneously a methodology or paradigm, in that it presupposes a theoretical and philosophical framework for understanding the development of knowledge.⁶⁵

In many ways, Brewer's ideas reflect the developments of an approach to ethnography prefigured by Tapper a few years earlier:

In recent decades, however, several radical movements have transformed ethnography. First, other disciplines such as sociology, social and cultural geography, cultural studies, and folklore studies have appropriated the term 'ethnography' and transformed ethnographic research practices. Second, the objects of ethnographic attention are now less likely to be exotic 'tribes' than urban public culture or the lifestyles of a national elite. Third, the political, ethical, and epistemological implications of 'writing about other cultures' have been questioned more radically than before; and ethnography is now increasingly practiced [sic] 'at home'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Archambault, "A Community United?", 27.

⁶⁵ John D Brewer, "Book Review: Handbook of Ethnography," *Qualitative Social Work* 1, no. 2 (2002), 246.

⁶⁶ Richard Tapper, "What is This Thing Called 'Ethnography'?" *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1998), 390.

Nature of data collection

Drawing from Brewer, the data collected for this study not only comes from multiple sources, but it is also analysed in a variety of ways. In addition to participant observation, therefore, I also collected textual data such as printed brochures and flyers, as well as internet downloads. Wherever possible, I also took photographs and recorded audio and video of the events I attended. As such, my iPhone 4, a backup digital camera, a Moleskin, Muji, or Paperchase notebook, and several pens were all part of my stock fieldwork kit. Together with recording contacts, details, observations, conversations with and reactions to the people I spoke to, or what I saw or heard, this generated copious amounts of data and associated fieldnotes, of which necessarily only a fraction is incorporated into the thesis and analysed accordingly.

There is wide variation on the definition of fieldnotes, and the timing and process by which they are written. For some, as Emerson et al note, fieldnotes 'record both what they learn and observe about the activities of others and their own actions, questions and reflections.'⁶⁷ Yet others distinguish between records of what others say and do, and their own notes, thoughts and reactions to them.⁶⁸ Equally, the writing process may involve 'a running log written at the end of each

⁶⁷ Robert M Emerson, Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), ix.

⁶⁸ Emerson et al., x.

day'⁶⁹ or in the case of some researchers, such as myself, writing up 'elaborate notes as soon after witnessing relevant events as possible, typically sitting down to type up complete detailed observations every evening.'⁷⁰

Throughout the ethnographic approach of this thesis, 'thick description'⁷¹ is evident and deliberate, providing, sometimes literally, a picture of the events and spaces discussed here. This is because 'an adequate description is nothing less than a thorough analysis of a chunk of the world as it actually functions', and in this way, aiming to bridge a 'descriptive gap' which often 'seek[s] for the nature of things instead of their workings'.⁷² As such,

Instead of attempting to describe the social world as it unfolds when empirically observed, researchers often lose the actual object of interest and propose new narratives in its place that are devoid of the contextual and praxiological specificities of any actual situation. This holds especially true where religious phenomena are concerned.⁷³

In this way, the content is not divorced from its context, and together they provide a basis for comparison and analysis with past and future work both in this and other contexts. All of the chapters, therefore, record details from my participant observation, as much as they analyse the texts, speeches, performances, and

⁶⁹ As it does for Jean E Jackson, "'I Am a Fieldnote': Fieldnotes as a Symbol of Professional Identity," in *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*, ed. Roger Sanjek (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 6. Quoted in Emerson et al., x.

⁷⁰ Emerson et al., x.

⁷¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973).

⁷² Baudoin Dupret, et al., "Introduction", in *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, ed. Baudoin Dupret, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press in association with The Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, 2012), 1.

⁷³ Dupret, et al., 1.

images of their respective events and spaces. Chapters 2 and 4 additionally engage with literature about similar events in other parts of the world.

Data organisation and coding

The ethnographic approach here also includes data from social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube; community listservs, and the announcements and posters, etc, that accompany these media. This online ethnography, accompanied by a visual analysis of images and videos is particularly evident in Chapter 3. This is ethnography as defined by Dupret et al:

...the description and analysis of practices *from the perspective of the social context in which they were produced*. From this point of view, formal interviews are not ethnographic instruments if they are used to collect *ex post* accounts of practices that were performed in another context; their ethnographic relevance is limited to the moment of the interview itself.

Conversely, carrying out ethnography does not necessarily imply that the researcher is *present* during the interactions s/he studies. Ethnographies can be based on video recordings, as well as written documents, as long as they are not approached as mere *contents* but as *contextualised practices*. Any document is the outcome of an action that was performed for all practical purposes, that is, that had a teleological aim constraining the way in which this document was written. The practice of writing a text can therefore be retrieved from the close scrutiny of its internal organisation, its lexicon, its sequential ordering, its orientation to the context of its production, its embedment into a whole set of various documents, and its capacity to look retrospectively [sic] and prospectively at the process it is a part of.⁷⁴

The case studies also focus on the most public and visible 'chunks' of the people, places and texts under discussion. The majority, however, were limited in time, and otherwise unrecorded. This includes events in Chapters 1 and 2. Where some were recorded, they are no longer existent, or publicly available or accessible, such as elements discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In these cases, therefore, the

⁷⁴ Dupret, et al., 2. Emphases in original.

events and performances are analysed as texts. In this regard, some sections in the chapters make extensive use of dialogue and quotes to mitigate against the ephemera of certain discourses and performances. This is important for several reasons. First, it allows the social actors to speak for themselves and minimises, to the extent that is possible, the negative elements of selective quoting. Second, it has the added advantage of making more widely available public statements that would not otherwise be available for further study, even as it better balances the risk they face of being injuriously interpellated.⁷⁵ Third, it highlights the importance of storytelling as a key way of transmitting knowledge, values, and information - and enables a close reading of a performative text. Still, it is not without its challenges. As Emerson et al note,

Writing up dialogue is more complicated than simply remembering talk or literally replaying every word. People talk in spurts and fragments. They accentuate or even complete a phrase with gesture, facial expression or posture. They send complex messages through incongruent, seemingly contradictory and ironic verbal and nonverbal expression as in sarcasm or polite put-downs. Thus ethnographers must record the meanings they infer from the bodily expression accompanying words – gestures, movement, facial expression, tone of voice. Furthermore, people do not take turns smoothly in conversation: they interrupt each other, overlap words, talk simultaneously, and respond with ongoing comments and murmurs. Such turn-taking can be placed on a linear page by bracketing the overlapping speech.⁷⁶

Recounting these dialogues in the thesis therefore entailed long hours playing and replaying audio recorded on my iPhone across various apps such as its inbuilt Voice Memos app, or independent apps such as AudioMemos, or Dropvox (later rebranded as RecUp). I then uploaded these to TranscribeWreally⁷⁷

⁷⁵ On this see Judith Butler, "Introduction: On Linguistic Vulnerability", in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-41.

⁷⁶ Emerson et al, 75-76.

⁷⁷ See transcribe.wreally.com

which facilitated slowed-down playback and loop repeats of the audio so that I could type up ever more refined transcriptions and correct any errors. Finally, I laid these transcriptions side by side with my fieldnotes, coding and making note of recurring themes and ideas line by line. I undertook a parallel coding process for texts and images, whether online or in print, and in the latter, often physically cutting out titles, descriptions, quotes and blurbs categorising and recategorising themes that fit within, added to, or provided a different perspective from the reading and literature review I was doing at the same time. In doing so, I found, as Emerson et al note, that 'In this process, the researcher's stance towards the notes changes: the notes, and the persons and events they recount, become textual objects (although linked to personal memories and intuitions) to be considered and examined with a series of analytic and presentational possibilities in mind.'⁷⁸

As a next step, I elaborated on these 'analytic and presentational possibilities' by writing up 'memos'⁷⁹ of how these coded categories related to each other and the wider literature I was reading. Here, it is important to note that coding is not the process of the mere 'discovery' in data. Rather, it is 'more creatively ... linking up specific events and observations to more general analytic categories and issues.'⁸⁰ In this way, the coding focused and grounded the data even as I drew from a variety of sources and utilised a number of methodologies.

⁷⁸ Emerson et al., 143.

⁷⁹ See Emerson et al., 143. For a more recent application of a similar principle, see Pat Thomson, "Tiny Text - Small is Powerful." 2019, <https://patthomson.net/2019/02/11/tiny-texts-if-not-beautiful%E2%80%8B-small-is-pretty-darn%E2%80%8B-useful/>, accessed 11 February, 2019.

⁸⁰ Emerson et al., 154.

Over time, these wider 'initial' memos coalesced into narrower 'integrative' memos,⁸¹ resulting in the case study chapters in this thesis and their respective subsections.

Altogether, these processes and case studies demonstrate the value of the diversity of methodologies that fall under the umbrella of the ethnographic approach. As Dupret et al observe, such an approach:

allows a researcher to describe the complex ways in which people orient themselves to normative codes, material, corporal and social constraints, as well as the intentional strategies that inform their social practices. This is particularly important for the study of religious phenomena, for ethnography allows for a more complex and pluralistic understanding of how people attach and belong to religious communities, and how religious subjectification affects cultural and individual practices.⁸²

The Dynamics Of Public Space

The notion of space is an integral aspect of this thesis given the diversity of spaces discussed here. This section, therefore, highlights the complexity of the dynamics of public space. In its most inclusive definition, public space is 'nothing more than space to which all citizens are granted some legal rights of access.'⁸³ These rights are understood to be conditional, usually limited in time and involving 'certain unavoidable exchanges with the environment.'⁸⁴ But what is perfectly acceptable exchange and behaviour in one public space may well be frowned upon in another. Light and Smith provide a very useful example of this in their contrast of

⁸¹ Emerson et al., 143.

⁸² Dupret, *et al.*, "Introduction", 2.

⁸³ Andrew Light, and Jonathan M. Smith, eds. *The Production of Public Space* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 3.

⁸⁴ Light and Smith, 3.

remote parks with sidewalks, noting that conflict here is primarily about 'grades of access directed at individuals who live in spaces... that others occupy only briefly.'⁸⁵ In this regard, despite the legal right of individuals to access the various sites discussed in the thesis, at least some are likely to face a little difficulty in doing so. There are at least three reasons for this.

The first relates to the purpose of the public space. Where people 'more closely resemble the public for which the space is intended', they are less likely to be objected to, as is the case for homeless individuals at airports.⁸⁶ This also explains how I 'fit' into the spaces discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Secondly, 'public spaces are spaces in which citizens gather to form themselves into, and represent themselves as, a public.'⁸⁷ As such, they are sometimes referred to as 'civic spaces', distinct from merely 'spaces open to public access'.⁸⁸ Thirdly, public spaces are expected to be "'educative," a living tableau of "society's inner contradictions," of "economic, racial and ethnic realities," of "all sorts of people, impulses, ideas, and modes of behavior."⁸⁹ But public spaces that encompass such diversity are likely to be 'gritty and disturbing rather than pleasant', and

⁸⁵ Light and Smith, 3.

⁸⁶ Light and Smith, 14, fn 12, citing Kim Hopper, "Symptoms, Survival, and the Redefinition of Public Space: A Feasibility Study of Homeless People At a Metropolitan Airport," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 20 (1991), 151-175.

⁸⁷ Light and Smith, 3.

⁸⁸ Light and Smith, 3, citing Lynn Hollen Lees, "Urban Public Space and Imagined Communities in the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of Urban History* 20 (1994), 443-465; and Alex Krieger, "Reinventing Public Space," *Architectural Record* 183 (1995), 76-77.

⁸⁹ Light and Smith, 4, quoting Marshall Berman, "Take it to the Streets: Conflict and Community in Public Space," *Dissent* 33 (1986), 477; and Richard Sennett, "Whatever Became of the Public Square?," *Harper's* 281 (1990), 49-53.

which the middle class generally steers clear of.⁹⁰ As such, 'To the great annoyance of social critics, the middle class has for the most part chosen to preserve its social complacency in pleasant places protected by "mechanisms of social filtration."' ⁹¹ Indeed, large shopping centres and theme parks have been key sites of study in this regard, particularly in North America.⁹²

These elements are not discrete criteria for the evaluation of public space and associated terms such as the public square and the public sphere. Rather, they form overlapping ideas about the nature of such spaces, highlighting how the role and function of public space is rather more circumscribed in practice. In so doing, we are faced with two conceptions of public space: 'grimly realistic' educative spaces and 'comfortingly fantastic' entertaining spaces.⁹³ But for such spaces to be truly public they must bring together disparate sections of society to form a community.⁹⁴ As each of the case study chapters illustrate, the spaces that they produce, occupy and represent, attempt to bridge these two conceptions into concrete forms that are educatively entertaining. Art, theatre, film and literature form the building blocks of such spatial practice. As explicated particularly in Chapters 1 and 2, such performances on stage provide novel understandings of the re/presentations of Islam and Muslims in the comparatively

⁹⁰ Light and Smith, 4. See also William Grimes, "Have a #!&\$! Day." *New York Times*, 17 October 1993.

⁹¹ Light and Smith, 5, citing Louise Mozingo, "Public Space in the Balance," *Landscape Architecture* 85 (1995), 42-47.

⁹² Light and Smith, 5.

⁹³ Light and Smith, 5.

⁹⁴ One may add religious, linguistic, sexual, and any number of other kinds of difference to this broader categorisation.

understudied Scottish context. Off-stage public performances of Islam and by Muslims, such as those discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, are equally revealing in this regard. Only in creating 'spaces where a community acquires a sense of itself' can public spaces honestly and effectively address the challenges of social, economic and cultural diversity and the realities of its accompanying inequities.⁹⁵ The scope and implications of some of these challenges, as they relate to and mutually inform and reinforce the understanding and re/presentation of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh as to Islam and Muslims elsewhere, are elaborated in the respective chapters of the thesis. Engagement and impact, then, are not limited to academia, but form part of a larger discussion, rooted in democratic ideals, about accountability, public participation and public discourse.

The issues of access to public spaces, therefore, whether for *Big Issue* vendors or indeed for other constituents of society, including ethnic and racial minorities, remains hotly debated, particularly in the realm of cultural production. This was exemplified by the furore over Janet Suzman's comments in December 2014 that 'Theatre is a white invention, a European invention, and white people go to it. It's in their DNA. It starts with Shakespeare.'⁹⁶ But access is only one element in what Lefebvre would call the 'spatial practice' of the spaces discussed in this thesis, and it is to this we now turn.

⁹⁵ Light and Smith, 3, citing Rowan Moore, "Open and Shut," *New Statesman & Society* 3 (1990).

⁹⁶ Danya Alberge, and Mark Brown, "Actor Janet Suzman Criticised for Calling Theatre 'a White Invention'." *The Guardian*, 8 December 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/dec/08/actor-janet-suzman-criticised-calling-theatre-white-invention>, accessed 8 December, 2014.

Spatial Practice

This thesis broadly aims to meld elements from the field of human geography with those of Islamic studies. Specifically, it draws upon Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991),⁹⁷ a seminal theoretical framework that has remained largely unexplored in the context of Islam and Muslims. In doing so, it references Lefebvre's triadic framework, namely, spatial practice, the representation of space and, finally, the space of representation (sometimes termed 'representational spaces'), as it applies to knowledge about Islam and Muslims. From the field of Islamic studies, it utilises a key definitional concept from the civilisational approach of Marshall Hodgson's equally pioneering three-volume work, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*.⁹⁸ More on this in the next section.

For Henri Lefebvre, 'space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).'⁹⁹ As such, 'Space is never produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is produced.'¹⁰⁰ It is also not 'an aggregate of the places or locations of such products as sugar, wheat or cloth.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, USA: Blackwell, 1991).

⁹⁸ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

⁹⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre, 85.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, 85.

Rather, 'space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships'.¹⁰² It is both 'a precondition and a result of social superstructures.'¹⁰³

The spatial practice of a society is secretory: '... it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it.'¹⁰⁴ In more concrete terms, it expresses the relationship 'between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure).'¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, it 'ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion.'¹⁰⁶ Although a spatial practice must be somewhat cohesive, it is not necessarily coherent.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, it 'implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.'¹⁰⁸ All of the case studies discussed here manifest this competence and performance, as illustrated below.

Connotative and denotative discourses

According to Lefebvre, an abstract space 'presupposes the existence of a "spatial economy" closely allied, though not identical to the verbal economy.'¹⁰⁹ As we shall see in greater detail in the individual chapters, in the context of all of the spaces discussed in the thesis, the consumption and production of words

¹⁰² Lefebvre, 82-83.

¹⁰³ Lefebvre, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Lefebvre, 38.

¹⁰⁵ Lefebvre, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Lefebvre, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre, 38.

¹⁰⁸ Lefebvre, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Lefebvre, 57.

'valorizes certain relationships between people in particular places ... and thus gives rise to connotative discourses concerning these places.'¹¹⁰ This is particularly well illustrated in their spatial practices, which establish expectations, frame narratives and discussion, elucidate assertions, claims and facts, and manifest authority and credibility. Together, the 'consensuses' and 'conventions' arising from these discourses, to cite Lefebvre, provide authenticity and meaningfulness in the social relationship formed between authors, moderators (Chapter 1), or performers (Chapters 2 and 4), or speakers (Chapters 3 and 4) and their audiences. If, for Lefebvre, such abstract spaces are understood 'to be trouble-free, a quiet area where people go peacefully to have a good time, and so forth,'¹¹¹ the parallel with the festival space at the Fringe (Chapter 2) is as obvious as it is for EIBF (Chapter 1), which for director Nick Barley, is a 'place where people go to feel intelligent.'¹¹²

Denotative, or descriptive, discourses in abstract space are equally consensual in their 'quasi-legal aspect', where not only 'spaces are to be left free,' but 'wherever possible allowance is to be made for "proxemics" – for the maintenance of 'respectful' distances.'¹¹³ In the context of EIBF (Chapter 1), the

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, 57.

¹¹¹ Lefebvre, 57.

¹¹² Barley reiterated this elsewhere, stating, 'What makes festivals work is that they're festivals of ideas – they're very rarely about the writing process. People tell me they love Edinburgh because it makes them feel more intelligent. The talks are like short, sharp educational courses, a counterweight to dumbing down.' Quoted in Anthony Gardner, "For Books, Read Community: The Unstoppable Rise of the Literary Festival, From Devon to Dubai." *1843*, September/October 2015, https://www.1843magazine.com/intelligence_for_books_read_community, accessed 26 December, 2018.

¹¹³ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 57.

Festival Fringe (Chapter 2) and the Sunni conferences (Chapter 3), this was evident in matters as mundane as seating conventions. Except for spaces for the disabled and a few seats reserved up front for guests of the speaker, seating was unassigned and people quickly flocked to their preferred seats. In the case of the Sunni conferences the seating convention was additionally circumscribed and enforced by considerations of gender. At EIBF, it was the spatial practice of the festival in the militancy of its organisers and ushers in keeping to start and end times, together with the barring of late arrivals, rather than mere social pressure, which ensured that even hardcore festival attendees rarely reserved seats adjacent to them for more than a few minutes.

But proxemics was also manifest in the interactions between the stage and the floor. Multiple voices and points of view, heteroglossia 'where the Nietzschean, the peasant or the student speak publicly as such', were characteristic of all of the case studies discussed here.¹¹⁴ Although no Nietzscheans or peasants ever identified themselves as such over the course of my fieldwork in these spaces, such actors, young and old, including students, musicians, poets, artists, layperson, professionals, clerics, and the laity, were a necessary part of the idea of all of these spaces and events as a kind of public square, all of whom, again in Lefebvrian terms, appropriated the space. The existence of this space before their appearance in it affects their 'presence, action

¹¹⁴ Ken Hirschkop, "Heteroglossia and Civil Society: Bakhtin's Public Square and the Politics of Modernity," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23, no. 1 (1990), 72.

and discourse'.¹¹⁵ This kind of prefiguring, therefore, makes it difficult to radically modify the space even as it is being appropriated. As Lefebvre states,

...the texture of space affords opportunities not only to social acts with no particular place in it and no particular link with it, but also to a spatial practice that it does indeed determine, namely its collective and individual use: a sequence of acts which embody a signifying practice even if they cannot be reduced to such a practice.¹¹⁶

In this regard, spatial practice in the authority and credibility established by those 'on stage' ensured that even in the rare instance of outright dissent and conflict from the audience, this was generally muted and tightly circumscribed. In the case of EIBF, for example, Nick Barley asserted in the run up to the festival in 2014:

We want an atmosphere in which it is safe to express views and where all views are welcome. What we don't want is a cosy consensus where we are pretending we all agree with each other when, of course, we don't. We want people to be comfortable with expressing their views and opinions without fear of getting shouted down.¹¹⁷

Inside the events at EIBF (Chapter 1) or at the Sunni conferences (Chapter 3), minor challenges from the floor resulted in those 'on stage' responding by disagreeing politely but firmly with audience members, subtly invoking their authority and authenticity by recourse either to their expertise or their 'being-there'. Pronounced disagreements, as at EIBF in a case where two women walked

¹¹⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 57.

¹¹⁶ Lefebvre, 57.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Brian Ferguson, "Book Festival Wants 'Debate, Not Hate' Says Barley." *The Scotsman*, 8 August 2014, <http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/book-festival-wants-debate-not-hate-says-barley-1-3503051>, accessed 4 February, 2015.

out in a rage at Israeli architect and academic, Eyal Weisman's event,¹¹⁸ were met with much the same response, and the only option left to the dissenters was to leave noisily and publicly in protest before the event carried on as quickly as they had left. In any case, most interactions at all the events under study here were deferential even when they were challenging, illustrating another one of Lefebvre's assertions: that such spatial consensus formally and categorically rejects violence.¹¹⁹ This public disavowal of violence is examined in greater detail in Chapters 3 (Sunni conferences) and 4 (Ithna'ashari Shi'a processions).

Deciphering space

In the context of Lefebvre's triadic framework, spatial practice is 'perceived' space, and '[l]ike all social practice, ... [it] is lived directly before it is conceptualized'.¹²⁰ But because of 'the speculative primacy' of the representation of space, which is to say 'conceived' space, spatial practice tends to remain largely unexamined.¹²¹ As Lefebvre notes, 'the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.'¹²² In describing the various spaces and events in this thesis, and analysing how they are set up for consensual discourses, we have

¹¹⁸ Eyal Weizman, *The Hidden Architecture of Occupation*, ScottishPower Studio Theatre, 19 August 2013. See Edinburgh International Book Festival, *08.2013 Edinburgh International Book Festival: Celebrating 30 Years* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd, 2013), 38.

¹¹⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 57.

¹²⁰ Lefebvre, 38

¹²¹ Lefebvre, 34.

¹²² Lefebvre, 38.

additionally gone some way to decipher its space, and thereby reveal its spatial practice.

It is important to note that spatial practice 'is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it.'¹²³ In other words, it is not an abstraction but a concrete relationship to 'conceived' and 'lived' spaces, that is, representations of space and spaces of representation (also referred to as representational spaces) respectively.¹²⁴ Within this dialectical, or perhaps more accurately trialectical, framework, the '[k]nowledge of space wavers between description and dissection', where '[t]hings in space, or pieces of space, are described' and '[p]art-spaces are carved out for inspection from social space as a whole.'¹²⁵

This framework also allows us to see these spaces and events as both work and product. As a product, EIBF (Chapter 1) 'can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures'¹²⁶ over some 30-odd years of author events, book-signings and discussions in a format that is largely consistent. As a work, however, it 'has something irreplaceable and unique about it',¹²⁷ with every year bringing topical programming, new permutations of authors, thematic discussion and increased reach through media old and new. This principle could also be applied to the Festival Fringe performance (Chapter 2), the Sunni

¹²³ Lefebvre, 47-48.

¹²⁴ Lefebvre, 40.

¹²⁵ Lefebvre, 91.

¹²⁶ Lefebvre, 70.

¹²⁷ Lefebvre, 70.

conferences (Chapter 3), and the Shi'a ritual procession (Chapter 4). In so doing, these case-study applications reinforce Lefebvre's notion that '[t]hese spaces are produced' from nature and that they 'are products of an activity which involves the economic and technical realms but which extends well beyond them, for these are also political products, and strategic spaces.'¹²⁸

What is 'Islam'?

What constitutes 'Islam' is another integral part of this thesis. For many social scientists, "'Islam" is neither a set of practices and beliefs precisely bounded by textual "orthodoxy", nor just any social practice carried out by people who happen to be Muslim; discourses and practices are "Islamic" when Muslims refer to them as such'.¹²⁹ Such discourses and practices 'must be *described* in action.'¹³⁰ In this way, 'We are more likely to gain an understanding of the meaning of religious practice through the close description of people's orientation to, and reification of, religious categories as it emerges from their actual experiences in a given social context.'¹³¹

In his *Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson cautions against the scholarly tendency 'to use the terms "Islam" and "Islamic" too casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion.'¹³² Over the years since he published this work, this tendency to conflate

¹²⁸ Lefebvre, 84.

¹²⁹ Dupret, *et al.*, "Introduction", 2.

¹³⁰ Dupret, *et al.*, 2. Emphasis added.

¹³¹ Dupret, *et al.*, 2.

¹³² Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 57

the particularity of the properly religious with the generality of the widely cultural has only gained momentum, becoming entrenched in media representations and popular discourse, among not just non-Muslims but also Muslims themselves. In this regard, the thesis uses 'Islamicate', a term coined by Hodgson.

Although it has not caught on as much as Hodgson had hoped, 'Islamicate' helps to distinguish between two related, but nonetheless different, analytical concepts. Hodgson uses 'Islamicate' to refer to the '*culture*, centred on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom.'¹³³ Hodgson concedes that even though the additional neologism 'Islamdom' might not be adopted widely, its obvious analogy with 'Christendom' might render it less easily dismissed. He also points out that one could use Islamicate in the form 'of the culture of Islamdom', but that this is periphrasal and ultimately clumsy in style. He thought it far better, instead, to use the neologism explicitly and pedagogically.¹³⁴

The term Christendom is admittedly dated in an increasingly secularised Western context, so 'Islamdom' may be seen as even more antiquated, if not wholly alien. Furthermore, it carries a potentially hegemonic connotation that Islamophobics would perhaps perversely relish, especially when tied to

¹³³ Hodgson, 58. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁴ Hodgson, 59.

contemporary discourses that present Islam, the religion, and associated practice in areas of law, justice, gender relations and so on, as medieval.¹³⁵

Notwithstanding these challenges, the use of 'Islamicate', at least, certainly remains warranted. Importantly, Hodgson sees it being 'used for *the milieu of a whole society* and not simply for the body of all Muslims, for the Ummah.'¹³⁶ The term 'Islamic', then, he restricts to its adjectival sense, "'of or pertaining to" Islam *in the proper, the religious, sense*'.¹³⁷ So, Hodgson continues, "'Islamicate" would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the [sic] Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.'¹³⁸

Conclusion

Edinburgh is a vibrant capital city heaving with culture and cosmopolitan in its outlook. Its population of 12,000 Muslims is not insignificant. This study aims to demonstrate that culture and cultural production is an important area of study in the context of the re/presentation of Islam in Edinburgh. Culture, argued Raymond Williams, is a process, not a conclusion. And so, the 'debate over the roles, definitions and challenges of culture are still being played out in Edinburgh,

¹³⁵ For a critique of the term 'medieval' as a shorthand for primitiveness, brutality and barbarism, as well as examples of its usage particularly as it applies to ISIS, see Chris Jones, "Is Islamic State Medieval?" *Research the Headlines*, 18 September 2014, <https://researchtheheadlines.org/2014/09/18is-islamic-state-medieval>, accessed 7 July, 2016.

¹³⁶ Hodgson, *Venture*, 58. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁷ Hodgson, 59. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁸ Hodgson, 59.

in Scotland and, indeed, across the world.¹³⁹ As such, it is hoped that this research may be fruitfully compared with existing research on Muslims in Britain, and specifically Scotland, highlighting crosscutting themes in a case study of Edinburgh insofar as notions of 'self' and 'other' representations of Islam bear upon other studies in the field vis-à-vis identity, gender, education, and authority.

Edinburgh, Alexander McCall Smith has said, is an

... extraordinary city. I have sometimes thought that living in Edinburgh is like living on an opera set. The city is an intensely romantic one, and this romance is well-captured in these photographs. Look at the details. Look at the buildings in the background, at the clothing and at the cars in the street. Look at the bearing and the appearance of the performers. These photographs reveal a great deal not only about what was happening artistically, but about what was happening in the world at the time.¹⁴⁰

It is hoped that the case studies that follow reveal as much about our understanding of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh.

¹³⁹ Bartie, *Edinburgh Festivals*, 229.

¹⁴⁰ McCall Smith, "Foreword", 7.

Chapter 1

The Edinburgh International Book Festival:

Producing Islamicate Space¹⁴¹

It is a typical washed out August summer's day in Edinburgh. The ground is wet from a persistent light drizzle, but the sun manages to break through the clouds every hour or so for about 10 minutes. The city centre is heaving with tourists visiting for the summer festivals. Caught off guard by the vagaries of Edinburgh's weather, many of them are sporting overpriced clear plastic ponchos, hurriedly bought from tourist traps. Those locals who can, have fled, giving up their flats for a tidy festival surge in rent. Amidst the sea of people clutching damp flyers and halting mid step to peer at well-worn maps lies an island of relative calm. Here, at the intersection between the Old Town, the New Town and the West End, the outer boundaries of which roughly constitute a UNESCO World Heritage Site, sits Charlotte Square. Replete with historic buildings, including the official residence of the First Minister of Scotland, its eponymous private garden is thrown open to the public at this time of the year. Plain, yet formal for a statue of Prince Albert straddled atop a horse, the fenced garden is transformed into a colourful, vibrant hub by the erection of white marquees of various shapes and sizes clustered around an otherwise open-air square at the base of the statue for the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF).

¹⁴¹ A condensed version of this chapter was published as Fayaz S Alibhai, "Representing Islam at the Edinburgh International Book Festival," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*, ed. Peter Hopkins (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). I am grateful to the editor for the invitation to contribute to the volume.



Fig. 2 Charlotte Square Gardens, home of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, August 2012

The year 2013 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the festival, where it was expected that 200,000 people would be in attendance over the course of 17 days for some 700 events involving '[m]ore than 800 authors from around the world.'¹⁴² Despite its size, the festival manages to feel like a tented village community. Children laugh and loll about on a low wooden dais, eating ice cream from the stall inside the gardens, their parents sitting beside them. It is usually too wet to sit on the grass, so there is often a polite scramble for the deckchairs, appropriately emblazoned with literary aphorisms, strewn around the square under the shade of umbrellas. The sun is not particularly out in full force during

¹⁴² BBC, "Edinburgh International Book Festival Celebrates 30 Years." *BBC Scotland*, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-23578116>, accessed 10 August, 2013.

this time of the year, so there is not as much a pull to orient the deckchairs to its rays. But people are enjoying the intermittent sunshine, reading the papers, listening to music through headphones or speaking to others on their mobiles. Some sit on plastic chairs around a table or two, talking, poring over the festival programme. Others kick back on the benches, reading their newly signed books. Yet others are simply people watching. It is quiet, but certainly not silent. The steady hum of conversations in the square mingles occasionally with a child's plaintive cry or the clink of glasses. Clapping and laughter in equal measure erupt intermittently from inside the tents. Playful yet serious, expansive yet intimate, the festival's garden setting is idyllic, a veritable Eden pregnant with the promise of delight and knowledge (Fig. 2).

Gardens in Islam are quintessential representations of heaven on earth. Mirroring the gardens of paradise, where the righteous are promised flowing rivers of water, milk, honey and wine, (Qur'an 47:15),¹⁴³ these earthly manifestations of almost Platonic forms of beauty and order provide relief, entertainment and sanctuary. Above all, they are spaces for contemplation. The parallel with the literary festival at Charlotte Square Gardens, 'the biggest in the

¹⁴³ *(Here is) a Parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and Grace from their Lord. (Can those in such Bliss) be compared to such as shall dwell for ever in the Fire, and be given, to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels (to pieces)? Unless specified otherwise, all translations of the Qur'an are by Yusuf Ali, as reproduced on Quran.com, which helpfully provides several other parallel translations in common use. See <http://quran.com/47/15>, accessed 23 February 2015.*

world' according to its director Nick Barley is, therefore, particularly salient.¹⁴⁴ As a public space for the production of ideas and their dissemination, this home of the EIBF plays a major role in not only influencing but also defining wider debates about art, science, governance, social justice and religion. This may be surprising in a globalised context, in which much traditional media cycles relentlessly through the triumvirate of reality TV, the cult of celebrity, and coverage of conflict and violence. But, as Barley goes on to note:

literary festivals have become some of the most vibrant forums for public discussion of the early 21st century. For anyone who thinks that the book is dead, the literary festival boom is clear evidence that reading, writing and ideas are anything but.¹⁴⁵

This is especially significant for discourses about Islam and Muslims. Daily, it seems, the public is assaulted afresh by yet another incomprehensible narrative of irrationality and lawlessness. The intractable threat of terror that results from this coverage also feeds it, contributing to populist debates about the 'problem with Islam' among both Muslims¹⁴⁶ and non-Muslims.¹⁴⁷ In all, they evoke the emotions precisely opposite to the idea of the Islamic garden – a widespread sense of the chaos rather than the order, the ugliness rather than the beauty, the barbarity rather than the civilisation associated with Islam and Muslims.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Nick Barley, "Directing the Edinburgh International Book Festival." *The Guardian*, 12 August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/aug/12/edinburgh-international-book-festival-director>, accessed 15 February, 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Barley, "Directing".

¹⁴⁶ e.g. Irshad Manji, *The Trouble With Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Pamela Geller, *Stop the Islamization of America: A Practical Guide to the Resistance* (Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2011).

¹⁴⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Much analysis of this phenomenon, particularly within the specialism of Muslims in Britain, has revolved primarily around representation in the media.¹⁴⁹ There is, of course, a long and established history of analysis on the representation of Islam and Muslims. Epitomised by classic treatments such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*,¹⁵⁰ these works remain salient against the backdrop of contemporary policy and academic debates about the extent and dangers of not only radicalisation among Muslims but also Islamophobia.

This chapter explores the representation of Islam within the confines of one of Britain's most widely acclaimed literary festivals, the EIBF. It begins by examining the festival as a public square. It then describes the festival's spaces and its spatial practice before discussing the festival's production of an 'Islamicate' space. Finally, it analyses how the festival may be conceived as a representation of Islamicate space.

The Festival as a Public Square

Ever since the invention of Gutenberg's printing press in around 1455, reading and writing in the Western context have become increasingly private, if not predominantly solitary, acts. Now, reading out loud as a public act is limited perhaps only to baby and toddler parenting and spousal allocutions from the

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, Poole, *Reporting Islam*; and Petley, and Richardson, *Pointing the Finger*.

¹⁵⁰ Said, *Orientalism*.

weekend papers that are received rather more absent-mindedly.¹⁵¹ While book and poetry readings may constitute counter-examples of such public performance, they tend to be considerably limited in time, and often form only part of a larger discourse. In this context, the festival's celebration of books is paradoxically less about the individual act of reading and writing per se than it is about the collective creation of a new conversation. As Barley noted for the festival in 2014, historic for the Scottish referendum on independence, it had:

been a breathtakingly vibrant year ... The atmosphere among audiences has ranged from exuberant to deeply thoughtful, with a real sense that Scotland is on the cusp of an epoch-defining decision. True to the spirit of dialogue that ran through this year's programme, authors and audiences alike engaged in conversations that were intelligent and often incredibly perceptive. Public democracy is alive and kicking in Charlotte Square Gardens.¹⁵²

Like the genre of the novel, the public square is a site of formation as well as encounter.¹⁵³ For some, it is different, however, from civic spaces, 'the discursive spaces of the life of the state, where the individual speaks as a *citizen*, and so enters "world-history" through his state membership'.¹⁵⁴ Being a citizen requires giving up a 'differentiating, local identity in favour of [an] abstract equality'.¹⁵⁵ In

¹⁵¹ On the transition from reading aloud to 'the private, inward activity it is today,' and its manifold consequences, see William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age* (Brunswick, Australia, and London: Scribe, 2013), 124-126, 131-133). I am grateful to Michael Rosie for the observation that in semi-literate societies, however, 'newspapers were often consumed communally - the literate reading out to the illiterate.' Personal correspondence, 4 February, 2019.

¹⁵² Edinburgh International Book Festival, "Edinburgh International Book Festival Wraps Up 17 Days of Dialogue, Discussion and Debate." 25 August 2014, <https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/news/edinburgh-international-book-festival-wraps-up-17-days-of-dialogue-discussion-and-debate>, accessed 15 February, 2015.

¹⁵³ Hirschkop, "Heteroglossia", 71.

¹⁵⁴ Hirschkop, 72.

¹⁵⁵ Hirschkop, 72.

this sense, the public square is not constituted of the particular, but as a collective for 'the formulation of all values as distinct "points of view"'.¹⁵⁶ Here, groups come together 'to "make history" ... which requires ... a change in form, from private world to "world-view", from personal passion to public ... argument.'¹⁵⁷

This coming together of a variety of points of view, of difference, for wider social ends, is often referred to as civil society. A particular kind of public space, civil society is an 'aesthetic form of the public square.'¹⁵⁸ In that 'intermediate realm of public interests and activities', it is, according to Bakhtin, semi-official: 'at once public yet not official, concerned with a range of social identities between those imposed by the state and the economy.'¹⁵⁹ In this regard, the EIBF may be seen as an 'institution of civil society', and thereby 'capable of being both public and meaningful, which is to say that [it] offer[s] quasi-aesthetic, rather than strictly political or economic rewards.'¹⁶⁰ As such, it is an arena of what Habermas would call 'public communicative action, thereby distinct from both "private life" and the public yet rationalized domains of state bureaucracy and economy.'¹⁶¹

Light and Smith provide a striking image for the idea of the public square:

Picture an open plaza overlooked by a regal balcony. In the plaza stand the people, for the moment listening; on the balcony stands the ruler, for the moment pronouncing. The people assembled in the square become a public once they are able to debate among themselves and respond to the pronouncements of the state with rational protests and formal petitions. In other words, if the balcony is taken as

¹⁵⁶ Hirschkop, 71.

¹⁵⁷ Hirschkop, 72.

¹⁵⁸ Hirschkop, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Hirschkop 72-73.

¹⁶⁰ Hirschkop, 73.

¹⁶¹ Hirschkop, 73.

a metonymy of the state speaking to the people, the public square is a metonymy of the people talking among themselves and, perhaps more importantly, talking back to the state.¹⁶²

Together with being 'an aesthetic form of the public square', such pronouncement and debate is an integral part of the experience of the EIBF, and the festival's numerous spaces, both open and enclosed, are key to this exchange.

The Festival's Spaces

Snaking around the square where people are soaking up the atmosphere in the open air gardens, stand long queues on wooden platforms waiting to be let in to events. Sheltered from the elements, the queues are sometimes confusing – although they stand parallel to each other, they go in opposite directions. But this very disorientation presents opportunities for strangers to become familiar faces as individuals voice their enjoyment or, rarely, their dissatisfaction with a particular event. If 'civil life requires settings in which people meet as equals', places that 'encourage conversation, the essence of civic life', the Book Festival provides it in abundance.¹⁶³

All around the square are banners carrying almost life-size portraits of authors especially commissioned by the festival (Fig. 3).¹⁶⁴ Next to the entrance is the Spiegeltent. With its painted brick-red wood and canvas, it is a striking venue amidst the sea of otherwise white canvas of the rest of the festival tents. Complete

¹⁶² Light, and Smith, *Production of Public Space*, 2.

¹⁶³ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. Norton, 1995), 117, 120.

¹⁶⁴ See also Chris Close, *Between the Lines: Portraits of Authors* (Edinburgh: Capercaillie Books Limited, 2015).

with café bar, it is used primarily from the late afternoon onward either as part of a sponsored lecture or debate panel or the Jura Unbound series of evening music programmes. Adjacent to it, forming almost a full side of the square is the main bookshop, with book-signing desks on either side of the cashiers desks near the entrances. At the back of this tent is a café bar. In the middle, a book-lover's dream, rows upon rows of wide aisles of shelves stacked with books. Fiction is organised alphabetically, non-fiction by theme. There is always a separate Scottish section, in addition to biographies, graphic novels and comics. Books on special display stands at the ends of the shelves change daily according to author meet-and-greet schedules, easy pickings for readers keen to buy not only new books but also back titles and get them signed. Not everybody buys books; many pick up one and head off to read it on the comfy sofas and around the tables next to the café, nursing a cappuccino or indulging in a treat of tea with scones. If theft is an issue, it is certainly not evident, at least in that there are no visible electromagnetic barriers at the exits, which also double up as entrances. Perhaps middle class social pressure acts as an effective deterrent, preventing people from just picking up a book, wandering around and going off with it. For those who do buy books, they are packed into lovely, festival-branded cloth book-bags for each purchase – the colours and logos change year on year, so in addition to their durability, they make great marketing and publicity items, even



Fig. 3 A life-size portrait of Salman Rushdie at EIBF, August 2013. The exhibition of these portraits, taken by Chris Close, began in 2009 and has remained an annual tradition of the festival. The Waterstones bookstore on Edinburgh's Princes Street has exhibited a selection of these portraits for many years, right up to December 2018.

authenticating the book festival experience for gift-giving purposes, as opposed to buying them at another bookstore or online, where they are often cheaper.¹⁶⁵

The children's bookshop sits next to the main bookshop. Despite the absence of a café, it remains inviting. Taking account of a younger audience, beanbags and cushions dot the space, and one often finds children cuddled up on them next to their parents, who are reading aloud to them. The displays here are brighter, more colourful and placed lower for easier access. Here, too, the display of some books changes daily; as with the main bookshop, a section titled 'Today at the Festival', again helps with the cycle of book-buying and signing. Tucked away in a corner of the gardens just behind the children's bookshop is another tent for children's activities, hugely popular for its free, drop-in arts and crafts projects and storytelling (Fig. 4).

Continuing clockwise around the square sit the Peppers Theatre and the Baillie Gifford Theatre. Between them, at the northwest end of the gardens lies a smaller, elongated theatre, unusual in that one of its shorter sides forms the stage. This is the Writers Retreat, which does what it says, as well as morning readings, receptions, and smaller book events. Next to the Baillie Gifford theatre, directly across from the main bookshop is a smaller café bar and bookshop. Used primarily for book-signings, its selection is, therefore, smaller and specific to that

¹⁶⁵ I would often deliberately buy books at multiple times during the course of the day, rather than at one go because I would get a bag for each purchase.



Fig. 4 Children are well-catered for at EIBF, with a hugely popular space dedicated to them for a variety of activities

day's signings. The Scottish Power Studio Theatre, the largest of the tents, comes next, brushing up against the festival entrance on the fourth side of the square.

Inside the entrance tent itself, there are low sills and display cases where flyers advertise events at other venues and festivals. On the left is a waist-high see-through ballot box, filled with votes for festival-goers' best reads from a large selection of new author debuts for a chance to win them all. Further back sits a small box-office, next to which is a subscriptions centre for the major newspaper sponsoring the event that particular year. There is often a returns queue at the right of the tent, next to a second, larger box office, the result of popular events

getting sold out online very quickly, as was the case with Salman Rushdie in 2013.¹⁶⁶ A few chairs make up the beginning of the queue and there is usually a form of musical chairs as people shuffle closer to the counter. Although individual ticket prices range from £8-10 for concessions to regular priced tickets, committed attendance can quickly put one seriously out of pocket, even with the festival's bulk-buy offers. Some people come by to give away their tickets gratis, usually approaching whoever is at the front of the returns queue. I was twice the recipient of such generosity for sold-out events and it really made my day. At the back and centre of the tent, opening out onto the main garden square, is a screen updating visitors to cancelled events and absent speakers. It is here that one catches the first glimpse into the garden proper.

The Spatial Practice of the Festival

As noted in the introduction, spatial practice for Lefebvre 'implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.'¹⁶⁷ At EIBF, this competence and performance are evident in the way its events are set up. The organisers are almost militant about start and end times. Every year, festival-goers complain about not being let in to events because they were only seconds late. These complaints are aired over social media as well as in person, overheard at the entrances to tents, or narrated to others in queues for alternative events. For its part, the festival sticks to its guns, citing not only its clearly printed policy about

¹⁶⁶ 'Salman Rushdie: Defining a Literary Generation', 10 August 2013, Baillie Gifford Main Theatre, Edinburgh International Book Festival, 3:00-4:00pm.

¹⁶⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 33.



Fig. 5 Eskenderella, with a performance of music and poetry at EIBF, August 2013

late arrivals on the festival programme, website and tickets, but also its specific recommendations on all these media that people should be aware that buying tickets for back-to-back events can sometimes be risky.¹⁶⁸ Box office staff at the returns queue are in radio contact with ushers at the tents' entrances who confirm

¹⁶⁸ On the 2012 programme, for example, every other recto page states that 'Latecomers will not be admitted after the start of events and no refunds will be given. Events are 1 hour long unless otherwise stated and take place in Charlotte Square Gardens.' On the 'Booking Information' section at the end of the 2012 programme, under 'Events and Seating' on p. 83, it states: 'Events are 1 hour long unless otherwise specified. Please do not book events back to back (where one event finishes at the same time the other starts) as you will not get to the second event on time for the start, and we do not admit latecomers (see below). All our seating is unreserved.' Under 'Latecomers' it states: 'Latecomers are hugely disruptive to audience members and authors and will not be admitted after the start of events. Please arrive in good time, allowing yourself time to collect tickets and get to the relevant venue. Refunds will not be given to latecomers'. Edinburgh International Book Festival, *Edinburgh International Book Festival: 11-27 August 2012. The World, in Words* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd, 2012), 83.

whether people can still come in or not. Once the event has started, however, it is all but impossible to get the doors opened, and late arrivals are politely, but firmly, turned away. Only once in the course of three years of fieldwork did I observe that the time limit for an event was violated. But this was for Eskenderella,¹⁶⁹ a rousing and magical musical performance (Fig. 5), who succeeded in carrying on past the allotted time only because of a combination of the audience's insistence for an encore, the chair's implicit go-ahead and the late hour, it being the last and rousing event of the evening in the tent. Even then, the irritation of the technical staff at the back of the tent was clear to see.

Depending on the event, there are between two and four people on the stage. There are rarely more, unless it is a music group, or similar, like Eskenderella above. A moderator or chair usually sits across from the author, facing the audience. Some authors have interpreters in attendance. If there is more than one author, the moderator or chair will take centre stage with an author on either side. Besides introducing the author and asking some key questions, the moderator will field questions from the audience towards the end of the event. For more high-profile events, the chair will be joined by the Festival Director, who will give a 'meta' introduction and then either sit with the audience or proceed to double duty as chair/moderator. The introduction is followed by an author reading, lecture or speech, sometimes supplemented by a film clip or two. Less often, authors might choose to deliver a PowerPoint presentation to which

¹⁶⁹ 'Poetry from the Egyptian Revolution: Poems and Music in Tahrir Square', 25 August 2013, ScottishPower Studio Theatre, EIBF, 8:30pm.

they will speak directly. But even here, ironically, the slides are led primarily by images and little text. Much of the actual event is constituted as a précis of the book in question, with moderators making reference to specific incidents and passages, striking turns of phrase, and the relevance and impact of the work beyond the book itself. There is frequently a compelling backstory, often humorous, sometimes shocking, presented variously as anecdotes that formed the genesis of a book, including specific and extraordinary biographical incidents constituting the bulk of a memoir, or other kinds of personal experience or material that did not make it into the book. The parallel, then, of the set-up of the festival with the plaza and the balcony referenced earlier is evident.

The intimacy of this narration, the opportunity for interaction and the limits of time make for great storytelling. Indeed, it has elements that are almost revelatory – unfolding, minute-by-minute access to insights unavailable to most others, moments of resolute curiosity and questioning followed by an ‘aha!’ profundity and a most satisfying, if not stimulating, admixture of amazement, despair, hope, sadness and laughter. Similarly, the tented space, its close and tiered seating, level of lighting and quality of sound, make a great *space* for storytelling. And from the discreet efficiency in being ushered in and out of the festival tents, to the availability of refreshments, the layout of the bookshops, and the book-signing tables and stands, little hubs for people to meet their favourite authors up close and personal at regular intervals throughout the day, the festival makes a great *business* of storytelling. In this way, the EIBF is not only a valuable

site for a study of the public square but also, as argued below, a remarkable and novel illustration of the production as well as representation of 'Islamicate' space.

The Production of (Islamicate) Space

In discussing the terms 'representation', 'Islamicate' and 'space', this section aims to meld elements from the field of human geography with that of Islamic studies. As noted in the Introduction, it draws upon Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991), and references Lefebvre's triadic framework, namely, spatial practice, the representation of space and, finally, the space of representation (sometimes termed 'representational spaces'), as it applies to knowledge about Islam and Muslims. The scope of the term 'Islamicate', as articulated by Hodgson, was also discussed in the Introduction. As such, this section turns to a wider discussion of how key elements of Lefebvre's notions of the production of space may be understood in the context of the EIBF, and particularly as it applies to the production of an Islamicate space.

For Lefebvre, representations of space refer to 'conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent'.¹⁷⁰ It is, he continues, the 'dominant space in any society (or mode of production)', tending 'towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.'¹⁷¹ In other words,

¹⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 38.

¹⁷¹ Lefebvre, 39.

representations of space are 'conceived'.¹⁷² They are exemplified by signs such as maps, plans, models and designs.¹⁷³

In its inaugural year in 1983, the EIBF was the first of its kind in Scotland and only the third in the rest of the UK. Now there are over 300 such events.¹⁷⁴

According to Jenny Brown, the festival's first director, 'it was conceived of as being a big, one-off celebration of books and the written word at the Edinburgh Festival, which had every other art form represented but nothing on literature.'¹⁷⁵

As the 'biggest and best-respected festival of books in the world'¹⁷⁶, the EIBF not only draws out the world by bringing attention to the diversity of authors and genres, but also maps it by organising them thematically and in the light of contemporary conversations. Crucially, in so doing, it actively produces a social space which is 'tied', as Lefebvre would put it, 'to relations of production and to the "order" which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to "frontal' relations.'¹⁷⁷ As such, it is not just the content of the books, the reading and writing of which, as we have already seen, is a largely solitary affair, but the idea of books and what they stand for - what might be called their performance in the public square - that is at play here.

¹⁷² Lefebvre, 40.

¹⁷³ Hannah Anderson, "Chicago's Critical Mass and the Transportation of Everyday Life: Lefebvre's Spatial Triad." *The Inversion of Space and Spectacle*, 2003, <http://hannahwinkle.com/ccm/Lefebvre.htm>, accessed 3 January, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ See BBC, "Edinburgh International Book Festival Celebrates 30 Years."

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in BBC, "Edinburgh International".

¹⁷⁶ Nick Barley, "Celebrate 30 Years of the World in Words: What Will the Next 30 Years Bring?," in *08.2013 Edinburgh International Book Festival: Celebrating 30 Years* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd, 2013), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 33.

Furthermore, the representation of space is 'in thrall to both knowledge and power'.¹⁷⁸ In Lefebvrian terms, therefore, authors, moderators, chairs, panellists and interpreters who are invited by the festival's programmers all 'identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.'¹⁷⁹ As such, they represent particular kinds of spaces by engaging in a series of conversations that are of both contemporary and historical relevance. The quality of those conversations as expressed in on-stage readings, presentations and question-and-answer sessions, together with reputational capital from authors' previous appearances and their overall fame - all these elements provide a sense of the place of these books and the spaces that they produce, often even before they have been purchased, let alone read. The blurbs in the festival programme for the events featuring Richard Holloway and Nadeem Aslam respectively in 2013 are clear examples of this production of space:

Richard Holloway: *30 Years of Scottish Society*. His gorgeous memoir was one of the finest books of last year, confirming the former Bishop of Edinburgh's status as one of Scotland's great public thinkers. A firm Book Festival favourite, Richard Holloway joins us today to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the world's leading literary event in a conversation with founding director Jenny Brown about three extraordinary decades of society, faith and storytelling in Scotland.¹⁸⁰

Nadeem Aslam: *A Secret Journey into Afghanistan*. He's been described by Colm Toibín as 'one of the most exciting and serious writers working in Britain now' and his new book will build his reputation still further. Nadeem Aslam, twice longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, presents *The Blind Man's Garden*, an unforgettable story

¹⁷⁸ Lefebvre, 50.

¹⁷⁹ Lefebvre, 38.

¹⁸⁰ 'Richard Holloway: 30 Years of Scottish Society', Baillie Gifford Main Theatre, 18 Aug 2013, 16:30. See *EIBF 2013*, 34.

set in Afghanistan and Pakistan after the 9/11 bombings. It's an evocative novel that sheds new light on a key moment in recent history.¹⁸¹

The chapter now examines some of these events and conversations to determine how the festival may be understood as a representation of Islamicate space.

The Festival as a Representation of Islamicate Space

An analysis of the festivals listing compiled by the Alwaleed Centre reveals several broad themes discussed at the EIBF.¹⁸² These run the gamut from religion and politics to war and conflict as well as women and gender relations, all of which also feature in the other Edinburgh summer festivals as corroborated by my own compilation of Islamicate events at the festivals.¹⁸³ More specifically within these categories, events at the Book Festival not only tend to revolve around human rights issues and captivity, fundamentalism, and the Middle East, but they are also explicitly titled as such, for example *The Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series*, which takes place daily, 'Maziar Bahari and François Bizot: Coming Face to Face with Your Captor', 'Maajid Nawaz: One Man's Journey from Extremist to

¹⁸¹ 'Nadeem Aslam: A Secret Journey into Afghanistan', *The Guardian* Spiegelent, 12 Aug 2013, 10:15. See *EIBF 2013*, 15. Other examples abound, including blurbs for 'Rowan Williams: Is Britain Losing Faith in the Church?' (*EIBF 2013*, 24) and 'William Dalrymple: The Battle for Afghanistan' (*EIBF 2013*, 57).

¹⁸² Formally, the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World. The Centre is based at the University of Edinburgh and affiliated to its Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies department. Oddly, the link for this 2012 listing is tucked away at the very bottom of the Alwaleed Centre's 'Upcoming Events' page (Alwaleed Centre n.d.) whereas links listing relevant festival events in 2014 and 2013 are clearly and prominently signposted to the left of the page. See Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, "Events Relating to Islam and the World of Islam in Edinburgh's 2012 Festivals." 2012, [www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/file/Manager/Festivals 2012.pdf](http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/file/Manager/Festivals%202012.pdf), accessed 7 July, 2016.

¹⁸³ Alibhai, "Religion, Faith and Spirituality At the Edinburgh Summer Festivals 2013: A Compilation of Islamicate and Other Events."

Democrat', and 'Tom Holland: How Religion Shaped the Middle East'.¹⁸⁴

Additionally, the act, process and genre of writing per se in the context of these specific themes are themselves an integral part of the festival's programming, as evidenced by events such as 'Raja Shehadeh: Palestine, Politics and Playwriting'.¹⁸⁵ Similar examples can be found on the festival programme for 2013.

Given that this is a literary festival, it is unsurprising that, except for named series, events are fronted by the names of authors presenting them. The tasks, therefore, of (1) identifying 'Events relating to Islam and the World of Islam',¹⁸⁶ in other words, of Islamicate relevance, and (2) promoting this subset as such but without replicating existing marketing, and especially when this relevance is not immediately apparent, becomes a little trickier, if not more involved. In the case of the Alwaleed listing, it is easy enough to cite the festival programme's own title, 'Sadakat Kadri: Debunking the Myths About Shari'a Law'¹⁸⁷ without further explanation. But 'Youssef Ziedan and Andrés Neuman: Ancient Stories with Modern Twists'¹⁸⁸ requires the parenthetical gloss, 'discussion of their novels *Azazeel*, and *Traveller of the Century*, respectively set in ancient Egypt and 19th

¹⁸⁴ *EIBF 2012*, 30, 11 and 25.

¹⁸⁵ *EIBF 2012*, 22.

¹⁸⁶ Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, "Events Relating to Islam and the World of Islam in Edinburgh's 2012 Festivals."

¹⁸⁷ The festival blurb for this event reads 'Sadakat Kadri's *Heaven On Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law* offers a timely and eye-opening investigation into one of the most disputed yet least understood topics of recent times. The history and reality of shari'a law is put under the microscope by this lawyer, author, travel writer and journalist, opening in 7th century Arabia before going on a modern-day journey into Iran, Pakistan and Egypt' See *EIBF 2012*, 45).

¹⁸⁸ *EIBF 2012*, 44.

century Prussia', on the Alwaleed listing, as does 'Jonathan Steele: One War That Might Never Be Won'¹⁸⁹ with '(Afghanistan)'. In the case of the festival's original title 'Elif Shafak: Cross-Country Story of a Family',¹⁹⁰ the Alwaleed listing dispenses with it entirely, rendering it simply as 'Elif Shafak discusses her novel *Honour* (set in Kurdistan, Istanbul and London)'. These and other glosses, such as for Amnesty International's *Imprisoned Writers Series*, "'The Arab Spring'"¹⁹¹ (readings from works about the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria)' point to the importance of geography in marking events as Islamicate. Indeed, the festival programme itself as a whole uses such spatial references, frequently citing cities, countries and regions in its event titles and accompanying blurbs.

As Lefebvre would note, these are fundamentally social spaces and, as such, they 'interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia.'¹⁹² Such spatial configurations and overlaps allow people, events, debates and narratives located in one part of the world to be physically and metaphorically transposed to another part of the world where they are further discussed, analysed and comprehended. Chapter 4 provides another example of such transposition in the context of Muharram processions by Ithna'ashari Shi'a in Edinburgh. In terms of Islamicate events at EIBF, however, this transposition takes place chiefly through

¹⁸⁹ *EIBF 2012*, 45.

¹⁹⁰ *EIBF 2012*, 32.

¹⁹¹ *EIBF 2012*, 39.

¹⁹² Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 86-87.

three lenses: encounters, war and conflict, and women and gender. The chapter discusses one of these lenses next.

