# Psychodynamic Practice
## Individuals, Groups and Organisations

## Thought paralysis: tolerance, and the fear of Islam

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# Thought paralysis: tolerance, and the fear of Islam

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In much contemporary public debate, ideas of hate and terror have become synonymous with Islam. It is difficult to talk about how justified these associations might or might not be, as protagonists are readily accused either of Islamaphobia or of a naïve and dangerous tolerance. The paper will *critically* draw on elements from political theory, group analysis and psychoanalysis to reflect on some of the possible psycho-social reasons and mechanisms behind this impasse. It will be suggested that part of the reason for the thought-impasse is to be found in the way that liberalism has come to be taken up by some influential strands within the multicultural and diversity movements.

## Preamble

Although this paper focuses on our responses to fundamentalism in Islam, the arguments that are being put forward apply to all kinds of fundamentalisms – theistic, political, or psychoanalytic. I will occasionally use the term 'racist' or 'racism' loosely to mean the experience of denigrating others by virtue of the groupings they belong to, even though the grouping is not a 'racial' one.[1] The position I am speaking from is that of the mythic region called the secular West. Notions of East and West are a shorthand. Despite the fact that they contain many a contradiction, I have to rely on them none the less – as without them I would spend all my time setting up and undoing definitions. So my inevitable uses of 'us', 'we', 'them', 'the West' and so on, draw on a number of unspoken assumptions, assumptions that might well clash with you, the reader's assumptions as to the 'we' that is being spoken of. Rather than taking these to be 'mistakes', each of these should be considered as an opportunity for deconstruction.

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## Introduction

This paper has created more anxiety in me than any other. Ironically perhaps, in the writing I find myself gripped by the very thought paralysis in the title – the title I had so lightly thrown together when I was first invited to speak.

In part, this is because to engage *publicly* with the subject of Islam in this place, day and age is to encounter a number of potent taboos. Taboos are Manichean structures, binary structures with no in-betweens; things are either good or evil; in or out; ok or not, with nothing allowed between these two possibilities.

There is George Bush's Manichaeism (paraphrasing): 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'. Mr. Blair's version was: 'you either support the war on Iraq, or you are a lover and supporter of the despot Sadam'. There is the Islamist's binaried vision: 'You accept the words of Mohammed or you are an infidel deserving of death'. Next to which is the Zionist version: 'Say anything about the Israeli attitude towards the Palestinians and you are anti-Semitic'. Next to that are untold others: 'Say anything against the Palestinian Authority or Arafat and you are a rabid Zionist'; 'say anything about the USA's desire for oil as one of its reasons for launching the war on Iraq – and you are a paranoid conspiracy theorist'. Let us not forget the multiculturalist Manichaeism: 'respect all differences else you are a racist', nor its liberal counterpart: 'each must be allowed their freedom of conscience else we will be oppressing them'.

So, if I mention the fact that the war on terror has killed and maimed untold more innocents than all the terrorist attacks and suicide bombers put together, then does that make me an apologist for the terrorists? If I don't agree with some of the practices espoused by some Islamists, then does that immediately make me an Islamaphobe and a cultural imperialist?

The paralysis is further reinforced because any and all number of distinct issues (and therefore taboos) are overlaid and linked so that in addressing one issue one is inevitably drawn into and falls foul of another. For example I was taken aback (no doubt naively) when I read Moazzam Begg say in his book *Enemy combatant* (Begg, 2006, p. 44) that Palestine was 'the best known *Muslim* issue' and that his concern was for the *Muslims* in Iraq. I was taken aback because that is not how I primarily think of those embroiled in either of those contexts. In fact, in being asked by Begg to view those struggles in terms of a particular religion, I find that I take an emotional step back from them.

## *What do I step back into or onto?*

Confounded by this range of taboos, I find myself paralysed, because to step anywhere is potentially to cause offence and court disapprobation in myself

as much as in others. Can I find a place to stand, indeed *is there* a place to stand between the apologists and zealots of all descriptions, be they theistic, Marxist, capitalist, or whatever?

How am I to think about what is going on? For example on coming through immigration at Heathrow recently, I was struck by two things. First, that one of the immigration officers was a female in a headscarf and clearly a Moslem. I found the image anomalous. It was 'the enemy' at the gate – but not in the usual sense of the phrase – strangely, this time the alleged enemy, a follower of Islam, was actually guarding the gate at the British frontier! Does this mean that the xenophobes (Phillips, 2006) are right and 'they' have taken 'us' over?

Anyhow, a few moments later, another similarly-dressed woman approached a white English man ahead of us in the queue who was speaking on his mobile. She told him that for security reasons it was forbidden to use mobiles in that part of the building. He waved dismissively at her and carried on speaking until he had finished his arrangements. She stood helplessly by watching him all the while. None of us said anything.

