

Dr. A.M. A. Azeez Memorial Oration

From Islamophobia to Westophobia: The Long Road to Islamist Radicalization

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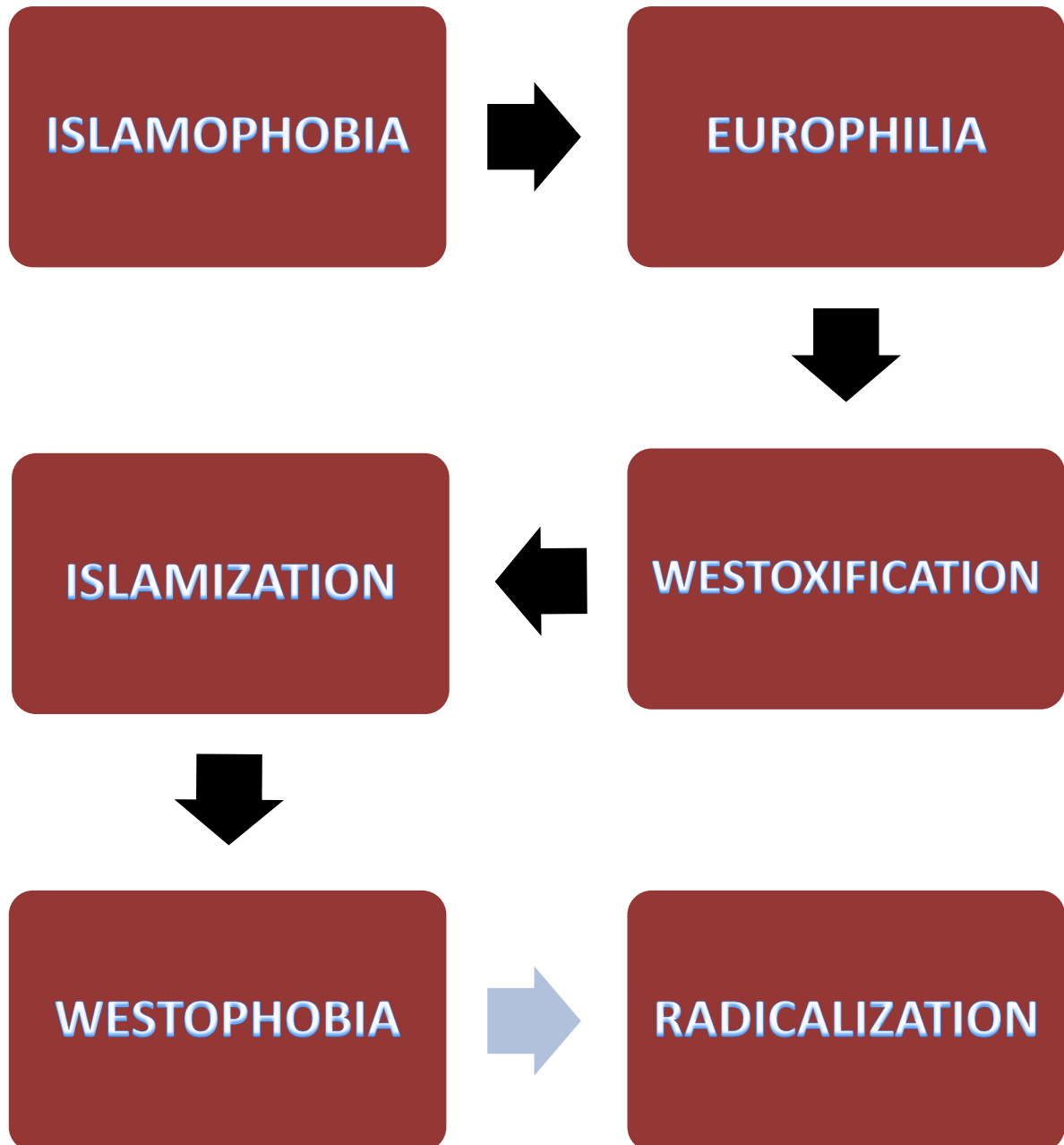
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THE LONG ROAD