Encounters

Encounters take place between minds, peoples, cultures and civilisations. They may be mysterious - troubling, even. But fundamentally, experiences of first contact are explorations of curiosity and exercises in suspending judgement. Only afterwards do they develop into dialogue and understanding or degenerate into confrontation and conflict. Perhaps this is because encounters are fundamentally meetings of difference, with either creative (or, in Lefebvrian terms, productive) or destructive potential. They are memorable, out of the ordinary, questioning each other's paradigms, mental maps, world views and ways of being. In returning to them again and again, they are even dialectical. While repeated encounters may breed a degree of familiarity and, in turn, clichéd contempt, they may also breed understanding, but only insofar as a delicate balance is struck between stability and unpredictability, and especially where the encountering cultures and societies, kindred or not, perceive each other as equals. If this element of unknowing does not induce fear or is not perceived as threatening, the encounters remain fresh, creative and full of promise, generating dialogue, interaction, borrowing, adapting and adopting. In this regard, what is often

termed a 'clash of civilizations'¹⁹³ is perhaps more accurately a 'clash of ignorance'.¹⁹⁴

In recent times, nowhere was this clash first made more manifest in the British context than in the aftermath of Ayatollah Khomeini issuing a death sentence against Salman Rushdie for his *The Satanic Verses*.¹⁹⁵ In the twenty-five or so years since Khomeini's edict, once referred to by V. S. Naipaul as an 'extreme form of literary criticism',¹⁹⁶ much ink has been spilled on the Rushdie Affair. It marked the beginnings of a now *de rigueur* pattern of protest and counter-protest about the representation of Islam and Muslims that is almost unthinkingly accompanied by tropes about free speech on the one hand and licence on the other. But even as headlines fuel the inflammatory interventions by various state actors and public individuals, it is interesting to note that these debates are less about religion per se and more about society at large. Indeed, as Devji notes, in the case of Rushdie:

¹⁹³ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations>, accessed 23 October, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance: Labels Like "Islam" and "the West" Serve Only to Confuse Us About a Disorderly Reality." *The Nation*, 4 Oct 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance?page=full>, accessed 23 Oct, 2014.

¹⁹⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini's message said: 'I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of the Satanic Verses book, which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who are aware of its content are sentenced to death.' See BBC, "Ayatollah Sentences Author to Death." *On This Day: 1950-2005*, 14 February 1989, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/14/newsid_2541000/2541149.stm, accessed 15 April, 2015; Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (New York: Owl Books, 1997).

¹⁹⁶ Maya Jaggi, "A Singular Writer." *The Guardian*, 8 September 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/sep/08/artsandhumanities.highereducation>, accessed 15 April, 2015.

the closest demonstrators came to a theological argument was to demand that their religion be included under Britain's blasphemy law. So in the UK at least, the controversy's only religious element had to do with the desire of Muslim immigrants to be integrated into British society. Otherwise Muslims demonstrating against Rushdie referred to their feelings of outrage at his depiction of Muhammad by using the secular language of libel, defamation and hate speech.¹⁹⁷

Rushdie's appearance at the Book Festival in 2013 to promote his memoir,

Joseph Anton,¹⁹⁸ was eagerly anticipated, the event title and blurb on the

programme reading as follows:

Salman Rushdie: Defining a Literary Generation. In 1983, Salman Rushdie was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for his novel *Shame* and named among *Granta's* inaugural Best of Young British Novelists. Only a few years later, he was forced into hiding by an Iranian *fatwa* after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie survived, became a passionate champion of free speech and emerged as the single most influential British writer of our times. We are thrilled to welcome him to reflect on a remarkable career with John Freeman, editor of *Granta*.¹⁹⁹

But his ultimate reception was rather muted, the earlier drama surrounding him and his book largely dissipated and displaced by more recent controversies on representations of Muhammad, and blunter attacks on Islam and Muslims.²⁰⁰ This was evidenced not only by the number of return tickets for his event, comfortably accommodating about a dozen queuing waitlisters at the box office, despite it being sold out early on, but also in the surprisingly brief discussion set aside on *The Satanic Verses* at the event itself. In a sense, everyone had moved on: looking back on the publication of the novel, even Inayat Bunglawala, then a university student involved in the Rushdie protests who went on to become the Assistant

¹⁹⁷ Faisal Devji, "Looking Back At Salman Rushdie's the Satanic Verses." *The Guardian*, 14 September 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/14/looking-at-salman-rushdies-satanic-verses>, accessed 15 April, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton* (London: Vintage, 2012).

¹⁹⁹ *EIBF 2013*, 10.

²⁰⁰ Not least the *Innocence of Muslims* YouTube video in 2012, and prior to that, the Danish cartoons controversy, and Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015.

Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, acknowledged in the run-up to the publication of *Joseph Anton* that the protesters' demands

were, in retrospect, totally over the top and very embarrassing. We may not have liked his book, but there could be no excuse for trying to deny others the right to buy it and read it for themselves. I would hope that if the same events were to be replayed today, UK Muslims would instead respond by publishing their own books offering their own narrative.²⁰¹

Rushdie is not a self-effacing man, but his deadpan humour was likeable, whether he interjected at the chair's introductory remarks recounting Khomeini's fatwa ('I remember V. S. Naipaul saying that Khomeini's was a very bad review',²⁰² said Rushdie, pausing for the punchline: 'I think he meant it as a joke'), spoke about being exposed to novelist William Styron's testicles or narrated a surreal standoff, replete with a convoy of armoured Jaguars, between English and Scottish police forces as to whose jurisdiction prevailed in rural Ayrshire over his security. I turn now to a discussion of some of the characteristics of encounter-themed events at the festival.

Commonality and Difference

A fundamental feature of encounter narratives at the EIBF is that they highlight commonality over difference, whether in discussing the divine, the relationship between truth, doubt and faith, the role of religion in society or the supposed clash between East and West. As such, seemingly solid distinctions between 'us' and 'them', 'self' and 'the other' tend to evaporate into more nebulous affinities.

²⁰¹ Inayat Bunglawala, "Looking Back At Salman Rushdie's the Satanic Verses." *The Guardian*, 14 September 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/14/looking-at-salman-rushdies-satanic-verses>, accessed 15 April, 2015.

²⁰² See fns 181-182.

Although Rushdie described the absurdities of protection and living in confinement as sometimes being like 'a comedy routine', his remarks on *The Satanic Verses* were astute and reflective. They took the form of pithy observations on the nature of revelation, the historicity of people and events associated with Islam compared to the other Abrahamic faiths,²⁰³ and the spread of religious fundamentalism not being the preserve of a single tradition. Recalling how his father, fluent in Arabic and Persian, unlike him, told him the story of the first revelation, 'but from the point of view of a completely disbelieving person', Rushdie was not at all dismissive of the Prophet Muhammad (Fig. 6):

Put it like this. When Muhammad describes his own description of revelation he describes the angel, Gabriel, as being very very large. The angel stood on the horizon and filled the sky [Rushdie gestures, holding his hands wide apart]. All right. Big angel [audience laughter]. So the question is, which my father asked me and I guess I asked myself afterwards, if you had been standing next to him, would you have seen the angel? And my view is, probably not. Right? And yet, he's not telling a lie. You know, he's not making it up. And so what is that? What is that event? You know, where he genuinely felt, what he genuinely sees, you know, and I would feel that if I was standing like you and I are next to each other I would not have seen the same thing. What does that mean? What is revelation? How does it work? And he gave me, my father gave ... me some of the stories which I went along and studied ... And when I was at university, I came across this incident, which is in the records, the sort of temptation of the Prophet, the incident of the satanic verses ... And I remember thinking, 'That's a good story', and you know, twenty years later I found out how good a story it was [audience laughter].

²⁰³ 'By contrast, Islam is very, very documented,' said Rushdie, 'We know about what kind of man the Prophet of Islam was, what his family circumstances were, who he married, what he did for a living.'



Fig. 6 The Prophet Muhammad (seated) receiving the first revelation from the angel Gabriel. Detail from the *Compendium of Chronicles* by Rashid al-Din. Digital Image: Copyright The University of Edinburgh. Original: Copyright The University of Edinburgh. Free use.

Good stories, if not excellent ones, are a fundamental requirement of literary festivals. Youssef Ziedan addressed similar issues at the EIBF just a year earlier than Rushdie, in 2012, for his novel *Azazeel* (2012).²⁰⁴ There is, first of all, the delicious parallel between the titles of arguably their most famous books, for not only was *Azazeel* awarded the International Prize for Arabic fiction, the 'Arabic

²⁰⁴ Youssef Ziedan, *Azazeel*, trans. Jonathan Wright (London: Atlantic Books, 2012). The event title and blurb for Ziedan's appearance at the festival read: 'Andrés Neuman and Youssef Ziedan: Ancient Stories with Modern Twists. Andrés Neuman's *Traveller of the Century* is an ambitious debut novel that invites the reader to look at the 19th century with 21st century eyes. Enigmatic traveller Hans stops between Saxony and Prussia, finding himself in a debate with an old organ-grinder. Youssef Ziedan's *Azazeel*, set in the 5th century, is an exquisitely crafted tale of a monk's journey from Upper Egypt to Syria during a time of social upheaval.' See *EIBF 2012*, 44).

Booker', in 2009,²⁰⁵ but also the word itself, as Ziedan noted, is 'the Hebrew and old Arabic name of the devil' and who 'here is a part of us, not an external figure'. Second, it is a novel steeped in history and philosophy: 'It's not for everyone,' said Ziedan, a scholar of Arabic and Islamic Studies, and Director of the Manuscript Centre and Museum associated with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Told in the form of an 'internal speech about Hiba' (or Hypa), a fifth-century Coptic monk fleeing his native Egypt for Syria in the wake of extreme violence propagated by dogma and corruption in early Christianity, *Azazeel*, too, revolves around the role and nature of religious texts. Third, it was popular and controversial in equal measure. According to Ziedan, it was in its ninth edition even before the prize and in its twenty-seventh by the time of his appearance at the festival, which is highly unusual for this genre. In the three years before, seven books for and against the novel had been published in response. But after 'the Italian translation and the Egyptian revolution,' Ziedan continued, 'they've reconsidered the novel, and the idea of God, [the] Devil, and ourselves'. Despite its explicit genre as a novel, Ziedan, like Rushdie, had to address issues of authenticity. Because it drew heavily from 'religious thinking and knowledge', Ziedan said that:

even specialists in Syria have asked if it's real. But it's not. The people are real, but I went through it and tried to make the history more real. History is *his* story. Histories tell us what they believe and we have many stories.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ See International Prize for Arabic Fiction, "Winner 2009, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). *Azazeel*. Youssef Ziedan." 2009, <https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/2009>, accessed 3 January, 2019.

²⁰⁶ Emphasis his.

The form of the novel is particularly suited to encounter narratives, because it raises important questions without the expectation of definitive answers. In other words, it allows for the continuing exploration not only of fundamental questions about life and meaning without the hubris of resolution,²⁰⁷ but also of comparably more mundane concerns – about individual as well as societal development and change, where the elements of transposition and poetic licence allow people to say things in one context that they might find considerably difficult, for a variety of reasons, in another. This is true, for example, of Joanne Harris's novel *Peaches for Monsieur Le Curé* (2013), the genesis of which, as she revealed during her event 'Joanne Harris: Milk Chocolate and Minarets', was the sight of veiled women in her native Yorkshire. Interestingly, however, the programme blurb for this event made no further reference to Islam.²⁰⁸

It is ironic that such licence did not allow escape for Rushdie. However, that backlash resulted from a confluence of circumstances then impossible to predict and for which there was no precedent. But if the reaction was a measure of fundamentalism, Rushdie was quick to point out, as mentioned earlier, that Muslims certainly did not hold a monopoly on its expression. Ziedan, citing opposition from within both Jewish and Christian communities for his novels and for *Azazel's* portrayal of Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, echoed similar sentiments at his festival event, arguing that 'Violence in the name of God is a

²⁰⁷ Famously satirised by Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: MacMillan, 2009, 156), where the 'Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything', is, of course, '42'.

²⁰⁸ *EIBF 2013*, 42.

problem in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.²⁰⁹ This illustrates an important point: that where historical incidents inspire contemporary novel writing, fiction often triumphs over truth, and the authority exercised by the forces of history, tradition and historiography fades in the face of competing publics in many squares.

Of course, this does not obviate the need for discerning fact from fiction. If anything, it renders history, tradition and historiography as essential to human life, so closely is it tied to the creation of memory and meaning. Take, for example, Mustafa Cerić at 'Rethinking Islam: Is Radical Islam the World's Greatest Threat?', part of a popular debate series at the Book Festival in 2012.²¹⁰ Introducing himself to an audience of around 120²¹¹ as the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina,²¹² a genocide survivor, Muslim and European, Cerić emphasised that Islam was not

²⁰⁹ Ziedan went on to reiterate that his main idea was violence in the name of God and that his next novel was about the same topic but in Islam.

²¹⁰ The title and blurb for this event read: 'The Alwaleed Centre Event. Debate: Rethinking Islam: Is Radical Islam the World's Greatest Threat? Tony Blair described radical Islam as 'the world's greatest threat'. Others argue that the widespread embracing of Islam has generally been thanks to its tolerance and its mission to deliver justice. The reality is more nuanced with recent history requiring us to re-evaluate our hopes and fears for the future. Mustafa Cerić, Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina and academic Dilip Hiro present perspectives from Europe and Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Chaired by Ruth Wishart' (*EIBF 2012*, 46). Oddly, novelist Jamal Mahjoub, who appears on the Alwaleed listing and was present at the event is not mentioned on this blurb as a panellist.

²¹¹ Mostly white, with only a handful of ethnic minorities in attendance, and varying in age from mid 20s to their 40s and 50s. While festival audiences largely conformed to this make-up racially, there did seem to be a generational tendency towards older attendees.

²¹² Cerić was in his second term as Grand Mufti at the time, having been in office for almost 20 years by then. Husein Karazovic replaced Mustafa Cerić as Grand Mufti in October 2012. See Zoran Arbutina, "Bosnia's New Grand Mufti to Promote Tolerance." *DW*, 20 October 2012, <http://www.dw.de/bosnias-new-grand-mufti-to-promote-tolerance/a-16320857>, accessed 11 May, 2015. Demonstrating political ambitions, Cerić bid for the tripartite presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina in August 2014. See Mersiha Gadzo, "Does Religion Have Role in Bosnia Elections?" *AlJazeera.com*, 16 August 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/08/does-religion-role-bosnia-elections-20148168188413365.html>, accessed 11 May, 2015.

something out there in the Middle East, but a reality here, in Europe, going back centuries. His linkage of the constituent elements of his identity to the promise of 'Never again', in memory of and response to the history of war, destruction and genocide in Europe, demonstrates another kind of commonality. Note that this commonality, however, is spatial and not merely ideological, a point reinforced by his repeated reference to the history of genocide in Europe,²¹³ as well as the use of the phrase 'we Europeans' throughout the debate. But the commonalities discussed above go hand in hand with the inescapable differences that I examine next.

Spatial and Temporal Diversity

The second characteristic emerging from these narratives is, conversely, the spatial and temporal diversity of these encounters. Even as the dichotomy between Islam and the West, if not a full-scale clash, is made explicit in the full title for 'Rethinking Islam' in 2012, and in others such as John Tolan's 'Islam and the West: More Complex Than You Might Think' in 2013,²¹⁴ the festival does present the existence of multiple histories, traditions and historiographies of Islamicate cultures, each of which becomes a reservoir of changing memory and meaning.

²¹³ In his talk, Cerić said, 'The Jews were expelled twice – in 1492 and in World War II, and Muslims now in Bosnia, in the middle of 500 million Christians.'

²¹⁴ The event title and blurb for this event read: 'The Alwaleed Centre Event. John Tolan. Islam and the West: More Complex Than You Might Think. Much has been written and reported about the 'clash of civilisations' that has ruptured relations between Islam and the West. John Tolan, history professor at the Universite de Nantes is one of many academics refuting this simplistic notion. In *Europe and the Islamic World*, Tolan and others chart 15 centuries of history to offer up a more balanced view of this complex state of affairs. Chaired by Ruth Wishart.' See *EIBF 2013*, 36.

In the case of 'Rethinking Islam', Cerić began a wide-ranging discussion by outlining the views of 'some historians' that there were twelve civilisations, seven of which were dead and five that were still living: Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Western and Islamic. He said he was interested in Western and Islamic civilisation, noting that, while Western civilisation was connected with geography and not religion, Islamic civilisation was connected to religion. This is an odd characterisation, particularly as he went on to speak of the West and Islam as 'Siamese twins' sharing a cosmology, cosmogony and eschatology.²¹⁵ Cerić described their mode of engagement as being 'one of competition' and said that 'Recently, I think, they're competing in a bad way.' Invoking Baghdad of the eighth century and Cordoba of the tenth century, he said, 'We have to live together. There is no choice. We are Siamese twins, like it or not.' Reflecting on the title of the debate, he said that 'Rethinking Islam was appropriate for the present time' and that especially from the view of the West, 'we've had ten to twelve years of a really unhelpful, monolithic view.'²¹⁶ Having lived in Spain, Denmark and the UK, Cerić said he had 'seen what Islam in Europe is going through', but that we need to 'see Islam not as competing within the West.'²¹⁷ He spoke of the 'challenge of

²¹⁵ Cerić made other unusual remarks as well: 'I wish that all Muslim countries went through what Turkey did because you have better Muslims in Turkey than in any other Muslim countries'; 'I am grand Mufti. Even I read books. Because once you become Mufti, you don't read, you teach. But I learnt too'; 'Muslims are not living in a state of cultural insecurity and this is why Muslims in Europe want to tell you, 'I'm a Muslim', because he feels he strengthens his cultural security. This is psychological.'

²¹⁶ This notion of a monolithic Islam was also taken up at Sadakat Kadri's event.

²¹⁷ Cerić did not seem entirely aware of how Scotland differed from England, on one occasion starting a sentence with 'In England here...' and then on another talking about an established church in the UK, before being corrected both times.

people now living in Europe who see themselves as Europeans and Muslim', and that 'this conflict needs to be resolved or we are condemned to repeating the conflicts of the past'. Speaking of the Middle East, he said that what we are seeing there 'is an evolution of Islam'. Whereas the coup in Sudan in 1989 was 'a very brutal Islam ... looking like a dinosaur', the present situation in 'Egypt and Sudan is a kind of dialogue where Islam and democracy can be compatible', but that 'It's not going to happen tomorrow.'

Dilip Hiro, Cerić's co-panellist, was equally expansive. He set the scene by comparing Muhammad and Jesus, arguing that 'politics and religion were intertwined in Islam', because Muhammad represented both spheres, whereas Jesus 'was a carpenter'. He noted that while Islam was associated with the Arab world, 'the number of Muslims in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh equalled 300 million, which is the same number of all twenty-two members of the Arab League.'²¹⁸ Starting from the abolishment of the (Ottoman) caliphate in 1924, Hiro surveyed the variety of forms of political Islam, covering the Muslim Brotherhood, the Mujahideen of Afghanistan in the 1980s ultimately spilling over into Pakistan and India, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Sufi Islam in South Asia, the development of the Pakistani Taliban and the rise of the AKP in Turkey.

²¹⁸ See, for example, Brian J Grim, and Mehtab S Karim, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population." *Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life*, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>, accessed 4 February, 2011.

The panellists, who included the novelist Jamal Mahjoub, also covered the spread of Islam, European Islam, educational systems, the failure of secularisation in Muslim societies, Sunni-Shi'a tensions, the role of the state in intervening for religion in the public sphere, fundamentalism, the status of women, the application of shari'a in various contexts and multiculturalism. They did not always agree with each other, each citing specific examples, but this served only to highlight the diversity of Muslim responses to the issues at hand. In light of Cerić's earlier remarks on an 'unhelpful, monolithic view' of Islam from the West, this was an important element of the event. As we shall see shortly, however, the demonstration of this diversity and its attendant complexity does not in itself facilitate greater understanding of the issues at stake among observers. Cerić, however, dominated the floor, often interrupting even when the panel's chair, Ruth Wishart,²¹⁹ directed questions to another panellist. On Islam as a whole, he said, 'Islam is more than religion, culture, geography, Shi'a or Sunni issue. It's a way of life. Because Islam is a civilisation.' On European Islam, he asserted, 'Unfortunately, we Europeans are not confident of developing our own theology because the Sun still rises in the East.' On the performance of religion in the public sphere, Cerić cited the presidents of the newly independent states of Central Asia after 1991 all very publicly going on the *hajj*, shops closing during Ramadan and Pakistan under Zia ul-Haq, who had army commanders lead the Friday prayer. On the appeal of Islamist parties, Cerić said, 'Go to a mosque in

²¹⁹ Wishart is described as 'one of Scotland's leading journalists'. See <http://www.creative-scotland.com/who-we-are/our-people/board/ruth-wishart>, accessed 16 June 2015.

Cairo. You get food, employment, medical aid. They were doing what the government should have been doing.' But he also noted that in Egypt 'there's an internal battle', evidenced by the exchange between the Speaker of Parliament 'arguing with a Salafi calling on everyone to forcibly pray'. Pointedly, he stated, 'The question is, who is going to hijack Islam and who is going to lead it?'

In response to an audience question about the transformation of a cosmopolitan, liberal and civilised Kabul in the 1970s to how it is now, Hiro spoke of villages, a feudal society, ideological fervour and anti-imperialist attitudes. Cerić, in turn, argued that faith, religion and morality were not the same, but he was jeered – very unusual for a festival audience – when he spoke of God breathing life into man. When the audience was silenced by one of its own, urging them to 'respectfully listen', Cerić continued, 'You may be religious but not moral, or moral and not religious. So there is always a relationship between religion and the state. The possibility of both is different.' He further argued that there should not be a confrontation between religion and the state, but harmony, and that people lived in a forced secularisation when they were not allowed to have a voice in this way. This prompted another audience member to comment that the debate had been 'enlightening, and interesting to rethink' and as such that it 'might be worth looking at similarities between the three great [monotheistic] faiths and not just differences'. Cerić ended on a sobering note, highlighting yet another spatial difference. He asserted that we should appreciate freedom here because '70 per cent of all refugees in the world are Muslim. All the

wars today are in Muslim lands. Muslims nations haven't had freedom. The Muslims need their own West.'

As suggested earlier, discussions on difference do not necessarily enlighten. If anything, they make people uncomfortable and unsettled. As one reviewer noted, this event 'was perhaps too ambitious. The panel ... were all informed and explained their views well but couldn't agree the issues amongst themselves. Inevitably the audience had a whole different set of opinions. Little progress was made.'²²⁰ But does this assessment have more to do with a lack of cultural and religious literacy specifically about Islamicate cultures? After all, Western religious diversity seems to be taken for granted - it is difficult to imagine, for example, that anyone in the same context would suggest that Christians of various stripes should completely agree on the same issues among themselves.

If the sheer diversity of themes and opinions on these themes at this event proved too messy to handle for some, the earlier-mentioned John Tolan's 'Islam and the West: More Complex Than You Might Think'²²¹ a year later in 2013 provided a much more concise presentation on rethinking the relationship between Islam and the West. Critically referencing the notion of a clash of civilisations, Ruth Wishart, again chairing, observed:

The media as we know is fond of clichés, which often provide an easier route for them for analysis than joined-up thinking does [audience laughter], and a persistent cliché not least since 9/11 has been to characterise every incident involving cross-

²²⁰ The reviewer further rated the event as 5/10. See Robert Stodel, "Edinburgh Festivals 2012." *BobView.com*, 19 August 2012, <http://bobview.com/2012/08/edinburgh-festivals-2012/>, accessed 11 May, 2015.

²²¹ *EIBF 2013*, 37.

cultural acts of violence as a product of the ongoing clash of oriental and occidental civilisations.

Picking up on Wishart's initial remarks, Tolan provided a pithy observation of Huntington, who 'claimed that conflict was inevitable'. 'Huntington,' Tolan said, 'realises, of course, that this was a simplification, as the idea of the Cold War was also a simplification. In other words, if you liked the Cold War, you'll love the clash of civilisations!' Indeed, 'anyone who knows about the history of the Mediterranean world' knew that contact was rich and varied. Amidst laughter, Tolan said that Huntington bashing was 'easy sport, like shooting fish in a barrel. But we don't do that for 400 pages.'

Dedicating his talk to a co-author who had died of leukaemia a few months earlier, Tolan began by addressing the issue of the need for their book *Europe and the Islamic World: A History*.²²² First, he said, although it was ostensibly 'on a much covered subject', many other works tended to 'lack historical depth' and so this work had attempted to 'look at the importance of these relations over history'. Second, these other works 'were very much from a European perspective', but this one was a corrective in that it came from 'multiple perspectives, many languages, many cultures, which share the Mediterranean basin'. Here, again, the attention drawn to spatial and temporal diversity, as it applies to encounters between Islamicate and non-Islamicate cultures and civilisations, is evident.

²²² John Tolan, Gilles Veinstein, and Henry Laurens, *Europe and the Islamic World: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Tolan proceeded with the rest of his talk by presenting four vignettes of encounters between these peoples from his portion of the book: the Italian who dies in Toledo, the shipwrecked pilgrim, globalisation, and the weeping sultan. These deftly woven tales covered the great translation movement through the example and efforts of Gerard of Cremona and described a thriving Muslim community in Sicily as seen through the eyes of Ibn Jubayr. They also demonstrated the remarkable exchange, facilitated by cross-cultural trade, between 'merchants, missionaries and mercenaries'. Finally, in the figure of a nephew of Saladin who had just won a major victory over the fifth crusade, they covered an example of empathy in suffering, and the possibility of a 'humane and philosophical conqueror' such that 'in the midst of war' was 'born the image of the wise and just sultan'.

In narrating the wealth and rich detail of these narratives dispersed deliberately over time and space, Tolan delivered on the promise of the event's title, providing examples of ambivalence and exchange and borrowing as well as conflict and collaboration in the historical relationship between Islam and the West. Again, however, audiences appeared to struggle in engaging with the complexity of this diversity. This time round, the gap between historical knowledge and how it related to understanding and addressing contemporary conflict was even starker. This was clear from the moment that Tolan concluded with the fourth of his vignettes. Indeed, the question-and-answer session that followed took a jarringly presentist turn from the outset, with Wishart immediately

asking about the prospect of the Arab Spring turning. Subsequent questions continued this trend, with a discussion on the European Union, the war on terror and contemporary Shi'a-Sunni conflicts. Unsurprisingly, then, the audience took this lead and Tolan had to field questions about the difference in the 'Islamic diaspora' between France and the UK, and which had the 'better model' of multiculturalism, as well as larger issues about immigration, migrants and language, including the rise of Spanish as the second language of the USA. Tolan did try to steer back into more familiar historical territory, citing examples from conflict relations between the Ottomans and the Safavids in the context of civilisational clashes, the intellectual debt Europe owed to Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and precisely the dangers of presentism in discussing the 'sorry state' of affairs of contemporary intellectual life in the Arab world. But it was clearly a losing battle, and the event arguably 'jumped the shark' when an audience member asked Tolan what, in his view, were 'the things, the attractive things, that we could learn from the Arabic culture, the Islamic culture'.

It was a sincere question and Tolan's response was equally well meant.

Invoking London and Paris, 'where there is a lot of exchange and conflict as well',

Tolan stated that an 'increasingly globalised world' had its negative sides as

countries like China and India

become more ... powerful all across the world. But what is it that we in Europe can appreciate from the Arab cultures now? I think that those of us who travel in the Arab world can come up with lots of examples ... [the] sense of hospitality, openness ... [of being] invited into people's homes. Even people in difficult economic situations will make an effort out of pure generosity to make people feel

at home. It is something interesting for us to think about ... [in] other parts of the world as well ... [there is] more generosity and sharing where people have less.

But the question was vexingly, if perhaps inadvertently, utilitarian in its framing. After all, the entire talk preceding the question-and-answer session was didactic, premised precisely on addressing the amnesia or ignorance of historical interactions between Islam and the West. Tolan could not have presented more vivid and powerful examples of positive contact and exchange, 'for better or for worse', as he had said in bringing his talk and the last of the vignettes to a close. But these arguably self-evident lessons seemed only implicit to the audience. Thus caught off guard, Tolan's response to the question was hesitant, punctuated by pauses and almost bewildered, not only falling back on a cliché of generosity and hospitality, but also conflating 'Islam' with 'Arab' and thereby undermining the very diversity that he had been so careful to demonstrate. This was frustrating for several Muslims in the audience whom I spoke with immediately after the event. One confessed that she groaned inwardly when the question was asked and had seen the response coming. 'But it wasn't really his fault,' she said. 'He gave a historical point of view, but the questions just focused on what is happening now.' Sadly, the tyranny of immediacy looks set to prevail for some time still.

Conclusion

A number of other events also exemplified this notion of encounter. The two described above were sponsored by the Alwaleed Centre, whose sponsorship

was certainly a result of its ongoing outreach agenda and in fulfilment of several of its stated objectives, not least:

To improve radically knowledge and understanding of Islamic civilisation and of Muslims in Britain among policy-makers, the general public, and students of all ages in the UK through a comprehensive educational outreach programme, and by helping to integrate the study of Islamic civilisation into the school curriculum. (Alwaleed Centre, n.d.).²²³

The centre's events at the EIBF are thus circumscribed by a discourse that is both academic and strategic. But, like a number of other, non-Alwaleed events at the festival, they did not entirely resonate with their intended public.²²⁴ For all the cool rationality evident in the titles of these events as well as other similarly themed ones,²²⁵ the actual discussions were invariably passionate and humanising in equal measure. Nonetheless, it would seem that there are limits to the extent that these events, at least in the short term, can fundamentally change the public and popular paradigm that conflates Islam, Islamdom and Islamicate. This problem is compounded when discussions on history are not perceived as bearing on contemporary circumstances, especially when they remain overwhelmingly framed by a discourse of conflict, violence and othering.

²²³ The Centre has continued to sponsor similar events at the Book Festival.

²²⁴ This is also the case for aspects of the Shi'a Ithna'ashari Muharram procession discussed in Chapter 4.

²²⁵ This includes the previously-mentioned example of Sadakat Kadri's 'Debunking the Myths About Shari'a Law', the festival blurb for which reads 'Sadakat Kadri's *Heaven On Earth: A Journey Through Shari'a Law* offers a timely and eye-opening investigation into one of the most disputed yet least understood topics of recent times. The history and reality of shari'a law is put under the microscope by this lawyer, author, travel writer and journalist, opening in 7th century Arabia before going on a modern-day journey into Iran, Pakistan and Egypt.' See *EIBF 2012*, 45).

The EIBF is a remarkable site in its function as a public square. Its role, too, in both the production as well as the representation of an Islamicate space cannot be understated, particularly in the way that this contributes to wider public understandings of Islam and Muslims. Where encounters between Islamicate and Western cultures are narrated, commonality is an overriding theme. Spatial and temporal diversity, nonetheless, also feature, especially in relation to the politics and conflicts between modern nation states. But other seeds of Islamicate diversity, particularly of the histories and thought of many distinct communities of interpretation and, in turn, their notions of religious authority and leadership, ethics, governance and civil society, have yet to take root in Charlotte Square Gardens.

Chapter 2

The Edinburgh Fringe: Islam in the Festival Fun

It is opening night for *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*. The one-woman performance by Dr. Maisah Sobaihi, an academic at the University of Jeddah, is running late, and people are still coming into the venue at Spotlites Merchant's Hall on Hanover Street.²²⁶ On stage, a canvas set of high-rise, narrow-alleyed buildings typical of an Arab Old Town, forms the backdrop to a living room. There are cushions, a chair, and a divan covered in rugs and throws. All of it in rich shades of red, providing an overall impression of a comfortable, if not luxurious, upper-middle class home. A shisha bubbles at one side of the room and a large, push-button telephone with an extended cord sits atop a low stool. Both are key props, particularly the telephone, for Sobaihi and two other characters she plays, Maryam and Laylah.

As Sobaihi makes her stage entrance to the beat of a lively percussion, the audience applauds. Dressed in flowing red and black robes with matching, fashionable headgear, which Muslims would quickly recognise to function as a hijab, she almost immediately draws the audience into a dialogue with her about the title of the show. 'I mean you don't really hear a love story about Saudi Arabia, do you? No. What do you hear about Saudi Arabia? Please, relax...shout it out!' she says in an American accent. The audience obliges with responses about oil,

²²⁶ The performance had a run from 11-26 August 2013. Clips from its run in New York from the Midtown International Theatre Festival in 2012 are available at her website www.maisahsobaihi.com/head-over-heels-in-saudi-arabia, accessed 17 August 2017.

war, repression, and having four wives. 'Everybody remembers that in Saudi Arabia, a man is allowed four wives, yes?', Sobaihi continues. 'Many men are intrigued by that. My friends, no matter what nationality, what religion, they are always asking me questions about that.' She goes on, 'That is absolutely true. A man is allowed four wives. It is legal in Saudi Arabia. But not all men have four wives. Some have one, till death do them part. Some have two. Some have three. And yes, some have four. Absolutely true.'

And so began Sobaihi's hour-long performance exploring marriage, divorce, custody and sex in the kingdom. Acting and opining in turn, she and her characters aimed to represent the voices, experiences, and importantly, choices, of Saudi women, particularly divorcées and those faced with husbands taking on another wife. Sobaihi herself does double duty, delivering the play's social commentary and drawing from her own experience as woman married at 17 and divorced 10 years later, with 'two beautiful boys, living alone as a single mother in Saudi Arabia.'²²⁷ Then there is Maryam, wife to Abdullah for 25 years and mother to their two children. We learn that Abdullah has been testing the waters with Maryam to marry a second wife, a prospect she has always feared. Finally, we are also introduced to Laylah, a divorcée who has custody of her children and who has entered into a *misyār* marriage, becoming a second, covert wife to a wealthy man who showers her with gifts.

²²⁷ Edinburgh Evening News, "Preview: Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia." *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 August 2013, <http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/entertainment/preview-head-over-heels-in-saudi-arabia-1-3059589>, accessed 16 August, 2017.

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Fig. 7 One of the flyers for *Head Over Heels*. This design focuses on polygamy and women's responses to it, as highlighted by the red text in the middle. To the right, an anguished Sobaihi, face in her hands, leaves viewers in no doubt of the distress this causes. Indeed, in its explicit articulation of the fact, it catches the reader's attention for the very stereotype it reinforces. Only its tempering by the deliberate rhyming 'do/2' and 'flee/three' hints at a potential subversion of this narrative.

Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia is a case study of how Islam and Muslims are represented at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which had not one but two different flyers for its marketing (Fig. 7). Sometimes, as was the case for *Head Over Heels*, these performances go on tour more widely both domestically and internationally. In the absence of a published script or recording, however, such performances are inevitably ephemeral and episodic, lasting at most, at the Fringe in any case, the full 3-week-length of the Festival, and often running much shorter. As such, as well as for the reasons outlined in the Fieldwork, Sources and Methods section of the Introduction, this chapter quotes extensively from the performance, taking it as primary source material to substantiate the arguments being presented. It also provides an in-depth analysis of reviews of the performance to highlight particular aspects of its reception.²²⁸

This chapter first examines how *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* positions itself as an authoritative and authentic social commentary on the lives of women in Saudi Arabia. Next, it examines the complexity and variety of marital relationships there and how women negotiate and navigate their way through them. It then discusses the kingdom's infamous ban on women driving, repealed only in 2017, with an associated commentary on its attendant racism and impact on the economy. Fourth, it explores how Islam is refracted through the lens of Saudi

²²⁸ Sobaihi's own website featured no less than nine reviews, including one each from *CNN*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Record*, three from *Saudi Gazette* and one each from *Culture* and *Arab News*. See www.maisahsobaihi.com/press, accessed 17 August 2017.

Arabia ending, finally, with a survey of the shari‘a and how it relates to temporary marriage.

Authority and Authenticity

As one reviewer noted, Sobaihi’s ‘women are full of fire, frustration, intelligence and ingenuity.’²²⁹ Their stories were deeply personal yet humorous, and Sobaihi took care, both on- and off-stage, to ensure that they were seen as authentic. On-stage, performative tropes of maniacal laughter and high-pitched voices were liberally accompanied by code-switching excursions into Arabic that drew guffaws from the audience. The *mise en scène* described earlier was lauded by one Middle Eastern reviewer as a ‘Saudi in-joke’, replete with ‘the velvet fabric...just this side of tacky.’²³⁰ Another, describing a 2012 performance at Effat University in Saudi Arabia (Fig. 8), wrote of the stage that it was ‘divided into three sets, each designed as per the classic Arabian tastes of colour and lavishness.’²³¹ Off-stage, Sobaihi was rather more explicit about her motivations for the performance:

I’ve always felt that there needs to be a representation of Saudi women by Saudi women and of course me being one of them, a full blooded Arab...I lived in Saudi Arabia. I feel it’s always more credible when someone talks about what they know after being there and living there and that’s what, for me, the play is really about.²³²

²²⁹ Bidisha, “The Saudi Women Laughing in the Face of Inequality At Home and Ignorance Abroad.” *The Huffington Post*, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/bidisha/the-saudi-women-laughing_b_3751881.html, accessed 20 August, 2017.

²³⁰ Bidisha.

²³¹ Anousha Vakani, “A Review of ‘Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia.’” *Jeddah Blog*, 20 October 2012, <https://jeddah-blog.com/2012/10/20/head-over-heels-in-saudi-arabia-reviewed/>, accessed 22 August, 2017.

²³² The Telegraph, “First Saudi Comedienne Takes to the Stage At Edinburgh Fringe.” *The Telegraph*, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/edinburgh-festival/10240548/First-Saudi-comedienne-takes-to-the-stage-at-Edinburgh-Fringe.html>, accessed 16 August, 2017.

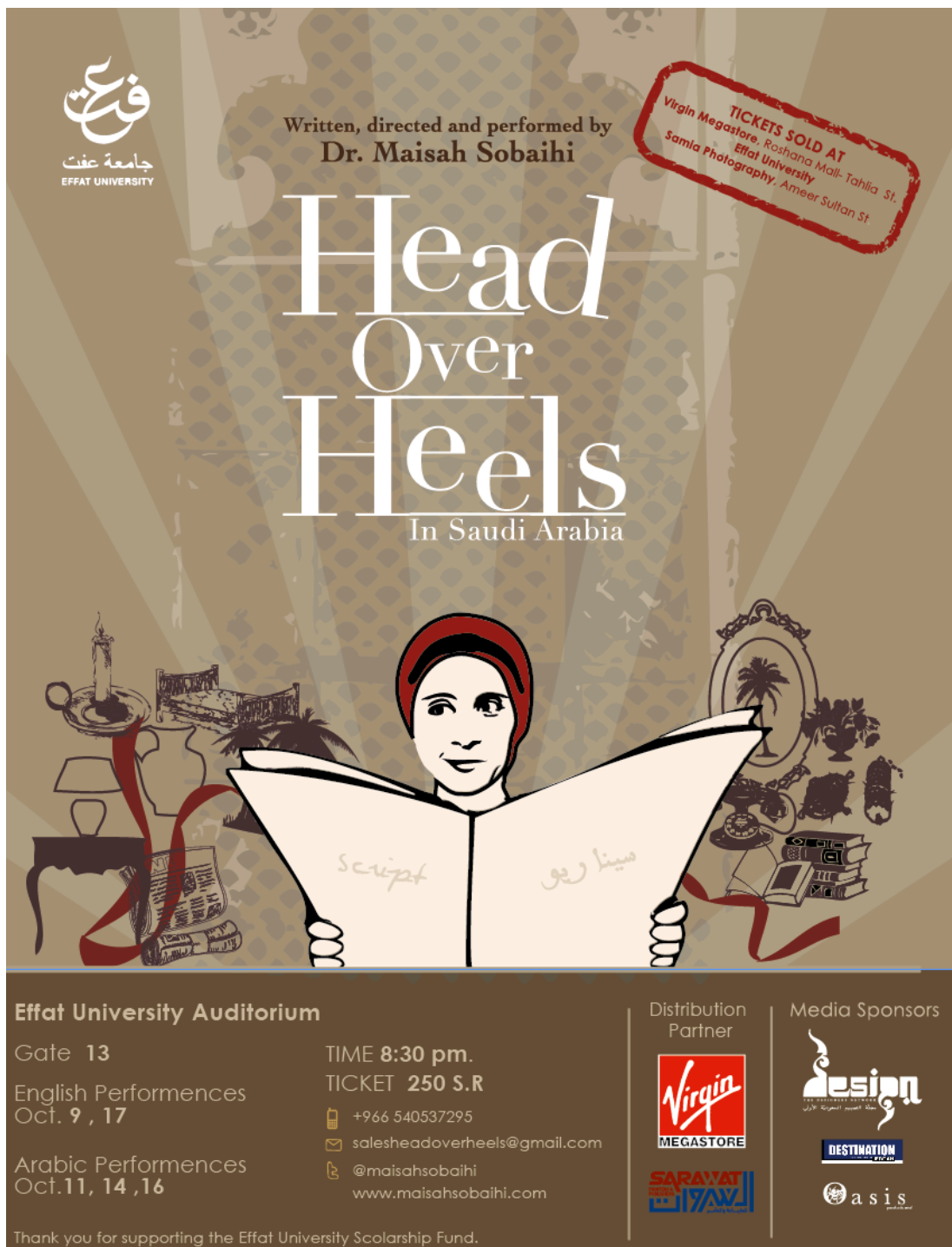


Fig. 8 Flyer advertising a performance of *Head Over Heels* at Effat University, Saudi Arabia

Sobaihi's intrinsic credentials as an insider (woman and Arab), coupled with the extrinsic expertise of her lived experience in the country further reinforces *Head Over Heels'* appeal to authenticity. In this way, Sobaihi shined a spotlight not only

on women's experiences and attitudes towards marital and family relations, but also on their class and racial prejudices. The latter issue of discrimination is rooted in Saudi Arabia's casualised immigrant labour policies and was portayed in the performance in the form of an unexpected and fascinating take on the kingdom's infamous ban on women driving.²³³

However, Sobaihi's invocation of authenticity and authoritative staging of the lives of Saudi women is not without its problems. The first and most glaring of these is the performance's stereotypical depiction of women as nosy, gossipy, and prone to flying off the handle. Perhaps this is because Sobaihi says she 'prefer[s] to take serious things and deal with them in a light-hearted way'.²³⁴ This deliberate ebullience found expression, for example, in a singalong of The Supremes' 'You Can't Hurry Love' (1966), incorporated into the performance as a response to the pressure that Sobaihi herself faced from friends and family to remarry in the wake of her own divorce. Aside from this audience interaction, however, this exuberance was perhaps most manifest in the shrieks of her characters throughout the performance. In the context of a Fringe performance, they were arguably necessary caricatures of real Saudi women. But they risked stereotyping Saudi women as overwrought and hysterical, potentially trivialising, if not obfuscating, the clear rationales of these particular women and their agency

²³³ The ban was repealed by royal decree in September 2017 and took effect in June 2018. See Ben Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees to Let Women Drive." *The New York Times*, 26 September 2017, <https://nyti.ms/2yrfu5l>, accessed 26 September, 2017.

²³⁴ Sheena McKenzie, "Maisah Sobaihi: The Saudi Arabian Woman Revealing All on Stage." *CNN*, 27 September 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/27/showbiz/maisah-sobaihi-the-saudi-arabian/index.html>, accessed 22 August, 2017.

in determining how best they wanted to live as they negotiated their roles and expanded their space in a stiflingly patriarchal society. Indeed, a more critical review noted that while the 'stories are played for laughs, and though in some senses they are sympathetic portrayals, these women are largely made to look a little ridiculous.'²³⁵

But this was a lone voice amongst theatre critics. CNN's Sheena McKenzie wrote that Sobaihi was 'touched by the huge number of women telling her how much they associated with her characters – regardless of whether they were from New York or Jeddah'.²³⁶ She quotes Sobaihi as saying:

In the beginning I was really surprised to hear that, because I was writing it in Saudi Arabia about myself and other women I knew. But I was also happy because I think at the end of the day the experiences of women are always connected somehow. And one of the objectives of the play is to create that strong dialogue for understanding.²³⁷

Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia has been performed several times in Saudi Arabia, in universities and private homes 'because the country does not have a significant theatre scene.'²³⁸ It was first performed in 2006 at the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, and then in 2008, also in Jeddah, at Effat University Theatre.²³⁹ There were also performances in Saudi Arabia in 2011, 2012 and 2015,

²³⁵ Lauren Mooney, "Edinburgh Fringe Review: Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia." *A Younger Theatre*, 14 August 2013, <https://www.ayoungerteaatre.com/edinburgh-fringe-review-head-over-heels-in-saudi-arabia/>, accessed 17 August, 2017.

²³⁶ McKenzie, "Maisah Sobaihi".

²³⁷ McKenzie.

²³⁸ Telegraph, "First Saudi Comedienne".

²³⁹ Bizzie Frost, "'Head Over Heels' is Back in Jeddah." *Saudi Gazette*, 20 February 2015, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/113694/Head-Over-Heels-is-back-in-Jeddah>, accessed 25 August, 2017.

with the two latter ones reportedly in separate Arabic and English renditions.²⁴⁰ It had also played in the Midtown International Theatre Festival in New York in 2012.²⁴¹ Aside from the inherent power of storytelling, several other elements of *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* mattered to make this particular parable of a patriarchal kingdom more universally relatable. The aforementioned Supremes song is one. Sobaihi's widely reported cosmopolitan background and academic qualifications (e.g. 'born in Saudi Arabia, raised in California, and with a doctorate in literature from King's London')²⁴² is another. So, too, was its novelty, which also garnered comprehensive media coverage as a first ('Saudi Arabian playwright, actress and academic, Dr Maisah Sobaihi, is making history by being the first performer from the kingdom to showcase their work at Edinburgh's famous Fringe Festival').²⁴³ Finally, the power of a well-oiled machinery of public relations can also not be underestimated – McKenzie, for instance, 'meet[s] Sobaihi in the dimly lit dining room of a stately London hotel, [where] she is as serene as the paintings on the wall, yet with the same huge, mischievous eyes which bring so much life to her characters on stage.'²⁴⁴ The captions accompanying the photographs for this piece are equally fulsome in their praise and quote Sobaihi herself for the impact and reception of the performance. Nick Clark's review in *The Independent* is written before the performance and takes the form of an

²⁴⁰ See Vakani, "A Review". and Frost, "'Head Over Heels'".

²⁴¹ Telegraph, "First Saudi Comedienne" and also clips on Sobaihi's website.

²⁴² Edinburgh Evening News, "Preview".

²⁴³ Telegraph, "First Saudi Comedienne".

²⁴⁴ McKenzie, "Maisah Sobaihi".

extended and apologetic conversation with Sobaihi rather than a review of the performance itself. Together, these and other reviews are reminiscent of the scene in *Notting Hill*,²⁴⁵ where Julia Roberts' character is interviewed by different reporters in a London hotel room, each of whom is given more or less the same vacuous soundbites about her latest film despite the particularities of their respective readerships.

In the context of Edinburgh and the Fringe and its largely white, middle-aged-and-above, Western audience, all of these elements helped, therefore, to bridge a gap in understanding the 'other'. Enabling such empathy with women of a differing or opposite racial, linguistic, religious and cultural identity arguably mitigated against more widespread criticism of the way Sobaihi portrays women as emotional and highly strung. Only one review wrote that 'Unfortunately [it] is such a strange little play that it's hard to tell, what, exactly, Sobaihi wants to say.'²⁴⁶ Gauging by the audience reaction, however, the individual, private and almost confessional nature of the stories of Sobaihi's women appeared to overcome the challenges of diversity and ignorance of the 'other', instead highlighting familiarity, commonality, and even solidarity for the circumstances they found themselves in. This is further evidenced in a number of reviews, exemplified by the *Daily Record*, which headlined with 'First Saudi woman to play Edinburgh Fringe Festival Lifts the Veil on Arab Female Stereotypes', followed by an unusually expansive drophead stating that Sobaihi hoped 'her Festival date will

²⁴⁵ Roger Michell, *Notting Hill*, 1999.

²⁴⁶ Mooney, "Edinburgh Fringe Review".

help debunk the image of Saudi women being downtrodden, as well as showing a common feminine bond stretching past national borders', before providing its own assessment: 'The play teaches us that women have a common ground, however distant they seem in terms of geography and culture, certainly in affairs of the heart.'²⁴⁷

For its part, the *Edinburgh Evening News* wrote that 'It gives a unique insight into the pressures and challenges of being a modern and educated woman negotiating love, marriage and career in traditional patriarchal society, where polygamy is legal, gender segregation is the norm and where women are forbidden to drive.'²⁴⁸ That these elements were repeated almost verbatim across many other reviews hints at the copy-paste nature of press releases, underpinned by a savvy marketing strategy noted earlier. Indeed, neither the *Edinburgh Evening News* nor *The Telegraph* reviews carried a byline. But a number of these reviews also carried more sobering factoids about the curtailment of other freedoms in Saudi Arabia, 'a country notorious for its sexist attitudes'²⁴⁹, such as the requirement that male guardians 'grant permission for everything from traveling to opening a bank account',²⁵⁰ for women, or that it was 'ranked fifth

²⁴⁷ Annie Brown, "First Saudi Woman to Play Edinburgh Fringe Festival Lifts the Veil on Arab Female Stereotypes." *Daily Record*, 23 July 2013, <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/first-saudi-woman-play-edinburgh-2079293>, accessed 17 August, 2017.

²⁴⁸ *Edinburgh Evening News*, "Preview".

²⁴⁹ Nick Clark, "Maisah Sobaihi: Heard the One About the Saudi Woman At the Edinburgh Fringe?" *The Independent*, 2 August 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/misah-sobaihi-heard-the-one-about-the-saudi-woman-at-the-edinburgh-fringe-8744347.html>, accessed 22 August, 2017.

²⁵⁰ McKenzie, "Maisah Sobaihi".

worst for equality of the 135 countries rated' in the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report²⁵¹ or that 'this is a country where a gang rape victim may be sentenced to 90 lashes or women imprisoned for bringing food to the half-starved victim of an abusive husband.'²⁵² Elsewhere, Sobaihi was quoted as saying that she 'hope[d] this play will reassure people that we (women) are active in Saudi Arabia and that women are not the stereotype that is always put forth more and more in the international media.'²⁵³

This well-meaning and laudable assertion, again replicated in various reviews in different ways, conceals an important, second problem vis-à-vis the authentic and credible representation of women in *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*. It presents, perhaps inadvertently, the experiences of Sobaihi and her characters as typical of women in the kingdom. Only the most critical review, by *A Younger Theatre's* Lauren Mooney, cannily observed what all the others missed or ignored – 'Sobaihi's two friends and Sobaihi herself are actually women who are hugely wealthy or educated, which statistically makes them a minority.'²⁵⁴ In this way, the performance reinforced stereotypes of rich Arabs, and women especially being perceived as bored and privileged housewives, lording it over immigrants indentured to their households. We shall return to Sobaihi's portrayal of class and racial prejudice amongst these immigrant labour communities later.

²⁵¹ McKenzie.

²⁵² Mooney, "Edinburgh Fringe Review".

²⁵³ Telegraph, "First Saudi Comedienne".

²⁵⁴ Mooney, "Edinburgh Fringe Review".

Mooney concluded by conceding that Sobaihi could not 'by any means be expected to speak for ... a plurality of experiences', but that her 'exclusive focus on the positives feels, at times, uncomfortably propagandist.'²⁵⁵ Several factors suggest that this may not be an altogether unfair assessment and that Sobaihi is arguably at least somewhat of an establishment figure. The first factor is the strength of her academic affiliations in Saudi Arabia. As noted earlier, *Head Over Heels* has had several runs at universities there. Abroad, her previously-mentioned intrinsic and extrinsic credentials are explicitly reinforced by her academic qualifications. Quite aside from her PhD at King's College, Sobaihi's standing as a scholar was prominently established in all of the reviews I collated, with the majority noting that she was an academic at a university in Jeddah. However, only CNN specified that she was an assistant professor at the King Abdul Aziz University.

A second factor is Sobaihi's positioning as an established and reputable artist in Saudi Arabia. Her domestic performances have received overwhelmingly positive reviews, which have been carried in a number of Saudi and other Middle Eastern media outlets. One of these even reported Michael Cockle, the deputy consul general and head of trade and investment to have said:

The performance was a lot of fun for me, and I liked the elaborate décor on stage. I'm not an expert on Saudi society as I'm an "Ajnabee (stranger)" here, but I think

²⁵⁵ Mooney.

what makes this play popular is the humor, and the social commentary on contemporary issues. I guess that's the attraction.²⁵⁶

Beyond, *The Huffington Post UK* mirrored such assessments by describing her as 'an eminent comedian, producer, stand-up performer and director ... [who] namecheck[s] the women who founded the Kingdom's first children's library.'²⁵⁷ It would seem that she is keen to maintain this reputation with a quiet insistence that she is not a threat to the status quo, for at least two UK reviews carried the caveat that *Head Over Heels* was 'not intended as a protest work'²⁵⁸ or that it was 'far from a protest piece on the Saudi treatment of women'.²⁵⁹ To CNN, Sobaihi herself said, '...we cannot deny that we are a conservative culture and we are very sensitive to issues that could be viewed...as unconventional, so we tread carefully.'²⁶⁰ The third, and related, factor is Sobaihi's socio-religious identity. *The Independent* wrote that Sobaihi 'defines herself as "conservative" and said she had never fallen foul of the religious authorities in Saudi Arabia. "I have been

²⁵⁶ Sana Abdul Salam, "'Head Over Heels' Regales Jeddawis." *Saudi Gazette*, 20 February 2013, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/33211/Head-over-Heels-regales-Jeddawis->, accessed 4 January, 2019. The British Consulate-General was a sponsor of one of these performances. The Consulate-General of Italy followed suit in October 2018 with 'an Italian twist' for Italian Language Week at the Italian Cultural Club 'with the addition of some Italian words and phrases, which helped make the whole audience feel connected to the story'. See Deema Al-Khudair, "Saudi Play Gets an Italian Twist to Round Out Italian Language Week." *Arab News*, 24 October 2018, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1392886/saudi-arabia>, accessed 4 January, 2019, which also reported that the Italian Consul General, Elisabetta Martini, 'welcome[d] the audience and introduce[d] Sobaihi.

²⁵⁷ Bidisha, "Saudi Women Laughing."

²⁵⁸ Clark, "Maisah Sobaihi".

²⁵⁹ Brown, "First Saudi Woman".

²⁶⁰ McKenzie, "Maisah Sobaihi".

working on the norms. My objective is not to upset anyone but move forward in a way that is better for everyone."²⁶¹

The fourth and final factor for consideration is the play's financing. In 2013, only *The Independent* mentioned how *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* was funded, stating that Sobaihi had 'spent much of her savings to bring the play to the Fringe'.²⁶² The review said that she had planned to come to the Fringe six years earlier, but that, 'It was too ambitious as I didn't realise it would be so expensive. So I realised I had to keep saving. It took me a few years but now I'm putting in most of my savings to come and create that dialogue.'²⁶³ Framing the funding of the performance as journey of perseverance is curious; how could someone with such rich and varied social, cultural and intellectual life experiences in the Middle East, the USA and the UK, book a large, prominent, and, therefore, expensive Fringe performance stage, and not realise for six years that it was entirely feasible to make it to the Fringe on considerably less? The *Saudi Gazette's* re-'review' in 2015 advertising the performance's return to Jeddah that year provides considerably more detail around the funding for Sobaihi's 2013 appearance at the Fringe.²⁶⁴ Interestingly, the writer quotes her original review for the same paper in 2008 which had suggested then that Sobaihi 'could easily take it' to the Edinburgh Festival.²⁶⁵ While the piece addresses some aspects of how

²⁶¹ Clark, "Maisah Sobaihi".

²⁶² Clark.

²⁶³ Clark.

²⁶⁴ Frost, "'Head Over Heels'".

²⁶⁵ Frost.

Sobaihi thought through the performance's financing then, it ultimately serves only to reinforce the privileged economic position Sobaihi occupies, and which Mooney highlighted.

This section has discussed the extent to which *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* is an authentic and authoritative take on the lives of Saudi women. It illustrated not only how the performance's on-stage and off-stage elements came together to strengthen this narrative but also how yet other parts raised problems of authenticity and credibility. Specifically, these ranged from the stereotypical depiction of women being emotionally unstable on the one hand, to Sobaihi and her characters not being at all representative of Saudi women on the other.

Be that as it may, there is much else to commend *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*. Despite its rarefied nature, the performance is an unabashed, humorous, and perceptive depiction by a Muslim woman, of the lives of other women like her, in a Muslim-majority context, which is widely seen 'as a place of intractable patriarchal dominance: wealthy, repressive, functional, claustrophobic, unbending.'²⁶⁶ In spite, or perhaps because, of the wealth, privilege, and elitism of these women, the performance demonstrates how some women in Saudi Arabia challenge patriarchy, subvert theology, and exercise considerable agency in the way they negotiate their role in society. These are voices still largely unheard, stories still largely untold. The next section examines some of these narratives as they relate specifically to marital relationships in Saudi Arabia.

²⁶⁶ Bidisha, "Saudi Women Laughing".

Snog, Marry, or Avoid

Marriage, divorce, sex, custody, and companionship – these are the overarching themes of *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*, all narrated from the intersecting perspectives and identities of privileged Sunni women in a Muslim-majority context. This section discusses how Sobaihi challenged audience assumptions about polygamy in Saudi Arabia by presenting not only the variety of sexual and marital relationships in the kingdom but also their motivations.

Back on stage, having quickly reinforced the stereotype of Saudi polygamy, and presented it as incontrovertible fact, Maisah Sobaihi moves on equally swiftly to deconstruct the audience's associated assumptions about the women this affects:

But what is not true is that women are happy when a man starts to look for a second wife. Now, the reason I say this is because a friend of mine came to live in Jeddah from South Africa. And she was actually surprised to hear that. We were talking about it and she said, 'Really? Women are happy and content when a man says he's going to take another wife?' I think my friend has this image in her mind. A man comes home from work, greets his wife, 'How are you doing, sweetheart? How was your day? Wonderful! You know I met this pretty lady. I think she's going to be Wife Number 2. What do you think? Huh?'