What are we to make of these everyday events in the context of a post-9/11 world? Indeed how are we to understand the catastrophic events on that fateful day? Ironically both the neo-conservatives and fundamentalist Islamists are in agreement that what is occurring in the world today is indeed a clash of civilizations, and that it is a continuation of a Holy War – a cosmic battle for minds, souls and territories begun some 1500 years ago. To both parties the attack on the Twin Towers is but another moment in the continuation of the Crusades (Huntingdon, 2002). Meanwhile, in some quarters in psychoanalytic settings, 9/11 was understood as an expression of primal envy – the East's envy of the West.

Neither of these 'explanations' is convincing to me, one grounding it in irreconcilable religious and cultural differences and the other deep within the psyche in a particular model of human nature.

Let me briefly attend to an aspect of my own thought impasse. My personal beliefs are such that I would wish to speak against and counter the injustices that marginalized groups are subjected to. So while I have no sympathy with xenophobic Islamaphobes, I also find myself alienated from some of those whom I would normally find myself allied with. For example, when Ken Livingstone embraces the Egyptian theologian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi while praising him as scholar. This is the same scholarly Qaradawi that said of a Moslem who might decide to leave Islam of his own free will: 'He is no more than a traitor to his religion and his people and thus deserves killing' (Cohen, 2005). Similarly, I am somewhat bemused when Tony Blair decides to honour the so-called moderate Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain, by making him a knight of the realm. This is the same Sir Iqbal Sacranie that said of the fatwa on Salman Rashdie 'death perhaps is too easy for him ... his mind must be tormented for the

rest of his life unless he begs forgiveness from the Almighty Allah'
(Murtagh, 1989). As far as I know he has not publicly withdrawn this view.

While it might well be the case that they are just being grubby politicians
pandering to sections of the brown vote, I venture something else is also
going on. To my mind they (and many others including myself) are in the
grip of a thought paralysis, and it is to the sources of that that I will now
turn.

Some of the roots of the thought impasse are to be found in the world
view that emerged from the Enlightenment and its reaction, the Romantic
Movement. Between the two they delivered three decisive cuts to the human
condition – between the individual and the social, between the internal and
external worlds, and between heart and mind (that is, desire and
rationality).[2]

This was the philosophical ground on which liberalism took root, and
for that matter, so did psychoanalysis. The fact that each of these mistakenly
takes as a given that there *are* these divisions where there are none, give rise
to a number of critical contradictions, which in turn lead to a paralysis of
thought. It is for this reason that I will begin in a seemingly remote place –
the philosophy of liberalism.

## Tolerance

The liberal democracy we live in organizes itself according to several beliefs:
that every individual human being is worthy of respect from every other
individual; that all individuals are equal to each other in the eyes of the law;
that the state does not interfere in personal matters. This individual that
liberalism addresses is universal (every and any person). The individual is
made universal by stripping persons of all their particularities – gender,
history, ethnicity, status, and so on. The liberal creed is deliberately blind to
these differences precisely because it actively seeks to ensure that no one
individual is privileged over another because of some status differential. The
liberal creed is anti-discriminatory; its intention is to create a just society
(Appiah, 2005).

At the heart of liberal democracy is the idea of autonomy: individuals
free to choose and act; but here is the first problem: it would seem that when
individuals are left free – then they often choose to behave in ways that
others disapprove of and think immoral. This then gives rise to a need for
legislation that seeks to establish minimum norms of good behaviour
between individuals, for example, that one should not kill or steal, and
so on.

Whatever the activity, the fact that some individuals do better than other
individuals is readily accommodated and understood in liberalism; their
success is put down to a mixture of their efforts and talents, combined with
life opportunities.

Now we hit the second problem, which is that when we look at society, not only do we find that *some individuals* prosper more than others, but certain *types of individuals* prosper more than others – men more than women and so on.

How has this patterning come about? How is it that certain *kinds* of individuals are being more successful than other *kinds*? Remember, liberal ideology deliberately set about blinding itself to categorical differences between *kinds* of individuals (the groups that people belong to) as a way of not discriminating between them. The principle being, that if one cannot see it, then one cannot be influenced by it; one cannot use it or be used by it.

It is evident then that the strategy of categorical blindness has not managed to do its work to produce an equitable society. In any case, a new sort of legislation is now required to compensate for this deficit: anti-discriminatory legislation. What is significant about this new variety of legislation is that its legislation is aimed at the 'group' that the individual belongs to or is seen to belong to. However, legislation that is aimed specifically at particular categories of social groups, at types or kinds of human being, runs counter to the principles of liberalism (which only wants to think about the universal individual). So, ironically, this kind of anti-discriminatory legislation, although driven by liberal sympathies, is in fact actually *anti-liberal in its ethos*.

## Privatizations and possessions

While liberalism finds that it is reluctantly obliged to police what takes place in public spaces between individuals, it avoids commenting on what may or may not take place in the private arena – that is one's mind or one's home.

