


# MUSLIM IDENTITY

in a Turbulent Age

Islamic Extremism and Western Islamophobia



Edited by Mike Hardy, Fiyaz Mughal and  
Sarah Markiewicz Foreword by H.E. Mr Nassir  
Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, UNAOC



‘This book is coming at the right time with a powerful message of hope. By featuring for the first time ever in Europe the richness and the depth of the Amman Message, it gives to everyone – policy makers, media, the public – the tools for a new understanding about Islam and the Muslim world and their true nature. An inspiring call for dialogue, respect and peace.’

– *Jean-Christophe Bas, Founder and CEO, The Global Compass*

‘We have never more needed a greater understanding of both Islamic extremism and Western Islamophobia than now. This collection of essays is a real contribution to that understanding. Bridges are more difficult to build than walls, and these essays, in their accessible and reflective tones, aim to make a difference more than a point. Their purpose is to ensure that the gift of diversity is not curdled into the curse of division and they know the path to making this happen can only open up by challenging misconceptions on every side.’

– *Canon Mark Oakley, Chancellor, St Paul’s Cathedral*

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and Sarah Markiewicz

*Foreword by H.E. Mr Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser*



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We dedicate this book to the many young people whose world is being disrupted and aspirations stunted by conflicts between Muslims and others or between and amongst Muslims themselves. Among all other things, the Amman Message is a message for belief in future generations, and a message that challenges those who hinder or place restrictions upon the dreams and opportunities of the young.





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# Foreword

In a world in which a rising number of people and families are being forced to escape conflict, poverty and persecution, there has resulted a sharp increase in hate speech against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants generally. This timely book, *Muslim Identity in a Turbulent Age*, comes at an important time in our history, explaining and raising awareness of the 'true nature of Islam'. It does so by looking at the Amman Message, a dialogue initiative by the King of Jordan Abdullah II.

The book, edited by Hardy, Mughal and Markiewicz, has compiled together an impressive collection of essays by experts looking at the core challenges and opportunities of communicating and promoting the Amman Message to European and other audiences. The book examines both the debates around the development of the Message as well as the discussion of the 'true nature of Islam' in a European context. It seeks to explore how and why the Amman Message could be a useful dialogue initiative. This book is an important tool to inform and educate everyone who is interested in the matter, as it aims to open the door to 'one of the most significant dialogue initiatives of the 21st century'.

We at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations strongly believe in promoting more inclusive societies through fostering cooperation and understanding among nations and peoples across cultures. The Alliance is committed to seeing peaceful societies where diversity is experienced as an asset. I welcome efforts such as this book as an important step in tackling existing prejudices and stereotypes. It is a valuable read for students and academics alike, but also for practitioners, civil servants, religious leaders and journalists as it provides a comprehensive outlook on Islam in Europe.

I congratulate the editors on this effort to share knowledge and understanding of the core principles of the Amman Message with

the wider audience and I know this book will be an important piece highlighting and challenging stereotypes that people still have about Islam. I am confident that, by building mutual respect amongst people and nations worldwide, we can tackle prejudices and build a more prosperous and peaceful world for all of us.

*H.E. Mr Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser  
The High Representative for the  
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations  
New York, November 2016*

# Acknowledgements

The editors are keen to acknowledge the engagement and patient assistance of all the organizations and people involved in this project. The book took shape against a backdrop of dislocating and distressing world events that have reinforced our conviction that now more than ever is the time to engage with issues promoting social cohesion.

We were determined, essentially, to place on record many of the concerns, feelings and shared conversations that we have had over four or five years of direct involvement in and observation of the role and contribution of The Amman Message initiative. This is a time when both the *true nature of Islam* and the *nature of true Islam* continue to challenge and be challenged. It is also a time when the ability to think and work contextually and reflectively has become critical to seriously engaging with complex and sensitive issues of contemporary importance. Fast-moving and instantly accessible social media and other electronic communications permit abbreviated, superficial and quite often false or misleading narratives and can open up the risk of promoting an imperfect understanding of Islam. We need more opportunities to stimulate thinking when people, cultures and faiths meet and we hope that this book can make a small contribution to this field.

Specifically, we would like to thank all the contributing authors; without your support and trust, this book would not have become a reality. We are privileged to have assembled such expertise, such insight and such a shared sense of purpose.

We thank also colleagues at Jessica Kingsley Publishers for their belief and enthusiasm.

Importantly, very special thanks go to our good friend Jessica Aitken, who joined our journey to help edit our manuscript and whose work shaped and sharpened the content and coherence of our book. It was Jessica's many questions that helped us all learn so much.

We are grateful for the active support of Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University who are helping us to use any and all proceeds from this book to support scholarships for potentially excluded young learners.

# Abbreviations

ALF	Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BNP	British National Party
CEOSS	Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services
CTPSR	Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EDL	English Defence League
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
HRH	His Royal Highness
ICC	Islamic Community in Croatia
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
LDJM	League of Judicial Defence of Muslims
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MINAB	Mosques and Imams National Advisory Body
MoAIA	Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSI	Open Society Institute
RABIIT	Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought
RIIFS	Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies
RISSC	Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre
UCOII	Unione della Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia
UNAOOC	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
WIHW	World Interfaith Harmony Week

# Disclaimer and Notes on the Text

There is no one, official translation of the Amman Message, and the contributors to this volume were given editorial freedom with regards to which version they referred to and quoted; in some cases even preferring to translate from the Arabic original.

*The editors*



# Introduction

*Mike Hardy, Fiyaz Mughal  
and Sarah Markiewicz*

Islam is possibly the most controversial religion in Europe today. What we mean when we say ‘Islam’, however, is not always immediately clear. As the world’s second largest faith with over a billion members, Islam has multiple forms and is interpreted differently according to legal school, audience or point of view. In the eyes of some Western media, Islam continues to be portrayed as associated with violence, warfare, opposition to democracy and the oppression of women. Hypotheses that seek supporting evidence for this – such as that Islam is taking over the West and is incompatible with and intolerant of Western forms of government – are no rarity, despite the reality that their claims are largely unverifiable.

These portrayals alone are powerful and influential, but when they coincide with acts of extreme violence and terror, apparently ‘in the name of God’, they become manifest in the rise of visible division and hate crime. The graphic visuals of the murders at the Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris or on the streets of Woolwich in London, among too many other examples in the recent past, express and generate fears between and within communities, creating self-fulfilling cycles of prejudice. Islamophobia and its challenge to peaceful, cohesive communities is a painful manifestation.

While the West<sup>1</sup> is struggling to come to terms with Muslims<sup>2</sup> and their faith, Islam is facing its own disruptions. The perceived threat of Islamist-inspired terrorism is certainly very real; but just as real is the fact that most victims of the associated terrorist attacks are Muslims.

Sectarian tensions have been commonplace within Islam (and many other religions) from the earliest of times and this is currently an acute issue in many communities; the question of who is a Muslim – and who and what defines Islam – has never been more pressing.

Islam is thus facing pressure from all sides – internally, it is lacking unity and also struggling to define itself through localized environments in European countries while, externally, it is misunderstood and vilified by uninformed oversimplifications. This works through as a crisis of identity for Muslims in particular places where, in conducting their everyday lives in multicultural and multi-faith geographies, they meet with a wide range of challenges and contexts.

This volume focuses on Europe,<sup>3</sup> itself neither stable nor monolithic, but a place where a growing sense of alienation has emerged in various communities, particularly among Muslims. Within the context of Europe's plural reality and the public discourse on diversity and inclusion there is still widespread misunderstanding of Muslims and Islam. The growth in mutual mistrust between Muslim communities and the wider European society is itself highly complex; not simply about misunderstanding beliefs but also involving a relatively low appreciation of the contribution of Islamic communities and cultures to the shaping of contemporary European civilization and society – both in the past and in the present. The alienation affects all parts of society and it risks, at best, indifference and prejudice and, at worst, subjection to violence, persecution and hate crime (Masood 2008).<sup>4</sup>

Much of the crisis facing Islam and Islam–West relations involves perceptions about Islam and its connections, real or not, with violent extremism on the one hand, and the association of the practice of 'true Islam' with membership of a particular school or confession on the other. It is not surprising, then, that there has been broad and growing recognition from religious and secular leaders and academics that something needs to change. In 2004, an initiative emerged from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in response to these concerns – as a 'counter attack to the accusations that Islam is a religion of violence and extremism, and as a means of correcting false impressions about Islam' (Nakhouda 2008). This initiative came in the form of a message from the King of Jordan, Abdullah II, and was addressed to

Muslims and the world at large. Its goal was to clarify 'the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam' (Ghazi 2006).

The Amman Message, as the initiative was called, began life as a press release during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. In the decade and more that followed, the Message has been expanded and developed, and assessed not only for its contemporary relevance, in general, but for its potential in addressing two fundamental global issues, in particular. These are, namely, the conflict among Muslims with regard to 'true Islam' and the often distorted impression that some non-Muslims have and propagate about Islam.

This is the backcloth for this collection of essays. It takes as its core challenge the task of communicating and promoting the Amman Message to European audiences, to look both at the debates around the development of the Message and the discussion of the 'true nature of Islam' in a European context. In so doing, it seeks to open discourse on the contemporary identity of Muslims in Europe and to explore the implications of the Amman Message, examining how and why it may be useful.

It is not our aim to contribute another book to the debate provoked by the narrative of Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' (Huntington 2002), but rather to make the audience aware of the potential of a specific initiative that offers a platform from which to discuss, reconcile and educate. It further intends to draw together the important work surrounding the Amman Message that has been undertaken over the last decade and relate this directly to the circumstances and violent events played out relentlessly in both European and other communities. This book represents the first published academic response to the Amman Message outside the Middle East. The authors are as varied as the intended audience of the Message: they are male and female scholars and practitioners from both the West (Europe, North America and Australia) and the Middle East, and include Muslims, Christians, practitioners of other faiths and those who claim no religious affiliation. The common denominator is the belief that the Amman Message represents one of the most significant dialogue initiatives of our times; a message that is accessible, timeless in its applicability, and which can be used on many levels; a message that, if better known and more effectively propagated, can make a powerful and positive contribution.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book has a broad intended audience. Written in the English language, it is primarily directed at an English-literate readership from Western and non-Western countries. The language is accessible, and the subject matter is topical.

The aim of the book is to inform and educate, to open the door to one of the most significant dialogue initiatives of the twenty-first century, and to encourage its continued use and application. Since intra-Islamic and Islam–West relations are social issues as well as security issues, awareness of the subject matter involved and of initiatives to alleviate these tensions has a broad scope. Moreover, the editors consider this work to be ideal as a text for use in a *tertiary context* on courses teaching interfaith, intra-faith and intercultural relations, peace studies, media studies, political science, cultural studies, Islamic sciences, theology and sociology.

The Amman Message and its ‘Three Points’ are global statements; hence, this volume will be of interest to international leaders, especially those living in contexts experiencing the repercussions of sectarian or Islam–West tensions. As a tool for *advising on policy*, it will be of interest to *governments* and *community organizations* alike and for all those concerned with countering violent extremism and the terrorism so pervasive in our societies. The Message, itself, is a powerful tool and very relevant for *religious leaders* in their work educating Muslims about the nature of their faith and their obligations towards Muslims of other denominations, as well as to non-Muslims. This book will be a strong support to this, as well as for non-Muslim religious leaders to grow understanding in their communities about Islam. As the Message has an interfaith dimension, the book will also be a tool for dialogue between different faith communities.

The *media* plays an important role in the dissemination of public knowledge about Islam and the editors see this volume as being an informative tool for media reporting, presenting a differentiated view of Islam from a number of different disciplines.

Finally, this volume is for the *common readership*. It is written in an accessible style, and is interdisciplinary, intersectional and topical. Anyone who is curious about understanding Islam and the current challenges facing it will find much of interest.

## EXISTING LITERATURE ABOUT THE AMMAN MESSAGE

Despite the fact that the Amman Message has been in existence for 12 years, there is a surprising lack of literature available about it and its associated initiatives. Of the four books that have been written, only two have an ISBN number or can be accessed outside of Jordan.

The first, and arguably most significant of these, was published in 2006, in the form of a volume edited by the Jordanian prince, Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, with contributions from several Islamic scholars. Entitled *True Islam and the Islamic Consensus on the Amman Message*, this comprises 200 pages in English and around 700 pages in Arabic. Following a foreword by King Abdullah II, it contains a reprinting of the Amman Message and its Three Points as well as a list of all signatories (over 550). The English language section further contains declarations from the Islamic councils (such as the Organization of Islamic Conference) that ratified the Amman Message and its Three Points in 2005 and 2006. Ghazi himself wrote the very informative introduction to this volume, which outlines the genesis of the Amman Message and explains the notion and importance of consensus in Islamic law, which is the basis for ascribing a binding authority to the Amman Message and its Three Points. The Arabic part of the volume contains much of the same information as the English version as well as *fatwas* of various highly esteemed Islamic scholars (including the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi) supporting the Amman Message and its Three Points.

The first conference dedicated to the Amman Message, ‘The Amman Message in the Eyes of Others’, was held at the Hashemite University in Jordan in 2006. A year later an edited volume was published by Jordanian academics Jamal Al-Shalabi and Mahmoud Al-Khalayleh, comprising a reprinting of the conference papers variously in English, French and Arabic. This edited book, entitled *Political Islam. Amman Message as a Model*, contains a number of interesting articles concerning the status quo of inter-Islamic and Islam–West relations in 2006. Unfortunately, it demands a trilingual readership to fully appreciate its content, and is not available outside of Jordan. However, it marks the first attempt to collect international voices on issues relating to the Amman Message and its potential application.

The year 2007 saw the establishment of The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre (RISSC). The first book in their English language series was a small booklet about the Amman Message, which is freely available online for download (RABIIT 2009). This little book contains a brief introduction, a reprinting of the Amman Message and its Three Points, a list of signatories and a section on ‘frequently asked questions’ that addresses some of the more common queries to arise in connection with the Amman Message, such as ‘Why is it so important?’ and ‘What does “Amman” have to do with the “Message”?’ (RABIIT 2004).

The most recent book concerning the Message is a bilingual publication, *Muslims and Human Communities: A Relationship of Harmony or Fear? (In the light of the Amman Message)*. It was published by the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) and emerged at the end of an EU-funded project introducing the Message into Europe, entitled the Promotion of the Amman Message Project. The book contains four English articles and seven Arabic articles, each based on talks held at the conferences and workshops associated with the Project. Many of the articles address the issues of extremism, Islamophobia and the challenges of Islam in Europe. The book has no ISBN and is not available outside Jordan.

Should one wish to search for more information about the Amman Message, the internet offers a few further resources. One significant source is a transcript of an interview that Prince Ghazi gave to Oxford Islamic Studies Online in 2012, eight years after the Amman Message was first released. In this, he discusses a number of dialogue initiatives he has been involved in, beginning with the Amman Message.

The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic thought (RABIIT), which produced the booklet about the Amman Message, also hosts the official Amman Message website<sup>5</sup> that provides much of the same information as the RABIIT booklet and the book, *True Islam*. It provides links to other dialogue initiatives and institutes as well as to the homepage of Jordan’s monarch (and Amman Message instigator), King Abdullah II. A second website, set up by the RIIFS several years later for the Promotion of the Amman Message Project, provides a portal where the Amman Message can be downloaded in a variety of languages. It also contains the four *Al-Bayan* newsletters, also available for download, which trace the various activities of the Project.

Finally, there is an excellent article by Jamal al-Shalabi and Menewar Bayan Alrajehi (2011), entitled ‘The Amman Message: Arab Diplomacy in the Dialogue of Civilizations’. This article traces the political circumstances in which the Amman Message emerged, considering factors such as the end of the Cold War, the role of America as the international superpower, the impact of globalization and the attacks of 9/11 in the United States (US). It considers the legitimacy of Jordan’s role in representing Arabs and Muslims. In relation to this, it highlights the question of Palestine as an important factor to consider in Islam–West relations, arguing that the Amman Message’s assertion to avoid ‘double standards’ in the implementation of United Nations (UN) mandates might be a veiled reference to this. The authors, writing just before the launch of the Promotion of the Amman Message Project, conclude that the Message, while valuable, had not received as much attention as it merited, and question the interests of the West in reporting about Islam:

[W]hy is it that the West focuses on the discourses, actions, and visions of the religious currents, especially the Jihadi Salafi currents, more than concentrating on the reformist and progressive discourses as the case is now with the Jordanian ‘Amman Message’ which has been given only scant attention, while the media and university scholars and others know and deeply study Abu Mus’ab Al-Zarqawi, Abdullah Azzam, Al-Maqdisi and analyze them. (Al-Shalabi and Bayan Alrajehi 2011)

This observation reinforces the idea that tensions within Islam and tensions between the Islamic world and the West are independent but intersecting categories. Not only do intra-Muslim relations impact how Islam is viewed in the West, especially in relation to sectarian conflict and its frequent association with violence, but the observation further indicates that the West is interested in promoting a particular side of Islam, one that is more focused on conflict than reform.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In this first chapter, Markiewicz introduces the Amman Message and provides an overview of its origins, growth and development since its introduction. She considers the triggers and inspirations for the Message that was developed against a background of sectarian

conflict within the Islamic world, although specifically in response to the Beslan Massacre in North Ossetia. This horrific event took place earlier in 2004 while King Abdullah II was in Russia on state business. The chapter traces the development of the Message from its beginnings as a 'media-friendly declaration' (Ghazi 2006), through ratification as a legal principle in 2005/2006 and espousal by the British Council in 2007, to its receiving EU funding in 2012 for a two-year project promoting its content within Europe and the Middle East. The chapter also discusses the key issues of authority within Islam and the legitimacy of the Jordanian royal family to engage in intra-Islamic dialogue.

In Chapter 2, Hardy considers the Amman Message within a European context, focusing on the challenges faced within contemporary Europe. He draws on his experience of launching and implementing the EU-sponsored Promotion of the Amman Message Project in Europe and the significant learning and insights that followed. He places these in the context of the changing face of Europe and the evolving context to help verify and validate a stronger appreciation of the complexity of the European terrain. He considers how, essentially, the Project sought to introduce a clear but complex message into a European landscape that was itself dynamic, turbulent and highly diverse. Hardy references the Amman Message as a dialogue tool that can be deployed to provide opportunity to rebuild, create and develop trust and to consider what needs to be done to ensure an impact. It is the *dual* audience and *dual* message that makes the Amman Message so appropriate for the current climate. Addressing Muslims and Christians, East and West, Hardy critiques the Islam/West 'clash' narrative, on the one hand, and suggests a theological response to sectarian conflict within Islam, on the other. These dualities echo many of the needs of European Islam and Muslims in Europe today and demand a complex and multi-layered response to encourage social cohesion and trust.

In Chapter 3, Catto takes the reader on a historical journey; beginning with a history of Islam in Europe, spanning over 1300 years, she outlines important benchmarks and historical events, as well as some key contemporary challenges facing Muslims in Europe today. These range from restrictions on clothing (such as the burqa ban in France) and mosque building (such as the minaret ban in Switzerland) to implications of the calendar and holy days



being based around Christian festivals, as well as social phenomena such as Islamophobia. She then focuses on the countries in which the conferences organized by the EU-sponsored Promotion of the Amman Message Project were held (namely, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and the UK). She provides country-specific profiles for these, considering the history of Islam and the specific issues and challenges within each context. The chapter ends with a reflection upon future challenges and areas for focus.

The previous chapters having set the framework for Islam within Europe, both historically and socially, in Chapter 4, Mughal focuses on the particular context in the United Kingdom (UK). In this significant exploration, he examines how the UK has become a fascinating melting-pot of different Muslim traditions, identifying some areas as regions of 'super-diversity'. Many of his findings are based on the results of the 2011 Census and make an important contribution to the demographics of British Islam, while he also critically evaluates the methodology of the Census. An important issue flagged by Mughal is the 'identity' of British Muslims, observing that what is considered to be 'mainstream Islam' in the UK context is labelled as such because, in statistical terms, it represents the largest number of British Muslims. However, this is linked to a specific ethnic heritage and does not reflect the diversity of Islam in the UK and, consequently, has ramifications for public policy. Mughal also considers specific challenges, citing certain key events as especially problematic, including the Salman Rushdie affair; 9/11 and the London terror attacks of 7/7; the *Prevent* agenda initiated in 2007; the threat of the English Defence League (EDL); and the Woolwich murder in 2013. Against this background, he considers the potential of the Amman Message as a tool for 'moderation, self-reflection, the protection of pluralism within society and for the rule of law and human rights' and explores the challenges this involves.

One of the most significant trademarks of modern extremism is its online presence and, in Chapter 5, Awan considers the Amman Message as a response to widespread negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, perpetuated by the media that often associates Muslims with terms such as holy war, terrorism and violent extremism. In this context, the Message offers a counter-narrative by highlighting the peaceful and tolerant aspects of Islam, which according to Awan constitute 'its purest sense and form'. He considers issues such as

online radicalization and extremism, questioning how and why these occur. He explores how the internet has become a prime location for 'grooming' and recruitment of young British Muslims by spreading propaganda, sharing information, fundraising, planning, and preying on vulnerable people. Tackling cyber-terrorism has become an issue of national and international relevance as it offers anonymity, is rarely constrained by national borders and requires minimal effort to achieve maximum results. However, Awan suggests that the internet has the same potential to de-radicalize as to radicalize and that it must become a platform for encouraging good governance. In this, with its correct and clear articulation of Islam's message and core values, the Amman Message can be especially useful to counter the radical ideologies promoted online.

In Chapter 6 Al-Shalabi, as one of the leading international experts on the Amman Message, takes a holistic approach, considering the Message within its broader political and intellectual context. He suggests that the notion of moderate religion it espouses is beneficial to Jordan's domestic agenda and also for relations with the West, especially as perceptions of moderate Islam have changed dramatically since 9/11. Al-Shalabi locates the Message within an atmosphere of a 'threat to the cultural identity of the people of the South', as suggested by al-Habib al-Janhani. He explains how it is a product of several factors, including the collapse of colonialism, the Cold War, the emergence of terrorism and the fractious relations between Middle Eastern and other partners. All of these factors can be viewed within the broader context of the intra-Muslim and Islam–West tensions to which the Amman Message responds. Second, Al-Shalabi considers why and by whom the Message has been rejected. He cites a number of scholarly Salafists, in particular Al-Maqdisi, a Jihadi Salafist who views its content as misleading and its authors as ignorant. Especially problematic is the designation of Jews and Christians as believers and the imperative to honour non-Muslims. The emergence of groups such as the so-called Islamic State, or Daesh, raises questions as to whether the Amman Message has failed in the face of Jihadist Salafism. The third part of this chapter considers the contribution of the Amman Message, summarizing this as having 'serious import and a limited impact'. For Al-Shalabi, the litmus test is whether Jihadist Salafism in Jordan has receded since the Message was published. He observes that while the Message is still largely unknown, the Jihadist

Salafist trend continues to grow. Consequently, he concludes that the Amman Message should not be seen as a magical solution but rather as an 'early alarm' to create awareness of the threat from violent extremism which – as a message to its European partners – he suggests is closely aligned to the Palestinian cause.

In Chapter 7, Eiedat argues for the Amman Message as providing a counter-narrative to Islamic fundamentalism, citing it as a document 'denouncing violence without compromising on rights'. He presents an ethical framework that picks up on underdeveloped themes present within the Message. First, he considers the importance of ethics in the Islamic narrative, arguing for the primacy of the ethical over the legal. Islamist approaches to Shar'ia law, for instance, do not attempt to place it within an ethical context, which is imperative if law is to be properly understood. He then considers the issue of Islamic identity for both individuals and groups. In the Islamic narrative, Shar'ia law has been identified as a defining feature of Islam whereby collective identity (within the Muslim community) is elevated above the individual, while society is considered to be a product of a political framework. He outlines options for rediscovering the value of individual identity based on elevating moral self-fulfilment. Finally, Eiedat considers the implications of asserting 'morality as a major ethical principle for the idea of individual, social and political authority in Islam'. Throughout the chapter, he considers the relevance and implications of the Amman Message, and closes by appreciating its potential to create a counter-narrative to Islamic fundamentalism that requires and supports a more cohesive ethical framework based on the primacy of ethics and a positive notion of identity.

In Chapter 8, Seeberg writes from a theological and philosophical standpoint, viewing the Amman Message as an invitation to interfaith dialogue and offering insights into the Amman Message from within the Christian tradition. In doing so, Seeberg focuses on a number of key themes within the Message that could act as a basis from which to engage in dialogue. She begins with the idea of tolerance as promoted in the Amman Message; that is, not merely as a possible attribute of Muslim faith but rather as an indispensable element of it. She argues that the 'very essence of faith in Jesus as the Christ' may also be summarized as an attitude of tolerance, and that confessing that Jesus is the Christ is tied to *individual* responsibility for actions and beliefs. The heart of Christian faith is brotherly love

and loving one's enemies as oneself, which inherently presupposes tolerance. Seeberg also considers the relationship between religion and politics, exploring the understanding of the *church* from Lutheran and Roman Catholic perspectives, identifying the political and religious spheres, and considering their function and relationship to one another. This is then compared with the Amman Message's claim to having religious and political authority. Finally, she considers the confessional disagreement between the Christian churches and the consequent loss of an 'all-embracing spiritual identity' in Europe as a result of the confessional wars following the Reformation. She describes both the disagreement and loss as forerunners to the modern experience of secularism, all of which have led to new challenges in religious and spiritual self-understanding, as well as a consequent lack of language to express the notion of shared human experience that goes beyond basic or egotistical needs. Overall, she intends her explanations to inform a non-Christian audience about some of the key defining features of modern Christian identity. Seeberg ends by citing the Qur'an (49:13), especially picking up on the invitation to 'know each other' as a point from which to engage in dialogue.

In Chapter 9, Rose in collaboration with the UK charity, Faith Matters, considers a significant expression of violent extremism on European soil: the Charlie Hebdo killings in January 2015. The chapter outlines the events and issues – social, political and theological – surrounding them. These include the problems of media bias, blasphemy within Islam and self-censorship by the European public. It focuses on the problem of Islam's lack of central authority and public discourse around 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, as well as examining the precedent set by the Muhammad cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. The authors also explore the reasons for radicalization that are specific to the French context, as well as those related to the broader European context, such as the struggle to define personal – including religious – identity that emerges out of isolation from a dominant culture. Rose and Faith Matters argue that it was a combination of these factors that led to the events of 7 January 2015. They then consider the rise of Islamophobia as a growing concern, citing a number of examples provided by Faith Matters' project, Tell MAMA. Lastly, the authors discuss the Amman Message as an option for countering the ideologies behind violent revenge attacks, seeing in it 'a possible framework for addressing the issue of Islamic identity'.

They suggest no expectation that this will be positively received by violent extremists, nor that its particular target audience should be those who are already convinced of its message; rather, they assert that it should aim to speak to those in the 'middle ground', as it is able to provide guidance for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Shamas, in Chapter 10, addresses one of the most pressing issues concerning the debate about the nature of Islam and the conflict surrounding it: identity politics and 'othering'. By promoting 'common ground' reason, Shamas suggests that the Amman Message provides a new position from which one can discuss identity with the imperative to act against political and religious extremism while encouraging collective responsibility. In doing so, she draws upon the notion of tolerance that, within the Amman Message, is aligned to respect and dialogue. Shamas provides an introduction to the processes surrounding identity construction, significantly highlighting that identity is both a process of being acted upon (such as in the 'clash' narrative, through which one is ascribed a side) and one of agency (where subjects take on hybrid, non-static and multiple identities). The latter is encouraged through dialogue, and can be used to undo and deconstruct the former, passive, narrative. This is, according to Shamas, what the Amman Message enables through its focus on unity as opposed to division. Since unity is its basis, only those who reject it – that is, the intolerant – isolate themselves as 'others'. In relation to this, Shamas also reminds the reader that the marginalization of Muslims is an old narrative with roots in Western Orientalism, and which continues to affect identity construction in both East and West. She praises the Message for embracing a self-articulation of Muslim identity and inviting Muslims to participate in the 'communication revolution' represented through dialogue. In conclusion, she considers issues of media justice, and the right of marginalized communities to articulate the violence that they are subjected to. Thus, she ends by opening the door for debate around media objectivity and the representation of Muslims and Islam within the media.