At this point, Sobaihi makes abundantly clear that the wife's response is not, 'Let's celebrate! Haha!', launching into an extended segment both trenchant and sarcastic ('*Ḥabībī* [Beloved], do I *look* angry?') as she makes up a game of 'the wife is right', modelled along the television programme *The Price is Right*, and proceeds to role-play wives competing for the husband's recognition and favours. And because 'it's all about making him comfortable, haha!', she says, he can just

call them by number: 'Wife Number 1, Wife Number 2. I call Number 1. I wouldn't like to be called Wife Number 2. *Ḥabībī*, after 25 years, I deserve to be called Wife Number 1. Yes, thank you, darling!', she says, laughing maniacally in, as noted earlier, the first of many performative tropes. That way, he could just call out a number, and not need to, 'you know, talk very much', and each of them could carry out dedicated duties. She could be in charge of the money, Wife Number 2 could get him his morning coffee, 'then Number 3 can be in charge of bringing you, maybe, you know, the paper, you always read the papers, don't you? No? And Wife Number 4 can be in charge of combing your hair!' Amidst audience laughter, she shrieks, 'Ahahaa! That'd be lovely! Ooh, ooh! Oh no! How many hairs do you have now? Haha! You're bald now, aren't you? Right? No?', reminding him that if he decides to remarry, he would just be helping her to increase the already-rising divorce rate in Saudi Arabia because 'I'm not going to sit around and comb your lovely bald head!'

And so we are introduced gradually to Maryam, Abdullah's wife of 25 years and mother of two. Wily and increasingly weaselly Abdullah, we find out, has realised Maryam's worst fears and unbeknownst to her, already married a second wife. Sobaihi comically illustrates that the taking up of another wife is rarely blatant, at least in her social circle. Rather, it is softened up and couched, as it was for Maryam, in the language of social responsibility, that there were now so many single and divorced women in Saudi Arabia that it behoved decent men to do the right thing and marry them. Maryam's response to 'all [these] Saudi men who have

been struck by the Cupid of social responsibility' was for them to clean up 'the Corniche, along the Red Sea...Clean it all up! We have black rats that you can apply social responsibility to...No, no, you don't like that?... I understand. You're Saudi, I'm Saudi. I wouldn't like to clean either!' Loud, brash and highly-strung, Maryam immediately challenges any conceptions of Arab, and specifically Saudi, women being meek and submissive.

Maryam finds out soon enough that Abdullah had not been joking about his social responsibilities and she coaxes Sobaihi to attend his second wedding and report back to her. However, Sobaihi has little success. Saudi weddings, she explained, with the music turned up on stage as she led the audience into a rousing clap complete with ululation and celebratory shrieking, are so noisy that any conversation is all but impossible. Unable to determine, therefore, whether 'this woman was a teacher or a preacher', all Sobaihi, like other women in attendance, could do was to dance. 'But that's okay,' she said. 'Because in Saudi society we have people dedicated to making sure you know exactly what you don't want to know!', resulting in laughter from the audience. When Maryam finally confronts Abdullah with the gossip, she realises he had already been informally married for a year!

Sobaihi speaks at length about these informal and temporary marriages, which are known as *misyār* marriages. 'Allow me to clarify, what a *misyār* marriage is', begins Sobaihi slowly and deliberately,

A *misyār* marriage is a marriage that happens between a man and a woman, it happens in secrecy [and] a man is not obliged, to provide, for this woman, financially. In other words, the woman renounces her [unclear] rights....And it is secret. And they visit occasionally. They don't actually live together. That's a *misyār* marriage.

Sobaihi first narrates her own story and the pressure from her family and friends to enter into such a marriage after her own divorce:

So all my friends were saying to me... 'just marry *misyār*'. You've been waiting and then they start calculating years. 'What! It's been seven years since you were single?' That's not fun! Anybody who's single knows that it's no fun when your friends start counting how many years you've been single, right?

As the audience laughed lightly, Sobaihi burst into song, recounting that the first and most important thing she would say to those friends came from *The Supremes*: 'You can't hurry love. Oh, you can't hurry love. No, you just have to wait. Love don't come easy. It's a game of give and take, oh, how long must I wait?', followed immediately by a deadpan, 'Inshallah, not too long', which drew a roar of laughter from the audience. 'You know the words!', Sobaihi urged them on, carrying on for another stanza or so, and interspersing it with interjections that drew more laughter. She was not entirely faithful to the original cover, and took the lead on some changes, incorporating Phil Collins' lyrics,²⁶⁷ before finishing up and asking the audience to give themselves a round of applause.

This provided the break for Sobaihi to segue to the story of her friend, Laylah, who is considering a *misyār*. Laylah is done waiting for her 'Prince Charming, ... like in the movies, like in the beach, [to come] and sweep me off my feet [audience laughter]. Uh-huhhhhhh! Not going to happen. Uh-uh.' She is

²⁶⁷ Phil Collins, *You Can't Hurry Love*, 1982.

speaking over the phone to Sobaihi: 'Why? Why? Why is not the Saudi prince going to come sweep me off my feet? *Ḥabībtī* [my beloved], because, well, first of all, Some Saudi guys don't even know how to ride horses [audience laughter]. And they'll just forget anyway. They're just going to waddle off [audience laughter].' We do not hear what Sobaihi is saying on the other end of the line, but from Laylah's response, it is clear Sobaihi is trying to dissuade her from engaging in *misyār*:

No, *la, la, la, la!* Don't, don't. I know, know. I read the papers. *Misyār*? You're right. Yes, I won't deny it. No, that's the plan. I changed my mind. Not because I think I've become more open-minded now. You haven't become more open-minded. You're just too judgemental. You know what? I, I, hear you judging me because I want to do this *misyār*. Don't judge me. You know what? Judge? You're going to go mental, you know that? Because when you judge people, you go mental. That's why the two parts are connected – judgemental [audience laughter].

Laylah tells Sobaihi that she is

the one that's uptight. Of course you're uptight! What?! Ha! You're calling me... yeah, I don't deny I want to have fun and live my life. What's wrong with that? You know I don't smoke, huh?...You're too upset. How about a cigarette? You've got to smoke today. What have I? What, what? Huh? Fine. And yet. Well, I think it's, well, you know everybody is doing it, you know, this *misyār* thing, is very popular.

That a temporary, practically no-strings marriage might appeal to men may be stereotypical. But it would seem to be rather counter-intuitive for women in this context, for whom such a dalliance is a rather more risky set of circumstances to be involved in. As we shall see in a later section, there is less security and social recognition for women in these cases. And yet, Laylah makes a case for why it would work for her, enabling her to live a lifestyle ostensibly with all the socio-religious reputational benefits of marriage, not least legitimate sexual pleasure

and companionship, but with none of the downsides. In other words, a *misyār* for Laylah was, paradoxically, empowering. It allowed her to get what she wanted.

Sobaihi steps out of Laylah's character to play her own:

[She] did it. Yeah. She married *misyār*. She's been married *misyār* [unclear]. Well, she said it's really good. She says it's very convenient. She's erm, she's able to do what she needs to do, you know, her mother's still alive. Yeah, ever since she's been at school, she's been taking care of her mother. This *misyār* thing, allows her to, you know, take care of her mother and fill her needs. So. She's joined really well. She says it's kinda like a part-time thing. Like a part-time, part-time job. Not everyone can cope with a full-time job for [unclear]'s sake! [Sobaihi shrieks with laughter as does the audience]. She says it's perfect, you know. And she, and I, and I agree with her. I mean our hormones [unclear]. We don't really need a full time [unclear]. Yeah, I don't want this whole thing about the intimacy and sharing and things.

This is a manifestly subversive take on an otherwise obvious expression of patriarchy. Women like Laylah were deliberate about choosing a form of religiously sanctioned but socially suspect marriage to essentially live their life on their own terms. This agency was all the more powerful in a society, as Sobaihi narrated, that rated youth over age in women, that women stopped being 'young princesses at the age of twenty-five' and that there was 'nothing like old fish, nobody wants them.' Reverting to the character of Laylah, she mused:

...you know, there is a very important thing, that I have been single, without [unclear] for how long? One, two, three, four, five, *sita, saba, saba*, seven, seven, seven years! I haven't been touched, touched! [Unclear Arabic] Yeah? Such a good reason!

The audience laughed as her voice became increasingly high-pitched. Then she turned to another practicality, that at least her ex-husband

won't take my kids away from me. I don't know. I don't have to worry about that. I don't have to worry about me. *Ḥabībtī*...I don't want to go and, and oh, God, just the thought of that really scaring us.

Laylah's fear is well-founded. In most forms of the shari'a, women may retain custody of their children until they turn between seven to nine years of age. If they remarry, however, they immediately and automatically lose this custody to the father.²⁶⁸ As *misyār* is not a full marriage, Laylah is not at risk of losing them. At this point, hardly surprisingly, Sobaihi concedes to her friend, 'You know what? Sure, go ahead. Marry a *misyār*. Be happy!' In this way, women like Laylah demonstrate their resolve to circumvent at least some aspects of the patriarchy they are subject to by utilising those very structures and mechanisms that otherwise circumscribe them.

At the next scene, Sobaihi confides to the audience that *misyār* doesn't really connect for me. But I realise that it is a very popular thing in Saudi Arabia. I also realise that there's other forms [of marriage] that are quite popular. Uh, there's something called a *ṣayf misyār* marriage, which is something that happens in the summer. Yeah! [Audience laughter]. *Ṣayf misyār*. The word *ṣayf* means summer. So basically my understanding is that a man and a woman marry at the beginning of summer, when they travel together, [and they] come back [clap] kaput! They are divorced! [Audience laughter] Now come up [unclear] for people with commitment issues [Audience laughter]. Could be something there. So I think what I'm trying to say here is that marriage is a hot topic in Saudi Arabia. There's always talk about somebody getting married.

As noted earlier, Sobaihi flits back and forth between the three stories. Through an extended family connection, Maryam finds out more about her new co-wife

²⁶⁸ There is significant variation between the various schools of Islamic law on the duration of maternal custody. This is further complicated by the sex of the child and the determination of whether puberty takes place at a preset age or follows the child's natural development. Cf. the broadly Shi'i Fatma Saleh, and Sayyid Moustafa al-Qazwini, "Chapter 5: Child-Custody." *A New Perspective: Women in Islam*, <https://www.al-islam.org/a-new-perspective-women-islam-fatma-saleh-moustafa-al-qazwini/chapter-5-child-custody>, accessed 28 December, 2018, with the Sunni Zaman Vardag Law Associates, "Child Custody After Divorce: Islamic Perspective." 7 June 2012, <https://pakistanilaws.wordpress.com/2012/06/07/child-custody-after-divorce-islamic-perspective/>, accessed 28 December, 2018.

who is in hospital for cosmetic surgery. 'I hope whatever she's got will pop in his face at the right time and he sinks in collagen!' she exclaims angrily to Sobaihi over the phone. Maryam even manages to obtain her rival's phone number, and proceeds to give her a piece of her mind:

Nooo! *Na'am* [Yes] [unclear]. Mashallah. You want to know my name, huh? You want to know my name? Maybe you should have asked about my name before youuuuuuu decided to marry my husband! Yeah! [Shrieking]. *Na'am*! Ok, now [unclear]. Oh, whooooo! Shut up! Shut up! [Shrieking]. I didn't call to talk to you! You think I called to talk to you? You, you, you, you, you, hooooome wrecker! That's what you do, you wreck homes? Oh my, shut up! Shut up! Shut up! What, what do you mean he approached you? Of course he approached you, he's a man, that's what they do! They approach women! You're not supposed to approach back! You're not supposed to step [unclear] on a place [unclear] that's what you're supposed to do. They step on [unclear], you step on back! [Shrieking] Uh-huh! Oh, *wa*! You, you, you, you, you, *wallaaaaahi*. *Wallaaaaahi*. *Walllaaahi*! [By God!] I'm going to crush you. You think he's going to leave, after twenty-five years, to be with youuu! Eeeii! He's not going to do that! And I'm going to make sure he doesn't...I will crush you! Crush you, crush you! Crush you! Like a cockroach! Get away! [Lots more shrieking and shouting. Slams phone down]

Maryam lets it fly equally with Abdullah, who initially feigns ignorance:

Hmm [lots of non-specific hums and haws]. Any news in your life? Any new friends, maybe? Ah! Any new wives?! Abdullah. Any new wives? What am I talking about, huh? Haha! Abdullah? Please. I know. I know everything there. I know that you are married. I know that [unclear]. I know that she's a teacher. Could you just tell me to my face? Be a man! And say it to me, 'Yeah!' Tell me! Here! Fuck! I deserve to know this...Whoo! Oh my God! That's [unclear]. Oh, oh my God. Why? Why? What? Oh, shut up! Oh! Excuse me? Now it's my fault? Because I'm off spending too much time with my kids? Ha! Fuck that! They're your kids too, you know! God knows [unclear]. Haha! [Shrieking]. What does it matter whether they're a boy or a girl? [Audience laughter]. Huh? Ei! That's fine. *La, la, la, la*. What about you spending too much time at work, huh? Huh? No, no, no, no, no. You've just uh...shut up! That's it! No, I'm [unclear] sit down. This is my reward. For being a good mother, huh! *Wallāhi*, thank you so much! Yeah, I can't believe you said that, because from this day on, I'll be [unclear]. You will never touch me again! I will be the mother of your children, in this house and I will stay as such. But out there, in Saudi society, we can pretend to be married and that would be it! Sigh! Oh my God! I've been, I've been [unclear] for a year? For a year! [All shouted angrily]. It's humiliating! [More shrieking and high-pitched voicing]. I've been walking around in Saudi society. People have known and I haven't known!...

After a few more remarks from Abdullah, Maryam slows her voice down patronisingly, and imitates Abdullah saying that he didn't know and that he loves that poor woman. 'Oh, that poor thing!' says Maryam.

No is not in my dictionary. No *ḥabībī*. Let's just contain ourselves, huh? Yeah? I will watch you tomorrow to go to town to record, first of all, and put the house in my name. Yeah. My name. My name. And a flat in Dubai in my name. Our flats in London in my name, yeah, good, that will be my name. Alright, that's in my name already. That way I can save you some trouble. Come, things are always looking up for you. Ok, yeah. And I would like five million dollars in cash. Five million. Yeah.

Laughing, Maryam carries on more patronisingly now:

Yes, ok, alright. You poor thing. You worked so hard to earn this money. I know. When a woman spends long nights working in the middle of the night. You forgot one itsy-bitsy, tiny, weeny thing. You work hard for your money because [begins shouting now] they're a [unclear] place for you in my father's company! Yes, my father's company! I made you. Who made you?'

Calming down, she continues, 'If she wants you, she can have you poor' [audience laughter]. My money, my children. Ok? She can have you poor and bald [audience laughter]. At least I have some hair [audience laughter].

We learn that Maryam's father has passed away and that Abdullah would not have dared to undertake a second marriage had he still been alive. 'Why now? Why now?', wails Maryam. 'Oh! Oh! Ah! Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Get away from me! Aw, shut up! I don't want to even hear that! Oh, God! Oh, Get up! No, no! You want a son? Yes, twenty-five years is a long time. You should have thought about it before!' Maryam is quite clear that Abdullah will have to divorce his new wife if he wants to keep the money and the houses: 'Just divorce her. Just divorce her. I'll feel better. And just tell her. Just tell her...you no longer [unclear].

It'll be [unclear]. You were under some strange influence. Whatever that means. I'm okay with that. Ok? So, just why can't you divorce her?'

And then comes the bombshell, all the more comic for its literally pronounced in-joke: 'What?' She is ... bregnant?', which drew laughter and even a shocked 'No!' from some audience members. Whether for the plot twist or in acknowledgement of the 'b/p' pronunciation stereotype Sobaihi had casually sent up was not clear. But Maryam was forced to concede, ruefully saying, 'Ok, I think we're going to make it temporary' [audience laughter].

Laylah, meanwhile, was in raptures about her *misyār*. 'Oh, God! Yes! It kills me [unclear]. I feel aliiiiiiiiive! I love it!' she shrieked with delight. They did not have a honeymoon, 'more like a honeyday' [audience laughter]. Her new husband took her shopping to 'something called Hermès. Which means it's not Chinese, by the way' [audience laughter]. It's a real Hermès expensive [unclear]...took so long, you know? Like I didn't know which one and ... they're all pretty...and then he just took out a whole big wad of cash...It was so lovely!' Laylah carries on talking about her shopping for sleepwear. 'Nice, nice? Isn't it beautiful? It comes with a matching headband!' she says, brandishing a purple thong to guffaws from the audience. 'Isn't it lovely? I love it! What? What? The headband? Aw, ok. No, I think...we'll put that away. Anyway, I mean... you know...in Jeddah, when I came back, there was so much money that I couldn't buy stuff. Can you imagine?' Laylah tries to convey her excitement to Sobaihi:

It's just, it's just, I just want to tell you...it's wonderful....Because, you know, when I look at it, we, uh, are very respectable. What about his wife? Don't look at me like that! I'm a horrible woman? Don't even go there.....No, of course, I wouldn't go to their house! He has many houses! He has a beach house. And it's lovely and its very convenient.

Like her *misyār*, Laylah soon finds that her happiness is only temporary. For reasons that are not entirely made evident, her new husband appears to be heading for a divorce - with Laylah, not his first wife. Perhaps he is being pressured by his first wife, much like Maryam was pressuring Abdullah. Regardless, Laylah is terrified at the prospect. 'I need you to pray for me. I'm so scared. I'm so scared. I don't want to be divorced all over again! I really don't. I really don't. Yeah, no!' She tells Sobaihi, 'It's okay for you. You just stay. Stay divorced. I don't want it. I don't want it. I don't want people walking around telling me I had my just desserts. I don't want a divorce! I don't want that! I don't want that!...Yes! Even, even if it's just *misyār*!' Sobaihi ends Laylah's story with a short segment that is peppered with a lot of invocations of prayer, Qur'anic verses and conversational Arabic. Laylah receives a call from her new husband, who tells her that his first wife has found out and that he needs to continue to be there for his family. Laylah is divorced.

Sobaihi comes out of character and ends the performance with a commentary on the dreams of these women:

We all had our dreams, when we were young. Laylah wanted to be a painter. And paint. Maryam, she wanted to be a businesswoman, following her father's footsteps....And me? I just always wanted to be on stage. I started very young. I started doing [unclear] in Saudi. People thought that was kind of weird.

She goes on to speak of the establishment of the first children's library in Saudi Arabia, where she last performed *Head Over Heels* to raise funds for it. She also recounts that 'When I hear negative things about Saudi Arabia, I remember women like these women' but that she also remembers the Arabia 'sometimes connected to romance and adventure', and the 'simple life' of the Bedouins, and their pride and strength. She speaks very briefly about her journey after her own divorce and ends the performance by introducing her new-found love and life, bringing out her tennis racquet to the audience ('We have a wonderful relationship. No arguments. I usually win anyway.') Her last statement is:

So. If you found your love, cherish it. And if you're still waiting, don't give up. Because you, too, could fall in love, head over heels, in Saudi, in Saudi Arabia! Haha! Thank you and good night! [audience clapping and whooping]

Life, therefore, goes on. Only Sobaihi, it would seem, succeeded in extricating herself from the difficult circumstances she found herself in. Maryam and Laylah appeared, at least for the moment, to have resigned themselves to their new social realities. Importantly, however, we learn that they were active, not passive, they had some scope of agency, and if their stories are any indication, were unlikely to take it lying down for too long. This resistance to patriarchy, vociferously expressed in word and deed by Sobaihi and her characters is reminiscent of Offred's resolve in *The Handmaid's Tale*, when she discovers the pseudo-Latin phrase to 'not let the bastards grind you down'.²⁶⁹ Its very imperceptibility and inaccessibility, carved as it is at the very bottom of the closet,

²⁶⁹ 'Nolite te bastarades carborundorum', scratched by one of her predecessors into the wall of her closet. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 2017).

almost at floor level is a powerful metaphor for the indomitability of the human spirit. When one is that low, the only place left to go is up. And so, through the experience and message of another, Offred finds hope and solidarity at her lowest physical, mental and emotional point. In the same way that Offred's story outlives her, perhaps Sobaihi's stories of these Saudi women will continue to inspire and rally.

To Drive or Not to Drive

In prefacing its review of *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*, *The Huffington Post* observed that

when we look at artistic output from the Arab world we see that a strong majority of the most interesting voices are those of women artists, women writers, women speakers. The veiled woman is not silent, passive or uncreative. Yet she is turned into a symbol against her will and various forces are applied to her: oppression, disgust, pity, patronage, lust, judgements and presumptions of all kinds.²⁷⁰

Setting aside polygamy, perhaps no other phenomenon epitomises these 'various forces' in the popular imagination about Saudi Arabia more than its infamous ban on women driving. At a children's event on historic women featuring Theresa Breslin and Holly Webb at EIBF in August 2018, for example, Breslin was asked by a 9-12-year-old what challenges women faced. She responded that women could not drive in some parts of the world. Although she did not name Saudi Arabia,

²⁷⁰ Bidisha, "Saudi Women Laughing". The review also covered Haifaa Al-Mansour's, *Wadjda*, 2012. *Wadjda*, too, marked a first on a number of levels – not only was it the 'first feature length film shot entirely in Saudi Arabia' it was also the 'first feature length film made by a female Saudi director, and additionally, 'Saudi Arabia's first official submission to the Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film' in 2014.' See http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2258858/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv accessed Friday, 16 February 2018. Al-Mansour has since gone on to direct *Mary Shelley* (2016) and *Miss Camel* (2017).

when it rescinded its ban on women driving in June 2018, it was certainly the last country left in the world which had banned women from driving to have done so. For all the many other challenges faced by women globally, not least economic disparity and gendered violence, Breslin's example is unusual. As the commentary and sources on the subject analysed next illustrate, however, they are not isolated and remain telling for ban's enduring power and perception in the public consciousness. In doing so, this section also examines Sobaihi's somewhat unexpected and, therefore, fascinating take on the subject. Instead of making a standard economic, political, religious, or gender-equality case for how the ban hindered Saudi women, and the kingdom more generally, Sobaihi presented not only a credible perspective of insouciance about women themselves wanting to drive, but also a commentary on the immigrant chauffeurs who normally drive them.

The kingdom's ban on women driving, at least formally, is relatively recent, dating only to 1990. Until then, driving 'was merely forbidden by custom, but not illegal'.²⁷¹ Of course, custom is a powerful force for maintaining and enforcing the status quo. Only when forty-seven Saudi women drove around Riyadh on 6 November in protest at this customary exclusion was '[a] fatwa was issued

²⁷¹ Sherifa Zuhur, "Women and Empowerment in the Arab World," *Special Issue of Arab Studies Quarterly: Social Work in the Arab World* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2003), 25. This mirrors the difficulties faced by women in Afghanistan wanting to drive, who even after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, faced familial and societal restrictions to do so rather than technically legal ones. See Miriam Arghandiwal, "Afghan Woman Pushes for Rights From Behind the Wheel", 15 May 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-afghanistan-driving-women/afghan-woman-pushes-for-rights-from-behind-the-wheel-idUSLNE84E02520120515>, accessed 20 August, 2018.

declaring that women's driving was contrary to Islam',²⁷² thus buttressing the breached custom with religio-legal force.

In 2005, when Mohammad al-Zulfa, a member of Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council, an advisory body with limited powers, proposed that the government examine the ban, he was 'besieged with angry phone calls and e-mails and was vilified in newspapers and on the Internet' for doing so.²⁷³ His legislative proposal appeared relatively modest - 'that only women over the age of 35 or 40 should be allowed to drive, and then only in cities, not on highways'²⁷⁴ - but it sparked a backlash, with men calling for him to 'be removed from the council or even deprived of his Saudi nationality.'²⁷⁵ No further protests took place until 2008, when the campaign for women to drive cars was revived by Wajihah Huwaidar, who escaped arrest for driving around the eastern provinces, and then from 2011 by Manal al-Sharif and Najla al-Hariri whose efforts drew worldwide attention and pressure for Saudi Arabia to reconsider its position.²⁷⁶ In May 2011, seven women were arrested for driving, including al-Sharif who was held for ten days. One month later in June, around 30-40 women drove without significant repercussions. Perhaps because they drove only short distances and for brief periods of time, they were either largely ignored, detained briefly and escorted

²⁷² Zuhur, "Women and Empowerment", 25.

²⁷³ Priya Verma, *et al.*, "Saudi Arabia: Proposal to Allow Women to Drive Fuels Male Rage," *Off Our Backs* 35, no. 7/8 (July-August 2005), 7.

²⁷⁴ Verma, *et al.*, 7.

²⁷⁵ Verma, *et al.*, 7.

²⁷⁶ Martin Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow Women to Obtain Driving Licences." 26 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/26/saudi-arabias-king-issues-order-allowing-women-to-drive>, accessed 8 March, 2018.

home, or fined and given a ticket.²⁷⁷ In October 2013, it was reported that over sixty Saudi women got behind the wheel to defy the ban, making the 'demonstration the biggest the country has ever seen against the ban.²⁷⁸ Some were later briefly arrested.²⁷⁹

But at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival just a few months before in August 2013, and presumably in earlier tours of her performance of *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* elsewhere, Sobaihi took an arguably establishment line. Her commentary on women and driving in Saudi Arabia was sandwiched in a transition in the development of the story of Layla's *misyār* and began with Laylah and Sobaihi discussing whether one should send her driver over to the other's so that the women could meet up:

Yeah, we do that a lot. Wait for our driver. They wait for us. Everybody knows that women in Saudi Arabia can't drive. Of course. So when I've spoken to my friends in the US, they don't really understand why. 'Oh wow! You have a driver and city [unclear] and a hat? You have a limousine?' No, it's not like that, girlfriend! Uh-huh.

It culminated in Sobaihi waking up her driver in the early hours of the morning and unashamedly ordering him to deliver a bar of Twix to her: 'I'll bet. We don't deny it. Many Saudi women I think have done this. Three a.m. in the morning: 'Muhammad! How are you, Muhammad? [light audience laughter]. Sleeping? What, at 3:00am? Hmm? Ok. What? Alright. Erm, ok.'

²⁷⁷ Jason Burke, "Saudi Arabia Women Test Driving Ban." *The Guardian*, 17 June 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/17/saudi-arabia-women-drivers-protest>, accessed 8 March, 2018.

²⁷⁸ Staff and agencies, "Dozens of Saudi Arabian Women Drive Cars on Day of Protest Ban." *The Guardian*, 26 October 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/26/saudi-arabia-woman-driving-car-ban>, accessed 12 March, 2018.

²⁷⁹ Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow"

Sobaihi then made only the second explicit reference in the entire performance to women driving in Saudi Arabia:

So, we don't deny, that it is convenient, sometimes, being cuddled up at home in pyjamas, and you get, you know, service, to your door, yeah? And maybe that's why a lot of women in Saudi Arabia, they say they don't want to drive [light incredulous audience laughter]. It's true, I read it in the papers, from a survey done. So many women in Saudi Arabia don't want to drive. I don't know. I'm sure there are many, many, many others that want to drive. One writes, wrote in the paper, her name was Nama [unclear]. She said her dreeeeam [high-pitched voice] was to drive, to drive from Jeddah to Riyadh in her convertible.²⁸⁰

What Saudi women really want, at least in terms of driving, is far from clear-cut. Surveys such as the kind Sobaihi mentions would appear to reflect, for example, an op-ed piece carried by *The Guardian* some months later in November 2013. Here, Ahmed Abdel-Raheem recounted the voices of Saudi women from a large-scale survey he conducted which he admits 'wasn't exactly scientific, but [whose] responses are worth considering', and despite 'offer[ing] them anonymity...some wanted to be recognised'.²⁸¹ Abdel-Raheem's respondents were 170 women, his former students from Al-Lith College for Girls at Um al-Qura University, Mecca. Of these, he writes that 134 (almost 80 per cent) said:

female driving is not a necessity and that it opens the door for sexual harassment and encourages women to not wear the niqab under the pretext that they cannot

²⁸⁰ This would be a journey of about seven hours.

²⁸¹ Ahmed Abdel-Raheem, "Word to the West: Many Saudi Women Oppose Lifting the Driving Ban." *The Guardian*, 2 November 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/02/saudi-protest-driving-ban-not-popular>, accessed 17 August, 2017. According to his profile on *The Guardian*, Abdel-Raheem is 'an Egyptian poet, actor, and PhD student at Lodz University, Poland. He is also a contributor to the Jerusalem Post, and a former lecturer at Al-Lith College for Girls at Um al-Qura University, Mecca, Saudi Arabia.' See <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/ahmed-abdel-raheem>, accessed 17 August 2017.

see the road when driving. Some also fear that gives husbands a chance to betray and agree with the assertion that it creates sedition in society.²⁸²

Abdel-Raheem goes on to note that his informal survey was 'almost identical to those of a questionnaire my former Saudi students conducted.'²⁸³ It is impossible to determine whether this survey is the same as the one cited by Sobaihi on stage as appearing in the newspaper she had read, for neither provides any other identifying details. This questionnaire, Abdel-Raheem notes, 'found 3,209 out of 3,710 Saudi women opposed changing the driving laws, for the same aforementioned reasons', and that 'Even women who supported driving (about 501) stressed that their support has conditions. Crucially, they stipulated that there must be laws that deter men against sexual harassment and that allow women to drive safely in lanes of their own.'²⁸⁴

For Abdel-Raheem, this research 'stresses that the continuous attempts from the west to impose its values elsewhere are pointless. Western feminism is not only unlikely to take hold in countries like Saudi Arabia, it is not what many women in the kingdom want.' Furthermore, he writes,

People in Saudi Arabia have their own moral views and needs. What works in other societies may not fit in Saudi, and the reverse. In short, instead of launching campaigns to change the driving laws in the kingdom, the west should first ask Saudi women if they really want this or not, and western countries should accept the result, even if it's not to their liking.²⁸⁵

Abdel-Raheem's was not an isolated point of view in 2013, and reflected broad and long-standing public Saudi opinion. Reporting on women testing the ban in

²⁸² Abdel-Raheem.

²⁸³ Abdel-Raheem.

²⁸⁴ Abdel-Raheem.

²⁸⁵ Abdel-Raheem.

2011, for example, *The Guardian* quoted a camel trader in Riyadh as saying that 'You have your ways of doing things in the west and that's fine for you. We are conservative people. We are not democratic. We have another religion and women should not go alone.'²⁸⁶

When in late September 2017 it was announced, by a royal decree no less, that Saudi women would be granted the right to drive, news of the lifting of the ban was received with considerable acclaim outside of Saudi Arabia. The US State Department called it 'a great step in the right direction',²⁸⁷ and President Donald Trump also weighed in saying it was a 'positive step' for women's rights.²⁸⁸ While the decree was signed by King Salman, credit for the change, the most remarkable in a series of other recent changes, was widely attributed to the king's son, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, as part of his Vision 2030 roadmap to transform the kingdom.²⁸⁹

It is significant that the decree, read live on Saudi state television, was simultaneously communicated to journalists at a news conference in Washington, hosted by the Saudi ambassador to the US, Prince Khalid bin Salman, another son of the king. As the *New York Times* reported then, the 'ban has long marred the image of Saudi Arabia, even among its closest allies, like the United States, whose

²⁸⁶ Burke, "Saudi Arabia Women".

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow".

²⁸⁸ Quoted in BBC News, "Saudi Arabia Driving Ban on Women to be Lifted." *BBC News*, 27 September 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-41408195>, accessed 15 March, 2018.

²⁸⁹ See Vision 2030, "Vision 2030: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." n.d., <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>, accessed 4 April, 2018.

officials sometimes chafed at a policy shared only by the jihadists of the Islamic State and the Taliban.²⁹⁰ That the decree required – and received – captive and public US attention is a testament to the success of the announcement as a public relations exercise. It not only eased the longstanding embarrassment occasioned by the ban, of both the ruling Saudis and their Western supporters, as alluded to by *The New York Times*, but it also helped to demonstrate the kingdom's ostensible commitment to reform. As Madawi al-Rasheed notes,

Appearing to support women has won dictators applause, especially in the west, where women's rights have become an axis against which to measure nations and evaluate regimes. Today's authoritarian regimes will win extra praise when they appear to be liberating Muslim women from the oppression of Islam. Saudi Arabia is no exception.²⁹¹

Indeed, the basis for this critique is all too evident in, for example, the statement released by Britain's Prime Minister, Theresa May, upon the announcement of the lifting of the ban:

As a long standing friend of Saudi Arabia I welcome the Kingdom taking this important step towards gender equality. The empowerment of women around the world is not only an issue I care deeply about, it is also key to nations' economic development. The UK will continue to work in close partnership with Saudi Arabia

²⁹⁰ Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees". In the case of Afghanistan, for example, over 300 licenses were issued to women in 2011. Still, Shakila Naderi, Kabul's only female driving instructor in 2012 recounted how when she first opened her driving school for women with her husband in 2008, she had faced threats from conservative elements who denounced women driving as unIslamic. Although these had dissipated in the intervening years, Naderi said she was still taunted by male drivers who 'try to chase her car off the road, sometimes causing her swerve dangerously.' See Arghandiwal, "Afghan Woman Pushes".

²⁹¹ Madawi al-Rasheed, "Women Are Still Not in the Driving Seat in Saudi Arabia." *The Guardian*, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/27/women-not-driving-seat-saudi-arabia>, accessed 8 March, 2018.

as it builds on this progress and delivers its ambitious programme of reform, Vision 2030.²⁹²

Inside the kingdom, too, there was jubilation among activists, many of whom had been arrested for violating the ban in the past and had vowed to continue their campaign 'until a royal decree is issued allowing them to drive "without any conditions"'.²⁹³ This excitement was, however, tempered by ordinary Saudis who were a little more circumspect about the challenges that remained. 'This has nothing to do with religion, it's our customs,' said Maysoon Sleiman, a fifty-five-year-old male doctor from Riyadh, 'Which is why I expect backlash and disapproval from a lot of women not just men.'²⁹⁴ Thirty-six-year-old Madawi al Blehid said:

The fact that we need approval of family and society is normal. This is the first time so ... we can't just explode on the scene it will cause a lot of problems. Even in taking it slowly, there will be problems but we should be able to overcome. Women are overjoyed. We woke up happy.²⁹⁵

The kingdom's tactic of appeasement therefore, both internal and external, would appear to be working. But while the ban is to be formally lifted on 24 June 2018, the specifics remain unclear.²⁹⁶ Arguably, the kingdom has merely shifted

²⁹² Theresa May, "PM Statement on Saudi Women Gaining Right to Drive." 27 September 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-statement-on-saudi-women-gaining-right-to-drive>, accessed 3 April, 2018.

²⁹³ Burke, "Saudi Arabia Women".

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Martin Chulov, and Nadia al-Faour, "'This is a Huge Step for Us': Jubilation as Saudi Women Allowed to Drive." *The Guardian*, 27 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/27/huge-step-jubilation-saudi-arabian-women-allowed-to-drive>, accessed 8 March, 2018.

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Chulov, and al-Faour

²⁹⁶ The ban was lifted as scheduled, albeit ironically, 'amid an intensified crackdown on activists who campaigned for the right to drive.' See BBC News, "Saudi Arabia's Ban on Women Driving Officially Ends." *BBC News*, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-44576795>, accessed 13 February, 2019.

the burden of determining whether or not women can drive from the state to the family.²⁹⁷ This allows for a fine balance to be struck between the kingdom's conservative and traditional elements and its progressive and modern voices.

Al-Rasheed contends that such shifts allow 'Dictators [to] conveniently depict themselves as liberators of these downtrodden women while society is shown to be the oppressor', which is an appealing narrative 'to both Arab dictators and certain constituencies in the west.'²⁹⁸ Her argument would certainly appear to be borne out by the sentiments of Sleiman and al Bhelid, mentioned earlier. It is also substantiated by official pronouncements from the kingdom. Prince Khalid, for example, was variously reported to have stated, 'I think our leadership understands our society is ready',²⁹⁹ and 'I think our society is ready'.³⁰⁰ Moreover, the newspapers that carried his comments themselves also largely framed the story in terms of a patient, modern, and moderate monarch attempting to gradually enable, and in some cases, hasten, change in a recalcitrant and conservative context.³⁰¹

There were exceptions to this trend. Writing in *The New York Times*, Ben Hubbard was one of the few early commentators skeptical of such an establishment narrative, noting that *both* Saudi officials and clerics had

²⁹⁷ Chulov, "Saudi Arabia: Prince Mohammed".

²⁹⁸ al-Rasheed, "Women Are Still Not".

²⁹⁹ Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow".

³⁰⁰ Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees".

³⁰¹ Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow"; Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees"; BBC News, "Saudi Arabia Driving Ban".

rationalised the ban until the announcement.³⁰² He also observed that such 'social strictures ... have been reinforced by the kingdom's top clerics, *many of them on the government payroll*.'³⁰³ Madawi al-Rasheed, who wrote for *The Guardian* was blunter. Not only did she characterise the announcement as being 'little more than a public relations stunt designed to cement this notion of the Saudi regime as the liberator of women', but she also went further and called it out as a particular example of how 'in recent times, Islam and shari'a law are portrayed as the cause of women's suffering.'³⁰⁴ Tellingly, Prince Khalid had refused to comment when asked if the kingdom would 'relax the guardianship laws, or take any other steps to expand women's rights.'³⁰⁵

At any rate, that first fatwa, which cemented a traditional, customary restriction with religio-legal force clearly had to be abrogated, together with many other rationalisations of the ban over the years, not least that driving was harmful to women's ovaries³⁰⁶ or that it caused 'their brains [to] shrink to a quarter the size of a man's when they go shopping'.³⁰⁷ And so the volte-face began. The decree lifting the ban was given religious legitimacy by its invocation of the Council of Senior Scholars, clerics appointed by the king, who had 'agreed that the government could allow women to drive if done in accordance with Shariah

³⁰² Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees".

³⁰³ Hubbard. Emphasis added.

³⁰⁴ al-Rasheed, "Women Are Still Not".

³⁰⁵ Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow".

³⁰⁶ See Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees".

³⁰⁷ Quoted in Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to Allow".

law.³⁰⁸ This was followed by what *The Guardian* called ‘an apparently coordinated series of public statements’ from the clerics themselves and other establishment figures, ‘aimed at shifting a widely expected conservative pushback’.³⁰⁹ On its Twitter account, the Council tweeted, ‘May God bless the king who looks out for the interest of his people and his country in accordance with sharia law’,³¹⁰ followed by a link to a press statement setting out the religio-legal basis for the decision.³¹¹ The former head of religious police also lent his support by tweeting, ‘Women driving is not against sharia and women will choose what best suits them.’³¹² Sheikh Khaled al Mosleh, a professor of religion in Saudi Arabia, also tweeted that ‘allowing women to drive answered the needs of a big portion of the population’, and added a lengthy justification for the move under Islamic law.³¹³

Tellingly, however, as *The New York Times* noted, in the weeks running up to the announcement, the government had ‘arrested more than two dozens [sic] clerics, academics and others, accusing them of being foreign-funded dissidents.’³¹⁴ It went further to state that after the announcement, ‘an anonymous text circulated through What’s App [sic] in the kingdom calling on the “virtuous

³⁰⁸ See Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees”.

³⁰⁹ Chulov, and al-Faour, “Huge Step”.

³¹⁰ Quoted in Chulov, and al-Faour. The full text of the relevant tweet in Arabic is available at https://twitter.com/ssa_at/status/912754300446748673, accessed 21 March 2018. The Twitter account of the Council of Senior Scholars, launched in December 2014, is at https://twitter.com/ssa_at.

³¹¹ See tweet in Arabic at https://twitter.com/ssa_at/status/912963363688378368, accessed 21 March 2018.

³¹² Quoted in Chulov, and al-Faour, “Huge Step”.

³¹³ Chulov, and al-Faour.

³¹⁴ Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees”.

ones" to work against its implementation, to protect against epidemics, adultery and other disasters.³¹⁵ We shall return to a discussion on the shari'a later. For now, however, it is clear that the conservatism of Saudi society cannot be isolated from the relationship between the ruling family and the clerical establishment.

Saudis and non-Saudis alike acknowledged that economics would be the primary driver of eventual acceptance. The aforementioned Sleiman, for example, noted, 'The thing is, a house cannot function properly without a driver and a lot of families cannot afford to hire one', contextualising the change with reference to satellite dishes, once 'dubbed *haram* [forbidden], now they sell them. It's going to be the same in this I believe. At least mothers can now safely drop their kids to school.'³¹⁶ Twenty-three-year-old student Amal al Dayyem, another Riyadh

resident said:

Most families will be on board with this simply because people no longer want to spend a huge chunk of their salaries on drivers and transportation. We can do this on our own. Women all over the Gulf can drive, it was about time we Saudi women get the right to as well. Society will be accepting once they see how easier matters and everyday chores will be once this is implemented.³¹⁷

The economic argument is a powerful one. As far back as 1998, it was estimated that US\$ 2.8 billion is spent on chauffeurs annually, offering the potential of much savings were women were allowed to drive.³¹⁸ As *The New York Times* noted:

Low oil prices have limited the government jobs that many Saudis have long relied on, and the kingdom is trying to push more citizens, including women, into private sector employment. But some working Saudi women say hiring private drivers to

³¹⁵ Hubbard.

³¹⁶ Quoted in Chulov, and al-Faour, "Huge Step".

³¹⁷ Quoted in Chulov, and al-Faour.

³¹⁸ Ambika Patni, "Behind the Veil: Saudi Women and Business," *Harvard International Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1998/1999), 15.

get them to and from work eats up much of their pay, diminishing the incentive to work.³¹⁹

For the Saudi women depicted by Sobaihi, however, the economics of the ban was not even an issue. And neither was its politics, nor its religious justification one way or the other, nor even a case for or against equality on this issue between the sexes, despite these broader contexts and debates within which the play was being performed in 2013, and earlier. While Sobaihi did temper the expectations of the audience (and the imagination of her US friends) about the realities of a chauffeur service for Saudi women at the outset of this segment of her performance, much of it came across as a problem of the haves. At least for this group of women, having drivers was a marker of easy privilege and conspicuous convenience and consumption, played out in the interstices of bourgeois boredom.

The lifting of the ban does, however, resolve a major discrepancy of the interpretation and application of another, more fundamental, principle of the shari'a, which prohibits the mixing between unrelated men and women. As Zuhur points out, 'Oddly, Saudi women are chauffeured by male, unrelated, usually foreign men. Since the fatwa rules against driving using the argument that women will run the risk of mixing with unrelated men if they are allowed to drive themselves, this is a little strange.'³²⁰

³¹⁹ Hubbard, "Saudi Arabia Agrees".

³²⁰ Zuhur, "Women and Empowerment", 25.

Sobaihi's brief take on the issue packed a powerful punch – not for the debate on women driving per se, but for starkly highlighting the lot of the kingdom's casualised immigrant labour and its attendant racism for the men who drove these women from place to place. According to Frank Gardner, estimates in 2017 put the number of foreign chauffeurs for women in Saudi Arabia at around 800,000.³²¹ As Zuhur notes, 'These men, often Asian immigrants, have rights superior to women's with regard to freedom of movement in public space, although their social and economic status is far inferior to their mistresses in every other respect.'³²² As the excerpts below illustrate, Sobaihi was strikingly blunt about this workforce and their status – they were unreliable, smelled bad, spoke little English or Arabic, had unpronounceable names and were demonstrably stupid. Sobaihi began by bemoaning her current lack of a driver to her friend over the phone:

'Yeah. I don't have a driver anymore. I kicked my driver out. What do you mean, why did I kick him out? Ah, three months, I can't take it anymore. I can't take it anymore.

'The guy, stinks! [audience laughter]. Yes, I can't. Of course I tried everything. I tried everything. I buy him deodorant, I buy him shampoo, everything! And yeah, he sprays my car with men's deodorant thinking it was air freshener, so now I, am driving around in a car that smells like men's deodorant, right? I have to stick my head out the window because he stinks, the car stinks. I pay for this car. Yes! So how much can I take? We live in a desert. I can't even turn on the AC for God's sake!

'I'm just, I just, please don't mention it [unclear]. Just send me a driver. Aaany driver. Can you just have your driver go check out the other drivers, and just get, I don't care, any nationality...

Next, she let the audience listen in to her side of an interview with a prospective employee:

³²¹ BBC News, "Saudi Arabia Driving Ban".

³²² Zuhur, "Women and Empowerment", 25

You're, you want to work, right? As a driver? Good. So, English, Arabic, what do you speak? ... *shway, shway* [lit. a little here and there]. Little bit of English? Not even that. Ok, no problem. Erm, ok. Uh, what is your name? [unclear]. Hmm? Huh? Chakabakah? No! Muhammad, your name! We change the name, right away. First thing we do [audience laughter]. Ready? Uh-huh. Yeah. Do you have a driver's license? Good. And you have, you know, your resident's card here? I'll take it. Ok. ... Now, every day, I want you to wash the car...dust...wash....Far. Inside out. Right? Then, after you finish washing, huh, the car...[shrieks:] wash Muhammad! [audience laughter]. Now [unclear as audience member hushes others] Muhammad, here and here, huh? [audience laughter]. Everything, Muhammad. *Kulla* [unclear and continues in Arabic]. Now nice, yeah...[audience laughter].

The put-downs continued:

And you know, it's just to remember that when you say something like oh, you know, 'Muhammad, please go to Madam Kerry's [unclear] house and pick up a CD', don't be surprised, ten minutes later, he'll get a box of curry [unclear] cheese! So you have to be very specific with your instructions, each and every time. *Na'am* [Yes]. So you have to train them. [Patronising voice:] "Remember? Remember the house we went to? When I was in the car? And mum was in the car? Huh? And then mum was [unclear] everything out and had a list of [unclear]. [Voice gets increasingly more patronising:] Big house, with a brown door! Remember Muhammad? The brown door and the house has brown walls, yeah? [audience laughter] and then there were plants, plants that were high... [Sobaihi gets increasingly high-pitched, and ends with a hard clap of her hands, all interspersed with audience laughter]. So that's the kind of communication we have. Right. And a Porsche. We're all [unclear]. I'm joking.

Of course this may well be a minority view. The reaction of some audience members, particularly during the skit's segments in Arabic, however, clearly betrayed their familiarity with such scenarios, if not their complicity in them. Like the set design mentioned at the outset of this chapter, it was an in-joke. And for Sobaihi's women, these drivers were a necessary luxury. Nonetheless, Sobaihi's driving skit is a twist on the former establishment line. As she did with the issue of multiple and temporary marriages discussed earlier, Sobaihi was once again subversive about Western presumptions. She presented the case that for some women in Saudi Arabia, not being able to drive was not the big problem

Westerners might suppose it to be. Indeed, it even questioned the popular and enduring Western presumption that Saudi women wanted to drive in the first place. Sobaihi's representation is perhaps not widespread or common, betraying, as mentioned earlier, its upper-middle-class privileges. But it is an important complication in an often too simple and monolithic narrative about women in Saudi Arabia. Certainly, the constraints Saudi women faced around driving had little to do with Western perceptions of the importance of women driving and associated ideas about their freedom and oppression and movement and choice.³²³ Not being able to drive did not mean they could not get around. These women could go where they wanted, when they wanted, and get what they wanted – their drivers just needed to be more dependable, shower regularly, speak the language, have easy names, and pay more attention.

Refracting Islam through Saudi Arabia

Punctuated as it was with song, ululation, numerous one-liners, and a liberal peppering of Arabic, *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* was clearly well-received by the 150 or so people present at its opening night who filled the hall almost to capacity. As with events at the EIBF and indeed Edinburgh's other festivals, the audience was primarily white.³²⁴ Even so, minority ethnic groups were in

³²³ Kathleen A. Tiemann, Abdallah M. Badahdah, and Daphne E. Pedersen, "Driving a Car in Saudi: An Illustration of the Power of Norms and Values Using Multicultural Data," *Teaching Sociology* 37, no. 2 (Apr 2009), provide details of an interesting pedagogic exercise in their sociology classes, which focuses on responses of men who can and do drive and get to decide who sits where in cars driven by family members in Saudi Arabia.

³²⁴ The Edinburgh Mela and the BBC's Asian Network Comedy programme are notable exceptions to this make-up of Edinburgh's summer festival offerings.

attendance, most notably several Arab men and women who laughed heartily at the few extended sections in the performance, particularly towards the end, that were delivered in Arabic.

Although I was unable to conduct interviews with members of the audience at the performance's run in Edinburgh, Sobaihi's website does provide video vox pop of her performances elsewhere, particularly in the US.³²⁵ In these, as in many reviews of the performance referenced in earlier sections of this chapter, religion, and specifically Islam, were not subjects of discussion. Of course, the fact that the play was consciously and explicitly about Saudi Arabia, not Islam per se, had much to do with this.

Nonetheless, the performance portrayed a selection of social behaviours and practices in a religious, traditional and patriarchal context that explicitly self-identifies as Islamic, from the *shahāda* emblazoned across the kingdom's flag, to Article 1 of its Basic Law of Governance.³²⁶ Notwithstanding its unabashedly Sunni, and more narrowly, puritanical, Wahhabi form, such legitimising symbols arguably contribute to wider re/presentations and perceptions of Islam, and what is considered Islamic, by both Muslims and non-Muslims. It seems easier to

³²⁵ See, for example, the promotional video for the performance at <http://maisahsobaihi.com/promo-video/>, accessed 1 May 2018.

³²⁶ Article I proclaims that 'The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, The Holy Qur'an, and the Sunna (Traditions) of the Prophet (PBUH). Arabic is the language of the Kingdom. The City of Riyadh is the capital.' See the official website of The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Washington, DC, "Basic Law of Governance." *The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Washington, DC*, n.d., <https://saudiembassy.net/basic-law-governance>, accessed 22 May, 2018.

dismiss a ban on women driving as ridiculous and backward even though, as we shall see shortly, this was sanctioned under religious law before being reversed, under the same corpus and mechanism of laws. Yet, other aspects of these laws tend not to be questioned or challenged, and are taken to be normative of Islam – even when they are not – both by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This refraction of Islam through Saudi Arabia is evident across a number of registers.

Local Community Perception

The first of these refractory registers is local community perception. The performance's depiction of Saudi men and women in the context of family law and life cannot be separated from its reception as a commentary or introduction to Islam. In this regard, aside from the externally-focused interviews and press releases discussed in earlier sections, Sobaihi was equally and demonstrably keen to promote her one-woman performance amongst Edinburgh's Muslims. As such, numerous emails were sent to various Muslim groups and listservs in Edinburgh advertising the performance, and seeking assistance with its production during the festival. One such email in July 2013 noted that 'Both Muslims and non-muslims [sic] have connected with the message in her play in the past, and she hopes that it will continue to have this impact in Edinburgh.'³²⁷ When I wrote to request further information, Sobaihi's Production Manager, Hiba Ali, responded that they 'would be glad to have [me] involved' and they were looking 'specifically [for] street team members to help promote the play and represent it.' They were

³²⁷ Ummah Edinburgh listserv correspondence, 10 July 2013.

'also looking for social media support for the same purpose'. Furthermore, they were 'currently looking to connect more deeply with the Muslim population in Edinburgh' and that 'help...in this regard...would be be [sic] great.'³²⁸ Later in mid August, Ali also reached out to the Alwaleed Centre, asking if it could arrange a talk with staff and students.³²⁹ Sobaihi herself was interviewed on Radio Ramadan Edinburgh at the beginning of August,³³⁰ and also put in an appearance, complete with her film crew, at a local gathering of Muslims who used to meet regularly at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.³³¹

Despite these promotional drives, at least some Muslims in Edinburgh raised concerns about the performance's Islamic-ness. 'Is this even synchronised [sic] with Islamic principles?', asked a frequent commentator and contributor to the Ummah Edinburgh listserv, resulting in an exchange even I waded into, but which did not elicit any further response.³³² In a separate response, one of the hosts of Radio Ramadan wrote to say that she had interviewed Sobaihi earlier in

³²⁸ Personal email correspondence 25 July 2013.

³²⁹ Personal email correspondence, 13-15 August 2013.

³³⁰ See Radio Ramadan Edinburgh, "Talking Heads: Interview With Maisah Sobaihi, Saudi Woman Playwright Featuring in Edinburgh Fringe Festival." *Radio Ramadan Edinburgh*, 4 August 2013, www.radioramadanedinburgh.com, accessed 23 May, 2018, available online and on 87.9FM. Unfortunately, archives for this programme only date back to 11 June 2016.

³³¹ Anam Cara began simply as an 'Open Gathering' for Edinburgh's Muslims and any other interested individuals to come together over a shared 'bring your own finger food' meal. As a forum for people to get to know one another better, it was unusual and appealing for not needing an explicitly religious motivation to do so. It was also keen to create a sense of fellowship among converts, new and old. It adopted the name Anam Cara in mid 2012, meeting at a variety of venues and then primarily at Edinburgh's Botanic Gardens. There, members even tended to an allotment provided by the Botanics for about a year. The group formally folded in May 2017.

³³² Ummah Edinburgh listserv correspondence, 21 August 2013.

the month. Sobaihi had also noted after the on-air interview that while 'the show is billed as 16+ because it deals with the subject of divorce, re marriage and second wife scenario in Islam', it 'has had family audiences in Saudi Arabia and Muslim children affected by divorce or second marriage have enjoyed it.' The host further wrote that she hoped 'that helps to make a decision about going to see it or not' and that she was 'going to the Saturday show :)'³³³

This show of support from an active, long-standing, and highly respected member of Edinburgh's Muslim community appears to have successfully addressed both concerns about the performance's Islamic-ness, as well as its own merit in a way that 'description and reviews [which] certainly look good'³³⁴ could not hope to match. Indeed, another and later response to the sceptic's query had retorted, 'What makes you think it might not be? Read the description. Its [sic] speaking about some experiences of women which are universal', to which the sceptic responded equally tersely, 'Descriptions are not always reliable sources. However Baji Zareen has clarified.' As if to provide further support, another respected member of the community and office-bearer of the Central Mosque wrote to say, 'Haven't seen it yet but I met the sister who acts in it, Maisah, and her husband, and the Director who is also a Muslim woman. Maisah was intelligent and interesting. She is an Assistant Professor at University in Jeddah'.³³⁵ Still, some remained wary. At the Anam Cara gathering, for example, for all her

³³³ Ummah Edinburgh listserv correspondence, 20 August 2013.

³³⁴ Ummah Edinburgh listserv correspondence, 20 August 2013.

³³⁵ Ummah Edinburgh listserv correspondence, 20 August 2013.

assertiveness, Sobaihi was unable to gain the unanimous consent of this group of Muslims to film them. The presence of a large and bulky video camera amongst a group of about twenty individuals, many with children, was perhaps felt to be intimidating and intrusive. Few independent and first-time Fringe performances could boast of an accompanying and professional camera crew. It highlights, therefore, the relative capital available to *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*. Whatever personal funds Sobaihi may have used to bring the performance to Edinburgh's Fringe, they would appear to be far larger than many others of ostensibly the same category of performance, as noted in an earlier, separate section. In all these ways, however, it is evident that these public community exchanges mirrored the personal dynamics of authority and authenticity Sobaihi herself had attempted to establish, and which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Islamic and Islamicate motifs

A second, more evident, refractory register is the Islamic and Islamicate motifs that run through the entire performance. Indeed, as in all the case studies discussed in the thesis, the language, vocabulary and context of the events and performances are key in this regard. *Head Over Heels* certainly does not engage in apologetics, but neither is it an exercise in propaganda, even though it does take an establishment line in its presentation of Saudi Arabia, and particularly of its marital practices. Rather, these motifs are taken for granted, presented and

engaged with as a given, occasionally invoked explicitly, but never self-consciously or apologetically.

Very early on in the performance, for example, Sobaihi reads aloud statistics about 'divorce rates...shooting sky high' all over the kingdom, and that in Riyadh alone it had increased by about 40 per cent. She then goes on to cite a religious scholar writing in a newspaper who thinks this is '...because we do not choose right' when we choose partners. 'We've lost our Islamic values, and now when we choose', she said, we do so on materialistic aspects, rather than considerations 'based on the ... teachings that were taught to us by our Prophet, peace be upon him.' Here, she also takes the opportunity to 'clarify that divorce is not always a man's choice. In fact, women are allowed to divorce in Saudi Arabia, and sometimes women divorce with a most interesting reason.' Picking up a newspaper, she gives an account of a woman who decides to divorce her husband after twenty-five years of marriage. 'Why everyone? Why?' she asks. 'Hmm. Because, she got bored!' Amidst audience laughter, Sobaihi continued, 'Seriously. She got bored and she divorced him. Ladies, they don't have the guy's number here. He sounds like a nice guy.'

As the performance unfolds, other such Islamic and Islamicate motifs are introduced. At one point, one of the characters calls up a fatwa hotline for advice. *Misyār* marriages are, of course, another example of these motifs. Whatever the ultimate ends and motivations of the individuals involved, the *misyārs* are clearly

religious means in that they are validated and legitimised through recourse to the shari‘a of Saudi Arabia. Any other consensual sexual relations outside the bond of marriage, whether adultery or pre-marital, or post-marital, are forbidden and often punished, usually by lashing, under the law. Women disproportionately tend to carry the burden for this over men.

A third example of explicitly Islamic motifs is not only the invocation of the Qur’an, but also brief recitations of some verses, particularly towards the end of the performance. This was in heartfelt prayer for courage to brace against imminent bad news that Laylah was about to be divorced. I was unable to identify the exact verses, but they were clearly signposted by the standard formula which begins any Qur’anic recitation, ‘*‘udhu bi-llāhi min al-shaytān al-rajīm*’, followed by the *basmala*, ‘*Bi’smi-llāhi-l-rahmāni-l-rahīm*’. This particular segment was additionally marked by considerable code-switching between English and Arabic, a feature also discussed in Chapter 4. Some of these phrases were easily identifiable, with ‘*inshā’a-llāh*’, ‘*subhān-llāh*’, ‘*wa-llāhi*’, ‘*‘udhu bi-llāh*’, ‘*al-salām alaykum*’ as some of the more preponderant ones.