Here we find another tension. The line between what is private and what is of public concern has always been in dispute, practices of child care and sexual practices in the privacy of one's home being two primary examples. Nevertheless, the liberal intention is to remain as silent as possible on these private matters. As Hobbes (1996 [1651]) famously said: 'The liberty of the subject is [in] the silence of the laws', cited in Benhabib (2002, p. 85).

Hand in hand with the notion of the privacy of individuals, goes the other critical ingredient of liberalism: that of ownership. According to this principle one has *rights* over one's property. I can do what I want with my property in the privacy of my mind and my home, but here too there is dispute. Am I allowed to do anything with my computer because I own it? What of my garden or dog? What of my children? And what, if I claim that my wife too is my property? We can see then that these freedoms are never absolute, and continually contested. While legislation sets out limits and constraints as to what I may do with my property, internalized taboos constrain what I may freely feel, think and desire.

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There is a further problem with the idea of privacy *per se*. For example, although we can say that the transactions between family members take place in the privacy of the 'home', they nevertheless take place between people and in front of other people in that home. Therefore they are *public* to the inhabitants of that home. Thus privacy is not an absolute; territories are privatized in relation to certain excluded others. We could say that privacy is ultimately a matter of perspective. Privacy is a relational concept.

If there is a taboo at intruding into someone else's private space, then there is a double taboo regarding someone else's spiritual beliefs. This is because in commenting on the spiritual beliefs of others, we would not only be intruding into their private world, but, it would appear, intruding into an inner sanctum deep within the internal world. This taboo is enshrined in liberalism in the principle of 'freedom of conscience' in which each person is entitled to believe in whatever their conscience dictates – however disagreeable these beliefs might be to others.

There is an additional twist to this whole schema, which is that as soon as something becomes one's property, then in the same moment it also becomes private, *although it does not quite disappear from public view*. As we will see, it is important that it does not disappear from public view.

In sum, the ethos of liberal democracy is founded on four components: first, it supports the view that individuals are to be left free to follow their own personal desires; second, it blinds itself to differences of category; third, it tries to keep out of the private arena; and finally, it assumes that individuals have rights over their own property. As we have seen none of these are unproblematic in themselves.

## The entry of culture

Things get even more complicated when cultures enter the picture. They proclaim themselves to be entities in themselves, and being entities they claim possession of a space that is internal to the body of the culture. In proceeding in this way they are exploiting the liberal ethos in which internal private spaces are the property of those who own them, and in which they may do things in their own way within it. Further, it is asserted that those *outside* that space have no jurisdiction or right to comment on what goes on *inside* it – *because it is private and belongs to another*. In effect, cultural spaces are not only privatized, they are transformed into sacred spaces.

However, cultural practices are not private *per se*. Not only are they visible to members of the cultural group, but also they are very often extremely visible to those on the outside of the cultural group. This is because their purpose is to signal the difference between the 'us' and the 'them'. The Romantic injunction that individuals are duty-bound to express

their inner selves, is now applied to the entity 'culture'. It is said that cultures too are duty-bound to express who they are, because if they did not, then they would not be living an authentic life. So, the grounds for justifying cultural practices are not those of 'privacy' but 'ownership'. Thus only justification required to legitimate these practices is that this is 'our' way of doing things. Being ours, they are owned by us. Therefore, you, who are not one of us, have no *rights* to speak on the matter.

We are now in a position to approach an understanding of the rationale for the multiculturalist agenda.

## Multiculturalism

In the bad old days of European colonialism and imperialism the cultures of conquered peoples were mostly discounted as primitive and backward.[3] On that basis it was perfectly reasonable to replace 'their' culture with 'ours'. In reaction to this *imperialist* stance (driven in part by protest and struggle) there arose a more tolerant attitude – call it a *liberal* stance – which enjoins us to respect the other's culture on its own terms. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum to the liberal stance is the *fundamentalist* one which attributes to itself an absolute right and certainty. The fundamentalist has his cake and eats it too. On the one hand you are not allowed to make comment on his/her culture, and if you do it is discounted as meaningless or you are branded a heretic and blasphemer. On the other hand because the fundamentalist is so convinced that their way is the right and only way of living, they feel duty bound to tell you what is wrong with your way of living. They continually occupy the high ground.

There are clear affinities between the imperialist and the fundamentalist, as each valorizes their own way as the right way of doing things. The affinity between the liberal and fundamentalist is less obvious. They are joined in that they both support versions of a 'no comment' stance. The liberal does not allow him or herself to comment on 'their' culture, and for the same reason the fundamentalist does not allow 'them' to comment on 'our' culture. However, the proselytizing fundamentalist feels duty bound to comment on the shortcomings of your culture. This is a version of what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine.