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Aboobucker Mohamed Abdul Azeez, popularly known as A.M.A. Azeez or just Senator Azeez, was not only an incomparable Muslim intellectual and educationist of his time but also a staunch lover of Islam and a keen observer of developments in his own community and country in particular and in the Muslim world in general. In all his writings and speeches one could detect the underlying influence of the Islamic religious and cultural spirit that shaped his thought and outlook. He was a lover of the poetry of Iqbal, and in an intellectual partnership with my father Abdul Cader Lebbe who was also a poet and philosopher, Azeez was instrumental in introducing Iqbal to the Sri Lankan literate public. He was yearning to see the return of the glorious days of Islamic civilization when Muslims were at the cutting edge of scientific knowledge and rational thought. Had he lived today I am certain that he would have been appalled at the tragic turn of events in the Muslim world in the late 20th and 21st centuries and at the reaction towards them from outside. It is therefore fitting that this memorial lecture addresses a subject that would have been closer to Azeez's heart.

Since the explosive entry of Al-Qaeda in 2001 and the Islamic State of Iraq and Shams (ISIS) in 2013 onto the international stage as violent political enterprises, the issue of Islamist radicalism and measures to combat its spread has taken the centre stage of international deliberations focusing narrowly on security matters alone. However, the phenomenon of Muslim radicalization with its episodic manifestations of violence is not simply a 21st century occurrence, but has its genealogical antecedence in the long historical relations between Europe and Islam. What I shall endeavour to do in the next few minutes is to trace that genealogy and address some of the root causes of Islamist radicalism. It is the refusal to look at these root causes by world leaders that has made Islamist radicalism an attractive alternative to a new generation of Muslims who feel victimised by the ruling World Order.

To start with, the fear and therefore the hatred of Islam or ISLAMOPHOBIA started in medieval Christendom almost immediately after the birth of Islam. When Muslim Arabs in the 7th century began their campaign of territorial conquest and expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula by subjugating swiftly the war-wearied Byzantine and Persian empires before bringing under Muslim rule, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the rest of North Africa, 'Islamdom', to borrow one of Marshall Hodgson's coinages, posed an existential threat to the Latin Christian Establishment. The Islamophobia thus emerged in Christendom especially

within its religious elite condemned Islam as heresy, its prophet as an anti-Christ and its followers as pagans.

Christendom's response to Islamdom's challenge was understandably militaristic and not dialogic or evangelical. After several setbacks, the Battle of Toulouse in 721, and eleven years later, the one at Moussais-la-Bataille in Poitiers where the Umayyad army of Abd al-Rahman was defeated by the Carolingian General Charles Martel, were the first two of the military victories that Christendom achieved in its earliest encounter with Islam. It is from these encounters, memorable to the Christians but trivial to Muslims, that one can find the origins of Europe and European identity. Islam is thus "one of the conditions" of Europe's emergence and identity, and as the Belgian Historian Henri Pirenne pithily stated, "without Mohammed Charlemagne would have been inconceivable".

It was in the last quarter of the 11th century however, and with the commencement of the first Crusade that Islamophobia became a populist project in Europe. Pope Gregory VII's denunciation of pagans and Saracens, and later, Pope Urban II's address at Clermont set the tone for an 'anti-Islamic discourse' that was to become at first the Christendom's and later, after the French Revolution of 1789, the West's standard measure of judging Islam and Muslims without caring to find out from the Muslims themselves what they actually believed in and practised. The anti-Islamic discourse, born out of the Crusades, received further intellectual sustenance from the Orientalist project after the Enlightenment and provided the political and cultural justification for European colonization of Muslim lands in the 18th and 19th centuries. The same discourse became the basis of justification for the British massacre of Muslims in Delhi after the 1857 mutiny, and in the 21st century provided the pretext for the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. In promoting this anti-Islam discourse the role played by patristic theologians in medieval Europe is replayed in the West and particularly in the U.S. by comprador intellectuals, establishment journalists, conservative think tanks and native informers. Thus, according to Mohammed Salama, an Egyptian scholar and academic, the institutionalised Islamophobia that we witness today "is the lingering effects of a crooked history" of an anti-Islamic discourse "that not only legitimized colonial and imperial domination ..., but also managed to reproduce itself in the post-colonial and sustain its underlying xenophobic codes up to the present day."

On the other hand, Christendom's anti-Islamic discourse did not mean that the Christian and Islamic worlds lived in isolation from each other. Economic, commercial and intellectual intercourse increased over time, but it did not remove or alter the anti-Islamic image that Europe nurtured. Instead, as Andrew Wheatcroft of the University of Stirling writes, "The initial crudity of the image was made more subtle both by adding new dimensions as circumstances altered ... So, the crude parodies of the Prophet Muhammad tended to diminish while ever more baroque descriptions of Islamic virulence multiplied."