Here, the boundaries between Islamic and Islamicate language are much more blurred. While in the tense segment outlined above they functioned in a more religious sense, they were also used elsewhere in the performance less religiously and more phatically. Indeed, in these lighter segments, this vocabulary and these phrases were not self-conscious, and did not mean ‘Glory be to God’ or

'God Willing' or 'Peace be upon you' anymore than saying 'Jesus!' in astonishment in regular Western conversation is a conscious and deliberate invocation of the divine. It is just 'Goodness!', 'Maybe/Hopefully', or 'Hi!' Despite their ostensible religiosity, these terms function largely secularly.

But beyond these two refractory registers, that is, community perception and Islamic/Islamicate motifs, lies a much more fundamental principle, wholly unexplored in the performance even as it circumscribes it and, indeed, orders and regulates Saudi society more widely - the shari'a, which I discuss next.

Shari'a, Saudi Style

Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia is unmistakably didactic in its presentation and depiction of specific yet widespread aspects of social behaviour in Saudi society, such as polygamy, whether through a secondary or temporary – and often covert – marriage, and the ban on women driving. Not once, however, does Sobaihi make any explicit reference to the specifically Islamic laws, that is, the shari'a, that regulates this behaviour in the kingdom. This section, begins, therefore, by providing an overview of the shari'a. Then, it goes beyond the humour of the performance to provide a rather more sobering survey of the impact of temporary marriage. Next, much as we determine from the exchange between Sobaihi and Laylah in the performance, the section examines how temporary marriage is still met with public disapproval even as it is rationalised in socio-economic terms and lent a veneer of religious legitimacy. Against this backdrop, it finally turns to the

curious matter that despite the increasing prevalence of temporary marriage in Sunni contexts, it is still widely perceived as a Twelver Shi'i phenomenon.

What is the shari'a?

In popular perception, Islamic law is often simply translated as the shari'a and, consequently, misunderstood as a simple synonym for a highly selective and sometimes misattributed set of Qur'anic injunctions. Even combined, the Qur'an and the sunna did not, in the history of the development of Islamic law, constitute a comprehensive legal system.³³⁶ Rather, they were a 'collection of piecemeal rulings on particular issues scattered over a wide variety of different topics; far from representing a substantial corpus juris, it hardly comprise[d] the bare skeleton of a legal system.'³³⁷ At its outset, therefore, Islamic law drew from a very wide variety of sources, reflecting the concerns and customs of particular geographical and historical contexts.

Over the eighth to ninth centuries, debates about the validity of these sources led to the development of many different schools of law (*madhhabs*), to which groups of jurists associated themselves, practically or intellectually. Of these, the Ja'fari, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools, after their

³³⁶ The sunna is the reported tradition and/or practice of the Prophet Muhammad.

³³⁷ N. J. Coulson, *Conflicts and Tensions in Islamic Jurisprudence* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 4.

eponymous 'founder-scholar[s]',³³⁸ came to be crystallised as the classical schools of law and survive down to the present-day.

The Ja'fari school broadly represents the Shi'a, while the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools represent the Sunnis. Saudi Arabia is governed by Hanbali law. The differences between all these schools are most evident in their treatment of family law.³³⁹

In the modern period, however, 'the dividing lines' between especially the four Sunni schools of law have, for all practical purposes, 'almost totally disappeared'.³⁴⁰ Of course, ideological differences between the Shi'a and the Sunnis have remained, played out in the legal arena not least in matters of inheritance and temporary marriage.

Islamic law is, therefore, a complex system of principles, constituted, influenced, informed and developed over centuries by a variety of sources, actors and factors, and which continues to evolve. It is also not monolithic. Despite certain shared principles and understandings, what constitutes shari'a law and how it is interpreted and implemented in Saudi Arabia differs from its manifestation and practice in other Islamic countries as wide ranging as Iran,

³³⁸ Coulson, 21. Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765); Abu Hanifa (d. 767); Malik b. Anas (d. 796); Al-Shafi'i (d. 820); Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855).

³³⁹ Coulson, 24-25.

³⁴⁰ Coulson, 33.

India, Indonesia, Pakistan or Nigeria.³⁴¹ Some aspects of how it is understood and re/presented in the West, particularly in the UK, are discussed in Chapter 3.

Temporary/Misyār Marriages

Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia is probably the first and only long-form comedic treatment on stage of the subject of temporary marriage in a Muslim context.³⁴² In this medium it is also perhaps unique in illustrating the agency of a segment of women in Saudi society – women who are educated, upper-middle-class, married (or previously so) and approaching middle age. Of course, such agency is not limited to Saudi women. Women in Iran, for example, have long and feistily resisted patriarchy especially in marital matters as Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Kim Longinotto illustrate in turns both dramatic and comical in their documentary *Divorce Iranian Style*.³⁴³ And in the specific case of temporary marriage among upper-middle-class women, there are parallels with Sobaihi's character, Laylah, in the Egyptian context, where Mona Abaza examines press coverage about such women engaging in *misyār* marriages 'or of women who apparently married four

³⁴¹ For contemporary takes on the issue, see Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2005); and Kadri, *Heaven on Earth*.

³⁴² *Ali's Wedding* (2018), a Netflix Original film comedy covers some aspects of temporary marriage in a subplot but in the diasporic context of Australia, where the protagonists, one of whom originally comes from Iraq via Iran, and the other from Lebanon, hit upon it as a religiously legitimate way to be together. This despite Ali being formally engaged to another woman, unbeknownst to his girlfriend-cum-temporary-wife.

³⁴³ Kim Longinotto, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Divorce Iranian Style*, 1997.

and six men respectively through ‘urfi (*Al-Ahram*, 22 March 1999; *Al-Akhbar*, 28 September 1999, cited in Abaza, 2001).³⁴⁴

Off-stage, however, temporary marriage, whether in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, is the subject of numerous academic studies³⁴⁵ and has also attracted considerable media and popular attention. Of the academic studies, a recent work by Khalid Sindawi comparing temporary marriage in Sunni and Shi‘i Islam is particularly eye-opening for the sheer variety of its examples. Indeed, it boasts a dizzying array of a whole range of marital forms and arrangements both historical and contemporary, including those abolished by Islam such as ‘Impregnation marriage’, ‘group marriage’, ‘spouse exchange’, and ‘marriage to the wife of one’s father’; disputed marriages still practised such as ‘usufruct marriage (*nikāḥ al-mut‘a*)’, ‘common-law marriage (*al-nikāḥ al-‘urfī*)’ and ‘Marrying with the intention to divorce’ as well as contemporary marriage types such as ‘travel marriage’, ‘day and night marriage’, ‘fictitious marriage’, ‘white marriage or cohabitation’ as well

³⁴⁴ Quoted in Zuhur, “Women and Empowerment”, 32. I was unable to source Abaza’s own work, *Circuiting or Transgression? Perceptions of ‘Urfi Marriage and Changing Sexual Norms in the Egyptian Press* (2002). Although it has been cited by a handful of authors across other books and articles, I suspect they all had access to the electronic version on the Global, Area, and International Archive (GAIA) repository, which has since been withdrawn (see <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/1bm002gs>). An interlibrary loan request through the University of Edinburgh generated advice from the University of California, Berkeley, who originally published the text, that I contact Mona Abaza directly.

³⁴⁵ In Iran, see Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi‘i Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2002). In Lebanon, see Barbara Drieskens, “Changing Perceptions of Marriage in Contemporary Beirut,” in *Les Métamorphoses Du Marriage Au Moyen-Orient*, ed. Barbara Drieskens (Beirut: IFPO, 2009). In the UAE, see Frances S Hasso, *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

as 'internet marriage' and 'soap opera marriage'.³⁴⁶ Reflecting a longstanding feature of Islamic jurisprudence, much of the analysis in the work, however, is casuistic and, ultimately, constitutes merely a series of variations on a theme.

While a detailed analysis of temporary marriage is beyond the scope of this work, much of its discourse, as we shall see below, revolves around the legal status of these marriages, socio-economic pressures, religious roots and rationales, and the concomitant exploitation of vulnerable women in such explicitly patriarchal contexts.

In a syndicated article for Reuters in 2006, for example, *misyār* was headlined in economic terms, a way for poor Saudis 'to beat inflation'. Indeed, it 'offers an alternative to cash-strapped men who want to avoid lavish weddings but would like a relationship, without incurring the wrath of the morality police', wrote Sohail Karam.³⁴⁷ This economic argument is striking for its framing and invocation of such marriage as first and foremost a workaround for male poverty. That women in such marriages face far more social and economic uncertainty, insecurity, and instability is a secondary concern in this media analysis. Yet, it has parallels elsewhere in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, which has been the focus of the bulk of academic studies on *misyār*, and where they are better known

³⁴⁶ Khalid Sindawi, *Temporary Marriage in Sunni and Shi'ite Islam: A Comparative Study* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013).

³⁴⁷ Sohail Karam, 'Saudis turn to 'misyar' marriage to beat inflation', *Reuters*, 24 July 2006. Interestingly, the original piece is no longer available on the Reuters website, although it is available in a number of other newspapers online, including the Pakistani *Dawn* at <https://www.dawn.com/news/202796/saudis-turn-to>, accessed 1 September, 2017.

as 'urfi marriages. Often used as a source of shari'a, 'urf is constituted of custom and tribal law. 'Urfi marriages have taken place in Egypt since the 1930s, 'but were never considered to be legitimate marriages implying transference of property, duties to financial support or inheritance.'³⁴⁸ Among university students and other youth, they became increasingly common from the mid 1990s, often 'because "regular" marriage is beyond their financial means, costing more than six years' wages on average for young Egyptian men.'³⁴⁹ According to Zuhur, fifty percent of students at Cairo University undertook 'urfi marriages. Shereen El Feki notes, however, that while 'official sources' for 'urfi marriages 'range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands...a year', such 'public panic' is not borne out by other research:

In a study of more than forty-five hundred Egyptians aged eighteen to thirty, at most 6 percent of university students were estimated to be in such relationships; the real frequency lies somewhere between what young people are willing to admit to and what their elders greatly fear.³⁵⁰

Whatever the figures, Mira Tzoreff also cites economic considerations in the Egyptian context, stating that the 'trend is a direct result of the inability to marry'.³⁵¹ Her 2010 study referenced al-Azhar's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs which had by then 'confirmed the validity of *Misyar* and 'Urfi weddings as a

³⁴⁸ Zuhur, 31.

³⁴⁹ Zuhur, 31

³⁵⁰ Shereen El Feki, *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 44, citing Sahar El Tawila, and Zeinab Khadr, *Patterns of Marriage and Family Formation Among Youth in Egypt* (Cairo: National Population Council and Cairo University, 2004), 88.

³⁵¹ Mira Tzoreff, "Restless Young Egyptians – Where Did You Come From and Where Will You Go?," *Sharqiyya* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2010), 21.

solution for the hardships which young people face.³⁵² Tzoreff's work is distinctive, however, in illustrating the spread of the phenomenon beyond university youth and how economic considerations go hand in hand with demographic particularities.³⁵³ While the Supreme Council's sanction of these marriages demonstrated for some their 'flexibility' and 'a pragmatic view of reality'; for others, as for Tzoreff, it was only

a means of bypassing [the problem] - these weddings only provide a specific temporary solution. The women are liberated by these marriages from their late bachelorhood. The men get a taste of married life, but mainly experience sex, despite their financial difficulties that prevent them from purchasing an apartment, finding work, and marrying properly.³⁵⁴

There is more than a hint of sexism at play in this analysis - after all, exactly the same could be said of women. Tzoreff does go on to state that women in these marriages 'pay a heavier price than the men' but this is 'because the loss of virginity will make it more difficult for them to remarry' even though 'this can be solved through surgeries for restoring the hymen, which have become more common nowadays.'³⁵⁵ Other challenges include the fact that a

woman cannot sue her husband for a divorce if he chooses to deny this marriage which is undocumented and unauthorised, and will have to remain "chained", forbidden from remarrying out of fear that she will be guilty of bigamy. Also, if a young woman were to get pregnant during such a marriage and her husband were

³⁵² Tzoreff, 21. 'Urfi marriages had gained legal recognition in Egypt after reforms to personal status law in 2000. See Zuhur, "Women and Empowerment", 30.

³⁵³ As she notes, Egypt's Central Bureau of Statistics showed that in 2007 there were more than nine million unmarried men and women over the age of thirty-five. In this age group, unmarried men stood at approximately 6.5 million, far outstripping the women who numbered around 3.8 million. Moreover, the marriage age for men had risen to forty-two years and thirty-five years for women.

³⁵⁴ Tzoreff, "Restless Young Egyptians", 21.

³⁵⁵ Tzoreff, 22.

to abandon her, she could end up penniless and be forced to raise her children as a single mother.³⁵⁶

Clearly, despite their upgraded legal status, these marriages remain deeply problematic for Egyptian women. Furthermore, as Doe notes, such marriages often serve as a cover for prostitution, which is illegal in Egypt. In recent years, this has been compounded by sex tourism from wealthy Gulf states like Saudi Arabia in the form of *miṣyāfs* or summer marriages (and which Sobaihi had also made passing reference to as *ṣayf miṣyārs*). Chillingly, these often become a gateway for human trafficking to Saudi Arabia.³⁵⁷

Newer forms of temporary marriage continue to develop, including *mityār* or ‘flying’ marriage ‘in which a man takes a trophy wife for international travel’, as well as ‘friend’ marriage, ‘an Islamic gloss on Western-style dating’ complete with ‘guardian’s consent for the girl, witnesses, declaration and acceptance, and symbolic *mahr* [dowry]’. This would leave the couple ‘free to pursue their relationship, but would continue to live separately, in their respective parental homes.’³⁵⁸

Let us now return to Karam’s *Reuters* article, which begins and ends in an affirmation of patriarchy: ‘Khaled never thought a form of temporary marriage

³⁵⁶ Tzoreff, 22.

³⁵⁷ Stephanie Doe, “Misyar Marriage as Human Trafficking in Saudi Arabia,” *Global Tides* 2 (2008), 6-10. See also El Feki, *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World*, 182, 187-188.

³⁵⁸ Shireen El Feki, ‘Informal marriage across the region’ at <http://sexandthecitadel.com/research-and-resources/notes/chapter-2/informal-marriage-across-the-region/>, the eponymous website for Shireen El Feki’s book, www.sexandthecitadel.com, accessed 13 September 2018.

would open the door to his happily-ever-after,' and "'We got used to each other very quickly,'" said Khaled, who has been married for 18 months. "Then she got pregnant. We couldn't bear our situation, so we decided to live together for real, not just with Misyar."³⁵⁹ Karam noted that *misyār* 'is traditionally frowned upon' because 'it leaves the wife financially vulnerable', which had 'angered many women's activists and intellectuals.'³⁶⁰ Of the two cited by the article, both women, only Hatoun al-Fassi, a Saudi historian, is unequivocal on the subject: 'Misyar reduces marriage to sexual intercourse. For clerics to allow it is shameful for our religion.' But this comes half-way through the article, by which time readers have already been informed that 'Influential Muslim cleric Youssef al-Qaradawi has given his blessing to Misyar', albeit conceding that 'there should be at least some form of dowry to provide a guarantee for the wife.' And to stave off any further dissent, al-Qaradawi is very clear, for Karam cites the former's statement to Al-Jazeera, 'No doubt it is somehow socially unacceptable, but there is a big difference between what is Islamically valid and what is socially acceptable.'³⁶¹

Ironically, however, these differing perspectives bear a striking parallel to debates about *mut'a*, a form of temporary marriage practised by some Shi'a communities, whose duration can be as short as a few minutes to as long as ninety-nine years. The majoritarian Ithna'ashari (or Twelver) Shi'a have long borne the brunt of wider Muslim, that is, Sunni, criticism and ridicule of *mut'a* as nothing

³⁵⁹ Karam, "Saudis Turn to 'Misyar'".

³⁶⁰ Karam.

³⁶¹ Karam.

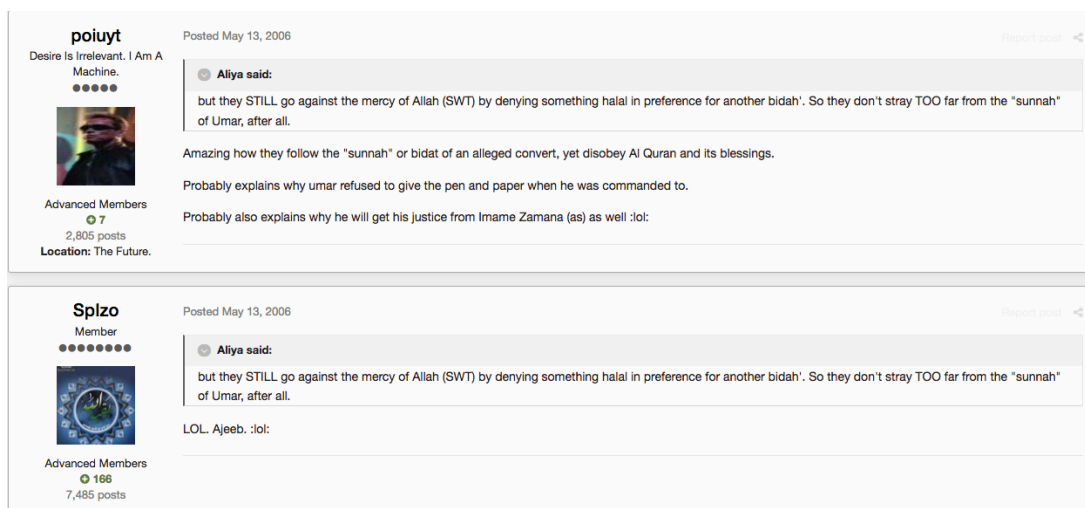


Fig. 9 Screenshot from ShiaChat.com illustrating responses to the announcement that *misyār* (temporary marriage) was legal in Saudi Arabia and permissible in Sunni Islam

more than a form of legalised prostitution.³⁶² Indeed, while acknowledging that temporary marriage existed during the time of the Prophet, much popular Sunni discourse routinely emphasises that it was banned by ‘Umar, the second caliph, and effectively abandoned by most schools of Islamic law.³⁶³ As Ziauddin Sardar noted in 2008, ‘Sunni Muslims of my ilk see it as “impulsive sex”, not too far removed from adultery and “fornication”’.³⁶⁴ In her analysis of ‘*urfi* marriages in Egypt, Zuhur categorises them (i.e. ‘*urfi* marriages) together

with other forms of marriage that are suspect to the Sunni *madhahib* like muta[‘] marriage, known as *sigheh* in Iran (Haeri, 1989), with customs like kidnapping (Zuhur, 2000, 2001b) that often defied parental controls, and worst of all, close to the Western pattern of “living together” without the benefit of marriage.”³⁶⁵

³⁶² It should be noted that the minority Musta’li Shi’a also subscribe to the practice.

³⁶³ Ziauddin Sardar, “Will You Marry Me - Temporarily?” *Newstatesman*, 2008, <https://www.newstatesman.com/asia/2008/02/temporary-marriage-muta-iran>, accessed 1 February, 2018.

³⁶⁴ Sardar himself disagrees with this assessment and goes on to write that ‘western critics, particularly feminists, equate *muta* with prostitution. I disagree. Indeed, I think these attitudes reflect our hypocrisy about sexual issues.’ See Sardar. But this is a minority view.

³⁶⁵ Zuhur, “Women and Empowerment”, 31

Similarly, in discussions with Muslims (both Sunni and Shi‘a) and non-Muslims, including even academics in Islamic Studies, whenever I said was writing up a chapter about the depiction of temporary marriage in Islam in a Fringe festival performance, the response was invariably, ‘Ah, *mut‘a*!’, referring to its Ithna‘ashari Shi‘i manifestation. When I would say it was actually *misyār*, practised by Sunni Muslims, and that, too, in Saudi Arabia, people were incredulous. That there was another form of temporary marriage in Islam called *misyār*, and that it was practised openly and legitimately, in Saudi Arabia, a fundamentalist Sunni context no less, was mind-boggling, not least because its Wahhabi base is so evidently and virulently anti-Shi‘a. And yet, here it was – not only being practised in the heartlands of Sunni Islam, but also the subject of a successful comedy performance at Edinburgh’s Fringe Festival. This is not a merely anecdotal account. It is a persistent assertion even in more formal academic writing. In his review of Shahla Haeri’s *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi‘i Islam*,³⁶⁶ for example, William O. Beeman writes that ‘Haeri’s study has the added attraction of being virtually the only study of this social institution even within the world of Islam, since it is prohibited by Sunni Muslim law.’³⁶⁷ El Feki, too, writes, that ‘*Mut‘a* marriage is allowed in Shi‘i, but not Sunni Islam’, and while it is

religiously accepted, a *mut‘a* union does not enjoy the same social prestige as, nor the full legal rights of, official marriage – and is not something a woman with a reputation to keep would likely put on her resume. This is because *mut‘a* marriage

³⁶⁶ Haeri, *Law of Desire*.

³⁶⁷ William O. Beeman, “(Review), *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi‘a Islam*,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 524, Political Islam, no. Nov. 1992 (November 1992), 195.

is not about settling down and starting a family; it makes no attempt to varnish its sexual purpose.³⁶⁸

In describing *miṣyāf* or summer marriage later in her book, El Feki writes of its frank sexual nature and the 'well-established network of brokers and lawyers in Egypt procuring young women for these visitors' from the Gulf. She notes further that

These unions lasting from a few days to a couple of weeks, usually include a written contract and witnesses, which makes them *shar'i*, or Islamically sound. However, they remain unofficial because they are not registered with the government. Although the intent is to keep these unions temporary, the actual term is rarely written down, which means they sidestep the issue of *zawaj mut'a*, pleasure marriage permitted in Shi'i Islam but prohibited for Sunni Muslims.

Despite the manifest sexual motivations for these and related forms of marriage, such hairsplitting is rather curious. Even as it acknowledges an all-too-thin veneer of religiosity, regardless of who engages in temporary marriage and where, it serves to reinforce rather than challenge presumptions about the practice's sectarian distribution or preponderance. In so doing, it also makes an implicit, normative judgement for the relative Islamicness of one group over another for what is effectively the same practice, its legitimacy hinging primarily around whether its limitedness in time is made explicit or not. Tellingly, as Dankowitz notes, 'The Sunni clerics reject the comparison between *mut'a* and *misyar* marriage, stressing *misyar*'s formal aspects which meet religious requirements',³⁶⁹ with the obvious implication that *mut'a* does not.

³⁶⁸ El Feki, *Sex and the Citadel*, 43-44.

³⁶⁹ Aluma Dankowitz, "Pleasure Marriages in Sunni and Shi'ite Islam." *The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, 291, 1 September 2006, <https://www.memri.org/reports/pleasure-marriages-sunni-and-shiite-islam>.

Karam's piece for *Reuters* was itself a report on the fatwa which had just been issued by Saudi clerics through the Institute of Islamic Religious Law³⁷⁰ permitting *misyār*. He pointedly stated that *misyār* was 'allowed in Sunni Islam and it is legal in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and other Middle East countries.'³⁷¹ By simultaneously invoking both the primacy of the law and the privilege of geography, the article was quick to guide its readers to appropriate judgement, and thereby subtextually establish the practice as longstanding, normal, common and valid in Sunni contexts. Yet, that is a brazenly revisionist portrayal of an otherwise long-standing negative, almost hostile, Sunni perception of temporary marriage. Writing in *Al-Watan*, a Saudi daily, Maryam Abd Al-Rahman Makawi was, however, one of few insiders unafraid to call a spade a spade:

What is strange is that we very often condemn those from other schools of religious thought [i.e. Shi'ites] because [they agree to] *mut'a* marriage. Even though I am completely opposed to this kind of marriage, I respect the fact that they call things by their name...³⁷²

This disingenuity did not go unnoticed in other quarters, and was called out as is evident in the popular response of Twelver Shi'a faithful to the *Reuters* article when it broke over media in the Muslim world. On ShiaChat.com, for example, which styles itself as 'the largest Shi'a community since 1998', members put up a number of these articles from papers as varied as *Dawn*, the *Khaleej Times* and others, prompting a mixture of laughter ('lolz'; 'LOL. Ajeeb. :lol:'); , a flood of

³⁷⁰ Also referred to as the Islamic Jurisprudence Assembly.

³⁷¹ Karam, "Saudis Turn to 'Misyar'".

³⁷² Quoted in Dankowitz, "Pleasure Marriages".

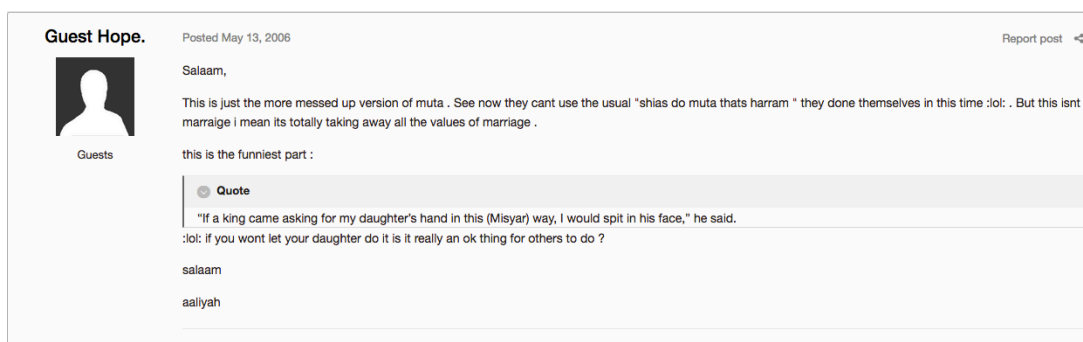


Fig. 10 Screenshot from ShiaChat.com illustrating not only longstanding Sunni-Shi‘a antagonism on the issue of temporary marriage but also charges of *misyār* being a perversion of marriage.

astonishment (‘khaili ajeeeb’) and a host of ironic comments and history in-jokes impugning ‘Umar’s integrity (see Fig. 9). Unsurprisingly, many of these comments charged the Saudis, rivalling only the Egyptians as bastions of Sunni orthodoxy and normativity, with hypocrisy: ‘Look at the hypocrisy. :dry: I gues they had to go against the commands of the great Umar after all. ;)’ (see Fig. 10.)

Amongst the Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a, the contemporary loci of authority are often vested in establishment figures representing the theocratic state of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite *mut‘a* being largely sanctioned by Ithna‘ashari Shi‘i theology and validated by the laws of the state, the laity have generally looked down upon the practice, perceiving it primarily as a perverted preserve of clerics in the seminarian cities of Qom and Mashhad and/or as a practice exploiting the poor, rural and uneducated.³⁷³ As Ziba Mir-Hosseini notes, although *mut‘a* gained new legal validity with the Islamic Revolution in 1979, it ‘has remained a socially

³⁷³ See Homa Khaleeli, “I Was a Temporary Bride.” *The Guardian*, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jul/11/i-was-a-temporary-bride-in-iran>, for a fascinating review-cum-interview with Jennifer Klinec, an Eastern European-Canadian who writes of her *mut‘a* experience as a traveller to Yazd. Klinec eventually married her husband more permanently at a register office in London, UK. See Jennifer Klinec, *The Temporary Bride: A Memoir of Love and Food in Iran* (Virago, 2015).

defective marriage. It is seen as a temporary union whose object is gratification of sexual needs, and which rarely results in the establishment of a marital home. A *mut'ā* wife is referred to as *sigħa*, a term which has derogatory implications'.³⁷⁴ In this regard, as we have already seen, al-Fassi's critique as cited in the *Reuters* article, mirrors the arguments made by Mir-Hosseini and others.

The fact is, however, that research in this field, usually by women, has for some twenty-five years now, highlighted the practice of temporary marriage among Sunni Muslims in the Middle East. Despite its obvious introduction and development in Sunni contexts where it is rationalised on religious grounds and buttressed by economic and demographic imperatives, the notion that temporary marriage is an aberrant and exclusively Shi'i practice remains oddly widespread.

Conclusion

Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia is a personal and performative account of the social and marital lives of women in Saudi Arabia. In examining its spatial practice, this chapter also served as a case study of how Islam and Muslims are represented at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, illustrating how women in a particular Muslim context challenge patriarchy, have agency, and negotiate their roles in society. Despite its subject and geographic specificity, it challenges more widely, and particularly for Western audiences such as those at the Fringe and elsewhere beyond its Saudi Arabian performance runs, the notion that women in

³⁷⁴ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), 166.

Islam are passive or quiet or victims. Through Sobaihi and her characters, we beheld rather, that they they speak, frankly, vehemently and loudly; demanded concessions from their husbands; participated in their own networks with like-minded women; and laughed, teased, pleaded, cajoled and got angry. In so doing, it demonstrated, as outlined in the Introduction, a key aspect of Lefebvre's definition of the production of space, namely, that 'space was not a thing but rather a set of relations between things'³⁷⁵ and that it further 'implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships'.³⁷⁶ And all of this in a most unexpected Muslim majority context, known for its religious conservatism, literalism and fundamentalism.

From marriage to driving, this chapter illustrated how, in Lefebvrian terms, an 'educatively entertaining' space such as a comedy Fringe performance authoritatively presented a novel and alternative narrative of the experience of women in Saudi Arabia. Its portrayal of the lives of its upper-middle-class protagonists is admittedly not representative of all Saudi women, let alone Muslim women more generally. Indeed, these women have their own dedicated drivers, not familial male chaperones, who would be the requirement, strictly speaking, under Saudi Islamic law, and who as foreign employees, have little choice but to follow these women's orders to satisfy a sweet tooth at 3.00am. In this way, in terms of the production of space, the performance bridged what Light and Smith called the 'grimly realistic' educative space (the role and status of women

³⁷⁵ Lefebvre, *Production*, 83.

³⁷⁶ Lefebvre, 82-83.

generally in Saudi Arabia) with the 'comfortingly fantastic' entertaining space (the luxury and rarified lives of a particular group of Saudi women).³⁷⁷

Combining source material from the artifice of Sobaihi's stage together with existing academic literature and later developments reported in traditional as well as new media, the chapter highlighted how Islam is refracted through the lens of Saudi Arabia, both in the instrumentality as well as the flexibility of the shari'a when it is necessary and motivated by economic, demographic or political considerations. This was most evident in the example of the driving ban imposed upon women, which had religious sanction, and its repeal in 2017, which also invoked Islamic law for its volte-face. Still, it was widely received as a sop to Western concerns about the need for reform and modernisation and in this regard highlighted how this state of affairs, which in Lefebvrian terms existed in this abstract space before its appearance in it, affected its 'presence, action and discourse'.³⁷⁸ Indeed, local Saudi reaction, both reformist and activist as well as religio-traditional and conservative, demonstrated the Lefebvrian principle that such prefiguring posed challenges to alter the space even as it was (re)appropriated. Despite this specific disingenuity, the shari'a in Saudi Arabia functions, arguably, however, not unlike any other legal system, which responds to either social pressure and changes from the ground up or to political pressure from the top down. In terms of the production of space, therefore, this issue

³⁷⁷ Light and Smith, 5.

³⁷⁸ Lefebvre, *Production*, 57.

illustrated not only Lefebvre's 'texture of space' but also the ban's spatial practice, which determined not only 'its collective and individual use' but also 'a sequence of acts which embod[ied] a signifying practice even if they cannot be reduced to such a practice.'³⁷⁹ Equally, back on stage at the performance itself, its in-joke *mise en scène*, Islamic and Islamicate references, as well as English-Arabic code-switching, enabled its Saudi audience members to appropriate the space even as it was being produced, if not before. As such, their 'presence, action and discourse',³⁸⁰ variously expressed as hearty applause, complicit laughter in self-recognition, and singalong, informed how the rest of the audience responded and reacted.

The chapter also illustrated how the performance, which took place several years before the repeal, challenged Western-held assumptions twinning driving with the freedom of women. The performance had a distinct didactic thrust – the context was spelled out, the options were laid bare, and the how and why of the choices women make were clearly, if noisily, articulated. For Lefebvre, as noted in the Introduction chapter, these articulations, being both produced and consumed, validated 'certain relationships between people' (ie temporary marriage and employer-chauffeur relations), 'in particular places' (ie in Saudi Arabia, but extending to Egypt and Iran) even as they fundamentally challenged perceptions of other relationships, (the status of women in Islamic societies),

³⁷⁹ Lefebvre, *Production*, 57.

³⁸⁰ Lefebvre, *Production*, 57.

resulting in 'connotative discourses concerning these places.'³⁸¹ Still, the performance omitted, however, any substantive mention of the Islamic laws that underpin both the driving ban as it existed then, and the phenomenon of temporary marriage. The chapter ended, therefore, by providing an overview of the sources, development and complexity of the shari'a before examining how temporary marriage is rationalised under religious law, even as popular reception to the practice remains unconvinced of this, in both Sunni and Shi'i contexts. In Lefebvrian terms, therefore, this is akin to both the overlap as well as the gap between the pre-existence of a 'spatial economy' and its congruence with a verbal one.³⁸²

Comedy is a feature of many Edinburgh Fringe Festival events. For all its light-heartedness, the humour in *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia* facilitates an all-too scarce discussion and representation, from the inside, about Islam and Muslims, and particularly women, in their everyday lives and experiences. In drawing from her own life and experience, Sobaihi's performance was, in Lefebvrian terms, 'lived directly before it [was] conceptualized'.³⁸³ As discussed earlier in the thesis, spatial practice tends to remain largely unexplored.³⁸⁴ In examining and deciphering the spatial practice of this particular Fringe performance, this chapter therefore presented a novel approach and opportunity to understand how Islam and Muslims live in that space, understand it themselves,

³⁸¹ Lefebvre, 57.

³⁸² Lefebvre, 57.

³⁸³ Lefebvre, 38

³⁸⁴ Lefebvre, 34.

and produce it. In this way Islam and Muslims in Saudi Arabia, and other spaces it 'interpenetrates' and 'superimposes' itself on, to use Lefebvre,³⁸⁵ are nonetheless able to be re/presented even in a context which seems familiar because of its perceived religious primacy, geopolitical significance and associated reporting in the media.

This examination is far removed from the dry, austere, and prescriptive ideals that are characteristic of other insider treatments, as I discuss in the next chapter. Here, however, as in many stand-up acts at the Fringe by Muslims and about Islam and Muslims, but which are beyond the scope of this chapter, faith, world, belief and practice can all be observed and critiqued with empathy and laughter. The triumphs and tribulations characteristic of individual stories become touchstones for wider, more universal concerns and successes, critiquing, challenging and validating our own world-views and identities. In this way, what seems familiar or obvious can often be revealed as novel and subversive, complicating notions of piety and practice. Despite their 'Fringe' status, performances such as *Head over Heels in Saudi Arabia* re/present powerful, alternative ways of seeing Islam and Muslims, hitherto little explored, presenting opportunities to understand and engage with a diversity of voices. In so doing, they democratise the public performance and articulation of Islam, wresting away and resisting attempts at essentialising Islam and what it means to be Muslim.

³⁸⁵ Lefebvre, 86-87.

Chapter 3

Testaments of Faith: Two Sunni Conferences

Far from the festival scene at EIBF and the Fringe, where Islam and Muslims are re/presented primarily to an 'other' of non-Muslims, Edinburgh has also been home and played host in re/presenting Islam and Muslims to a 'self' of Scottish Muslims. These are large, visible, public, and Sunni Muslim discourses and performances of Islam and being Muslim. In Edinburgh, as elsewhere in the UK, they have largely been ignored in the desire to locate the study of the practice of Islam and Muslims in Britain almost exclusively in the mosque.

The Hope and Last Testament Conferences, together with the Islam Festival, are examples of the few large-scale events in Edinburgh that revolve explicitly around Islam per se. Several others, such as the Edinburgh Iranian Festival and the Edinburgh Arab Festival, tend to be circumscribed by geography and framed primarily in cultural and sometimes political terms. This chapter will focus on the two conferences.³⁸⁶

As open events, the two case studies here of self-styled conferences are important spaces for public discourse of the tenets of Islam and the practices of Muslims. Taking place as they do outside of traditional religious spaces and in explicitly public spaces, they are addressed to both internal and external

³⁸⁶ The Islam Festival was held in 2011, and then 2014, the tail ends of the duration of my research and fieldwork. As such, it is not included in this research. There are some indications that it was held in 2012 or 2013, but if so, I missed it. The biennial Edinburgh Iranian Festival first began in 2009 and has gone from strength to strength. The Arab Festival debuted in 2015 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

audiences. In speaking for themselves and controlling their own presentation and representation of Islam through the use of narratives and imagery, these events can provide a valuable counterpoint to prevailing negative media stereotypes and Islamophobic hacks spouting decontextualised soundbites of scripture.

The Last Testament and Hope Conferences

The Last Testament Conference

Billed as 'Scotland's Biggest Islamic Conference' in its subtitle, and replicated on its Eventbrite tickets and other marketing, The Last Testament Conference took place on a cold and overcast Sunday, on 31 March 2012 at Napier University's Craiglockhart Campus. A day-long event with around 350 people in attendance, it comprised a mix of people in varying degrees of 'visibly Muslim'³⁸⁷ appearance, hijabied and non-hijabied women, bearded and unbearded men. The majority were primarily of South Asian origin, with a handful of South East Asian extraction. Most had come in tow with friends or family. The bulk of the audience, segregated by gender in the large, pitch floor lecture theatre that was the primary locus of the conference, was made up of youth, mainly university students, followed by middle-aged folk with families. The children of these families tended to be around ten years of age and older, understandable perhaps because of its generally sober, didactic nature. There were very few, if any, attendees over the age of fifty, at least among the men, who were sat in the front of the lecture

³⁸⁷ For a study of the effects of this visibility in terms of physical appearance and how it affects Edinburgh's Muslims in airports, see Bonino, "Visible Muslimness".

theatre. It was a little more difficult for me, sitting half way up, to determine an age range for the women because they were sat at the back behind me. Mindful not to cause offence, I caved in to the social pressure to not visibly turn around for an extended period of time in the middle of the talks on stage to do so.

The youthful demographic was likely a reflection of the conference's organisational origins, emblazoned on a standing banner at the right of the stage, next to the entrance of the lecture theatre. Against a backdrop reminiscent of aged parchment, the banner advertised the At-Tawheed Association, co-sponsors of the conference. *Tawhīd* is a fundamental credal concept for all Muslims, articulating the unity of God and encapsulated in the first line of the *shahāda*, commonly translated in the declaration that 'There is no god, but God.' The banner stated that the Association had been 'established by a number of youth from Edinburgh and our aim is to seek the pleasure of Allah³⁸⁸ and expand our efforts afar.' It continued, 'Our goal is spreading the message of Islam in its purest and unadulterated form and uniting the community under the ... banner of the Qur'an and authentic ... Teachings of the Prophet...' before ending with details of its website and associated email address.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ 'Seeking the pleasure of Allah' is a common phrase in the Qur'an.

³⁸⁹ www.at-tawheed.co.uk and info@at-tawheed.co.uk. The Association's website should not be confused with the website that previously existed at an almost identical URL, www.at-tawheed.com. I spent over a month researching and writing about the ten-year history and development of the latter, which almost certainly was jihadist when it first appeared in December 2005. By August 2015, however, it displayed a Japanese page advertising tax and legal services related to property. To my enduring chagrin, I caught the error only when I first began concluding this chapter and double-checking the references – an unfortunate auto-correct setting revealed a mistranscription from my handwritten conference fieldnotes and had sent me off on a wild-goose chase.

Hope Conference

Despite its billing, The Last Testament Conference was a modest affair – tucked away in a university lecture hall, held with little fanfare, and attended by a rather specific group of people. In contrast, some 600 people attended just the day event for the Hope Conference, which was held at the Edinburgh Corn Exchange on 17 March 2013.³⁹⁰ Organisers announced that over 800 tickets had been sold for 'Light of Guidance', the Conference's evening event at the same venue which, we were later informed, ultimately sold out.³⁹¹ Where two policemen stood just outside the main entrance to the building at 10:00am, a number of volunteers welcomed a long queue of people, ushering them along a reception area, partly given over to white-linen-lined desks for registration, and into the main hall where the morning session had already started.

The day event, 'Islam: Not What You Think',³⁹² was advertised at the outset as a showcase and public event for the Hope Conference, itself a series of sporting and speaking events in Glasgow and Edinburgh held over the weekends of 9 and 16 March 2013 (see Figs. 11 and 12). Attendees were primarily Muslim, varying greatly in age and from all walks of life, but there was also a significant proportion

³⁹⁰ www.edinburghcornexchange.com, accessed 9 April 2013.

³⁹¹ After the Conference, organisers reported that there were five events in total, with 870 guests for 'Islam: Not What You Think' and over 900 for 'Light of Guidance'. Other statistics provided about the event noted '25 exhibitors, 7 speakers, a team of dedicated volunteers and MOST IMPORTANTLY 7 shahadas on the day'. See pinned post at <https://www.facebook.com/events/413330148755814/>, accessed 10 February 2016. Emphasis in original.

³⁹² See the event's public Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/events/413330148755814/>, accessed 10 February 2016, which provides a fair amount of information without requiring login.



WHICH EVENT ARE YOU ATTENDING

- > SAT 9 MARCH - HOPE BADMINTON CUP
Edinburgh
- > SUN 10 MARCH - HOPE FOOTBALL CUP
Edinburgh
- > SAT 16 MARCH - RISE DAWAH TRAINING
Glasgow
- > SUN 17 MARCH - ISLAM NOT WHAT YOU THINK
Daytime seminar - Edinburgh
- > SUN 17 MARCH - LIGHT OF GUIDANCE DINNER
Evening Dinner - Edinburgh

MARCH 2013

VISION [ISLAM]

Fig. 11 One of several posters for the Hope Conference, outlining a series of sporting and speaking events held in Scotland in March 2013

of non-Muslims, most of whom appeared to have been invited by their Muslim friends and colleagues who could be overheard pointing out factoids on the

banners as they walked about. There was a conscious effort to make these non-Muslim visitors feel welcome. Pre-event online publicity, for example, advertised that they would be allowed in for free, whereas ticketed contributions for Muslims were priced at £10.³⁹³ This inclusivity was reinforced by a mailshot about a month earlier from the listserv of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association (EIFA), a longstanding stalwart of Edinburgh's civil society scene.³⁹⁴ When I walked in with a white, non-Muslim friend and fellow researcher, my Muslimness was assumed as much as his non-Muslimness was taken for granted. Muslim ticket contributions were waived, we were told, courtesy of generous sponsors on the day. Although we both got in for free, he retained an 'other's' edge—whereas he was presented with a small gift pack upon registration, I got only a sheepish but knowing smile.

The scale of the event was evident not only in the number and the kind of people attending it but also in its utilisation of space – the Corn Exchange was almost entirely taken up by the Conference, with large areas comfortably dedicated to stalls, banner exhibits, information booths, a food court, and prayer. The variety of these discrete yet connected spaces enabled people to move around freely at any time instead of being cooped up in the main hall and bound by propriety to sit through the formal programme. And even there, on the perimeter of the seating and stage area, a number of desks had been set up, each manned by individuals representing different organisations distributing a variety

³⁹³ See preceding note for their Facebook page, which makes this clear.

³⁹⁴ See Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association, "Mailshot." 2013, <http://us4.campaign-archive2.com/?u=fefa17235eb906e3549710910&id=645d4e90e5&e=1c235327e0>, accessed 10 February, 2016.

of material, ranging from religious literature to cancer support. Consequently, the Hope Conference had a relaxed feel and an air of liveliness about it where The Last Testament Conference was considerably more austere and restrained.

General similarities

This difference, however, belies the overall thrust of and commonalities between the two conferences. Firstly, this is not to suggest that The Last Testament Conference comprised only a series of presentations. It, too, had areas separate from the lecture hall. But they were fewer, much smaller, and in parts of the building physically disconnected from the main event, comprising only a prayer room and a couple of desks for the sale of books and magazines located in the reception to the main entrance of the building.

Secondly, like the lecture theatre in The Last Testament Conference, the main hall in the Hope Conference was also segregated along gender lines. In the latter, however, the segregation was lateral, instead of front and back. There is a tendency in some public Muslim gatherings to replicate some of the conventions surrounding Muslim *religious* spaces. Gender segregation is one of these conventions, particularly at events perceived to be 'community' occasions. Such events may not be explicitly religious in nature. But because they are often sponsored by mosques or other similar religious institutions or organisations, they naturally become spaces where one expects to see fellow faithful who would otherwise only be seen in formal, explicitly religious contexts. Their very

VISION [ISLAM]
HOPE
conference
EVENTS

SUNDAY 17 MARCH EDINBURGH - SHOWCASE EVENT

ISLAM NOT WHAT YOU THINK - DAYTIME SEMINAR
All speakers will attend | Corn Exchange [9:30am-4:30pm]

SUNDAY 17 MARCH EDINBURGH

RISE – EVENING DINNER WITH SCHOLARS
All speakers will attend | Corn Exchange [6pm-10.30pm]

SATURDAY 16 MARCH – GLASGOW

RISE - DAWAH TRAINING SESSION

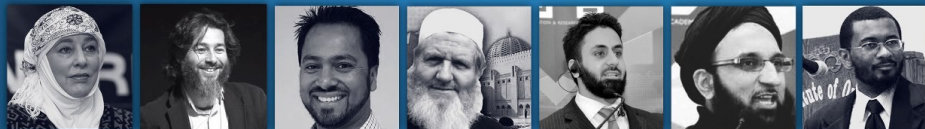
With Sheikh Kamal EL-Mekki only | Al-Meezan Centre [2pm-6pm]

SATURDAY 16 MARCH ABERDEEN

AMBASSADORS OF ISLAM

With Sheikh Yusuf Estes only | NK6 New Kings Building [4pm-6pm]

**SCOTLAND HOSTS WORLD FAMOUS SPEAKERS
DO NOT MISS OUT!!!!**



For tickets and more info WWW.EVENTS.VISIONISLAM.CO.UK

Fig. 12 A Hope Conference poster detailing events and speakers cities across Scotland. The Aberdeen event does not appear to have panned out

presence, therefore, produces a new religious space regardless of the degree of religious leaning in these community gatherings. This sets up normative expectations of 'proper behaviour' therein, and which people will tend to comply with consciously or unconsciously. In this regard, the queue of people coming into the lecture hall at the Hope Conference appeared initially to gravitate in exactly the same way, with men bifurcating left and women right. As it turned out, however, the convention was also visibly enforced. Where individuals did not automatically comply, it was only a matter of minutes before one of the many ushers would come over to the offending party and politely request they move to the appropriate side of the hall. This is a clear example of the Lefebvrian production of space, constituted, as noted earlier in the thesis, as not only 'a set of relations between things',³⁹⁵ but also that it 'implies, contains, and dissimulates social relationships'³⁹⁶ as well being both 'a pre-condition and result of social superstructures.'³⁹⁷ As more people came in, however, the middle columns became harder to police, partly because there was not enough physical space delineating a visible boundary and partly because many came with young children, for whom these conventions are less strictly enforced in any case. The resulting liminality here, as elsewhere in the Conference, especially enabled young men and women, with or without children, to mix somewhat more freely, and effectively resist the status quo.

³⁹⁵ Lefebvre, *Production*, 83.

³⁹⁶ Lefebvre, 82-83.

³⁹⁷ Lefebvre, 85.

A third general point to note is the naming convention of these events. At first sight, for me, at least, the use of 'conference' in the title harked back to *The Conference of the Birds*, the common translation for Farid al-Din Attar's *Mantiq al-tayr*.³⁹⁸ A classic, twelfth-century Persian tale of spiritual search, it tells the story of a community of birds seeking to understand their purpose in life. Led by the indefatigable efforts of the hoopoe, they journey together to seek out the Great Bird, the Simurgh. The path is demanding and difficult and as they fly over seven valleys and seven hills, scores turn back, give up or die on the way. By the time they arrive at the Great Hall at the end of the world to be received by the Simurgh, only thirty birds remain. As they wait for the Simurgh to appear, realisation dawns upon them. They are the *si-murgh*, Persian for *thirty-birds*. Their destination is ultimately a reflexive journey of discovery. But where *The Conference of the Birds* is a tale of search and doubt, of question, challenge and complaint, The Last Testament and Hope Conferences were, as we shall see shortly, decidedly discourses of complete certainty and prescriptive practice.

The use of 'conference' to describe these two gatherings of Muslims, as indeed others, which are also referenced in this chapter, suggests, therefore, a more conventional association – a kind of collective discussion and exchange that is almost academic in that it is led by a panel of invited experts. In so doing, it

³⁹⁸ Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi, and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Classics, 1984). Notwithstanding changing usage and issues for translation for *mantiq*, which may be translated as speech or language. The title invokes Qur'an 27:16, where the Prophets David and Solomon are described as having 'been taught the language [or speech] of the birds'. See quran.com/27/16.

reinforces their credibility as well as their legitimacy, important features also discussed in Chapter 2. Coupled with their marketing and publicity, it is a presentation of Islam that is accessible rather than obscure for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In this regard, arguably, some elements of a journey of (re)discovery may well be at play.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, it is interesting to also note that the governing body of some Christian churches, such as the Methodist Church, is also referred to as a Conference. This is not to suggest a conscious borrowing of the term for these two events in Edinburgh. But it does prefigure an unmistakable evangelical feature of these gatherings, and which is examined towards the end of the chapter. For the moment, however, suffice it to note that even the subtitles of these and similar events are almost messianic in their nomenclature. This is particularly salient for The Last Testament Conference, which even as it evokes a continuation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition through their respective Old and New Testaments, reinforces the finality of the Islamic tradition that follows.

The popularity of these conferences, as evidenced in such mundane matters as sold-out dinner tickets, may also be seen as a validation of this attempt at self-presentation, with the consequent commercial success resulting in repeat

³⁹⁹ See, for example, www.discoverislam.com, www.ediscoverislam.com, www.dislam.org, www.missionislam.com, and www.discoverislam.co.uk, all of which explicate this notion of a search for the true meaning of Islam.

performances, quite literally, in subsequent years.⁴⁰⁰ They are fascinating examples of religion, and specifically Islam, in the public sphere, with commercial and social elements attached to the religious elements. As we shall examine later, they are also civic and educational spaces, mediums for outreach and understanding, as well as opportunities for *da'wa* or religious dissemination.⁴⁰¹ But there are two caveats. The first is that despite their number and frequency, they should not be taken as official positions on issues by the collectivity of Muslims, except for the specific individuals expressing those positions. This is different for the case study on Shi'a processions discussed in Chapter 4, where participation is rather more corporeal and ritual instead of passively receptive. The notion of authority in Islam, as in any other area of sociological analysis, is complex, intertwined with law, history, scripture and charismatic figures, each permutation of which has given rise to a variety of interpretive traditions and internal divisions. Secondly, just because they may be well attended by Muslims does not necessarily mean that these Muslims approve, comply or conform to the messages propagated in these contexts. Measuring the degree of such

⁴⁰⁰ There was another Hope Conference advertised for January 2015, as well as one titled 'Awakenings', see <https://www.facebook.com/HopeConferenceScotland/>, accessed 22 February 2016. A promotional link to the conference on their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/VisionIslamTube>), is available at <https://youtu.be/zWvF4TkhUzo>, accessed 22 February 2016. The Hope Conference website eventually moved to an eponymous domain, <http://www.hopeconference.co.uk> accessed 22 February 2016. A recheck for the website on 28 December 2018 drew a blank.

⁴⁰¹ Open, public references to the fact that this was an open event for At-Tawheed. Marketing material for Hope made it clear it was for both private and public consumption.

congruence is, in any case, rather difficult, and so these case studies do not attempt to analyse the motivations of conference audiences.

What they do, however, is to illustrate how orthodoxy and normativity may be transmitted. These efforts offer audiences a sense of solidarity and belonging, a produced space where the community can 'acquire a sense of itself'⁴⁰² and, therefore, a way to demonstrate a general Muslimness by subscribing to the overall thrust and messages of the conferences. In turn, this enables attendees to reinforce their basic beliefs, but without necessarily translating them into specific and enduring acts or practices of faith. This kind of distanced engagement is an important consideration of how representative these conferences really are of Muslims in Edinburgh.

For one thing, while the first half of the day event of the Hope Conference discussed here was open and conscious of non-Muslims being present, it was avowedly Sunni in its approach. For many insiders, otherwise oblique critiques of other traditions within and outwith Islam were clear. And certainly the beginning of the second half of the day event, after lunch, took a distinctly conservative view, if not troubling turn, of the validity of other faiths, with the Bahais and Mormons being particularly singled out. The make-up of the audience had also changed by then – most of the non-Muslims had left, including Kenny MacAskill, then Cabinet

⁴⁰² Light and Smith, 3, citing Rowan Moore, "Open and Shut," *New Statesman & Society* 3 (1990).

Secretary for Justice in the Scottish Government,⁴⁰³ who had taken the stage for several minutes in the morning. His presence was undoubtedly the result of the Conference's wider marketing strategy and likely helped to endorse messaging about Muslim integration and inclusivity. 'Events like these can help to dispel ignorance,' he had said. 'They can help contribute to the process of dismantling damaging and excluding stereotypes and reduce misunderstanding or misrepresentation.'⁴⁰⁴ Even the Iranian International Qur'an News Agency (IQNA) carried an abbreviated story from OnIslam.net, oblivious to the implicit anti-Shi'i and anti-Sufi thrust of the conference.

Marketing and Publicising the Conferences

The Last Testament Online

Despite the advertised scale of At-Tawheed Association's event in 2012, it had significantly pared down on its activities as well as its online presence by 2015. Its website fell into disuse, and even when it was up and running, it does not appear to have drawn much traffic. Indeed, it drew only eight 'captures' or snapshots of its content from the period 7 January 2012 to 18 December 2014⁴⁰⁵ as archived by the whimsically-named WayBackMachine, an initiative of the non-profit Internet

⁴⁰³ Kenny MacAskill stepped down from this role in November 2014. See <http://www.kennymacaskill.co.uk/biography/>, accessed 21 January 2016.

⁴⁰⁴ See OnIslam.net, 'Conference brings hope to Scotland Muslims', available at <http://www.onislam.net/english/news/europe/461845-conference-brings-hope-to-scotland-muslims.html>, accessed 18 March 2013.

⁴⁰⁵ See https://web.archive.org/web/20110401000000*/http://www.at-tawheed.co.uk/, accessed 1 October 2015.

Archive.⁴⁰⁶ Half of these snapshots are in 2012, in January, February, June and August. There is only one snapshot for the whole of 2013, in May, and three snapshots in 2014, in February, May and December.

Despite the paucity of this material, the snapshots illustrate the development and evolution of the website, starting off with a blank page in January 2012⁴⁰⁷ and within some six weeks moving on to a holding page on a pale yellow background (Fig. 13). Underneath this text is an image frame that is not captured by the Archive, alongside a broken YouTube frame. By 20 June, however, the Association's website has a calligraphic logo, rendered in blue and set against a white/grey background, and which reads *al-Tawhīd* in Arabic, and At-Tawheed in English. It also has a comprehensive site map and a 'Live Streaming' section. Two months later on 28 August, the website's scope has been consolidated and scaled back somewhat, with a revised menu containing only five categories (Fig. 14). This minimalist trend continues for the remainder of the snapshots captured by the Internet Archive until the website is ultimately abandoned. In May 2013, the menu comprised only the items, Home, About Us, and Contact Us. Events now formed a frame underneath this menu, and the live streaming section had been dispensed with entirely. The next snapshot, under

⁴⁰⁶ The Archive's stated aims 'include offering permanent access for researchers, historians, scholars, people with disabilities, and the general public to historical collections that exist in digital format.' See <https://archive.org/about/>, accessed 31 August 2015.

⁴⁰⁷ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20120107220327/http://www.at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

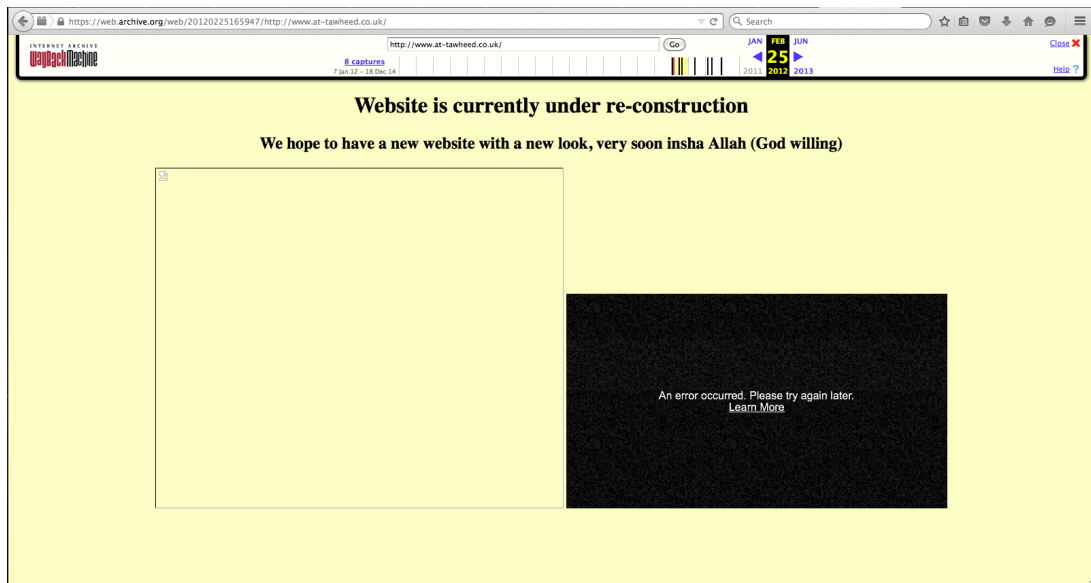


Fig. 13 Screenshot of the At-Tawheed website in February 2012. Clicking on the Youtube frame generates an error message. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20120225165947/http://www.at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

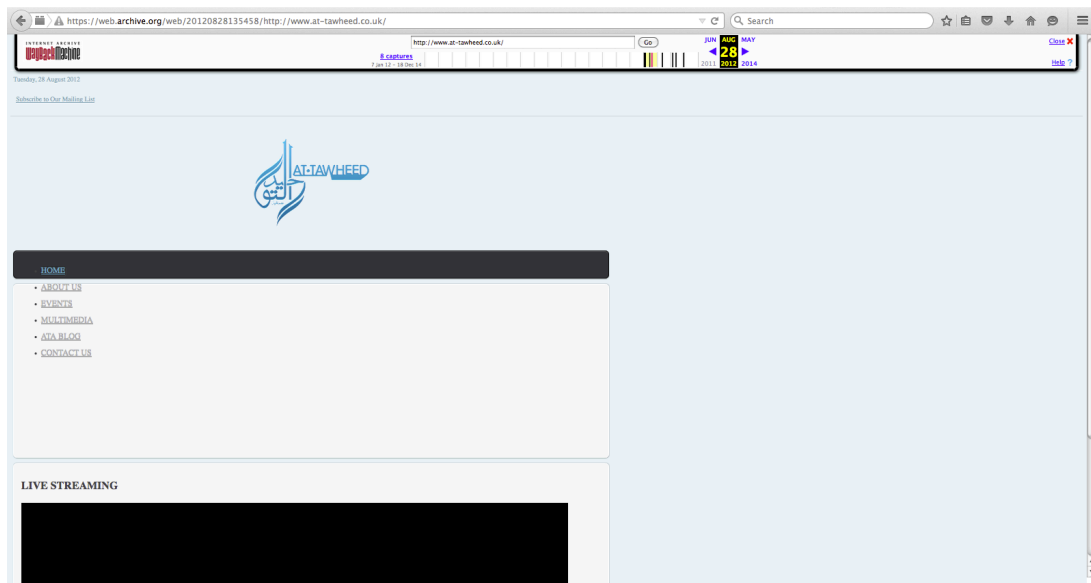


Fig. 14 Screenshot of the At-Tawheed website in August 2012. The option to subscribe to the website has been made more explicit, moving to the top left. Additionally, the At-Tawheed logo now sits on a light blue background. The live streaming section is retained, but the notice acknowledging the design of the website has been removed. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20120828135458/http://www.at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

a year later in February 2014, sees the menu reduced further, with Contact Us getting the boot.⁴⁰⁸ This does not change by the next snapshot in May.⁴⁰⁹ The last snapshot, in December the same year, displays a refreshed holding page, with the Association's logo now in a gold-brown colour atop a block sky-blue background, further modified by its incorporation of 'Association', and which I had first seen at the lecture theatre at Napier University in 2012. A two-line message underneath the logo reads, 'Thank you for visiting At-Tawheed Association | The website is currently under maintenance' (Fig. 15). In October 2015, the URL for the website displayed clip art monkeys.⁴¹⁰ The website came back online in March 2016, but with dummy *lorem ipsum* text in several pages, and the complete absence of references to the events under discussion here. By then it had registered as a Scottish charity, and its 'About' text was very different from that discussed here. A recheck on 28 December 2018 illustrated further development vis-à-vis its advertised events through to December 2016. These later developments are beyond the scope of this chapter.