The final chapter provides reflection upon the main issues that have been highlighted in this volume, and upon the journey ahead. The major challenges facing Europe and the Islamic world continue to be the rise in violent extremism and the imperative to create sustained campaigns to prevent this. The instability of Muslim identity in the

Middle East and Europe, especially among the younger generation, must be addressed, while factors contributing towards positive identity formation, such as education and employment, need to be ensured. However, the rise of Islamophobia in the West has increased since the launch of the Amman Message in 2004. Moreover, the increase in terror attacks on European soil, as well as the large-scale migration of predominantly Muslim refugees to Europe, are serving to exacerbate this, leading to the rise in popularity of far-right, xenophobic and Islamophobic movements. The editors see an imperative to act and believe that the Amman Message is a valuable tool in addressing the 'clash' narrative as well as sectarian conflict, both of which fuel violent extremist ideologies. The immediate challenges that lie ahead for the Message include disseminating it more effectively, as well as addressing the competitive nature of many interfaith and intercultural initiatives, on the understanding that amassing the collective power of political and religious leaders behind one united initiative has far more potential than dissipating their energy behind a variety of projects. Time itself is testament to this, as initiatives are plentiful but transient. Finally, we highlight that overcoming media prejudice and creating trust within European societies – between and among Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans – remain key challenges in facilitating social cohesion.

Addressing various aspects of the Islam–West and intra-Muslim narrative, as this book aims to do, is a difficult but no less worthy and necessary task. In his autobiography, King Abdullah II cites 'education and opportunity' as the most effective tools to confront *takfiris*<sup>6</sup> (Abdullah II 2011, p.259). We believe these to be applicable to the broader society. Through this book, we attempt to provide both education about the current situation in Europe and some difficult issues facing Europeans and non-Europeans, Muslims and non-Muslims, with regard to Islam and the Islam–West encounter. The Amman Message presents us with an opportunity and a communication that can help to confront and replace the populism of the clash narrative with better-informed dialogue about true Islam and enable participants to become active in promoting a positive acceptance of pluralism so needed in our troubled world.

## NOTES

1. When referring to 'the West', the editors make use of the helpful definition provided in the 2008 World Economic Forum's report, 'Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue'. This states, 'In this report, the "West" refers mainly to Europe and lands of significant European settlement, primarily North America, but also Australia and New Zealand. The definition is geographical/historical rather than cultural. Today, Christianity, Judaism, liberal democracy, free markets, individualism and consumer culture, while part of a European legacy, are increasingly transnational and global phenomena. To identify them exclusively with the West, as Samuel Huntington and others do, is no longer valid. A geographical-historical definition of the West makes sense for another reason: throughout much of the Muslim world, the West is still viewed through the lens of the colonial and post-colonial European and American global preeminence' (Tranchet and Rienstra 2008, p.10).
2. Throughout this volume, we use the term 'Muslims' to refer to those who profess the Islamic faith, as well as those from Muslim cultural backgrounds.
3. Though Europe is not a stable term, it is employed in this book to include countries belonging to the European Union. The issues the book addresses give special attention to the concerns of the six countries that hosted seminars of the Promotion of the Amman Message Project; namely, the UK, Germany, Croatia, Italy, Greece and Denmark.
4. Masood (2008) describes what he calls 'the Europe of today' as a product of a complex set of cultural influences including those from Christian, Jewish and secularist traditions as well as Asian and Islamic. These influences from beliefs, traditions and places represent a complex basket of cultures creating a rich but unstable Europe with a cocktail of identities. The Muslim contribution to this has a history of over 1300 years, a history that has not always been an easy story and has often been a misunderstood one.
5. See RISSC: The Official Website of the Amman Message: [www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com).
6. A *takfiri* is a Sunni Muslim who believes another to be an apostate. *Takfiri* is taken from the Arabic word *takfir*, meaning apostasy, and is also related to the word for apostate, *kāfir*. It broadly designates one who makes an accusation of apostasy.

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# 1

## The History of the Amman Message and the Promotion of the Amman Message Project

*Sarah Markiewicz*

*'The future lies in unity and respect, not division and stereotypes.'*

King Abdullah II of Jordan in a speech delivered  
at the EU parliament, 10 March 2015

The Amman Message is an initiative that is not only timely, but also belongs to the *zeitgeist* of twenty-first-century discourse concerning current challenges facing Islam and Islam–West relations (see Note 1 of the Introduction). A substantial body of literature already exists relating to the issues surrounding intra-Muslim and Islam–West tensions and the Amman Message is both a practical and a scholarly contribution to this debate. It emerged out of the background of these various academic and social discourses as well as a series of alarming global events, all of which share the common trend of highlighting the increasing tension between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’ (two artificial categories which are nevertheless widely used) as well as the internal crisis within Islam as evidenced by sectarian conflict. The Amman Message goes a step further by linking these two discourses, which mutually influence each other, and so to address one requires awareness of the other. Sectarian tensions within Islam and the associated violence transmit an unfavourable image of Islam to outsiders, perpetuating negative stereotypes (such as the perceived connection between Islam and violence). This attempt to clarify

Islam's intrinsic nature is thus aimed at both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Amman Message, its 'Three Points' and the EU-funded Promotion of the Amman Message Project are three separate but related initiatives which uniquely address the issue of Islamic identity and perception from the perspective of self-understanding and self-representation. This chapter aims to provide the framework within which each of these initiatives emerged. This is a long overdue task; although the Amman Message has been in existence for over a decade, there has not yet been one English-language monograph about it published in the Western world. This chapter is an attempt to summarize a number of significant developments, while assuming no previous knowledge by the reader.

The Amman Message began as an initiative from His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, in 2004, who saw it as so significant that he dedicated an entire chapter to it in his autobiography, *Our Last Best Chance*, published seven years later in 2011. The chapter preceding the Amman Message, entitled 'Jordan's 9/11', sets the tone in addressing the Amman bombings on 9 November 2005, in which 60 people were killed and over a hundred injured. These post-dated the Amman Message by exactly a year and in themselves represented everything the Message advocates against and tries to warn about; namely, concerns regarding sectarian tensions, false representations of Islam and their impact on Islam–West relations.

The 'Jordan's 9/11' chapter profiles Jordan's most infamous terrorist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and introduces the fight against extremist ideology as an issue of very personal relevance to King Abdullah II. Responding to a video that al-Zarqawi, at the time head of al Qaida in Iraq (forerunner of the so-called Islamic State), had posted online showing the brutal murder of the American hostage, Nicholas Berg, the King states, 'It was outrageously disgusting, and I could not see how they could pose as defenders of anything, let alone Islam' (Abdullah II 2012, p.254).

The King ends the chapter, and thus leads into the chapter about the Amman Message, by saying:

To comprehensively defeat terrorists, we will have to neutralize the appeal of their extremist ideology and combat the ignorance and hopelessness on which they thrive. This is not just a military battle, it is an intellectual one. And it is a battle we started a while ago. (Abdullah II 2012, p.256)

The Amman Message emerged out of a broader background of sectarian tensions and regional terrorism within the Middle East, specifically as felt by Jordan, a strong American ally sandwiched between Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Syria and Egypt. One event, however, took on particular relevance as being the specific trigger for the Amman Message. In September 2004, King Abdullah II was in Russia on official business visiting President Vladimir Putin when tragedy occurred. On 1 September, traditionally the first day of the Russian school year, Islamist separatists stormed a school in the North-Ossetian town of Beslan and took over 1100 people hostage, two-thirds of whom were children. They demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya (see Tuathail 2009). The siege lasted three days, during which the hostages were forced to stand for long periods of time without food and water in the over-heated school gymnasium. On the third day, the siege was ended by Russian security forces, who entered the school by force. Over 300 people were killed in the ensuing standoff, half of whom were children.

King Abdullah II was very moved by the tragedy in Beslan, and motivated to action. In an interview in 2005 with the journal *Middle East Quarterly*, he said:

At the time of the Beslan school massacre in Russia, all of us were disgusted. But it's just not good enough to sit in the privacy of one's home and say how awful this is and condemn these people who are defaming Islam. This was a crime against humanity, and we have to be much more vocal, in public. In my view, Islam is going in a direction that's very scary, and as the Hashemite Kingdom, we have a moral obligation to stand up. Yes, there are a lot of other things that are happening inside the Muslim world, but we have to draw the line. If we don't, then these people are going to win. (Satloff 2005)

In this quotation, Abdullah II draws some clear battle lines, positing the 'we' who are disgusted by these acts of terrorism and who have an imperative to act versus 'them' who are defaming Islam and who threaten to win if action is not taken soon. He also mentions the responsibility of Jordan as a Hashemite kingdom, a status that would play an important role in his response.

Upon returning to Jordan, the King commissioned a group of Jordanian scholars to formulate a 'studied media-friendly declaration' (Sonn 2012, p.1) about the 'true nature of Islam and the nature of

true Islam' (Ghazi 2006, p.xviii). The declaration was presented by the King's advisor for Islamic Affairs and Chief Justice Sheikh Izz-Eddine Al Khateeb Al Tamimi in the Al-Hashimiyyen mosque on the eve of 9 November 2004, to mark the Muslim festival of *Laylat al-Qadr*,<sup>1</sup> and became known as the *Amman Message*. Delivered in Arabic, it was addressed to 'brethren in the lands of Islam and throughout the world' and aims to defend Islam's true spirit both from those who 'try to portray Islam as their enemy' and those who 'commit irresponsible acts in its name' (RABIIT 2008). It begins by indicating an awareness of the existential threat facing the Islamic community and laments that Islam's message is being attacked even though it constitutes 'an address of brotherhood, humanity and a religion that encompasses all human activity. It states the truth directly, commands what is right, forbids what is wrong, honors the human being, and accepts others.' The body of the Amman Message is an explanation of the defining qualities of the Muslim faith, beginning with the five pillars (namely, belief in God and Muhammad's message, the daily prayers, fasting for the month of Ramadan, paying charitable tax and the pilgrimage to Mecca). The five pillars are more than a legalistic requirement; as the Message makes clear:

[They] bear witness to noble principles and values that verify the good of humanity, whose foundation is the oneness of the human species, and that people are equal in rights and obligations, peace and justice, realizing comprehensive security, mutual social responsibility, being good to one's neighbour, protecting belongings and property, honouring pledges, and more. (RABIIT 2008)

The text then goes on to outline other key principles of the Muslim faith – supported by quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith – which 'provide common ground for the followers of religions and [different] groups of people. That is because the origin of divine religions is one, and Muslims believe in all Messengers of God and do not differentiate between any of them' (RABIIT 2008; brackets in text) (Qur'an 2:285). Other basic principles of Islam that the Message highlights include respect, honour and respect for human life, gentleness, kindness, respect, mercy, tolerance, forgiveness, just treatment, respecting conventions, and moderation.

The Amman Message juxtaposes its discourse on the message and principles of Islam with clearly denouncing extremism, whose ‘ends do not justify the means’. It reinforces that extremism, radicalism and fanaticism are ‘recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice’. They are not particular to Islam but rather ‘an aberration that has been experienced by all nations, races, and religions’. War is only permissible in the face of aggression and, even then, it must be regulated by the obligation to treat others with ‘benevolence, justice and virtue’ (Qur’an 60:8, 2:193). Terrorism is also explicitly denounced, both on religious and moral grounds.

The Message acknowledges the presence of injustice and calls on the international community to implement international law and consistently respect UN resolutions. This will contribute towards ‘uprooting the causes of violence, exaggeration, and extremism’. The Muslim sector of the audience is encouraged to participate in modern society to reform religious discourse and rehabilitate religious preachers, arming them with an awareness of true Islam and helping them develop skills to cope with contemporary issues. Education is an important pillar in forming a balanced and accurate understanding of Islam. Therefore, the Message also highlights the importance of scholars as role models, especially for the younger generation, which bears the seeds of the future. Moreover, it asserts that participation in modern society and placing emphasis on the value of education both lie within the framework of an Islamic approach, which is:

founded upon [maintaining] the delicate balance between the spiritual, economic and social dimensions [of life]; providing for human rights and basic liberties; ensuring life, dignity and security, and guaranteeing basic needs; administering the affairs of society in accordance with the principles of justice and consultation. (RABIIT 2008; brackets in original)

The basic goal of the Amman Message was summarized by Abdullah II in a speech in Washington, DC in 2005, when he said:

The Amman Message’s ultimate goal is to take back our religion from the vocal, violent and ignorant extremists who have tried to hijack Islam over the last hundred years. They do not speak for Islam any more than a Christian terrorist speaks for Christianity. And the real voices of our faiths will be, must be, heard. (Abdullah II 2005)

## JORDAN'S ROLE IN INTRA-FAITH ENGAGEMENT

The Amman Message portrays the Jordanian Hashemite royal family as 'promoting the true luminous image of Islam' (RABIIT 2008, p.4), asserting that as descendants of Muhammad, they have a 'spiritual and historical responsibility' (RABIIT 2008, p.4) to correctly practise and defend Islam. It therefore bears considering what role Jordan views itself as playing in making a public and international statement that sets a clear framework for Muslim identity.

While Jordan may be a small country of merely seven million inhabitants, it has some unique features that single it out as a clear contender to take a leadership role in dialogue initiatives among Muslims. The Jordanian royal family can trace its lineage, not only to the tribe of Muhammad (the *Quraysh*), but to his family's clan within that tribe, the *Banu Hashim* (Sons of Hashem, who became known as the 'Hashemites'). This is significant for a number of reasons. The Hashemites are Sunni Muslims; however, they enjoy a high standing among Shi'a Muslims, not least because the family of the Prophet Muhammad plays an integral role in Shi'a identity, and the Jordanian Hashemites are known as *Alid* Hashemites, meaning that their ancestry is traced through Muhammad's daughter Fatima and her husband, Ali (the first Shi'a Imam and fourth Sunni Caliph). As a sign of respect, the Hashemites were historically given the honorary title 'Sharif', meaning 'nobleman' (Salibi 1993, p.51), to acknowledge their distinguished ancestry.

A factor further supporting a Hashemite bid to champion intra-Muslim dialogue is historic: the claim is often made within Islamic circles that Saudi Arabia should be championing intra-Muslim initiatives, as the two holiest cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, are located within its borders. However, those making this claim forget that from the tenth century until the Great Arab Revolt at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Hashemite Sharifs were located in the Hijaz, the area of Saudi Arabia that encompasses Mecca and Medina. They held an honorary function as the 'Emir of Mecca', their main duty being to safeguard Muslim pilgrims by protecting the Meccan holy sanctuaries. While the Hashemites were merely vassals to the ruling occupying power in the Hijaz, they were an acceptable middle ground for Sunni and Shi'a pilgrims.

Even if the Jordanian Hashemites have a strong ancestral claim to taking a leadership role in intra-Muslim dialogue, this is by no means a generally accepted claim. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, the cousin of King Abdullah II and, at the time the Amman Message was written, the King's Special Advisor and Personal Envoy, states in this regard: 'Although everyone agrees to the message, it's the Amman part they don't agree to.'<sup>2</sup> According to Prince Ghazi, Jordan has no real ambition to lead dialogue; it does so because no one else is doing it.<sup>3</sup>

Added to this comes the domestic struggle and, therefore, personal experience with transnational terror, which is felt acutely in Jordan. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the Amman bombings in 2005. In his autobiography, King Abdullah II states that '[i]n our battle against the *takfiris* I had always feared that, sooner or later, we would be attacked' (Abdullah II 2012, p.251). On 9 November 2005, al Qaida in Iraq coordinated suicide bombs at three luxury hotels in Amman, causing 60 fatalities and 115 injuries. King Abdullah II explains: 'To a large country like the United States, sixty people may not sound like very many, but to Jordan it was a devastating blow, the equivalent of losing three thousand people in a single attack on America' (Abdullah II 2012, p.251), referring to the number of lives lost in the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the date of this incident – not just the one-year anniversary of the Amman Message, but specifically 9 November, which can also be written 9/11 – makes it a chilling reminder of the events four years previously. Jordan is very much in the thick of incidents related to violent extremism and can therefore speak from experience with this struggle.

## AUTHORITY IN ISLAM

The Amman Message was initially a press release from a Jordanian monarch with high standing, morally and politically, but with no religious authority; accordingly neither had his message. Rather, it was a media-friendly message to the world, attempting to counter some of the negative and false ideas about Islam that were being circulated in 2004. Shortly after releasing the Amman Message, King Abdullah II was advised by Prince Ghazi (also a 'highly respected Islamic scholar' (Abdullah II 2012, p.257)) that if he wanted to give

the Message any lasting or binding authority, he must get it ratified under Islamic law. As Ghazi explains:

Islam has no central authority, no church and no sacerdotal caste. It is and has been held together over history by texts – starting with the very word of God, the Holy Qur’an, and the sayings or hadith of the Prophet Muhammad...and common practices. (Ghazi 2006, p.xxxvii)

Islam comprises several schools of jurisprudence and thought which, while sharing common ground, differ in a number of ways, especially with regard to accepted authorities and the interpretation of holy scriptures. Authority in Islam is less a question of individual decision-making and more a question of an issue gaining acceptance among the various Islamic schools (Ghazi 2006, p.xxxvii). With so many different Islamic movements, all claiming authenticity, the matter of who is qualified to represent Islam and Muslims, and to issue binding declarations to the core question of *what constitutes true Islam*, has been much debated since the seventh century. This question becomes immediately relevant, however, when one attempts to clarify the ‘nature of true Islam’.

In order to give the Amman Message binding authority it would be necessary to get it ratified under Islamic law according to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Within Sunni Islamic jurisprudence there are four sources of law: the Qur’an, the Hadith (traditions and sayings of the Prophet), *ijmā’* (a consensus agreement) and *qiyas* (deductive analogy). The third source of jurisprudence, *ijmā’*, is the principle upon which the ratification of the Amman Message was to be based and is, itself, based upon the Hadith: ‘My Umma will not agree upon an error.’<sup>4</sup> A popular interpretation of this Hadith is that if all Muslims are in agreement upon a matter, then it must be truth.

There are, broadly speaking, two schools of thought that exist in relation to the issue of *ijmā’*. One school believes that a true *ijmā’* must be an *ijmā’* of all Muslims, in which each and every one consents to the matter in question. With over one billion Muslims worldwide, it is unrealistic to expect such an *ijmā’* ever to come to fruition. The second school, however, believes an *ijmā’* is valid when it represents a consensus of the authorities and the learned. Ghazi explains:



Of course the Prophet...supremely combined both functions in his person. However, after the death of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib... these two functions became split, in practice if not in theory, for certainly the Umayyad rulers and those after them could not and did not pretend to be of 'those who know'. Today we have an almost complete scission between what we now call the 'executive authority' on the one hand, and the 'judiciary authority' on the other. Clearly, however, when both 'those in authority' and 'those who know' universally and unanimously agree on something, then that is an *ijmā'*, even in our present day. (Ghazi 2006, pp.xxvii–xxviii)

While *ijmā'* is firmly anchored in Sunni jurisprudence, it has another standing in Shi'a jurisprudence; although they both emerged within the same framework, the historical presence of the Imam and the associated *imamah* doctrine<sup>5</sup> initially rendered the need for a consensus ruling within Shi'a jurisprudence redundant. With the departure of the last Imam came a new need for decision-making, which was taken on by scholars. An *ijmā'* was thus rendered possible; however, it ended with the death of the last of the scholars involved in making it. A cornerstone of Shi'a faith is their waiting for the return of the hidden Imam, or Mahdi. *Ijmā'* will only be valid until the return of this Imam, after which Twelver and Ismaili Shiism believes that his infallible rule will override the need for an *ijmā'*. Zaidites, however, do not accept the infallibility of the Imam and thus believe *ijmā'* to remain binding.

While the principle of *ijmā'* is simple in theory, it is clearly much more complicated in practice. Benjamin Jokisch poignantly states: "There is no *ijmā'* about *ijmā'*" (Rohe 2009, p.59). Nevertheless, it exists as a theoretical principle and, importantly, it is the only way in which to legalize innovation in Islam.

## RATIFYING THE AMMAN MESSAGE

Following Ghazi's advice to ratify the Amman Message, King Abdullah II commissioned him to coordinate this course of action. The first step involved condensing the Message down to its essential elements (Abdullah II 2012, pp.257–258). The following three questions were sent to 24 leading Islamic scholars and authorities around the world, who between them represented all branches and schools of Islam:

1. Who is a Muslim?
2. Who has the authority to issue a *fatwa*?<sup>6</sup>
3. Is it permissible to declare someone an *apostate*?<sup>7</sup>

The scholars asked included the Shaykh of Al-Azhar University; the foremost Shi'i Ayatollahs of Najaf and Iran; the *Zaydi maraji'* of Yemen; the Ibadhi Grand Mufti of Oman; and the Grand Muftis and the Supreme Fatwa Councils of the major Islamic countries that have these (Ghazi 2006, p.xviii).

After receiving the answers of these leading figures, an international Islamic conference was convened in Amman in July 2005 where the issues were discussed by 200 leading Islamic scholars from 50 countries. A new document was produced, entitled 'The Three Points of the Amman Message', and this, along with the Amman Message, was signed by all participating members. The 'Three Points' address the three questions posed above and offer the following answers:

1. They specifically recognized the validity of all eight *Mathabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Ibadhi* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true Salafi thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2. Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
3. Based upon the *Mathahib*, they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

(RABIIT 2008, p.vi)

The Three Points were agreed upon by unanimous consensus and signed by all participating members. They were presented at a number of other conferences and meetings between June 2005 and July 2006 for ratification, including the Forum of Muslim Ulama and Thinkers, the Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence Conference, the Organization of Islamic Conference and the International Fiqh Academy Conference, to name but a few.

To date, the Amman Message and its Three Points have been endorsed by over 500 leading Muslim scholars and authority figures

from 84 countries (Ghazi 2006, p.1). According to Ghazi, the consensus on the Amman Message and its Three Points ‘amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the Ummah (nation) of Islam in our day, and a consolidation of traditional, orthodox Islam’ (RABIIT 2008, pp.87–88). This *ijmāʿ* is significant for three reasons: first, it is the first time in Islamic history that such an *ijmāʿ* has been attempted; second, it is representative of all schools and branches of Islam and is thus binding for all Muslims; and, finally, it addresses a key challenge facing Muslims today: the question of what constitutes Islam (RABIIT 2008, p.88). Abdullah II states that ‘the whole Muslim world together, for the first time in history, declared the very fundamentals of the *takfiri* movement to be unacceptable, illegal, and un-Islamic’ (Abdullah II 2012, p.259).

Whether one believes that the Amman Message and its Three Points constitute an *ijmāʿ* or not, credit must be given to the fact that this initiative represents the first ever attempt to create such a consensus, which potentially provides new opportunities for intra-faith engagement and Muslim ecumenism and has set a new benchmark for international dialogue.

## THE FRUITS OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND ITS THREE POINTS

The Amman Message initiative was originally coordinated by the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT). This institute was founded in 1980 by the late King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan, and was initially known as The Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research. Its objectives were to serve ‘Jordan, Arabs, Muslims and humanity at large’ (RABIIT 2007). The majority of its achievements in its first 19 years can be credited to Prince El Hassan bin Talal, who at this time was the Crown Prince of Jordan, and very active in intercultural and interfaith dialogue initiatives. In 2000, a year after King Abdullah II acceded to the throne, Prince Ghazi was appointed chairman of the board of trustees of the Institute. The Aal Al-Bayt’s mission statement included promoting accurate awareness about Islam, highlighting the Islamic contribution to and impact upon human civilization, facilitating dialogue between schools of Islamic jurisprudence and highlighting the contribution of the

Aal Al-Bayt (family of the Prophet).<sup>8</sup> All of these goals are clearly identifiable within the Amman Message.

In 2007, a new institute affiliated with the Aal Al-Bayt Institute was established to support the Amman Message: the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre (RISSC). The RISSC was to be an 'international Islamic non-governmental, independent institute' with its primary goal being 'to protect, preserve and propagate traditional, orthodox, "moderate" Islam' (RISSC 2016) as defined by the Three Points, as well as to 'spread knowledge of the "Amman Message" of November 2004 and the principles it contains in so far as these best represent traditional, orthodox, "moderate" Islam' (RISSC 2016). The Centre is interested in conducting and publishing research relating to Islam and contemporary society. One of the first activities the RISSC undertook in 2007 was to create an English-language website for the Amman Message.<sup>9</sup> This website contains, among other things, an English translation of the Amman Message and its Three Points and also provides an introduction by Ghazi, explaining the theological background to the Message and the principle of *ijmā'*.

Through *ijmā'*, the Amman Message and its Three Points set criteria for defining who is a Muslim, which leading authorities and scholars then ratified. A related and important question therefore becomes that of who the current leading Muslim figures actually are. Possibly in response to this question, the RISSC launched the series *The Muslim 500* which provides an annual publication, listing and profiling the 500 most influential Muslims of each year. In the Foreword to the 2011 edition, the editors discuss the difficulty of selecting their entries:

How to measure this influence is of course the most challenging aspect of the publication, and the one where opinions diverge the most. Influence can sometimes be gauged on a quantitative basis; the number of people influenced, the number of books written, the amount of sales etc., but more often it is related to the qualitative and lasting effect of that influence. The achievements of a lifetime are given more weight than achievements within the current year. This means that our list of names will change gradually, rather than dramatically, year-on-year. (RISSC 2011, p.3)

*The Muslim 500* has been released annually since 2009 and can be freely downloaded from the RISSC website.

In 2007, the year that the RISSC was founded, the British Council became involved with the Amman Message. It established the first project involving a non-Muslim body in the promotion of the Amman Message, entitled 'Capacity Building of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places'. The project had a twofold aim. On the one hand it intended to support the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (MoAIA) in Jordan in better promoting key Islamic values in line with those promoted in the Amman Message. On the other, the project was aimed at supporting religious preachers, especially those within the Ma'an community in southern Jordan. One desired impact of this project was that the MoAIA became 'modernized and become[s] more effective in managing outreach activities and [the] quality of messages and services delivered by its Preachers and Imams in contribution to its strategic objectives'.<sup>10</sup>

The Amman Message became the first in a series of international dialogue initiatives launched in Jordan. It was the forerunner to the Amman Interfaith Message, which was aimed at highlighting common ground between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Then, in 2007, the international 'A Common Word' initiative was introduced; this took the form of an open letter signed by 138 Muslim scholars and authorities and addressed to the leaders of the various Christian churches and networks worldwide. Finally, in September 2010, King Abdullah II proposed a World Interfaith Harmony Week to the UN General Assembly. This proposition was adopted in the same year, and the first week of February each year has subsequently been set aside for activities promoting harmony between people of all faiths and even no faith. Jordan's tolerant attitude towards the followers of other faiths lends considerable credibility to its efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Jordan is also involved in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), which was established in 2005 as a further platform for supporting a number of initiatives including the promotion of the Amman Message (Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2011).

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE COMES TO EUROPE

Before 2010, the Amman Message had remained a largely intra-Islamic message, and it still had a low media profile despite having acted as the impulse for other high-profile international interfaith initiatives.

This was to change in 2010. The Jordanian Ministry for Planning and International Cooperation issued a call for proposals for an EU-funded project to promote the Amman Message, within the Middle East as well as in Europe. This project was to be introduced within the framework of a long-standing EU–Jordan partnership that aims to support Jordan ‘as a force of moderation and reform in a region in political turmoil’.<sup>11</sup> The long-term goals of the proposed partnership were to support cooperation in the area of democratic reforms and economic modernization. The EU aid to Jordan comprised two forms – the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU–Jordan Action Plan – which aimed to promote Jordan’s own reform agendas. These are outlined in its National Agenda for 2006–2015, which aimed at developing Jordan politically, socially and economically. Alongside this, Jordan was running a parallel initiative, *Kulluna Al Urdun* (‘All of us are Jordan’), which aimed to raise support for the National Agenda and opening the debate about what Jordanians want for their country in the future.

The Amman Message and its Three Points corresponded both with the objectives of the EU–Jordanian partnership and with those of the inner-Jordanian initiatives. Therefore, the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation hoped, with support of the EU funding, to contribute towards achieving these objectives through implementing five measures:

- (1) Inter-Islamic treaties; (2) national and international legislation using the Three Points of the Amman Message to define Islam and forbid *takfir*; (3) the use of publishing and the multi-media in all their aspects to spread the Amman Message; (4) instituting the teaching of the Amman Message in school curricula and university courses worldwide; and (5) making it part of the training of mosque *Imams* and making it included in their sermons. (Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2011)

The overarching objective of the programme was ‘to support the promotion of the “*Amman Message*”, in order to contribute to good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to counter the root causes of terrorism’.<sup>12</sup> A maximum of €800,000 was set aside for this project, and consortia that consisted of at least one Jordanian and one European partner institution could apply. The winning bid was placed by the Amman-based Royal Institute

for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs in Jordan. European partners involved in the consortium included the British Council and the University of Coventry in the UK. Thus, the Promotion of the Amman Message Project developed from an application to an international consortium.