Within the world of Islam and within its political vocabulary the name West, as we understand it today, as "a socially exclusive cultural heritage as well as a broad territorial community" was absent until the nineteenth century. For that matter even to the Westerners, according to Alastair Bonnett, "It was only in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that the idea of the West acquired the role and range of meanings ... that are familiar to ... (them) today even though Anthony Pagden considers the name "West" as an eighteenth century

coinage. However, as Hamid Dabashi of Colombia University cogently argues, while “The West was the self-congratulatory pronouncement of all things good and admirable, for Muslims it became the symbolic construction of corrupted excellence, an object of discrete adoration and manifest hatred.” In whichever way one wishes to look at it, the binary, “Islam and the West”, is the product of the European colonial enterprise, and the name Islam itself as a monolithic entity devoid of its immense heterogeneity is an imperialist product.

Thus, the Islamic world in the medieval era was only familiar with Europe, and that too as part of a broader zone of infidels, and not with an entity called the West. Even then there was no Europhobia or hatred of Europe at that time, let alone Westophobia, because, as Bernard Lewis argues, “Muslim civilization, proud and confident of its superiority, could afford to despise the barbarous infidel in the cold and miserable lands of the north, and for the medieval Muslim in the Mediterranean lands, the Europeans, at least to the north and west, was a remoter and more mysterious figure than the Indian, the Chinese, or even the inhabitant of tropical Africa. Even in the Ottoman world the remoter lands of Europe were seen offering neither gain nor risk and therefore unworthy of closer attention.” While Christendom was denigrating Islam, Muslims on the other hand considered Christianity an imperfect religion and argued that Prophet Isa’s true message was corrupted by his followers, and therefore had to be renewed by a new and final message revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Thus, “Right through the medieval period Islam remained indifferent (and) uninterested in the backward and infidel peoples who lived in the lands to the north of the Mediterranean.” No wonder then, as Andrew Wheatcroft surmises, “the Christian preoccupation with Islam ... as judged by the volume of written texts ... far exceeded any Muslim interest in western Christendom”. With the rise of the Ottomans however, Islamophobia in Europe metamorphosed into Turkophobia or fear and hatred of the ‘accursed’ Turk. In spite of this however, there was never “an anti-Europe, a Counter-Christendom” in the multinational Ottoman Constantinople.

A determined indifference towards if not total ignorance of developments in the west might have been inconsequential to medieval Caliphate given Islam’s expanding political power and self-proclaimed superiority of civilization. But, that indifference became “dangerously obsolete” by the end of the medieval era. After the 15th century and with the Age of Discoveries, the Enlightenment Project and Europe’s scientific and technological breakthrough the centre of political and economic gravity had started shifting away from the Caliphate. It was a paradigm shift that witnessed a simultaneous rise of Europe and a parallel decline of the Islamic/Ottoman Empire. This shift which began the process of Ottoman capitulation to European powers from the 16th century advanced steadily so that by the end of the 19th century almost the entire “Islamdom” had fallen under Europe’s colonial domain.

European conquest and colonization of Muslim Orient was Occident’s ultimate payback for centuries of humiliation endured by Western Christendom. The entire Orientalist enterprise spearheaded by Britain and France in the 18th and 19th centuries until that leadership was taken over by the United States in the 20th, was, in the final analysis, not only an attempt to break the military might of Islamdom but also to expropriate its economic resources, to reinforce, through systemic indoctrination and propaganda, an Orientalist view of Islam and its culture as backward if not barbaric, and to prevent for ever the re-emergence of an Islamic threat to the West.

Yet colonization of Islamdom did not automatically and immediately provoke Westophobia. The impact of colonization led to two contradictory strains of development in the Muslim world. On the one hand, there was a notable admiration of Western education, and an increasing desire to adopt Western science and technology in the name of modernization and reforms. Muslim reformists and intellectuals like Rif'a Al-Tahtawi, Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan pinned their hopes for a Muslim regeneration and renaissance that will adopt the European model of scientific progress founded on the rational values of Enlightenment. Such modelling entailed a total rejection of Muslim traditionalism and a call for serious reinterpretation of the Holy texts to meet the new demand.