That the original website no longer exists is unsurprising—local interest groups and associations often fizzle out after a period of initial, even frenzied, activity. This is not only because their aims and identities evolve and are re-evaluated in the context of other organisations doing similar things, but also

⁴⁰⁸ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20140228032830/http://at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

⁴⁰⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20140516201619/http://at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

⁴¹⁰ See www.at-tawheed.co.uk, accessed 1 October 2015.

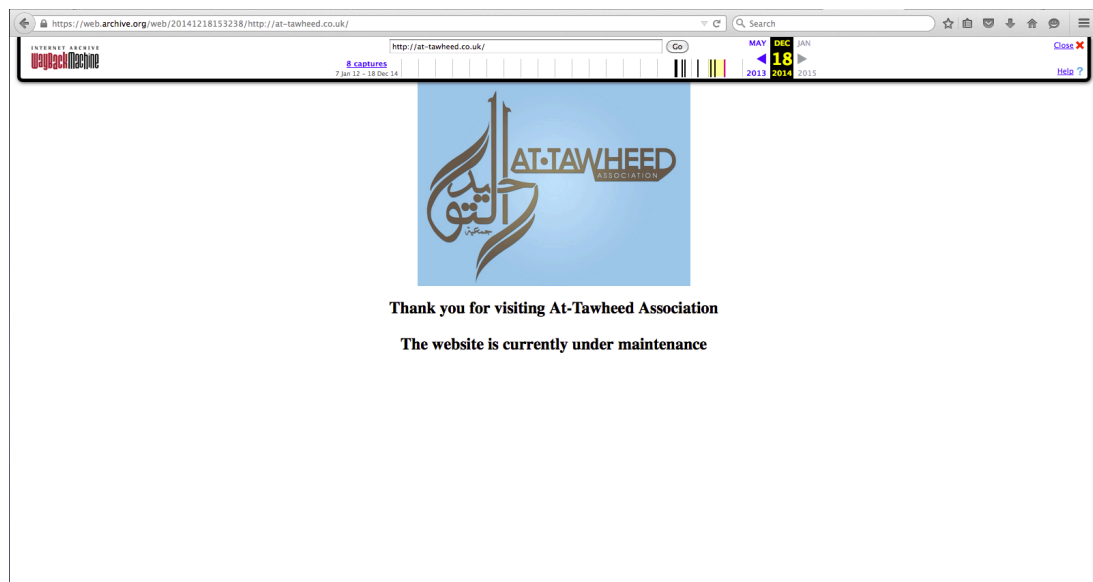


Fig. 15 Screenshot of the At-Tawheed website in December 2014. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20141218153238/http://at-tawheed.co.uk/>, accessed 1 October 2015.

because the individuals at the hearts of these organisations come and go, either physically or, more prosaically, as competing demands are made on their time and resources. In At-Tawheed's case, the 'youth from Edinburgh' may simply have grown up (and out) of their original goals. While the Association was active, the website was but a single element of their presence. Other elements included its Facebook page and its YouTube channel. Altogether, these new media platforms demonstrated concrete efforts at maintaining a coherent, if not unified, online organisational profile and identity, and which reflected the communicative modes of its own demographic.

What is curious, however, is how little of At-Tawheed's internet detritus remains and how fragmented it is. As discussed above, the Internet Archive has only the most basic records of At-Tawheed's existence, even when its URL was explicitly advertised and associated with 'Scotland's Biggest Islamic Conference'

in 2012. These lacunae are also evident in the sudden disappearance of its Facebook page,⁴¹¹ as well as the website of its eponymous partner for the Conference, the Last Testament.⁴¹² Additionally, many secondary references to At-Tawheed's activities, and particularly the Last Testament Conference, have also disappeared or been actively taken down. In their absence, an Eventbrite listing is perhaps the only comprehensive promotional textual material that remains about this event.⁴¹³ The listing comprised an upbeat description of the event together with a boldly coloured poster (Fig. 16), a detailed visual analysis of which follows.

The poster outlines the usual sponsor, speaker, venue, ticketing and further information details, most of which is repeated in the accompanying event description. But its most striking feature is the single image of a modern copy of the Qur'an, emanating a bright golden light, which breaks through and banishes the dark clouds around it as it descends from the heavens. Taking up the middle third of the poster, this Qur'an powerfully invokes not only its divine origin, but

⁴¹¹ www.facebook.com/attawheed, unavailable as at 20 August 2015, but back up again as at 24 November 2015. It should be noted that At-Tawheed's Facebook page did come back up (and, therefore, once again become available for analysis), as I noticed when I was rechecking the links for this chapter in November 2015. It is likely, therefore, that the account had been deactivated (although it is impossible to determine for how long this had been the case) and then reactivated in the interim. Despite its re-availability for analysis, it was too late to incorporate here fully, and so it is referenced only in very specific circumstances.

⁴¹² See www.last-testament.com, down as at 20 August 2015, and possibly much earlier.

⁴¹³ See <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-last-testament-scotlands-biggest-islamic-conference-tickets-2535892924>, accessed 20 August 2015. There is a YouTube video endorsing the Conference, but it is by Qabeelat Taqwa, its co-sponsors, and it is essentially a video message by a Shaykh Navaid Aziz encouraging people to attend. Uploaded on 27 February 2012, it had only 212 views by December 2015. See <https://youtu.be/yDAZbvp9N2g>, accessed 17 December 2015.

AT-TAWHEED ASSOCIATION & QABEELAH TAQWA
PRESENTS:

THE LAST TESTAMENT

EXPERIENCE THE QUR'AN LIKE NEVER BEFORE



TAQWA

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SHAYKH HAITHAM AL-HADDAD
USTAADH HAMZA TZORTIS
SHAYKH WAJID MALIK

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

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VENUE: EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY, CRAIGLOCKHART CAMPUS, EDINBURGH, EH14 1DJ

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SCOTLAND'S BIGGEST EVER ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

Fig. 16 Poster from the EventBrite listing for The Last Testament Conference in March 2012

additional self-referential tropes associated with its heavenly descent (*tanzīl*),⁴¹⁴ light (*nūr*)⁴¹⁵ and luminosity (*mubīn*),⁴¹⁶ all interlinked in a web of related concepts about guidance, knowledge, and discernment for all people, all times, and all places. The tagline above the image, 'The Last Testament: Experience the Qur'an Like Never Before', then definitively melds this vision of the Qur'an in all its rich symbolism of timeless spirituality, to the highly specific advertised event on 31 March 2012, which is buttressed by an assorted list of exclusively male religious scholar-speakers invited to the conference by the sponsors at the bottom of the image. The image of the Qur'an used here, leather-bound, gilt-floriated, fully formed as a complete book descending from the sky in all its fiery glory belies both received accounts of the revelation from Muslim tradition and the associated historical record.

Firstly, the Qur'an is believed to be a manifestation of the divine tablet, the *lawḥ al-maḥfūz*⁴¹⁷ which, being the eternal message of God, is popularly conceived as being 'preserved from alteration'. But because of the temporality of the Qur'an, the two are not necessarily identical. Additionally, as noted earlier, the corollary of a final message is the descent of earlier Abrahamic manifestations of this heavenly slate.⁴¹⁸ Secondly, the Qur'an was revealed piecemeal, over the

⁴¹⁴ e.g. Qur'an 2:4, 2:23, 2:97, 3:84, 4:166, 5:83, 12:2, 17:105-106, 20:4, 26:192-193, 36:5, 41:2, 41:42, 56:80, 64:8, 97:1.

⁴¹⁵ e.g. Qur'an 4:174, 5:15, 7:157, 24:35, 61:8, 64:8.

⁴¹⁶ e.g. Qur'an 4:174, 5:15, 12:1, 27:1, 43:2.

⁴¹⁷ Qur'an 85:22.

⁴¹⁸ See, for instance, A. J. Wensinck, and C. E. Bosworth, "Lawḥ." *EI2*, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/lawh-COM_0576, accessed 27 January, 2016.

course of some 20 years until the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Not only does it reference its own development and elaboration,⁴¹⁹ its canonical compilation into a codex did not take place until the caliphate of ‘Uthman (r. 644-656).⁴²⁰ And even today, most Muslims’ actual engagement with the Qur’an remains primarily aural and oral, rather than written.⁴²¹ Indeed, the continuing importance of the power of recitation is evident in the mention of the two reciters of the Qur’an who are billed equally alongside the scholar-speakers. Thirdly, Muslim tradition recounts that the first instance of revelation was a deeply personal, solitary and unsettling experience, if not frightening event, for the Prophet, in a cave of Mt Hira on the outskirts of Mecca (see Fig. 6). In all, the revelation of the Qur’an, was not the awe-inspiring, all-at-one-go, sky-blazing public performance depicted by the poster. And neither was its broad, initial reception. It was also threatening and dangerous for Muhammad, his kin and tribe.⁴²² These distinctions are entirely erased by the image under discussion. Not only does history have no place in this heavenly vision of light, this almost rapturous image itself suggests a certain kind of evangelical fervour, which we will explore later in the chapter.

⁴¹⁹ See, for example, the extract from Qur’an 5:3, which reads ‘...*This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion....*’

⁴²⁰ Stefan Wild, “Canon,” in *The Qur’an: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 136.

⁴²¹ Kristina Nelson, “The Sound of the Divine in Daily Life,” in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Donna Lee Bowen, and Evelyn A. Early (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁴²² See, for example, W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 14-16.

Moving on from the poster per se, clicking on the YouTube link for the trailer referenced in the EventBrite listing results in a message that the video is private, although six other videos uploaded by At-Tawheed remain accessible to the right of the webpage.⁴²³ As Appendix 3 illustrates, these videos advertise events that took place either mid week or on the weekend every six months or so in the years between June 2011 and December 2013. They were also evenly spread between Glasgow and Edinburgh, each of which had two events to themselves, and two events that toured both cities. Only in Edinburgh did events take place in university buildings in addition to the Edinburgh Central Mosque, suggesting student involvement that is not otherwise made explicit. These are the events, with their YouTube categories in parentheses:

1. Qibla Tour (Non-profits & Activism)
2. Conference Promo: Loving Allah – with Shaykh Abu Bakr Shatri – Part II (Non-profits & Activism)
3. The Final Abode – Scotland Tour (People & Blogs)
4. The Shade of Allah’s Throne (Non-profits & Activism)
5. Aqeedah Al Ha’iyyah Course (Education)
6. Time is up (Education)

As the table in the appendix further shows, most of these events link to individual Facebook pages. Public and clearly identifiable as being ‘Hosted by At-Tawheed Association’, to whose main page it links back to,⁴²⁴ these pages generally

⁴²³ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5b0V49VusY&list=UUf-orKyTPX5WJqhTTAgA&index=1&feature=plcp>, accessed 20 August 2015. As at 20 October 2016, these related videos no longer show up. A different link to the conference video on At-Tawheed’s Facebook page also comes up as an error message stating, ‘This video is unavailable. Sorry about that.’ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zaX7IFFofA>, accessed 24 November 2015.

⁴²⁴ www.facebook.com/attawheed, accessed 10 March 2016. ‘747 people like this’ page.

replicate the information provided on YouTube and often provide a little more written detail. There is minimal audience engagement on YouTube – some thumbs up and one or two comments, if any. Although there is slightly more engagement in the form of expressions of interest and confirmations of attendance on the individual Facebook pages, these form a very tiny fraction of the numbers invited to the events. User likes and comments on the updates posted on these pages tend also to be minimal and perfunctory. Apart from its reactivated Facebook profile, a full analysis of which is beyond the scope of this chapter, At-Tawheed thus maintains a minor YouTube presence, the only other record of some of its activities during this period.⁴²⁵

The Hope Conference Online

Whereas online archival material for the At-Tawheed Association and The Last Testament Conference is difficult to uncover, it is an altogether easier task to search such source material for the Hope Conference. As such, although the promotional trailer for The Last Testament Conference is no longer publicly accessible, there are several YouTube videos of the Hope Conference 2013, including two trailers as well as a retrospective highlight.⁴²⁶

The first of these trailers addresses the misrepresentation and stereotyping of Islam and Muslims head on. Amidst the general presentation of angry Muslims

⁴²⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/user/AtTawheedAssociation/>, accessed 20 August 2015.

⁴²⁶ A full list of videos uploaded by the Hope Conference's YouTube channel, and which includes material from the first conference in 2013 as well as the second one in 2015, is available here: https://www.youtube.com/user/VisionIslamTube/videos?sort=dd&shelf_id=0&view=0, accessed 23 February 2016

around the world East and West, there were three clearly identifiable, now arguably archetypal, newsreels: the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001, the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, and an eclectic selection of worldwide protests against the *Innocence of Muslims* YouTube video in 2012, anger against which may have partly contributed to an attack on the US consulate in Benghazi on the eleventh anniversary of 9/11.⁴²⁷ Decried as 'a dark demonstration of the power of film',⁴²⁸ this video is salient in the context of Edinburgh for the period under research, not least because the protest against it outside the Scottish Parliament in September 2012⁴²⁹ was for all intents and purposes organised by the same individual behind the Hope Conference in 2013. As part of this local, ongoing

⁴²⁷ For the video, see <https://youtu.be/YJBWCLeOEaM>, accessed 24 February 2016. Against this backdrop of protests, Google-owned YouTube voluntarily took down the film in Egypt and Libya, after the attack in Benghazi. See Kimber Streams, "Youtube Temporarily Censors Offensive Video in Egypt and Libya." *The Verge*, 2012, <http://www.theverge.com/2012/9/13/3328106/youtube-censorship-innocence-muslims-egypt-libya>, accessed 24 February, 2016. This was followed by a take down order in America by the US courts on somewhat spurious copyright grounds filed by an actress duped to participate in the film. This decision was reversed on 18 May 2015. See United States Court of Appeal for the Ninth Circuit, "Cindy Lee Garcia Vs Google Inc. Opinion." <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2015/05/18/12-57302.pdf>, accessed 24 February, 2016. A Google search for the video in February 2016 placed a content advisory for viewers to agree to before being able to proceed to the video. For a detailed account of the events in Benghazi and contributing factors, see David D. Kirkpatrick, "A Deadly Mix in Benghazi." *The New York Times*, 28 December 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/benghazi/#/?chapt=0>, accessed 25 February, 2016.

⁴²⁸ Peter Bradshaw, "Innocence of Muslims: A Dark Demonstration of the Power of Film." *The Guardian*, 17 September 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/sep/17/innocence-of-muslims-demonstration-film>, accessed 24 February, 2016.

⁴²⁹ According to the BBC, around 200 people attended this protest. See BBC, "Muslims in Scottish Parliament Film Protest." 21 September 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-19680144>, accessed 24 February, 2016. *The Scotsman*, which carried an almost identical report, however, reported only half that number. See Mark McLaughlin, "Protests Against Us Anti-Islam Film Reach Scottish Parliament." *The Scotsman*, 21 September 2012, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/protests-against-us-anti-islam-film-reach-scottish-parliament-1-2541100>, accessed 24 February, 2016.

response to the video, he also organised another conference-styled event.

Entitled 'Protecting the Honour of the Prophet', it took place just over two weeks after the parliament protests and was held at the Pakistan Association Centre, better known as the Annandale Street Mosque, on 7 October 2012. The stated aims of this conference were:

1. To promote true Islamic values of respect and societal harmony
2. To revive true status and love for the prophet amongst the Muslim Ummah
3. To lodge concerns and call for the Scottish Government and other politicians to take necessary steps to stop media material that are mischievous and likely to incite unrest and disharmony amongst communities including immediate actions to stop circulation of the repulsive video
4. To initiate a steering group that will (a) Develop and undertake constructive long-term strategies including pursuing legal channels and *shifting public perception* that will bring about necessary systematic changes in law and media regulations to protect honour of religious personalities (b) Undertake various PR initiatives and dawa activities to spread the deen of islam and prophet Muhammad's noble character.⁴³⁰

Furthermore,

The organisers urge[d] all Muslim brothers to attend *this conference which is the first of a series of events and conferences* in our effort and struggle to change the laws and systems to protect the honour of our beloved prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him. Our unity and strength will be key in influencing any changes in laws whenever they come about.⁴³¹

The Hope Conference and similar others that have followed can thus be seen as a natural outgrowth and evolution of a budding activism forged in a now de rigueur two-pronged response to such international incidents – to speak out and condemn violence on the one hand, as well as to stand up against

⁴³⁰ See 'Conference: Protecting the Honour of the Prophet', available at <https://www.facebook.com/events/473665266000409/>, accessed 26 February 2016.

⁴³¹ See 'Conference: Protecting the Honour of the Prophet', available at <https://www.facebook.com/events/473665266000409/>, accessed 26 February 2016. Emphasis added.

misrepresentation and address misperceptions on the other. A third, perhaps more subtle, response is directed internally and self-oriented – to educate Muslims themselves about their faith. How these aims and responses were elaborated upon is made evident in Appendices 4 and 5.⁴³² The remainder of this chapter will illustrate how these varied responses and stated aims gained practical expression (a) by examining the two aforementioned pre-event publicity trailers for the Hope Conference and, (b) by assessing the themes and content of these conferences as they unfolded on the day.

The 'promo' trailer

The first of these trailers, titled simply as 'Hope Conference 2013 promo' is just over two minutes long.⁴³³ Originally published on 29 January 2013, it has four distinct parts. The first part begins simply with the name of the organisers, Vision Islam, followed by these words in red and capital letters against a black background: 'WHAT DO THEY THINK | OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS'.⁴³⁴ This fades out to show a scene of men in long white robes in what looks like a hot, dry place. There are no immediately distinguishing features, except for a mountainous background. There is indistinct yelling, and a fire, possibly a flag burning. This fades out to what looks like the same setting, but some moments later. The crowd has got bigger, and a man in a cap is taking pictures with his smartphone. There

⁴³² Downloaded from the now defunct website events.visionislam.co.uk, accessed 2 January 2013.

⁴³³ See <https://youtu.be/nAQ5ftiCAa0>, accessed 10 February 2016.

⁴³⁴ The vertical bars here and henceforth indicate the start of new lines on the audio-visuals being described. The use of all-caps here and henceforth are in the original.

are banners in the background, some people are beating something that has been set on fire. There is more noise and shouting, before a third fade. The next scene depicts large crowds of men in white robes and mostly khaki vests who are marching alongside cars. This cuts to another image of yet more men in another context holding a large, horizontal white banner at chest height with their fingers. The banner reads: 'USA! | your ridiculous film is an act of hatred to Islam & Muslims'. Another fade to black is followed by a clip of a demonstration of young, bearded men, generally without moustaches, many sporting black or green bands around their heads. Uniformed police officers, men and women, some with high visibility vests are clearly identifiable. A female voiceover provides some context: '...tense and angry in Sydney's CBD'. The next segment moves from Australia to an American television interview where a man in his 60s in a suit and tie is gesticulating with the words, 'How many families died...' and 'Do this on 9/11' just before an image of the second plane crashing into the World Trade Centre towers, which is accompanied by the sound of screaming. The clip that follows is of a bus outside Aldgate Station as the London bombings unfolded. The next scene returns to the US with another interview, where the guest, another man in his late 60s, can be heard saying, 'We believe Islam is the devil. And it is causing billions of people to go to hell....' The next scene comes back to the UK, possibly near the Houses of Parliament at Westminster, where a policeman in a high visibility vest looks over a crowd of people, before cutting to a classic stone-throwing but ready-to-flee riot image of youth in Western clothing. There are

several frames here, one of which identifies Cairo as the location of this particular street conflict, as security personnel stand atop walled barriers looking down at the crowds beneath them.

The remaining clips in this section become very short and comprise primarily images of burning flags and effigies. At least one is identified as a breaking news item with a banner reading, 'ANTI-ISLAM FILM: GERMAN AND UK EMBASSIES IN SUDAN ATTACKED' and 'Lebanon: Violent reaction to Pope Visit'. These remaining clips are alternated with blink-and-you-will-miss-it text rendered in red lettering and all-capitals on black background that started off the trailer. Each of these one-word declamations are punctuated by a crashing beat that reinforces all of the images presented up to this point. They read as follows: 'EXTREMIST, RADICAL, BACKWARDS, IGNORANT, BLIND, MILITANT, TOWELHEADS, CAMEL JOCKEY, ISLAMISTS, FANATIC, VIOLENT, JIHADDIS' and, finally, 'TERRORISTS'. A short silence follows this last label as it fades into the question: 'ARE THESE | TERRORISTS | ?'

The news reels are excerpted from RT (formerly Russia Today), BBC, ABC, Ten (an Australian channel) and CNN, amongst other broadcasters. Except for a vertical area in the centre left of the screen, all of the frames in this first segment are otherwise more blurred, darker, more opaque, clearly directing viewers to the locus of action. The length of the majority of the clips is only about 2-3s, contributing to the staccato effect. The steady stream of shouts coupled with a

backing track of the drone of air sirens rising to a crescendo, the frenzied crosscuts from the images pregnant with violence, to the capitalised red text foregrounded on black, themselves broken by sizzling blackouts reminiscent of breaking news interruptions on analogue televisions in times past – all of these combine to create an overall impression of dread and impending doom.

A slow, male a cappella marks the beginning of the second part of the trailer. The background is now grey and blue, possibly hinting at the Saltire. Whereas the first part had video clips, this second part comprises primarily stills of men (at prayer, sport or both), women (in science) and children (being themselves). As if to address stereotypes head-on, this second part begins with two women in sharp contrast to the almost exclusively male segment preceding it. Additionally, they are in a scientific setting, wearing white lab coats. One is peering through an electron microscope while the other appears to be assisting. Both are wearing solid-coloured hijabs and both are Southeast Asian. Several messages are compacted here, but they are clear – instead of noise, there is music; Muslim men may play a dominant role in the representation of and discourse about Islam, especially with regard to violence, but Muslim women play an important role in science, education and development; and finally, Muslims are not all Arab or Asian. The next clip is of four children, lying on their backs in a circle, heads touching, on a carpeted floor that has a repeating motif of a dome flanked by twin minarets. This segues to an image of a 2-3-year-old-boy, looking directly at the camera, dressed in green and wearing a cap, next to another man,

presumably his father, who is prostrate in line with several others on a red and white, minaret-themed carpet. The remainder of the clips that follow in this second part of the trailer then take on a male sporting theme. Cricket, track, boxing and football are all depicted, complete with images of Muhammad Ali and Mohamed 'Mo' Farah. Farah, as well as two footballers, are seen in the prostrate prayer position in their respective sporting arenas, presumably celebrating their wins. As this part comes to a close, so does the a cappella that initiated it, 'Yā Ilāhī' ('O My Lord') a *nashīd*⁴³⁵ in Arabic, which is unmistakably set to 'Hallelujah', first composed by Leonard Cohen and re-imagined in a now-famous cover by Jeff Buckley.⁴³⁶

The third part of the trailer, like the second part, has the hint of a Powerpoint presentation about it, distinguished only by the presence of accompanying music and heavy animation. The Saltire remains discernible in the background, but the all-capitalised text returns, this time animated in a diagonal ripple of blue, and interspersed as before with fade outs to black:

TO ADDRESS THE | MISCONCEPTIONS; TO PROMOTE TRUE | TEACHINGS | OF
ISLAM; TO PROMOTE | HOPE; IN | SCOTLAND; WITH EVENTS IN | EDINBURGH |
GLASGOW | ABERDEEN; A CONFERENCE OF | KNOWLEDGE AND | INSPIRATION;
SHOW CASE EVENT: | ISLAM | NOT WHAT YOU THINK | A PUBLIC EVENT |;
SPEAKERS FROM ALL | OVER THE WORLD.

⁴³⁵ In the contemporary period, an Islamic devotional song or hymn. See A. Shiloah, "Nashīd." *EI2*, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nashid-SIM_5813, accessed 29 February, 2016.

⁴³⁶ See BBC, "Hallelujah! The Rise and Rise of Leonard Cohen's Once-Forgotten Classic." 20 December 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20778621>, accessed 29 February, 2016; and Alan Connor, "Just Whose Hallelujah is it Anyway?" 17 December 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7787355.stm>, accessed 29 February, 2016. See also Alan Light, *The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of 'Hallelujah'* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2013).

This is followed by the names (in capitalised letters) and photographs of the speakers invited to the event: SHAYKH | YUSUF | ESTES; SHAYKH | KAMAL | EL MEKKI; SHAYKH | ZAHIR | MAHMOOD; SISTER | YVONNE | RIDLEY; IMAM | AJMAL | MASROOR. Here, the rippling animation from left-to-right changes colour, literally illuminating the countenances of the speakers with an almost ethereal white light as the film carries on. The final slide in this segment cuts to a white screen with blue lettering stating simply: HOPE CONFERENCE 2013. The visual contrast between the darkness and despair of the first half of the clip with the light and hope of the second half and, thereby, the difference between the media representation of Islam and Muslims and their reality, could not be clearer. Unfortunately, however, this otherwise positive message is significantly undermined. In large part, this is due to the dissonance between the text presented in this segment and the music that accompanies it. Loud, deep and ominous gongs announce each statement and each name of the slides in this part, reinforcing rather than reducing the sense of fear and unease provoked by the start of the trailer.

The fourth and final segment of the trailer is marked by the start of a sudden silence and the cut to an image of what looks like a stock conference gathering or any other similar convention – there are three screens, blue and pink ambient lighting on stage, and halogen spotlights above the audience in a low-ceilinged hall. A mixed-gender audience (there are lots of women in blonde, uncovered hair) in their thirties to fifties sit on standard conference chairs – metal-backed and

covered in upholstery. The next image is a set up of a formal dining hall, with lots of round tables seating ten people each. A large centrepiece, many candles, fine napkins and cutlery, wedding style covers for metal-backed chairs, and ambient light blue and pinkish purple lighting simulating dusk, completes the look. The final image is of people standing, helping themselves to a buffet. Except for one woman in a yellow, sleeveless top holding a red purse, the rest of the people in this picture are all men. A sign near the buffet partially reads, '...Scotland's Seas'. This segment ends with three text slides: 'FOR MORE INFORMATION | ABOUT EVENTS IN YOUR CITY | WWW.EVENTS.VISIONISLAM.CO.UK;⁴³⁷ BE PART OF HISTORY IN THE MAKING; before fading to black and ending with the white text: PRODUCED | BY | WWW.HALALMELO.COM.⁴³⁸

If the second part of the trailer succeeds in addressing the fear-mongering set up by the first part of the trailer, and dissipating it by the depiction of small groups of Muslims engaged in some form or another of knowledge and cultural

⁴³⁷ This website no longer exists, returning a 'Server not found' error when accessed 10 February 2016. However, the website www.visionislam.co.uk does come up, with the same mobile number as that of the organiser. It also carries a note stating that 'WE ARE UPDATING OUR WEBSITE...' and that a 'NEW WEBSITE WILL BE GOING LIVE VERY SOON | YOU CAN CONTACT US ON | info@visionislam.co.uk | 0794 747 3442'. Additional dummy text for this Wordpress-powered site, a generally unfinished look, as well as a lack of any other content in February 2016 suggested that this website would ultimately be abandoned. A recheck in December 2018, however, illustrated its continuing and revamped existence. The last event it appears to have organised was in April 2018, held at the Corn Exchange and titled 'Inspired Conference: A Unique Event to Recognise Muslim Women's Achievements and to focus on Women's Rights in Islam'. No mention is made of any previous events or conferences it has organised. See visionislam.co.uk/inspired, accessed 29 December 2018.

⁴³⁸ The website no longer exists, returning a 'Server not found' message, accessed 22 February 2016.

production, the fourth part arguably goes so far as to present the conference and other such large gatherings of Muslims as normal, even almost banal activities. This is an important message but it is let down by the third part which, instead of contributing to an overall sense of the trailer being reassuring, is actually, albeit unwittingly, rather alarming. Perhaps this is why a radically different trailer was published about two weeks later on 12 February 2013.

The Edinburgh trailer

Titled 'Hope Conference 2013 – Edinburgh Trailer',⁴³⁹ this second pre-event publicity trailer comes in at just under 1m 40s. Aside from its comparative brevity, it is much more internally oriented, structurally coherent as a single piece, and on-message. It is set against a blue background with scintillating lights, like shooting stars across a night sky, that plays through the entirety of the trailer. It is also better visually tied to another Hope Conference poster (Fig. 17). As in the first trailer, there is also a *nashīd* in Arabic, also a cappella, with the slightest hint of an accompanying synthesiser. This score also plays for the length of the trailer, rising to an almost haunting crescendo as the trailer comes to an end. These two elements, the background and the music, combine therefore to create an overall impression of calm, reflection and even a kind of restrained ecstasy very different from the fiery violence, choppiness and foreboding of the first, 'promo', trailer.

⁴³⁹ See <https://youtu.be/Cc8LYbN-Kxc>, accessed 22 February 2016.

VISION [ISLAM]
HOPE
conference

PREPARE TO BE INSPIRED!

**DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY!
YOU HAVE SEEN THEM ON TV. NOW SEE THEM LIVE
IN SCOTLAND... ONLY AT THE HOPE CONFERENCE!**



**BIGGEST GATHERING OF SCHOLARS
IN SCOTLAND
BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW
WWW.EVENTS.VISIONISLAM.CO.UK**

Fig. 17 Poster for Hope Conference in March 2013, visually tying in with its 'Edinburgh trailer'

Once the music starts off, the trailer begins with the following white/light-blue text, each line of which constitutes a single, animated screenshot:

Vision Islam presents
HOPE CONFERENCE 2013
A WORLD CLASS MEGA CONFERENCE IN SCOTLAND
THIS VIDEO ONLY FEATURES EVENTS IN EDINBURGH ONLY [sic]
ISLAM NOT WHAT YOU THINK | DAY TIME SEMINAR | 17 March 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

This cuts to the Vision Islam promotional poster for the event (Fig. 18), which was also used on its Facebook page.⁴⁴⁰ A comprehensive visual analysis is beyond the scope of this section, but suffice it to say that the poster depicts a park scene, which starts on the left with the Twin Towers engulfed in fire and clouds of smoke. Next to it are two minarets, followed by an edifice comprising several domes, smaller versions of which are dotted around the minarets, almost encircling them. A large tree sits next to the major domed structure. Several palm trees, a flight of birds, and barely discernible rays of sunlight just to the right of the minarets seem to disperse the black clouds of smoke emanating from the burning buildings. This linear narrative image is itself framed by a latticed archway, with red, green, black and white as the poster's primary colours, the bottom of which provides a glimpse of the topics to be discussed, as well as brief biographies of the five speakers whom we first saw in the original trailer. In this regard, the poster on the Edinburgh trailer references some

⁴⁴⁰ See <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152580121530206&set=oa.141705595993625&type=3&theater>, accessed 24 February 2016.

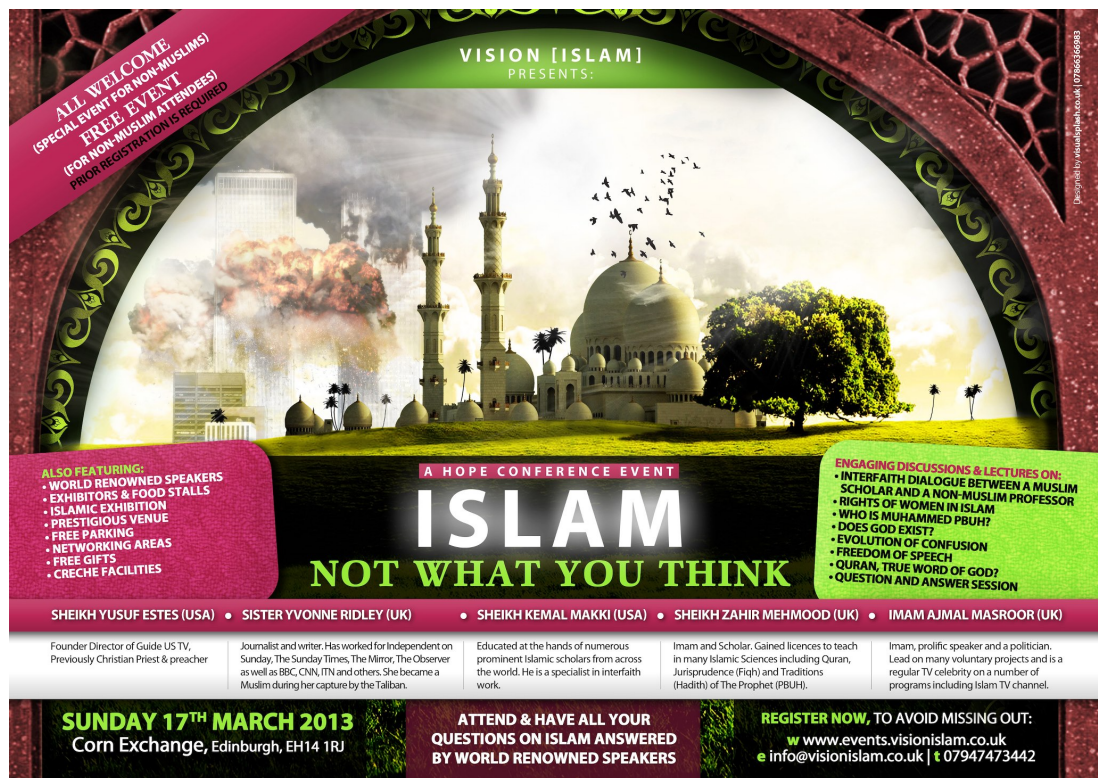


Fig. 18 Promotional poster for the Hope Conference's day event, 'Islam: Not What You Think'

of the violence and stereotypes associated with Islam, but only for a few seconds and much less obtrusively than the first trailer did.

The next scene reads 'RISE AND SPREAD THE LIGHT OF GUIDANCE | Evening of inspiration with scholars | 17 March 6pm - 10.30pm', and cuts to a second poster, this time with a Hope Conference logo, titled 'Light of Guidance'. It is dominated by the image of a crescent moon backlit by a glowing orb, both of which are encased in a glass lamp itself framed through a vertical archway, flanked on either side by smaller, latticed arches. The reference to the Qur'anic

verse in the Chapter of Light (Sura Nūr) is hard to miss.⁴⁴¹ The bottom of the poster prominently carries headshots of seven invited speakers, two more than earlier advertised, which leads to the next text: 'FEATURING | 7 WORLD RENOWNED SPEAKERS', all of whom are named and featured in the form of video clips (instead of the first trailer's stills). Additionally, they are all announced on an even keel, still to the chant of the *nashīd*, without the sudden and dramatic gong that characterised the first trailer. The speakers were as follows: Sheikh Yusuf Estes; Sheikh Kemal Makki; Sister Yvonne Ridley; Sheikh Zahir Mehmood; Br Hamza Tzortzis; Br Yusuf Chambers;⁴⁴² and Imam Ajmal Masroor.

The trailer then cuts to the penultimate text: 'Also featuring | POWERFUL SPEECHES | ENGAGING DISCUSSIONS | ISLAMIC EXHIBITION | STALLS | FREE GIFTS | PRESTIGIOUS VENUE | CORN EXCHANGE', before cutting to a selection of images of the Corn Exchange: registration, a double-tier stage in the round with pink and red lighting, lecture theatre style seating with panel table and lectern on front stage with blue lighting, and two formal dinner setting images, the first of fine cutlery, covered chairs and candle centrepieces with blue lighting, and the second, a little more zoomed out, of much more subdued lighting, also

⁴⁴¹ Qur'an 24:35, '*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.* See <https://quran.com/24/35>.

⁴⁴² Yusuf Chambers appears to be speaking in a lush green garden. The text 'Pure Matrimony' and the website www.PureMatrimony.com are clearly visible at the top right of this video clip. The website describes itself as 'The World's Largest Shariah-Compliant Muslim Matrimonial Website', see <http://purematrimony.com>, accessed 3 March 2016.

blue, but with yellow-pink candlelight at the centre of each table of 10 seats. The final animated text before the trailer fades to black and ends, reads:

And many more features
BE PART OF THE CHANGE
HOPE CONFERENCE 2013
BOOK TICKETS NOW | www.events.visionislam.co.uk

As such, there is a real sense of excitement and promise in the run up to the Conference. It should be noted here that this second, upbeat trailer bears much resonance in both imagery and sound with the now private Last Testament video mentioned earlier, as well as several other At-Tawheed videos outlined in the table at Appendix 3. Having examined the pre-event publicity for both the Hope and Last Testament Conferences let us turn to assessing the themes and content of these conferences as they unfolded on the day.

Conference Themes and Content

The Hope Conference aimed at providing a platform for a series of 'engaging discussions & lectures' (Fig. 18) by shaykhs and/or imams, as well as by professional speakers but otherwise 'lay' individuals in comparison, who are easily identified with 'Br' or 'Sister' prefixing their names. The titles and content of these talks reveal a preoccupation with the truth of Islam, the role of women, the figure of the Prophet, the Qur'an, science and religion, and media representation. Interestingly, in contrast to EIBF, the individual lecture titles here do not seem to have been explicitly tied to the speakers delivering them, at least on the marketing and publicity material discussed earlier. Additionally, some lectures

did not directly link up with what was advertised either. The lack of a formal programme on the day, unless it was in the welcome pack provided to some attendees at registration, would suggest the allowance of a certain kind of flexibility in availability of speakers and last-minute scheduling. For their part, the lectures at The Last Testament Conference were not dissimilar, differing only in that the Qur'an, as the *raison d'être* of the conference, provided the overall backdrop for the discussions. Let us turn to examine a selection of the themes common to the conferences.

The role of women

Journalist and writer Yvonne Ridley was the obvious voice representing women on the otherwise all-male panel of speakers at the 'Islam: Not What You Think' event of the Hope Conference. Described on the conference poster (Fig. 18) as having 'bec[o]me a Muslim during her capture by the Taliban', this is an intriguing factoid of vicarious appeal to potential audiences both Muslim and non-Muslim. Sceptics have, perhaps uncharitably, suggested some form of Stockholm syndrome at play in Ridley's conversion, and at an Islam Awareness Week event in Edinburgh at St Augustine's Church just the day before the conference, she acknowledged that 'this [was] a favourite' response, particularly in terms of the reaction of her colleagues in the newsroom, who thought that she had gone 'dotty, mad'. She contested this vehemently, saying she 'spent ten days spitting, cursing' and going on a hunger strike, not to mention that she 'did not bond at all

with Mullah Omar.’ Amidst audience laughter, she said that if anything, her captors were ‘still being counselled by their experience with me!’ These sentiments at St Augustine’s, as well as the general thrust of Ridley’s two talks at the Hope Conference the following day, echoed views she expressed many years earlier in a blogpost titled ‘How I came to love the veil’, the second of 66 entries on her longstanding personal website and, interestingly, the only one to have also been translated into Arabic.⁴⁴³

Ridley covered considerable ground in her two lectures at the Hope Conference. The first revolved around Islamophobia, media representation, the hijab, the status of women in Islam and their equality to men, her ‘reversion’, as she termed her conversion to Islam, and her family’s subsequent reaction to it, as well as her aforementioned experience as a captive of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The second talk expanded on some of these themes, going on to her thoughts on colonialism, government policy and politics, including the referendum on Scottish independence, the Arab Spring, secularism, Christian fundamentalism, the ‘clash of civilisations’, ‘shari’ah law’, and monarchies. But these topics formed the backdrop to her primary aim: advocating the role and rights of women in Islam. In

⁴⁴³ Yvonne Ridley’s personal website is available at <http://yvonneridley.org>, accessed 11 March 2016. The earliest blogpost/op-ed piece on the website, ‘Pop Culture in the Name of Islam’ goes back 10 years. The most recent piece, ‘Shock and Horror at Killings, but not when Victims are Palestinians’ appears to have been written in 2015, the only one that year. See <http://yvonneridley.org/analysis-and-opinion/>, accessed 11 March 2016. Her Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/YvonneRidley1>) and Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/yvonneridley>), however, remained current and active as at 11 March 2016. Her post, ‘How I came to love the veil’, is available at <http://yvonneridley.org/analysis-and-opinion/how-i-came-to-love-the-veil/>, accessed 14 March 2016.

doing so, she spoke at length about the idea of Islamic feminism, a label she twice acknowledged courted controversy:

Although it was certainly not deliberate, I can see how Western women's rights groups, back in the 70s, could be seen as corrupting and unIslamic, especially the bra-burning debate. I never quite understood that because the only people who seemed to enjoy the sight of a woman burning her bra were men. That was then, and here I am now. A Muslim woman but still a feminist and still holding feminist ideals. I know people don't like it when I call myself an Islamic feminist, but it is a fitting description.

Defining Islamic feminism as 'the promotion of women's rights through Islamic discourse', Ridley argued that:

By firmly grounding their arguments with Islamic discourse, Islamic feminists offer a culturally acceptable and sustainable way to expand the opportunities for women, and there sisters can only help to achieve a more stable, prosperous and developing community. And it's true if you don't like the term Islamic feminism, and I know people will be bristling every time I say it, don't use it. Call it whatever you like, but as long as this empowerment is, comes from within the pages of the Holy Qur'an, how can anyone tell you that you are wrong?

Ridley's invocation of a scriptural basis for women's rights in Islam and their equality with men is, of course, not new. But it was striking in the overall context of the Conference, especially in her open critique of '...Muslim men who will try and reach out for religious justification to enforce the control of women. It's wrong, but it only can be challenged if you know your Islam.' She went on to assert that, 'There isn't a man alive who would dare challenge this Islam because we know it is the Word of God and by trying to remind them of this Word, that [to challenge] it would be, like trying to challenge Allah himself.'

Ridley returned repeatedly to the importance of education in this endeavour, saying, '...we need to challenge those who seek to oppress women in

the name of religious tradition. This brings me back to something that I have long said about the need and the importance of education and the responsibility of women to seek education and learn their Islam,' and that as women, 'we should use our mind to seek out knowledge and to know our Islam and our rights within Islam.' Furthermore, 'Only through Islamic knowledge can we assert ourselves and demand the right given to us by God as laid out in the Holy Qur'an. And the Qur'an makes it crystal clear. We as women are equal in spirituality, worth, and education.'

Perhaps her strongest declaration was that

The time has come for both men and women within the conservative Islamic community, to stop telling women what they can't do. Islam is about the opposite. It is about what we can do, and what we can achieve by assertion and demanding that a fuller role is issued [for women] in our societies.

This last statement is interesting not only for the way it implicates women as well as men as instruments of patriarchy, but also in acknowledging, perhaps unwittingly, the reality of the status of Muslim women, even in the West, when the power of tradition and the convention of the majority still hold sway. Furthermore, the invocation of 'the conservative Islamic community' is telling if not entirely clear. Is it an appeal to literalist communities of Muslims, which she is attempting to distance herself from? Or is it, rather, an identification with a broader orthodoxy, which in turn may suggest an identification with Sunni, rather than Shi'i Islam?

Ridley's efforts were laudable. But for all her strident defence of the independence and equality of Muslim women in the first half of her talk, she ultimately succumbed to the very patriarchy of religious tradition and convention she had worked so hard to get around:

Some of our leading supporters are actually distinguished male scholars. And I would not have been invited here today without the backing and endorsement of our brothers. However, it is important to remember that I am not a scholar, and you must arrive and seek knowledge and clarification from this speech. It would be wrong to accept solely my word. God gave you an enquiring mind and you should use it.

Ridley's assertions may have been rooted in humility. Or in well-researched patterns and preferences of communication that differ between men and women.⁴⁴⁴ But by grounding the locus of her legitimacy to speak at the conference in male scholarship and at the behest of lay brothers, Ridley not only undermined her own arguments, she also tempered her earlier passion for the cause and reinforced the status quo of male religious authority. In reminding the audience of her own lay status, her appeal to 'arrive and seek knowledge and clarification from this speech' was reminiscent of the Muslim expression, 'God knows best' (*allāhu ʿaʿlam*), used as often to rhetorically mark the end of a complex theological argument as it is to close rather more prosaic social, indeed

⁴⁴⁴ These patterns are not exclusive to religious patriarchy and authority, but symptomatic of a more general one. See Bessie Dendrinis, and Emilia Ribeiro Pedro, "Giving Street Directions: The Silent Role of Women," in *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Adam Jaworski (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), 216-218; Megan Garber, "Why We Prefer Masculine Voices (Even in Women)." *The Atlantic*, 18 December 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2012/12/why-we-prefer-masculine-voices-even-in-women/266350/>, accessed 16 April, 2016; and Rindy C Anderson, and Casey A Klofstad, "Preference for Leaders With Masculine Voices Holds in the Case of Feminine Leadership Roles." *PLoS ONE*, 7(12):e51216 doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0051216.

phatic, exchanges. As such, she effectively enjoined the audience from taking her word at all, in stark contrast to statements made on stage by the other speakers, all male but not all scholars, which were unequivocally authoritative.

Despite this, Ridley did take pains to speak of the role of women and feminism more broadly and beyond Islam, even if she drew the line quite sharply: 'My brothers, Islamic feminism is quite the opposite of the secular feminism I used to follow. Secular feminism in the West is usually promoted by intellectual elites...', and being forged there, the 'ivory towers and dreamy spires of academia cannot be adopted instantly by everyone'. She argued that 'There is no one size fits all with this sort of secularism ... whereas Islamic feminism strives to work within the values of Islam to provide social and economic benefits to families from the upper classes to the lower classes, to the privileged, to the elite, to the poor and the impoverished.' Rubbishing the notion of a 'clash of civilisations', a subject also discussed in the context of EIBF in Chapter 1, she argued that if there 'is a clash, it should be about gender because most women face security, promote values and public policy amongst them and their children'.

In all this, it is evident that the audience Ridley most wanted, or perhaps needed, to convince was that of men. Aside from acknowledging the vital role they played in her appearance on stage and addressing them directly, she also sought to assuage their insecurities. Ironically, she did this first by framing their

concerns within the very clash hypothesis she had dismissed moments earlier

and, second, by analogy with fundamentalist evangelical Christianity in America:

But whilst striving to our goals, we also need to reassure our men that women empowered does not mean a slippery slope towards Western academic and Godless secularism. Some men will try and leave feminism to the evils of the West, and strengthen those who prefer a male-dominated system, which is actually at odds with Islam. But it's not just the men from the East who often tremble at the use of the f-word. Let me read out the words of a cleric who had the ear of the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, and he still has a huge following, millions following him across America's Bible Belt. The Reverend Pat Robertson once said of feminism, 'The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about the social[ist], anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbian.'

Although Ridley went on to assert that 'The media tend to ignore this',

Robertson's views on feminism, and indeed other quotable quotes, have received

wide news coverage.⁴⁴⁵ But her comparison drove home the larger issue of

Muslims being singled out for similar statements: 'Can you imagine that if I say

those words were uttered by one of our brothers? He would be called a preacher

of hate and nonsense.' She conceded, 'Yes, there are those who in our Muslim

communities who resist girls' education and powerful Islamic groups that

successfully protected unequal laws in the name of upholding the shari'a

particularly in the realm of family law', a point that allowed her to segue into a

wider discussion on Islamic law:

I believe we have nothing to fear from shari'a law. The only problem with it is an inability, how limited it can sometimes be by men who have a long-distance

⁴⁴⁵ See for example New York Times, "Robertson Letter Attacks Feminists." *New York Times*, 26 August 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/26/us/robertson-letter-attacks-feminists.html>, accessed 12 April, 2016, and Leslie Bentz, "The Top 10: Facebook 'Vomit' Button for Gays and Other Pat Robertson Quotes." 9 July 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/09/us/pat-robertson-facebook-remark/>, accessed 12 April, 2016.

relationship with true Islam and they allow backwards cultural features to be adapted and placed within family law. This is wrong.

This discussion on the shari‘a, different elements of which have been discussed in Chapter 2, extended out into a brief history of colonialism, the aftermath of decolonisation, and its push towards modernisation and secularisation, all of which ‘undermined the role of the religious establishment and overturned centuries of tradition.’ According to Ridley, women suffered most at the hands of secularism, ‘put in the firing line over the wearing of the hijab and other Islamic dress.’ New rulers,

with deep ties to their former colonial masters ended up on a collision course with the religious authorities. The tide is now turning and we are seeing the tyrants fall one by one. And I predict there will be more tyrants to go. And quite frankly if there were no royal families anywhere in the world, I would be quite happy.

She argued that ‘Now’s the time to completely rewrite their constitution...now’s the time to implement the changes we’ve been critical for and need based on Islam’, asserting that ‘In the early days when the Islamic society was being shaped and developed, the process of *ijtihad* was, is now, the most important contributor to the shaping of Islamic law.’ Ridley went on to proclaim that ‘centuries of Islamic jurisprudence can highlight the more progressive aspect of Islam’ and asked, ‘Can women help shape the new landscape appearing in their communities and in the Muslim world?’ Answering her own question, she said,

Once again it is down to education. Once equipped with the knowledge, even the most illiterate woman can challenge centuries of unIslamic tribal customs or traditions that have been sustained in the name of Islam. The only people who will not welcome this sort of female empowerment, are men, from both the East and the West, who seek to control women. Their behaviour is not Islamic and it is cancerous.

There is more than a little naïveté in Ridley's assessment of what is required to take on such a mammoth task, not least that the burden to do so implicitly falls squarely on women. While the sentiment may be understandable in the context of such a large and sympathetic public gathering, the analysis she follows through with is confused at best, equating secularism with the suppression of women, and flawed at worst, conflating revolutions in the Middle East with a kind of self-directed Islamophobia in cahoots with a global conspiracy against her. She said:

The truth is, the empowerment of women and equal rights for Muslim women are enshrined within the pages of our Holy Qur'an, and through the sunna. The removal of Islam, will mean the destruction of those rights. The Islam [unclear] the Islamophobes both men and women from East to West, who dismissed Islam as an imperious, misogynist religion and refuse to acknowledge that it can be a force of female empowerment will despise every word I have spoken today. These are the very same people who despise the Arab Spring, because the Arab Spring has turned into an Islamic awakening. The last stand of the secularists was in fact in Syria and they can see the Islamic flavour of that revolution. And that is why the Arab left are so vehemently against what is happening in Syria. They don't care about the liberation of our sisters in Syria. They don't care about that at all. They want to drive religion out. They have no room for religion in their hearts and they don't have a [unclear]. And these Arab leftists armed with cuddly, socialist models that we have in the UK, these are hardline, brutal people who want to drive every ounce of religion out of the Arab world and the Muslim world and that is why they despise every word I have spoken today, which makes me wonder if these intolerant secularists with Islamophobia have a hand in stopping a visit I tried to make to India recently, to address 50,000 women in Hyderabad. Interesting, isn't it? I'm wanting to promote equal rights for women in a country which, let's face it, has a shocking record of treatment of women and I couldn't get a visa. The critics have even accused me of whitewashing my faith, but the truth is everything I am quoting today, has been inspired by the Qur'an. I have much to learn and I am not a scholar. But I would urge everyone in this entire room to study Islamic jurisprudence. We need more female scholars. There was a wealth of them in the early stages of Islam and we need to reassert ourselves as scholars and great thinkers. This is the best place to assert Islam....

In these concluding remarks, Ridley returned to tie up a thread she had weaved in and out of her speech: the power of education. But it was hobbled by

its narrow definition, scope, and application. For all the insistence on the necessity of scholarship and knowledge, particularly of Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic discourse as it relates to the status of women in Islam, not once did she mention the works, ideas and writings of fellow feminists, Islamic or otherwise.⁴⁴⁶ Neither was there an engagement with history or literature. Education here was clearly limited to the religious sphere – religious education, religious scholarship, religious knowledge as represented, and held, by the men on stage. Nowhere was this locus of religious authority more evident than in the question-and-answer session that followed Ridley's speech. Although it was a collective session for the conference's morning panellists, the bulk of the questions were directed to her. Even so, authoritative opinion on sensitive queries from the audience tended to be settled by the men on the stage, helped along by Ridley's own deference to them.

One question in particular, revolved around violence, religiously-sanctioned, against women. Despite the male questioner's parenthetical approach, curious enough for its attempt to additionally elicit a response on the comparison of the rights of (earthly) women with houris (paradisal virgins), the question itself was simple: What were Yvonne's thoughts on Qur'an 4:34?⁴⁴⁷ Much

⁴⁴⁶ Yvonne Haddad, Fatima Mernissi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Amina Wadud are just a handful of many examples.

⁴⁴⁷ *'Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.'* See quran.com/4/34, Pickthall translation, accessed 2 May 2016.

ink has been spilt on interpreting and contextualising this verse in the Qur'anic chapter titled '*al-Nisā*' (the Women) and even a cursory look at the variety of its translations and the degree of accompanying glosses reveal a very human – and modern – struggle to reconcile late antiquity world-views with 20th-century sensibilities. This struggle was reflected in no less than three responses from the Hope Conference stage. Ridley went first, taking a contextual approach by invoking the hadiths surrounding the verse:

...but what I would say is yes, I did look into, erm, the issue of er, er, a man being allowed to hit his wife. If you look into the, erm, the hadith around that, and the, erm, references to it, what it says is that, erm, you can, erm, hit a woman with a *miswak*, which is like a toothpick. And, erm, a toothpick is about that size [drawing out a space between her thumb and index finger]. And you can hit her as long as you don't leave a mark. Basically, what it's saying, is don't hit your wife. It's another, it's, it's a, a, it's a thought-provoking saying, which is saying, don't hit your wife. It's, erm, the Qur'an, it's, erm, easy for a child to understand. But it is also a very intellectual document...which stretches the mind and provokes a discussion. And, erm, of course the Qur'an doesn't give permission to, erm, be violent to your wife.

Conscious, perhaps, in the context of her noticeable hemming and hawing that she needed to be more convincing, Ridley followed through with a comparative approach citing the Freemasons:

And something I can liken it to, erm, is that the, is a passage in, in a, a book that's called *Freemasons*. And it says, if a Freemason betrays another, then he should be chained in shackles and taken in to the rock, and, and, put against the rock, er, by the sea and, er, he should somehow, and let all the sea creatures eat him and then the waves will come along, and it's quite, erm, erm, graphic, erm, description of how somebody should be punished if they betray, erm, somebody, erm, in the faith.

But she quickly abandons this train of thought, moving to a more general comparison of 'problems between the scriptures':

But that is also faith. Or, he should be getting old. And basically, it's a, it's an established, it's, it's just trying to, erm, provoke an expression of the seriousness of, erm, of this. I mean, I used to be a, erm, practising Christian, and I have to say that, er, our family's divided between, erm, incredibly, erm, negative, towards the

treatment of women, and, and I often had problems between the scriptures, which is why I find the Holy Qur'an to read so, erm, enlightening. And to making it quite clear that erm, women are equal in spirituality, education and worth. And also that erm, erm, that, erm, again, referring to, erm, the final message of the Prophet Muhammad and I don't want to misquote him but, erm, essentially he was saying, erm, you are the guardian of your women and they are the guardian of you. You know, look after each other, and care for each other.

Here, Ridley fell back on a statement that Ajmal Masroor had invoked earlier in the morning, but it was a Qur'anic assertion rather than a prophetic one per se. She continued, 'So there's absolutely nowhere in the Qur'an that says you can go and beat the living daylights out of your wife.' She seemed to be struggling at this point, and looked to her male colleagues on stage to contribute to the discussion, resulting in the following exchange:

Ridley: Erm, so that, erm, I've got a scholar to my right who, no, you don't want to jump in and...

Chambers: No, I'm not a scholar.

Ridley: Oh, you're not.

Chambers: I would like to...

Ridley: So he wants to comment anyway, so, erm, this is an interesting question because so many people who are ignorant about the [unclear] complexities in the Qur'an, erm.⁴⁴⁸ People of faith and no faith, make the mistake that, erm, they think you know, that they can, erm, get married to a Muslim woman and, erm, or a man can get married to a Muslim woman and then [unclear] about her. Don't try to [unclear] [Laughs].