In this way of thinking, some of the rights that accrue to individuals as entities are transposed onto cultures as entities; in particular, the rights born of privacy and ownership. The rules of engagement are encapsulated by the terms 'respect' and 'tolerance'. There are of course many ways of understanding these terms of reference. The multiculturalist enjoins us to respect the other's culture, and tolerate their differences from us. Thus, the adage: *equal but different*, but what does that mean in practice? Indeed what *can* it mean in practice?

### Culture as a practice

One of the things it is taken to mean at times is a no-contact policy. Different cultural bodies may respectfully gaze upon each other; however, they must not impinge on each other. The ethos insists that the integrity of one cultural system is not to be compromised in any way by those of another system.

Let me sum up the basis for this: the multiculturalist agenda requires us to treat cultures as though they were entities like individual people, and then to confer similar rights on them. The idea of culture that follows out of this is one of it being a bounded entity that has coherence over time. Being bounded it then automatically own/possesses an internal space and so what they do within it is a private matter for 'them'. Being an entity, it is conceived of as a living thing with rights. Finally, it is obliged to express its nature through its way of doing things.

### Three problems with this way of thinking

There are three critical problems with this perception of culture: first, it treats cultures as monoliths; second, it assumes that there is a consensus within the cultural group as to its beliefs and practices; and third, it assumes that each individual belongs to a single cultural group.

To take each in turn: when we probe a given culture, the illusion of coherence fragments and British culture disintegrates into northerner, rural, metropolitan, working class, Moslem, Catholic, and so on, and Islam fragments into Sunni, Shia, Wahhabi, Sufi, Black American, and so on. When one probes each of these names in turn, then they too fragment into further categories. It is important to note that this is not a taxonomy moving through genus, class, and so forth. So, while some of the categories might be mutually exclusive (rural and metropolitan for example), most of them overlap each other and are simultaneously present.

This insight is in fact an aspect of the second problem – the illusion of consensus and coherence. The bloodshed taking place in Iraq and the current politics of Pakistan are both testament to the view that Islam is not a coherent world view – these are bloody differences – with each party saying that it is they who have understood the real message of God.

The more general point to be made here is that cultural practices consist of rules that are the means of policing not only the territory between the 'us' and the 'them'; they are also the means of sustaining and reinforcing the structure of power-relations between different groupings *within* the culture. Amongst other things, cultural practices are rationales of domination and oppression. The status quo is then read as an expression of the divine or natural order of things – as to why the Brahmin should dominate the untouchable, why woman is the property of man, and so on.

The rationales given by group members for particular cultural practices are two-fold – we do it in this way because it is so written, it is so ordained. Second, that they are a way of expressing something that is intrinsic and so meaningful to that culture. Consequently, multiculturalism says that the more we know about the content of another's culture, their way of doing things, and understand their reason for proceeding in that way, the more respectful and tolerant we would be of their differences from us. While I think that there is something to this idea pertaining to the contents of cultures, I also think that this kind of multiculturalism misses a critical point, which is to do with function. My view follows the sociologist of knowledge Norbert Elias (1976, 1994 [1939]), to say that the primary purpose of differentials in cultural practices (say whether to eat pork or not) is not the expression of an inner meaning, but *to differentiate* an 'us' from the 'them'. Thus cultural practices are not designed to be kept private; the function of cultural practices are precisely to create boundaries by acting as *visible* markers of differentiation through rituals, dress code, and so on (Dalal, 2002).

For example, within the alleged homogeneity called English culture, there are conventions as to whether one is to pour the milk first and the tea second, or *vice versa*. The upper classes pour milk in last, as do the working classes. The middle classes stand out, that is, they differentiate themselves by pouring milk into the cup first (Fox, 2004, pp. 311–312). These practices are supported by rationales of taste and so forth. I do not say that everyone follows this prescription precisely or even cares about it, but that more often than not, one finds that one's way of doing things that feels ever so natural, is but an aspect of the conventions of the circles one is born into or grow into.

I deliberately used the plural – the circles one is born into – as a way of addressing the third difficulty with the orthodox view of culture. This is the tacit assumption that people belong to a single culture, and indeed *can* only belong to one culture at a time. This allows for a great number of false dichotomies and oppositions to be asserted, such as Western culture vs. Eastern culture, or the West vs. Islam, or a male way of doing things vs. a female way. In this way of thinking there is no room for the idea that people inhabit and are inhabited by multiple cultural discourses simultaneously, discourses that variously intersect, undercut, reinforce, and so transmute each other. In the same way that there can be such a thing as a secular Jew, so can there be a feminist Moslem or a socialist Moslem. To the orthodoxy of course – these terms are oxymorons, contradictions in terms.