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies had been established in 1994 under the patronage of Prince El Hassan in Amman as a non-profit and non-governmental organization. It still provides a unique platform in the Arab world for hosting and conducting research and enabling dialogue with and between representatives of different cultures and religions. The RIIFS focuses on the interdisciplinary study and rational discussion of religion as it relates to cultural and civilizational diversity on a regional and global level. Since becoming involved in the Promotion of the Amman Message project, the RIIFS has further defined its thematic focus as follows:

[a] forum for the interdisciplinary study of issues that focus on clarifying the image of Islam and its civilizational and intellectual achievements, as well as interreligious and intercultural studies, with the aim of defusing tensions and promoting peace, regionally and globally. (RIIFS 2012a)

The application for a two-year project was approved in 2011 and was set to run for 24 months from September 2012, with the RIIFS as its organizational hub. The RIIFS' concept paper outlines both overall and specific objectives that the Project aimed to fulfil. The initiative was designed to have both an intra-Islamic as well as an interfaith component and its primary intention was to spread knowledge about the Amman Message (and subsequently to improve knowledge about Islam). On the ground that the values inherent in the Amman Message can be used to promote good governance and human rights, and to counteract religiously motivated violence, the Amman Message was to be promoted through a variety of educational campaigns while utilizing and acknowledging the role of the media. This project also aimed to assist Jordanian participation in interfaith, intra-faith and intercultural activities. A number of target groups were identified to promote the values of the Amman Message, including Islamic clergy and religious leaders (including female preachers), school communities, university communities, grassroots communities, academics and the media.<sup>13</sup>

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE PROMOTION OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE PROJECT

The RIIFS' plan of action proposed that the Promotion of the Amman Message Project would reach over 500,000 people across Jordan and Europe in the two years of its funding. This section briefly outlines some of its main achievements, largely summarized from four newsletters produced by the RIIFS to document the project's activities, called '*Al-Bayan*' (*The Bulletin*).

The project ran from September 2012 to September 2014. To provide guidance, the RIIFS formed a consultative academic research committee in the last quarter of 2012, consisting of a group of experts and academics. An Arabic/English bilingual brochure, *Introduction to the Amman Message*, was produced and the Amman Message was translated and printed in six languages – Arabic, English, German, Greek, Danish and Italian – corresponding to the six countries where the Project intended to hold seminars. Both the information brochure and translations were distributed to participants of events related to the promotion of the Amman Message (RIIFS 2012b).

## EXCHANGES AND SEMINARS

The majority of events associated with the project took place in Jordan, as meetings of different sorts: seminars, workshops, study visits and conferences. Two exchanges took place between the EU and Jordan: in June–July 2013, six young people from the UK were taken on a study visit to Jordan for five days with the goal of introducing them to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, acquainting them with the Amman Message (so they could subsequently encourage interest in it in Europe), and promoting Jordan as a positive example of co-existence (RIIFS 2013a). In another inbound visit a year later, four British imams were taken to Jordan for similar reasons.

An important goal of the project was to spread awareness of the Amman Message within Europe, where it was previously unknown. In cooperation with the British Council and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at the University of Coventry, five seminars were organized in Europe: in the UK (Coventry), Germany (Berlin), Italy (Rome), Greece (Thessaloniki) and Croatia (Zagreb). The seminars



brought Jordanian delegations, comprising of members of the RIIFS, the Ministry of Awqaf and scholars, into contact with a European audience, including members of the British Council in the host country, religious leaders, civil society activists, academics, journalists and interested members of the public. The seminars focused on disseminating information about the Amman Message as well as providing a platform to share the experiences of Islam in Europe. They also discussed issues relating to integration, radicalization, identity, extremism, and Christian–Muslim relations, both within the immediate context of the host country and within the broader European context, as well as from a global perspective. During the Greek seminar, theologian Dr Angeliki Ziaka of Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, made the important observation that: ‘We cannot imagine the Middle East without Christians or Europe without Muslims, leading to the idea that religious diversity is permanent in both places, so local areas need to act in order to accommodate this reality’ (RIIFS 2014a).

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND THE MEDIA

The media were identified as a key tool to disseminate the Amman Message and a number of seminars and workshops aimed at the media (including social media) were held over the two years. These events were aimed at spreading awareness of the Amman Message and the role of the media in disseminating it. An award was introduced to be presented at the end of the project to the member of the media whose work had made the most significant contribution towards the promotion of the Amman Message. As well as the RIIFS dedicating part of their website to the Project, the Amman Message’s online presence also included a YouTube channel called ‘PromotionAMP’; this uploaded videos taken from events associated with the Project, such as a speech given by the Prince of Wales in February 2013. In addition, a promotional video was created, which can be found on the YouTube channel.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The role of the young people was identified early on as key in the dissemination of the Amman Message, and several activities centred

around youth engagement. In December 2013, the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures (ALF), in cooperation with the Institute for Leadership Excellence, organized a training workshop to improve youth capacities to promote the Message. The target audience of this workshop included civil and media activists and, on the final day of the workshop, the participants drafted their own plans for promoting the Amman Message in their specific fields (RIIFS 2013c).

In May 2014, in cooperation with the Adyan Foundation of Lebanon, the Project organized a workshop involving 13 Muslim and Christian young adults from Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon in Beirut. Using the Amman Message as an example for peace-building and co-existence, the workshop largely discussed the role of religion in society, the notion of religiousness and the concept and treatment of the 'other' from the perspective of the Message, highlighting its capacity to act as a force for promoting dialogue and supporting diversity.

A five-day workshop was held in Cairo in August 2014 in cooperation with the Forum of Cultures Dialogue under the auspices of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS). This involved a mixed group of young Arabs from Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt and explored the topic of 'enhancing co-existence and management of differentiation' (RIIFS 2014b). The workshop discussed contemporary issues that intersected with the promotion of the Amman Message, such as media and youth engagement, human rights, conflict management and analysis, and negotiation skills.

University and school students were also included in the project. A course was taught at the Aal Al-Bayt University in Jordan about the 'Objectives of the Amman Message' and a schools competition was held in 2013 involving 10,000 Jordanian students from grades 8–12. Pupils were given copies of the Amman Message along with a questionnaire which asked challenging questions relating to the Message and required some research and careful thought in order to respond correctly (RIIFS 2013d).

The RIIFS introduced issues relating to youth engagement at several meetings of the Hashemite Scientific Council, under the title of 'The Role of Islamic Scholars with Regard to Youth in Light of the "Amman Message"'. This highlighted how scholars are often out of touch with the interests and needs of young people in society.

At the same time, it emphasized that the younger generation plays an integral role in the future of society and that measures need to be taken to involve them in the establishment and preservation of a cohesive society. Islamic scholars and young people are identified as being the key players in effecting change and reform in civil society (RIIFS 2013b). Young people make up the strongest group in terms of numbers and bring with them an added energy and ability to grow and adapt.

## TRAINING RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Providing training and skills-building for imams and women preachers was also an important objective of the Promotion of the Amman Message Project. Religious leaders were involved in many of the activities of the Project, such as outbound visits, workshops, seminars and conferences. In particular, a training workshop for 140 imams and ten women preachers was held with the specific goal of promoting the Amman Message. In addition to this, a training manual was prepared for use by religious leaders, as well as teachers (in line with youth engagement), and was designed on the basis of the results of a questionnaire that had been issued to identify the specific needs and experiences of its users. It combines modern didactic approaches to strengthen preaching skills and build competencies, while also ‘deepen[ing] their awareness of the spirit and methodology of Islam in building a life characterized by humanism [and] exposing them to contemporary cultures, so that they will interact with their societies with perception and vision’ (RIIFS 2013d).

## CELEBRATING WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

Events promoting awareness of the Amman Message were also tied into the UN-sponsored World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) in both 2013 and 2014. This annual initiative was used as an opportunity to promote the Amman Message and also to tie it into interfaith activities. A film clip was prepared tying the WIHW to the Amman Message and a symposium was aired on the Jordanian TV programme ‘Islamic Horizons’, discussing the Amman Message with a panel of experts.

One specific event held during the WIHW involved a meeting to evaluate schoolbooks in Jordan as to whether they appropriately included the common ground between Islam and Christianity and whether they highlighted the contribution of Arab Christians to Arab Muslim civilization (RIIFS 2012b).

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

A number of informative and advisory workshops and conferences were held around social (global) issues which the Amman Message seeks to alleviate, such as extremism and Islamophobia as well as the false association between Islam and violence or terrorism, moving on to encourage religious moderation. Skills-building workshops were also held both with imams and female leaders, as mentioned above, as well as with members of civil society, such as embassy employees and members of civic organizations. The focus in these workshops was on the development of communication skills with a view to disseminating the Amman Message.

The Promotion of the Amman Message was concluded with a two-day seminar in Amman in September 2014 which included speeches, reflections upon the journey of the Project, a consideration of the current status quo of inter-Muslim and international relations and the distribution of the book, *Muslims and Human Communities: A Relationship of Harmony or Fear? (In the light of the Amman Message)*, which is mentioned in the introduction to this volume. Those involved observed on the one hand what a positive experience the journey had been, while on the other hand highlighting that inter-Muslim conflict had, unfortunately, increased in the period in which the project was running. The emergence of the so-called Islamic State, which, in the summer of 2014, and thus directly preceding the conference, had made significant territorial gains in Syria and Iraq, was a topic of shared concern. The necessity of further work to promote communication between religions and cultures was highlighted as being indispensable.

While the Amman Message is a valuable and timely contribution towards the ongoing debate about the nature of Islam, its success will

depend in many ways upon whether and how it is disseminated. Its methodology is unique and it provides a credible and authoritative counter-narrative to extremist positions. It has the potential to lay the foundation for a number of measures aimed at boosting social cohesion, preventing violent extremism, and educating the public – both in Muslim and non-Muslim societies – about the true nature of Islam. The remainder of this volume will present a varied approach to these issues, highlighting on the one hand the complexity of the intra-Islamic and the Islam–West encounter in the face of religiously motivated extremism, but also reinforcing the many and varied options which exist to improve relations between individuals, faiths and communities.

## NOTES

1. ‘Laylat al-Qadr is the holiest night of the fasting month of the Ramadan that marks the day when the Holy Book, the Qur’an, was revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, nearly 1400 years ago.’ See [www.aalalbayt.org/en/news.html](http://www.aalalbayt.org/en/news.html).
2. Ghazi bin Muhammad, in discussion with the author, 14 September 2011, Amman.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibn Majah, Subban, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith no. 4085.
5. The doctrine of the *imamah* relates to the belief that the leaders of the Shi’a community, known as the Imams, were the divinely inspired, true successors of Muhammad and could provide divine guidance to the Muslim community.
6. A *fatwa* is a legal opinion on an issue relating to Islamic law by a Muslim legal expert, known as a mufti.
7. *Apostate* signifies a person who is considered to have renounced or abandoned their religion, one or more of its central tenets or its true practice. This is fundamental to most sectarian disagreements regarding Islam.
8. For more information, see the homepage of the RABIIT website: [www.aalalbayt.org/en/index.html](http://www.aalalbayt.org/en/index.html).
9. The official website of the Amman Message and its Three Points can be found at [www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com).
10. Project Brief: Capacity Building of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places (unpublished).
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. ‘Supporting the Promotion of the “Amman Message”: Grant Application Form.’ Unpublished manuscript, Concept Notes, 23 August 2011.

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- RIIFS (2012b) 'World Interfaith Harmony Week.' *Al-Bayan 1*, 6.
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- RIIFS (2013b) 'The Hashemite Scientific Council Present Issues Concerning the Youth and Current Challenges.' *Al-Bayan 2*, 10.
- RIIFS (2013c) 'Anna Lindh Network Jordan: Building Youth Capacities to Promote the Amman Message.' *Al-Bayan 2*, 11.
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# 2

## Taking the Amman Message to European Audiences

A Message for Muslims and Non-Muslims Alike

*Mike Hardy*

### INTRODUCTION

The task seemed both urgent and clear. More than five years on from the agreement and publication of both the Amman Message and its Three Points,<sup>1</sup> the introduction of a project to promote these within European and Middle Eastern communities seemed a timely and obvious thing to do. With the commitment of the Amman Message to provide an authoritative counter-narrative to distorted, uncomfortable but increasingly and regrettably normalized views on governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms associated with Islam worldwide, the critical second step was to communicate the message and promote its understanding. The new ‘Support for the Promotion of the Amman Message’ project (henceforth ‘the Project’),<sup>2</sup> introduced in 2012, brought partnership between the Jordanian government and the European Union delegation in Amman, and identified an international consortium for its design and implementation that included the British Council and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK. I combined my role as Centre Director with responsibility for leading the European arm of the Project, giving me both insights into and influence over the challenge and progress. The team comprised academics and practitioners, Muslims and non-Muslims, including stakeholders in each of the countries in which the Project was implemented.

The Amman Message had been developed as a direct result of a deep concern of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan that recurrent instances of extremist violence were often perpetrated in the name of Islam. His Royal Highness saw a need to reaffirm ‘what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not’ (RABIIT 2004). When we add the Three Points of the Amman Message, the three theologically sound, legally valid and consensually definitive statements made accessible to a wide range of people, we have a powerful resource. Taken as a whole, both the Amman Message and its Three Points talk to multiple and complex audiences: while not tied to one particular Islamic school of thought,<sup>3</sup> the Three Points define who is Muslim while the Message, by outlining Islam’s defining qualities, goes beyond Muslims, meeting the needs of a *dual audience* in Europe and acknowledging the importance of non-Muslims in this respect. The Amman Message addresses Muslims and Christians, those with religious belief and those without, East and West, North and South; and, in doing so, it allows us to examine tensions between Islam and other faiths and traditions on the one hand, and to suggest a theological response to sectarian conflict within Islam on the other. It is both international and intercultural, and contextually relevant to issues of sectarianism, violence and prejudice. The Project, for its part, focused clearly on the objective of transferring this affirmation to discourse in Europe and, through this, further supporting communication of the ‘true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam’ for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

This chapter does not set out to establish the best way of using the Amman Message to address or mitigate difficult experiences or relationships in Europe; rather, it seeks to use the lens offered by the application of the Message in the European context to verify and validate a stronger appreciation of this complex terrain. Our experience of the powerful dialogue associated with the promotion of the Message in a number of European cities between 2012 and 2014 highlighted an array of critical challenges within the important search for understanding of troubled communities. The radicalization of young people (particularly males) (Coppock and McGovern 2014), extremist behaviours and terror persist in a context where they are strongly associated by the media and too many policy-makers with Muslims (Bhui *et al.* 2012) and with a certain understanding of



Islam. Reference to ‘Islamic terrorism’ has entered the contemporary lingua franca and, as a direct consequence, the identity, role and contribution of Muslims within European communities have continued to be questioned (Lynch 2013). The Project, by proposing to promote actively an authoritative and accessible awareness of the ‘true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam’ was seen, generally, as a critical and helpful imperative.

The chapter will look, first and briefly, at the Project, as launching and implementing it provided significant learning and insights; second, by reflecting on the changing face of Europe and the evolving context, I will consider how, essentially, the Project sought to bring a clear but complex Message to a European landscape that was dynamic, turbulent and highly diverse. I conclude by critically revisiting the assertion that we are in reality on the verge of – or in the middle of – a worldwide ‘clash of civilizations’,<sup>4</sup> as well as the all too frequent reference to the incompatibility of Islam with ‘Western’ civilization.<sup>5</sup> However, were this the case, the wider dissemination and any traction of the Amman Message would have little more effect than the application of a small bandage.

## A PROJECT JOURNEY

The Promotion of the Amman Message in Europe focused on establishing high-level discussions, facilitating intercultural exchange based on the Message and using it as a tool for training and guidance for some of Europe’s key religious figures, opinion makers, leaders and institutions. From the outset, the dialogue activity that this programme started and supported confirmed its relevance to the challenges posed in today’s Europe.

The underlying objective of the two-year Project was to further endorse the religious credibility and humanist appeal of the Message, and to mobilize this through better governance, at all levels, aimed at protecting human rights and counteracting perceived root causes of terrorism while curbing tendencies for religious violence – violence in the name of Islam, in particular. The research questions underpinning the Project actions sought to identify and tackle the root causes of misunderstanding and mistrust among both Muslims and non-Muslims across the varied human geography of Europe and the Middle East. They were also intended to provide a basis from

which to develop and launch a process of multi-level discourse that derives its legitimacy from an enlightened Islamic scholarly research that confronted head on and in depth the complex dimensions of contemporary religious conflicts.

These were ambitious objectives. Where the Amman Message sought to confirm and raise awareness about Islamic values, the Project sought to reduce the stereotypical images of Islam as a religion of yesteryear unable to co-exist in comfort with 'modernity', as well as to pinpoint the inconsistencies of extremist discourses using the theoretical and moral references and the religious frames of sacred texts. This, combined with promoting Jordan as a leader of international initiatives in the field of interfaith, intra-faith and cross-cultural relations, suggested a juxtaposition of a genuine and deep-seated anxiety and concern with a goal that many perceived as being excessively difficult to achieve.

The Message was conceived, negotiated and finalized in the Arab world by Islamic scholars, and to take this to European audiences brought challenges of relevance and engagement. The implementation involved a series of high-level seminars in cities across Europe, in the United Kingdom, Greece, Denmark (later changed to Croatia), Germany and Italy. At the start of the first European seminar in Coventry (UK), a question was raised that would accompany the Project throughout its two years, and which is broadly applicable to many international dialogue initiatives: participants questioned why a message from the King of Jordan would hold any real significance in Coventry, London, or anywhere else in the UK or Europe generally. One of the responses was that the focus should be placed more on the message itself, and less upon its bearer, whether he or she is a monarch, scholar or layman. Through the ensuing dialogue, it became clear that the more accessible the Message was found to be, the more receptive participants became – and that accessibility was particularly about relevance to context and appropriateness to audience.

By itself the Amman Message might have had very little impact as a statement, regardless of how erudite and clear. However, its evidential impact was as a tool and 'prop' – a means to provoke dialogue around the underlying issues rather than about the Message per se. On the other hand, the initiative to take the Amman Message to Europe seemed to be much more about form – the *how*, than about substance – the *what*. Of course, the substance was critical

– as is the authority, the legal validity and the global accessibility provided through the scholars assembled by King Abdullah II; but the Message's impact in terms of making a difference to the perceived crisis in mixed communities worldwide (including Muslims and non-Muslims and, importantly, among Muslims themselves) depends crucially on the way it is applied and framed.

The Project worked well at the national level and allowed for the testing and vetting of the concept of the Amman Message with high-profile European audiences; it is worth reflecting, however, that these were informed and willing participants, and not necessarily a litmus test for the potential application of the Message in broader society. The Message becomes more challenging to disseminate in a positive and impactful way the more local the engagement and the less 'willing' the audience. Through the Project, the Amman Message was entering a European discourse that was both tense and emotionally charged. The context in multicultural Europe generally was challenging for all, Muslims and others alike (Lowndes and Thorp 2010).

With the clear and stated purpose of building a strong understanding of the Amman Message across Europe, primarily among national and international actors, Project activity reached more than 150 organizations and over 300 influencers and activists for social cohesion in Europe. The strengthening of understanding of the Amman Message across Europe, primarily among national and international actors, aimed to develop an understanding of where and in what way the initiative could add the most value. It also helped to identify partners who could provide the most effective strategic fit in carrying the Message forward.

As the Project team developed their confidence in the substance, form and context of the Message, in relation to different audiences, it also developed new strategies and approaches for how best to present the Message so as to make it attractive, accessible and, above all, relevant. Using local knowledge, academic research and policy analysis, we framed the Message in the context of local and national situations – in response to a lack of Muslim representation in Germany, for example, or the role of the Orthodox Church in Greece. The seminars in Greece and Italy, in particular, were strong indicators of the success of this approach, with the events attracting a large number of high-profile delegates who provided their backing to the potential of the Amman Message in their respective areas of work.

An important goal underlying the Project was that the Amman Message should have strong resonance within the context of violent extremism and terrorism in the name of Islam. An assumption underpinning this was that a link exists between such behaviour and conservative or distorted interpretations of the Islamic faith, and that misconceptions and misunderstanding of the faith are used to validate or legitimize violent and criminal actions (Francis 2012; McDonald and Mir 2011).

What appears to be the case in European communities is that radicals and the radicalized among Muslims look backwards, sometimes with nostalgia, at some idealized picture of a time when identity, life and a sense of belonging appeared clearer and more secure (Bartlett and Miller 2012). Many minorities feel more comfortable in doing this. But in contemporary Europe this has also become an attractive prospect for many young Muslims who see themselves as excluded locally or – worse – as targets of prejudice and hate crimes. To these, the promises of a radical Islam as portrayed on social media can be seen as glamorous or as validating extreme and reactive behaviours and offering a stronger, better-defined identity and sense of belonging. Some studies, however, suggest that identity is not a strong predictor of radicalization as the act of ‘identity-seeking is quite normal behaviour for all’ (Lynch 2013). That said, European-based Muslims are a diverse and eclectic demographic. Many, though by no means all, have limited education and low-skilled jobs and are often angered by their lack of acceptance, perceived or real. In this way, it is a question of identity, self-esteem and of displacement. In an age of low-cost, always-on digital technology, the pull of radical groups and ideas offering an alternative narrative seems to have become even stronger.

With experience, other issues and relationships became important to understand. The Project began to highlight how, in addition to the value of the Message’s much clearer guidance regarding Islamic teaching, other work was also needed. Little effort, for example, had been dedicated to understanding radical Islamic groups, the way they interpret religious texts, and their links with more moderate Islamic thinking or movements in the Muslim world. There seemed even less effort dedicated to religious reform and to the interface between tradition and modernity. Without such a portfolio of focused work,

discussions of causes of so-labelled 'Islamist terrorism' in Europe appeared to be both superficial and contestable.

And, of course, beyond those categorized as extremist are the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Europe, who, while united by their faith, are neither a monolithic entity nor hold uniform views about formal religion or its political dimensions. The significance and variety of Muslims' presence and influence in Europe are rarely included in the discourse – the diverse history of Islam and its adherents is often swept under the carpet, silenced, or reduced to a few key events such as the Crusades, the siege of Vienna or Moorish Spain. Moreover, what precisely constitutes the boundaries of the term 'Europe' is also often silenced from discourse, though this has a bearing on Europe's historical relationship with Islam.

Much of modern-day lived experience in Europe and elsewhere draws on perceptions of 'clash narratives', and of how the rise of far-right groups, terror threats, random acts of violence and Islamophobia means that both Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe are faced with the imperative to act to address current tensions, as well as prevent further deterioration of relations. This duality of message echoes many of the needs of European Islam and Muslims in Europe today and demands a complex and multi-layered response to encourage social cohesion and trust.

The underlying battle of ideas might be more related to the conflict between forces for pluralism generally and the forces of prejudice – as evidenced by the growth of xenophobes who target the 'other' irrespective of type, rather than an anti-Muslim agenda. But the tendency to negatively stereotype Muslims and Islam within Europe encourages support for a view of a fundamental incompatibility between Islam and so-called 'Western' traditions and values. At the time of the launch of the Project, Islamophobia as a political and cultural phenomenon was increasing and extremists from all sides were asserting their political power and participations in many parts of the world. In the years since, this has become even more the case and the challenges have become far greater.

More specifically, during the two years of the Project, the prominence of extremism directly associated with Islam and intra-Islamic tension increased dramatically in public discourse and the violence, conflicts and displacements that continue to proliferate in

the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are now having a tangible and vivid impact within Europe. Networks, connectivity and globalization generally mean that a focus on Europe cannot avoid acknowledgement of events elsewhere.

Irrespective of ambitions or success, the ideas behind the Project served to shed light on the nature of the deep-seated anxiety contingent on this impact. Exploring the specifics of the broad application of the Amman Message to the current European context required a focus on the challenges and complexities experienced within contemporary Europe; in particular, on the nature of the relationship between Muslims, Muslim identities, and the turbulence associated in multicultural communities with the polarizations evident where trust and social cohesion are almost absent.

In this terrain, as at project conception, the Amman Message was seen as a potential dialogue tool able to be mobilized and deployed to enable a space to introduce and rebuild trust and, more importantly, to develop action plans for positive change. The worry was that images of a generous, accommodating and forgiving Islam would continue to face sustained attack from those whose interpretations – and, at times, distortions and fabrications – seek to portray Islam as an enemy to them and their way of life. What became clear through the Project is that the Amman Message is a necessary but, in and of itself, insufficient intervention.

In the next section, I will look more carefully at the dynamic and fast-changing European context and highlight my view of the tectonic changes that have taken place since the publication of the Message. In this short time, perceptions of Islam in Europe have changed for the worse. Events in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the Arab world generally, have altered the views of many regarding Islam's relationship with democracy. When combined with new technologies and globalization, the struggles of people and groups across geographies and societies become more connected, and changes to mind-sets throughout the world are amplified. By the time of the launch of the Project, the old alignment between the 'Muslim world' and the 'Arab world' had already shifted, affecting Europe's relationship with each and both. 'Europe', however defined, has never been and is still not a single place, with rarely a coherent regional view about anything; however, a growing visibility of religious pluralism in Muslim-majority countries in Africa and Asia,

such as Sudan, Senegal and Indonesia, has begun to refocus European ideas of Islam away from conflating Muslim with Arab towards a more global view of the Muslim population.

Ironically, this was a change in the landscape that the Project was intending to promote and the broader global awareness of the geographical diversity of Islam is a core principle within the Message. But this is, also, an example of how change, and the fast pace of change, provides a difficult context for communicating the Amman Message. The situation in Europe, as elsewhere, is dynamic and leaves little space for static or slow messaging. Taking the Message to European audiences is not a simple journey as it involves intervention in what appear to be deeply troubled and continuously changing European communities broadly lacking in minimal religious literacy and battling an underlying Islamophobia.

## A EUROPE ON THE MOVE

Europe has changed since 2004 both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Mass migration, political change and economic struggle have altered the landscape for Europeans and for Islam in European states and have underlined that, in the same way that it is inaccurate and unhelpful to view Islam as a single, monolithic faith or culture, Europe can be defined by its diversity and internal conflicts. Divergence in political approaches to migration and integration has continued to grow among European states and Europe is less homogenous in its stance and progress as a result.

A prominent feature of right-wing parties throughout Europe since 2015 has been the anti-immigrant rhetoric, further fuelled by the mass arrival of (mostly Muslim) refugees. This became a central influence also in the negativity of the debate over the UK's decision to exit the European Union. It introduces a clear and simple link between Muslims in Europe and challenges to the post-Second-World-War European project itself. At the same time, the violent attacks in France, Belgium and Germany have fuelled public fears about terrorism even though a number of attacks had no terrorist links and were, in fact, random acts of violence. Pew Research Centre surveys show how the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism are very much related to one another in the minds of many Europeans. In eight of the ten European nations surveyed, half or more believed

incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country (Poushter 2015).

The Pew review of Europe's Muslim population illustrates the dynamics and changes within the European landscape. At the same time, the significant growth of violent actions, killings and terrorist attacks, as well as the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees in Europe, have drawn increased attention to the Continent's Muslim population and to the changing landscape in which the Message might be introduced. This increased attention is accompanied by significant increase in xenophobic and anti-Muslim attacks (Poushter 2015).

The Muslim share of Europe's total population has been steadily growing by about one percentage point per decade, from 4 per cent in 1990 to 6 per cent in 2010. This pattern is expected to continue through 2030, when Muslims are projected to make up 8 per cent of Europe's population. Germany and France have the largest Muslim populations among European Union member countries. As of 2010, there were 4.8 million Muslims in Germany (5.8 per cent of the country's population) and 4.7 million Muslims in France (7.5 per cent); these are projected by Pew to rise to 5.6 million and 6.8 million, respectively (Hackett 2004).

Mughal, in Chapter 4, reflects on how Muslims are younger than other Europeans. In 2010, the median age of Muslims throughout Europe was 32, eight years younger than that for all Europeans (40). By contrast, the median age of religiously unaffiliated people in Europe, including atheists, agnostics and those with no religion in particular, was 37. The median age of European Christians was 42 (Hackett 2004).

Views of Muslims vary widely across European countries. A 2016 Pew study that covered ten European nations found that negative views prevailed in eastern and southern Europe. However, the majority of respondents in the UK, Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands gave Muslims a favourable rating. Moreover, views about Muslims were found to be tied to respondents' overall political views. While 47 per cent of Germans on the political right gave Muslims an unfavourable rating, just 17 per cent on the left did so. The gap between left and right was also roughly 30 percentage points in Italy and Greece (Wike, Stokes and Simmons 2016).



By 2010, the European Union was home to about 13 million Muslim immigrants. The foreign-born Muslim population in Germany is primarily made up of Turkish immigrants, but also includes many born in Kosovo, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Morocco. The roughly three million foreign-born Muslims in France are largely from France's former colonies of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (Pew Forum Communications 2012).