In a lecture delivered by Al-Afghani in the University of Istanbul, he asked: "My brothers, are we not going to take an example from the civilized nations? Let us cast a glance at the achievement of others. By effort they have achieved the final degree of knowledge and peak of elevation ... Only laziness, stupidity, and ignorance are obstacles to advance." Even for Muhammad Iqbal who abhorred blatant Western materialism and outright secularism, Europe's scientific advancement and democracy were to be the ideals of a resurgent Muslim society. "Democracy is one aspect of our own political ideal" said Iqbal wittily, "that is being worked out in the British Empire, the greatest Muhammadan Empire in the world". Similarly, the Iranian scholar Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, an ardent critique of the Orientalists, appealed to the Iranians to become European "from the top of the head to the tip of the toe". In fact, behind the Edict of Gulhane of 1839 that heralded the Ottoman *tanzimat* or reorganization program was the tacit recognition that Europe was "the exemplar of modern civilization and Ottoman Empire ... its partner." Thus, European colonialism in spite of its oppressive political institutions, exploitative economic structures and humiliating cultural influence did not create a hatred of the West but a love towards Europe or EUROPHILIA.

Inspired by the spirit of the *tanzimat* and influenced by the intellectual thoughts of Muslim leaders a program of westernization in the name of modernization and reforms set the zeitgeist in almost all post-colonial Muslim regimes. It is a strange irony in the history of post colonial Islamdom that the modernization programs undertaken by various Muslim nations provoked no Westophobia as one might have expected after the colonial experience but led to a kind of self-promoted and disfigured Islam-cleansing. Turkey under Mustapha Kemal went to the extreme of 'de-Islamizing' its polity and economy in favour of wholesale Westernization. The Pahlavi regime in Iran denounced the 'semitic-invasion' of Islam and opted to go back to its pre-Islamic Aryan past as a step towards Western style modernization. In Morocco and Jordan, a 'quasi-caliphate strategy' was adopted to cover their overt Westernization projects. In conservative Saudi Arabia also, in Sayyid's view, the title of the monarch as the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' appears to be a cover for a diluted Kemalist strategy of modernization. In short, postcolonial modernity in Islamdom was not anti-Western but pro-Western and Westernization soon turned into WESTOXIFICATION or OCCIDENTOSIS.

It was this kind of top down Westoxification promoted by Muslim despots and tyrants, and their bureaucratic and feudal supporters that provoked the opposite strain of anti-Westernization and Westophobia. It was the same Al-Afghani for example, who, while admiring the scientific achievements of the West and demanding the Muslim world to reform

and modernize, condemned at the same time the Muslim rulers' readiness to sacrifice wholesale the religious and cultural edifice of Islam at the altar of blind Westernization.

Demonization of the West however, became an inseparable theme of radical politics within Arab nationalism during the 1950s and 1960s. This was partly the legacy of growing Socialist influence on Third World politics after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Soviet Communists and their revolutionary Maoist Chinese counterparts condemned the West as exploitative, anti-working class, imperialist and reactionary. In the Middle East, the Nasserite's and Baathist's disillusionment with Western powers especially with the United States over its lack of economic support to Egypt and Syria pushed them into the arms of the Soviet camp and made them to adopt an anti-West stand in the interest of Arab Socialism, a conflation of Arab nationalism and Marxism introduced by Michel Aflaq, the co-founder of the Baath Party. Similarly, in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Lebanon various socialist groups blended their political philosophy with nationalist emotions and Arab unity, and structured their agitation on an anti-West platform. Even then this anti-West posture did not turn into rabid Westophobia as it was to emerge much later. It was simply an ideological protest against capitalism and its imperialist super structure. Even Nasserism and Baathism for that matter were West oriented secular movements which donned an Islamic garb in order to gain popular legitimacy.

Westophobia as a distinct Islamist response to the failures of all political and economic models hitherto experimented by Muslim regimes was a post-1970 phenomenon. To the Islamists communism, socialism and state capitalism are all products of the West and therefore to be shunned. However, unlike the anti-West stance of earlier decades, Westophobia in its late twentieth century avatar incorporated into its philosophy not only the de-legitimization and denial of Western models of political governance and economic development but the entire epistemology that shaped them. The intellectual roots of Westophobia are to be found in the philosophy of three prominent Islamist intellectuals, Sayyid Qutb, Abu Ala Maududi and Ayatolla Khomeini. There were others too like Muhammad Abduh and Hasan al-Banna but their writings are not as popular as the first three. Among the writings, speeches and publications of this trio Sayyid Qutb's *Ma'alim fi Tariq* (Milestones), a book based on his letters and notes written while in incarceration became undoubtedly the most cherished reading of the Islamists.