We now come to the crux of the matter. Cultures consist of ways of doing things – the right way of doing things. *In other words, cultures are moral orders.* Moral orders consist of rules and prohibitions, distinctions as to what is right and wrong, good and bad, and so on. We each inevitably use the conventions and convictions of the moral order in our day-to-day life,

continually discriminating between this and that, and making our unreflected daily micro decisions on that basis. Essential to ethics and morality is the capacity for discrimination. Cultures are systems of moral *judgement* – it is the basis of their identity.

This shows us why the adage 'different but equal' is wishful thinking; it is an impossibility. As the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) has persuasively argued, *we make distinctions in order to discriminate*, in order to position the distinctions in relation to other distinctions. Preference and value judgement are ever-present in all our thought processes – however objective we may think they are. This of course is the work of ideology – to disguise rationales as facts of nature. In psychoanalytic language, this is saying nothing more revolutionary than our emotions are integral to our thought processes.

Given that we are each born into established cultural orders, we come to imbibe them through the psycho-social developmental processes. In a very real sense we become them as they make us. However, as we are born not into one but multiple cultures conflicting and overlapping, means that the self is not any more coherent than the cultures we are born into. Our psyches are divided and we are torn between competing demands and claims.

Before going any further, I need to mention something about thought processes in general: the universe we inhabit is seamless and infinite. As infinity is just too large for us to process; we can only digest it in smaller chunks – words if you like. This is not so much a 'mistake' on our part – but an inevitability born of the human condition. Our cognitive processes are predicated on the possibility of differentiation. We are obliged to divide in order to think.

However, the way we find ourselves dividing and experiencing the world is severely constrained by the cultural systems one is born into. One could say that we are moral beings by virtue of the fact that we are born into, imbibe and inhabit moral universes. *I take this to mean that my particular sense of self, of who I am, is constituted by my sense of right and wrong; it is the basis of my humanity*.

If we keep this in mind and try to follow the multiculturalist ethos precisely (that of respecting cultural differences), then we find ourselves faced with the following anomaly: that cultural system A, that is constituted through discrimination and judgement, is suddenly required to suspend these capacities when faced with cultural system B, and *non-judgementally* accept their views and practices.

As we have seen, I must divide. My humanity, my capacity to think and feel, are predicated on this possibility. The kind of human being I am is constituted by the *kinds of divisions* I am subjected to and the *kinds of divisions* I subject the world to. I would say, paraphrasing Descartes, I divide therefore I am.

So in a sense, the multiculturalist injunction 'to tolerate and not judge' is an invitation to me to give up on who I am, on my sense of right and wrong, my ethics; in brief, to give up on my humanity. If this is the case, then no wonder it leads to an impasse – to thought paralysis. Here, the idea of tolerance, in its simplest and most worrying version, is an invitation not to think; so much so that thinking itself becomes a taboo.

We can readily sympathize with the reason for the direction multiculturalism has taken given the history of imperialism and the proclivities of fundamentalism. Nevertheless, we can also see that there is something inherently contradictory in its attempt at a solution. Yet I do not want to give up on the idea of tolerance *per se*. So let me now inquire into the other half of the subtitle – the fear of Islam – as this might help us formulate a more sensible understanding of tolerance.

## The fear of Islam

Let me begin with the question, is there something about Islam really to be feared or is my fear born of a kind of racist paranoia, a fantasy? The short answer is that both are true, but in complicated ways.

The first thing to notice is that there is a problem with the question itself. As we have already seen, I cannot speak of Islam as though it were a unity. Further, it is over-simple to even talk of the fundamentalist vs. the rest, because there are a number of different claims as to who really understands the fundamentals, Sunni and Shia, for example – leading to many a bloody dispute. This is true not only of Islam, but also of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and even Buddhism – in brief, it is true of not only of all religions but also all 'systems' of belief and practice.

Let me begin with what in my opinion, there is to be feared. Recently, Iqbal Sacranie (2004), in the BBC programme *The Moral Maze* argued that Mr Blair should make illegal through an 'Incitement of Religious Hatred Bill', the voicing of any views critical of the ideas put forward in the Koran, because this would be an insult to the Prophet. According to Sharia law, death is the only fit punishment for this crime.[4] Leaving aside whether or not people should be killed for insulting the Prophet, the issue turns on what one considers to be an insult. For example, scepticism in itself is not an incitement to hate. However, the zealot would consider a sceptical attitude towards the mythology and content of the Koran as an insult to the Prophet and so illegal. Accordingly, if the Bill had indeed become law, then the zealots could claim that I had committed a crime in taking a moral stand *against* the marriage of 9-year-old girls, or *against* the stoning of adulterers, or *for* the rights of women to be seen and work outside the home if they so choose. True, here in Britain I would not be executed for expressing such views; but I might well be imprisoned, and if not that, then certainly criminalized.