Worries about extremism are higher in Europe than in Muslim-majority countries worldwide, and roughly half or more of participants across all the countries surveyed said they are at least somewhat concerned about Islamic extremism in their country. European countries with significant Muslim populations are getting more worried. In the last period since 2011, the general population that is 'very concerned' about Islamic extremism has increased. For instance, after the murders of the Charlie Hebdo staff, two-thirds of those polled in France are 'very concerned', 29 per cent more than in the 2011 poll. In Spain, 61 per cent are very worried about the extremist threat; roughly half in Italy (53 per cent) and the UK (52 per cent) and 46 per cent of Germans are apprehensive (Poushter 2015).

Significantly, these changes coincide with a maturing population of Muslims across Europe amplifying the real complexity of the audience for the Message. Part of this maturation is the growth of so-called 'cultural Muslims' – those who accommodate the cultural elements of Islam but are not practising the religion (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of this). These have become a growing silent majority in Europe and cannot be ignored in their potential role and contribution to promoting moderation and shifting mass-perceptions. Communicating a faith-based message to this audience requires distinctive agency and interfaces.

A major challenge for the Message is communicating with European communities, both faith-based and other, as well as those many who are less engaged with their faith, which are not only fed with misconceptions of Islam and battling an underlying Islamophobia but are also in constant flux.

So the European landscape is permanently on the move, challenged and changed by external events, by unfolding internal relations and by shifting demographics. Overall, and in this specific

context, in the wake of the violent events, especially from the early 2000s onwards, a generation of non-Muslims have grown up being suspicious of Muslims and a generation of Muslims have grown up unsure of their place in society. A further complication is the extent to which events and feelings unfolding in Europe are 'European agendas' at all, or rather wider global agendas played out in Europe.

A further distinctive characteristic of the Europe context, in comparison to the Middle East and North Africa, is the relatively limited impact of intra-Islamic tensions, though this is changing, for example with a growth of anti-Shi'a activism and with the strong feelings held about Ahmadiya communities. A significant achievement of the development process of the Amman Message, as discussed by Markiewicz in Chapter 1, was the ability of Jordan's open and inclusive Hashemite ideology to promote and support a consistent, tolerant image of Islam. Tensions between the strands of Islam have existed for centuries in different countries – and even Jordan has not escaped fully from sometimes violent internecine conflict, an example being the tense relationship between Islamists and Jordanians in 2015 (see Magid 2016). As Markiewicz points out, the Message process successfully adopted a solutions-based approach, mobilized scholars with narratives broadly acceptable to all conflicting parties and began the process of using a language and tone that encouraged change without causing real harm to others in the name of religion. The approach emphasized the importance of religious legitimacy and the Message's role as an authoritative foundation from which to work towards positive impact and achieve change.

This, however, cannot be assumed to be easy within the diverse context of Europe. Here intra-Islamic tension is much less significant and the priority is to project a more tolerant and respectful image of Islam generally, in part, as a counter to Islamophobes, by raising awareness about the understanding of Islam portrayed in the Amman Message. The second related and highly complex challenge for the European context is to enable greater trust between Muslim and secular citizens. This is all the more challenging because differences are more likely to arise between these around the social norms developed within the secular world, rather than as a result of codes developed in religious texts and teaching. Critical though this is, it is not an area considered within the Amman Message but represents an important missing piece of the dialogue jigsaw.

There is an important and growing divide within communities in Europe. This lies between those who consider Muslims completely incompatible with Western traditions, values and forms of government and those who support a multicultural respect for difference.<sup>6</sup> There is growing awareness of the contribution of Islamic philosophy, medicine and science that has greatly benefited Europe, but also a strong counter-narrative that challenges the story of Islam's input. The counter-narrative arises from the actions of a very few Muslims who either embrace a violent and extremist pursuit of power and influence or a simple but deadly expression of dissidence or anger. Both are acted out using religious terminology and reference to Islamic texts for legitimacy, and founded in a perception of self-exclusion and victimhood.

## THE EUROPEAN PROBLEM

The repeated and continuing terrorist and other violent attacks in Europe have fuelled growing debate and analysis regarding Jihadism as scholars grapple with trying to provide explanations to help policy-makers anticipate and react.<sup>7</sup> Divergent views on the nature and source of the problem have emerged with force in European discourse on just what radical Islam is, how it developed and what its future may be. At the core is the question asking whether Islam is itself the problem. These differences in views have emerged and consolidated since the publication of the Amman Message and now challenge the assumption (behind the Project) that the dialogical contribution of the Message had meaning, purpose and relevance to extremism in Europe.

On one side, Kepel (2005, 2015) argues that Islam is at the root of the problem because of the *radicalization* of Islam. Roy (2015) counters by arguing that it is the *Islamicization* of radicalism – and as a consequence, radicalism albeit overlaid with 'Islamic flourishes' – that is the problem, with significant consequences for policy. Roy's emphasis on individual behaviour and psychology highlights extremists as mostly marginalized young men and petty criminals, who have used Islam as a cover to pursue extreme violence. If the main impetus is related specifically to Islam, then the central problem is a failure of integration, with Muslim minorities being detached and living in parallel universes within European communities, and

policies on social cohesion and inclusion are appropriate. If, however, the core drivers of extremism are strictly marginal to Islam, and are driven by many different individual motivations, a different set of policy options towards the larger Muslim community makes sense.

This is a debate about forces at work within Europe, but there is also the complexity of the European *theatre* within a global context. So, are drivers of extremism in Europe about Europe at all, or is the violence a proxy for other fundamental frustrations? There is an important difference between a focus on the 'faraway enemy' rather than the 'near enemy' and an easy-to-communicate Jihad with a strongly felt legitimacy enacted in Europe (and the US), since there exists little outlet for pluralism in a Middle East dominated by authoritarian regimes, forcing the disaffected to resort to arms if they want to express their dissidence.

So Europe is changing and highly complex, and the experienced violence and extremism are the more challenging and intractable, because they are just not well understood and their drivers are not clear and defined. Even while the local and global influences are unpacked and analysed, we have a Europe in which our understanding and responses remain a *work in progress*.

As long as the views, feelings and perceptions of and about Muslims, particularly those living within European communities, remain a major destabilizer to the global order (and as a result to human security generally), there will be a role for the clarity and raised awareness brought by the Amman Message. There is a real danger that everyone becomes an expert on Muslims and their beliefs, and that the less informed, alongside the ideologically driven, present a highly distorted, unhelpful and incorrect catechism defining in their words the 'true nature of Islam'. This highly charged reality represents the real challenge for both Muslim and non-Muslim European communities as the influence of prejudice is given impetus and significant damage is done to what little progress has been made towards a plural society.

Irrespective of whether radicalism or Islam challenges European security, what we describe as *radical Islam* (whatever that may be) fulfils an agency role: it is responsible at times for the terror, sometimes directly but increasingly by inspiring disconnected individuals, acting alone and hence less easily detected. But it is not responsible by itself; there appears to be a toxic mix of the campaigns and exhortations of

‘radical Islam’ with a whole set of other socio-economic imperfections and dysfunctions. Locally born and raised individuals searching for ill-defined identities in an unfriendly space appear to lose touch with moderating constraints on behaviours.

Saggar and Summerville (2012) record how Muslim identity can become an important sense of masculinity among young Muslims who construct a ‘strong’ Muslim identity as a way to resist stereotypes of weakness, compliance and passivity. It is at this point of the search for identity that individuals may be vulnerable to radicalization. It is these implications that are the most challenging as the resultant problems are actually a combination of widely held misconceptions with (sometimes deliberate) misunderstandings of religious and cultural guidance. The people – mainly young, mainly men – who are prey to these are those who feel strongly that they are not accepted by society and do not belong, that equal opportunities matter for others but not for them, and who have little sense of feeling included or of identifying with the dominant values of local society. The critical contribution of the Message in this context is not a direct one; it is more one of supporting the emergence and nurturing of a self-confidence and, in part, a validated identity – for families, religious leaders and community activists or anyone who might be in the front line to support the more vulnerable.

In 2016, a bitterly regular scenario for Muslim communities in Europe is represented in news of the disappearance of one or more citizens and family members, apparently to join extremists fighting outside Europe, or the announcement of the deaths of those who had already done so.<sup>8</sup> To anyone attracted by radical Islamic ideas, surrounded by Western culture, so-called Islamic extremists elsewhere appear to promote a satisfyingly fundamental ideology. Some have suggested it is the certainty and the sense of purpose that is attractive to some young Muslims who, as we have indicated, may feel alienated within their European space (O’Duffy 2008).

The young people involved are often described as being ‘groomed’ and brainwashed by radicals. The recruits are frequently described, in a domestic context, as pleasant and thoughtful family members and friends, and as victims – no doubt accurately. To some extent, this is understandable (especially for those left behind in their communities), but whatever other charges could be laid at the door of Islamic extremists, concealing their dogmatic approach to their

view of the true nature of Islam is not one of them, and all European communities, Muslim and others, have a real struggle to counter their ideas. An assumption referred to above was that the Amman Message represents a powerful and importantly authoritative counter-narrative to the language, assertions and behaviours of the extremists. The experience of our work in disseminating and communicating the Message to European audiences, both Muslim and others, confirmed the challenge that this was not simply a battle of (or for) ideas, but one significantly impacted by a crisis of identity, whether minor or major, among many Muslims and non-Muslims – all struggling with new and rapidly developing multicultural communities.

When communicating the Amman Message to Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in Europe, a powerful and unexpected insight emerged. In discussing the central question of the Kepel/Roy debate – to what extent has the radical been captured by the Islamist, or has Islam been radicalized? – further questions became important. Have the radical and extremist forces in evidence in Europe been mobilized by Muslims in a way that any other group might do, or have extremists captured Islam? Do we have Islamic extremists or extremist Islamists? Applying the Amman Message and reasserting the true nature of Islam works better in countering those ideologues who would radicalize Islam, but less so in countering extremists who then explain their extremism through their claimed religion.

In and by itself, the Daesh of 2016 and its self-proclaimed ‘caliphate’ has become a major challenge to the global order, as to human security generally, and it is not surprising that so many commentators have questioned out loud whether Huntington was right and that we are on the verge of a worldwide clash of civilizations. The real challenge for local communities, however, lies in the significant damage to the development of a more accepting (or less intolerant) society caused by the growing prejudice. Indeed, Daesh and the establishment and early growth of the caliphate they describe and showcase have created a whole new scale of challenge and conflict at most local levels. The far-reaching tentacles of the terrorism they support, facilitated by globalization, travel and the internet, direct and inspire terror attacks in our communities, promote divisions and separation, and serve to radicalize young people. The extremists are responsible for the terror, but not by themselves; it is the toxic mix of a radical narrative with a whole set of other imperfections and dysfunctions.

## COMPLEXITY, PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY

This is a massive issue within European Muslim communities because, first, Islamic teaching has historically revolved around the application of the Qur'an and Hadith – although contextualized theological reflection has not played the prominent role in Islam that it does in Christianity. But contextual theology does play a role in Islam. Translating the Qur'an and Hadith into different languages is one prominent example of this. However, it does appear that there is a real reticence to engage in historical–critical study of the Qur'an (as a product of its time) – study that has not established itself as a popular discipline, most likely, in my view, because it encourages seeing and using the Qur'an as a book of its time which is perceived as threatening to its status as the word of God.

Second, in a twenty-first-century 'European' context, there is a perceived disjunction between the Islam of the Imam (accepting that there is a diverse array of imams) and the existential questions that young European Muslims are asking. Increasingly, we see the use of popular culture – film, music, including Muslim rap music, and art – as a vehicle for exploring Islamic ideas in a culturally relevant way, although I observe that most of this is still much 'below the radar' (Briggs 2010).

I am, however, interested in the seemingly unending battle between the forces of prejudice and the forces for pluralism and so look at the many questions that arise around disparity and disadvantage, and especially those that result from cultural plurality. A key question is whether it is possible to incorporate diversity and difference in our lives without creating insecurity or exploiting vulnerabilities.

Communities worldwide have always been dynamic, diverse and complex. But the last two decades, in particular, have seen demographic shifts of an unprecedented scale: our societies and communities today feel – and are – ethnically and culturally plural like never before. Millions of Europeans are of dual heritage, and most are young. So this trend is only going to grow, and it is far sharper in Europe because of the declining and ageing population. Opinions about the impact of rising levels of diversity vary. On one side is a worry about separateness within communities, a weakening of positive social capital, a decline in trust, and heightened tension. Others place an unquestioning faith in the capacity of people and

communities to adapt and absorb these major shifts. (For a good overall discussion, see Council of Europe 2016.)

All this is against a backcloth of general human insecurity in which inequality and the political, economic and social structural issues may outweigh everything else. These create the most fertile ground for the myths, perceptions and reality of negative perceptions and fears about Muslims to persist in Europe.

Pankaj Mishra sets out the following interesting and non-apocalyptic diagnosis: 'Europe's once-mighty nation-states are undergoing a perilous transition, coping as they are simultaneously with shifts in demography, weakening of national sovereignty, shocks of economic globalization and other radical changes in economy and lifestyles' (Mishra 2015). Mishra views the European project as beginning to unravel: Europe's institutions were not specifically built for a federal association but more to serve national interests within a defined (though sometimes challenged) territory; they are now struggling to adjust to a new world order characterized in part by global terror, the mass movement of people for all sorts of reasons, footloose capital, and the internet – all accompanied by the new complexity referred to earlier.

Take the contradictory posturing by politicians about national sovereignty and identity, at the same time both progressive and restrictive. The current focus on controlling migration into Europe, at a time when the global economy dictates the necessity of immigration, demonstrates this well. And then there are the affairs of nation-states, the foreign policy approaches – where European countries, most notably Britain and France, still use gunboat diplomacy in spite of large and disaffected (Muslim) immigrant populations, and despite poor economic performances at home. Joining the global war on terror, in any shape or form, has clearly not prevented educated and other young British (or French or...) citizens from embracing extremism, and may even have encouraged it.

The radicalized have used this globalized and mostly dysfunctional world to their advantage. They play on and seek to expose the sectarian faultlines in the Middle East and North Africa while at the same time providing route maps to dignity and clearer identity through high-profile, abhorrent and extreme violence that seems to appeal to some of the young Muslim Europeans struggling to find either by other routes.



Terror attacks in Europe by European citizens fulfil the wildest aspirations of the extremists – wherever they reside; and, in doing so, they have led directly to exacerbating hate crimes and prejudice. Throughout Europe, following the attacks and murders of 2015 and 2016, anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by factors of three or four almost overnight, the vast majority of those recorded being directed against Muslim women and girls. Moreover, Muslims now feel the harshest effects of rapidly enhanced security and community safety actions. For many, the murders and mayhem reinforce a perception that Samuel Huntington was right and we are playing out a global clash of civilizations (or perhaps it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy).

In this last section, I will seek to draw conclusions about what we know and don't know about the forces at work in our European communities, and I will question in passing the helpfulness (or otherwise) of the continued reassertion of the Huntington clash narrative referred to earlier. (See the discussion in Harris 2005, p.134; Russett, Oneal and Cox 2000; Said 2001, 2004; Sacks 2002; Willis 2003.)

This clash narrative is important as its acceptance places obstacles to whole swathes of policy options: whether the clash is real or imagined, the 'other' becomes an intractable challenge. In European nation-states, new laws have emerged that oblige the mobilization of communities' social capital to enable due regard for the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism; security takes priority over human rights for the most part. This suggests a situation entailing a defensive 'West' (civilization) and communities of besieged European Muslims, which does not help with the struggle against the ideas of the Jihadists. The concepts of trust and respect – hallmarks of a plural society – fade away.

An imagined clash may feel real because facts and reality are difficult to distinguish from perceptions; or this just may be the case where perceptions outweigh facts, especially when fuelled by a media focused on short-term outcomes. For example, media in European countries frequently apply an 'Islamic' prefix to terrorism, fundamentalism, extremism, making all Muslims become one and the same.

The highly visible actions of the extremists, whether within Europe or at least influential within Europe, have provoked belief

and confidence in this notion of a worldwide contest for ideological supremacy that has been supported inexorably in the US, Europe and other 'Western' countries, and compounded by both the rise of neo-conservatism and an aggressively assertive press and media. All these developments have created global and local landscapes in which it has been all too easy to simplify very complex and bizarrely connected events and occurrences.

The reality, however, is that there were, and are, even more serious clashes *within* civilizations, both in the 'West' and, even more so, within the Muslim world. In Europe, tensions have emerged and continue to be played out around a growing crisis of identity among *European* Muslims (or indeed *Muslim* Europeans, or Muslims in Europe...). This has been complicated by local worries about immigration, both legal and illegal. Europe is the more complex because of post-colonial issues and the territorial proximities and hence movements of people (see Chapter 3 for more detail and insight regarding these issues).

Popular opinion and the powerful imaginations both in the 'West' and within the Muslim world also failed to acknowledge the serious clashes *about* civilization in the Islamic world itself. While it may have been the case that a small minority of Muslims were attracted to the idea of a worldwide caliphate imbued with Islamic values, there have been very different realities on the ground.

Serious differences in the interpretation of Islam in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia have begun to emerge and grow. Consequently, different interpretations of the practical application of Muslim values are present within the Middle East, among and within each Arab state, between Arab states and Iran, between the larger Middle East and Turkey, between Muslims in Pakistan and Muslims in India, and indeed even among Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims.

In reality, it is much more likely that it is clashes of local political interests that define and divide the conflict in the Middle East. Much of the root causes of these conflicts ultimately rests on tribal or family rivalry, on clan contests for access to status, power, group privilege, or on a combination of all three – a mix of history, ethnicity and politics wrapped up in religion.

Huntington was criticized by many, using evidence, history, ideology or just simple logic. Some have argued that distinct cultural boundaries do not exist in the present day, so to these observers there is neither 'Islamic civilization' nor 'Western civilization', and the

evidence for a clash is not convincing, especially when considering relationships such as that between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Berman 2003). In addition, we can observe that the many so-labelled 'Islamic extremists' spent a significant amount of time living and/or studying in the US and Europe. Evidence is stronger that conflict arises because of the beliefs that various groups share, or do not share, regardless of cultural or religious identity.

There is little doubt that we face a real battle of ideas. The extremists apply extreme ideology, quoting religious justifications to speak to a range of grievances and inspire horrific acts of violence. This is a battle of ideas that we cannot ignore, but it is a battle in which we do not seem to understand the ideas very well. The value to us of the Amman Message is that it provides a definitive and consensual interpretation – a powerful counter-narrative to those who exploit uncertainty or ignorance.

The vast majority of religious believers, including Muslims, practising or otherwise, reject and condemn extreme ideologies and their religious justifications. But the life-progress or lack of progress of too many vulnerable people, for whom the ability to fulfil their need for secure identity and the comfort of belonging remains distant, removes some of the inhibitors of anti-social behaviour, and can encourage some to react against established society. Many of these are the very young – and in Europe there are many second- and third-generation citizens. Our duty of care to these vulnerable people, and our need to disrupt what at times seems to be a self-perpetuating cycle of violence that accompanies their vulnerability, means that we must both challenge the ideas themselves and support the development of resilience within those targeted for radicalization.

Countering violent extremism, particularly that fuelled by this toxic mix of ideas and vulnerability, will take time. The struggle will be to mobilize – to inspire engagement across generations, and between and within societies' diversity. Moreover, we need to mobilize around what we know and work hard to fill the gaps of the unknown.

We have to start with the difficult reality that this is about ideas based on a perversion of religion, and we have to mobilize and engage in effective counter-narratives. We need to be appealing to all groups and generations while building their capacity to help young people become much more sceptical of extremist ideas and more questioning of their identities and futures.

So how does the Amman Message provide hope against this rather bleak picture? Much of the answer is about taking dialogue seriously and using dialogue to recalibrate social relations between people; using dialogue to validate social capital that dilutes the difference between the engaged and disengaged, the haves and the have-nots. And we need to commit to the long run and to a consistency that is completely detached from political election cycles.

Building a counter-narrative is difficult when our overall knowledge and understanding is so limited and when contrary views are propagated (about Jihad, apostasy and sectarian divides). And this has not been helped by the dominance of broadcast, print and social media in the discourse; media that is largely uncomfortable with acknowledging the role of faith in almost every aspect of life – this is a dimension of our very recent diversity that is critically understated and not understood. Add to this that, in Europe as elsewhere, we have either an education system that is seriously weak and uninspiring regarding religious matters (since many teachers with a responsibility to handle people's faith have little background for doing so) or a secularist commitment to avoid issues of faith in the public sphere.

If we agree that religion in general has been relegated to a marginal position in our press and schools, we do have a real struggle on our hands – one characterized by limited religious literacy. This is a major challenge.

Dr Jenny Taylor recently put this very well:<sup>9</sup>

Religious literacy was now urgent. The tectonic plates of our whole civilization are shifting. Without understanding the religious background to many of the stories dominating the news, journalists were simply 'the blind leading the blind'. What's needed is a whole cultural change. Instead of ruling out religion from your stories as you are trained to do, you rule it back in.

So there is a set of ideas and the need to understand these better, and a real urgency to equip ourselves with a literacy about the ideas of others and our own. This is as much a European agenda as one for Muslims in the Arab world, the Middle East and North Africa. In the Europe of 2016, this may mean taking a very different view about refugees fleeing the very horrors visited by extremist violence and conflict, and addressing the sense of exclusion and alienation,

among other factors, that is driving thousands of Europeans to fight in foreign lands.

The promotion of the Amman Message can support diverse and plural communities in Europe through incorporating and adapting it to the needs of the lived experience of people in their everyday lives. Moreover, as demonstrated during the Project process, refreshing the Message and tailoring the concept for different contexts, as well as conciseness in communication, could prove beneficial for its potential to provide a basis of support for constructive change.

One of the most powerful contributions of the work that led to the development of the Amman Message was its clear implication that interpretations of sacred texts can help show how our sense of common humanity should have more influence in our thinking and actions than our religious differences. Edmund Burke summed it up well when he stated, ‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that *good men do nothing*’ (italics added).<sup>10</sup> The real danger comes from our own indifference – and it was this awareness that spurred King Abdullah II to take action and initiate the dialogue that led to the Message, and that inspired its introduction into Europe.

## NOTES

1. Within this volume, the ‘Message’, as described by Markiewicz in Chapter 1, refers collectively to the Amman Message of 2004 and its Three Points of 2005. The historic consensus of the Three Points in 2005 supported the publication of the Amman Message of the previous year.
2. This was ‘Support for the Promotion of the Amman Message’, EuropeAid /131-675/M/ACT/JO implemented 2012–2014 by the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University and the British Council.
3. The Message recognizes Sunni, Shi’a, Ibadi Islam, traditional Islamic theology, Islamic mysticism and true Salafi thought.
4. The notion of a ‘clash of civilizations’ was first publicly raised by Samuel P. Huntington in a 1993 article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* and further developed in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in 1996. Huntington, though not without serious critics, had set out a theory that people’s cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world.
5. See Akbar Ahmed’s excellent ‘Journey into Europe’, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZleegkA-r4w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZleegkA-r4w).
6. For more information, see the following links: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVMKavEIOyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVMKavEIOyQ); <http://razarumi.com/muslimness-shifting-boundaries>; [www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries](http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries); [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/)

- wp/2015/09/02/europes-current-anti-migrant-rhetoric-carries-echoes-of-1930s-anti-semitism; and [www.insidermonkey.com/blog/10-most-racist-european-countries-towards-muslims-3672](http://www.insidermonkey.com/blog/10-most-racist-european-countries-towards-muslims-3672).
7. See the following link for more discussion of this: <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/kepel-vs-roy-arguing-about-islam-and-radicalization>.
  8. August 2016 saw confirmation of the death of East London schoolgirl, Kadiza Sultana.
  9. Jenny Taylor is Media Director at Lapidio. See [www.lapidio.com/troubling-distance-between-muslims-and-british-media-says-broadcaster-our-book-launch](http://www.lapidio.com/troubling-distance-between-muslims-and-british-media-says-broadcaster-our-book-launch) for more information.
  10. Attributed to Edmund Burke, Irish orator, philosopher and politician (1729–97).

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# 3

## Islam in Europe and the Amman Message

Overview, Challenges and Potentials

*Rebecca Catto*

This chapter is based on reports written in 2013 specifically for the Promotion of the Amman Message Project. In keeping with the original project rubric, the chapter includes reflection upon key challenges and areas for focus in relation to the Amman Message. I have updated the reports in order to reflect more recent developments regarding Islam in Europe; in particular, the influence of the transnational militant group Islamic State (IS), the associated large-scale terrorist attack in Paris in 2015, and the increase in the number of people attempting to flee conflict and seek stability and income in Europe. The fact that so much has happened over recent years indicates how fast moving, politicized and significant the status of Islam in Europe is.

### ISLAM IN EUROPE

Islam has been both an integral and an important part of Europe for a long time. In a contribution to the British Council's 'Our Shared Europe' project, Masood (2008) notes that there have been people in Europe with connections to Islam for over 1300 years: 'traders and teachers, converts and conquerors, astronomers and astrologers, architects and builders, gardeners, chefs, spies, philosophers, medics, mystics, missionaries and more' (p.8). For the same project, Sedgwick (2012) highlights the influence of Arabic philosophy on Latin philosophy in the medieval period, and that discoveries by Jewish-Arabs as well as Muslim-Arabs were absorbed into European science



and medicine. Much of the Iberian Peninsula came under the control of Arab Moors in the eighth century CE. This included the city of Cordoba, a centre of Islamic Spain where Islamic and Jewish culture flourished until conquest by Ferdinand III of Castile in 1238. Over two centuries later, the last of the Iberian areas under Muslim control, the Islamic Kingdom of Granada, finally fell in 1492 (Hulmes 2010).

From the fourteenth century onwards, the Islamic Ottoman forces made incursions from Anatolia into Greece, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria and Hungary. The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans<sup>1</sup> led to the establishment of significant Muslim communities in the region. The 1529 siege of Vienna<sup>2</sup> by Sulayman, 'the Magnificent', is considered to be the high point of the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Europe. The decision to enter the First World War on the side of the Central Powers<sup>3</sup> proved disastrous for the Empire. Allied forces supported uprisings against the Empire and, following defeat, several former Ottoman provinces came under Allied mandates: Mesopotamia, Jordan and Palestine under the British; Syria and Lebanon under the French; with Greece and Italy also claiming areas (Gleave 2010). During the Colonial Era, Western European powers expanded dramatically, taking control of areas with Muslim majorities and significant Muslim populations across Asia and Africa. These regions then became implicated in the First and Second World Wars, and this colonial legacy continues to influence the shape of Islam in Europe.

Europe, today, comprises a diversity of nation-states, many of which are members of the supranational organization the European Union (EU).<sup>4</sup> Hence, a range of languages, ethnicities, histories and national policies must be taken into account when considering the role of Islam within Europe. While there is a common Christian heritage, there are significant distinctions between Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox regions and, as noted above, some European countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina have long-standing Muslim populations (Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006). This Muslim minority suffered greatly during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s when Muslims were the only group identified by and persecuted on the basis of their religion. Reference was not made to Orthodox Bosnians or Serbs or Catholic Croats, indicating the complex relationship between ethnicity, religion and nationality. In a separate context, Turkey may be considered a Muslim-majority country within Europe, but its

membership of the EU has been under discussion since the 1950s and is still not forthcoming (Leustean and Madeley 2010).

In Europe, a crude division can be drawn between the more religious Catholic South and the less religious Protestant North, as well as between Eastern and Western Europe, although, as a Northern and predominantly Catholic country, the Republic of Ireland challenges this model (Davie 2002). As Europe is diverse, so is Islam; and hence so is Islam within contemporary Europe. Large numbers of Muslims arrived following the Second World War, when many Western European nations looked to their current or former colonial territories and nearby Muslim majority countries for labour to support post-war reconstruction. For example, in France, Muslim migrants arrived from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. There have been subsequent movements of Muslims into Europe to work and join family, as well as asylum seekers and refugees, especially following the 1979 Iranian revolution, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the desperate traumas ongoing in Syria.

This chapter draws upon literature available in the English language. Its focus is on Islam within EU nations and, specifically, on the six national contexts in which the Amman Message European seminars were held: Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom, representing two Catholic majority, two Protestant majority, one Orthodox majority and one mixed European country.

The Open Society Institute (OSI) report, *Muslims in Europe* (OSI 2009), is based on its survey of Muslims and non-Muslims in 11 European cities (Leicester, London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Paris, Marseilles, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm). The report observes that many Muslims are EU citizens while, according to official European estimates (EU 2007), there are 2.3 million third-country nationals from Turkey in the EU, 1.7 million from Morocco, 0.8 million from Albania and 0.6 million from Algeria. These, the report states, are 'likely to account for a significant proportion of the 13–15 million Muslims in the EU' (OSI 2009, p.39). Masood (2008) puts the estimated number of Muslims in the EU at 20 million and across Europe (including Russia and Turkey) at 120 million. The OSI also reports that EU policy does not focus upon groups based on religious identity, so it is

EU policies and infrastructures concerning immigration, integration and intercultural dialogue that are of most relevance to Muslims as Muslims in Europe.