Chambers takes over at this point with the second response to this question.

As much as Ridley's was hesitant and searching, Chambers' is firm and almost angry, his tone unmistakably heated:

You know, again, first of all, the Qur'an can hardly be understood by the average layperson from the English meaning. It is not the Qur'an when you read it in English. Ok, you cannot say the Qur'an in English, ok, so scholars are there making their jurisprudence, from the understanding, from the Arabic, known as the *tafsīr*. So if

⁴⁴⁸ Ridley seems rather ironically to quite forget her own ignorance about the Qur'an on this issue.

you want to read the Qur'an, you have to go to a person. Just like if I want to know about a Mercedes Benz, I go to the people who designed the Mercedes Benz. I don't go to a group of people, who don't understand where the Mercedes Benz even came from, so please, don't make a mistake. Go to the people who understand the Qur'an, number 1.

Chambers' approach is thus to first establish without a doubt that the authority to interpret the Qur'an is vested not in the laity, but in a specialised class of persons, jurists and theologians. And they are taken for granted to be men.⁴⁴⁹ Although the logical extension of Chambers' analogy would suggest, certainly inadvertently and rather unfortunately, that scholars designed the Qur'an in the way engineers designed a vehicle, it also reveals, more importantly, a facet of authority in Islam, particularly its Sunni interpretation, that runs counter to the popular and convenient perception that 'Islam' has no clergy. As Bassam Tibi observes,

The *ulema*, or the *faqih* have no place in the Qur'an and are merely a product of Islamic history. Their understanding of the Qur'an is not divine, but clearly human. It is intriguing to see the *ulema* themselves sharing the claim that Islam has no clergy to perform such a mediating role. They view themselves not as clergy, but rather as religious scholars, and this is the meaning of the term *ulema*. In reality, the *ulema* were and continue to be an Islamic clergy oriented against any kind of secularization. There is nothing scholarly in what they do.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, we have already seen how Ridley retreats, ultimately, from taking up an authoritative position in contrast to the other speakers. She coupled this with a defensive plea addressed to men about the difference between Islamic feminism and the secular feminism of the West. In the overall context of the conference, therefore, it is difficult to imagine these specialists not being men, even though Chambers does not make gender-specific claims above.

⁴⁵⁰ Bassam Tibi, *Islam's Predicament With Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 196.

The second aspect of Chambers' approach is ostensibly historical, but viewed through the lens of *jāhiliyya*, a worldview in contradistinction to Islam,⁴⁵¹ and explicitly identified as such:

No. 2, women were no-one before Islam in pagan Arab culture. They were nothing. In fact they were the sexual property. They were the, they, they were abused as sexual, erm, you know, property, of the whole, erm, you know, community. They would be put in a tent, ok. And it, erm, they were? in a tent. The flag would be up. If there was no-one in the tent, man would go in and use the woman, abuse the woman, and nobody knew whose those children that came from that relationship. They were the property of the community. That was before the Prophet Muhammad came and the Qur'an was revealed. Afterwards they had inheritance rights, they had property rights, they had all of their property, was their own and half of their husband's property was theirs.

Like Ridley, Chambers also follows with a comparative approach but instead of merely citing another religious group or its writings, he additionally sets up an East-West dichotomy rooted in a wider religion versus secularism discourse prefigured in the panellists' formal presentations:

And it took only us, I think Yvonne was going to mention, Emily Pankhurst, in the 30s, in the 1930s to give these rights to British women. So before we start pointing out issues about that, we should look at our own self. When you point one finger forward, three fingers point back to yourself. So I'm saying as an an, an, as, as, an Irish, former Irish white Catholic, in the room today, the reason I left this understanding, of Western values is because Islamic values have really intrinsically for so many [unclear]. Thank you.

Amidst applause for Chambers, Masroor began to craft the third and final response to this critical question of religiously-sanctioned violence against

⁴⁵¹ Ed., "Djāhiliyya." *EI2*, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/djahiliyya-SIM_1933, accessed 12 May, 2016. Mernissi defines it as 'the time of ignorance according to Muslim terminology, the time when people did not have criteria for distinguishing the permitted from the forbidden, the licit from the illicit.' See Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1991), 52.

women. Taking the form of a conversation with the audience, his was perhaps the most cogent of responses:

AM: 'Do we know, do you know who, er, is a living example of the Qur'an?

[Unclear response from audience]

AM: The Prophet. The Prophet, right? Did the Prophet ever lay a single finger on any of his wives?

Audience member: Er, there is a hadith of 'A'isha and [unclear]

AM: The Prophet. Not a single time.

[Audience member continues, but not clearly]

AM: [Unclear] Not a single time. [Unclear] very clearly. [Unclear] the Prophet said to me [unclear] a word of rebuke. [Unclear] my first session. So, if Prophet Muhammad was the living example of the Qur'an, whatever God intends and order, Prophet [unclear] and he has never [unclear] now, never done anything like that with his wife.

In this way, Masroor's approach combined Socratic method with reference to the example of the Prophet. Unlike the other speakers, however, he then turned explicitly, albeit briefly, to the theological exercise of interpreting the problematic verse⁴⁵² before returning once again to the prophetic example, this time in the form of a hadith:

The Arabic word *ḍaraba* appears in the Qur'an at least 4 times. But all of the time, it is in regards to one thing. *Ḍaraba* is a word which means to hit. That's true. *Ḍaraba* is also the opposite meaning of [unclear]. *Ḍaraba* is also to appear. *Ḍaraba* is also to warn, so it appears 4 times in the Qur'an in 4 different contexts, giving 4 different meanings. It's very convenient to just take one and say, therefore beat your wife. If the main [unclear] interpretation, in my view the Qur'an does not intend any of this.

And by the way look, Prophet said, the worst amongst you is the one who beats his wife. The worst amongst you, is the one who beats his wife. One who beats, contradicts the Quran [unclear] allowing men to beat their wife. Look, is the Prophet contradicting the Qur'an? So, [unclear] understanding the concepts of Islam and interpretation of the Qur'an [unclear] and the complete understanding that comes from the life of the Prophet, and of course we have zero tolerance, zero tolerance to violence [unclear] in the Qur'an. [Clapping]

⁴⁵² Cf. Qur'an 4:34 with 33:35, which promises forgiveness and reward for men and women equally, based on their actions rather than on attributes believed to be inherent to their sex.

In at least the two latter responses, the influence of a clerical class cannot be underestimated. The question had rattled the panelists and they came down rather strongly. In this regard, all three responses were characterised by a vehemence that belied a distinct lack of meaningful engagement with the issue. The speakers either turned the question back to the audience, became defensive or engaged in apologetics, or dismissed it out of hand. Although Masroor began to address the precise verse in Arabic, appearing to take up Chambers' exhortation to examine the Qur'an proper rather than in translation, he did not actually go any further than to suggest the variety of different meanings of '*daraba*' as it appeared in other verses. Instead of wrestling with the term in the problematic way it appears in this particular verse, he quickly returned to the safety of the hadith. Of course much exegesis exists elsewhere regarding this verse and this specific term.⁴⁵³ But in the context of the conference, it was arguably a missed opportunity to properly demonstrate an intellectual engagement between scripture and daily life through theology. On the other hand, however, perhaps such a public forum needs to settle at the lowest common denominator, not make a complex and long-standing issue even more problematic and uncomfortable. But it is striking that for all the immutability of the Qur'an much vaunted by traditional religious authorities, and strongly reinforced at such events, one need only the same scholars' gloss (and in this case a somewhat lesser 'imam' rather than a full-fledged 'shaykh') invoking an entirely different

⁴⁵³ See, for example, Mernissi, *Veil and Male Elite*, 154-160; Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oneworld Publications, 2006), 170-176.

source of authority (i.e. the sunna), to sidestep thorny issues and yet, where necessary, maintain the status quo.

A follow-up question, this time from a female member of the audience, focussed on violence against children, specifically in the educational context of madrasas in the mosque:

What are your opinions on *masjids* and mosques having to teach there and hit their children, I mean [unclear] I'm at two mosques. And at both mosques, er, the teachers [unclear] I mean, sometimes you know, you get hit, and it'd be like [unclear] children really did get [unclear] kept on being hit, and at the second mosque I went to know, there was like, nothing of the sort. So, what are your opinions on that? Because I thought like, [unclear] Islam was like, very peaceful, and that there shouldn't be any violence against anyone. So, what are your opinions on that happening there.

Although the question was addressed to Ridley, Masroor took this question, delivering an unequivocal response:

[unclear] very close to my heart and [unclear] truly heartbreaking that [unclear] several mosques. Yeah. And I tell you what. There is no rule for any imam to beat any children. None whatsoever. If an imam lays a hand upon a child, if he hits a child, imam is violating not only the law of our land, but more importantly in my view, the Qur'anic injunction of nurturing, respecting, and looking after them [clapping]. Surely [clapping].

[unclear] on if you abuse a child [unclear], you destroy their self-esteem, in other words, emotionally, they remain scarred.

Masroor followed up on these powerful statements by recounting the story of a man in his mosque who had not been to a mosque in 60 years. After having 'been beaten black and blue by the imam' as a child, this man, Masroor said, was so angry with God that he had vowed never to return. Although he was no longer angry, he had returned only at the urging of his wife whom, the old man said, wanted to be in heaven with him. She had said, 'I don't want you to be in hell. I

practise my faith. I practise my faith. I would like you to make peace with [unclear] please. For the love of God.' And so, Masroor concluded, the old man had returned.

'...Part of the [unclear] building of healthy emotions [unclear]. Nor demand, nor [unclear] but instil in them love of God. [Unclear]. So any imam, in any mosque [unclear], so any imam, in any mosque, if they ever hit [unclear] I am again, intolerant of [unclear] intolerant when it comes to [this]. I am thankful to you for raising that question. [Audience clapping]

In fielding the question as emcee, Masroor made it quite clear that he would address it, even though it was directed to Yvonne. In not allowing her to answer it, however, his decision was masterly not only for delivering an unequivocal condemnation of such violence but also to do so publicly, and with the full force of his own religious authority and experience as imam of his own mosque. As we will see with the Shi'a Ithna'ashari street procession in Leith in the next chapter, this kind of public disavowal of violence, a Lefebvrian element of the production of space, whether specifically gendered or more general in terms of a clash of values with the West, is an important element of the presentation and representation of Islam in the public sphere.

There were other questions, mostly from women, also directed to Ridley: Did she have advice on professional women who went on to get married and have children? What was the hardest thing about reverting to Islam? What were her thoughts on being conflicted about taking on the hijab? How should an imminent convert tell her parents of her reversion? Prefigured, almost inevitably, as concerning primarily women, Ridley's responses to these questions

nonetheless paralleled the preoccupations of other conference panelists revealing, thereby, other themes characteristic of the conference. We shall return to some of these in the appropriate sections that follow in this chapter.

Marital harmony and family life

Marital harmony and family life was another theme of the conference. Presented by Masroor, this was a kind of relationship counselling taster session, based on the work and activities of the Barefoot Institute. Run by Masroor and his wife, the institute is described on its website as a place 'where traditional Islamic guidance meets cutting edge psychology and relationship science to help support Muslim relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, siblings and relatives.⁴⁵⁴ Masroor's core message was understandably and predictably traditional – certainly there were no sops to premarital or same-sex relationships, or mention of the kind of temporary marriage discussed in the previous chapter, and examples were drawn from the life of the Prophet (him consulting with his wives, his kindness towards children) as well as verses from the Qur'an, interpreted for the present. But this discourse was also simultaneously modern and familiar, rooted in a kind of self-help framework and vocabulary almost indistinguishable from popular culture magazines, agony aunt and relationship advice newspaper columns, if not shelf titles at one's local Waterstones. In this regard, Masroor spoke of several principles that ought to govern family life and relationships: (1) equality (2) the creation of safe spaces (3) the relationship

⁴⁵⁴ <http://barefootinstitute.com/about-us>, accessed 7 March 2016.

between love and mercy ('love is not enough, but mercy is very important'), (4) the regular evaluation of family life, time and resources and, finally, (5) the consciousness that 'somebody is watching above us'.

No discussion of Muslim family life and the example of the Prophet can avoid the vexing – and modern – issue of the Prophet's own marital relationships, from the ages of his wives to the number he married. Masroor addressed this head on, acknowledging the perception in some quarters that 'Muhammad must be a pervert. But if he was a pervert, why would he marry somebody who's fifteen years older than him when the society was willing to offer any girl?' He further noted that the Prophet was monogamous for many years and was distraught after the death of Khadija, his first wife, 'cry[ing] over her death for many years to come'. Only later did he marry more, most of whom had been previously married and were between the ages of 55-60, and when they married the Prophet, did so knowingly. Masroor asserted that people had a romantic vision of the Prophet's family life, but that the truth was he used to argue with them all the time. Often, he continued, there were two camps – of 'A'isha, his youngest wife, and according to most traditional sources, his favourite, and of another, and they were always angry with each other. 'Having one wife is good enough', Masroor said, 'Two mother-in-laws is a torture', he joked amidst much laughter from the audience. Coming back to the Prophet, Masroor recounted an example of domestic disharmony with 'A'isha who, in a fit of anger, upset a tray of food all over the floor. 'The Prophet', continued Masroor, 'sat down to clean the mess'. By and by, 'A'isha returned, at

which point the Prophet spoke: 'O 'A'isha. Everyone has a devil', he said. 'You have a devil, too?', asked 'A'isha, surprised. 'I have a devil, too', the Prophet responded, 'But my devil has converted to Islam. And yours hasn't.' Masroor's punchline was greeted with much laughter and clapping from the audience. 'In other words', Masroor continued, 'the Prophet was saying, "I have tamed my devil". He's not complaining. He's saying [unclear] of every human being. That is, the bottom line [to be] happy, flourish and joy[ful?].

It is not only the Prophet's marital life that featured in the Sunni conference, but as we shall see next, also his wider life and example that figures prominently in this discourse.

The figure of the Prophet

As *rasūl Allāh*, the credal 'Messenger of God', Muhammad is prophet, teacher, exemplar, interpreter and leader all bound up in one. Like many other founding religious figures, his authority is exercised not only in matters of faith but also its practice in the world. It is not particularly surprising, therefore, that Muhammad's life and example should be repeatedly invoked in the service or support of one point of view or another. What is unusual, however, especially in the context of the conferences, is how much the mission, the figure and the personality of the Prophet is so insistently, vehemently and explicitly rationalised when it would normally be completely taken for granted.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the lecture ‘Who is Muhammad PBUH’, delivered by Sheikh Kemal Makki. Introduced as a well-known scholar and speaker from the USA, he was the ‘black belt of da‘wa’, who also served as imam at George Mason University. Makki’s entire talk revolved around the identity of the Prophet and the criteria to establish true prophethood: ‘Who was this man, Muhammad (*ṣalla-llāhu alayhī wa-sallam*)?’⁴⁵⁵ asked Makki, positing that there were only two options to consider – that ‘he was a genuine prophet sent by Allah’ or that ‘he was an impostor. Someone who had put together a religion, some laws, hodge-podge.’ Through a series of questions, circumstances and scenarios, Makki led the audience through an analysis of the Prophet’s life and actions. This decidedly deductive, albeit strawman, approach was postulated in the form of a prophet’s intrinsic qualities juxtaposed against an impostor’s extrinsic motivations.

These intrinsic qualities included advocating the Oneness of God, recognising that angels are essential intermediaries between him and God,⁴⁵⁶ the ability to produce miracles, the possession of an unambiguous genealogy, and explicit personal characteristics such as non-bias, honesty, and good manners. These criteria, Makki continued, could be used for ‘analysing anyone whether they are alive now or they lived a thousand years ago. We have a lot of data. We

⁴⁵⁵ Usually abbreviated to *saw*, an honorific commonly translated as ‘peace be upon him’, and itself abbreviated accordingly to ‘pbuh’.

⁴⁵⁶ The prophets are almost invariably ‘he’. Despite Muslim tradition that there have been over 124,000 of such enlightened figures in human history, the possibility of a ‘she’, at least in the discourse of the conference, is never raised. This criterion would additionally appear to pre-emptively preclude any possibility of a personal connection between an individual and God, and arguably be read as a veiled critique of the Ahmadi Muslims, as well as of many Sufi and Shi‘i interpretations of Islam.

can analyse this data and come to a clear conclusion. And [we can be] absolutely clear. We can't be, "Well, I'm not sure."

Indeed, so insistent is Makki on this dichotomy that he repeats, 'We have to be clear. Either he was sent by God and is genuine or he is an impostor, he made it all up. There is no third choice'. As such, even if Muhammad were some kind of social reformer, someone who 'was not sent by God but genuinely cared and wanted to change the community...wanted to change for the better...that would mean he's not a genuine prophet, he was not sent by God. At some point, he made it up.' This allowed Makki to segue to the motivations of such an impostor, however well-meaning, in the 'context of environment, trade, financial stability', and so on:

So if someone wants to pretend to be a prophet, in this environment, in this environment, he must have a very strong motive. He must have a really good reason to do something like this, to risk his life. So what could be a possible motive? And why the Prophet Muhammad (saw), if he was not a genuine prophet, what would be the motive behind why he wanted to pretend to be a prophet? What would make him do that?

Makki was remarkably forthright about an impostor's possible extrinsic motivations: a love of money, a lust for women, being a hero, wanting to be popular, desiring luxury, craving war, or being a madman, or a poet. For each of these, he spoke at length about how these did not relate to the Prophet. On the one hand, the relative openness about potentially difficult or sensitive topics is refreshing in the way they are addressed head on. On the other hand, however, they are also rather defensive positions, not issues explored together. And while

the conference format was hardly conducive to such nuanced exploration, the audience was clearly led by the hand to the numerous speakers' foregone conclusions. In his case, Makki invited the audience to consider each of these motivations as he described them in turn and in generous detail peppered with humour. Indeed, his exposition on women as a motivating factor regularly prompted distinct bouts of laughter from the audience:

Perhaps he pretends to be a prophet because of women. Maybe he wants to be a prophet because he wants a lot of women. Ok, first of all, where are we talking about? Where is the story set? It's set in Arabia where there was no limit on how many women you could have. Why'd he have to, right, what is the...need to get women, when you live in a society where you can get women? Just go out and get some women! [Light audience laughter]. That's that simple. Why...say the things...? It's because you want women. It doesn't make any sense. And actually, believe it or not, the Quraysh, the Meccans, they came to the Prophet Muhammad, (saw), and they offered him, 'Hey, stop preaching this religion. If it's women you want, we'll give you women. And if it's money you want, we'll give you money. And if it's leadership you want, we'll put you in charge of it.' And what happened? He could have said, 'Hey, you know what? This is impossible...Allah is inventing a lot of revelation...' So why would you risk your life to get women? In a society where you could get women. And there was no limit on how many wives you could have...So does that sound right? Doesn't sound right. If you'd risk your life to get women, in a society where you could get any number of women, and then the ruling you come up with says, 'Hey, you cannot get any number of women.' Doesn't make sense, does it?

In this regard, much of Makki's discourse on women mirrors that of Chambers and Masroor earlier, reinforcing the *jāhiliyya* narrative.

Having progressively demonstrated the absurdity of Muhammad being anything other than a genuine prophet (in long, drawn out scenarios revolving around wealth, women, heroics, popularity, a taste for the high life, war-mongering, mental illness and being a poet), Makki even went on to incorporate for good measure the possibility that the Prophet was an alien. 'How do we know

he wasn't an alien?', asked Makki. Coming full circle to the important characteristic of a prophet's genealogy, he went on, 'You know how I know he wasn't that? We know the name of his father, the name of his father, the name of his grandfather, and his great-grandfather and his tribe. There's no green light and baby like Superman!' This last comment prompted much laughter in the audience. Returning to some seriousness, Makki made reference to the Prophet's hard work as opposed to, presumably, Superman's lighter load in view of his extraterrestrial strength. While science fiction made an appearance, the relationship between science and religion was another preoccupation at the conference, and it is to this theme that we now turn.

The relationship between science and religion

Makki's overall approach suggests a certain kind of empiricism in its attempt to marry scientific method and religious impulse. Indeed, in some places, he makes explicit reference to the advanced knowledge contained in the Qur'an being vindicated by modern scientific discoveries.⁴⁵⁷ For example, in defence of his argument that Muhammad was a genuine prophet and not an impostor, Makki asked the audience to consider the origin and authorship of the Qur'an:

But if you look at the Qur'an, you'll see that it is impossible for it to have been written by a normal human being...not only that...there's too much, [but] there's knowledge of the future in the Qur'an. It knows what is going to happen and it happens exactly, in the time that it said it would happen. Now, how did this impostor know the future? There's so much science, so much that has been discovered recently in the Qur'an. How would an impostor know all this time...the

⁴⁵⁷ For a classic treatment of this, see Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, trans. Alastair D. Pannell, and Maurice Bucaille (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1979).

Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-three years...Imagine I tell you right now, 'Start writing a book. Don't finish writing the book until twenty-three years from now. And, you can't go back, and rewrite chapters. You think this book would look consistent?'

Makki further argued that the grammar and language would change and that this consistency would be impossible for a human to maintain over the course of key moments in war, victory, and so on.

In espousing this ostensibly empirical approach he was, in fact, only following in the footsteps of Brother Hamza Tzortzis who had taken the stage in a session titled 'Does God Exist?' just before Makki's and explicated this relationship between science and religion. Like Makki, Tzortzis, too, had put forward his arguments regarding the origins of the universe in a series of ostensibly empirical, rational postulates: 'Number 1 – it came from nothing. Number 2 – it created itself. Number 3 – it was created by something else created, or Number 4 – it was created by something that was uncreated.' Tzortzis was clear about his aim: 'The point I want you to understand is to take some concepts home, to be critical thinkers, so you could take this away and really understand that we have good evidence from my tradition.'

This explicit rationality arguably provides a welcome balance to the raw emotion that characterises much representation of Islam and Muslims, itself referenced in the promotional material of the Hope Conference discussed earlier. But it is the kind of selective, almost paradoxical, logic that shares much in common with fundamentalist movements in other religious traditions, such as the

Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴⁵⁸ Here is a flavour from Tzortzis as he introduced his four postulates:

So, as rational human beings, let's discuss this together. But before we do that, I ask you, let's put aside the assumption that the universe, the entire cosmos, began, it was brought into being. And we all have to discuss this part. It's something even the atheists and the theists agree...The universe began. T equals zero. ...The Qur'an says the whole universe originated...[Tzortzis recites in Arabic]. He [God] said, everything apart from what is *makluq*, is created, is *mubda*. It originated after it was, in a state of non-existence. So it *came* to be.⁴⁵⁹ So we know that the universe began. We don't have to talk about the Big Bang or talk about the absurdity of the infinite past, because it's like saying now, the world is flat, if we disagree with the beginning of the universe. It is such a well-established fact that the universe began. So if the universe began, then we can go and talk about the four possibilities. But let's do this together...

As we saw with Makki, so too with Tzortzis, who elaborated upon each of his postulates in turn. These expositions are reminiscent of classical Islamic treatises where successive arguments are put forward only to be refuted one by one until readers are left with a single, logical, incontrovertible conclusion. Here, however, they are but very poor and distant cousins of that rich and distinctly intellectual tradition. In a clearly well-practised delivery that mocked science through obfuscation and humour, Tzortzis eventually concluded that there is a Creator who 'must be eternal, transcendent, must be One, must be Knowing, Powerful, and must have a Will. And this is all rational thinking in a very simple way.' Tzortzis emphasised that 'we [must] continue using our minds, as the Qur'an says [recites Arabic] to discover this Creator. To underline these characteristics, Tzortzis once again recited from the Qur'an, this time the Sura Iklhas, or Chapter of Unity, a familiar chapter short enough to be a verse that needs no further reference but

⁴⁵⁸ See their website, www.jw.org.

⁴⁵⁹ Tzortzis' emphasis.

for which he provided a translation nonetheless: 'Say, God, Allah, is Uniquely One, is Eternal, Self-subsisting. He begat not, nor was He begotten, and there is nothing like unto Him.' He continued that

He is the uncreated Creator. Transcendent. Has Will, Power and Belonging and is One. This is something that is not only intuitive but rational. And to this day, in my humble opinion, I have met no-one, nobody, whether he has a PhD or not a PhD....No matter what, where he is or where she is or what he is, we have not heard a solid contention to this argument.

Tzortzis finished by once again reinforcing the importance of rationality in this discourse: 'If we remove that emotional baggage and we don't emotionally react, we can see the evidence for itself.' Despite these invocations of rationality, this representation of Islam is actually anti-intellectual, practically subverted by ad hominem arguments and pseudoscience. Characterised by populism and performative entertainment, the conferences are arguably a form of Islamic evangelism.

Evangelical Da'wa

The advertised titles and content of the Hope Conference ranged from 'Interfaith dialogue between a Muslim scholar and a non-Muslim professor', 'Rights of women in Islam', and 'Who is Muhammad pbuh?', to 'Does God exist?', 'Evolution of confusion', 'Freedom of speech', and 'Qur'an, true word of God?', as well as a Q&A session (Fig. 18). With the appropriate religion-specific replacements, none of these titles would be out of place in, for example, a standard issue of the

Jehovah's Witnesses' *The Watchtower* magazine.⁴⁶⁰ Both conferences had unmistakable evangelical elements, and which were manifested in a number of ways, not least in the Hallelujah melody featured in the 'promo' trailer discussed earlier. Given that there are over 360 versions of this song,⁴⁶¹ including for *Shrek*⁴⁶² it is perhaps unsurprising that it would have made the crossover into the popular culture of Islamic devotional music sooner or later for its inherent redemptive associations.

While it may be argued that *da'wa* is merely the Islamic term for evangelism in Christianity, or that there is a correspondence between these terms, this is true only for one aspect of evangelical Christianity, namely, the act of preaching with a view to proselytizing. After all, *da'wa* is an entirely appropriate term within a Muslim call, often defined as a call or summons to the faith or to God. But these two Sunni conferences manifest certain characteristics in common with, if not distinctive of, Protestant Christian evangelism, such as performance, conversion, and scriptural authority.

Performance

Performance as a key element of evangelism is prefigured in the conferences' marketing materials as discussed earlier, and wholly evident on the actual days of these conferences. This was especially the case for the Hope Conference, whose

⁴⁶⁰ A selection of up-to-date magazine covers for *The Watchtower: Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* is available at <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/>.

⁴⁶¹ See BBC, "Hallelujah!"

⁴⁶² Andrew Adamson, and Vicky Jenson, *Shrek* (2001); Connor, "Just Whose Hallelujah".

size and scale, and whose setup in terms of its lighting, backdrop and presentational content were rather more characteristic of a stage show than a mere – and one would expect, austere – religious gathering. The music in the trailers provided a sense of drama, and the lighting there faithfully matched up to the lighting of the Hope Conference as the programme progressed through the day and the panels of speakers. A black cloth backdrop dappled in white and gold resembled a vast night sky twinkling with stars. Against this background, speakers held forth as ambient lighting dimmed and brightened, and changed colour from a cool blue to a calm pink (Fig. 19).

Like big-church American television evangelism, this performance was led by charismatic figures, whose own energy and movement was reflected not only by these changing patterns of light, but also accompanied by musical interlude (both harking back to the trailers, but also pointing forward in its own sanitised 'Islamic' way, in the form of a soundtrack to trailer for another, upcoming conference), thundering rhetoric, quips and jocularities. Received and regularly reinforced by audience laughter that would be unthinkable within the confines of a mosque, all of it was spectacle – loud, energetic, fresh, updated and modern.

And so, paradoxically, it involved a significant element of *bid'ā* or innovation for the production of a 'religious' space that in classical Islamic traditionalism would be an absolute no-no. And yet the conferences retained some key elements of the socio-spatial restrictions of a traditional mosque space,



Fig. 19 Image of Yusuf Estes speaking at the Hope Conference in March 2013, with Ajmal Masroor seated next to him, from the conference's Facebook page. Note the dappled backdrop and the mood lighting.

particularly in the attempt to enforce a gendered segregation, as discussed earlier. Interestingly, even as a dedicated space was set aside for prayer, it was not, however, enforced as a practice, so that is another paradox. While there may be 'no compulsion in religion',⁴⁶³ some 'compulsions' are more socially enforced and more importantly, enforceable, than others.

⁴⁶³ See Qur'an 2:256.

The conferences examined here are a public performance and presentation of Islam – as is the ritual procession discussed in the chapter that follows. Bearing witness at the conference was an apparent concern of these Muslims, which leads us to another key element of evangelical *da‘wa*, that is, conversion.

Conversion

Conversion is another key element of evangelical Christian traditions, and this was clearly manifested in the evangelical *da‘wa* of especially the Hope Conference. A number of speakers at the conference were themselves converts, or as they themselves would put it, ‘reverts’ to Islam, and apparently long-standing ones at that. It is thus an open question as to just how much of this evangelical *da‘wa* is the influence of Western converts who originally came from both lay and clerical positions in (primarily Protestant) Christianity. Yusuf Estes’ conversion story is easily available online, and Chambers and Ridley both referenced their earlier faiths and subsequent conversions in their talks.⁴⁶⁴ In any case, the new and public conversion of individuals at the conference seemed to be almost expected and certainly welcomed amidst much fanfare. Three examples will illustrate.

The first is that towards the end of the Q&A session with Yvonne Ridley and her fellow panellists, the emcee Imam Ajmal Masroor read out a question from the audience: ‘Can Sister Yvonne give a sister who is going to take the *shahāda*...and advise her how to tell her parents she has reverted?’ adding, ‘Very

⁴⁶⁴ Tim Yusuf Chambers and Yvonne Ridley come from Catholic and Anglican backgrounds respectively.

briefly if you can...' Yvonne responded, 'I'm not the greatest example. I told my mother by email.' Amidst much laughter, she continued, 'It's, you know, it's a great [unclear], erm, difficult for them. Erm, so what I would say is, try and show affection, tolerance and understanding, erm, towards them. That they should be happy that you are [unclear] religion, which promotes equality...and erm, and you can and you are, you know, trying, to understand the shock...' At this point, Masroor interrupted to state that unfortunately, they were running out time, but that it was appropriate not to get into an argument but to be as sensitive as one could under the circumstances. He also noted that 'There are four people who have taken up the faith today. Congratulations to them!⁴⁶⁵ Amidst the immediate audience applause and a loud call therefrom for the glorification of God, '*Takbir! Allāhu Akbar!*', Masroor spoke over the audience to state that 'If anyone can help or do, to grow in the faith, they're certainly welcome. The door is open and you can do that freely without coercion when and whenever you're ready.'

The second example took place shortly thereafter and took the form of a full-on public conversion of a woman named Stefanya, which was led by Masroor, complete with running commentary:

Ok, there is a person who wants to convert to Islam, and wants to do it here with us if possible. Erm, which, er, is that right? She's here. So, erm. I think that, er. Wonderful thing to do. We should all be happy to welcome her. If you all could patiently wait. This will be the first actual...Erm, there's a microphone over there. Does the sister know the process? Do you know the process? Ok, let me rephrase it for everybody, just so that everyone knows. All she's going to do is she's going to recite the words, which is called the *kalima*, the declaration of faith, which

⁴⁶⁵ Conference organisers later noted that there were seven conversions that day. See pinned post at <https://www.facebook.com/events/413330148755814/>, accessed 10 February 2016.

is there is no god, but one God, and Muhammad is the Messenger. That's all she's going to do. And [unclear] willingly embrace the faith and then declare it in all of our prayers. Is that okay? Is that okay with you? Do you know the *kalima* or would you like to repeat with me?

At this point, there is a prolonged silence from the stage as a group of women confer with Stefanya. Masroor then explains, 'The sisters were talking to her. We're going to let that happen first. And then...' After trailing off, the following exchange takes place:

Woman: *Salām alaykum*

Masroor: *Wa alaykum salām*

Woman: Brother can you say it first and I repeat after you?

Masroor: Give her the microphone. And I'll say the words...And I'll say it in broken, one word at a time. *Lā ilāha*

Woman: *Lā ilāha*

Masroor: *illā-llāh*

Woman: *illā-llāh*

Masroor: *Muḥammad*

Woman: *Muḥammad*

Masroor: *Rasūl Allah*

Woman: *Rasūl Allah*

Masroor: There is no God

Woman: There is no God

Masroor: but Allah

Woman: but Allah

Masroor: And Muhammad

Woman: And Muhammad

Masroor: Is His Messenger

Woman: Is His Messenger

Masroor: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome [interrupted by loud shouts of 'Takbir!' followed by 'Allāhu Akbar!' and vigorous clapping]

Indistinct female voice: [unclear] Stefanya.

Masroor: Stefanya. Stefanya welcome to the Muslim family that you have [unclear] all around the world.

Congratulations. [More clapping, *Takbir! Allāhu Akbar!*]

With the conversion complete, Masroor went on to briefly introduce Hamza Tzortzis, Kamal Makki and Yusuf Estes as speakers for the afternoon session, before announcing the lunch break and requesting the audience to return to the auditorium an hour later at 1:30pm.

A third and final example on the subject of conversion or reversion: As mentioned in an earlier section, Ridley was also asked by a female audience member what the hardest thing about reverting to Islam was. Amidst laughter as Masroor directed the roving microphone towards this woman because he had identified her as 'The lady behind, er. Could you kindly go to the lady over there? I was about to say "the black scarf", but there are lots of ladies with black scarves', Ridley responded:

The hardest thing for me was the change in lifestyle, and erm, I [unclear] was already a practising Christian [unclear] before I [unclear] believed in God. And, erm, I happened to think that, for me, anyway, erm, Christianity was [unclear] reborn to Islam. Erm, but the most enchanting thing for me was the change in lifestyle, because of the erm [unclear] say erm Islam is not just a religion, it's a way of life. And erm, I mean I'm left-handed and I get into all sorts of troubles when I'm reaching for food and

Ajmal interrupts at this point, but what he says is not clear. In any case, Ridley responds as follows:

Well [laughs], I erm really tried, but, erm but I wouldn't sit near me when I'm eating spaghetti [laughing with the audience]. So erm, yes, so the change in lifestyle that I probably found the most, erm, the most difficult. And there was certainly before I got used to wearing the hijab and erm [unclear] hijab which I now learned and although I'm wearing my Australian bush hat, [unclear] exactly [unclear] my business [unclear] to tell the world, I'm a Muslim woman. Don't talk to me on demand. Don't try to chat me up at all [unclear] and erm [unclear] show me respect, so [Audience clapping drowns her out as she finishes].

In these general references to handedness, dress code, and appropriate behaviour, there is a kind of orthopraxy and literalism at play here, one that invokes the Qur'an for its legitimacy, which brings us to a third element of evangelical *da'wa*.

Scriptural authority

The Qur'an featured prominently in both the Last Testament and Hope Conferences. For The Last Testament Conference, for example, etiquette towards the Holy Book and *da'wa* through the Qur'an were as central to the conference's proceedings as were the talks about its miraculous nature, the stories it contained of people and nations perishing, and its 'crystal clear' incompatibility with the theory of evolution. Equal attention was also paid to the Unity of God (*tawhīd*), His Names, legal obligations, and do's and don't's all cited or otherwise derived from the Qur'an.

This is unsurprising – after all, one would expect that the subject matter would more or less correspond to the title of the conference and its sponsors' particular mission. But while the remit of the Hope Conference was broader, its speakers invoked the Qur'an no less across their diverse talks and presentations. Some of this took the form of standard discussions on translations of the Qur'an such as which was the best one, which ones would panellists recommend,⁴⁶⁶ as well as insistent caveats that translations could not compare with the original in

⁴⁶⁶ Abdul Haleem, Muhammad Abduh and Yusuf Ali topped the list of translators. Panellists were keen to point out, however, that none were perfect and that all of them contained errors in *tafsīr* (interpretation or commentary)

either style or content, and especially that the Qur'an in translation was just that – the Qur'an in translation; it was most definitely not the Qur'an itself. As Masroor clarified in response to a query from the floor about Chambers, whom we discussed earlier, stating that the Qur'an in English was not the Qur'an,

That's not what he said. He said the translation of the Qur'an isn't the Word of God, literally. The translation of the Word of God. You want to understand the essence of what he said really referred to an understanding of the Qur'an that is embedded in the translation or you speak with somebody who knows, as we also said before.

But in all the other discussions it was referenced, the Qur'an also functioned as a proof text, a 'rational discourse', as Tzortzis put it, invoked as a source of authority to legitimise, rationalise, permit as well as forbid a variety of acts and beliefs. While the relevant verses were often recited out loud in Arabic, they were not necessarily accompanied by an English translation, the preceding gist normally being taken for granted to provide the relevant context. Verse and chapter citations were also much less common, making it more difficult to revisit these independently beyond the confines of the talk. Nonetheless, and as we have already seen in the section on the role of women earlier in this chapter, frequent references to the Qur'an and recourse to its inherent authority as arbiter of what constitutes Islamic action or belief is not only an essential feature of these conferences, but also a key element of their evangelical *da'wa*.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁷ On the variety of ways that the Qur'an is read and approached, see Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, With Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 13-15.

Qur'anic literalism

One of the most characteristic expressions of evangelism is scriptural adherence, and often, a literal understanding of the word of God, buttressed by other sources of tradition and authority such as in this case of the conferences, the hadith and sunna. Some elements of this literalism have been alluded to earlier in this chapter, not least the evangelism evident in the imagery surrounding the Qur'an at the Last Testament conference. But it was striking in the speakers' engagement there with many different narratives in the Qur'an having to do with the perishing of nations and peoples who disobeyed God. Chief amongst them was Sheikh Assim Al-Hakeem, introduced as an imam from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and a frequent contributor on Peace TV and Iqra amongst others, who spoke at length about fourteen perished nations and individuals on whom punishment was visited through a variety of natural and supernatural phenomena. These ranged from the people led by Nuh, the Prophet Noah, and destroyed by a great flood, to the 'Ad, a 'huge people' led by the Prophet Hud, who faced fierce wind for seven nights and eight days, and the Thamud, led by Salih, destroyed by a great quake and thunderbolt, and evidence of whose 'existence still remains' in the form of 'large palaces and houses made out of mountains with great skill'. The people of Lut, 'between Jordan and Palestine' also made the cut, as they often do in their Judaeo-Christian counterpart narratives, and who, because 'they abhorred anyone who was pure and clean' and were 'lusting after men', saw their villages tipped over with fire and brimstone by the angel Gabriel. Others included the

people of Pharaoh, visited by the plagues and several others peoples, including the 'People of the Sabbath' who were transformed into apes, pigs and monkeys. Interestingly, this porcine transformation was '...why we don't eat pig.' Outlandish as this presentation may seem, it is certainly replicated across a whole range of similarly conservative, literalist and parochial views widely available online.⁴⁶⁸

This emphasis on the literal, 'the letter of Islam' as Yvonne Ridley put it at the Hope Conference also found expression in other seemingly banal ways. At both conferences, for example, handedness was a recurring trope that reinforced a certain kind of orthopraxy. When an audience member absent-mindedly reached out for her water bottle and sipped out of it using her left hand, Sheikh Al-Hakeem broke off mid speech to chide that the right hand was the appropriate one for doing so, not the left. Left-handed Ridley, too, confesses her difficulty in this regard, as we saw earlier, even joking about the dangers of sitting next to her eating spaghetti with her right hand. The appropriateness of applause in these conferences was another example of discomfort, arising out of conservative ideas that it is a practice of unbelievers, which should not be imitated,⁴⁶⁹ but this time from the audience. In both conferences, it was interesting that the hesitant beginning of applause was greeted by acknowledgements from the stage that it

⁴⁶⁸ See, for example, Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, "Are the Monkeys and Pigs That Exist Nowadays Humans Who Have Been Transformed?" *Islam Question and Answer*, 2002, <https://islamqa.info/en/14085>, accessed 13 September, 2016. The specific Qur'anic verses, which are heavily glossed to justify this reading, are also provided at the webpage.

⁴⁶⁹ See, for example, Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, "Ruling on Clapping." *Islam Question and Answer*, 2001, <https://islamqa.info/en/20047>, accessed 3 October, 2016, amongst many others.

was okay to clap, which suggests that this hesitation had likely more to do with the kind of normative expectations, or in Lefebvrian terms, the spatial practice, described at the outset of this chapter, than of any particular sensibility that it was taboo.

Conclusion

Using extensive and original primary sources, this chapter has examined the spatial practice of two major Sunni conferences held in Edinburgh. In deciphering this space, that is, in revealing its spatial practice,⁴⁷⁰ it has argued that through their intended scale and self-identity, the conferences establish a highly visible, authoritative and public performance of Islam and Muslims in the capital city. As Lefebvre argues, this deciphering is not merely 'a means of reading or interpreting space' but 'of living in [it], of understanding it, and of producing it.'⁴⁷¹ In so doing, it elaborates a concrete relationship to 'conceived' and 'lived' spaces, what Lefebvre also calls the 'representations of space' and the 'spaces of representation' respectively. As such, the chapter raises important questions about who presents, what is presented, and how it is presented, as well as who and what is represented, and how, on the issue of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh.

By digging into the online backgrounds and origins of these conferences, undertaking a visual analysis of their associated marketing and publicity material,

⁴⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *Production*, 38.

⁴⁷¹ Lefebvre, 47-48.

and then comparing this with ethnographic data on the actual days of the conference, a clear picture emerges: This is an orthodox, conservative, literal and evangelical presentation of Sunni Islam. It is preoccupied with scripture, the role of women, the honour and legitimacy of the Prophet, and the superiority of religion over science.

In the conferences' attempt to stand up against misrepresentation and provide a 'true picture' of Islam, it also serves to educate concerned Muslims themselves about their faith. But it is a highly circumscribed education. Certainly within a Lefebvrian framework, the pre-existence of a misrepresented space affected the 'presence, action and discourse'⁴⁷² within the space. As discussed in the Introduction and exemplified in Chapters 1 and 2, such a prefiguring limits the extent to which the space can be produced anew even as it is being appropriated. This is particularly evident in the gender-segregated seating conventions discussed in this chapter, as well as in the defensive response to critiques about prophethood, scriptural truth-claims, and religious conflict amongst others. This normative, patriarchal endeavour is enhanced and facilitated by deliberately invoking powerful negative media narratives to create a sense of a collective Muslim identity under siege and in need of tools, in the form of prescriptive knowledge and information provided by the conference, to respond appropriately. Even more so than with the preceding two chapters, this case study demonstrated the conferences as producing 'educatively entertaining'

⁴⁷² Lefebvre, *Production*, 57.

spaces and 'spaces where a community acquires a sense of itself'.⁴⁷³ Indeed, here, the 'grim realism'⁴⁷⁴ that faces Muslims and how they are perceived by others and represented in the media is mitigated by the 'comfortingly fantastic'⁴⁷⁵ re/presentation of Islam and Muslim self-identity propounded by the conference speakers and organisers.

The chapter also illustrated another key element of the production of space, that such social spaces 'interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another'⁴⁷⁶. Such a palimpsestic blurring of boundaries allows, as noted earlier in the thesis for EIBF or for the Fringe, the physical and metaphorical transposition of people, events, debates and narratives from one place to another, and to then be further examined, elaborated, and understood there. In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note the impetus to explicitly re/present Islam across the case studies – not least in Chapter 1 at EIBF with 'Rethinking Islam: Is Radical Islam the World's Greatest Threat?' (2012) as well as 'Islam and the West: More Complex Than You Might Think' (2013), and in this chapter, with the Hope Conference's Day Event, 'Islam: Not What You Think'. The spaces and events discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 similarly focus on re/presenting Islam and Muslims, albeit in narrower geographic and denominational contexts.

⁴⁷³ Light and Smith, 3, citing Rowan Moore, "Open and Shut," *New Statesman & Society* 3 (1990).

⁴⁷⁴ Light and Smith, 5.

⁴⁷⁵ Light and Smith, 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 86-87.

As discussed in the Introduction, Lefebvre's conceptual framework enables the spaces and events examined in the thesis to be understood as both work and product. As a product, the conferences discussed in this chapter have been reproduced over the years, in much the same format and nomenclature, the result of 'repetitive acts and gestures'.⁴⁷⁷ As a work, they have unique characteristics, with each incarnation focusing on a particular theme, and a different set of speakers. As such, the conferences demonstrate the application of the Lefebvrian idea that they 'are products of an activity which involves the economic and technical realms', but also function as 'political products, and strategic spaces'.⁴⁷⁸

Coupled with humour and spectacle, these gatherings draw large numbers of Muslims. As with EIBF discussed in Chapter 1, there was much pronouncement (although less debate) from the stage at these conferences. Still, their role as a form of public square was clear, especially in the striking image of an open plaza overlooked by a regal balcony, described by Light and Smith and elaborated upon in Chapter 1.⁴⁷⁹ The extent to which these conferences reflect and represent the views and beliefs of Edinburgh's Muslims, however, is less clear, not least because of the kind of transposition discussed above – the key speakers originate outside of Scotland, directly from Saudi Arabia, or the rest of the UK and USA and strongly influenced by its preachers and particular brand of Islam. Furthermore,

⁴⁷⁷ Lefebvre, 70.

⁴⁷⁸ Lefebvre, 84.

⁴⁷⁹ Light, and Smith, *Production of Public Space*, 2.

while Scottish attendance is high, online engagement was rather more muted, and even where such engagement in the form of Facebook likes, for example, was high, much research remains to be done on whether such armchair engagement translates into meaningful and enduring social action or personal change.

Chapter 4

Marking Muharram, Mourning Husayn:

Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a Processions⁴⁸⁰

It is Friday, 15 November 2013. All week, sleep at night has been restless, fitful. It is the Islamic month of Muharram and my dreams have been pervaded by the sights and sounds of some of the rituals associated with it for hundreds of years, and which I have witnessed this week in Leith.⁴⁸¹ I wake up with the name of Husayn, both grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and the third imam of the Shi‘a, on my tongue. It is a cool, overcast day. Walking across the Meadows to the Alwaleed Centre in George Square, I am silently reciting, ‘*Labbayk yā Husayn, Labbayk yā Husayn!*’ – ‘I am here, O Husayn. I am here.’

I catch myself, startled. The invocation has come unbidden into my thoughts. Supplicating the Divine by invoking His attributes is part of the regular practice of the faith for Muslims of all stripes and colours, as is calling upon Him to bless Muhammad and his descendants. The latter practice, called *ṣalawāt*, is often understood as an appeal to God for Muhammad to intercede for his community.⁴⁸² Shi‘a Muslims have the additional recourse of calling upon their

⁴⁸⁰ A condensed version of this chapter was published as Fayaz S Alibhai, “Twelver Shia in Edinburgh: Marking Muharram, Mourning Husayn.” *Contemporary Islam*, December 2018, 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0432-z>, part of a special issue on Shi‘a Muslims in Britain. I am grateful to the guest editors Oliver Scharbrodt, Sufyan Abid and Reza Gholami for the invitation to contribute to the volume.

⁴⁸¹ See M. Plessner, “Al-Muḥarram.” *EI2*, 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-muharram-SIM_5426, accessed 15 May, 2014.

⁴⁸² See also Andrew Rippin, “Taṣliya.” *EI2*, 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tasliya-SIM_7436, accessed 15 May, 2014.

imams in this intercessionary capacity as designated inheritors of the mantle of the Prophet.⁴⁸³ But while invoking the martyr par excellence of Islam comes naturally for many Muslims as part of their respective communities of interpretation, it had not for me – at least until now.

Clearly, the Muharram rituals have left their mark. In hindsight, I should not have been surprised – participant-observation over nine consecutive days of lamentation, each painfully recounting in English, Urdu and Persian, the brutal killing of individual members of Husayn's family, that is, the family of the Prophet Muhammad, would be an emotionally draining experience for the most hardened of observers.

In light of the relative dearth of scholarship on the Shi'a in Scotland and of their religious spaces, this chapter focuses on an annual ritual procession emerging out of a Ithna'ashari (or Twelver) Shi'a *imambargah* in Edinburgh, Scotland, which situates it both within a pivotal event in Shi'a history, and its contemporary relevance in the city. The primary purpose of *imambargahs* is to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn b. 'Ali, the aforementioned grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and third Shi'a imam.⁴⁸⁴ These 'permanent Shi'i ritual-oriented buildings', are sites 'for various stationary rituals, the departure and

⁴⁸³ See Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1985).

⁴⁸⁴ *Imambargahs* are also variously known as *ashurkhanas*, *azakhanas* or *imambaras* in India and as *husayniyyas* in Iran. The term *imambargah* is most commonly used in a Pakistani context. See Jean Calmard, "Hosayniya." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, XII, Fasc. 5 15 December 2004 (updated 23 March 2012), 517-518, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hosayniya, accessed 9 October, 2014.

arrival point for processions, and the repository for symbolic objects used in different ceremonies'.⁴⁸⁵ The chapter begins by providing an ethnographic account of this procession. Next, it examines how the procession has evolved in the short time since it first took place, describing the community's demographics, its messaging and signage. In examining how the procession unfolds, the article also poses the question of what meaning the processionists are producing, both for themselves and others. As such, the chapter then analyses these signs and messages as well as the procession's associated public speeches in English and Urdu. In juxtaposing these two elements, I argue that even as the procession is a normative means to commemorate and transmit the core values of the Ithna'ashari Shi'a through the events of Karbala, it actively engages with and responds to stereotypes about Muslims in the West and thus serves simultaneously as a wider public presentation on, and defence of, Islam. By closely examining these Muslims' public performance of Islam, this chapter presents a case study of an alternative narrative of Muslims in Britain and sheds new light on the rituals and experience of the Ithna'ashari Shi'a in Scotland.

Jaloos: A Muharram Procession

Founded by the Wali-Al-Asir Trust in August 1989, the *imambargah* in Edinburgh's Leith district describes itself simply as a 'Shia Community

⁴⁸⁵ Peter J Chelkowski, "Lasting Elegy: Shi'i Art and Architecture," in *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (London: Azimuth Editions in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies in collaboration with the British Museum's Department of the Middle East, 2015), 190.



Fig. 20 Entrance to the Ithna'ashari Shi'a *imambargah* in Leith, Edinburgh, November 2013.

Centre' and an 'Imambargah following the Shi'a Ithna Asheri (Twelver) school of thought, based in Edinburgh'.⁴⁸⁶ It is indistinguishable from the other buildings around it on Great Junction Street (Fig. 20). There are no domes or minarets or arches, nor orbs or crescents or stars, not a single geometric pattern, not even a tell-tale calligraphic stroke on a plaque. A little worse for wear, the ground floor windows just off the cobbled street are opaque, below eye-level, possibly to let in light for the basement. Calcifications, watermarks and warps on the plywood of the windows on the mezzanine level suggest they were boarded up a long time ago. The windows on the first floor are wider than those below them and also opaque. Despite its capacious interior, there is nothing at all externally and stereotypically to indicate that Muslims regularly gather here for prayer and ritual practice, except perhaps for a deep green double door opening onto a well-kept stairwell. But the colour would be a desperate cliché. This could be any tenement entrance in Edinburgh. Only a small black flag, edged in red, but wrapped so tightly around itself as to be virtually invisible against the window rail above the door, might suggest otherwise. That, and if the door were to be inadvertently left ajar, a glimpse of the emulsion white stairs and its band of red, painted down the middle through the tread and riser – a simple, yet ingenious red carpet, striking for its contrast to the green door.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ See www.facebook.com/WaliAlAsirTrust/about, accessed 20 February 2017.

⁴⁸⁷ This invisibility would appear to be a deliberate choice. As Schubel notes, 'When imambargahs are established in buildings originally designed for other purposes, only the interiors of these buildings are transformed into recognizably Islamic places.' Vernon James Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space Among North American Shi'a: 'Every Day is Ashura, Everywhere is Karbala,'" in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*,

Once a year, however, during the Islamic month of Muharram, these Muslims make an unmistakable, conscious and public declaration of their presence. This takes place in the form of what they call a *jaloos* (from Urdu, lit. 'procession'), which emerges from the *imambargah* on King Street, stepping off onto Great Junction Street and marching on to the statue of Queen Victoria at the Foot of Leith Walk for speeches, before doubling back for more private rites.

Historical background

Such processions constitute one of a series of mourning rituals held around the world by Ithna'ashari Shi'a Muslims during Muharram to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn, the younger son of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, himself the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima, in Karbala, southern Iraq, in 680.⁴⁸⁸ The historical details below are worth revisiting briefly because they constitute fundamental tropes invoked and remembered publicly and repeatedly in the Muharram procession in Edinburgh.

'Ali was the fourth and last of what later Sunni Muslim tradition called the 'rightly-guided caliphs'. He came to office under turbulent circumstances – his

ed. Barbara Daly Metcalfe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 189).

⁴⁸⁸ For a historical overview of these processions, see Peter J Chelkowski, "Dasta." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII, Fasc. 1, 15 December 1994 (updated 18 November 2011), 97–100, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dasta>. For an ethnographic account of these processions in London, see Kathryn Spellman-Poots, "Manifestations of Ashura Among Young British Shi'is," in *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, ed. Baudoin Dupret, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). Marianne Bøe, and Ingvild Flakerud, "A Minority in the Making: The Shia Muslim Community in Norway," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017) provide details for processions in the hitherto unstudied context for Oslo and Bergen in Norway.

predecessor ‘Uthman was murdered (as was his predecessor, ‘Umar) amidst widespread civil dissatisfaction about his policies and mode of governance, which only compounded the unrest ‘Ali himself had then to face. ‘Ali’s accession to the caliphate in 656 vindicated Shi‘i beliefs about his right to succeed the Prophet, which for them had been usurped by the acclamation of Abu Bakr as the first caliph of the fledgling Muslim community. ‘Ali’s succession to the Prophet in his religious and spiritual capacity had, for the Shi‘a, remained unaffected by politics, charged as it were with a moral authority that invoked a divine plan as well as hereditary kinship. Its coupling now to a political and temporal role as leader of the Muslim community acknowledged by all, thus represented for the Shi‘a a restoration of divine order and justice.⁴⁸⁹ As Daftary notes, however, this view ‘contains distinctive doctrinal elements that admittedly cannot be attributed in their entirety to the early Shi‘is, especially the original partisans of ‘Ali’ and only ‘found full expression in the doctrine of the imamate’ in the mid 8th century.⁴⁹⁰

‘Ali himself was felled by an assassin’s sword to his head while praying at a mosque in Kufa, Iraq, in 661. Upon his death, Mu‘awiya, then governor of the wealthy province of Syria quickly consolidated his power, becoming the de facto fifth caliph of the now greatly expanded Muslim empire. Hasan, the elder son of ‘Ali and Fatima, and therefore the legitimate successor to ‘Ali, was briefly acclaimed as caliph, before yielding to Mu‘awiya and ultimately predeceasing him

⁴⁸⁹ See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹⁰ Farhad Daftary, *A History of Shi‘i Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 29.

in 669.⁴⁹¹ Mu‘awiya engineered his own succession through his son Yazid, setting up an essentially parallel dynastic model of Islamic leadership and authority that lasted until 750. Upon Yazid’s succession to the caliphate, Husayn, bolstered by support pledged from the people of Kufa, took up arms to reassert his own rights to the caliphate.

Setting out from Mecca with a small army of followers, Husayn’s plans were soon thwarted by the new caliph. Unbeknownst to Husayn, the Kufans folded under pressure, breaking their pledges. They never come to his aid. Meanwhile, Yazid’s forces quickly intercepted Husayn and his army, cutting them off from supplies of fresh water at Karbala. Surrounded by desert, weak with hunger and parched with thirst, Husayn’s numbers dwindled. Over the next ten days, scores were killed: followers, friends and family, including his six-month-old son, ‘Ali al-Asghar, shot, according to tradition, by an arrow through the neck as he was held up in the air in a desperate plea for water. On the tenth day of Muharram 680, Husayn was decapitated, his body trampled on by horses.⁴⁹² The killing of the Prophet Muhammad’s own grandson, let alone its brutality, shocked the populace, and for the Shi‘a particularly, it became a pivotal moment, infusing in them ‘a new religious fervour’ consolidating their ethos and identity.⁴⁹³ Thus, from early on in Islamic history, religious, social and political discord became associated with a particular kind of governance, leadership and authority.

⁴⁹¹ Daftary, 32.

⁴⁹² For a detailed account of the battle at Karbala, see S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi‘a Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, Pakistan, 2000).

⁴⁹³ Daftary, *History of Shi‘i Islam*, 33.

Contemporary commemorations in Edinburgh

The first Muharram procession in Edinburgh took place in November 2011. When I witnessed it in November 2012, it comprised some 150 men and 50 women, including children, and was organised as a prelude to a larger procession in Glasgow a few days later. I arrived by bus to the Foot of Leith Walk at 1:30pm, dismayed to discover the procession in full swing and doubling back to the *imambargah*. I had known it was going to start at 1:00pm, but past experiences with other events had jaded me to imagine a generous buffer. Much to my chagrin, not only was I clearly late, but I was now also stuck until the procession cleared the bus stop I was trying to get off at and the police waved us through.

Some of the processionists held aloft standards on which hung black cloth banners in various shapes and sizes edged with golden tinsel and calligraphic embroidery in blue, green and red. Others carried simpler motifs in the form of silver and blue floriated flags. The tips of some poles ended in a stylised representation of a hand atop a crescent. On one flagpole, wrapped in layers of cloth, sat a gold pot, on top of which rested another stylised hand.⁴⁹⁴ Both men and women carried these standards, although the women's were smaller.

⁴⁹⁴ For a wide-ranging survey on this motif, generally known as the *khamisa*, but here likely representing the hand of Abu al Fadl al-ʿAbbas, half-brother of Husayn and a key figure of Karbala, see Fahmida Suleman, "The Hand of Fatima: In Search of Its Origins and Significance," in *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (London: Azimuth Editions in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies in collaboration with the British Museum's Department of the Middle East, 2015).