The ideas of this new generation of Muslim thinkers and activists in combination with the economic and political changes that dominated Muslim Middle East and North Africa in the late 1970s, marked by the financial clout of OAPEC (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the 'Islamized' Iranian Revolution, paved the way for an Islamic resurgence whose ultimate objective was to Islamize the ruling political and economic world orders. Intellectually, this ISLAMIZATION project which saw Islam as the only solution to all world crises translated into a series of conferences, publications and institutions in different parts of the Muslim world and nurtured the idea that Western influence in Islamdom since the fall of the Ottoman Empire had been pernicious and therefore should be cleansed of in order to create an Islamic polity, Islamic economy, Islamic society and Islamic World Order.

Maududi had already set the tone of this Islamization and its corollary Westophobia in his passionate attack on European Renaissance that sowed “the pernicious seed ... which has grown over the centuries into a massive and deadly tree. Its fruits are sweet but poisonous, its flowers are attractive but full of thorns; its twigs and branches are green and verdant but are exhaling a deadly breeze which is imperceptibly poisoning the blood of all mankind.

The people of the West who themselves planted this pernicious tree, are now disgusted with it. It has created such serious problems in all aspects of their life that every attempt to solve them raises countless new difficulties and complications. Any branch that is lopped off is replaced by several thorny branches that run out to be equally, or even more dangerous. For instance, the attack on capitalism has resulted in the birth and rise of communism. Attempts to cure democracy of its ills have led to the rise of dictatorship. Endeavors to solve social problems have led to feminism and birth control. Efforts to eradicate social evils by law have resulted in large scale law-breaking and crime. In short, an endless crop of troubles has sprung from this pernicious tree of civilization and culture, making life hell for the peoples of the West. These troubles hurt every fiber of their being and they writhe in unbearable pain. Their souls are uneasy and restless and crave for the elixir of life; but they know not where to get it. Most of them still labor under the delusion that their troubles arise from this or that branch of the deadly tree; they are, therefore, wasting their time and energies chopping off the branches that appear harmful to them. It has not yet dawned upon them that all the trouble lies at the root, that their system of civilization and culture is poisoned at the heart, and that it is vain and foolish to expect a healthy branch from the rotten root.”

If European Renaissance and Enlightenment, could be dismissed as *Jahiliyas* Qutb and Maududi perceived, then the practical and institutional manifestations that emanated from that civilization such as democracy, individual freedom, equality, rule of law and separation of the sacred from mundane will, in totality, automatically become blasphemous in the eyes of Islamists. In the words of Qutb, “(T)he entire basis of European thought became *Jahili* and completely estranged from the Islamic concept, and even became contradictory and conflicting with it.” Among his followers, Abu Bakar Bashir, the Indonesian Islamist who was found guilty of and imprisoned for the Bali terror bombing in 2002, was categorical in pronouncing that “There is no democracy in Islam, so do not try to interpret the Qu’ran and turn Islam into democracy ... It is not democracy that we want, but Allah-cracy ... Democracy is *shirk* (blasphemy) and *haram* (forbidden).” Mullah Wakil, the “confidant” of Mullah Omar of Taliban when interviewed by Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, said that “General elections are incompatible with Sharia and therefore ... (they) reject them.” Similarly, Anthony Pagden quotes from another source that in Bangladesh, Imam Kadhem al-Ebadi al-Nasseri addressed his congregation in May 2003 and said that, “The West wants to distract you with shiny slogans like freedom, democracy, culture and civil society” which, “(is) infidel corruption enter(ing) our society” Such sentiments were also expressed earlier by leaders of Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in Algeria in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The epistemological and rapturous break from an intellectual Westophobia advocated by Muslim ideologues of the Qutbian genre, who yearned for a “future order ... thoroughly Islamic ... (and) cleansed of any undue influence of the other” and to be realised “through education and intellectual activism”, to a radicalized and militant Westophobia that desired the same Qutbian goal but through unmitigated violence and mayhem as demonstrated by Al-

Qaeda, the Taliban and the ISIS is the unfortunate outcome of the globalizing nature of American imperialism with its neo-liberal economic agenda.