There are, though, also protections against religious discrimination in Europe to consider. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights applies to all individuals within the EU regardless of citizenship and protects against discrimination on the grounds of religion and race (OSI 2009, p.57). The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, generally known as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), was signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 by the Council of Europe. This organization incorporates more member states than the EU<sup>5</sup> and is separate from it. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) was constituted in 1998 to uphold and adjudicate upon the ECHR. Article 9 of the ECHR guarantees the right to 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (ECHR 1950), to change and to manifest one's religion or beliefs, with manifestation being limited only by the law and what is deemed necessary in a democratic society. Since its creation, the ECtHR has heard a variety of cases relating to Article 9, including some related to Islam. For example, in the case of *Leyla Şahin v Turkey*, the ECtHR 'refused to adjudicate on the strongly contested question as to whether, in wearing an Islamic headscarf, the applicant was fulfilling a religious duty and thereby manifesting her faith' (Bratza 2012, p.14). The political and legal challenges and negotiations leading to the 2013 deportation of the Salafi cleric, Abu Qatada, from the UK to Jordan following his initial arrest under UK anti-terrorism legislation in the early 2000s indicate the intricacy of the relationship between national administrations and the ECtHR (BBC News 2013a).

In sum, a complex constellation of religion, ethnicity, nationality, migration, geopolitical history, law and socio-economic status affects Islam in Europe. Muslims are shifting from immigrant to citizenship status in many European countries as generations settle (Ramadan 2012), and '[a]ll available evidence indicates that Muslim youth are at least as happy in their European homes as their non-Muslim counterparts' (Jackson and Doerschler 2012, p.127). Nonetheless, challenges remain.

## KEY CHALLENGES

Throughout Europe there is a problem with the absence of accurate and reliable data that are specifically about Muslims, their health and well-being. National surveys rarely ask about religion.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, ethnicity, country of origin and citizenship status become proxies for identifying Muslim populations (Jackson and Doerschler 2012). The relatively small numbers of Muslims living within European nation-states, as well as issues affecting access such as language and residency status, also impact the effective collection of data. This hampers the ability of states and the EU to develop focused policies.

Since Muslims are and have been a minority in Europe (apart from in Turkey), infrastructures and institutions are not shaped around Islamic values or practice. The calendar revolves around Christian festivals, with Sunday generally remaining the officially recognized day of rest, and in many European countries there are close institutional ties between the church and the state. For example, in Finland the government collects taxes on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Hence, Muslims in Europe have worked and continue to work to establish space for worship and official state recognition/support on an equal footing with other formally recognized religious groups, as well as the opportunity to live according to their own religious views (Nielsen 2004).

Furthermore, there are tensions between the accommodation of religious requirements and state regulations. In France and Belgium, laws have been passed banning the wearing of a face-covering in public places and such legislation is under consideration in other European states.<sup>7</sup> Switzerland introduced a law limiting the construction of new minarets in response to the result of a public referendum in 2009 (Langer 2010). The religious slaughter of meat has come under intense scrutiny in Europe in relation to animal welfare concerns, to the extent that the European Commission (an EU institution) funded a large-scale research project on the matter.<sup>8</sup> Various issues persist regarding the provision of halal meat and other appropriate services in hospitals, as well as access to chaplaincy services in a range of public institutions (OSI 2009).

In terms of political representation and access to power, there are challenges in relation to the diversity of Islam within Europe and its absence of church-like leadership structures that European

governments are used to engaging with. Consequently, this requires adaptation on both sides. The OSI (2009, p.25) found that younger Muslims 'with more education and familiarity with political institutions' are more confident, and that Muslims are active within mainstream politics within Europe. However, Muslim voters are less likely than non-Muslim voters to feel that they can influence decision-making in their city (OSI 2009). Also, there are only six Muslims out of a total of 785 Members in the EU's European Parliament (Masood 2008, p.26) and Muslims' trust in national parliaments within Europe has been flagged as a concern (OSI 2009).

Research indicates that Muslims face multiple discriminations, and separating out the factors involved is, in itself, a challenge (FRA 2010). Muslims in Europe generally have lower incomes, less employment (particularly Muslim women) and lower levels of education than the rest of the population (Cesari 2009). They tend to live in urban, mixed locales with relatively high levels of deprivation. In the OSI survey, non-Muslims reported more trust than Muslims overall in their local neighbourhoods (OSI 2009). Nevertheless, Muslims report similar, if not higher, levels of satisfaction with European states' justice and health systems and economies (Jackson and Doerschler 2012).

Since the infamous attacks by al Qaida on American soil in September 2001, there have been high-profile – and sometimes large-scale – acts of violence perpetrated by individuals and networks of people (mostly young men) claiming Islamist motivations for terrorist attacks: the bombings in Madrid in 2004, in London in 2005 and in Stockholm in 2010; the killing of film-maker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 and of the soldier, Lee Rigby, in London in 2013; the mass shootings in Paris in 2015; and attacks in Brussels in 2016. In addition, many terrorist plots are reported to have been foiled by security services. The November 2015 attacks in Paris and March 2016 ones in Brussels have been linked to IS and cases of young Muslims leaving Europe to join IS, in Syria following a highly successful social media strategy have increased government and public anxiety regarding radicalization (Bari Atwan 2015).

Islamist terrorism and the securitization of Muslim communities have subsequently become two interrelated challenges in relation to Islam in Europe today. Concerns from governments regarding the

former are leading to an increase in the latter, with greater monitoring and surveillance (Cesari 2009). A lack of trust in the police among young, European-born Muslim men is frequently reported, and they appear to experience the most discrimination and unfair treatment from police (OSI 2009). Furthermore, Muslims are over-represented in European prison populations (Beckford, Joly and Khosrokhavar 2005).

Muslims tend to be more religiously active in terms of dress, diet and worship than the majority of non-Muslims in Europe – where an increasing proportion of the population states ‘no religion’ in surveys. They are also generally more likely to belong to an ethnic minority, meaning high public visibility and risk of racial, ethnic and religious discrimination, as well as socio-economic disadvantage.

In 1997, the UK-based Runnymede Trust published an influential report identifying and describing the phenomenon of Islamophobia. In the report, Islamophobia is associated with a closed view of Islam that sees it as a monolithic bloc, as ‘Other’, as barbaric and inferior to the West, and as supportive of terrorism. Anti-Muslim hostility is accepted as natural and ‘normal’ and used to justify discriminatory practices against Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from the mainstream (Runnymede Trust 1997). Allen (2010) critiques the Runnymede Trust’s concept of Islamophobia. He places his own emphasis upon Islamophobia as an ideology that sustains and perpetuates negative meanings of Islam and Muslims to such an extent that now neither term can be used neutrally. In 2000, the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) warned against intolerance towards Islam and hostile stereotyping (ECRI 2000, cited in Jackson and Doerschler 2012). More recently, public concern in Europe regarding Islamist terrorism has compounded such hostility, and Islamophobia is becoming an increasingly recognized yet contested phenomenon (Helbling 2012).

Hate crimes are known to be committed against Muslims in Europe but, again, lack of accurate reporting and data is a problem (OSI 2009). The way stories relating to Islam and Muslims are selected and represented in the mainstream media across Europe is considered to fuel stereotypes and hinder good relations, compounding the sense of division between a Muslim ‘them’ and Western/European ‘us’ (Said 1981).

Ramadan (2013) highlights how a ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative distinguishing Islam as something separate from and incompatible with the West is perpetuated. In populist discourses in Western societies, the beguiling and simplistic mechanism of blaming the visible immigrant minority is offered as a solution to complex socio-economic problems and, consequently, there is public resistance to multiculturalist policies. Furthermore, in the West, immigration remains associated with Islam, although millions of Muslims are citizens of Western countries and many immigrants are non-Muslim. Ramadan (2013) calls for a move away from the language of ‘integration’ to one of ‘contribution’ in order to be able to conceive of a new ‘we’, one that emphasizes living together and accepting our diversity and shared future. As a part of this, he argues, Muslims must not ‘ignore their own internal challenges’ (p.14), and should acknowledge what is known as the 3Ls: abiding by the *law* of their country, having a good command of the national *language*, and, critically, being *loyal* to the country.

As flagged by the above references to the relationship between young European-born Muslim men in Europe and the police, there are significant generational differences within European Muslim populations. Muslims generally have a younger profile than the rest of the population in European countries, and there can be tensions between the generations. Younger Muslims born in Europe may not accept the authority of religious leaders who do not know or understand their European context or language. Some consider the religious practice of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations too heavily overlaid by cultural practices and, consequently, they seek new sources of religious authority, including those they find online (Sunier 2011) (see Chapter 5 for a more in-depth discussion of these issues). Furthermore, access to general education and, specifically, to high-quality religious education can be a problem.

Issues concerning gender relations and rights exist within Islam in Europe. The forced marriage of young women among particular immigrant-origin communities, including Muslim groups, has become a public policy concern in Europe (Rude-Antoine 2005), as has the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) (EIGE 2013). Female genital mutilation has been identified as a problem among Christian and other groups as well as Muslim groups who have



migrated from specific African, Asian and Middle Eastern contexts, though it is generally understood to be a cultural practice rather than a religious obligation (Momoh 2005).

Converts to Islam in Europe can experience difficulties becoming included as part of Muslim communities due to ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences (Moosavi 2011). On the other hand, individuals who choose to leave Islam can also feel isolated and excluded from family and community, as can lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Muslims (like many LGBT non-Muslims) in European societies (Rahman 2010).

Lastly, issues relating to refugees have become an increasing problem this decade, with 2014 seeing the highest number of people on the move since the Second World War (UNHCR 2015). Recently, the civil war in Syria since 2011, including multiple attacks by government forces, and the subsequent success and growth of IS have driven people to flee the country. Although neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have received far more Syrian refugees, since 2015 there has been intense European public fear and concern regarding the number of people arriving in the EU fleeing the conflict, as well as those from other countries with significant Muslim populations, such as Eritrea and Somalia, to seek a better life. Some EU nation-states have struggled with the numbers arriving to such an extent that the situation has been referred to as a 'crisis'.<sup>9</sup>

Given the diversity of Islam and Europe emphasized above, there is a high risk of overgeneralization when presenting data on 'Muslims' and 'non-Muslims'. Context matters. Therefore, the more specific situation for Islam in each of the six individual nation-states in Europe in which seminars were run for the Promotion of the Amman Message Project is considered below.

## NATIONAL CASE STUDIES

The key sources that I have drawn upon for this section of the chapter are: *The Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 4* (Nielsen *et al.* 2012); *Religion and Discrimination Law in the European Union* (Hill 2012); and the OSI country reports for Denmark, Germany and the UK from 2007.



## *Croatia*

Croatia is the only post-Communist state included in the Project and has a long history of contact with Islam as a result of migration from neighbouring areas. Muslims consequently appear to be more embedded within the national community than in the other countries, although the large majority of the population remains Catholic. Given this distinctiveness, more space is devoted here to its history and background relative to the case studies of the other nation-states.

The story of Croatia and the development of Islam within its present-day borders is deeply shaped by historical geopolitical tensions and struggles in the region. The area was under Ottoman rule from the 1526 Battle of Mohacs against the Habsburg Empire until Ottoman defeat in the 1683 Battle of Vienna. The Habsburgs' Austro-Hungarian Empire then ruled until its collapse following the First World War (Kulenovic 2012). In 1918, Croatia became part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs – the first incarnation of Yugoslavia. During the Second World War, the Axis forces (Germany, Italy and Japan) occupied Croatia from 1941 and the Catholic, fascist *Ustasha* regime in Croatia allied with Hitler (Philpott and Shah 2006). Temporarily, Croatia became an independent state incorporating neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, but there was armed resistance to the fascist regime from both Communist partisans and Serbian nationalist Chetniks. At the end of the Second World War, in 1945, Croatia again became part of Yugoslavia, although this was now a Communist federal republic.

Subsequent to the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union, Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and this was followed by a war, variously labelled the Serbo-Croatian War, the Croatian War of Independence, and the Homeland War, which lasted from 1991 until 1995. Meanwhile, Croat forces were also involved in the Bosnian War following Bosnia and Herzegovina's declaration of independence in 1992, which also ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement. Regarding these conflicts, Perica (2006, p.178) writes:

Croatian Catholicism and Serbian Orthodoxy added much fuel to the fire of ethnic conflict and civil wars in former Yugoslavia. Through this interaction, the Catholic Church in Croatia adopted a semi-official label 'The Church of the Croats' so as to 'get even' with its Serbian religious-nationalistic rival.

Since the mid-twentieth century, Croatia's tourism industry has contributed to its relative prosperity in comparison to other parts of the former Yugoslavia (though it has high levels of poverty and unemployment relative to other EU states). Croatia has historically been a site of immigration from surrounding regions, for those both seeking education and employment, as well as high emigration. Croatia became the twenty-eighth member of the European Union in 2013; hence, studies of religion in the EU have not included Croatia as of yet. There is little English-language material available relative to other European countries included in the Promotion of the Amman Message Project, and little national-level research in relation to minorities, full stop (Geiger and Zrinscak 2012). Consequently, this account is particularly indebted to Mujadzevic's chapter in the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 5* (Mujadzevic 2013) and Geiger and colleagues' work in the edited volume *Welfare and Values in Europe, Volume 3* (Geiger, Zrinscak and Puhovski 2012).

### **State-religion relations in Croatia**

During the Communist period the regime undertook a process of 'atheization'. However, religion remained a political fact and, since the end of Communist rule, it has experienced revitalization, particularly in the regions of East Croatia and Dalmatia (Jerolimov and Zrinscak 2006).

Despite the Catholic majority, the Constitution approved by the Croatian Parliament in 1990 guarantees separation of church and state and equality between religious groups (Geiger and Zrinscak 2012). There are individual agreements between the government and specific religious groups; however, the Islamic Community in Croatia (ICC) is the only Muslim organization with such an agreement, signed in 2002. As Mujadzevic (2013) describes, this provides the ICC with rights in relation to places of worship, education (including the right to religious instruction in public school classes with seven or more Muslim pupils), communication, public-sector chaplaincy and finance. "Imams' salaries, healthcare and pension charges are fully paid by the government' (p.168). The marriages it conducts also have legal status. According to Fazlic (2011), the Muslim leadership in Croatia was satisfied with the level of state support.

## Muslim settlement

In the Croatian 2011 Census,<sup>10</sup> 62,977 people (1.47 per cent of the population) identified themselves as Muslim, representing an increase since 1991. The majority live in Zagreb, with smaller numbers living in other urban centres across the country (Mujadzevic 2013). Mujadzevic points out that significant Muslim populations also live in rural areas next to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Jerolimov and Zrinscak's survey (2006), Muslims constitute the highest proportion of the population in the western regions of Istria and Primorje (3.1 per cent), relative to 0.7 per cent of the population in Dalmatia, and 0.4 per cent in Central Croatia (which includes the capital Zagreb).

In Croatia, there is a strong connection between being Muslim and having an ethnic Bosniac identity, with the majority who identify as Bosniac also identifying as Muslim. This group originates in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro. Other Muslims in Croatia also identify as Croat, Albanian and Roma (in descending order in terms of proportion). Mujadzevic (2013) also states that there are 367 'ethnic Turks' in Croatia, and that 'Muslims in Croatia are almost exclusively Sunni and belong to the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence, with very small numbers of adherents of Naqshbandi, Qadiri and Bektashi Sufi orders' (p.165). Geiger and Zrinscak (2012) distinguish three groups of Muslims in Croatia: Bosniacs from Bosnia who speak the same language as Croats; migrants from other parts of the former Yugoslavia (mainly Albanians and some Macedonians); and a small number (approximately 500) from Arab countries. These differences in presentation of the ethnicity and country of origin of Muslim populations in Croatia indicate the complexity and variability of boundary drawing.

Apparently, there was a distinct Muslim population, most likely of Central Asian origin, living within the borders of modern-day Croatia as early as the twelfth century, which seems then to have become assimilated. The sixteenth-century arrival of the Ottomans, and their rule in eastern regions, led to the settlement of more Muslims (mainly from Bosnia), and the establishment of mosques, *tekkes* (Sufi dervish monasteries) and *waafs* (religious endowments) (Mujadzevic 2013). However, the late-seventeenth-century Habsburg and Venetian conquest,<sup>11</sup> once again, led to the loss of Islamic religious infrastructure and disappearance of most Muslims from Croatia.

Nevertheless, from 1878 onwards, Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina were again able to move to Croatia and settle because they were ruled as part of the same state by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1916, the Office of the Military Imam was established in Zagreb in order to meet Austro-Hungarian military needs and Croatia officially recognized Islam as a religion (Kulenovic 2012). The officially recognized Muslim community in Zagreb was then incorporated into the Yugoslav Islamic Religious Community in 1934, and a Shar'ia court was established in Zagreb in 1935 (Mujadzevic 2013).

During the Second World War, a mosque was built in Zagreb in 1944 under the *Ustasha* regime, which sought to incorporate Muslims into its nationalist cause. It was partly successful and some imams collaborated with the regime (Mujadzevic 2013). According to Kulenovic (2012), some Muslims sought state protection from the Chetniks (the Serbian nationalist guerrilla force) and others in rural areas formed self-defence militias against them; meanwhile, many Bosnian Muslims joined the armed partisan resistance against German occupation.

When the Communists came to power in 1945 some Muslim leaders were executed or imprisoned, and the mosque and Shar'ia court in Zagreb were closed. Nonetheless, Muslims continued to belong to the Yugoslav Islamic Religious Community, with Zagreb remaining the centre of religious activities, and Muslim communities established themselves more widely throughout the country (Mujadzevic 2013). In addition, more Bosnian Muslims migrated to Croatia, particularly Zagreb, following atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Second World War (Kulenovic 2012).

Following independence in 1991, the Yugoslav Islamic Religious Community was disbanded, 'and the Islamic Religious Community in Croatia, later the Islamic Community in Croatia (ICC), started to operate *de facto* independently' (Mujadzevic 2013, p.167). During the subsequent Balkan conflicts, Albanian and Bosnian Muslim refugees fled temporarily to Croatia and the Chief Imam of Zagreb, Ševko Omerbašić, became the first Mufti of the ICC in 1999. He was succeeded in 2012 by Asiz Hasanović, the current leader of the ICC. However, the leader of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina based in Sarajevo is acknowledged as the supreme leader (Mujadzevic 2013).

## Contemporary provision

A new Islamic centre, including a mosque, opened in Zagreb in 1987 and a European Qur'an recitation competition has since been held there annually on the anniversary of the opening (Mujadzevic 2013). The ICC also runs a nursery and high school in Zagreb (Mujadzevic 2013), and there is a Muslim elementary school in the central town of Sisak (Geiger *et al.* 2012).

The first recorded Muslim grave – that of a Bosnian tailor who died in 1881 – in Croatia is in Zagreb (Kulenovic 2012); however, this city is the only place where a separate cemetery section for Muslims is provided. According to Mujadzevic (2013), there are no halal food shops or restaurants in Croatia, although since 2010 the ICC has been providing halal certification for some businesses. The Muslim humanitarian organization, Merhamet, which provided and coordinated aid to refugees in the 1990s, remains the only recorded Muslim welfare network in Croatia (Geiger and Zrinscak 2012). Muslims are entitled to days off for major religious festivals, and '[b]oth *'id* prayers are broadcast live on the national TV and radio stations' (Mujadzevic 2013, p.170). However, there is no provision for imam training or tertiary Islamic Studies in Croatia (Mujadzevic 2013, p.169), although there is discussion of plans to establish a 'Theological-Welfare faculty' (Geiger and Zrinscak 2012, p.176).

## Interreligious engagement

Leaders of the ICC engage in dialogue with other religious leaders in various ways, including discussion at the Council for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Croatian Bishops' Conference. In 2012, the ICC organized the international conference 'Islam in Europe, Current Situation and Perspectives' (Mujadzevic 2013, p.171).

In December 2013, a referendum to amend the national Constitution to state that marriage is only between a woman and a man received majority support (BBC News 2013b). It was initiated by members of the Catholic Church, but also supported by Jewish, Orthodox and Muslim groups. This may be viewed as a new kind of religious alignment in response to Europeanization and associated fears regarding an imposed liberalization of values. Similarly, in 2005, a public statement emphasizing the dignity of human life as a gift from God was issued by 'the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox

Church, the Muslim Community, the Evangelical Church, the Union of Baptist Churches and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church' (Geiger and Zrinscak 2012, p.172).

### **Key challenges and areas for future focus**

The lack of infrastructural support for Muslims outside Zagreb may be an issue worth further investigation, as is the lack of imam training or study of Islam within universities. Apparently collective prayers have been held in a new mosque in the north-western city of Rijeka since 2010, but the building is still not finished and its construction met with some local resistance (Mujadzevic 2013). However, Geiger and Zrinscak (2012) note that this event has not triggered national public debate about Islam; moreover, they maintain that because the majority of Muslims speak the same language as the majority of the population they are well integrated. They anticipate, though, that the increase in the number of Chinese labour migrants to Croatia since 2000 will lead to tensions in the future.

Kulenovic (2012) describes three responses from the third generation of Bosnian Muslims to their position as a minority group in Croatia: acculturation (giving their children Croatian names and undertaking behaviour proscribed within Islam); choosing to identify as Croats of Muslim faith; or 'renewing values of their grandmothers and grandfathers, accommodated to present circumstances' (pp.268–269). This chimes with concerns expressed regarding younger generations of Bosniacs in Sisak as part of the Welfare and Values in Europe Project case study conducted there (Geiger *et al.* 2012). Since the 1991–95 war, the number of practising Muslims in the town has decreased, and there are concerns regarding how people choose to identify officially (i.e. as Bosniac, Muslim or Croat) as this has consequences for representation. The research team also report that young Muslim women they spoke to criticized the Western gender model, advocating protection of their rights by Islamic law instead. Gender inequality in employment and the domestic sphere was identified throughout Croatian society (Geiger *et al.* 2012).

The experience of Muslims in Croatia illustrates the diversity of Islam in Europe and shows that it cannot be assumed to be a religion external to the continent. According to Fazlic (2011), Muslim communities throughout the Balkans have shown resilience and resourcefulness, and this may be instructive. However, with its

Mediterranean coastline, its proximity to Turkey and its borders with Greece and Serbia, Croatia has been struggling to manage the numbers of people arriving into the country recently, including many Muslims. In October 2015, the government temporarily closed the border with Serbia because of concern that too many refugees and migrants were crossing into Croatia (BBC News 2015). This situation could stimulate tensions regarding Islam in Croatia, as well as elsewhere in the EU.

### *Denmark*

Denmark is a Scandinavian country in Northern Europe with a national Lutheran (Protestant) church that receives certain state privileges. Although freedom of religion is protected by the Constitution, the connection between the state, the national church and the monarchy endures and, consequently, there is not full religious equality (Christoffersen 2012). Membership of the national church is high, while attendance is low (Sundback 2007).

The earliest mention of Muslims in Denmark refers to eight 'Muhammadans' in the 1880 Census; however, subsequent censuses have not included Islam as a category (Jacobsen 2012). In the 1950s, Ahmadi Muslims from Pakistan established an Ahmadiya community and, in the 1960s, the overall Muslim population in Denmark began to grow with labour migration from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Pakistan and North Africa. Then, in the 1980s, political asylum seekers from Iran, the Middle East and Africa started to arrive, as well as people travelling to be reunited with family. In the 1990s, more Muslim asylum seekers came to Denmark from the Balkans, and then from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are now an estimated 175,000–200,000 Muslims in Denmark (OSI 2007a), including Alevis, Twelvers, Ismailis, Sufis and Sunnis (Jacobsen 2012).

Muslims have been forming religiously and ethnically based associations in Denmark since the 1980s, including organizations focused upon Turkish, Bosniac and Albanian identity. Some of these have subsequently received formal state recognition. As of January 2013, there are 23 'acknowledged Muslim communities' in Denmark (Jacobsen 2012, p.177), many of which are centred in the country's capital Copenhagen. Since 2000, umbrella organizations have been formed in an effort to give Muslims more of a unified voice, and



Danish convert Ras Anbessa founded the first Muslim political party in Denmark in 2009 (Jacobsen 2012, p.181). The political Muslim group Hizb ut-Tahrir is also active in the country.

In terms of specific provision and accommodation, 30 Muslim independent schools in receipt of state funding have opened since 1978, and access to religious guidance in prisons and hospitals has been improving since 2000. Halal meat is widely available, and the country exports a considerable amount of halal meat to the Arab world. Sections of Christian-consecrated, municipal burial grounds are reserved for Muslims and one Muslim cemetery has been established close to Copenhagen. The national Evangelical Lutheran Church has initiated interreligious dialogue activities with Muslim groups, and there is also formal dialogue between Jewish and Muslim groups (Jacobsen 2012). There are three Members of Parliament with Muslim backgrounds, and 'since 1989 all immigrants with at least a three-year legal stay in the country have the right to vote in the local elections, and to compete for these elections' (OSI 2007a, p.7).

### **Key challenges and areas for future focus**

National media, political and legislative events in Denmark since 2000 suggest that relations between the Muslim minority and the ethnically Danish, Lutheran majority could be improved. In response to the 2003 Eurobarometer survey, nearly one-fifth of Danes indicated resistance to a multicultural society and 55 per cent agreed that multiculturalism had its limitations (EUMC 2005, cited in OSI 2007a, p.12).

Such resistance found high-profile expression when, in 2006, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad that included portraying him as a terrorist. This sparked an international media storm with protests, riots and the boycotting of Danish products in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan.

In the following years, there have been a number of responses to the growing Muslim population. In 2007, legislation was introduced requiring all religious personnel entering the country to pass a Danish language test. The aim of this was 'to restrict further entry of Muslim clerics, whose number had already been restricted under a 2004 "Imam Law" that requires the number of religious residence visas to be reasonably proportionate to the size of the religious community in



question' (Jacobsen 2012, p.177). Soon after this, the Danish People's Party called for a ban on wearing the Muslim headscarf in Parliament and, the following year, the Conservative People's Party called for a ban on the burqa; both were unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the government did pass legislation in 2009 proscribing judges from wearing religious and political symbols (Jacobsen 2012). On the other hand, there have since been several high-profile convictions for defamation of Muslims 'under the anti-racism section of the penal code' (p.191).

In addition, there is thought to be residential segregation, as well as an increase in religiously motivated attacks against Muslims in Denmark in recent years. Research indicates that ethnic minorities and immigrants – comprising mainly Muslims – are disadvantaged in education and employment (OSI 2007a). Hence, there is much work to be done in reducing this disadvantage, and more research required into the housing situation. Measures to ameliorate the conceptual opposition of 'Danish' and 'Muslim' would also be welcome, although recent research from Aarhus' Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalization does indicate that attitudes towards Islam and Muslims are improving in Denmark (Jacobsen 2012). The OSI's report (2007a) on the country also draws attention to the delivery of healthcare and the efforts of state institutions to foster Muslim participation as areas for further investigation.

### *Germany*

In Germany, the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church both remain influential, each predominating in different regions, following territorial struggles, negotiations and power sharing from the sixteenth century onwards. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, religious freedom and equality were made central to the 'new constitutional order of the Federal Republic of Germany' (Robbers 2012, p.159). Despite this constitutional protection, religious people were persecuted and discriminated against in the socialist German Democratic Republic. Since German reunification in 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, several national-level laws have been instituted protecting religious groups and individuals from discrimination in line with European legislation, and there are also regulations within individual *Länder* (states). Religious communities

can obtain official status as a corporation if they meet particular criteria (Robbers 2012).

Similarly to Denmark, from the 1960s onwards, Muslims began to migrate from Turkey and the Balkans to work in Germany as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers), with Muslim political asylum seekers subsequently arriving from the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and North Africa. Ahmadis from Pakistan are the oldest organized Muslim group in the country, and there are also Twelvers and Alevis alongside a Sunni majority. The largest concentrations of Muslim populations are in Berlin and in industrial centres in the west of the country (Rohe 2012). The German government and guest workers alike had not envisaged this migration as permanent. Hence, policy and expectations have had to shift as Muslim communities have settled in the country rather than returned to countries of origin after a brief period of work in Germany.

Although there is a lack of official statistics regarding religious affiliation, the cumulative German sample examined for the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002–2008 indicates that in Germany 67.7 per cent of Muslims are not citizens, 72 per cent are foreign born, 57.1 per cent belong to an ethnic minority, and 37.1 per cent live in large cities. It also indicates that Muslims comprise 2.4 per cent of the total population. In addition, according to the ESS figures, 78.5 per cent of the Muslim non-citizens in Germany are from the Middle East or North Africa (including Turkey), 1.4 per cent from Africa (excluding the Maghreb), 11.9 per cent from Europe, and 8.2 per cent from Southern Asia and Indonesia. The ESS data also provide further details: 40.1 per cent of Muslims in Germany speak German as their primary language at home, 3.7 per cent Arabic, and 44.2 per cent Turkish. Muslims are 28 per cent more likely to pray daily aside from religious services than non-Muslims in Germany, and 24 per cent more likely to attend religious services once a week or more, excluding special ceremonies (Jackson and Doerschler 2012).