What this legislation would have done is legitimate and support *a very particular reading of Islam* – a very particular fundamentalist voice – and in the process silence other dissenting democratic voices. While there are indeed some Moslems who hold these kinds of extreme beliefs, there are also untold others to whom such ideas are anathema. Remember, Salman Rushdie too was born a Moslem. His crime, his insult, was not in what he said about the Prophet, it was the fact that he, an apostate, wrote a story in which a version of the Prophet was a character (1988). It is salutary to note that if the Rushdie affair had taken place after the institution of such legislation, the state would not have protected him but incarcerated him. If you were to discount Rushdie on grounds of being secular or an apostate, then you need go no further than reading Ziauddin Sardar's powerful volume called *Desperately seeking paradise* (2005). He is a true believer in the Prophet, who nevertheless finds it able to subtitle his book thus: *Journeys of a sceptical muslim*.

If Iqbal Sacranie is the moderate voice of Islam then to my mind there is indeed something to fear. What is frightening to me is not just the world vision of the fundamentalists, but the fact that politicians of all persuasions seem so keen to help them do their repressive work. For example, Canada has been considering allowing the setting up of Sharia courts within Canada to allow the so-called Islamic community *to see to their own*. I say so-called community because it does not speak with one voice. There is ample protest and dissent from within the Moslem community, particularly women, for example Homa Arjomand (2007), who condemn, fear and resist the setting up of these sorts of courts.

We have our own examples here in Britain: the Court of Appeal ruled in March 2005 that the 16-year-old Shabina Begum was to be allowed to wear full jilbab instead of the school uniform – shalwar, khameez and headscarf. The ruling was driven by a reading of the Human Rights Convention which grants persons a right to express their religious stance in public. However, this ruling was not universally welcomed by followers of the Prophet in this country. For example Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, Chairman of the Muslim Institute, said: 'This may be a victory for human rights but it is also a victory for fundamentalism' (Rosenberg, 2005).

The point of all this is worth underlining again. It is not possible to simply respect 'their' differences from 'us', because there are many differences of opinion *within* 'them'. In respecting and validating one 'cultural' view, one is inevitably taking a moral stand against the other 'cultural' views amongst 'them'. The logic of a policy of non-interference is born of the taboo not to meddle in their private matters. However, our very act of non-interference is tacitly to take a side in the internal struggle; our silence effectively ends up supporting the more powerful grouping within the 'them'.

For example, when Ken Livingstone took it upon himself to apologize to the Islamo-facist Qaradawi on behalf of Londoners, saying: 'I want to

apologise to the sheikh for the outbreak of xenophobia and hysteria in some sections of the tabloid press which demonstrated an underlying ignorance of Islam' (Cohen, 2005). In apologizing to one faction within radical Islam, Ken Livingstone has offended a great number of other followers of Islam – followers who find the views of Qaradawi anathema. (Qaradawi's publicly stated view being that Moslems who decide to leave the faith *should* be killed.) I too might like to apologize for the outbreak of xenophobia, but not to the likes of Qaradawi.

So to now directly answer the question: is there something about Islam to be feared? My answer is, not *per se*. What is to be feared is the way Islam has been appropriated by some Believers, and what they seek to do with it. What of the repost that the Islamists are merely using passages found in the Koran, and so the problem is more fundamental than one of appropriation. One can answer this by reminding ourselves that problematic passages are to be found in many Holy books, including psychoanalytic ones. For example the Book of Leviticus (particularly Chapter 20, Verses 9 to 21) in the *Holy Bible* (1611) enjoins one *to put to death* those who have committed acts of adultery, incest, bestiality and homosexuality. The same fate is also to be meted out to those who curse their parents. While some Jews and Christians take these passages unquestioningly as *instructions* from God, happily, others do not.

### The sound of silence

I am now going to look at further reasons as to why it is that liberals and those on the broad left of the political spectrum, are generally either silent when faced with the excesses of the Shariat, or more bizarrely, *in active support* of that world view. This is curious given that their world visions are so entirely different.

One reason is that they have fallen for the Manichaean fallacy, and think that my enemy's enemy is bound to be my friend. According to this simplistic logic, Al Qaeda is on the same side as the Green Party or the Radical Left because they all variously take a stance against the usual suspects, George Bush, Imperialism, large corporations, and so on.

Then there are other reasons that have to do with fear, and not wanting to look at what is frightening, *because it is frightening*. The frightening reality is that there are an increasing number of Jihadists whose wish is to destabilize the world, Islamacize it and compel everyone to live according to the tenets of Sharia Law. This is no secret and it is no exaggeration. Having said that, I need to keep repeating the caveat, for myself as much any one else, that not every Moslem is a Jihadist. It is as well to remember that the Jihadists are not just targeting The West, *they are also attempting to radicalise the other 99% of the Islamic world*, targeting other 'Islamic' states such as Turkey, Egypt and Algeria (Burke, 2004).