Islamism, both in its moderate and radical dimensions emanated from the psychological trauma experienced by the *umma* under Western colonialism and imperialism. In the present day Muslim Middle East and North Africa it was the destructive and humiliating impact of British and French colonialism succeeded by U.S. imperialism with its cornucopia of geopolitical aspirations, military adventures and economic aggrandizement that transmuted moderate Islamism into its current militant variety. In line with this transmutation the intellectual Westphobia was also radicalized into an intemperate Westphobia. If Islamism originated between the 18th and twentieth centuries as a movement of intellectual resistance to colonial and imperial adventures and intended to provide an alternative ideological edifice and authenticity to a colonist manufactured models of political governance and economic development, its ultra-radical manifestation in the 21st century signals the recognition of the failure of that ideological alternative and represents an uncompromising determination by a new generation of Muslims to redesign Islamism and to bring Islam as a 'master-signifier' back to the centre stage of politics, economics, society and culture. This 21st century Islamism, an amorphous entity splintered by objectivity and subjective elements but united in its methodology of unmitigated violence, was born out of the impotence of a Muslim leadership that abysmally failed to repair the injustices and humiliation inflicted upon the *umma* by yesterday's colonizers and today's imperialists. "The phenomenon of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda" as Dabashi says, "must be read in the same vein as the radical mutation of the United States into a predatory empire". That should apply to all other radical organizations including the ISIS. Unless one comprehends the enormity and depth of the injustices and humiliation which are at the root of present day radicalization and Westphobia any attempt to de-radicalize through security and military means will have only a negligible effect.

What follows in the remainder of this lecture is not an exhaustive account of the fundamental issues that underlie this militancy but a brief introduction that contextualises the current trend towards radicalization and violence.

Historically, even if one were to ignore the demise of Muslim Spain on the eve of the 16th century and its impact on the Islamic caliphate, the break-up of the Mughal Empire in 19th century India and the decline and death of the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century, followed by the conquest and subjugation of greater part of Islamdom by Western colonial powers were the most painful and traumatic experiences endured by Muslims in the entire history of Islam, and that historical wound is still irking the collective consciousness of the *umma*. Although European and Euro-American colonialism has ended formally coloniality in the sense of Western control and meddling in the political and economic affairs of Muslim countries persists. In fact, the Western Manufactured World Order that was put in place at the end of World War II, and which continued to treat Islam as the external Other, did not leave any room for a fractious *umma* to reunite and reconstruct its pre-colonial stature. In the eyes of the West the *umma* is part of the subjugated non-West to be tutored and disciplined so that it would embrace modernity and adopt the so called universal values backed by Western powers. Decaliphatization of Islamdom after 1924 has deprived the Muslim *umma* of political representation in the world stage. As Yasin Aktay describes Muslims have become

“organs without body or body without organs”. Radical Islamism is the latest response to that deprivation and humiliation. In this radicalism Westophobia is acute.

Soon after the September 11 infamy when the U.S. and its allies bombed, invaded, occupied and destroyed Afghanistan and Iraq, sixty U.S. intellectuals, including Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, signed and published a contestable open letter titled, “What We’re Fighting For: A Letter from America”. It obviously provoked equally contestable and even angry responses from Muslim quarters. Among them the one penned by Abul Bara from the Centre for Islamic Research Studies – an arm of Al-Qaeda – which was actually a counter to and critique of another response by 153 Saudi intellectuals to the U.S. open letter. Abul Bara’s response is fairly representative in the sense that it captures the underlying and unresolved issues that nourish acute Westophobia and radicalise sections of a new but younger generation of the *umma*. Abul Bara asks the U.S. intellectuals point blankly, “Where are their statements condemning the massacres against Muslims in Palestine, in Iraq, in the Philippines, in Indonesia, in Chechnya, in Eritrea, and in Kashmir? Where are their statements denouncing the massacre at Kograt in which 2,000 Muslims were burned alive over twenty days? You intellectuals, where are your statements in which you express your condolences for all the victimized nations, in which you ask God to bless them with patience? Where are your statements in which you look for solutions to the complex problems of the Muslim people? Where are your statements in which you describe the actual terrorism of these perpetrators and those who cooperate with them? Where are your statements concerning Muslim prisoners of war, who are imprisoned in the crusaders’ custody? Or is it that Islamic subjugation to the West is more important than all the above?” These questions, although not exhaustive in their coverage of Muslim grievances against the West, yet find common ground with other voices of protest from the Muslim side.