A Muslim organization has yet to gain the status of a corporation, but there are various Muslim organizations operating in the country, often organized along national/ethnic identities such as Bosniac, Moroccan and Turkish. The first Muslim political party in Germany, *Muslimisch Demokratische Union*, took part in elections in the city of Osnabrück in 2011, but was unsuccessful. Some education about Islam has been added to public school religious studies curricula, in

particular in *Länder* and big cities, such as Berlin. Many universities teach Islamic Studies and some, such as the universities of Osnabrück and Erlangen-Nürnberg, are now beginning to offer imam-training courses within departments for Islamic theology (Rohe 2012).

Since 2003, Muslims have been entitled to apply for an exemption from the federal statute banning the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning. However, this exemption has been found to take a significant struggle to obtain in practice, meeting resistance from administrative and lower courts. Despite some public calls for it, there is no mainstream political will to ban the burqa or niqab in public places (Rohe 2012). However, a law passed in 2005 in Berlin excludes all religious signs and symbols from schools and other public services, with public debate around the law focusing on the hijab (OSI 2007b). In addition, there is a lack of appropriate facilities available for Muslim burial across Germany.

In 2006, the Ministry of the Interior set up the *Deutsche Islam Konferenz* in order to facilitate dialogue with Muslim groups. Efforts towards dialogue have also been made between the main churches and Muslim groups, but there has been little interaction between Jewish and Muslim groups (Rohe 2012).

### **Key challenges and areas for future focus**

There is an absence of reliable national-level data on Muslims in the country, and Turkish nationality is often used as a proxy. Now that members of the Turkish community are gradually gaining citizenship, nuanced challenges regarding accommodation and majority attitudes need to be addressed urgently. Data for immigrants in Germany, particularly for those of Turkish origin, indicate that they encounter discrimination in education, employment and housing, as well as worse health outcomes (despite reported satisfaction from Muslims with regard to their hospital treatment) (OSI 2007b).

Many long-term Muslim residents still do not have the right to vote in local elections (OSI 2009). Furthermore, Jackson and Doerschler (2012) take the percentage given in the ESS report for Muslims who do not have citizenship as an expression of German policy to limit access to citizenship. The interview questions for citizenship developed in the German state of Baden-Württemberg are especially criticized for only being asked of applicants from 57 countries, all of which have a Muslim majority. Moreover, they are

phrased in such a way as to imply that arranged marriage, patriarchy, homophobia, veiling and terrorism are all condoned or prescribed in Islam (OSI 2009, p.46). There are also concerns regarding increasing segregation in neighbourhoods, particularly following the economic crisis, and the treatment of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, a considerable proportion of whom will be Muslim (OSI 2007b). These concerns are increasing, following the German government's initial decision in 2015 to accept more new arrivals but then, later, to restrict entry (Osborne 2015).

In response to the 2003 Eurobarometer survey, 34 per cent of respondents indicated resistance to a multicultural society, and approximately two-thirds of Germans agreed that multiculturalism had its limitations (EUMC 2005, cited in OSI 2009, p.38). Such resistance was reflected in protests organized by coalitions – which included right-wing extremists, conservative Christians and left-wing groups – against the construction of major mosques in Cologne, Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich (Rohe 2012). In 2011, it emerged that a neo-Nazi group had been responsible for a series of murders, over the course of a decade, of eight Turkish Muslims, one Greek immigrant and a policewoman. Initially, these murders had been assumed to have been committed within the immigrant population and the police and intelligence services have subsequently been criticized for seemingly not paying attention to the threat posed by far-right groups (Spiegel Online International 2011).

There have also been legal precedents testing the limits of accommodation. For instance, in a regional legal case in Cologne in 2012, the court deemed that a Muslim doctor who had circumcised a four-year-old Muslim boy had acted illegally, albeit without criminal liability. Despite consequent federal efforts to quell religious concerns regarding the legality of circumcision that this case exemplifies, in the future the issue seems likely to affect Muslims, as well as Jews, in Germany and in Europe more broadly (Cranmer 2012).

Despite national-level political statements asserting the importance of Islam to German society, events since 2001 suggest deteriorating rather than improving public attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. The OSI cites the listing of various Muslim organizations as Islamist by the German internal intelligence service as problematic and highly stigmatizing for groups, as it does the treatment and representation of juvenile Muslim offenders (OSI 2007b). Work supporting the

accurate collection of data relating to Muslims, particularly of attacks against Muslims, seems to have been productive. Efforts to build dialogue that includes young Muslims, especially between Muslim populations and the police, also seem to have been effective – as does public education regarding the actual relationship between Shar'ia and German law. In sum, there are positive as well as negative developments in the relationship between Germany and Islam.

### *Greece*

Since the country gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century, Greece's Constitutions have protected religious freedom and equality, although the Orthodox Church holds a special status and these protections may not always be implemented as intended (Papageorgiou 2012). The vast majority of the population in Greece belongs to the Eastern Orthodox Church, with Muslims constituting the second largest religious group, nonetheless remaining a small minority. Following the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, there was a forced population exchange between Muslim residents in Greece and Greek Orthodox residents in Turkey, although certain populations were exempted, including Muslims in Western Thrace in Greece. Following the union of the Dodecanese islands with Greece after the Second World War, Muslim residents on these islands became Greek citizens and, in 1951, a question about religion was dropped from the national census (Tsitselikis 2012). Later, during conflicts between Greece and Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s, many Muslims migrated from Thrace to Turkey and Germany (Tsitselikis 2012).

From the late twentieth century onwards, Muslims have also migrated to Greece from a range of countries, but principally Albania, Pakistan and Turkey, settling in major cities such as Athens. Currently, the majority of Muslims in Greece are Sunni, and there is a smaller number of Shi'as and Alevis (Tsitselikis 2012).

In terms of official and legal status, the Muslim community became officially recognized in Greece by the 1913 Treaty of Athens. Three muftis are now recognized as the state-funded and sanctioned religious leaders and judges for Muslims in Greece. Furthermore, Muslims are free to seek remedies to family and inheritance matters under Islamic law as practised by the muftis rather than follow Greek civil law. There were challenges to the leadership of the muftis

appointed in Komotini and Xanthi in the 1990s, with Muslims, both locally and in Parliament, arguing that they ought to be entitled to elect their own religious leaders. Alternative Muslim leaders were elected but subsequently prosecuted and, despite a European Court of Human Rights ruling that Greece had violated the rights of the elected muftis, the three state-appointed muftis in Greece remain those with influence. There are schools and a teacher training college funded and run by the state to serve the Muslim minority in Western Thrace.

### **Key challenges and areas for future focus**

Up until 1990, Greece had traditionally been a country of emigration, given its relatively high levels of unemployment within Europe. Hence, authorities and immigration policies were unprepared for the rapid increase in the numbers of immigrants. In particular, immigrant workers – including Muslims – struggle regarding rights and access to welfare. An increase in crime in the early 1990s was attributed mainly to Albanian and Romanian immigrants, reflecting the ethnocentricity and xenophobia that dominate media discourse around migration (Kokosalakis and Fokas 2012).

There are no registered mosques outside Thrace, and Muslims in other areas worship in private buildings. Many Albanian immigrants are nominally Muslim but appear to have adopted Greek names and baptized their children as Orthodox, whereas Muslims from the Middle East, Pakistan, India and Africa struggle for religious provisions such as that required for burial (Kokosalakis and Fokas 2012). According to Kokosalakis and Fokas, ‘many Muslim immigrants work in agriculture and struggle to make ends meet; they are less likely to mobilize for religious rights, and rather, are satisfied at present to worship in informal spaces which simply operate as mosques’ (p.258).

The far-right political party Golden Dawn has gained support as Greece’s economic situation has deteriorated following the 2008 financial crisis. Anti-Muslim as well as anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant rhetoric forms a significant part of their discourse.<sup>12</sup> With the deepening economic recession in Greece and the growing number of new arrivals, immigrant and minority populations have become a focus for anger and frustration; consequently, there is an argument

to be made for understanding the local diversity of minority groups in Greece in order to get beyond the limited national-level discourse surrounding immigration. For the same reasons, better representation for minority groups is required.

### *Italy*

The Roman Catholic Church continues to dominate socially, politically and legally in Italy, despite protection against religious discrimination being enshrined in Italian law at the country's unification in 1861. The National Fascist Party, which ruled Italy between 1922 and 1943, made Catholicism the state religion, but the new Constitution in 1948 reasserted the principles of religious freedom and equality. Following this, Italian society became increasingly secularized. In response, a new concordat between the Italian state and the church was drawn up in 1984 acknowledging that Italy was 'no longer a Catholic state' (Ventura 2012, p.195). Subsequently, in 1989, the Constitutional Court established the principle of *laicità* (legal equidistance and impartiality in relation to religious groups). Ventura (2012) describes how, more recently, the 1994 election of Berlusconi as president and the sudden influx of immigrants 'transformed Italy into a multicultural country' (p.196). Nevertheless, while before 1994 some non-Catholic denominations had gained improved legal status, Parliament stopped approving such agreements in 2000. However, one Islamic association – the Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy (Rome) – had gained official recognition as a religious entity as early as 1974.

There are no official statistics on religious affiliation in Italy, but Muslims are estimated to comprise between 0.9 and 1.5 per cent of the population, and more if illegal immigrants are also counted (in 2004 and 2006, Muslims were estimated to comprise a third of all immigrants). Furthermore, like Greece, Italy has moved from a pattern of emigration to one of immigration. In 1980, the highest percentage of immigrants came from Iran, followed by Yugoslavia. In 1990, the highest numbers came from Morocco and Tunisia, and in 2004 there was significant immigration from Romania and Albania. The majority of migrants are based in the more affluent north of Italy (Cancellieri and Longo 2012).



### Key challenges and areas for future focus

While there are issues with the recognition and status of non-Catholic religious groups and immigrants in Italy in general, it seems there are a lot of issues related to Islam in particular. Political debate became polarized from the mid-1990s with members of the populist political party Northern League accusing the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Tettamanzi, of being the 'Imam of Milan' and holding multiculturalist views: Ventura (2012) explains how '[r]acial, ethnic and religious discrimination became increasingly intermingled' (p.197), with 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' becoming essentially synonymous objects of public hostility. The Bossi Fini Immigration Act adopted in 2003 is regarded as repressive.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, while citizenship status is still difficult for foreign workers to obtain, it also appears that rules against discrimination on the grounds of religion in immigration and asylum law may not be being consistently enforced, especially 'when an alleged Muslim threat is at stake' (p.203).

In the Italian public sphere, Islam is represented as subordinating women, without any consideration being given to the parallels between Italian and Muslim women's situations in terms of labour segregation, responsibility for domestic labour and care work, and problems of domestic violence (Cancellieri and Longo 2012). Local requests from Muslims for access to places of worship have been exaggerated in the media and framed as indicative of Islam's problematic place within Italian society; for example, a 'mini-war' on mosques was initiated by Northern League members at the end of the twentieth century (Cancellieri and Longo 2012, p.197).

Ventura (2012) identifies the Comitato per l'Islam as problematic. This has been an advisory body to the Ministry of the Interior since 2010; however, the Minister of the Interior excluded the main Muslim NGO in Italy, the Unione della Comunità e Organizzazioni Islamiche in Italia (UCOII) from the official organization. Thus, both the Comitato and the Ministry risk being accused of unconstitutional assertion of norms in relation to a specific religious group without the agreement of representatives from that group.

Unemployment is high and rising in Italy following the economic crisis, and the prospects for citizens and immigrants alike are not good, most likely further straining relationships. Detailed, in-depth study of equality and discrimination in relation to Islam in Italy could be a positive step towards creating a more harmonious society, as



could the setting up of dialogues between Muslim groups, journalists and politicians.

### *The United Kingdom*

The United Kingdom comprises England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each with a distinctive history, culture and pattern of religious affiliation. The (Anglican) Church of England, for instance, has a formal relationship with the state and the monarch is its supreme governor; the (Protestant) Church of Scotland is also a national church, while the formal relationship between what is now the (Anglican) Church in Wales and the Welsh authorities was formally dissolved in 1914. Following the Irish War for Independence, the six counties comprising Northern Ireland remained in the UK in 1921, while the rest of Ireland became independent. The Anglican Church of Ireland was the established church in Northern Ireland until the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, there has not been a state church, but political tension and conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the region translated into sustained violence between the late 1960s and 1990s (Ganiel and Jones 2012).

A majority of the UK population continues to select the identity 'Christian' in surveys, but the proportion has been declining, and approximately 6 per cent of the English population attend church regularly. The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights, including Article 9 regarding freedom of religion or belief, into law in England and Wales, and the Equality Act 2010 protects religion or belief not only in employment, but also in the provision of goods and services (Catto, Davie and Perfect 2015).

There have been Muslims in Britain for three centuries and the first mosque was opened in 1889, but a more substantial Muslim population began to grow with post-war labour migration from the Indian subcontinent in the 1960s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, East African Asians, including Muslims, 'began arriving...under pressure from the "Africanization" policies in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Since the 1980s, Muslims also began to arrive in the UK in significant numbers as refugees from the Balkans, East Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey' (OSI 2007c, p.5).

Today, there are 2.7 million Muslims in England and Wales, comprising 4.8 per cent of the total population and the second largest religious group, according to the UK 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics 2012). According to the cumulative sample for the ESS 2002–2008 (of which Muslims comprised 2.9 per cent), 2.3 per cent of Muslims in the UK are non-citizens, 64.6 per cent are foreign born, 74.4 per cent belong to an ethnic minority, and 26.2 per cent live in a big city. Of the Muslim non-citizens in the UK, 41.9 per cent are from the Middle East or North Africa (including Turkey), 32.6 per cent from Africa (excluding the Maghreb), and 12.9 per cent from Southern Asia and Indonesia. In terms of language, 47.7 per cent of Muslims in the UK speak English as their primary language at home, 4.2 per cent Arabic, and 45.8 per cent another language. Muslims are 46 per cent more likely to pray daily, aside from religious services, than non-Muslims in the UK and 38 per cent more likely to attend religious services, excluding special ceremonies, once a week or more (Jackson and Doerschler 2012).

The majority of Muslims in England live clustered around former industrial centres in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands, as well as in London. There are also Muslims living throughout the UK, including a population in Cardiff, Wales, established by Muslim seafarers in the nineteenth century mainly of Yemeni, Somali and South Asian origin. A range of Islamic schools of thought are represented, including Deobandi and Sufi traditions (Gilliat-Ray 2012) (see Chapter 4 for more information).

Gradually, Muslim groups have developed religious provisions, such as mosques and access to imams in public institutions. The 1989 Rushdie affair crystallized issues related to Muslims' representation and recognition in the UK, and led to the formation of the Muslim Council of Britain, which remains the most publicly prominent Muslim organization in the UK. Fetzer and Soper (2005) concluded, 'on the variables that we analysed the [British] State has been relatively accommodating to Muslim religious needs and practices' (p.48).

### **Key challenges and areas for future focus**

Muslims in the UK – particularly young Muslims – experience relatively high levels of unemployment and discrimination in employment (Khattab 2012), and they are more likely to live in areas

of urban deprivation (OSI 2007c). Following 9/11 and the London bombings on 7 July 2005, there has been a public policy and security focus upon Muslim extremism leaving Muslims and young Muslim men in particular feeling under scrutiny and with a consequent lack of trust in the police (Spalek, McDonald and El Awa 2011).

In response to the 2003 Eurobarometer survey, 20 per cent of British respondents indicated resistance to multicultural society, and approximately two-thirds in the UK agreed that multiculturalism had its limitations (EUMC 2005, cited in OSI 2009, p.38). There is frequent and often negative national media coverage of Muslims and Islam. Public fear of Shar'ia in the UK erupted following selective reporting of a speech made by the former Archbishop of Canterbury (head of the Church of England) in 2008 (Petre and Porter 2008). This led as far as a Private Members' Bill being proposed in Parliament, although recent research indicates that religious courts, including Muslim ones, within the UK operate alongside the state legal framework and are not seeking to supplant it (Douglas *et al.* 2011). Nevertheless, there are concerns regarding the protection of Muslim women's rights in religious (rather than civil) marriages and divorces, which are often overseen by Muslim courts in the UK (Malik 2012).

Far-right groups in the UK employ strong anti-Muslim rhetoric and there is thought to have been an increase in the number of hate crimes against Muslims since June 2013, following the murder in London of an off-duty soldier by two young men involved with Islamist networks. Hate crimes against Muslims generally go unreported and are difficult to measure (Copsey *et al.* 2013). On 23 June 2016, the British electorate voted, by a narrow margin, for the UK to leave the European Union. Following this, there has been a significant increase in the number of reported incidents of abuse against minorities, including Muslims (Agerholm 2016). Moreover, the ensuing legislative, economic and social changes, such as the new Prime Minister's publicized desire to leave the European Convention on Human Rights as well (Asthana and Mason 2016), will impact on Muslims alongside all other British residents.

Although there is already more research available on Islam in Britain relative to many other European nation-states, there have been calls for more study of the relative strength and influence of different Islamic schools of thought (Gilliat-Ray 2012).

## CONCLUSION

Islam is an international and diverse religion that has been contributing to Europe's diversity and global connections for centuries. There are similarities between the European contexts considered: a strong relationship between Islam and post-war immigration; Islam's minority status among a (nominally) Christian majority; its struggles for recognition and provision; relatively high rates of unemployment and low levels of education for Muslims; the intersection of ethnic, racial and religious factors; and linkage between anti-immigrant rhetoric and media influence. Moreover, the issues of integration, immigration, anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions, resistance to multiculturalist policies, the rise of the far right, and the acculturation of Muslims in Europe interact in complex ways that require further investigation and unpacking.

It is clear that more effective, consistent data collection in relation to Islam is needed throughout Europe and this is something that the Promotion of the Amman Message Project could support advocacy for. The aims and achievements of national immigration and integration policies also require further research.

In addition, the impact of recent legislation relating to the wearing of a face-covering by Muslim women in public spaces in France and Belgium is an area to be investigated, and there is work to be done in improving relationships and trust between police and young Muslim people in some European states, such as France and Germany (Jackson and Doerschler 2012).

The economic crisis throughout Europe affects all residents but is having a disproportionate impact upon women, young people and those with an insecure economic status. As observed above, Muslims in Europe are consequently significantly affected. This situation ought to be monitored and there may be the opportunity to develop strategic support networks. The representation of Muslim women and young people alongside male community and religious leaders in politics, interfaith and multi-faith work is another area requiring development.

There is a strong risk of reification of 'Muslims' and 'non-Muslims' as monolithic groups within European nation-states. Local variation matters, as do individuals' self-perception and voices. Greater attention to 'lived Islam' and people's transnational experiences and identities could be worthwhile, as modelled by the

2013 volume *Everyday Lived Islam* (Dessing *et al.* 2013). There is also more in-depth work to be done differentiating between Islamic schools of thought and traditions and their location and significance within Europe.

I do not wish readers to take away from this chapter solely an impression of disaffection, discrimination and risk. Hence, I would also like to emphasize the value of finding and promoting positive stories of local integration, inclusion and collaboration. The Tell MAMA project in the UK, set up by Faith Matters to document and analyse anti-Muslim attacks (see Chapter 9 and also <http://tellmamauk.org> for more information), is a good example of a constructive response to a specific problem, and the Promotion of the Amman Message Project could play a role documenting and publicizing such good practice examples (see Chapter 4 for more information).

## NOTES

1. The Balkans refers to the geographical region in South Eastern Europe. It takes its name from the mountain range reaching across the area. Croatia is part of this region.
2. In Austria, Central Europe.
3. Initially the Central Powers comprised the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1915, the Kingdom of Bulgaria joined the alliance after the Ottoman Empire did so in 1914.
4. Twenty-eight states are currently members of the EU, though in June 2016 the UK voted in a referendum to leave. Visit [www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states](http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states) to view the full list.
5. There are 47 states in the Council of Europe. Visit [www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states](http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/47-members-states) for the full list.
6. The United Kingdom has been an exception to this, in that it asked about religion in the 2001 and 2011 national censuses, following consultation and lobbying from Muslim groups, among others.
7. The wearing of headscarves in public schools has been banned in France since the late 1980s under the prohibition of the wearing of any religious symbol in school.
8. This is the DIALREL project. For more information, visit [www.dialrel.eu](http://www.dialrel.eu).
9. For more information on this see the *Financial Times* website at [www.ft.com/migration](http://www.ft.com/migration).
10. Available at [www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/census2011/censuslogo.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/census2011/censuslogo.htm).
11. The Venetian Republic joined the Hapsburgs and other European powers, including Russia, to defeat the Ottoman Empire in Europe.
12. For more information on this see [www.euronews.com/2013/05/21/the-rise-of-golden-dawn-raises-concerns-at-us-state-department](http://www.euronews.com/2013/05/21/the-rise-of-golden-dawn-raises-concerns-at-us-state-department).
13. This Act is named after the then Minister for Institutional Reforms and Devolution and leader of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi, and the then Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Italian post-fascists, Giancarlo Fini.

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# 4

## Islam in the United Kingdom and the Impact of the Amman Message

*Fiyaz Mughal*

### THE 'SUPER-DIVERSITY' OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom can be regarded as an island with regions of super-diversity (Vertovec 2005) of Muslim ethnicity centred in key areas such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Leeds. This super-diversity means that within Muslim communities there are cultural and national differences that make the UK a challenging arena in which to convey a message around faith, especially when there is growing cynicism regarding faith itself. For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which undertook the latest national census of England and Wales in 2011, found that the largest rise in population corresponded to those reporting no religious affiliation, with nearly one in four people in the UK not affiliating themselves with any faith;<sup>1</sup> something that would be almost unimaginable in communities in the Middle East. The Census also makes clear that Muslims had the youngest age profile of all of religious groups while, in contrast to this, Christians had the highest median age in the Census.

Moreover, allied to age, nationality and cultural differences within Muslim communities in the UK, the proliferation of far-right groups, such as the English Defence League (EDL), adds further complexities in terms of promoting the Amman Message of peace, pluralism and respect for human rights. In particular, the EDL propagates popular stereotypes through their arguments that Muslims (1) are inherently violent; (2) lie and cannot be trusted; (3) want to covertly or overtly

spread Shar'ia Law in the UK; (4) are sexual predators (an assumption fuelled by a range of recent grooming cases involving Pakistani men); and (5) simply want to outbreed the 'indigenous' white population.

Against this backdrop of misunderstanding, misinformation and mistrust, the Amman Message has great potential to act as a tool for moderation, self-reflection, protection of pluralism within society and for the rule of law and human rights.

## THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Islam has had a presence in the UK for over a thousand years. Indeed, it has recently come to light that King Offa of Mercia (757–796), one of the most powerful and prominent Anglo-Saxon kings ruling a large part of England, authorized at least one gold coin to be minted bearing the Islamic inscription 'There is no God but Allah, the One, He has no partners'. Further engravings on the coin read, 'Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, who set him [Muhammad] with the guidance of the true faith to prevail over every other religion'. The coin was minted in 774 CE and also bears the Latin inscription 'offa rex' (Offa is King). It is postulated that such coins might have been used as a 'universal currency' with their Arab trading partners.

Further interactions with the Islamic world took place through engagement in the Crusades (eleventh to thirteenth century CE), which were extensively documented and depicted in Islamic art and historical texts. This was followed by trade, military engagement and the exchange of ideas and knowledge between England and those domains within the realm of the Ottoman Empire. However, Muslim communities were not formed in the UK until the turn of the twentieth century with the migration of workers from areas that are now modern-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They were followed by Asian populations in Africa and in the early 1990s by refugees from Central Asia, Turkey, the Middle East, North Africa, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other countries in turmoil.

Today, there are approximately 2.7 million Muslims in England and Wales, constituting about 4.8 per cent of the population (ONS 2012); moreover, the 2011 Census indicates that there has been a rapid increase in the overall Muslim population in the United Kingdom:

Just over half of all Muslims (53 per cent) in 2011 were born outside the UK. Numbers have almost doubled in a decade with a rise of over half a million (599,000) from 828,000 to 1.4 million in 2011. A similar pattern can be seen for the number of Muslims born in the UK where there was also a rise of over a half a million (560,000) from 718,000 to 1.2 million in 2011. (ONS 2012, p.10)

This statement underlines some of the issues that affect Muslim communities today; in particular, a sense of having to find new roots and identities within a fast-moving and shifting landscape, which is further complicated by issues of ethnicity and birthplace. The 2011 Census states that the increase in the Muslim population since 2001 ranged from 3.0 per cent to 4.8 per cent, and that the largest concentration of Muslim communities is in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. London itself has the highest proportion of Muslims at 12.4 per cent, followed by the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber, both of which are under 7 per cent (ONS 2012). The Census gives specific locations where Muslim populations are concentrated:

The areas with the highest proportion of Muslims were in London with the boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham having 34.5 per cent and 32.0 per cent respectively, and Redbridge and Waltham Forest having proportions of the population higher than 20 per cent. There were several areas outside London with proportions higher than 20 per cent including Blackburn with Darwen in the North West (27.0 per cent), Bradford in Yorkshire and the Humber, Luton in East of England, Slough in South East, and Birmingham in the West Midlands. (ONS 2012, p.8)

This highlights key areas in London where there are significant populations of Muslims, although it should be noted that there are differences in ethnic origin and culture between Muslims in different areas. For instance, most Muslim residents in Tower Hamlets are Bangladeshi and are of Sylheti origin, as are at least 95 per cent of the Bangladeshis living in the UK, who constitute the second largest (15 per cent) Muslim community in the UK (Brice 2008). In relation to the Sylheti predominance, Jeremy Brice ascribes the prolonged settlement of Sylhet Bangladeshis in the UK to nineteenth-century tax laws enacted by British colonialists, which meant that families

in Sylhet were better off than many in Bangladesh (Brice 2008). Subsequently, such families sent their sons to take up employment on British ships that were routinely transporting spices and cotton, and this allowed further remittances to be sent back home to their families. As a result, more and more Sylhetis settled in Britain and familial links and a settled status meant that spouses and elderly relatives were able to join the initial migrants, thereby creating areas where such communities became concentrated over time.

The Office for National Statistics also indicates the specific rise in the number of Muslims with Pakistani heritage: 'Nearly four in ten Muslims (38 per cent) reported their ethnicity as Pakistani, a 371,000 increase (from 658,000 to over a million) since 2001. Nearly half of all Muslims were born in the UK' (ONS 2013).

While, overall, the United Kingdom is home to the second largest diaspora community of Pakistani origin in the world (with the largest residing in the Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), the British Muslim community of Pakistani heritage can be regarded as a set of communities within a community. Geographical and regional variances continue in the mind-sets of such communities in the UK and have also led to systems of voting such as the *braderie* system, where individuals' votes are given to influential persons from the same geographical area/village in Pakistan or to someone who is from the same family caste system.<sup>2</sup> A large number of individuals of Pakistani heritage residing in the West Midlands and in the North of England originate from the Azad Kashmir area of Pakistan (Insted 2014). Consequently, many feel a strong affiliation and links to their Kashmiri identity and history, and are concerned to see Kashmir achieve independence from India and Pakistan. Other British Muslim communities of Pakistani origin come from towns such as Lahore and Karachi, as well as from the Punjab; these carry with them a strong tradition of Pakistani regional identity, nationalism and pride. There are also smaller populations from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region close to the Afghan–Pakistan border.

The first waves of migration to the UK from what is now Pakistan took place in the mid-nineteenth century, and these migrations were mainly associated with the roles that individuals had in the British Army and as part of the Imperial Raj, which was established throughout the subcontinent. Many soldiers from places such as Lahore served in regiments that saw action in France and other countries; however,

the heavy migration of people of Pakistani heritage took place after the Second World War due to the ensuing shortage of male labour within the British workforce. In addition, sources cite the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 as one of the drivers of migration to the United Kingdom (BBC Gloucestershire 2003), as well as the building of the Mangla Dam in the early 1960s. This construction displaced about 100,000 people who subsequently received compensation, which some used to travel to England in search of job opportunities and a better life. Many thought that they would return within a few years, but the 'Myth of Return' became just that – a myth. Muslim communities of Pakistani heritage are now in their fifth generation in the UK, and many young people have no links to Pakistan and no inclination to 'return'; for them, home has become Tipton, Bolton, Leeds and London. Furthermore, 'marriage migration' continues to affect the Pakistani and Kashmiri populations as spouses are brought to the UK (Abbas 2010, p.21).