My speculation is that in part it is fear that drives some of the legislatures in the West to support the radical 1% in their efforts to dominate the other 99%. It is much less frightening to disagree with Salman Rushdie than with a fanatical Islamist, because the latter has not only threatened violent retribution, he has carried it out on a number of occasions. As far as I know Rushdie did not send any death threats to Germaine Greer[5] when she declared that he was stupid to write about the Prophet and provoke the radical Islamist orthodoxy.

### Projection

It is also the case that some of the fear is a paranoid fear born of projection. My thoughts about that are as follows. Although there are several million Moslems in this country – they remain mysterious; they remain Othered. Their mysterious otherness is an empty space ready to be filled with all kinds of projections and fantasies. Through these mechanism Moslems become both, lascivious sensualists, and simultaneously, fierce puritans. As Freud has pointed out – the unconscious knows no contradiction (Freud, 1915, pp.186–187). In these kinds of emotional and thought processes parts easily come to stand for the wholes – but not in any which way. Elias has shown us that these associations are ideologically driven – the image of the outsiders is modelled on a 'minority of the worst' of them, while the image of the 'us' is modelled on a 'minority of the best' of us. Elias calls this mechanism 'an emotional generalization from the few to the whole' (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 159). According to Matte Blanco's theorizations, these sorts of emotional generalizations take place through the workings of symmetric logic in the mind (Matte Blanco, 1975).

It is through this process that the Jihadist (who are few in comparison) comes to stand for *all* followers of Islam. Any criticism and dissenting opinion regarding the world view of the Jihadist activates the liberal taboo, as apparently it is a private matter, and silence follows.

Let me underline this point – it is *because* we are unable or unwilling to discriminate between varieties of Islamic belief and practice, that we end up by homogenizing them, and *so damning them all*.

Further consequences follow out of the fact that in the Western imagination, the Moslem is located outside Europe, and is made container of all that is opposite of the sensibilities that are attributed to Europe. In other words, there are multiple unconscious denigrations and vilifications continually in play in regard to the idea of the Moslem. In the unconscious, the Moslem has become the opposite of the European 'us'.

What takes place now, in Freud's language, is a *reaction formation* (Freud, 1905). A reaction formation is a mechanism which is used in the service of obscuring something by emphasizing its opposite. Vertigo might be obscured by a love of sky diving, greed by anorexia, and so on. The

mechanism is only partly successful in that it does not resolve the issue, only represses and subjugates it. The subjugated remains somewhere in the wings, leaving us ever haunted by a discomfort that is hard to name. What must not become visible are one's real feelings about them to oneself as much as others. Not only must they not become public, visible to others, they must also become private to the conscious self. In other words the feelings of antipathy are rendered unconscious. In order to keep them there, they are buffered by their opposite – an apparent non-judgemental acceptance of 'them'. The strategy can be described as one of ensuring no one can say that 'your racism is showing'.

There is another much referred component of this mechanism – *liberal guilt*. A certain kind of guilt has arisen in some who are of a liberal persuasion, to do with the excesses of colonization, imperialism and modern consumerism. While there might be grounds for this guilt, in excessive amounts it adds to the paralysis. Now the Manichaeism is that 'we' are bad and 'they' are good. To think that some of them might be 'bad' is difficult to countenance because in doing so they think that they are allying themselves with the forces of oppression. According to this position, they are not allowed to conceive of the possibility that *some of 'them'*, might be in the wrong.

Ironically, what I think is needed here is more discrimination, not less. Quite simply: 'they' are not all the same, and nor are 'we'. I need to resist the collapse of categories. I need to be able to discriminate between the Islamo-fascist and Mr Khan, the shopkeeper down the road.

However, here is a more conscious reason – in fact it is an explicit strategy – as to why the revolutionary left is siding with the fundamentalist Islamists. Although each of them aspires to very different Utopias and world visions, and so each has a very different *end* in mind, they are none the less in deep agreement about *means*. They both agree that the current world order needs to be overturned – violently if necessary. Each is trying to use the other, as a means, for their own ends. For example, Chris Harman of the Socialist Worker's Party thinks that the revolutionary capacity of the Islamists 'could be tapped for progressive purposes' (Phillips, 2006, p. 187). He thinks that he can ride the tiger for his own purposes. This was exactly the kind of arrogant thinking that led many in the West, particularly the USA, to support first the Ayatollah Khomeni in Iran, then when that particular tiger turned, to support the dictator Saddam Hussein in his illegal war against the Iranian Ayatollahs, and then the Muhajaddin against the Russians. Each time the tiger has turned and savaged the rider. It is embarrassing to realize what a significant role our meddling has played, how complicit we have been in the creation of these monsters that terrorize us. So this is another reason that we aver our gaze – we do not want to see how we have contributed to our own misfortunes – and in order not to see, we blind ourselves.