Most of the processionists wore black or dark blue clothing comprising plain *salwar kameez* (trousers and shirts) under grey, black or blue winter jackets. Women, who marched behind the men, almost uniformly sported black trousers or blue jeans covered either by dark manteaux that fell at least below the knee, coupled with a black hijab (sometimes banded green), or a full black chador. Among some women, a slightly more colourful *kameez* was evident. Several men also wore *salwar kameez* ensembles where only the *salwar* was white but the *kameez* was black or blue. Grey hoodies were also a popular choice among younger men, as were jeans, usually blue, occasionally beige.⁴⁹⁵ Participation in the procession, therefore, did not require the donning of traditional clothing, which is sometimes conflated as a marker of religious identity. Some of these men also walked barefoot. Like all the women, several men had their heads covered, usually with a woollen hat, although this appeared more a practical measure to keep out the cold than to fulfil any religious requirement. Only one or two men wore turbans, which identified them as clerics (*mullahs*) of the community. Among both sexes, quite a few had additionally donned fluorescent yellow vests and it was they who flanked the other processionists, keeping them safe from traffic. A few, mainly children, wore slightly more colourful pinks, blues or browns. Many of these details offer a close ethnographic parallel with processions in Toronto,

⁴⁹⁵ For a fascinating ethnographic study on how jeans enable people, especially immigrants, to fit in and be 'ordinary', see Daniel Miller, and Sophie Woodward, *Blue Jeans: The Art of the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Canada.⁴⁹⁶ In Edinburgh, as we shall see, they are also important for how they change and develop in the years that follow.

The procession took its time to head back to the *imambargah*. It had five distinct phalanxes. The primary standard bearers led the way, followed closely by a group of male singers to whose songs and chants the rest of the processionists rhythmically struck their palms on their chests. Every few minutes when the processionists would stop, the chorus formed a circle, which signalled to the men alongside or behind them the onset of a rather more elaborate and ritualised chest-beating that never failed to stop even the most hurried passers-by in their tracks for its distinct style and faster tempo. Holding alternate hands high in the air, this third phalanx comprising primarily young men would bring them down on the opposite side of their chests while simultaneously bending their knees. This movement was usually accompanied by a sharp exhalation of the breath, 'Hu!' at each strike, which helped maintain the rhythm and so amplified the thumping of their hands on their chests, that it could be heard on the opposite side of the street. Behind them, older men, some of whom also bore standards, kept up with the increased pace without, however, changing over to this more involved rite, which in the South Asian context is commonly known as *matam*. The women and teenage girls who made up the final phalanx behind them did likewise, engaging only in light tapping, never chest-thumping. Despite also holding aloft standards, the women were not organised into sub-groups and thus appeared

⁴⁹⁶ Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space", 198-201.

undifferentiated from each other. They also did not sing. The children in the procession tended, unsurprisingly, not to observe these boundaries, and depending on their age and sex often milled back and forth between their parents or chattered amongst themselves. While some processionists looked forlorn, others smiled and exchanged pleasantries with each other. Yet others, mostly men, would periodically check their smartphones or use them to take pictures and videos of the procession itself. A number of them also wielded dedicated cameras and camcorders. Slowly, the processionists filed into the *imambargah*, thus marking the end of the public procession.⁴⁹⁷

Public reaction

Public reaction to the processions in both 2012 and 2013 ranged from mild shock and bemusement to predictable mutterings about holding up traffic unnecessarily. Cars honked insistently and more than a few passers-by asked each other aloud what was happening. Despite the biting wind, people stopped to watch the processions more closely, snap photographs and videos and accept

⁴⁹⁷ As the processionists went inside, a white woman beside me requested a flyer from one of the processionists I had just struck up a conversation with. Seeing that they had run out, he turned to me asking if I would give her mine and which he would replace with spares from inside. I had only just been given one and not had time to read it. Besides, I also wanted to retain it as a source of primary research (see Fig. 22 for a flyer I received in 2013). But as this 'gift' implied an invitation into the *imambargah*, which was not extended to her, I agreed. I got inside a few minutes later, but the flyer was never replaced. An account of the rituals inside the *imambargah* is the subject of a future paper.

flyers from the mourners.⁴⁹⁸ Where one male bystander next to me in 2012 playfully sang along 'la, la, la,' to one of the chants, another the following year was less enthused, shouting '...fucking go home!' as he deliberately rushed the women's flank from across the street on the return leg of the procession. If this was an attempt to intimidate, it failed because outwardly, at least, the women simply made way for him as he cut through them before closing ranks again, carrying on and looking quite unperturbed. He had timed his actions well, for by the time the police heard him and turned around, he had already lost himself in the crowd. While some onlookers were taken aback at his brazenness, most others ignored him, appearing either to dismiss him as crazed or drunk, or perhaps fearful of 'getting involved'.

The high street was bustling on both occasions. That the 2012 procession took place on a weekend and the 2013 one on a weekday made no difference either in its reception by potentially different members of the public or indeed on the level of participation and engagement by the community itself, which incorporated men, women and children, ranging in age from babies to individuals in their sixties. In other words, they represented a cross-section of the community (the broad demographics of which we shall turn to shortly) who had been deliberate about carving out time from either weekend leisure or workday responsibilities. For some, particularly the men, this was not just one day, but

⁴⁹⁸ For a comparative Sufi *zīkr* procession, see Pnina Werbner, "Stamping the Earth With the Name of Allah: Zīkr and the Sacralizing of Space Among British Muslims," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalfe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

potentially another, too, given that a number also likely participated in the Glasgow processions.

If the passers-by were generally curious, the shopkeepers, store managers and assistants whose businesses along Great Junction Street comprised fishmongers, convenience stores, corner supermarket chains, drapers, travel agencies, betting shops, and fast food outlets, were distinctly and almost uniformly wary. As community members went up to businesses to hand out flyers, many kept their doors closed, and where some accepted the flyers, they did so heads cocked and with their bodies held close to the partially opened door, a ready hand on the door handle (Fig. 21).

This unease may partly be the result of perceived parallels with the Orange Order, which until recently conducted two annual parades in Leith.⁴⁹⁹ Historically, the Orange procession or 'walk' was a public celebration of the anniversary of the Battle of Boyne and 'often the harbinger of serious disorder', which 'angered and offended' Irish Catholics by their 'ritual displays of Protestant tribalism'.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ The Order is named after King William III, the Prince of Orange, whose victory at the Battle of Boyne in 1690 'secured the future of the Reformed Faith in Ireland'. See William S. Marshall, *The Billy Boys: A Concise History of Orangeism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1996), 6). Primarily a working-class organisation and 'in effect organised militant Protestantism' (Marshall, 9), the Order in Scotland dates back to the Industrial Revolution for Irish migrant Protestants concerned about distinguishing themselves from their Catholic counterparts. According to Michael J. Rosie, the Order moved their march to Regent Terrace with the onset of tramworks in Edinburgh: 'An ageing membership valued the removal of a big hill from their parade (!) and they've never attempted to resurrect the 'traditional' route. Orange parades in Edinburgh rarely get any press coverage – and very little is written on the [Order] in Scotland, let alone Edinburgh' (Personal email, 13 November 2014).

⁵⁰⁰ Marshall, *Billy Boys*, 12.



Fig. 21 Girl handing out flyers explaining the Muharram procession in 2013. Note the wariness of the woman taking the flyer, body held close to the door, foot wedged firmly between the door and the narrow opening. This body language was typical of the wariness expressed by storekeepers on Leith's high street.

Although the Muharram processionists and the Orange Order seem unaware of each other, these businesses may have feared the demonstration getting out of hand regardless of the clear ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences between the Orangemen parade and the Muharram procession.⁵⁰¹ As such, the retailers may have simply been exercising caution about the alien and unknown turning up on their doorsteps. Though such disorder in Edinburgh is very rare, given the history of sectarianism in Scotland, the threat of violence, whether real or imagined, is hardly trivial, regardless of the religious tradition being represented. Ignorance, too, cannot be discounted as a factor – despite the handouts explicitly narrating the story of Karbala and the role of Husayn, several passers-by in 2012 stopped to ask me if the procession was about the Prophet Muhammad.⁵⁰²

Development and Change

Demographics

A full-length YouTube video of the first procession in Edinburgh in November 2011 uploaded by a community member contrasts starkly with my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013.⁵⁰³ Most apparently, there are double the number of people

⁵⁰¹ Including the unusual standards, ritual singing and flagellation, and dark uniform clothing.

⁵⁰² I also learnt some weeks later that one of the sergeants policing the procession had been asked by a member of the public if the group was protesting against the Christmas tree!

⁵⁰³ See Shabbir Sheikh, "Full Edinburgh Jaloos Muharram 1433 Jafaria Foundation Dalkeith." 5 December 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWnyggugXfU>, accessed 1 Oct, 2016.

participating in that first procession than in my ethnographic observations in subsequent years. An analysis of the video itself suggests several constituent elements of their identities.

In terms of their civic identity, the majority of processionists in 2011 were likely from Glasgow, where there is a larger population of Ithna'ashari Shi'a (and indeed other Muslims more generally). This is borne out by the presence of many individuals in this footage who also appear in other videos of the community that are explicitly identified as Glaswegian as well as from my own footage and engagement with the community in Edinburgh over the course of my research.⁵⁰⁴

The processionists' linguistic origin and identity can be similarly discerned – over the general hubbub of the procession, one can hear the distinctive lilt of Persian being spoken by men and children amidst the mass of people otherwise speaking Urdu or English. In this regard, the Ithna'ashari Shi'a in Edinburgh likewise comprise both Pakistani as well as Iranian diasporic communities, with the former constituting an overwhelming majority. My own interactions also suggest a small contingent of South Asians from parts of East Africa. Although transient university students make up some of the community, notably among the Iranians, all of these groups have settlement histories in Edinburgh that go back

⁵⁰⁴ I was unable to determine why there was such a large Glaswegian contingent. Perhaps they were offering the kind of organisational experience familiar to larger groups as well as moral support in the form of making the community's presence in Edinburgh more visible for their first procession.

at least thirty years, often more.⁵⁰⁵ In 2012 and 2013, only a handful of the processionists were Iranian, one of whom said to me that the procession was really a Pakistani affair, and that while theirs in Iran were rather different, it was important to show up to this one as a demonstration of solidarity.⁵⁰⁶

Finally, with regard to gender, the (male) videographers seem more focused on capturing what is happening around the men. While women appear in the videos, they get much less airtime. Despite the difficulty of estimating the number of women in the 2011 procession, it is important to note that in successive years while men constituted the bulk of the processionists, women made up a quarter of their ranks. In these years, while the men recited longer ritual chants and thumped their chests, the women, some of them pushing prams or buggies, were significantly quieter – almost silent, chanting ‘*Yā Husayn, Yā Husayn*’ (‘O Husayn, O Husayn’) so softly as to be heard only when the men were silent or if one were

⁵⁰⁵ Specific details on the national or ethnic origins and intra-religious diversity of Scotland’s Muslims is harder to come by. Seminal studies by Wardak, *Social Control and Deviance*; Qureshi, “Trans-Boundary Spaces”; and Peter Hopkins, “‘Blue Squares’, ‘Proper’ Muslims and Transnational Networks: Narratives of National and Religious Identities Amongst Young Muslim Men Living in Scotland,” *Ethnicities* 7, no. 1 (2007); for example, focus on Sunni Pakistanis. Bonino, *Muslims in Scotland* offers valuable insights from a slightly more geographically diverse pool of interviewees, including those from East and North Africa. Drawing from the 2011 Census, both Bonino and Elshayyal, *Scottish Muslims in Numbers*, provide useful breakdowns and analyses of the ethnic origins of Muslims in Scotland, but these are constrained by the census categories for ethnicity. Little or no mention is made, therefore, of Iran and the Shi‘a.

⁵⁰⁶ For an example in the Netherlands of how different Shi‘a youth groups have used Dutch to address the challenges of the diversity of their ethnicities and national origins, see Annemeik Schlatmann, “Towards a United Shia Youth Community: A “Dutch” Muharram Gathering,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017).

very close to them.⁵⁰⁷ In the context of Karbala, as in many others, battle and martyrdom are arguably gendered experiences that dialectically reinforce the role and performance of men over women, at least in public commemorative rituals. As Hegland notes of Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a women in Peshawar, Pakistan, they face ‘symbolic complexes that reinforce men’s role as repositories of holy power and succor’.⁵⁰⁸ While the women had a less performative role, they worked in concert with the men and were integral in disseminating the central message of the procession to the wider public. Certainly as girls joined boys in distributing flyers and women bore banners with slogans, they demonstrated that the sexes were equal participants in the procession.⁵⁰⁹ More broadly, these Muslims provided a very clear example of veiled women in the West actively participating in the public sphere, contrary to stock tabloid notions of their passivity.⁵¹⁰

The figure of Zaynab bint ‘Ali, the sister of Husayn, is an important historical example of such participation, and an almost certain inspiration for the female

⁵⁰⁷ Interestingly, they seem a little louder in the 2011 videos. Why this might be the case is difficult to say without further study – it may simply be individual variation or the proximity of the videographers to them.

⁵⁰⁸ Mary Elaine Hegland, “Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender Through Pakistani Women’s Rituals of Mourning,” *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998), 240.

⁵⁰⁹ While women in Iran participate in Muharram processions, they tend not to carry standards or banners (see, for example <https://ashurainiran.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/ashura-2017.jpg>, accessed 22 October 2018). I am grateful to my colleague Lucy Deacon for the observation from her fieldwork in Lebanon in 2018 that women march behind the men and that they and youth groups both male and female carry standards and banners.

⁵¹⁰ Schubel notes for his study in Toronto that ‘women marched separately from the men, at the rear of the procession, whereas in Pakistan women generally do not participate in processions’, and that the ‘increased presence of women in community activities is a common theme throughout [the] essays’ in the volume to which he has contributed. See Schubel, “Karbala as Sacred Space”.

faithful in Edinburgh.⁵¹¹ The eloquence of her complaint at Yazid's court in Damascus⁵¹² after the massacre at Karbala is popularly held up as a model of speaking truth to power, invoked and remembered by men and women alike. Indeed, Zaynab's esteem is reflected in many of the elegies sung by the male processionists.⁵¹³ Of course, Zaynab is no ordinary woman. For many Ithna'ashari Shi'a, she is an extended member of the *ahl al-bayt*, literally 'people of the house', referring to the family of the Prophet. Her mother, Fatima, is properly of the household of the Prophet and progenitor of the Shi'a imams. In this regard, Fatima is revered not merely by virtue of her filial relationship with the Prophet, but in and of her own right⁵¹⁴ and as evidenced by the number of lectures extolling her and uploaded to YouTube.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹¹ Although I was unable to speak with any of the female processionists, Schubel makes a similar observation for his comparable study in Toronto, Canada.

⁵¹² Recorded in Ahmad Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, *Balaghat Al-Nisa'* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadathah, 1987). An English commentary and translation is provided by Ibrahim Ayati, "Chapter 32: Sermon of Lady Zaynab in the Court of Yazid." *A Probe into the History of Ashura'*, <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati/chapter-32-sermon-lady-zaynab-court-yazid>, accessed 29 April, 2015.

⁵¹³ Several examples of elegies, including of women other than Zaynab, feature in David Pinault, "Zaynab Bint 'Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imams in Shi'ite Devotional Literature," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavily Hambly (New York: St Martin's, 1999), 83-92.

⁵¹⁴ Pinault, 72-75.

⁵¹⁵ See, for example, a compilation of her attributes, 'Lecture: Fatima (RA) by Islamic English/Arabic Talks at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39dW700hYYY>, accessed 23 October 2018. See also 'When Fatima Came to Karbala', an elegy in English attributed to Sajjad Jiyad, which is addressed to Fatima from the perspective of Zaynab, recited by Muhammad Sajjad and published in October 2017 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9smgWr1m2U>, accessed 22 October 2018. The appeal and popularity of this elegy is evidenced by the variety of its performances - by a young boy, Mehdi Fadhil, published in March 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcot5Wf6cYQ>, accessed 22 October 2018. The complete lyrics are available in a still motion video from December 2012 recited by Mullah Ali Fadhil available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhzPxDFL1yc>, accessed 22 October 2018. More recently, an animated version or 'cartoon depiction' was

Rather like the Prophet himself, the family of the Prophet as represented by these seminal figures of Shi'i history become people whose example believers not only are inspired by, but also aspire to emulate. In this way, the elegies represent both a personal relationship and a popular devotion to them that remains unmatched by relationships of allegiance to particular *marja'-i taqlid*, those Shi'i scholars qualified to interpret the faith for the laity and acclaimed as sources of emulation.

Messaging

Aside from the make-up of the processionists, a second change had to do with the community's increasing efforts after 2011 to disseminate the message of the procession to the wider public. Whereas in 2012 only a handful of adults handed out flyers, several more did so in 2013 including, notably, boys and girls aged twelve and above. All of these pamphleteers actively went up not only to passers-by, but also shops and businesses on both sides of the street. As noted earlier, these flyers narrated not only the story of Karbala and the reason for the procession, but also pointed people to online resources such as the London-based website whoishussain.org, inaugurated in 2012 (Figs. 22 and 23).

published in September 2018, the recitation of which is also attributed to Ali Fadhil, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuOGZh-rxpl>, accessed 23 October 2018.

Why we have a procession in Muharram

This is a procession of Muslims of the Shia sect, who are commemorating an important event in Islamic history which serves as a reminder to us of our obligation to stand up for what is right, make hard choices, and not compromise our principles. It's an age-old theme but the story is a very inspiring one which Shia Muslims have kept alive for over 1300 years.

It has to do with Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain standing up to a very corrupt and cruel leader guilty of many social injustices against Muslims and non-Muslims subject to his rule. Yazid wanted Hussain to pledge allegiance to him in order to help legitimize his rule over the early Islamic empire which spanned a large part of the Middle East and North Africa. Knowing that his allegiance would represent a compromise of the principles and rules of Islam and tarnish the legacy and leadership of his grandfather, Hussain refused to do so.

Yazid launched a force of thousands against Hussain and the less than 100 people that were with him, which included his friends and family; women and children, the youngest of whom was only 6 months old. While in the deserts of Iraq, Yazid's forces cut off Hussain and his companions from the river Euphrates, denying men, women and children water for days, while brutally crushing their occasional attempts to secure water for the children. Ultimately, all of the male friends and family of Hussain were killed, including his 6 month old boy who had an arrow shot through his neck while Hussain begged for him to be given water. The women and children who survived were captured and subjected to cruel treatment and humiliation as they were marched to Syria. These captives played a very important part in keeping the story and legacy alive.

So today, we're mourning the many that were lost that day and the days after in support of Hussain. This annual procession, and the rituals you see and the hymns you hear all serve as a way to honor that legacy and remind us that our faith requires us to stand up for what's right no matter what the odds, to serve and protect not only yourself, but your family, your neighbours, your community, humanity and the integrity of your faith. Every faith has certain stories that serve as a reminder of such obligations. This particular story has actually resonated with a lot of non-Muslims as well. In fact this idea of nonviolent resistance inspired Mahatma Gandhi who, although not Muslim, noted that this story about Hussain taught him how someone facing insurmountable odds and being wronged could still emerge the winner against his oppressors. Hussain lost the battle but won the war for the integrity of Islam in a way that has made us remember him for over a thousand years.

"I learned from Hussain how to achieve victory while being oppressed."

Mahatma Gandhi (Indian political and spiritual leader)

"If Hussain fought to quench his worldly desires, then I do not understand why his sisters, wives and children accompanied him. It stands to reason therefore that he sacrificed purely for Islam"

(Charles Dickens)

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT www.whoishussain.org OR www.edinburghahlubaysociety.org

Fig. 22 Image of flyer handed out to the public explaining the Muharram procession in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013

The processions also appear, from associated YouTube videos and flyers in print and social media, to have been organised partly and jointly by different institutions and groups within the community including the Imamia Islamic Mission, also known as the Wali-Al-Asir Trust, and itself the site of the *imambargah*; the Jafaria Foundation, which has its own centre just out of Edinburgh in Dalkeith, and the Edinburgh Ahlul Bayt society, founded in 2011, which appears to have been incorporated into the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society (SABS) from around October 2015, and in October 2016 also included the Lady Sughra Society and the SABS Health Awareness Campaign. The Wali-Al-Asir Trust is a registered charity and parent organisation of the Imamia Islamic Mission. As noted on the Scottish Charity Register, the Trust aims

- (a) To advance community development by providing a community centre for social and religious activities to be carried out.
- (b) To advance religion by providing a place for religious services, for the perpetuation and propagation of (Shia) Islam, within our community and to spread the Light of Islam and peace in the world.
- (c) To promote equality, diversity, spiritual well-being, religious tolerance and harmony for the public benefit by fostering better relation between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.
- (d) To promote daytrips, gatherings, meals for disabled aged and isolated members of the community.⁵¹⁶

The Jafaria Foundation was established in 2006, its stated aim 'to spread the Light of Islam in the world with peace. Our mission is to teach everyone according to the teachings of the holy Masoomeen (A.S.)' (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and the Twelve Imams) with programmes including 'Majalis, Jashans, Milads and lectures [which] are held to teach the followers of the

⁵¹⁶ The Wali-Al-Asir Trust was registered as a charity (SCO43534) on 1 November 2012. According to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), these objects are taken directly from the charity's constitution. See www.oscr.org.uk/search/charity-details?number=SCO43534, accessed 20 September 2018.

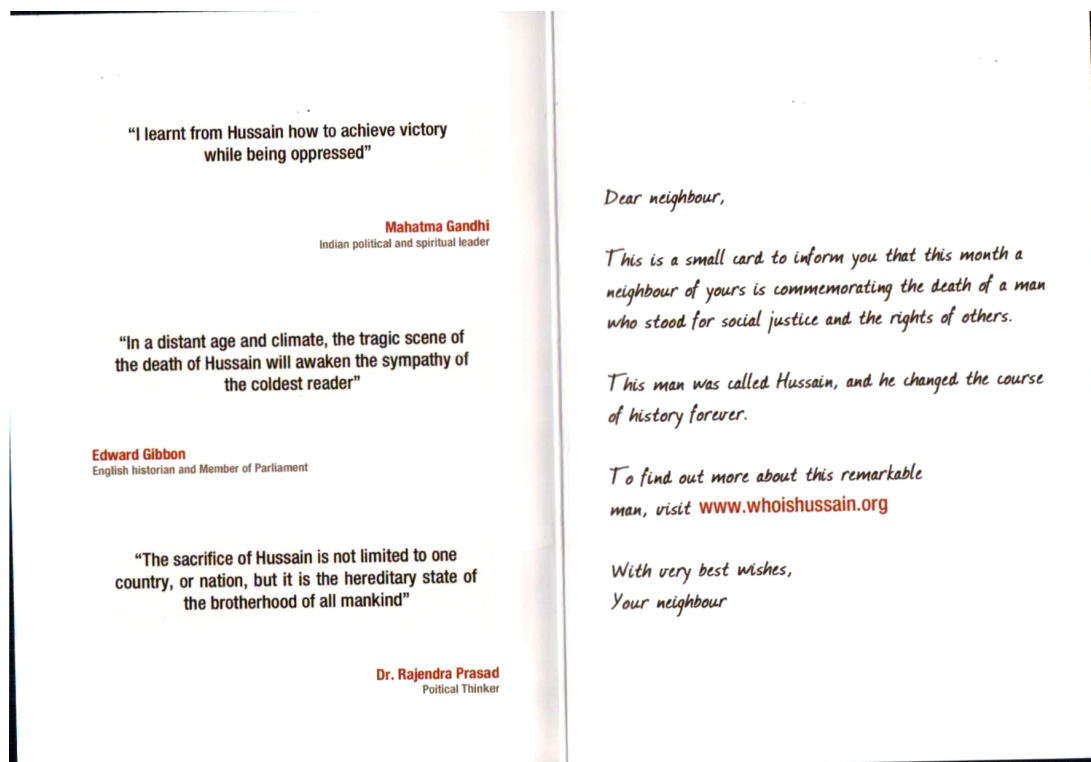


Fig. 23 Image of card handed out to the public during the Muharram procession in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013. While the external endorsements on the left serve to universalise Husayn's martyrdom, the note on the right is explicitly localised, with no less than three references to 'neighbour', situating the commemoration within the local community

Ahlulbayt (A.S.), how we should spend our lives according to Islam, purely reflecting the lifestyle of the Masomeen (A.S.)'.⁵¹⁷ For its part, the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society aims 'to meet the needs of the Scottish Shia Muslim community and the breadth of society in general across the cultural, social, political and religious spectra'.⁵¹⁸

All three organisations reflect a largely Pakistani constituency, and smaller numbers of Iranians and East Africans of South Asian origin. While the Wali-Al-Asir Trust and the Jafaria Foundation are more internally oriented, the Scottish Ahlul

⁵¹⁷ See www.facebook.com/JafariaFoundation/about, accessed 20 February 2017.

⁵¹⁸ See www.scottishahlulbaytsociety.org/about-us, accessed 20 February 2017.



Fig. 24 A male processionist holds aloft a red-stained flag symbolising the blood of Husayn in Leith, Edinburgh 2013. To his left is a barefoot, long-haired processionist

Bayt Society additionally has an explicit outreach agenda, evidenced not least by an endorsement by Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister, on their website.⁵¹⁹

Judging from a number of events I attended, it also appears to be run by a younger generation of community members, aged in their late 20s to their mid

⁵¹⁹ On its website, the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society states that it is additionally 'committed to educational workshops, seminars, gatherings and classes to address the needs and interests of the public in general, and the adherents of the Shia faith in particular, to enable people to attain an authentic and sophisticated understanding of the teachings of Shia Islam, as an ideology that can contribute to broader humanitarian discourse and spiritual development. We work to socially include and integrate those amongst the youth, the women and the elderly.' On Nicola Sturgeon's endorsement of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society: 'I'm very fortunate to represent one of the most diverse constituencies in the country. And so I see on a daily basis - as an MSP, and in my work as First Minister - the contribution which is made by the Scottish Shia community, by Muslims in Scotland more generally, and by all of Scotland's faith groups. They add to the diversity of our society and the strength of our communities. And so it's great to celebrate an organisation which plays a hugely important part in that - the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society.' See www.scottishahlulbayt.org/about-us, accessed 20 February 2017.

40s. The precise networks of relationships between these groups is beyond the scope of this study, but it suggests that while religious allegiance in matters of interpretation of the faith may be pledged to key *marja'-i taqlid* in the conventional Ithna'ashari Shi'a fashion, there exist several diffuse and relatively decentralised associations and, potentially even rival, models of leadership and authority in terms of the social governance of the Edinburgh community.

Signage

The most visible change over the period of study, however, has been in the standards, banners and flags heralding the processions. These *a'lām*, as they are known collectively, underwent a major transformation in 2013, which took place across three registers.

The first was an increase in the number and colours of these flags – orange shades and purple hues now accompanied the blacks, reds and greens of the previous year. Correspondingly, what the processionists were wearing had become progressively darker, more monotone, even amongst the children. As such, the contrast between the black-swathed processionists and the flags they were carrying was all the more striking, reinforcing the visual and psychological sense that this was not a random group of protesters, but a community bound by faith rather than brought together for a demonstration of purely profane concerns. Despite the bright colours and greater emphasis on the banners, it remained impossible to mistake this parade for a festival. There were no fancy



Fig. 25 Male processionists hold aloft a black horizontal banner which reads, 'To me death is nothing but happiness and living under tyrants nothing but living in a hell.' Other processionists in fluorescent vests flank the Muharram march, looking out for traffic in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013

costumes or bands playing joyful music; the elegies and chants were distinctly plaintive and mournful, the self-flagellation unmistakable. Cementing this presentation was a second change – the introduction of large, plain white flags, with red stains on them. Dramatic in their simplicity, they represented the blood of Husayn (Fig. 24). The reasons for these changes are difficult to determine, but with the tentative success of the procession in 2011, organisers may have felt increasingly confident to inject a little more drama and flair in the years that followed, and which mapped practices back 'home'. In any case, and as Flaskerud notes in her visual analysis of Iranian *parchams* or wall hangings commemorating the battle of Karbala, even as '[p]oetry and eulogies enhance a sad emotional



Fig. 26 Women bring up the rear of the Muharram procession in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013 with an English-message banner which reads, 'Everyday is ASHURA & every land is KARBALA'

temperament',⁵²⁰ the 'visual language'⁵²¹ of 'signifying devices: the iconographic sign, inscriptions and colour symbolism',⁵²² 'phrases a visual lamentation'.⁵²³ Much as 'the manipulated voice of a storyteller and an elegist, ... colour functions to instigate in the recipient sad emotions and mournful attitudes'.⁵²⁴

The third and most important development was the introduction of English signage. In contrast to previous years, 2013 saw the introduction of large, black horizontal banners, held up at each end by a different individual.⁵²⁵ The first of

⁵²⁰ Ingvild Flakerud, *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism* (London: Continuum, 2010), 107.

⁵²¹ Flakerud, 107.

⁵²² Flakerud, 106.

⁵²³ Flakerud, 107.

⁵²⁴ Flakerud, 107.

⁵²⁵ See Bøe, and Flakerud, "A Minority in the Making" for examples of similar banners in Norway.

these banners to be unfurled (Fig. 25) carried a picture of a golden dome at its left and a minaret, also golden, at its right. Between these two images, which depict iconic elements of Husayn's shrine in present day Karbala, in white san serif letters, were the words: 'To me death is nothing but happiness and living under tyrants nothing but living in a hell.'⁵²⁶

Minutes later, the women bringing up the rear of the procession raised a banner (Fig. 26) with an equally terse message, all in white except for the last word, which was rendered in red: 'Everyday is ASHURA and every land is KARBALA.' Two images, again elements from the shrine in Karbala, formed the backdrop of this banner; on the left a massive blue arch, with two minarets rising behind it. On the right, in close-up, was another minaret, identical to the one in the first banner.

Back in the front, two children walked hand-in-hand underneath another banner (Fig. 27), the older child holding aloft a pole about half his height wrapped in white cloth atop which rested a stylised gold hand. In a solid, white, san serif font it read: 'Fight terrorism through justice do not pass a verdict relying on probability.'

Within a short while all the banners in English faced outward, parallel to the procession itself, helping onlookers read them better. Any question as to the identity of these people was addressed by an additional banner with the same

⁵²⁶ A detailed analysis of this and other signs follows in the next section.



Fig. 27 A brief pause of the Muharram procession in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013. The English-message banner reads, 'Fight terrorism through justice do not pass a verdict relying on probability'. Note the variety of 'alams held aloft by the male processionists, including two stylised hands, one held by the child in the foreground

san serif writing, 'SHIA MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SCOTLAND Ashura Procession' emblazoned across it (Fig. 28).

The drama that all of this creates has obvious parallels to Easter passion plays in other Western cityscapes, exemplified by Oberammergau, Germany, historically, or given contemporary art house treatment as in *Jesus of Montreal*.⁵²⁷ Chelkowski also notes historical 'similarities between the Muharram processions' as recorded in Safavid Iran, 'and the European medieval theatre of the Stations [that] are obvious.'⁵²⁸ Edinburgh itself is no stranger to the passion play. The

⁵²⁷ Denys Arcand, *Jesus of Montreal*, 2006. For an up-to-date list of passion plays in the UK, see www.passionplays.co.uk.

⁵²⁸ Peter J Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde Theatre of Iran," *Performing Arts Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 33.

Princes Street Easter Play, for example, a community theatre production, has been putting on performances since 2005. Its 2014 production, *The Edinburgh Passion*, at Princes Street Gardens drew a crowd of 1,500-2,000. Focusing, predictably, on the referendum for Scottish independence, its stated aim was 'to reach people who might know very little of the original story and it seems to have worked well'.⁵²⁹ If this ignorance of the Easter passion, a fundamental Christian story, is credible within the Scottish context, let alone a wider Western European one, then common knowledge of an equivalent Muslim narrative, as told through the Muharram procession, is practically non-existent. There is, of course, an important caveat. While the *jaloos* re-enacts the lamentation processions of the eighth century and penitence, it is not, however, the *ta'ziyeh*, the 'only indigenous drama engendered by the world of Islam',⁵³⁰ and which is the passion proper in especially the Iranian Shi'i context. Rather, the procession is a shorthand for the story, indicating it without actually performing it.⁵³¹

As we shall see in the next section, participation in the *jaloos* serves two main functions. Firstly, through the signs and flyers, it presents a valuable opportunity to educate those unfamiliar with the story of Karbala and thereby potentially better communicate the community's history and values. Secondly, in

⁵²⁹ Princes Street Easter Play, 2014, <http://www.easterplay.org/en/events/edinburgh-passion-2014/>, accessed 17 September, 2014.

⁵³⁰ Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh", 31.

⁵³¹ Much as incomplete monumental calligraphy in Islamic architecture is a synecdoche for iconic Qur'anic verses, and whose part beginnings evoke the majesty of the whole.



Fig. 28 Male Muharram processionists on their way back to the *imambargah* in Leith, Edinburgh, 2013 hold aloft a banner reading, 'Shia Muslim Communities of Scotland Ashura Procession'. A processionist at the centre of the image can be seen walking barefoot

the very act of processing as an act of Islamic worship, it also co-opts these spectators into joining believers to bear witness to its eschatological significance. Documenting the event was thus an important aspect of the procession, demonstrated by the obvious care that the traffic chaperones took not to block the view of those wielding the smartphones, cameras and camcorders mentioned earlier, even when they were being held by those of us who were not part of the procession at all.

This documentation extends the idea of bearing witness – it is not only a record of the day of the procession but also whenever it is viewed, particularly by

others online, that day as well as the original day of ‘Ashura’ is remembered and so one participates in the ritual anew. Given the number of days marking the deaths of various holy figures within the Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a tradition, the formative event of Karbala is never far from the ‘collective memory’⁵³² and ritual calendar of the community.⁵³³

In ‘doing *da‘wa*’ or ‘spreading the message’ in this Shi‘a way,⁵³⁴ the specific story manifests an eminently relatable universal archetype: the suffering of an inspired but subversive man who stands up against the status quo dies so abject a death that he becomes a tragic hero, with the promise and power of redemption that is embedded in each re-enactment, remembrance and commemoration. As Ayoub notes in his classic study of the events of Karbala, ‘the literature which this popular piety has produced is vast, highly emotional and even fantastic, especially to the modern western reader’.⁵³⁵

Reading the Signs

All the participants in the procession already knew the story of Karbala – indeed, the previous nine nights inside the *imambargah* had been spent lamenting every

⁵³² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵³³ That the processions in the years under study coincidentally took place so close to commemorations for Remembrance Sunday also highlights the need for further study to situate them in a wider context, not only as contemporary manifestations of religio-historical traditions in new public spaces, but as part of a deeper and more deliberate appreciation of common humanity and shared values in a quest to honour the dead and fallen.

⁵³⁴ A clichéd shorthand for an activity layered, as we shall see, with shifting multiple meanings. Cf. with Chapter 3.

⁵³⁵ Mahmoud M Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi‘ism* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 7.

tragic death of the family of the Prophet, recounted as it was in graphic, mournful detail in the sermons delivered by *mullahs* in English, Urdu and Persian – so while public penitence of the community is an integral part of the procession and its spiritual efficacy, all of the associated outward-facing English messaging is evidently directed externally. However, even in their didactic role, the messages are somewhat undermined by their oddness.

Take the first banner, 'To me death is nothing but happiness and living under tyrants nothing but living in a hell' (Fig. 25). To the uninitiated, even in plain English, the equation of death with happiness comes uncomfortably close to the kind of suicide-bombing language and logic that frequently assails us on media, new and old.⁵³⁶ However, the statement is actually a translation of hadith attributed to Husayn and used as the rallying catchphrase, as captured on publicity and marketing material as well as on social media, for Muharram commemorations not just in Edinburgh but in English-speaking Ithna'ashari Shi'a communities around the world.⁵³⁷ More scholarly treatment published in Qum,

⁵³⁶ This quite aside from an uncanny and altogether unfortunate similarity with Jim Jones: 'But to me, death is not – death is not a fearful thing. It's living that's cursed' (quoted in Mary McCormick Maaga, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 149).

⁵³⁷ At least in 2013 when I was doing the fieldwork, and a Google search resulted in thousands of hits for the exact phrase in a variety of locations, screenshots of which, however, I neglected to take then. Continuing technological advances and optimisations in search algorithms – see Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (London: Penguin, 2012) and most recently Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (London: The Bodley Head, 2018) – make it difficult to replicate those search results. Repeating it nonetheless in October 2018 for the partial phrase 'to me death is nothing but happiness' resulted in 'about 3,500 results (0.59 seconds)' across a variety of websites both institutional and personal, as well as a number of social media platforms, including Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest, Twitter and Tumblr,

Iran translates the hadith as 'I consider death as happiness and life with the wrong-doers as boredom'.⁵³⁸ This latter translation, in turn, is invoked in equally nuanced explications elsewhere.⁵³⁹ But by and large, there seems to be a consensus on the first form for the hadith's English standardisation. If the Qum publication, by virtue of its place, is considered an 'Official Closed Corpus',⁵⁴⁰ then it points to a certain, curious conservatism. Given that the context of the hadith is expressly tied to the journey to Karbala, the downplaying of 'tyrants' as 'wrong-doers' and 'pain' or 'hell' or 'suffering' as 'boredom' might be explained as an acknowledgement of the triumph of 'Sunni normativities' over 'Shi'i sensibilities'.⁵⁴¹ For popular religious discourse, therefore, the first translation makes for a punchy insider slogan, however obscure, and even potentially misleading its implications, for outsiders. As such, what might appear to outsiders as a nihilistic community

evidence of its enduring appeal. See, for example, https://twitter.com/Tahahaider_/status/1039808971232763904, 12 September 2018, for Twitter. On Facebook, see <https://www.facebook.com/Syedbilgrami110/posts/for-me-death-is-nothing-but-happiness-and-living-under-a-tyrant-is-nothing-but-h/1557548330971233/>, 27 September 2017.

⁵³⁸ Abu Mohammed al-Hasan b. Ali b. al-Hussein b. Shu'ba al-Harrani, "Short Maxims of Imam Al-Hussein," in *Tuhaf Ul-Uqul: The Masterpieces of the Mind* (Qum: Ansariya Publications, 2000).

⁵³⁹ See, for example, <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/235017985-please-translate-this-hadith-to-full-arabic-text/> which has an 'Advanced Member' of the forum write in: 'This is part of a larger narration, and obviously this is badly translated by whoever did it.' (Accessed 1 October 2016).

⁵⁴⁰ Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002), 228-229. For an explication of the Official Closed Corpus, see Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. Robert D. Lee (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), an earlier work where it is referred to as a 'Closed Official Corpus (C.O.C.)'.

⁵⁴¹ Nacim Pak-Shiraz, *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 128.

statement is to insiders an assertion of identity and meaning, which is rooted in a pivotal historical event.

While an increasingly secularised society may not normally associate death with happiness, the notion of 'living in a hell', however, retains its symbolic power. It is not living per se that is the problem, but the oppression of living under tyranny and injustice that is. In the context of Karbala, Husayn's death is not meaningless. For believers, as evidenced by the plethora of hadiths that arose after it, it was foretold. Framed as part of a divine plan, Husayn's role was to be martyred and this martyrdom helped spread the message.⁵⁴² In this way, the banner emphasises the importance of standing up and speaking out against tyranny and injustice, whatever the cost.⁵⁴³ It also headlines the context of the speeches we shall examine shortly.

The second banner, which the women had unfurled, namely, 'Everyday is ASHURA and every land is KARBALA' (Fig. 26), points to the kind of struggle that most Muslims will refer to as, and what in Western popular discourse is a dreaded word, namely, 'jihad'. 'Jihad' ('struggle', 'striving', 'effort', and by these extensions the paradoxically reductive 'battle' or 'war' beloved of extremist Muslims and the far right) shares the same root as the term '*ijtihād*', commonly translated in the

⁵⁴² Pinault, "Zaynab Bint 'Ali", 71-72.

⁵⁴³ As Michael Rosie noted, this is a parallel so close to the core story of Christ, that it would be familiar to western eyes. Personal correspondence, 4 February 2019.

context of the development of Islamic law as 'independent reasoning'.⁵⁴⁴ As Schubel's study also illustrates, this is a popular procession banner, and in Toronto, too, borne by women.⁵⁴⁵ And so, when 'Everyday is ASHURA...', the tenth day of Muharram, when one of the two beloved grandsons of the Prophet, whom he would indulge to clamber upon his back during prayer, is brutally murdered, it is an ever present reminder for believers to be mindful of the deliberate as well as the unthinking, the major and the minor, wrongs, injustices, infractions, and unkindnesses, they face or dispense every day. The second banner thus articulates a clear challenge and public accountability of this principle in Islam: Do the faithful bear witness to these struggles and rise to address them within themselves (the 'greater jihad' of most of Islamic history, theology and jurisprudence) as well as in others, or do they look away in weakness, fear and discomfort? Furthermore, if 'every land is Karbala', then together with the fourth banner discussed below, the community is arguably reflexive - it is asking its

⁵⁴⁴ Although it has been argued, especially in the context of Sunni Islam, that 'the doors of *ijtihād* were closed' by the 10th century (Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 70-71), that has not really been the case in practical terms. See Wael B. Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984). This is not the place to explicate historical, doctrinal and theological differences between the Shi'a and what came to be known as the Sunni. Suffice it to say that these are contested discourses (See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994); Patricia Crone, and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*, to name a few. But for the Shi'a, certainly, the doors were never closed. Whether through the imams or the *marja'-i taqlids*, this source of law has interpretive force and represents an intellectual as well as practical striving to reconcile *dīn* and *dunyā*, faith and world, the Word of God and the exigencies of life.

⁵⁴⁵ Schubel, "Karbala as Sacred Space", 200.

members and telling the wider public what it is willing to volunteer and/or sacrifice to say no to these injustices, not only in the historical heartlands of Islam, but also in the contemporary societies beyond, and which for many Muslims is now also home.

This is not to suggest that such sacrifice and volunteerism is, or should be, violent. In fact, any hint of violence is immediately rejected by the third banner, 'Fight terrorism through justice do not pass a verdict relying on probability' (Fig. 27). After the identity banner discussed below, it is probably the most comprehensible of the four English messaging banners. In asserting the importance of fighting terrorism while simultaneously cautioning the making of snap judgements, the banner also points to a larger faith community feeling under pressure and under siege, as some book and film titles have vividly depicted.⁵⁴⁶ The underlying message here is that the simple fact of being Muslim should not automatically brand oneself to others as an extremist, someone to be feared and loathed as alien and other. The phrase is also somewhat technical in its use of 'verdict' and 'probability', which are hardly slogan friendly. A verdict suggests a final, authoritative judgement, rational and arrived at by due process. Juxtaposed with 'probability', it highlights the mutual exclusivity of the two concepts and the irony of conflating religious identity with extremism under the veneer of the law. Justice, therefore, becomes an important element of this

⁵⁴⁶ See Abbas, *Muslim Britain*, and Edward Zwick, *The Siege*, 1998. In light of Donald Trump's 'Muslim' travel ban shortly after his inauguration as US president in January 2017, this film is an interesting early example of life imitating art in long-standing fictional representations of Muslims.

discourse. This is not merely a this-worldly justice, the outcome of a rule of law that is dispassionate and logical. It is justice in its teleological sense, and in its specifically Shi'a conception, inextricably intertwined with love, devotion and loyalty (*walāya*) for God, the Prophet and his family, specifically his descendants, the imams, who issue from him.⁵⁴⁷ Imbued with these ethics, this justice is a reminder of divine rights and authority due to the family of the Prophet but usurped for political expedience and accompanied by unfathomable cruelty. In this regard, and as we shall see next, this is also part of an effort to publicly differentiate Shi'a Muslims from extremist forms of Islam.⁵⁴⁸

As a statement of identity, the fourth banner, 'SHIA MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SCOTLAND Ashura Procession' (Fig. 28) is relatively straightforward. Yet it, too, reveals several points. Firstly, there is the explicit invocation of Shiism. Sunni events, at least in Edinburgh, do not identify themselves as Sunni – as a majority group, its members take the privilege of its proportion and normativity for granted. Being Sunni is being 'properly' Muslim in popular insider perception and conversely, being Muslim is being Sunni. There is rarely a need to qualify it because it is the majority view. Being a Shi'a, however, is a minority view and explicating it as such on a banner suggests an element of necessary and

⁵⁴⁷ For *walāya*, which 'may be considered the very substance of the Shi'i faith in general and Imami beliefs in particular, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 231-275.

⁵⁴⁸ For an example of efforts at such differentiation among Shi'a Muslims in Belgium, see Iman Lechkar, "Being a "True" Shi'ite: The Poetics of Emotions Among Belgian-Moroccan Shiites," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017), which focusses on crying as a 'specific Shi'a disposition...fundamental if one wants to be a "true" Shiite', 241.

deliberate distinction from the majority 'other'. In a way, the processionists are saying, 'This is what "we" do. This is also Islam. But since "you" don't know it, "we" have to modify "Muslim". "We" are a little different.'⁵⁴⁹

This fourth banner also refers to 'communities'. The 'Muslim community' is used widely by journalists, politicians and Muslims themselves, albeit from a gamut of motivations ranging from ignorance about the diversity of Muslims, to essentialist agendas or attempts to express solidarity in the face of the most recent daily crisis catalysed by extremists. This usage in the singular, however, erases important differences in terms of heritage, country of origin, languages, beliefs, practices, and, therefore, Muslim 'positions' on a variety of issues, including, for example, the practical (as opposed to the ideal) role and status of women, veiling, law, faith schools, iconography, etc. The plural on the banner, however, makes this diversity very clear, and all the more striking for the numbers involved in the procession. These numbers are small enough for the encounters to have a real impact in terms of a dialectic understanding of one's own identity vis-à-vis the other. As we have already seen, the processions included Pakistani, Iranian and East African Ithna'ashari Shi'a. The banner thus acknowledges a real, meaningful, and abiding encounter of the community with its own diversity because there are ethnic, linguistic, and national differences sheltering under the

⁵⁴⁹ The diversity illustrated in this kind of alternative and diasporic Muslim identity is important for the reasons outlined shortly. For an example of Muslim diversity, specifically as it relates to religiosity, see Gholami, *Secularism and Identity: Non-Islamiosity in the Iranian Diaspora*, who examines it in relation to the understudied area of secularism in diasporic Muslim communities.

umbrella of an ostensibly single religious identity. A further difference that cuts across all of these categories is generational, for within these groups are also those who have acquired a Scottish identity by settlement or imbibed it through birth.⁵⁵⁰ This is not to say such diversity is not evident in other religious spaces in Edinburgh such as the Central Mosque, only that the larger numbers there mean that the differences tend to get diffused. This is because broadly similar smaller groups tend to congregate into larger normative, majoritarian ones. Therefore, encounters with difference, whether doctrinal or practical, are less likely in these larger groupings to pose epistemological challenges. If anything, differences are rather more likely to be seen as quirks that have little bearing on the 'real' issues because 'we are all Muslim anyway'. As a long-standing white Scottish convert observed wryly to me about the Central Mosque, it is a great place for prayer, but not to talk about Islam in this way.

This brings us to the final point on reading signs: the banner does not reference Edinburgh alone, but the whole of Scotland. As such, the procession incorporates other cities, notably Glasgow, as discussed earlier, and potentially

⁵⁵⁰ Bonino notes that 'Scottish Muslims feel more Scottish (24 per cent) than English Muslims feel English (14 per cent)' in his *Muslims in Scotland*, 67. Importantly, however, 'Muslims in Glasgow and Dundee ... record higher feelings of belonging to Scotland and lower affiliations to their non-UK ethnic identities compared to Muslims in Edinburgh and Aberdeen' (Bonino, 68-69). This is because Arabs comprise at least 15 per cent of the local Muslim population in these two cities, and because of the turnover of people in these economic hubs. In Glasgow and Dundee, however, Pakistanis make up at least 50 per cent of the local Muslim population (Bonino, 68-69). There is no quantitative data available at present which allows for an analysis of Scottish identity and belonging vis-à-vis the intra-religious diversity of Scotland's Muslims, let alone the diversity within the specific Shi'a group under discussion.

smaller centres such as Dundee and Aberdeen too.⁵⁵¹ It does not, however, invoke the rest of the UK. Whether this is a function of Scottish nationalism and efforts by the Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a to present themselves as part of these dynamics, or just a simple assertion of Scottish affiliation and identity, the important point is that it suggests a certain autonomy in relation to larger Ithna‘ashari Shi‘a institutions and organisations that are based primarily in England.

There is, thus, a duality of messages: one that speaks to outsiders and another that speaks to insiders. There are disconnects, of course – outsiders arguably would not fully understand the messages directed at them.⁵⁵² In Toronto, too, Schubel also notes that ‘despite the attempts of the community to use the *julus* for education about ... Islam, the press seemed more interested in asking questions about their reaction to the attempted Islamic coup that had just taken place in Trinidad. They were seemingly uninterested in the religious significance of the procession’.⁵⁵³ Bøe and Flaskerud record the same kind of press indifference to the Muharram procession rituals in Norway.⁵⁵⁴ Pinault also describes a similar ‘ritual opacity’⁵⁵⁵ for observers of an Indian diasporic procession in Chicago in 1994.⁵⁵⁶ Nonetheless, this duality is not limited to the

⁵⁵¹ A number of posters at the *imambargah* advertised these cities as sites for Muharram commemorations in 2014.

⁵⁵² As in the perception noted earlier about the procession being a protest about Christmas trees.

⁵⁵³ Schubel, “Karbala as Sacred Space”, 198.

⁵⁵⁴ Bøe, and Flaskerud, “A Minority in the Making”.

⁵⁵⁵ Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

⁵⁵⁶ David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 218-219.

messages on the banners. As we shall see in the next and final section, it is also reflected in speeches made in both English and Urdu, which not only elaborate upon these messages but also further extend the community's engagement and interaction with itself and with outsiders.

Public Speeches, Private Meanings

The middle of the march from and back to the *imambargah* was marked by a stop at the square that sits at the crossroads of Great Junction Street and the Foot of Leith Walk. The processionists filed into the square, the young men spreading out in rough rows parallel to the Foot of Leith Walk, while the women stood behind them. The remaining men formed concentric half circles, clustering around the foot of the statue of Queen Victoria. Several processionists holding *'alams* stood against the curved railing that demarcates the square from the crossroads. As before, these faced outward, clearly visible to both motor and pedestrian traffic. Even though traffic was flowing again, it was clear that there was a demonstration going on. All around the square, shoppers came in and out of stores, while other members of the public sat, stood, and milled about. After a further round of ritual chest-thumping by the younger men, several other men came forward to deliver speeches in quick succession.

The English speeches

In 2013, three speeches were delivered in English. Without a microphone and against the backdrop of chattering children, the blare of heavy traffic and the

howling of a bitter wind, the speeches were made in loud, hoarse voices. Varying in accent and inflection, they reflected the blended identities of the speakers and, therefore, the community as a whole. More importantly, despite the difficulty of hearing the speeches over the elements, the speeches demonstrate how the community not only articulated these identities to itself, but also presented and represented them to an 'other'. In elaborating upon the banners' English messaging in the procession proper, they seamlessly invoked the formative history of the community, transmitted its values and traditions, and spoke to wider concerns of contemporary relevance to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The first speech was delivered by a layman. It began explicitly with the narration of the story of Husayn and the fate of his immediate family ('... he sacrificed his whole family, and in particular, at the end, even a six-month-old son, 'Ali al-Asghar'). It then rapidly coupled a historical martyrdom with modern notions of freedom and human rights:

This gathering, this processing today, we are reminding ourselves, and our host nation, that when it comes to the freedom and human rights, we the Shi'a '*ahl al-bayt* ... will always, stand shoulder to shoulder, in ensuring there is no encroachment, no adulteration, and no loss of human rights and freedom for the people, whoever they are, whatever they do.

In so doing, it also subtly made the point that despite seeming differences between religious ideas and secular ideals, they share the same values, that even though 'the events of Karbala, and the sacrifice of Imam Husayn, for this freedom, took place 1400 years ago, but we the Shi'a ... will carry on marching, and reminding everybody, of how precious this freedom is'. Importantly, it carved out

a public space for the expression of religious identity but situated it within the larger discourse of human rights and 'freedom for the people, whoever they are, whatever they do'.

Embedded in this notion of identity was also the value of service to others in the remembrance of the imam. A key example of the practical application of service was evident in the community's blood drives during this month, held under the wider auspice of the Islamic Unity Society, which organises the Imam Hussain Blood Donation Campaign, and advertised on posters inside the *imambargah*.⁵⁵⁷ These drives consciously transformed an older, controversial ritual of shedding one's own blood through violent self-flagellation, practised by some Twelver Shi'a as penitence for historically failing Husayn, into a life-giving act of real impact and material consequence in the present.⁵⁵⁸ In doing so, they also

⁵⁵⁷ See Spellman-Poots, "Manifestations of Ashura", 46-48, for an account of the campaign in London, UK; and Bøe, and Flakerud, "A Minority in the Making" for Norway, which is sometimes 'documented with "selfies", thus making individual actions publicly known and part of a collective effort performed in Muharram' (195). In Greece, however, Marios Chatziprokopiou, and Panos Hatziprokopiou, "Between the Politics of Difference and the Poetics of Similarity: Performing *Ashura* in Piraeus," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017). relate the political rejection of such a campaign.

⁵⁵⁸ See Chelkowski, "Dasta", for a general overview of the degrees of this 'self-mortification' ritual. Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*, provides ethnographic accounts of this practice and its contestation in a number of towns and cities in India. Spellman-Poots, "Manifestations of Ashura", highlights the diversity of opinion on the issue among young Ithna'ashari Shi'a in London. More recently, Sufyan Abid Dogra, "Karbala in London: Battle of Expressions of Ashura Ritual Commemorations Among Twelver Shia Muslims of South Asian Background," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017), illustrates how debates about its validity in its original contexts in Iran, Iraq and India have been transplanted to Ithna'ashari Shi'a communities of South Asian backgrounds in London and root an ongoing struggle for their authority and authenticity. In Greece, Chatziprokopiou, and Hatziprokopiou, "Between the Politics of Difference", document that the practice began privately as far back as 1978. The use of blades at the climax of the procession takes place 'in the open air' just outside one of the community's premises, with official sanction since 2004 (2017: 204).

Full Text of Speech 1 by layman

...on that water of freedom, he sacrificed his whole family, and in particular, at the end, even a 6-month-old son, ‘Ali al-Asghar. This gathering, this processing today, we are reminding ourselves, and our host nation, that when it comes to the freedom and human rights, we the Shi‘a ‘Ali *ahl al bayt*, the [unclear] of *ahl al-bayt*, will always, stand shoulder to shoulder, in ensuring there is no encroachment, no adulteration, and no loss of human rights and freedom for the people, whoever they are, whatever they do. The events of Karbala, and the sacrifice of Imam Husayn, for this freedom, took place 1400 years ago, but we the Shi‘a of [unclear] to the day of justice, will carry on marching, and reminding everybody, of how precious this freedom is, and how precious it was, that it required the sacrifice, and the blood of Imam Husayn and his family. We pray, for Allah, *subhāna wa ta‘āla* [lit., ‘God the (most) Glorified and Exalted; henceforth, ‘swt’], and the *wasīla* [instruments] of the *ahl al-bayt* and the *shuhadā’* [martyrs] of Karbala, that we carry on to enjoy this freedom, and may he give us, the *tawfīq* [strength and/or good fortune], to carry on, in the service and remembrance of Imam Husayn *alayhī-salām* [lit., ‘upon whom be peace’], [unclear] *Muhammad āl-e Muhammad ṣalawāt* [(Recite) the *ṣalawāt* on Muhammad and his progeny]

[All:]: *Allāhumma salli ala Muhammad wa āl-e Muhammad*. [O God, may your blessing be upon Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad].

[A proclaimer:]: *Na’ra-ye takbīr!* [Proclamation of greatness!]

[All:]: *Allāhu Akbar!* [God is Great!]

[Proclaimer:]: *Na’ra-ye risalat!* [Proclamation of the prophethood!]

[All:]: *Yā Rasūl Allāh!* [O Messenger/Prophet of Allah!]

[Proclaimer:]: *Na’ra-ye Haydarī!* [Proclamation of the Lion (an epithet of the Imam ‘Ali)]

[All:]: *Yā ‘Alī!* [O ‘Ali!]

[Proclaimer:]: *Haydarī!*

[All:]: *Yā ‘Alī!*

[Proclaimer:]: *Bolandtar [unclear] ṣalawāt* [(Recite) louder the *ṣalawāt*!]

[All:]: *Allāhumma salli ala Muhammad wa āl-e Muhammad*.

explicitly invoked Qur’an 5:32 for sanction of the practice (*‘And whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the whole of mankind’*), reinforcing notions of Husayn’s intercessionary and salvific capacities through, as mentioned earlier, the foretold spilling of his blood at Karbala. In this vein, the speech carried on to make

abundantly clear that this precious freedom 'required the sacrifice, and the blood of Imam Husayn and his family', and that the community be given 'the *tawfiq* [strength/good fortune], to carry on, in the service and remembrance of Imam Husayn'.

Several proclamations in Urdu and Arabic followed these statements before this speech came to an end. The first of these proclamations enjoined the processionists to recite the *ṣalawāt*.⁵⁵⁹ The remainder map onto the Muslim creed or *shahāda*, the declaration of faith,⁵⁶⁰ before calling one last time for the *ṣalawāt*.

The second speech was delivered by a cleric and added detail:

1400 years ago our imam, in the desert of Karbala he remembered you. He said, 'O Shi'as, upon you is peace. O Shi'as, whenever you drink water remember my thirst, for I, was slaughtered, and wasn't given even a single drop of water. Not only was I slaughtered, horses ran over my body', and such was his state, that when Lady Zaynab came to his body, she didn't recognise him.

It also took a deeper historical turn. However, in its explication of hadith of the Shi'a imams and Qur'anic verses,⁵⁶¹ it was clearly geared towards the community and, potentially, its younger members. Coupled with an emotional appeal and graphic first-person narration, this introspection became an integral and socialising practice of the faith, transmitting the community's specific ethos and values.

⁵⁵⁹ As noted at the outset of this chapter.

⁵⁶⁰ To which the Shi'a under discussion here, as elsewhere, add the shibboleth, 'Ali, the commander of the faithful, is the friend of God' It is also no accident that the word for martyr, *shahīd*, derives from the root word *shahāda*, to bear witness.

⁵⁶¹ E.g. Qur'an 42:23 on kindness to the Prophet's family.