One of the weaknesses of the 2011 Census is that it did not categorize ethnicities beyond classifications that include (1) mixed or multiple ethnic groups; (2) Indian; (3) Pakistani; (4) Bangladeshi; (5) Chinese; (6) any other Asian background; (7) Black/African/Caribbean/ Black British; and (8) any other ethnic group. However, it did include two new categories in this round: Gypsy or Irish Traveller, and Arab.

The results indicate that Arab residents in the UK were estimated at about 240,000 people in 2011 (about 0.4 per cent of the population) (ONS 2012), while those regarding their ethnicity as Indian totalled 1.4 million (about 2.5 per cent of the UK population) and as Pakistani about 1.1 million (about 2 per cent of the population). Thus, the super-diversity of ethnic, race and religious groups in the UK becomes evident. For example, most Indian Muslims have migrated from places such as Gujarat and from East African countries such as Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Many Muslim migrants from India followed the same journey to Africa as their Asian Hindu counterparts who travelled on the same ships. They were expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972, while many left Kenya in 1983 after a particularly severe military coup against the then president of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi.

There are further populations that need to be highlighted here and which make up the wider picture of Muslim communities in the

United Kingdom. For example, Turkish-speaking<sup>3</sup> communities are estimated as being in the region of 70,000–80,000 people in London alone (King *et al.* 2008), while estimates of UK residents of Somali origin range between 100,000 and 200,000 people (IOM 2013). The 2011 Census also reflects major migration patterns post-1991, where many Turkish and Kurdish families migrated to the UK mainly because of ongoing military action and instability in eastern Turkey, while Turkish Cypriots began to migrate and be resident in the UK from the late 1960s, with numbers accelerating in the early 1970s due to conflict in Cyprus prior to partition. This rapid escalation in migration of Turkish Cypriots was mainly due to well-founded fears within the Turkish Cypriot population that their identity and future survival on the island were facing a real and imminent threat. On the other hand, many Somali migrants to the UK left Somalia (and what is now Somaliland) due to hunger, famine and continued military insurrections. Moreover, many did not arrive in the UK directly, initially travelling to countries in mainland Europe where they sometimes spent many years before reaching the UK.

## THE IDENTITY OF BRITISH MUSLIMS

The problems of oversimplifying our contemporary perception of the diverse Muslim identities in the United Kingdom are highlighted by Dr Tahir Abbas, who specializes in urban ethnicity and minority–majority relations:

Although it is true that South Asian Muslims reflect the greatest profile in relation to Islam in Britain, there is a risk of homogenizing the religion itself by suggesting that South Asian traits are wholly typical of British Islam itself. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are nearly always Muslim, but there are Muslims of Arab, Albanian, Bosnian, Iranian, Nigerian, Somali, Turkish and many other origins, whose cultural, social, economic and theological profiles directly contrast with the South Asian Muslim experience. There are also within-group variations to consider. For example, there are huge differences between Sunni Barelwi Pakistanis and East African Ismailis, but they are both South Asian Muslims by definition. (Abbas 2010, p.21)

Dr Abbas raises the fundamental point here that, for far too long, the ‘Islam practised by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis’ has always

been considered to be 'mainstream Islam', because it was practised by the largest number of British Muslims.<sup>4</sup> This has resulted in the diversity of practices and theological understandings present in the various Islamic communities within the UK being overlooked by public policy, as well as the range of conservative and liberal outlooks represented within them. A review of mosque statistics in Britain demonstrates that there are about 1577 mosques in the UK (Naqshbandi 2013). Of these, 332 are registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales, and 1535 are listed as being in England. According to the 'Muslims in Britain' website, about 44 per cent are Deobandi mosques with the second largest majority being Bareilvi mosques, constituting about 25 per cent (Naqshbandi 2013). Non-denominational and Salafi mosques account for 9 per cent and 6 per cent respectively, with Shi'a, Twelver, Bohra and Ismaili mosques comprising only 4 per cent. On one hand, these statistics highlight the diversity of Islam within the UK while, on the other, they indicate that the Deobandi and Bareilvi movements represent strong minorities, together constituting about 70 per cent of British Muslims. While Islam in the UK cannot be reduced to these South Asian schools, we cannot overlook their importance and, as the two most influential strands of British Islam, they are briefly introduced here.

Deobandi institutions are influenced by Sunni Islamic views that emanated from the Darul Uloom Deoband in India. This was part of a revivalist movement that started as a reaction to the poor social position of Muslims in India after the fall of the last Mughal king in 1857. The resultant dislocation and complete social collapse affecting Muslims and their position in economic, social and religious life created the need for such a movement that was given life through the establishment of institutions such as the Darul Uloom Deoband. The Deobandis follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence and the institution of Deoband in India has historically been socially conservative.

It should be noted that many imams and influential scholars who practise in the UK have graduated from Darul Uloom institutions in India or Pakistan and will have been influenced by the teachings and the conservative style and interpretations of this system which was developed from the Saharanpur district in India. For example, Mufti Taqi Usmani is a key academic figure in Pakistan and has



achieved an influential position in Muslim institutions in the UK. The founders of the Darul Uloom Bury school, Shaikh Yusuf Motala and Mufti Ismail Kachholvi of the Institute of Islamic Jurisprudence Bradford, both settled in the UK and are former theological students of seminaries in Gujarat, India. They graduated from the Deoband Islamic school in Saharanpur as key disciples of the (late) Shaikul-Hadeeth Maulana Muhammad Zakariyyah Kandhalvi. They exert influence over numerous institutions both in the UK and overseas. The conservatism of the Darul Uloom system continues and was reflected in the recent rejection of Maulana Vastanvi (a Gujarati Muslim scholar), since it was felt by some within the institution that he was too much of a liberalizing influence since he attempted to instigate changes that conflicted with the religious and social conservatism of Darul Uloom Deoband. The influence of the Deoband tradition in the UK is therefore significant and many seminaries, mosques and madrasas are based on this tradition. With this in mind, while the Darul Uloom Deoband has been very vocal and forthright in their condemnation of extremism, promotion of the Amman Message needs to take into account the socially and religiously conservative tradition that is pervasive in the majority of mosques in the United Kingdom.

The Barelvi movement originated in the north Indian town of Bareilly and is Sunni Muslim in its religious foundations though the movement was influenced by the more spiritually inward-looking and self-reflective Sufi (mystic) school. Followers of the Barelvi movement tend to prefer being called followers of the *Ahle Sunnah wal Jama'at* movement and are religiously less socially conservative in their outlook, an attitude that grew out of a reaction to the perceived religious rigidity and conservatism of the Deobandi tradition. Barelvi mosques are found mainly in areas such as the West Midlands, Yorkshire and the East Midlands. Some of the activities promoted by followers of the *Ahle Sunnah wal Jama'at* movement include visiting the graves of relatives, ensuring the protection and upkeep of Islamic shrines, visiting the graves of religious holy men – which confers blessing on the visitor – and the celebration of the Prophet's birthday.

Several umbrella organizations represent these various strands of the Islamic traditions. These include the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB),<sup>5</sup> the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)<sup>6</sup> and the British Muslim Forum.<sup>7</sup> The MCB and MINAB

have taken on more political roles in the last few years with regular press releases on matters of national or international interest affecting Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. Consequently, relations between the MCB and Her Majesty's Government are currently strained. Their lowest point occurred in 2009 when the then Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon. Hazel Blears MP, formally and publicly cut relations with the MCB. This was in reaction to the MCB's then Deputy Secretary General, Dr Daud Abdullah, signing of a declaration in Istanbul drawn up at the Global Anti-Aggression conference. This declaration called for a Jihad in response to the assault on Gaza by Israeli troops and supported a call for Hamas to attack foreign troops attacking Gaza; this was read as a call for an attack on British troops if they had been involved in the assault (Slack 2009). The British Muslim Forum, on the other hand, while socially active in 2008 and 2009 through social projects in the Midlands and Yorkshire, has cut back on many of its activities. National reductions in funding, the global financial crisis, donor fatigue and a range of other barriers have no doubt slowed down actual tangible grassroots-related social activities within these organizations.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2005 changed the face of social issues affecting Muslim communities in the UK. While poverty, youth identity, lack of employment, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice had been ongoing issues and barriers affecting the social development of Muslim communities, the securitization agenda that culminated in the Prevent strategy (HM Government 2009) changed the relationship between the state and Muslim communities. Before reflecting on this change, we need to consider those challenges that affected Muslims prior to 9/11 and 7/7.

Migration, international wars, dislocation and racism were social factors that had been affecting Muslim communities before the two attacks although, prior to the Salman Rushdie affair and the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 (BBC News 1989), Muslim communities were referred to in the wider context of Asian

communities. This term, 'Asian communities', mainly referred to communities of faith, race and nationality that were Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi, as well as Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists and others.

Some of the discrimination that affected Asian and Muslim communities is highlighted by Dr Abbas when he discusses the collective resilience of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and how they rejected the assimilationist model that had been promoted by successive UK governments from the 1940s to the 1970s (Abbas 2010). This resilience led the government to policies of multiculturalism that were introduced in the 1970s and 1980s. Multiculturalism provided a framework through which diversity could be recognized by policy-makers and where difference could be celebrated. However, by the mid-1970s, it had become clear that legislation was required to ensure equality within British institutions and that high rates of unemployment, poor housing and the segregation of BAME populations from the mainstream of society were creating disaffected populations. The introduction of the Race Relations Act (1976) was the start of legislative protection for minority rights within statutory service provision, and within British institutions. Dr Abbas also reflects on challenges to multiculturalism that took the form of anti-racist campaigns in the 1980s. These concerns are echoed by mainstream British politicians today, such as the former prime minister, David Cameron, who argue against the perceived divisions that they consider to be promoted by multiculturalism (Cameron 2011).

It was the Salman Rushdie affair in the summer of 1989 that brought faith identity to the foreground of the British media and into the social lexicon of today. After the burning of the *Satanic Verses* in places such as Bradford, national newspapers in the UK posted front-page pictures of bearded Muslim men with prayer caps standing around burning copies of Rushdie's novel, while interviews on news channels showed national audiences the angry faces of 'Asians', which soon turned into Muslims because the book focused on a fictional set of incidents involving the Prophet Muhammad. This incident and the ensuing media attention had two main consequences; the first was the development of an 'identity marker' in relation to Muslims, created through press headlines of Muslims in the UK and widely disseminated through national newspapers. The second was the development of the social

phenomenon called Islamophobia, first mentioned by Conway *et al.* (1997) in a ground-breaking paper, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, commissioned by the Runnymede Trust.

After the *Satanic Verses* affair, a series of events added to press Deadlines that promoted a deep sense of fear and unease about Muslim populations in the United Kingdom. These included the 1990 Gulf War, international terrorist incidents, terrorism in the Middle East and a growing Muslim population (some of whom were Islamists who had fled Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the civil wars in some of these countries). The growing prevalence in populist newspapers of statements by radical preachers such as the ‘Tottenham Ayatollah’ (Omar Bakri Mohammed) (*Daily Mail Online* 2010) created a sense for many that Muslims were extreme by nature. As these headlines became more prevalent, press stories gave the impression that there was something inherent within Islam (and thereby Muslims) that made them extreme or especially sensitive to radicalization. Many Muslim communities also began to talk about a rising level of hate that was targeted at mosques and members of their communities, and particularly at men and women who were visibly Muslim at street level. Religious leadership issues came to the fore and continue to be a discussion point both in central government and within Muslim communities. This was one of the reasons behind the development of the national advisory board, MINAB, in 2006.

These tensions also brought to the surface other issues that were specific to Muslim communities. The independent race equality thinktank, Runnymede, reported that:

There is an increasingly widespread perception in Muslim communities that imams are not equipped by their own training to help young British Muslims cope with issues such as unemployment, racism and Islamophobia, drugs, and the attraction of western youth culture. (Conway *et al.* 1997, p.17)

Other issues affecting Muslim communities involved high levels of economic inactivity. The May 2013 report from the Office for National Statistics highlights this as being due to many Muslims being young and/or students, while many others were looking after the family home or acting as carers (ONS 2013). In relation to age, the 2011 Census goes on to state:

Muslims had the youngest age profile of the main religious groups. Nearly half of Muslims (48 per cent) were aged under 25 (1.3 million) and nine in ten people (88 per cent) were aged under 50 (2.4 million). Muslims also had the youngest age profile in 2001. (ONS 2013, p.2)

Considering religion and economic activity, the report also states, 'Around three quarters of Christians and those with no religion (77 per cent and 74 per cent respectively) were economically active employees, compared with around three-fifths (59 per cent) of Muslims' (ONS 2013, p.13). And later:

17 per cent of economically active Muslims were unemployed (including unemployed students) compared with around six per cent of Christians and nine per cent of people with no religion. The religion with the smallest proportion of people in this category was Jewish at four per cent. (ONS 2013, p.14)

What is clear is that economic inactivity and the lack of employment opportunities in an economic downturn have affected the social development of Muslim communities in the UK. Dr Abbas supports this with further official figures indicating that, from 2003 to 2004, about 31 per cent of Muslims of working age had no qualifications and these figures were the highest for any faith group (Abbas 2010).

### *Post 9/11 and 7/7*

While 11 September 2001 was a global turning point, it was 7 July 2005 that particularly shook the United Kingdom. Multiple bombs in Edgware Road, Euston and other locations in London and the subsequent attempted bombings by the 21/7 bombers (see *Huffington Post* 2012) put strain on the relationship between the UK government and Muslim communities. Calls for greater action against extremism and continued calls for Muslim communities to condemn extremism and terrorism heightened to a crescendo and led to the contemporary Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Tony Blair MP, to call for a Task Force Against Extremism, which met in Windsor later in 2005. After two years of consultation and work with Muslim communities, the Labour government of the time launched the Prevent strategy in 2007 (HM Government 2011). Implemented at

local, regional, national and international levels, Prevent was focused on tackling violent extremism but did not include extremist narratives as part of its focus. Muslim communities raised a number of possible practical solutions against extremism which included the following strategies: (i) training for imams; (ii) developing and supporting Muslim chaplains who could provide pastoral care within prisons, higher education colleges, courts, health services and universities – such pastoral care was considered essential in helping to provide support to young people who might be vulnerable or in danger of being radicalized; (iii) introducing social projects that tackled violent extremism by confronting the narratives of al Qaida and groups such as the now proscribed Al-Muhajiroun which was previously led by Anjem Choudhary; (iv) setting up international projects that tackled radicalization in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, and which curtailed extremist influences on British Muslim communities of Pakistani, Somali and Arab heritage; and (v) initiating Muslim women's empowerment projects and a range of youth 'de-radicalization' projects. Many of the projects attempted to build penetration into Muslim communities in the UK but were accused by right-wing politicians of merely capacity-building these communities to tackle violent extremism themselves, rather than tackling the actual narratives of extremism.

The Prevent strategy in the UK spanned three major central government departments. These included the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Repeated statements from ministers of these departments since 2007 have left a lasting impression with Muslim communities and beyond that extremism and terrorism have to be tackled and, since al Qaida was then the greatest threat to the United Kingdom, Muslim communities have to do more. Many within Muslim communities felt bewildered by the repeated calls to do more, especially when confronted with media and ministerial calls that Muslims had to turn in those who were a threat to the nation. Such calls enhanced the fears already felt within these communities; in particular, many felt that their engagement with law enforcement in the UK would involve coercion to inform on others and stories started to come to light that further fuelled these fears (Taylor 2013).

What was also evident by 2009/2010 was that other faith communities were starting to become resentful about resources that were going to Muslim communities. The reason that the funding was to target violent extremism was not clear to some in Sikh communities, who voiced concerns at senior-level meetings with central government departments. For instance, one leading member of the British Sikh community asked, 'Why is money being given to Muslim communities who are involved in terrorism and extremism? Does this mean that we should also carry out a bombing for our funding needs to be heard?' Such statements were increasingly being voiced by other faith communities and a wider set of perceptions started to develop that saw a 'pathologized' set of Muslim communities who were, in effect, being rewarded for their 'bad actions' and for their silence. This was inaccurate, particularly when national debate issues in the UK included pre-charge detention (Library of Congress 2015), police stop and search powers (GOV.UK 2013), and Schedule 7 stops at entry ports, which were largely aimed at Muslims (HM Government 2000). All of these debates focused on Muslim communities who were now, by default, strongly associated with extremism and terrorism; moreover, these attitudes also had a disproportionate impact on young Muslim men and women. In fact, a 2009 newspaper report highlighted that there was a trebling in the stop and search of Muslims (Verkaik 2009). Some commentators also suggested that such powers, which were having major impacts on young Muslims, were liable to act as recruiting sergeants for extremists, particularly if these young people were also subjected to further anti-Muslim prejudice and humiliation in their lives.

What must also be noted is that over the last decade a strong sense of fear, resentment and cynicism has developed within Muslim communities and particularly within young Muslim men. Many fear giving their personal details to authorities such as the police and some have even started to change their first names in the hope that they do not suffer anti-Muslim prejudice in recruitment processes. The level of cynicism and the lack of trust within statutory authorities, such as the police, should not be underestimated and the long-term impacts on integration are not in doubt. Allied to this, the sheer diversity of Muslim communities and sects, the range of online information about Muslims and the pathologization of Islam and Muslims by

millions of websites, combined with small-scale localized religious groupings and a desire by young Muslims to live quiet lives, have meant that the question of who represents Islam and Muslims has become even more acute.

### *The far-right English Defence League and the baiting of Muslim communities*

The English Defence League formed as a result of a counter-reaction to the Islamist, Al-Muhajiroun demonstration in 2009 that protested the Afghan War on the return of the Royal Anglian Regiment. Led by Stephen Lennon (also known as Paul Harris and Tommy Robinson), it is a far-right extremist group that was once able to bring thousands of people onto the streets, as the Stoke-on-Trent demonstration in 2010 evidenced (BBC News 2010). Support for the group declined in 2010 after a series of revelations came to light regarding its supporter base, many of whom promoted deeply racist views and prejudices against Muslim, Roma and migrant communities. Allied to this, when facts such as Stephen Lennon's membership of the British National Party (BNP) came to light (Eglot 2013), many could not see a future in the EDL as a legitimate means of countering or protesting against Islamist extremism.

However, the real support base of the EDL has never been in street-based demonstrations, as the decline in numbers of people attending demonstrations post-2010 indicates. Rather, the organization is far more active and effective online, especially through social media platforms. The first academic study of the use of social media and online sources in the promotion of anti-Muslim prejudice was undertaken by Teesside University on behalf of Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), a national project supporting victims of such prejudice (Copsey *et al.* 2013), which is coordinated and delivered by the NGO Faith Matters. The Teesside report is an independent analysis of the data from Tell MAMA, which witnessed and recorded anti-Muslim incidents in England and Wales from January 2012 through to late 2013. The report outlines the key impacts of the activities of EDL sympathizers and its leadership, who consistently promote their extremist messages about Islam and Muslims to wide audiences, particularly those who may be susceptible to them. Much like Al-Muhajiroun, who threw their net far and wide campaigning



on various issues of interest to Muslim communities in order to gain young and active followers, the EDL leadership understood early on the power of social media and the internet in spreading their messages of hate as widely as possible. The Teesside report looks at the type of social media messages promoted through tens of thousands of tweets on a daily basis emanating from UK Twitter accounts. Tell MAMA caseworkers have also observed increased activity from Twitter users in the United States, many of whom describe themselves as ‘Tea Party’ followers of the Republican right who also engage with EDL sympathizers in the United Kingdom.

The Teesside report highlights social media and online platforms as one significant engine in the promotion of anti-Muslim prejudice and marks out the demographics of victims and perpetrators of anti-Muslim prejudice. It also goes into detail regarding some of the narratives used and, since this is an emerging piece of work, the report sets the foundations for further research work to be undertaken in the future. However, what is already clear is that one of the issues affecting Muslims today in the UK is the cancer of anti-Muslim prejudice or Islamophobia that is promoted online, as well as the verbal abuse and name-calling at street level – mostly aimed at visibly Muslim women.<sup>8</sup>

What is also of interest is the way in which online activity by the EDL and other far-right sympathizers has started to create what Dr Matthew Feldman of Teesside University calls ‘Cumulative Extremism’ (Feldman 2012). Extremist activists from far-right groups and from within Muslim communities have started to play off against each other using the same social media platforms. This leads to ongoing hate being targeted at one another while subjecting the wider population to messages of hate, intolerance and bigotry, which does nothing to promote shared values, mutual understanding and co-existence. As time goes on, the real issue for Muslims in the UK will be how to ensure that the messages of far-right/extreme groups (which now mainly only focus on Islam and Muslim communities) can be undermined through a better understanding of the Islamic faith and of Muslim communities. Part of this work will also have to include untangling far-right narratives, shutting down far-right Twitter and Facebook accounts by reporting them directly to social media providers and reporting anti-Muslim prejudice to the relevant forces in England and Wales, or through third-party reporting projects such as Tell MAMA.<sup>9</sup>

### *Post-Woolwich*

The brutal murder of the soldier Lee Rigby by Michael Adebowale and Michael Adebolajo in Woolwich, South London, on 22 May 2013, simply stunned the nation. The shock and horror of butchery on the streets of London targeted at a young man serving in the army sent a shiver through all communities in the UK. As soon as the murder had taken place and pictures of the bloodstained hands of the killer were beamed through news and satellite channels, Muslims in the country felt that a backlash was imminent and that the crime was so heinous and so well documented that it was only a matter of time before mosques and Islamic institutions were attacked. Tell MAMA documented a sixfold rise in the number of prejudiced anti-Muslim incidents that were reported to them; in the week following the murder, about 120 incidents were reported in all. Cases involved street-based insults, assaults, broken windows in mosques, and online threats and abuse. This spike in incidents was also highlighted by the Metropolitan Police Service's Commander Simon Letchford who, on 10 June, stated that anti-Muslim incidents were coming into the 'Met' at the rate of eight per day in London compared with one per day prior to the Woolwich attack. He also emphasized the problem of under-reporting hate incidents that affected Muslim and other communities, who simply endured such events and carried on with their lives (*Metro* 2013).

The 'post-Woolwich' period has therefore been a troubling time for Muslim communities. MINAB described this period as one in which 'Mosques and Muslims were under siege' (MINAB 2013), highlighting the growing sense of fear within Muslim communities and citing terrorist incidents in local mosques in Walsall, Tipton (BBC News 2013a) and Wolverhampton (BBC News 2013b). In particular, in April 2013, a 25-year-old Ukrainian neo-Nazi, Pavlo Lapyshyn (who had recently entered the UK for a work placement in a local West Midlands electronics firm), murdered Mohammed Saleem, a 75-year-old Muslim man, who was returning home after prayers at a local mosque in Birmingham. His murder sparked a nationwide manhunt that ended with the arrest and conviction of the young Ukrainian (Wilkes and Greenwood 2013).

The post-Woolwich landscape is, therefore, one in which Muslim communities are starting to seriously consider better security measures in mosques, better reporting processes for hate crime and,

more importantly, finding ways to reduce community tensions by providing others with a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in the United Kingdom. This seems set to be the challenge for another decade and one that will present a difficult, yet achievable, path to follow. It will cost money, time, patience and resources, as well as the development of international partnerships with institutions that can promote Islamic values within a framework of respect for human rights, human life, the protection of all faiths and of those who profess no faith, alongside the rejection of extremism and terrorism, which are completely at odds with Islamic doctrinal teaching.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE AMMAN MESSAGE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Amman Message presents a number of opportunities within the context of the United Kingdom. At the very least, it provides a textual basis through which the various theological schools of Islam can build on the principle of human rights; it may also help to bring together Muslim communities by providing an accessible and positive focus to help counter extremism.

The continued fragmentation of Muslim communities into disparate voices that are rarely coordinated has created vacuums in the social spheres of some Muslim communities in the UK where extremists may target vulnerable young Muslims while, at the same time, far-right extremists play on the resentments of young white men from poorer backgrounds. The former are influenced by narratives steeped in the use of violence as a means to achieving politicized religious goals while the latter aim to blame and target all Muslims for the social ills in the UK. Sometimes this far-right hate has led to overt violent actions against Muslims, such as the murder of Mohammad Saleem, discussed above. This was compounded in 2015 by the murder of Mushin Ahmed on the streets of Rotherham, a town that became a focal point for far-right extremist campaigns following the exposure of child abuse scandals that lasted decades.

To achieve its full potential, the Amman Message needs to be considered through the prism of a message that has been developed in the heart of the Middle East, and this is important since, as such, it will carry more weight with some imams and Muslims in the UK. Moreover, they may defer to the fact that it has been accepted by

the Ulema<sup>10</sup> in Jordan and by Arabs with a clear understanding of the context of the Qur'an and of the variety of nuances within the language of the holy texts of Islam. This is significant since it means there will be scope for serious discussion of the Amman Message in the UK that will encourage a receptiveness to its implementation. This is even more important in present times given that extremism has meant that over 2000 British residents and citizens have gone to fight in Syria and that many British Muslim lives have been lost.

Furthermore, the value of the Amman Message is that it is not simply a message intended to counter extremism but that it also aims to counter intra-Muslim hatred and tensions. These have been slowly rising in the UK since the Syrian civil war, with individuals from groups such as the (now banned) Al-Muhajiroun attacking people perceived to be Shi'a, as happened on the busy Edgware Road in the heart of London in 2013. Allied to this, Shi'a communities have stated that cable channels beamed from the Middle East have promoted anti-Shi'a rhetoric that has been driven by the Syrian conflict. Recently, there has been a small but steady rise in anti-Ahmadiya attacks during 2015–16 by other British Muslims. Examples include notices outside mosques stating that Ahmadiya Muslims cannot enter, online abuse, and leading Muslims speaking out against Ahmadiyas as non-Muslims and, more derogatorily, as kaffirs (or non-believers in Islam). The murder of Asad Shah in Glasgow in April 2016 highlights how intra-faith extremism aggravated by online posts can have fatal consequences; Mr Shah was an Ahmadiya Muslim who was targeted by a perpetrator who drove over 200 miles from Bradford to murder him. It is such intra-Muslim prejudice that the Amman Message can also speak to.

However, there are further challenges that will need to be overcome, the first being the fragmentation of Muslim communities and the lack of clear leadership developing within them. Allied to this, many Islamic institutions are dominated by men who are usually over the age of 60 and who have no real connection with the current situation of Muslim women and young people in the UK. Change for them appears as a threat, which results in the classic response of obfuscation on issues around change and in other destructive scenarios; in particular, the ostracization of people bringing new ideas to these institutions.

Last but not least, the Amman Message needs to be developed into a format that young people can engage with, given that young

people are increasingly turning to visual sources to gather their information and rarely have more than a few minutes to be influenced by something they read. If the Message is to have traction in the United Kingdom, it will need to be reworked into something that can draw in young people, whether in video form or as animations. In today's world, information is produced so fast that a single year may see what was once a decade's worth of informational content packed into 365 days. If we see the world through such a prism, the Amman Message can either be a solution in a challenging environment or just a footnote in history. It is up to us to give it life.

## NOTES

1. This increased from 16 per cent in 2001 to 21 per cent in 2011.
2. It has been suggested that most of *braderie* voting takes place in the Midlands and in the North of England.
3. These include Turkish Cypriot, Turkish and Kurdish communities.
4. For ease of reference, the term 'British Muslims' will be used here as a broad term to identify a deeply diverse and localized set of Muslim communities across the UK, of which the vast majority live in England and Wales. However, the main focus of this article is on issues affecting Muslims within England.
5. For more information, see Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board. Available online at [www.minab.org.uk](http://www.minab.org.uk).
6. For more information, see the Muslim Council of Britain. Available online at [www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk).
7. For more information, see the British Muslim Forum. Available online at [www.britishmuslimforum.co.uk](http://www.britishmuslimforum.co.uk).
8. Those wearing the *hijab* (the Islamic headscarf) and the *niqab* (the face veil).
9. There are problems associated with police forces getting prosecutions since the Social Media Guidelines produced by the Crown Prosecution Service of England and Wales have a high threshold for the protection of freedom of speech if the incident falls into the scope of the Race and Religious Hatred Act (2006).
10. Ulema: a body of Muslim scholars who are recognized by Islamic institutions and bodies as having specialist knowledge of Islamic theology.