The fact that the Left and liberals in general are struck silent, means that questions being raised primarily by those on the Right of the spectrum. They are having a field day with so much ammunition for their xenophobic agenda. For example, even while Phillips (2006) raises some very valid points, she places them in the midst of a beleagured world view in which the English are being swamped by inferior others, and in the process are losing their values, identity and culture, and so on.

## Politics: Spirituality as a red herring

The mistaken belief that it is possible to separate out the internal world from the external has led us into many a cul-de-sac. What we have seen is that the private cannot help but be public. Nevertheless we continue to be bewildered by the mythology that the external social world is distinct from the internal psychological world. The feminists have already been challenging this dichotomy with the adage – the personal is political. The Jihadists have gone one step further to say that the spiritual is political. Here, I think that they are right. The practical and the ethical cannot be differentiated. My ethics, my ideas about what constitutes a moral life, of necessity involves ideas and practices about how I am to live with others.

The fact that the liberal conscience operates as though the ethical is different from the practical, allows the Jihadist a powerful strategy. They use the language of faith and spirituality to paralyse the liberal, and then walk in and take over. Through this device, the liberal is made fodder.

We should also recognize that respect for the internal space of other states and cultures has not always been practiced by the so-called liberal democratic states. On many an occasion the 'West' has intruded into 'their' territories when it has suited some political agenda.

## Recognition

How is one to go forward? One way can be gleaned by drawing in some of the thinking around recognition. To merely *look* at the other and say 'I respect your difference to me, and I celebrate your diversity' is not recognition but a kind of fearful paralysis covered by a smile. The stance is a passive one. Meanwhile, the *activity* of recognition is fraught with danger. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) the term recognition has two main senses, the first is to re-cognize, to look over again, and so to revise and amend; the second has to do with acknowledgement, treating as valid, sanctioning, 'to admit to consideration, or to a status, *as* being something'.

It seems to me that for me to really recognize you and your way of doing things, I have to in some way be sufficiently empathetically connected to you to know why certain ways of thinking and being make emotional sense. I have to be able to feel the 'rightness'. In order to do this, I am obliged

(however briefly or partially) to take on something of the Other that has been negated.

For this to take place, not only do I have in some way to enter your world, I have to allow you into mine. On what terms will I let you into me, on what terms will you allow me into you? The act of recognition is not a benign process of passively looking and acknowledging. Rather, it is a process of engagement. The frightening thing is that one is changed by, and through, the process of engagement – one's identity shifts. It is because of this that not only is it an active process, but also it is one in which the other is violently resisted.

This is particularly the case when the prospect before me is of becoming something I not only disagree with, but abhor. There is the chance, that if I risk myself then there is the possibility that the other will also be changed. In other words there is the chance that the process will be one of mutual recognition and both will be transformed.

However, I am still left with questions that the multiculturalist and diversity agendas do not address. *There are some differences that I do not want to tolerate, respect or celebrate*. What do I do now? One possibility is to distance and reject. One is to give oneself over uncritically. Another is to engage with my critical faculties intact. It is the last of these that I would call recognition.

I cannot not discriminate. My humanity is constituted out of this possibility. To paraphrase Descartes again – I discriminate therefore I am. I can only continue and go forward into the future by discriminating, by choosing this over that. How else can I live something akin to an ethical life? Perhaps what I can also try to do is to scrutinize and question the basis on which I make my discriminations. To this The Other (more precisely, s/he-who-has-been-Othered) is essential, as I can only get a glimpse of my taken-for-granted beliefs in the light cast by The Other.

This is a transformative moment, because in that moment I can no longer recognize myself; my identity shifts and I am become something other than what I was.

## Notes

1. The interesting anomaly regarding the notion of racism *per se*, is that despite the fact that there are no objective entities called 'races', there nevertheless exists the phenomenon called racism, in which groups are denigrated by virtue of their alleged 'race'. For more on this see Dalal (2002).
2. To be sure none of these had their genesis in this epoch – their lineages can be traced back to many times and places – suffice it to say that in this epoch they became fundamental to how the world and the self came to be experienced and perceived. So even though I am able to analyse and deconstruct this apparent reality, it remains my experiential ground none the less.
3. Not only in the bad old days. Here is Melanie Phillips speaking in 2006 of the Christian missionaries, 'Christianity had brought civilization to these remote

parts, for the very good reason that it was superior to traditional practices' (Phillips, 2006, p. 215).

4. In Pakistan, for example, there are approximately 700 to 1000 executions a year for the charge of insulting the Prophet.

5. 'As I well remember, she has done this before' [Rushdie] wrote. At the height of the assault against *The Satanic Verses*, Germaine Greer stated, 'I refuse to sign petitions for this book of his, which was about his own troubles'. She went on to describe me as 'a megalomaniac, an Englishman with dark skin' (Thompson, 2006).

6. All Freud citations are from the *Standard Edition* (*SE*).

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