Yet, here too, there was an element of reaching out beyond the community, for in narrating the sorrow of Husayn's son and successor, Imam Sajjad, the cleric referenced the Qur'anic story of Joseph and Jacob. Noting how Jacob lost his sight from crying at having lost only one of his sons, Joseph,⁵⁶² the Imam, said the *mullah*, had chided a disciple for being unjust by asking why he had cried for 14 years when 'in front of me, the kin of my family was slaughtered!' Here, the speech drew parallels with the suffering of characters of an even older story, familiar to believers in the other Abrahamic traditions, thereby seamlessly melding two different pasts. As before, the speech came to an end with a processionist enjoining the crowd to recite the *ṣalawāt*.

The third speech was delivered by another layman. It began by welcoming 'you, the sons of Husayn and daughters of Zaynab!' before specifically invoking the notion of 'not [being] a minority'. But, of course, they were – a crowd of 150 does not a majority make. Twice, the speaker proclaimed that they should 'not be undeterred [sic] by the like [later, 'lack'] of our numbers', and juxtaposed this with the defiant assertion that they were not a minority. In doing so, the speaker effectively reminded the processionists that even though few of Husayn's companions remained to fight by his side,⁵⁶³ and thereby met their tragic ends,

⁵⁶² Qur'an 12:84

⁵⁶³ Seventy-two, according to Shi'a tradition.

Full Text of Speech 2 by cleric

Allah swt said in the Holy Qur'an, 'O Prophet! (peace be upon him). Tell this ummah, tell your people that I don't want any reward to you but you [unclear] the *majmu al-risalat(?)* you show kindness to my family.' Why people, 1400 years ago, today we commemorate, today, we come out here to pay the *majmu al-risalat* [unclear]. That's why you gathered here today. 1400 years ago our imam, in the desert of Karbala he remembered you. He said, 'O Shi'as, upon you is peace. O Shi'as, whenever you drink water remember my thirst, for I, was slaughtered, and wasn't given even a single drop of water. Not only was I slaughtered, horses ran over my body', and such was his state, that when Lady Zaynab came to his body, she didn't recognise him.

Imam Sajjad cried 14 years for his father. It is said once his companion Minhal came. He said, 'O Imam! It's been so long! Why don't you stop crying?' He said, 'O Minhal! You have done no justice. Jacob had lost one son, only one Yusuf, [unclear] it was spilled. Yet he cried so much, that he lost his eyesight. In front of me, the kin of my family was slaughtered! Yet you say to me why do I cry.' It, er, Minhal says to him, 'O Imam! What was the most difficult time for you? What was the most difficult time for you?' The fourth imam replies, 'It must have been a bazaar like this!' 'He said, "Ashar! Ashar! Ashar! We were all chained and taken from one street to another."'

[A proclaimer:] [unclear] *Ahl-e bayt-e tilawat* [Recitation/proclamation upon the Family of the Prophet]. *Muhammad wa āl-e Muhammad ṣalawāt:*

[People:] *Allāhumma salli ala Muhammad wa āl-e Muhammad!*

[Mullah stops. A layman takes over for the third speech.]

they ultimately possessed a moral and spiritual triumph over their executioners.

Husayn had two options:

One is to unsheath the sword, or the second is humiliation. We. will. never. be. humiliated.⁵⁶⁴ Imam unsheathes his sword. And he took everything on. Imam said, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said, 'Let them be. If, I, were to die, and be burned, and then, my ashes were to be scattered in the air, and if that, happened to me, 1000 times, then I will. not. leave you! *Yā Husayn!* [O Husayn!] *Labbayk yā Husayn!* [I am here, O Husayn!]

At this point everyone joined in to the call to Husayn, repeating it seven times,

before trailing away.

⁵⁶⁴ The periods here reflect the speaker's dramatic staccato delivery.

Full Text of Speech 3, by layman

Brothers and sisters, welcome to you, the sons of Husayn and daughters of Zaynab! Let us today not be undeterred [sic] by the like of our numbers. We, are, here, today. Marking the tragedy that befell Abu Abbas b. Muhammad? al-Husayn. We are not a minority. We are not small in number.

We are here, together. Let me, reiterate, that here, today, let us [unclear] the hero of our world. Let us together take allegiance that we will, be there, for Imam al-Husayn, any time, anywhere, every day, and every, single, month of the year.

[Interruption by a proclaimer:] *Husayniyya!* [The followers of Husayn!]

[All:] *Zinda bad!* [Long may they live!]

[Proclaimer:] *Husayniyya!* [The followers of Husayn!]

[All:] *Zinda bad!*

[Proclaimer:] *Husayniyya!*

[All:] *Zinda bad!*

[Proclaimer:] *Yazidiyya!* [The followers of Yazid!]

[All:] *Murda bad!* [Death to them!]

[Proclaimer:] *Yazidiyya!*

[All:] *Murda bad!*

[Previous speaker continues:]

Let us not be undeterred [sic] by the lack of numbers that are here, because the philosophy Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib left you, O Shi'a of Husayn. Imam 'Ali said, 'Let them be, if they fill the whole wide earth, I will not be scared, nor will I be frightened. I will take them on!' Today, Imam Husayn he says with two options. One is to unsheath the sword, or the second is humiliation. We. will. never. be. humiliated. Imam unsheathes his sword. And he took everything on. Imam said, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib said, 'Let them be. If, I, were to die, and be burned, and then, my ashes were to be scattered in the air, and if that, happened to me, 1000 times, then I will. not. leave you! *Yā Husayn!* [O Husayn!] *Labbayk yā Husayn!* [I am here, O Husayn!]

[All join in:]

Labbayk yā Husayn! Labbayk yā Husayn! Labbayk yā Husayn! Labbayk yā Husayn!

Labbayk yā Husayn! Labbayk yā Husayn! Labbayk yā Husayn!

[softer, now, perhaps just one or two people:] *Labbayk yā Husayn.*

Taken as a whole, the three speeches summarised here were characterised by the religious, social and political concerns of the historical tragedy of Karbala.

Importantly, however, they all made direct links between this history and action in the present day. This living and lived tradition is a key example of another kind of practice of faith; one where action in this world for reward in the next is not merely limited to rote ritual, which is almost invariably exemplified by the definition of Islam and the identity of Muslims being wholly tied to platitudes about the five pillars of Islam, a model beloved of textbooks and media explainer pieces on Islam. Linguistically, the speeches also employ the technique of code-switching between Arabic, English and Urdu. This helps bridge the gap not only between past and present but also between internal and external audiences. As Bøe and Flakerud observe for Muharram processions in Norway, these 'events perform a dual function as ritualised mourning and as public expressions of a Norwegian Shi'a identity, which is presented as inherently non-violent. The new Shi'a voice in the public urban space thus use well-established ritual practices as platforms for communication with fellow citizens'.⁵⁶⁵

The speeches also invoke an abiding pledge of spiritual allegiance rooted in ideas of justice, and the importance of standing up against persecution, oppression, tyranny and injustice whatever the cost. These speeches are all the more relevant for the contemporary anti-Shi'a backdrop against which they were made, and of which Shi'a Muslims in Edinburgh or elsewhere could not have been unaware – Shi'a pilgrims undertaking the hajj to Mecca from America just a month earlier in October 2013, for example, were widely reported as having

⁵⁶⁵ Bøe, and Flakerud, "A Minority in the Making", 193.

been attacked by English-speaking extremists and told, 'Our [holy pilgrimage] will be complete once we have killed you, ripped out your hearts and eaten them, and [then] raped your women', before shouting, 'We're going to do Karbala all over again'.⁵⁶⁶

The Urdu sermon

The English speeches were followed by a sermon in Urdu. Differing in tenor from the earlier speeches, the Urdu sermon was about twice as long as the three English speeches combined. Apart from Husayn, it invoked a number of figures, notably Zaynab, Fatima and 'Ali al-Asghar, amidst frequent interjections of '*Labbayk yā Husayn*' and '*Be shakk*' (lit. without a doubt), that is, 'indeed, verily, truly'. Yazid also featured prominently and parallels were drawn between him and the Pharaoh ('They continue to come in varying guises. Recognise them. Test your mettle and humility'). It was also much more emotional, vehement, and vivid. This was reflected back by the processionists' responses, which were not only louder and more vehement than for the English speeches, but also more frequent. This is partly explained by the fact that the story and the message have a longer history of inhabiting languages like Arabic, Persian and Urdu than it has English. As such, it is rhetorically more emotive and fiery in those languages. Its prose, cadence and style, too, are similarly affected. Since the necessity of communication in English is more recent, translating the message and adapting it to the rhetoric

⁵⁶⁶ Rahat Husain, "Muslim Americans Urge Kerry for Protection During Hajj." *The Washington Times*, 27 August 2014, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/aug/27/husain-muslim-americans-urge-kerry-protection-duri/, accessed 27 August, 2014.

of English is understandably harder. Nonetheless, both kinds of speeches were characterised by a staccato delivery, dramatic pauses, and slow, long-drawn out inflections.

There were also repeated supplications and emotional exhortations which elicited amens (*ilāhī āmīn*). Much reference was made of 'the world' (*dunyā*) and 'people' (*dunyā wālo*, lit. 'people of the world'), to justice, to tyranny and oppression, to innocence, good and evil, as well as the necessity of bearing witness to injustices, past and present. There were also assertions of the elevated role and nature of Husayn ('The protector of God's Oneness is Husayn. The second name for justice is Husayn ... The second name for prayer is Husayn. The second name of crying is Husayn. If it were said of the hajj that it is Husayn, then Husayn is the hajj and that is the truth. All that is good in the world is of Husayn').⁵⁶⁷ That these sentiments were given public expression is surprising, particularly given traditional Sunni discomfort of this idea. Nonetheless, the value of Husayn's sacrifice is made very clear – his blood and death continue to give life; and so failure is sublimated into success. As with the English speeches, the Urdu sermon came to a close with the same proclamations, followed by prayers for the prosperity of the followers of Husayn, and the ruin of the followers of Yazid, before finally ending with the *ṣalawāt*.

⁵⁶⁷ See, for example, Pak-Shiraz, *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema*, 123-125, for innovative manifestations of this status (and quasi-official resistance) in contemporary Iran, as well as Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*, 103-132, for a wider historical treatment on the divine nature of the imam.

Summary translation of Urdu sermon

Be certain that these voices reach Karbala. Be certain that these voices reach the world. There is nothing to fear in this matter. We are on the path of truth and righteousness. We want to send a message to the world that we have a connection to our faith, to Husayn ibn 'Ali. Who is Husayn? All of the good in the world is of Husayn. The protector of God's Oneness is Husayn. The second name for justice is Husayn. The second name for honour and innocence is Husayn. The second name for prayer is Husayn. The second name for crying is Husayn. If it were said of the hajj that it is Husayn, then Husayn is the hajj and that is the truth. All that is good in the world is of Husayn.

All that is evil and unjust in this world is of Yazid. That is the message Husayn conveyed to the world. Be certain that we are on the path of truth and righteousness. Whatever strength the murderers confront you with there is nothing to fear.

Be not afraid of Yazid. Be not afraid of Pharaoh. They continue to come in varying guises. Recognise them. Test your mettle and humility. We have to decide whose side we are on – that of the innocent or that of the evildoers. Today, the whole world knows this truth. We must always raise our voices against injustice and tyranny. The evildoers thought that by letting Husayn's blood, they had destroyed him. But look at the power of that blood.

Where there is injustice in the world, it is the manifestation of Yazid. Whatever the form it takes we stand against it. We are the innocent. Alas, to have been at Karbala! We too would have been martyred. Or raised voices bear witness to this injustice. We are the innocent and the companions of the Innocent. Husayn will not be destroyed. Do not forsake Husayn. Do not let Zaynab be alone. Remember not to be greedy for this world. And those who accompany the innocent, God accompanies them. God is with you. Muhammad and his progeny is with you. And we are ready to make the sacrifices they did. On the Day of Judgement, God will side with the innocents.

There is strength in truth and it is with the innocent. The companion of the innocent is God and whoever has God as a companion, for them there can be no greater strength. Let the world take heed. Whoever has tried to destroy Husayn and his companions they have forever been ruined and destroyed themselves such that no trace has been left of them.

The companions of Husayn remain present today and will remain till the Day of Judgement. No power on earth can destroy it. This is the message we wish to convey to the world. Do not rise against Husayn. Whoever does so will be ruined. If you wish to deliver a message of humanity, then take the side of Husayn, take the side of the innocent of Karbala. And this is the message we are conveying, standing in these streets and alleys.

We pray for the manifestation of the hidden imam of the time. Today is the day of 'Ashura'. Let us raise our voices and recite aloud *Labbayk yā Husayn*.

It may be argued that being extempore speeches, they should not be read too closely. However, precisely because they were public and likely unrehearsed, they are more revealing. They were pitched at varying levels, to different audiences and represented overlapping identities and ways of being. And despite their potential 'ritual opacity'⁵⁶⁸ as noted earlier, particularly for outsiders, these speeches are a form of 'public offering'.⁵⁶⁹ Of course, 'making a public offering is perhaps the most basic of all communicative acts, but once the seeds are cast, their harvest is never assured... The metaphor of dissemination points to the contingency of all words and deeds, their uncertain consequences, and their governance by probabilities rather than certainties.'⁵⁷⁰ This public-private dichotomy and layering of the procession is subversive because the duality of messages serves both insiders and outsiders. Yet, even as it steeled members of the minority community against potentially negative reactions from the majority, its relative safety also reinforced the rightness of the procession and its associated rituals. In turn, whatever the degrees of their ritual opacities, this allowed the community to express itself freely thereby increasing its confidence in its own public identity and the presentation of itself to an internal as well as external 'other'.

⁵⁶⁸ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*.

⁵⁶⁹ John Durham Peters, "Communication as Dissemination," in *Communication as... Perspectives on Theory*, ed. Gregory J. Shepherd (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 212.

⁵⁷⁰ Peters, 212.

Conclusion

Much research remains to be done on the Shi'a in Scotland and of their spaces of worship and gathering. In attempting to fill this gap by eschewing examinations of Muslim spaces that focus normatively on the mosque, this chapter has discussed an alternative example of a Muslim religious space in the form of an ethnographic study of a Muharram procession in a public street in Edinburgh, Scotland. It demonstrated how the procession provides a sense of continuity of tradition in the West, fulfilling not only a keenly-felt ritual requirement, but also the community's aspirations for public visibility and recognition. Furthermore, it traced the development and change in these aspirations in the form the procession took over the years to educate and engage with the wider community within which it lived. Although the procession is clearly an expression of Shi'a ritual practice, it was not explicitly presented in opposition to the majority Sunni interpretation of Islam. Nonetheless, it was conducted as an unapologetic practice that was also Islamic and different from conventional characterisations of what is Islam, such as the five pillars. In this way, it made visible, if not comprehensible, a ritual practice that is of fundamental importance to a significant minority of Muslims, but is almost practically invisible or unknown to the wider public. By analysing the public speeches made during the course of the procession, this chapter also demonstrated the duality of its messages and audiences. This duality speaks to insider and outsider, to the past as well as the present. In doing so, a formative historical event in the past is relived and

revivified to make sense of the anxieties and uncertainties of the present, and to produce a space where tradition and modernity coincide to create – and sustain – faith.

Conclusion

How are Islam and Muslims re/presented in Edinburgh, Scotland? This was the central research question of the thesis, which I addressed by examining the people, places and texts re/presenting Islam and Muslims, and with particular regard for the capital and festival city's context as a site of cultural production. Through four case studies of performances of Islam in the public sphere, I analysed how Islam and Muslims were generally re/presented in Scotland as well as how Muslims in Scotland specifically re/presented Islam and themselves. These performances included and re/presented both insiders and outsiders, minorities and majorities, to others and to themselves. Equally importantly, these performances also represent platforms and perspectives (ie of people, places, and texts) that have hitherto been ignored or not considered seriously either academically (because of disciplinary constraints) or by believer-practitioners (because of confessional considerations). This oversight is often the result of unconscious bias towards long-standing traditional, institutional or organisational foundations as proxies for valid expressions of what Islam is and what it means to be Muslim.

Summary of Thesis

Research on Islam and Muslims in Scotland has been under-represented in the wider field of Muslims in Britain, where the spotlight shines rather more brightly on cities such as London, Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham, and Manchester. A

number of significant studies, for example, have relegated Scotland and its Muslims to a few lines or a footnote, whether they have examined historical developments or more contemporary issues. Ali Wardak's *Social Control and Deviance: A South Asian Community in Scotland*, published a year before the events of 9/11, was a notable exception, and for over 15 years the only academic monograph on the subject. There are other works – where Bashir Maan's memoir-like survey of Asians in Scotland represents a valuable insider perspective,⁵⁷¹ the pioneering academic efforts sustained by Peter Hopkins have laid the foundation for a new generation of scholarship exploring the everyday lives and experiences of Scottish Muslims. These are epitomised by Stefano Bonino's *Muslims in Scotland: The Making of Community in a Post 9/11 World*, and a number of other unpublished dissertations in the last 8-10 years, whose authors have also contributed to a wide-ranging recent volume edited by Hopkins and titled *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*.

These are welcome developments. Much, however, remains to be done. Despite being home to just under 13,000 Muslims from a total of around 77,000 across Scotland, Edinburgh has received relatively scant academic consideration, with Glasgow, for example, continuing to eclipse Edinburgh as a site for study. Moreover, the experiences of South Asian Muslims, specifically of Pakistani national origin still dominate, if not stand in, for what could be a richer and rather more inclusive discourse. While this segment is admittedly the most numerical

⁵⁷¹ Maan, *The New Scots*.

and visible of Scotland's diverse Muslim population, there are significant gaps to be filled in the understanding of Islam and Muslims in Scotland from other national and linguistic origins (e.g. Africa, the Near and Middle East, Central Asia); other ethnicities (including white Scottish converts); and communities of interpretation (e.g. Sunni and Shi'a).

This thesis aimed to make a modest, yet original contribution to filling in some of these gaps, framed as they are by the real need to address the diversity of Muslims in order to better understand Islam in the West. In this regard, and following Marshall Hodgson, this study took as its starting point that 'Islam' was not merely religion per se, but also encompassed society and culture.⁵⁷² It also traversed three cross-cutting fronts – geographic, denominational, and thematic – drawing upon a combination of methodological and theoretical approaches, including textual and visual analysis as well as participant-observation and ethnographic fieldwork, which took place primarily from 2011-2013. Through an analysis of content and context, the thesis's four substantive chapters explored not only how Islam and Muslims generally are re/presented in Scotland (Chapters 1 and 2), but also how Muslims in Scotland specifically re/present Islam and themselves (Chapters 3 and 4). While the former chapters demonstrated how both Muslims and non-Muslims contribute to this endeavour, the latter chapters illustrated how Muslims themselves participate in the discourse.

⁵⁷² Hodgson, *Venture*.

As a counterpoint to numerous studies examining the representation of Islam and Muslims in the media in the UK, Chapter 1 explored such representation in the context of one of the country's, if not the world's, most acclaimed literary festivals, the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Such festivals provide a happy medium bridging academic, civic, and popular discourse in society in ways that are simultaneously thoughtful and entertaining. They are also important public fora and spaces for the wider dissemination and subsequent accessibility and topical discussion of such discourse. In this way, the chapter demonstrated how the festival functioned as a public square.

Drawing upon the work of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, this chapter further examined the festival's production of an Islamicate space, explicating its spatial practice and the representation of space, two key elements of Lefebvre's triadic framework. The application of this theoretical framework highlighted the importance of encounter narratives between Islamicate and Western cultures and how commonality between them is used as a pathway for mutual understanding. Diversity, both spatial and temporal, also features, but this is seen more as a weakness, a divergence from an expected, if stereotypical norm, rather than as a strength. This divergence is made prominent primarily in terms of politics and conflict, ignoring how different histories, and notions of authority and leadership, and governance and ethics in Islam among many distinct communities of interpretation, can contribute to greater religious literacy and a more complex and fruitful understanding of Islam and Muslims. In this regard, much remains to

be done to assess and evaluate Islam and Islamicate cultures in this public square on par with long-standing discussions on the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Several of these themes, therefore, were taken up in the remaining chapters. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 for example, all dealt with the theme of encounter, not just with an 'other', but also with a different 'self'. Unlike the arguably more highbrow offerings of the EIBF discussed in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 was situated in the usually more light-hearted context of another of Edinburgh's summer festivals, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It analysed a one-woman performance about Muslim women in Saudi Arabia, challenging the notion that women in this context, known for its religious conservatism, literalism, and fundamentalism, were passive victims of patriarchy and male desire. This performance, *Head Over Heels in Saudi Arabia*, also strikingly revealed the little-known and where so, rarely acknowledged, issue of temporary marriage in Sunni Islam. In doing so, it opened up another, lighter, public space for a narrative about Islam and Muslims that was novel, and at times even subversive. It also laid bare the importance of personal context, class, education, and life experience as a valid source of authority to speak on the subject. In other words, one did not have to be a man or an Islamic scholar (and usually both) to speak publicly as a Muslim and about Islam to be taken seriously.

The role of patriarchy in demarcating an authoritative discourse on Islam and Muslims was evident in the chapters that followed. Like Chapter 2, Chapters 3

and 4 also provided an internal perspective on re/presenting Islam and Muslims. Unlike Chapter 2, however, Chapter 3 examined a more formal, institutionalised, mostly male and theological take on how to be a good Muslim through case studies of two large-scale public conferences on Islam. Austere and heavy with the weight of tradition, these were essentialist, majoritarian Sunni articulations of Islam. Here, piety and practice was simple, uncomplicated. There was no room for doubt, but certainty abounded. For all their intended scale, visibility, authority and public performance of Islam and Muslims, however, this was an external, almost alien re/presentation of Islam and Muslims. Orthodox, literal, prescriptive and evangelical, its key interlocutors came from outside Scotland, either directly from Saudi Arabia, or where they came from the West, strongly influenced by its Wahhabi/Salafi ideology. Aside from attending, Scotland's Muslims had arguably little do with this re/presentation, even as it may have functioned didactically.

For its part, Chapter 4 also illustrated how history and tradition and, specifically, martyrdom played a role in the transmission of religious values and identity, but here for Edinburgh's Ithna'ashari Shi'a. Research on Shi'a Muslims in Britain has yet to catch up with research on the majoritarian Sunni communities. Research on Muslim spaces of worship and gathering in the West other than the mosque is also scarce by comparison. Chapter 4 is thus the first major study of any Shi'a communities in Scotland. This chapter examined the evolution of an annual Muharram procession emerging out of an *imambargah* in Leith to commemorate the tragic events of Karbala, which culminated in the martyrdom of

Husayn, the third Shi'i imam. Focussing on the signage and public speeches which accompanied this ritual practice, it additionally illustrated how the Ithna'ashari Shi'a in Edinburgh engaged with and responded to stereotypes about Muslims in the West. In this way, the procession functioned both normatively and as a wider public presentation on and defence of Islam. In doing so, it not only provided a sense of continuity of tradition in the West, but also the community's aspirations for public visibility and recognition.

Main Contributions

The diversity of Islam and Muslims is an overarching theme of the thesis. Through four case studies closely examining Muslims' public performance and re/presentation of Islam, the thesis aimed to shed new light both on Muslims in Scotland, their rituals, practice and experience, as well as how Islam is re/presented in Scotland by them and others. In so doing, it also attempted to open up alternative spaces to hear and tell a fresh set of narratives about Muslims in Britain. As outlined below, the explication, application, and analysis of the diversity of these performances, spaces, experiences and narratives is a key and original contribution of this thesis to the field:

Firstly, the thesis expands and diversifies the scope of the field of Muslims in Britain by advancing the study of the Scottish context. Scotland, like Wales and Ireland, is often invisible to the wider field, focused as that is on England, and the lives and experiences of South Asian (particularly Pakistani), and Sunni Muslims.

Consequently, the different and particular history, migration, politics, nationalism, and civic sensibilities of Scotland are either ignored or assumed to be equivalent to that of England, which stands in for the whole of the UK.⁵⁷³ Muslims in Scotland, for example, are far more likely to consciously identify themselves as being Scottish Muslim than Muslims in England will identify themselves as being English Muslim. This reveals very different developments and understandings of nationalism in these two contexts, which in turn stem from very different historical labour pressures and associated migratory impetuses. In this regard, the thesis contributes to the literature and record of Islam and Muslims in Scotland not only by its focus on Edinburgh (which is often overlooked in favour of Glasgow), but also by its emphasis on culture and cultural production (which is equally glossed over and perceived as less important than representation vis-à-vis political participation, or in the media, for example).

The methodological diversity employed in the thesis is a second contribution to the field, particularly in the Scottish context. Taking an ethnographic approach, it encompassed not only participant-observation, but also incorporated more historical studies and approaches which grounded and traced the development of particular and contemporary ways of thinking and being – ranging from encounters between Islam and the West and temporary marriage, to the role of women, the compatibility of science and religion, and the

⁵⁷³ See Peter Hopkins, "Race, Nation and Politics: The Difference That Scotland Makes," in *New Geographies of Race and Racism*, ed. C Dwyer, and C Bressey (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008); and Peter Hopkins, ed. *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

commemoration of martyrdom. These methodological approaches were further buttressed by anthropologically 'thick descriptions' of observed performances and practices, intertwined with analyses of text, images and audio across the four case studies.

This resulted in a third contribution to the field, namely the novel combination and application of two distinct theoretical frameworks to examine the re/presentation of Islam and Muslims in Scotland. The first of these drew from elements of human geography, and specifically, Henri Lefebvre's theorisation of the production of space. The second drew from the field of Islamic Studies, specifically, Marshall Hodgson's argument for the analytical necessity to distinguish between the broader society and culture associated with Islam, and what is 'religious' per se. Combined with the methodological approaches outlined above, Lefebvre's triadic framework (constituting spatial practice, the representation of space, and the space of representation), Hodgson's distinct neologisms ('Islamdom' as the historical society, 'Islamicate' as its culture, and 'Islamic' limited to its properly religious, adjectival sense) and my resulting idea of an 'Islamicate space' – all these, together, provide a richer, more complex and nuanced analysis and understanding of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh, but also, it is hoped, more widely in Scotland, and beyond. It is important to note that these theoretical frameworks were not a top-down imposition of pre-conceived order that generated the data for the study. Rather, they provided fertile ground to fruitfully explore and analyse other kinds of difference in the way Islam and

Muslims are re/presented and understood, and to then situate those differences in these frameworks in dialogue with each other. As Emerson et al note,

It is usual for ethnographers to try on, modify, discard, and reconsider several possibilities before deciding which tells the best story. As [is] the case when writing fieldnotes in the first place, organizational decisions will be influenced by factors that range from how inclusive an organizational scheme is to how well it highlights particular theoretical and substantive interests and preferences.⁵⁷⁴

And so the fourth contribution of this thesis to the field is an examination of the spatial diversity of Islam and Muslims. It was a deliberate choice to break out of and beyond the stereotypical site of the mosque as the only domain relevant to Muslim life and, therefore, more worthy of study than other sites and alternative spaces to understand Islam and Muslims. As such, the thesis focused on the production of Islamicate spaces, spaces associated with the culture of Islam, and that were not necessarily religious, and which, therefore, had not previously been paid any significant academic attention in the wider field of Muslims in Britain, and certainly in the Scottish context. These Islamicate spaces were additionally in the public sphere, and did not require insider or privileged access (even if it still spoke to those concerns). Two of these Islamicate spaces were festival contexts, one highbrow in form of EIBF, the second more popular, in the form of a Festival Fringe performance. The third Islamicate space was a conference gathering in dedicated facilities, and the fourth an annual street procession. Furthermore, within these local Edinburgh geographies, however, resided links, if not portals to, and for the examination of, other spaces and geographies, both historical and

⁵⁷⁴ Emerson et al., 166.

contemporary – Afghanistan, Bosnia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other parts of Europe, the UK, and the US. Identifying, understanding and analysing these overlapping links and portals and their relationships to each other owed much, coming full circle, to the theoretical frameworks outlined in the preceding paragraph. Crucially, this understanding of Islamicate spatial diversity can provide valuable means to educate and better inform public discourse, challenge hegemonic re/presentations about Islam and Muslims both internally and externally, as well as address all-too ingrained stereotypes and misrepresentation.

Finally, the fifth contribution of this thesis is its denominational diversity. Segueing from the spatial diversity discussed above, the thesis discusses and references commonalities and differences between various communities of interpretation in Islam, both historically and in the modern period, throughout. Structurally, therefore, these differences are addressed not, as is often the case, in majority/minority, orthodox/heterodox or Sunni/Shi'a terms, but as part of a spectrum. They are, therefore, not ignored or taken for granted as representative of Islam and Muslims generally. In this regard, these denominational differences are not exceptionalised. Rather, they are seen as part and parcel of the subject under study.

In all of these ways, the thesis therefore resists the the tendency to essentialise Islam and Muslims and suggests new ways of understanding the

messy, complex, contradictory and intertwined reality of the subject. As Emerson et al note,

Rather than simply tracing out what the data tell, the fieldworker renders the data meaningful. Analysis is less a matter of something emerging from the data, of simply finding what is there; it is more fundamentally a process of creating what is there by constantly thinking about the import of previously recorded events and meanings.⁵⁷⁵

Directions for Future Research

In theorising the production of space, Lefebvre articulates how within his triadic framework, the '[k]nowledge of space wavers between description and dissection', where '[t]hings in space, or pieces of space, are described' and '[p]art-spaces are carved out for inspection from social space as a whole.'⁵⁷⁶ Throughout, therefore, the thesis has attempted to reflect this principle in the ways Islam and Muslims are re/presented in Edinburgh. Still, there is ample scope to fruitfully extend and apply this framework to future research.

The first may be to continue to expand the examination of Islam and Muslims in Edinburgh and Scotland more widely in terms of their geographic and national origins. While South Asian Muslims form the bulk of the population, many other communities of Muslims also live here from various countries in North, West, and East Africa, as well as from the Middle East and Iran. But simple geographies can often overlap with, if not mask, more complex ethnic, denominational, cultural and linguistic differences. All Arabs are not Sunni; all Iranians are not Shi'a. Equally, all Shi'a will not necessarily be Ithna'ashari, and can

⁵⁷⁵ Emerson et al., 168.

⁵⁷⁶ Lefebvre, 91.

still hail from Iran, India, Pakistan, Uganda or Syria. A number of other groups and communities in Edinburgh including Alevis, Alawis, Ismailis, and Sufis (e.g. the Naqshabandis) also occupy such interstitial spaces, as do white converts. Several Pakistanis I met were Ahmadi, who remain proscribed and persecuted in their homelands, even as they have made new homes here. Indeed, even as they represent some of the most interesting examples of public outreach and engagement in Scotland and the rest of the UK, they remain largely ignored by other Muslims and in academia. All of these groups could be case studies for further research.

A second direction may be to expand and elaborate upon the spaces initiated by this study. These could range from studying Muslim stand up at the Festival Fringe to a performance of *1001 Nights* at the Edinburgh International Festival. It could also take on *mawlid* processions commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as pop-up exhibitions about Islam at the Central Library, or indeed the Islam Festival exhibition at the Central Mosque. As discussed at the outset of the thesis, there are many spaces of Muslim gathering in Edinburgh, both formal and informal, public, and varying in how Islamic or Islamicate they are. Whether for converts new and old, or university students, and comprising lectures, talks, film screenings, workshops; and whether for Edinburgh's various festivals or independently organised to raise political awareness or funds for humanitarian causes, commemorative events, or disaster relief in various parts of the Muslim world – all these can also be examined as

cultural productions of Islamicate space, and again, in physical spaces as diverse as café basements, the Botanic Gardens, local libraries and churches, and on the street, as well as concert halls, museum spaces, university auditoria, and conference centres.

Together, such studies can provide valuable new ways of understanding and examining Islam and Muslims, particularly in Western contexts. Crucially, they can challenge dominant narratives of identity politics, such as by external non-Muslim others or even by internal, majoritarian Muslim selves. By demonstrating that Muslim identities are not essentialised but are, rather, multiple and varied and express themselves in different ways and to different degrees in different contexts, we may yet break out of the essentialist spaces and narratives that bind us. And can hope to listen to and produce new, more powerful and creative ones.

Appendix 1

List of Edinburgh Festivals

March - April	Edinburgh International Science Festival
May	Imaginate Festival
June - July	Edinburgh International Film Festival
July	Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival
August	Islam Festival Edinburgh; Festival of Spirituality and Peace
August	Edinburgh Festival Fringe
August	Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo
August	Edinburgh International Book Festival
August	Edinburgh International Festival
August - September	Edinburgh Art Festival
August/ September	Edinburgh Mela
October	International Storytelling Festival
December/ January	Edinburgh's Hogmanay



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
The Alwaleed Centre

Events relating to Islam and the World of Islam in Edinburgh's 2012 Festivals

Alwaleed Centre-sponsored events:

At the International Book Festival, Charlotte Square (www.edbookfest.co.uk)

Thursday 23rd August, 7-8.30 pm **Dr Mustafa Ceric** (Chief Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina), 'Rethinking Islam', with novelist Jamal Mahjoub and journalist/academic Dilip Hiro (Chair: Ruth Wishart)

At the Festival of Spirituality and Peace, St John's Church, Lothian Road (www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk)

Friday 24th August, 12-1 pm, 'What is Uprising in Syria?', with Sadakat Kadri, Dr Mounir Atassi and Dr Thomas Pierret

Friday 24th August, 6-7 pm Dr Mustafa Ceric, 'Bosnia Twenty Years On', with Rev Donald Reeves (Soul of Europe) and Prof Hugh Goddard

Saturday 25th August, 10-11 am 'Challenging Islamophobia: the 12 Cities Project' with Rev Donald Reeves (Soul of Europe), Dr Harry Hagopian (EU political consultant) and Shaykh Amer Jamil (Solas Foundation)

Other Festival Events:

Events at the International Book Festival, Charlotte Square (www.edbookfest.co.uk)

Sunday 12th August, 12.30 pm, Maajid Nawaz, 'One Man's Journey from Extremist to Democrat'

Wednesday 15th August, 7 pm, Raja Shehadeh, 'Palestine, Politics and Playwriting'

Thursday 16th August, 8.30 pm, Tom Holland, 'How Religion Shaped the Middle East'

Friday 17th August, 10 am, Sandy Gall and Max Benitz with James Fergusson, 'Afghanistan: Is There a Solution?'

Friday 17th August, 3 pm, Ahdaf Soueif and Elif Shafak, 'Should Literature be Political?'

Saturday 18th August, 12 pm, Ahdaf Soueif, 'The Writer and the Egyptian Revolution' (Amnesty International Event)

Saturday 18th August, 6.45 pm, Maziar Bahari and François Bizot, 'Coming Face to Face with Your Captor' (Iran and Cambodia)

Sunday 19th August, 10.15 am, Elif Shafak discusses her novel 'Honour' (set in Kurdistan, Istanbul and London)

Tuesday 21st August, 5.30 pm, Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series, 'The Arab Spring' (readings from works about the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria)

Wednesday 22nd August, 6.45 pm, Parker Bilal and Zoë Ferraris, 'Crime Novels Set in Cairo and Jeddah'

Thursday 23rd August 2 pm, Youssef Ziedan and Andrés Neuman, 'Ancient Stories with Modern Twists' (discussion of their novels 'Azazeel' and 'Traveller of the Century', respectively set in ancient Egypt and 19th century Prussia)

Thursday 23rd August, 3.30 pm, Jonathan Steele, 'One War That Might Never Be Won' (Afghanistan)

Thursday 23rd August, 4 pm, Sadakat Kadri, 'Debunking the Myths about Shari'a Law'

Thursday 23rd August, 5.30 pm, Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series, 'Women in Iran' (readings from poetry and prose written by and about women in Iran)

Friday 24th August, 11 am, Christopher de Bellaigue, 'Iran, Oil and a Very British Coup' (the 1953 Revolution)

Friday 24th August, 2 pm, Dilip Hiro and Jonathan Fenby, 'What Future for Central Asia and China?'

Friday 24th August, 3.30 pm, Ilan Pappé, 'Understanding Israel'

Friday 24th August, 5 pm, Stefan Collini, 'What is the Point of Universities?' (The University of Edinburgh Event)

Friday 24th August, 7 pm, Christopher de Bellaigue and Ilan Pappé, 'Rethinking Iran: is Iran Willing to Go to War with Israel?'

Saturday 25th August, 5.30 pm, Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Series, readings from the works of Mahmoud Darwish

Sunday 26th August, 12 pm, Barnaby Rogerson, 'Africa Revisited' (discussion of the author's 'History of North Africa')

Sunday 26th August, 8 pm, John McCarthy, 'How Can We Live Without a Place of Safety?'

Monday 27th August, 8 pm, John McCarthy, 'Captivity, Fame and Surviving Freedom' (The Frederick Hood Memorial Lecture)

Events at the Festival of Spirituality and Peace, at St John's Church, Lothian Road
(www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk):

Sunday 5th August, 7.30 pm, 'Meet Your Muslim Neighbour', an open evening at the Blackhall Mosque, 1 House O'Hill Road, Edinburgh EH4 2AJ, an opportunity to observe the late afternoon prayer and enjoy a tour of the mosque

Friday 10th August, 4-5 pm, 'The Quest for Ethical Banking', with panel including Saftar Sarwar (Islamic Finance Council)

Friday 10th August, 6-8 pm, 'The Message of Karabel: Democracy, Theocracy and Hypocrisy' (in the Persian Tent at St John's) (also on Friday 17th August, 6-8 pm)

Saturday 11th August, 6-8 pm, 'The Story of a 94 Year Old Mother (in Iran)' (in the Persian Tent at St John's) (also on Saturday 18th August, 6-8 pm)

Thursday 16th August, 8-10 pm, 'Dirty Paki Lingerie', (a one woman play by Aizzah Fatima about six American Muslim Pakistani females discussing Sex, Religion and Politics, followed by a discussion with Farkhanda Chaudhry OBE, Equalities Officer for East Renfrewshire Council, and Shabnum Mustapha, Director of Amnesty International Scotland)

Saturday 18th August, 12-1 pm, 'Afghanistan – A Women's Battle', with Dr Claire Duncanson, Horia Mosadiq and Firuz Rahimi

Sunday 19th August, 4-5 pm, Duncan Mackintosh, 'Voice of the Heart: an Introduction to the Life, Poetry and Stories of Rumi'

Saturday 25th August, 4-6 pm, 'The Breeze at Dawn – a Rumi Workshop with Duncan Mackintosh'

Music from the World of Islam in the Edinburgh International Festival (www.eif.co.uk):

Friday 17 August, 5.45 pm at Greyfriars Kirk, Greyfriars Place, the Homayun Sakhi Trio (Afghan music)

Thursday 23 August, 5.45 pm at Greyfriars Kirk, Greyfriars Place, the Alim Qasimov Ensemble (Azeri music).

Saturday 26 August, 7.30 pm at Greyfriars Kirk, Greyfriars Place, the National Youth Orchestra of Iraq

Comedy from the World of Islam at the Fringe Festival

(See www.edfringe.com for dates of performances):

Big in Dubai! (including Ali al-Sayed) (7.35 pm, GHQ, 4 Picardy Place)

A Little Perspective with Imaan Hadchiti (11.59 pm, Gilded Balloon, Teviot Row House, 13 Bristo Square)

Naz Osmanoglu: Ottoman without an Empire (8 pm, Underbelly, Bristo Square)

Shappi Khorsandi: Dirty Looks and Hopscotch (8.30 pm, Pleasance Courtyard, 60 Pleasance)

Photographic exhibition (<http://www.edfringe.com/whats-on/exhibition/nature-of-iraq>):

The Nature of Iraq, Royal Botanic Gardens, Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5LR

Sunday 4th August – Sunday 2nd September

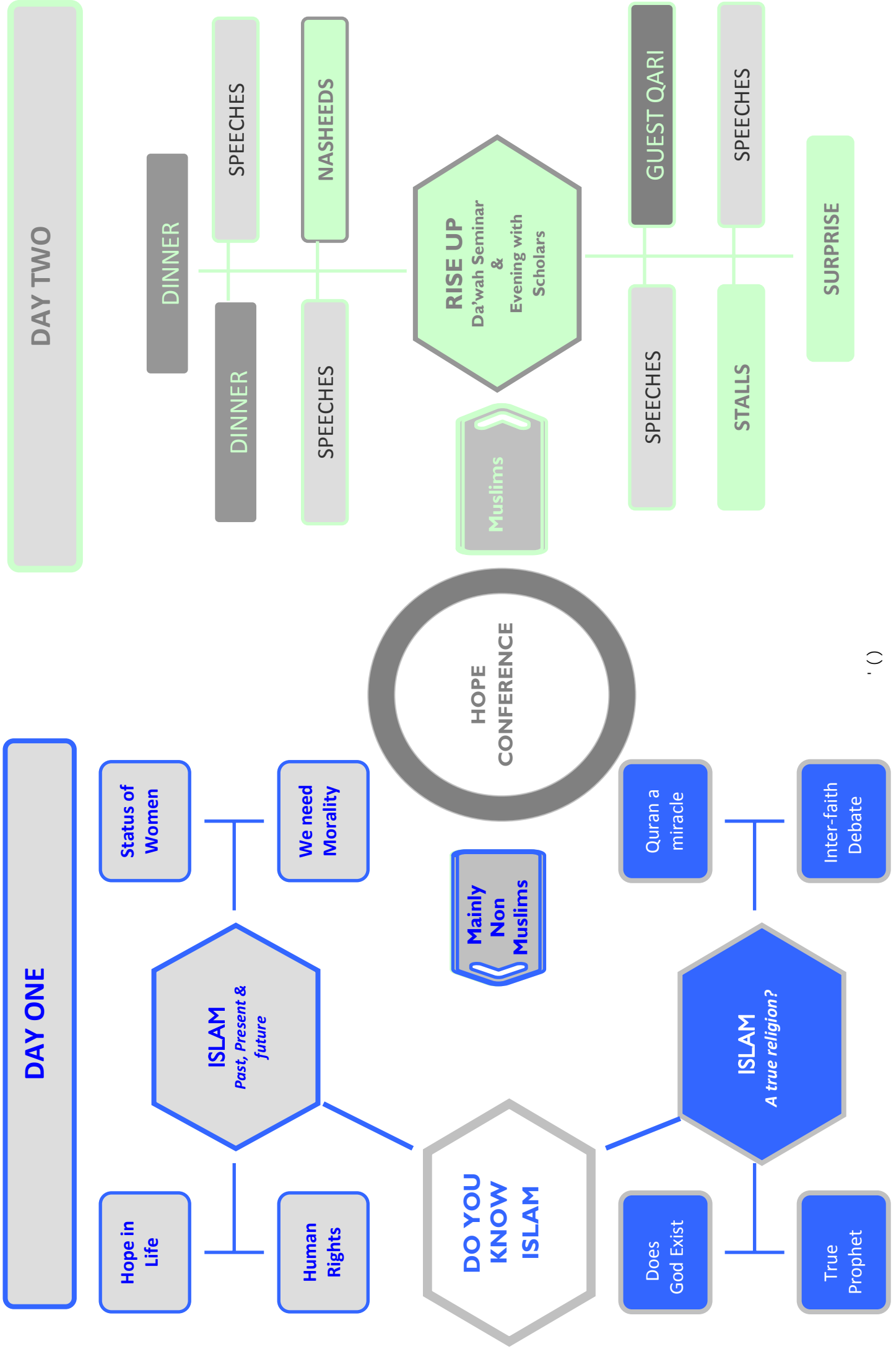
Appendix 3: Table of YouTube Events

Title/Date/Venue	Additional Information Associated with/on Video	Engagement 24 Nov 2015	Source/Links; and Notes
<p>1. Qibla Tour 29 Dec 2013 Glasgow Masjid Farooq and Edinburgh Central Mosque</p>	<p>Full details at www.theqiblatour.com, 15 UK cities, including Glasgow and Edinburgh, and Ireland, 29 Dec 2013 - The Qibla Tour, partnering with At-Tawheed, event in Glasgow and Edinburgh Mosques. Coming to Edinburgh and Glasgow on Sunday 29th December 2013 December 2013 sees The Qibla Tours first official tour with the former Imam of Masjid al Haram (The Ka 'bah) Makkah, world renowned Imam Shaykh Adel Al Kelbani and the current Imam of Masjid Qiblatain Shaykh Mahmoud Khalil al Qari. This unique tour will also focus on over 16+ events in 17 cities across 4 countries! Reaching over 30,000 Muslims through these events! Partnering with At-Tawheed Association will see the Imam's of Makkah and Madinah visit two iconic mosques in Scotland as part of their official tour of Scotland with us. Don't Miss the FREE Winter Conference with Sh. Adel Kelbani (Makkah) and Sh. Khalil Al-Qari (Madenah). Reserve your space now: Edinburgh Central Mosque: https://www.facebook.com/events/572481132830163/, edinburgh 1pm Glasgow Masjid Farooq: https://www.facebook.com/events/553807274714069/, glasgow 6.30pm</p>	<p>Published 16 Dec 2013 Qiblatour.com: 22 subscribers; 242 views; 3 thumbs-up Facebook pages Edinburgh: Guests: interested 17; went 56; invited 1.4K Glasgow: Guests: interested 31; went 72; invited 1.7K</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anzfjmDgMvk, accessed 20 August 2015. Private as at 10 March 2016: This video is private. Sorry about that. Qibla Tours' website, www.theqiblatour.com is no longer existent, and displays a generic search portal in Cyrillic script as at 10 March 2013 The Edinburgh and Glasgow events had their own event Facebook pages (see left)</p>
<p>2. Loving Allah 18 Apr 2013 Glasgow</p>	<p>No people gather in one of the houses of Allaah, reciting the Book of Allaah and studying it together, but tranquility descends upon them and mercy encompasses them, and the angels surround them, and Allaah mentions them to those who are with Him. (Sahih Muslim) Loving Allah - with Shaykh Abu Bakr Shatri "An evening of eloquent recital and beneficial knowledge on the topic of loving Allah" Thurs 18th April - Glasgow More info: https://www.facebook.com/events/325855210850585/ web: www.at-tawheed.co.uk email: info@at-tawheed.co.uk facebook: attawheed</p>	<p>Published 8 Apr 2013 22 subscribers; 222 views; 3 thumbs-up Dedicated Facebook page: Guests: interested 46; went 90; invited 1.7K Contact details provided</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8dmAB49qNE, accessed 24 November 2015</p>

<p>3. The Final Abode 16 Jan 2013</p> <p>Glasgow & Edinburgh</p>	<p>THE FINAL ABODE with Shaykh Ahmed Raashid Ar-Ruhailee (student of Shaykh Mukhtar Ash-Shinqitee)</p> <p>Shaykh Dr AbdulAziz Al-Hujailee Shaykh Muhammad Tim Humble & Shaykh Sohaib Hussainin Glasgow and Edinburgh More details on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/events/461554617241180/ info@at-tawheed.co.uk</p>	<p>Published 11 Jan 2013</p> <p>21 subscriptions; 231 views; 1 thumbs-up</p> <p>Dedicated Facebook page: Guests: Interested 49; went 75; invited 2K</p> <p>Contact details provided</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiretHGyy_I, accessed 24 November 2015.</p>
<p>4. The Shade of Allah's Throne 10 Jun 2012</p> <p>Madrasah Al-Farooq</p>	<p>Celebrating Glasgow At-Tawheed Association Launch with the Shade of Allah's Conference [Sun 10th June @ Madrasah Al-Farooq, Glasgow between 7.15pm to 9.30pm]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Day where mothers will abandon their child - They Day the Sun will be above our heads - The Day where we will be standing alone <p>Some in the blazing heat and some in the shade</p> <p>Will you be among the one whom Allah has granted his Shade?</p> <p>A detailed explanation of the characteristics of people, who will be under the shade of Allah by Shaykh Adnan Abdul Qadir with Shaykh Ahsan Hanif.</p> <p>Visit Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/events/368719649843613/</p>	<p>Published 3 Jun 2012</p> <p>21 subscriptions; 480 views; 4 thumbs-up</p> <p>Dedicated Facebook page</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUCLP7RmHLg, accessed 24 November 2015.</p> <p>This event also celebrated the launch of At-Tawheed's Glasgow branch, which was hailed as a resounding success on At-Tawheed's main Facebook page on 11 June 2012.</p>

<p>5. Aqeedah Al Ha'iyyah Course 3 Dec 2011 Edinburgh, Heriot Watt, Lecture Theatre 1</p>	<p>Scotland's first Aqeedah course [1 Day Intensive] on the famous Aqeedah Al Ha'iyyah poem of Ibn Abee Dawud - Get your tickets now</p> <p>Register online and get your tickets on the day or online now @ http://aqeedah-ata.eventbrite.co.uk/ Sat 3rd Dec 2011 from 11am to 7pm @ Heriot Watt, Lecture Theatre 1, EH14 4AS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What is the definition of Sunnah, What's Bid'ah? o What is the Muslims positions towards understanding the Names and Attributes of Allah? o Will we see Allah on the day of Judgement? o Tawheed (monotheism) and Shirk (polytheism) - what are the importance of these two in Islam? o Sahabah (Companions) whats our view towards them as Muslims and what about Ali (may Allah be pleased with him)? o How do we understand free will? o What are major sins and do they take us outside the fold of Islam? o Sirat (small bridge) to cross over the Hell Fire, which type of people can cross this? o What about the Hawd (cistern of the Prophet in Jannah), who will be able to attain this? Don't miss out!! <p>www.at-tawheed.co.uk info@at-tawheed.co.uk</p>	<p>Uploaded* 21 Nov 2011</p> <p>21 subscriptions; 283 views; 0 thumbs-up</p> <p>Contact details</p> <p>*YouTube references the videos post-2013 as being 'published' while those in 2011 are 'uploaded'</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pv0DMjYUkCw, accessed 20 August 2015. [</p> <p>Has an Eventbrite page that links separately to a Facebook event page but which has either expired or no longer publicly available.</p> <p>For Eventbrite page, see http://www.eventbrite.com/e/aqeedah-belief-course-aqeedah-al-haiyyah-the-belief-that-gives-life-031211-tickets-2506912242, accessed 24 November 2015.</p> <p>For FB page, see https://www.facebook.com/events/254166854632493/, accessed 24 November 2015, which gives the error message, 'Sorry, this content is not available right now. The link you followed may have expired, or the page may only be visible to an audience you're not in.'</p>
<p>6. Time is up 23 Jun 2011 Edinburgh, Edinburgh University, Appleton Tower</p>	<p>Join Shaykh Adnan Abdul Qaadir and Shaykh Ahsan Hanif in "Time is up!" - 23rd June 2011 Appleton Tower, Edinburgh University, EH8 9AB</p> <p>1st Session - 4pm - 6.15pm 2nd Session - 7pm - 9.30pm</p> <p>www.at-tawheed.co.uk info@at-tawheed.co.uk Tel: 07768025063</p>	<p>Uploaded 8 Jun 2011</p> <p>21 subscriptions; 486 views; 1 thumbs-up</p> <p>Contact details</p>	<p>Trailer available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRypSj_t8Ew, accessed 20 August 2015</p>

Appendix 4 Hope Conference Event Chart



VISION [ISLAM]



HOPE Conference 2013

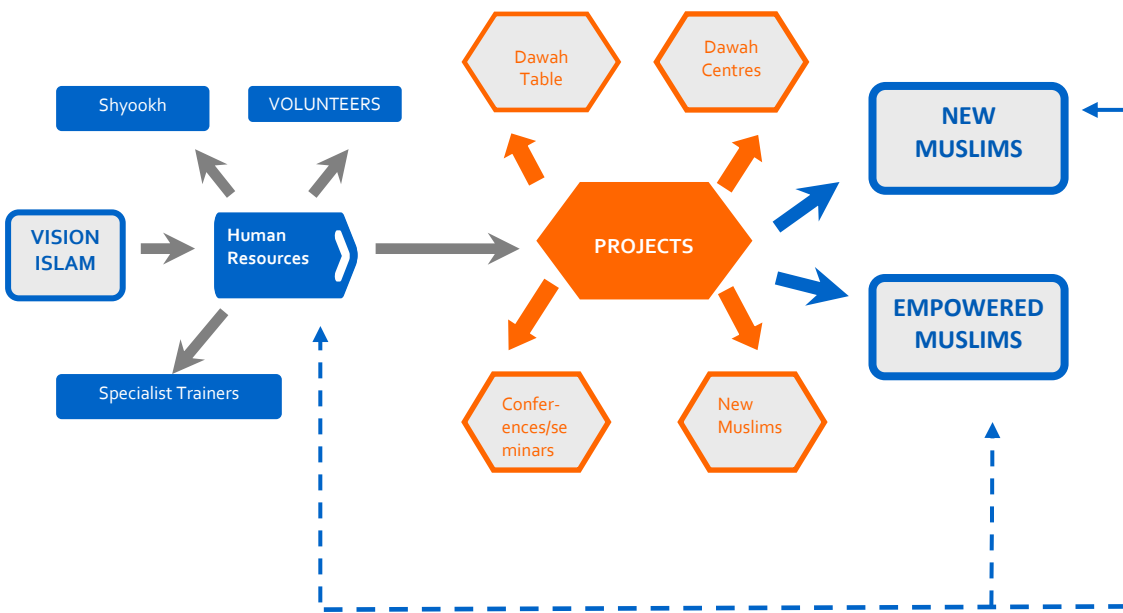
VISION ISLAM

“Vision Islam is committed to promoting true teachings of Islam by empowering Muslims”

It will undertake various initiatives individually or in partnership with other organizations to promote Islam.

Its' current projects/ initiatives include:










-  **DAWAH TABLES**
-  **DAWAH CENTRES**
-  **NEW MUSLIM SUPPORT**
-  **SEMINARS & LECTURES**
-  **EMPOWERING YOUTH**
-  **SPECIALIST TRAINING**



Progress



Since its inception on 15 Sept 2012:

-  Set-up Dawah table in Edinburgh
-  Organised a unique dawah training course with IERA
-  Distributed 100's of Quran copies
-  Distributed 100's of high impact leaflets
-  Organised a Eid Dinner for new Muslims
-  Started basic study classes for new Muslims
-  Engaged in discussion with 100's of local residents
-  Provided support for many to come into Islam
-  And many more services provided.

HOPE CONFERENCE 2013

Objective

To organise a “comprehensive opportunity” in the form of a conference that will appeal to a vast number of local residents leading to intellectual engagement and gaining true knowledge of Islam through highly educated and prolific Muslim scholars/ speakers. This will facilitate in:

- Delivering actual message of Islam for humanity
- Dispel misunderstandings of Islam and its values often presented in media
- Understanding Islamic theology and logical aspects (where applicable)
- Recognition and appreciation of the noble and sublime character of prophet Muhammed pbuh
- Broadening of vision in recognition of Islamic systems and benefits derived for humanity
- Gaining hope through Islamic teachings
- Creating a very engaging opportunity for future relations

Program

The conference aims to engage with the wider society both muslims and non-muslims.

- ◆ One full day seminar titled “DO YOU KNOW ISLAM” dedicated to teaching Islamic values to wider society, with topics such as

Who is Muhammed

Status of Women

Human Rights

Hope in life

Do we need morality

Does God Exist?

Quran a miracle?

Evolution

- There will be an opportunity to ask questions and the program will also feature a debate with Christian scholar/ Atheist/ Humanist

- ◆ 2nd day program will be focussed on empowering Muslims, specifically, under the title “RISE UP AND SAVE OUR FUTURE” which will focus on reviving the dawah activities and stressing on its importance in the role of continuation of goodness in society as well as recognition its need to save our future.

- ◆ Modern conference facilities to gain maximum appeal
- ◆ Book stalls
- ◆ Gifts and free material for guests
- ◆ Networking booths
- ◆ Promotion opportunity for business and other organisations
- ◆ TV/ Radio and other media coverage
- ◆ Stalls for various items on the 2nd day
- ◆ Children activities and crèche facilities
- ◆ Full facilities for deaf and disable guests
- ◆ Opportunity to learn from world renowned scholars
- ◆ Very engaging interfaith debate
- ◆ Extremely educational event for all
- ◆ Opportunity to make a impact on wider scale, bridging societal gaps
- ◆ Earning opportunities

HOW CAN YOU JOIN?

CONFERENCE 2013

■ PREPARATION STAGE

- ▶ Dua
- ▶ Inform your family & friends
- ▶ Identify who you would like to invite
 - Day one
 - Day two
- ▶ Make a suggestion or two
- ▶ Donate in making this a success

▶ JOIN US

ROLES / TEAMS (PREPARATION STAGE)

- ▶ VOLUNTEER LEAD
- ▶ MARKETING TEAM/ LEAD
- ▶ MEDIA CONTACT PERSON
- ▶ VENUE MANAGER
- ▶ HOSPITALITY TEAM / LEAD
- ▶ PARTNERSHIP MANAGER
- ▶ SPONSORSHIP TEAM/ LEAD
- ▶ MOSQUE CO-ORDINATOR
- ▶ COLLECTIONS & DONATIONS
- ▶ OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS CO-ORDINATOR
- ▶ SHYOOKH HOSPITALITY LEAD AND TEAM
- ▶ IT IN CHARGE
- ▶ TICKETS & BOOKING IN-CHARGE
- ▶ PROGRAM MANAGER
- ▶ SISTERS/ HOST AND CO-ORDINATORS
- ▶ FINANCE MANAGER
- ▶ ADMIN MANAGER
- ▶ CATERING AND LAYOUT INCHARGE
- ▶ **** VOLUNTEERS

VISION ISLAM

- ▶ Complete a Joining form
- ▶ Suggest a project
- ▶ Donate
 - Quran Project (suggested £10 per month)
 - Dawah material (suggested £10 per month)
 - General donation towards dawah work
- ▶ Become a volunteer, see roles:
 - Dawah table
 - New Muslims Support
 - Youth Development Team
 - Mosque co-ordinators
 - Gen Volunteers
 - Dawah Centre
 - Dawah Centre Manager (sister)
 - Invitation and Welcome team
 - Layout & Co-ordination
 - Logistic s team
 - Discussion Hosts (specialist training)
 - Follow-up team
 - Catering and setup team

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F: <https://www.facebook.com/VisionIslam>

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