Numerous statements of Osama bin Laden for example, harp on these questions *ad nauseam*. In his “Letter to the American People” he answers the question “Why are we fighting and opposing you?”, and in that answer he reiterates, “You attacked us in Palestine.” “You attacked us in Somalia; you supported Russian atrocities against us in Chechnya, the Indian oppression against us in Kashmir, and the Jewish aggression against us in Lebanon.” “You steal our wealth and oil at paltry prices because of your international influence and military threats.” “Your forces occupy our countries; you spread your military bases through them.” “You have starved the Muslims in Iraq, where children die everyday.” “You have supported the Jews in their idea that Jerusalem is their eternal capital, and agreed to move your embassy there.” “These tragedies and calamities are only a few examples of your oppression and aggression.”

These specific issues raised not only by Islamists like Abul Bara, Bin Laden and their supporters but also by Muslim intellectuals, economists, political scientists, writers and academics such as Tariq Ramadan, Shahid Alam, Ziauddin Sardar, Mahmood Mamdani and a host of others, are totally ignored and dismissed as irrelevant to the unilaterally declared and endless War on Terrorism by the U.S. and its Western allies. The corporate media with its phalanx of mercenary journalists, native informers and comprador intellectuals who tout themselves as experts on an Islam which is, in Said’s words, “part fiction, part ideological label, (and) part minimal designation of a religion called Islam” are in concert with the centres of power. While Said exposed the West’s distortion of Islam, the humiliation it has

inflicted upon Muslims and its outright dismissal of their historical grievances, the Hollywood movie industry backed by corporate capital and unrestrained by the centres of political power is also in a mission to demonize Islam, dehumanise its followers and devalue its contribution to civilization.

It is worth quoting at length Said's penetrating observations on the sinister role of the media in the West.

“For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is “news” of a particular unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and ... the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is threat to Western civilization. ... (N)egative images of Islam continue to be very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not to what Islam “is” ... but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. These sectors have the power and the will to propagate *that* particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others.”

On a cultural level no other phenomenon has aggravated so acutely the growth of Westophobia than the misuse of the freedom of expression. Historically, Islam and its civilization had been the subjects of Western ridicule and negative image-making long before the idea of the ‘West’ was born. The almost entire intellectual and literary output of the Orientalist project was impregnated with that mission. Muslim response to this pernicious vocation had remained mostly passive but totally academic until the last quarter of the 20th century. That was at a time when modern means of information technology and communication were absent. The first Muslim violent response to challenge the West's anti-Islam mission ushered in with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* - a master craftsman's malicious product - in 1988. When Khomeini, without even reading the book, issued the notorious *fatwa* condemning the publication and called for Rushdie's assassination, Muslim masses in their hundreds of thousands came out to the streets from Bradford in UK to Bombay in India and Jakarta in Indonesia in support of the Imam's verdict. The production of the film *Submission* and the murder of its producer Theo van Gogh in 2004, the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten's* provocative cartoons on Prophet Muhammad in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI's controversial quote on the Prophet during his lecture at the University of Regensburg in 2006, and the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo's* repeat performance of the cartoons in 2012, are all an outrageous depiction of the bloody side of freedom of expression. Anne Norton has subtly exposed West's double standard in operationalizing the principle of freedom of expression and opines “that true freedom of speech required not only the freedom to speak, but also the freedom to keep silent...”. However, all these episodes radicalized the Islamists and ended in riots, destruction and deaths.

In this age of virtual time, virtual distance and instantaneous communication, information and images travel fast. The distortions, misrepresentations and deliberate denigration of Islam and its followers, and the double standard shown in interpreting events in the Muslim world by Western audio-visual and printed media are listened, watched and read by millions of Muslims. Just as the media megaliths like CNN, BBC and CBC for example enter the Muslim households with their distorted and sanitised versions of happenings that impact Muslims so are Al-Jazeera and the social media generated by Muslim agents themselves enter

the same households with a counter version. This encounter between the two versions is particularly noticeable in the manner of reporting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is at the heart of Muslim grievances against the West. When the U.S. started bombing Afghanistan and Baghdad in 2001 and 2003 respectively, Al-Jazeera offices were one of the targets because the U.S. did not like any one to counter its own version of events.

The new generation of newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers in the Muslim world are more discerning, technologically better skilled, and more restless than the previous generations. It is this restless post-modernist generation that heralded the Arab Spring in 2011 and it is this generation that is being radicalised and becoming militantly Westophobic. The failure of the Arab Spring to achieve its aspirations of freedom, democracy and economic justice on the one hand and the conspired success in restoring the ancient regime in Egypt aided by external forces has only accentuated radicalisation. The rise of the ISIS with its despicable acts of cruelty and mayhem represents the culmination of a radical wave that began in the late 1970s. When ISIS named its occupied territory as the Caliphate and when the Jihadists twitted “Smashing Sykes-Picot” the underlying message was made clear to its potential recruits and fellow travellers. The Caliphate is not simply a hopeless attempt to resurrect a dead institution, but on the contrary, and, as Sayyid correctly contends, is “a metaphor for the struggles between Muslim aspirations to reorder the post colonial world and the investments in the continuation of the violent hierarchy of coloniality.” Even Bin Laden when he called for the Caliphate he used it only “for motivational purposes” and not as a political aim as the American Bush administration vehemently propagated.

Until now and viewing from the Muslim side the relationship between the Muslim *umma* and the Judeo-Christian West has been marked by political mistrust, economic inequity and cultural enmity. The Muslims then and now continue to be treated as the distant ‘Other’ by the Judeo-Christian West. Just consider the concept of Judeo-Christian values. This concept came into prominence after the Second World War in order to demonstrate to the Jews a newly dawned compassion by the Christian West after centuries of humiliation and persecution culminating in the infamous Holocaust. It is a historical fact that all the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam hails from the Prophet Abraham. Why then the reluctance to talk of Abrahamic values rather than Judeo-Christian values?

The parlous economic condition of the *umma* adds another crucial dimension to the growing radicalization. Rising expectations and unemployment among Muslim youth, the dominance of a consumerist culture in the midst of widening wealth disparity, the control over economic resources and commercial ventures by foreign capital have combined to create mass poverty, hunger and increasing disenchantment with the economic status quo. Joseph Massad succinctly captures the economic predicament of the Muslim countries in the face of imperialism and globalization when he writes, “if Muslims refuse to convert willingly to liberalism or at least to forms of Islam that liberalism finds tolerable, then they must be forced to convert using military power, as their resistance threatens a core value of liberalism, namely its universality and the necessity of its universalization as globalization.” Already in 2000, Chalmers Johnson warned of “a twenty-first century crisis in America’s informal empire ... based on the projection of military power ... and on the use of American capital and markets to force global economic integration on our terms, at whatever costs to others.” A radicalised and Westophobic Islamism is one of the consequences of this cost.

Thus, radicalization among Islamists has its roots in the unresolved grievances of the *umma* against Western powers. Unless those issues are addressed with honesty and sincerity by the guardians of the World Order the permanency of that order is in jeopardy. Let me conclude this lecture by quoting Edward Said's perspicacious conclusion in his masterly publication *Covering Islam*:

"If the history of knowledge about Islam in the West has been too closely tied to conquest and domination, the time has come for these ties to be severed completely. About this one cannot be too emphatic. For otherwise we will not only face protracted tension and perhaps even war, but we will offer the Muslim world, its various societies and states, the prospect of many wars, unimaginable suffering, and disastrous upheavals, not the least of which would be the victory of an "Islam" fully ready to play the role prepared for it by reaction, orthodoxy, and desperation."

Note: This lecture is an abridged version of an article that I published in the *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, volume 3, issue 1, April 2016.

About the Speaker

Dr. A.C.L. Ameer Ali, B.A. Hons (Cey), M.Phil (Lond), Ph.D (W.Aust) is a Sri Lankan scholar domiciled in Australia. He is a senior academic lecturing in economics at Murdoch University in Perth. He was a former student of Zahira College, Colombo when A. M. A. Azeez was the Principal. Apart from his speciality in economics he has developed a keen interest in Muslim affairs and in that respect has published numerous research articles in international journals and presented several papers in international conferences. He is the author of *From Penury to Plenty: Development of Oil Rich Brunei, 1906 to Present* and has edited several books in Tamil. He is a regular contributor to newspapers in Australia and the *Colombo Telegraph* carries a number of his short articles on Sri Lankan issues.

He is heavily involved in Muslim community affairs in Australia and was the vice-president and then president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) holding each of those positions for four years respectively. He was also the Head of the Muslim Advisory Group under the Howard Government. Currently he is one of the trustees for the Noorul Islam Society and Mirrabooka mosque in Perth.