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# 5

## Young British Muslims

Online Extremism and the Message of Islam

*Imran Awan*

### INTRODUCTION

Muslims are often portrayed in a negative light by the media and a variety of accusations have been made against Islam implying that it is a religion that promotes extremism. Many of these accusations have aimed to create a climate of fear and moral panic around issues such as the Muslim veil and extremist demands for Shar'ia law to be adopted in Britain. This has been perpetuated by a narrative that has made both Islam and Muslims almost synonymous with terms such as 'Jihad', 'extremism', 'fundamentalists', 'radicalization' and 'terrorism'. In light of this, the Amman Message has brought together a universal testament that presents a peaceful and tolerant picture of the Islamic message in its purest sense and form. The following extract demonstrates the Message's understanding of the current situation:

Today the magnanimous message of Islam faces a vicious attack from those who through distortion and fabrication try to portray Islam as an enemy to them. It is also under attack from some who claim affiliation with Islam and commit irresponsible acts in its name. (Amman Message 2008, p.4)

The Message identifies a key set of objectives and goals that include protecting human rights, and promoting equality, diversity, freedom of religion and the rights of women. These are important because the negative stereotypes in the media so often misrepresent Islam as being a barbaric faith. This chapter considers the Amman Message and the Islamic code of ethics specifically in relation to the world of internet



extremism and what can be done to counter the online radicalization of young British Muslims.

In the heightened atmosphere following 9/11, the role of the internet in radicalizing young British Muslims became a serious and complex issue. While such radicalization is carried out in the name of Islam, for most Muslims this is clearly a misinterpretation since the Qur'an makes clear that Islam is against terrorism and prohibits the killing of any human being:

No good is there in much of their private conversation, except for those who enjoin charity or that which is right or conciliation between people. And whoever does that seeking means to the approval of Allah – then We are going to give him a great reward. (Qur'an, an-Nisa, 4:114)<sup>1</sup>

This message against extremism and terrorism is underscored by Islam's emphasis on promoting social cohesion and community building. From this perspective, it is clear that Islam promotes pluralism, social justice, peace and mutual respect. Moreover, since it asserts that there should be no compulsion in religion, Islam makes clear that Muslims should respect others' views and not violate their own religion by committing any acts of violence or terrorism:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (Qur'an, an-Nahl, 16:125; brackets in text)

This is something that fringe groups and extremist narratives are built upon, in particular the ethos of al Qaida that has promoted a distorted version of Islam that they have used to create an 'us versus them' mentality. This is extremely dangerous when young impressionable people may become radicalized by this distortion that has blurred the true picture of Islam. This goes completely contrary to the following statement from the Qur'an:

So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you

have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]. (Qur'an, al-Imran, 3:159; brackets in text)

This message of peace, tolerance and forgiveness is the cornerstone of Islam and as such should be respected and followed. Other passages in the Qur'an also support this belief in the need for peaceful resolution, for instance: 'the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation – his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers' (Qur'an, As-Shuraa, 42:40); and, 'not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend' (Qur'an, Fussilat, 41:34; brackets in text).

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE

As discussed above, Islam has often been hijacked by those who claim the faith allows the killing of innocent people and who have therefore used this to justify the violent acts they commit in the name of Islam. However, this contradicts the message of Islam, which recognizes the sanctity of human life and the importance of peaceful resolution. The Amman Message emphasizes this, saying:

Assault upon the life of a human being, be it murder, injury or threat, is an assault upon the right to life among all human beings. It is among the gravest of sins; for human life is the basis for the prosperity of humanity. (Amman Message 2008)

This view reinforces the passage in the Qur'an that states:

Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proofs. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors. (Qur'an, al-Maidah, 5:32)

In relation to Islam's prohibition on murder and terrorism, the Amman Message provides a counter-argument to the online extremists' views that do not acknowledge the injunction: 'They are not from the true

character of the tolerant, accepting Muslim. Islam rejects extremism, radicalism and fanaticism – just as all noble, heavenly religions reject them – considering them as recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice’ (Amman Message 2008, p.10).

This profound and strong message of condemnation against terrorism is important and makes clear that Islam is against all forms of extremism. The Amman Message reinforces this, stating:

We denounce and condemn extremism, radicalism and fanaticism today, just as our forefathers tirelessly denounced and opposed them throughout Islamic history. They are the ones who affirmed, as do we, the firm and unshakeable understanding that Islam is a religion of [noble] character traits in both its ends and means; a religion that strives for the good of the people, their happiness in this life and the next; and a religion that can only be defended in ways that are ethical; and the ends do not justify the means in this religion. (Amman Message 2008)

Moreover, the Qur’an also notes that:

Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. (Qur’an, al-Mumtahanah, 60:8)

The rest of this chapter explores the world of online extremism and the ways in which it contravenes these clear Islamic statements. In particular, it argues that by providing a focus through which to help protect human rights and tackle terrorism, the Amman Message can make a real impact in this area.

## ONLINE RADICALIZATION AND EXTREMISM

Radicalization of young British Muslims has become an increasingly complex issue. While there is no universal definition of the word ‘radicalization’, it has been defined by the UK government as ‘the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism’ (HM Government 2011, p.108). I would argue, further, that radicalization involves individuals who have been influenced by a culture of violent activities and who hope to re-enact those feelings and perceptions of hate, anger and violence;

this desire can often be linked to violence and acts of terrorism (Altheide 1997).

One theoretical approach that helps to clarify the link between online activity and radicalization/extremism is social learning theory; this provides a theoretical basis for understanding the process that leads terrorists to choose the internet as a means of targeting young British Muslims and promoting violence as a strategy (Freiburger and Crane 2008). The theory asserts that individuals learn deviant behaviour from other groups, through learning that can be characterized as association, definitions, differential reinforcement and imitation (Bronskill 2001). Supporters of social learning theory argue that terrorist groups use such psychological mechanisms on the internet as tools to facilitate attacks and encourage recruitment. These include using factors such as persuasion and identity as a means to recruit would-be sympathizers. This perspective on deviant behaviours offers a thought-provoking insight into the processes that transform naive individuals, such as Copeland and Ibrahim,<sup>2</sup> into violent extremists (Desmond 2002).

For instance, Freiburger and Crane (2008) use social learning theory to examine the European case of Peter Cherif, who was involved in masterminding the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris and who had been recruited by al Qaida over the internet through a learning process similar to that suggested above (Powell *et al.* 2005). Their argument is that when groups become marginalized they become more likely to use the internet for terrorist purposes. In relation to this, the use of social constructionism as a mechanism to comprehend the competing definitions of extremism is crucial to gaining a better understanding of the phenomena. Clearly, social practices and social behaviour change with time and thus our understanding of online radicalization will also evolve. Within this context, social constructionism offers both criminologists and sociologists a means to examine the various social processes that emerge when looking at interpretations of radicalization (Felson 2002).

The Amman Message is very clear regarding the importance of how we conceptualize terrorism, while also making the case that radicalization is against Islam in its entirety:

On religious and moral grounds, we denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices,

whatever their source and form may be. Such acts are represented by aggression against human life in an oppressive form that transgresses the rulings of God, frightening those who are secure, violating peaceful civilians, finishing off the wounded, and killing prisoners; and they employ unethical means, such as destroying buildings and ransacking cities. (Amman Message 2008, p.11)

McKenna and Bargh's (1998) research suggests that the convergence of cyberspace and terrorism has allowed terrorists more opportunities to recruit and radicalize young Muslims for terrorist purposes. As a result, some researchers argue that there is a real and present fear that the internet has become a safe haven for potential extremists to 'groom' vulnerable people (Grabosky and Stohl 2010). Moreover, Tsfati and Weimann (2002) found that terrorist groups are using the internet to groom such individuals by justifying violence against innocent civilians as retribution for invasions of Muslim countries and crimes committed against Muslims across the globe. Again, the Amman Message provides a counter-argument for this, asserting that:

We realize that over history extremism has been instrumental in destroying noble achievements in great civilizations, and that the tree of civilization withers when malice takes hold and breasts are shut. In all its shapes, extremism is a stranger to Islam, which is founded upon equanimity and tolerance. No human whose heart has been illumined by God could be a radical extremist. (Amman Message 2008, p.12)

### *Recruitment of young British Muslims in cyberspace*

That terrorists have been successful in using the internet to encourage youths to support their ideological and fanatical aims has been made clear by several studies exploring the methods they use. Research by Conway (2003) indicates that these include fundraising and promulgating propaganda via websites, sharing information, data mining, communicating and recruitment. Weimann's research (2004) demonstrates that terrorists use the internet for similar purposes, including publicity, propaganda, fundraising, recruitment, networking, sharing information and planning – as well as for psychological warfare. These findings are also supported by Lachow and Richardson (2007), Whine (1999) and Yar (2006).

Further studies indicate that recruiters also use more interactive internet technology to enlist support from vulnerable young people (Furnell and Warren 1999). For example, Kohlmann's research (2008) found that MySpace is used to access and participate in online chat rooms and cyber cafés. Marc Sageman's research (2008) suggests that these forms of interaction help build ideological relationships and are a key tool in radicalizing youths. This participation in online discussion constitutes a form of political activism in itself. Furthermore, as Weimann (2004) argues, this can be transformed into political violence in a process that is active rather than passive. Recent events in the Middle East, such as the conflict in Tunisia, demonstrate the murky connections between participation in social media and physical demonstrations. However, it should be noted that some researchers argue that internet use by terrorists has changed dramatically in the past decade and what was written about it seven to ten years ago is not so relevant today. For instance, while al Qaida is known to have used cyberspace in the past, there are very few recent reported incidents of its online activity.

The reported effectiveness of online recruitment has caused much consternation in British government, which has made efforts to control the problem. For instance, following the tragic murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich, the then British Home Secretary, Theresa May, was quick to identify the internet as a potential source of radicalization, saying, 'There is no doubt that people are able to watch things through the internet which can lead to radicalization' (quoted by Wintour and Jones 2013). As a result, the UK government introduced a new taskforce called TERFOR in 2013 to explore ways of restricting what people can see on the internet as a means of tackling some forms of cyber-terrorism. The government is also considering a Communications Data Bill with the intention of giving the state the power to filter and control the flow of extremist content. It also aims to work more closely with internet service providers to facilitate removing material that is considered to be intended to incite people to commit acts of terrorism or violent extremism.

Although the Amman Message does not specifically discuss the use of the internet to promote extremism, it does assert that radicalization and the attraction of all forms of extremism can be challenged in a positive manner through the use of collective efforts by international and local communities. It adds that by addressing potential grievances

and foreign policy issues in a fair and proportionate manner we will be more able to achieve a world in which young Muslims feel an allegiance to the states and countries in which they live. After making clear that no person truly influenced by God could perpetrate terrorist acts, the Message states that:

At the same time, we decry the campaign of brazen distortion that portrays Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalizes terrorism. We call upon the international community to work earnestly to implement international laws and honor the international mandates and resolutions issued by the United Nations, ensuring that all parties accept them and that they be enacted without double standards, to guarantee the return of rights to their [rightful] holders and the end of oppression. Achieving this will be a significant contribution to uprooting the causes of violence, fanaticism and extremism. (Amman Message 2008, p.12; brackets in text)

Websites are a powerful tool for extremist organizations, especially as they can secure membership without directly approaching potential recruits (Tsfati and Weimann 2002). They can also reach thousands of people across the world and online recruitment by terrorist organizations using websites and associated chat rooms is said to be widespread, as discussed above. These websites contain crucial information with historical accounts, statistics and images of terror that can be downloaded by millions of people. This is worrying as it musters support and acts as a recruitment tool. The next section looks specifically at the role of social media and radicalization.

### *Anonymity, websites and radicalization*

A main reason that the internet provides a safe haven for terrorists (McKenna and Bargh 1998) is that they can remain anonymous online where, since they do not need to travel, they are not required to have or show passports (Weimann 2008); meanwhile, with the click of a mouse they can recruit and radicalize young people. For example, Younis Tsouli, the online terrorist who used the name ‘Irhaby 007’<sup>3</sup> to hide his identity, posted extremist material online that promoted al Qaida’s cause. He was planning a major terrorist attack in the UK in 2007 when he was arrested and convicted of inciting terror through the use of the internet. Tsouli had helped prepare al Qaida’s online

propaganda campaign (including translating al Qaida's online ebook into English). However, despite this and similar cases, Geltzer (2008) argues that such online material is still not a complete substitute for physical training camps, and he uses the example of the 7 July 2005 bombers in the UK who had taken part in rigorous physical training sessions as opposed to using online material for training and terrorist purposes.

A key aim of the extremist ideology propagated through such websites is to cause resentment towards the West and allow extremists' international support to reach millions around the world (Innes *et al.* 2011; see also Innes and Innes 2011). For instance, although their online presence is now greatly diminished, when they were more active al Qaida's media operations were supported by a network of productions that included al-Fajr and Global Islamic Media Front (Denning 2010). Al Qaida's most prominent media arm, however, was the As-Sahab Institute for Media Productions, which played a leading role in recruiting a wider audience. According to IntelCentre, As-Sahab released more than 58 videos every six days during the first decade of this century (IntelCentre 2007). Furthermore, in 2009, SITE – an institution in Washington that monitors terrorist use of the internet – found online videos of interactive question and answer sessions with al Qaida's main leaders, in particular Ayman al-Zawahiri, which they described as deeply disturbing. These videos acted as propaganda tools providing a means for al Qaida to use information technology to reach a global audience.

Within this scenario, social constructionist theories relating to internet use are also helpful in giving us a more grounded understanding of the lone-wolf image of self-radicalization since it is on the internet that individuals might be subjected to radical ideologies and discourses that subsequently lead them down the process of self-radicalization. By providing a private virtual environment, cyberspace allows disaffected individuals to meet like-minded people who are able to 'groom' them and so help them to create powerful social identities. This is clear in the case of Hammad Munshi, who was radicalized through websites and online extremist material and, at 18, became the youngest person ever convicted of a terrorist offence. The Amman Message suggests that such extremist influences and activities indicate that the true message of Islam is



not recognized by many people, and then goes on to present ways of countering this:

The primary components of these policies comprise developing methods for preparing preachers, with the goal of ensuring that they realize the spirit of Islam and its methodology for structuring human life, as well as providing them with knowledge of contemporary culture, so that they are able to interact with their communities on the basis of awareness and insight. (Amman Message 2008, p.13)

Al Qaida is known to have used the internet to promote and to indoctrinate their audience using propaganda through a wide variety of means, including videotapes of its leaders condemning the West, and the sale of t-shirts with slogans, flags, CDs, DVDs and images advertising al Qaida on a global scale. Another example is that of Omar Bakri, who was barred from entering the UK in 2005 but continued to promote and broadcast his message of terror online using emails, chat rooms and online seminars to keep in contact with those supporting his cause. Thus, Bakri's use of the internet allowed him to continue to preach his extremist views for recruitment purposes.

Chat rooms are also used for terrorist fundraising online. For example, Paltalk, which has been heavily criticized for lack of regulation of its members and of the messages they are able to post, hosts the room 'Ansar Al Mujahdeen' which continued to present 'live interviews conducted with actual Al Qaeda terrorists in Iraq' over a period of several years (Shahda 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The Amman Message gives us the following counsel as to how to create a more enlightened understanding of Islam that can provide a strong corrective to that promulgated by terrorist groups:

Hope lies in the scholars of our Nation, that through the reality of Islam and its values they will enlighten the intellects of our youth – the ornament of our present age and the promise of our future. The scholars shield our youth from the danger of sliding down the paths of ignorance, corruption, close-mindedness and subordination. It is our scholars who illuminate for them the paths of tolerance, moderation, and goodness, and prevent them from [falling] into the

abysses of extremism and fanaticism that destroy the spirit and body.  
(Amman Message 2008)

This conveys the message that the spirit and reality of Islam can be used in a positive manner to counter extremist narratives. In the context of cyberspace, these narratives involve online forms of cyber-hate and cyber-terrorism. Through these, terrorist groups have the capability to use the power of the internet to radicalize and recruit vulnerable people into cyber-terrorism and a belief in an ideology based on hate (Awan and Blakemore 2012). Therefore, we need to use the new communication technologies to promulgate counter-narratives, as Lord Carlile of Berriew states:

To protect our society, we must be prepared to use the internet as a tool of good governance: internet radicalization must face a competing narrative, with the good facing up to the bad on equal terms, using the same or better technology and methods. (Carlile 2011, p.7)

The Amman Message provides us with just such a counter-narrative.

Theresa May's concerns regarding terrorist groups' capability to use the internet to groom and recruit young vulnerable British Muslims towards a path of violence and hate are clearly well founded. In 2011, she argued that, following the Arab Spring in 2010–11 and the death of Osama bin Laden, the extremist threat from al Qaida increased: 'Since the death of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda has explicitly called not only for acts of lone or individual terrorism, but also for cyber-Jihad' (FSEC Global 2011). Terrorist-related materials on the internet, such as websites, images and sermons, are clearly becoming increasingly important in the discourse on cyber-extremism since extremist groups – both those at home and those based overseas – are able to use the internet to radicalize vulnerable people.

Terrorist groups' use of the internet to present live online beheadings amplifies the act of violence, as well as increasing its appeal to a global disaffected audience (Weimann 2005). It also provides extremist organizations with a psychological platform where they can manipulate and propagate their demands (Awan and Blakemore 2012). For example, Pervez Khan aimed to kill and behead a British Muslim soldier and then use the internet as a platform for advertising the beheading to the world, although he was arrested and charged

for conspiring to commit murder with intent before this was possible (*Guardian* 2008). The effectiveness of cyber-extremism prompted the British police to launch a new Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit. The main aim of this is to assess, investigate and tackle online material considered to be illegal and related to terrorism. This would include output from preachers, such as Omar Bakri, who have been able to use chat rooms and online forums to promote an agenda of extremism to youth in the UK, even when barred from entering the country (Swann 2011). Nevertheless, the true message of Islam is one of peace, tolerance and social justice; by recognizing and supporting this, the Amman Message provides a real opportunity to resist violence, build positive identities and promote justice through communities working together.

## NOTES

1. All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from [www.quran.com](http://www.quran.com).
2. David Copeland, also known as the Nail Bomber, planted three bombs across London hoping to start a race war. He is currently serving six concurrent life sentences. Andrew Ibrahim attempted to blow up a shopping centre in Bristol but was turned over to the police by the local community.
3. 'Irhabiy' is the Arabic word for 'terrorist'.

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# 6

## The Amman Message

An Early Confrontation with  
Extremist Islamic Movements

*Jamal Al-Shalabi*

When Jordan issued the Amman Message in 2004, it wanted to avoid an early confrontation with Islamic extremism. Unfortunately, the country found itself embroiled in extremist tensions and ideologies only one year later, as demonstrated by the Amman bombings on 9 November 2005, which left 60 people dead and more than 100 injured (International Crisis Group 2005). This day has become known as Black Wednesday. Ten years after this, Jordan re-encountered a similar unwanted event when one of its pilots was burned to death by militant Jihadists after an attack in which his plane was brought down during a mission over Syria and Iraq in 2015 (Rogers 2015).

Jordan realized the danger of such militant Jihadist and Salafist movements at an early stage – and it was this realization that led it to issue the Amman Message. Furthermore, as an early strategy dealing with the terrorism issuing from such extremist Islamic groups, the Message had the potential to successfully refute their controversial ideas regarding crucial issues such as the ‘other’, Jihad and democracy. As such, it provides much more than merely ink on paper, as has been the case with so many other Islamic and Arab initiatives that simply point to a danger or problem without being able to find an effective solution.

This chapter discusses these issues in three sections. The first relates to the political and intellectual context in which the Amman Message emerged; in the second section I analyse some different positions adopted by the Salafist Islamic approach regarding the Message. Lastly, I consider some of the achievements of the Amman Message, and the implications of these.

## THE POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The Amman Message can be considered a Jordanian diplomatic initiative par excellence. It was issued when the phenomenon of religious extremism was in the process of transforming from an internal issue concerning the Islamic and Arab world, according to the bi-polarity of East and West, into an international phenomenon. This transformation began following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – both of which have been linked with the exclusive domination of the US over the international arena, with the bloody events of 9/11 representing strong evidence of this dramatic change in scope (al-Shalabi and Alrajehi 2011). Against this backcloth, it seems that Jordanian diplomacy responded to the absence of relevant Arab and Islamic initiatives by expressing its position on political Islam and its international expressions by releasing the Amman Message in 2004. Is it not surprising that such a message should come from Jordan in the form of ‘a statement to people, to our brothers and sisters in the Islamic world and throughout the world’ (Amman Message 2007), while other major Arab countries – for example Saudi Arabia (where the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Madina are located) or Egypt (which is the largest Arab country and home to the Al Azhar Mosque and University, the oldest and most important juristic landmark in the Arab and Islamic world) – remained silent (al-Shalabi and Alrajehi 2011)?

In his autobiography, King Abdullah II dedicates the twenty-third chapter to a discussion of the Amman Message. He explains how the Message originated, as follows:

In late 2004, I brought together a group of leading Islamic scholars in Jordan and asked them how we could combat *takfiris* and their terrible ideas. I asked my cousin and adviser Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, a highly respected Islamic scholar with a PhD from Cambridge University, to lead and coordinate their work. The scholars produced a document called the Amman Message, which set out what Islam is, what it is not, and what types of actions are and are not Islamic. (Abdullah II 2011, p.329)

King Abdullah II explains how the Amman Message came to be launched as a sermon delivered by the Jordanian Supreme Judge Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Tamimi on 9 November 2004 with the king’s endorsement and blessing. After the Amman Message was launched,

the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought collected the responses to three questions issued to 24 eminent religious scholars in the region, with the aim of specifying 'the real nature of Islam': (1) Who is a Muslim? (2) Is it right to accuse anyone of *takfir* (infidelity to Islam)? and (3) Who has the right to issue *fatwas* (formal religious opinions)?

In a special appendix to the Amman Message, King Abdullah II explains his desire to present these three questions:

I knew that no statement coming from Jordan alone would be enough to combat the *takfiris*, who had spread their poison across the entire Muslim world. So Ghazi distilled the Amman Message down to its three most basic points, three questions that would undercut the *takfiris'* distortions and show them up as fraudulent from the point of view of normative Islam. (Abdullah II 2011, p.330)

The scholars' answers can be summed up in three main points. First, a Muslim can be identified as a person belonging to one of the four Sunni juristic traditions/denominations or one of the two Shiite traditions. Second, any person who belongs to these Islamic juristic traditions should not practise *takfir*. Third, those who are not qualified expounders of Islamic law have no right to issue *fatwas* within the scope of the eight *madhabib* (schools of jurisprudence). These three points received 552 signatures from 84 countries, and remain open for more endorsements (Gutkowski 2015).

According to the Tunisian thinker, al-Habib al-Janhani, the Amman Message was issued in 'a new global atmosphere characterized by a threat to the cultural identity of the people of the South due to globalization and western domination on the one hand and an aggressive attack on Islam and Muslims on the other' (Al-Janhani 2007, p.14). Moreover, Finnish thinker, Tuomo Melasuo, states that the Message comes about 45–50 years after the end of colonialism in the region and 15 years after the end of the Cold War and the emergence of mono-polarity and the related emergence of the phenomenon of terrorism and the collapse of understanding between the Middle East and other communities (Melasuo 2007).

Shortly before the Message appeared, many global events that influenced the relationship between the East and the West, and between Islam and Christianity, contributed to inspiring such an initiative:

1. The Amman Message came three years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that the Franco-American researcher, Stanley Hoffman, described as 'divine chance' since they came from the sky to the new conservatives in the US and allowed them to begin to bring into effect their long-term projects (Hoffman 2003).
2. The Message came two years after the destructive attack that the US launched on the Taliban regime in Islamic Afghanistan on the grounds that this regime was accommodating Osama bin Laden, the perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks.
3. The Message came only 20 months after the US occupation of Iraq in March 2003 whereby the world's largest superpower ushered in the new millennium with the occupation of Baghdad, the Arab and Islamic capital from the ninth century to the thirteenth century CE.

To sum up, the Amman Message has two intellectual and political contexts, one international and the other regional (al-Shalabi and Alrajehi 2011):

- *The international context* is based on the notion of a 'clash of civilizations' and the opposition to this by proponents of intercultural dialogue. The notion of dialogue among cultures has come to be used a great deal in the Arab and Islamic world recently. It did not spread as part of a new civilizational project with intercultural dialogue as a distinctive feature, but rather it became popular as a reaction against the 'clash of civilizations' that had been proclaimed by the American professor of political science, Samuel Huntington, in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, and later as a book (Huntington 2002).
- *The regional context* is represented by the rise of sectarianism in the Arab world, especially after the fall of Baghdad to American occupation, which contributed in various ways to Jihadist extremist discourse which placed emphasis on charges of *takfir*, or apostasy. Thus, in 2013 – nine years after the launch of the Amman Message – Jihad and other concepts became key words for the strategy of ISIS (Daesh)



in the Middle East which ‘expanded quickly and gradually’ (Bauchard 2014, p.6), especially in Iraq and Syria.

The Amman Message emphasizes the efforts Jordan has exerted, both at the official level and through civil institutions, to promote the concepts and principles of ‘moderate’ Islam and the use of interfaith dialogue. This is clearly beneficial to Jordan in deepening political relations and trust between it and the US, and in creating tools that may be used to support the authority of religion as one form of positive power in the country. The latter is particularly significant because, since 9/11, perceptions regarding the moderate nature of Islam as a religion have changed both in the Middle East and the West (Gutkowski 2015).

## WHY DO EXTREMIST TRENDS REJECT THE AMMAN MESSAGE?

The concepts contained within the Amman Message – in particular, the unity of humankind and of religions, Jihad, human rights and democracy – are the site of difference between two kinds of thought: the first seeks reform on the basis of bringing together what is original and what is contemporary in order to achieve certain political ends; the second relies on the past and predecessors to interpret reality, and resorts to different kinds of violence as a means to an end. Hence, the question arises: which views are offered by the Amman Message but not accepted by different forms of extremist ideologies? To answer this, we will initially consider how the Amman Message relates to the following core concepts:

- *Unity of humankind and religions.* The Amman Message opens by stating its premise using Qur’anic verses justifying the civilized and humane position of Islam towards the ‘other’: ‘O mankind, indeed, we have created you male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you (Al-Hujurat, 13)’ (Amman Message 2007). The aim of such an opening is to emphasize the common essence of human beings, and that the existence of a multiplicity of peoples was created so that they might cooperate and live in mutual recognition, not strife and

conflict. The intention is to establish ‘a broad ground for meeting the believers in other religions with the common goal of serving human society’ (Amman Message 2007).

- *Jihad*. In contrast to the extremist Jihadist view which justifies killing and the use of violence to achieve its goals, the Amman Message relies on ‘a logic of moderation and in-betweenness’ as it highlights that the way to achieve the needed change can be through ‘a call for Allah based on lenience and kindness (Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way) (An-Nahl, 125)’ (Amman Message 2007). As for killing civilians and damaging their property, the Amman Message makes clear its perspective on this, as follows:

Islam has given life a high status. So, there is no fighting with non-militants, and no aggression against peaceful civilians or their property, nor kids on their mothers’ laps nor students seeking education nor old men and women, [...] Allah the Almighty says that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption in the land – it is as if he had slain mankind entirely (Al-Ma’idah, 32). (Amman Message 2007)

- *Human rights and democracy*. The Amman Message calls for respect for the rights of individuals by making reference to a basic Islamic value represented in the term *justice*. It reminds Muslims that Islam champions ‘the principle of justice in treating others and securing their rights and not devaluing their property (Do not allow your hatred for other people to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; it is nearer to piety) (Al Maida, 8).’ It also reminds us of the importance of establishing good relations with others, and that this is at the heart of the teachings of Islam. In this regard, the Message says:

The relationship between Muslims and others is, in principle, one of peace, with no fighting when there is no aggression, but amity and justice and benevolence instead. (Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just) (Al Mumtahanah, 8). (Amman Message 2007)

While the above points indicate the view of the Amman Message in regard to these concepts, the core question remains: how did the Salafists (with their extremist tendencies) react to the Amman Message?

Before we answer, we should mention that the extremist Salafist movement comprises three strands: *adaptable Salafism* (based on a politics of non-violence in Islamic and non-Islamic countries; these are limited in number); *scholarly* or *informed Salafism* (based on traditional views that reject political organization and violence; this follows the Saudi religious institution); and *Jihadist Salafism* (based on violence against current political systems and the establishment of a caliphate; al Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and Daesh are examples of this) (Abu Rumman 2014). Below, we consider the latter two forms of Salafism as these are more significant in relation to our discussion here.

### *Scholarly Salafism*

In regard to the Amman Message, scholarly Salafism has become divided into two trends: one supporting it and the other strongly opposing it.

#### **Salafist support for the Amman Message**

Sheikh Ali al Halabi, one of the leaders of scholarly Salafism, praised the Amman Message. In a sermon he delivered after the Amman bombings in 2005, which was attended by King Abdullah II of Jordan, he said:

Amman's pioneering message in explicating the true mission of Islam ushered by His Majesty – may Allah save and protect him – more than a year ago is but a strong evidence and a clear proof of His pride in this religion and His pride in the purity and beauty of this faith and His care about the progress and vitality of this religion, which makes it necessary to obey him in righteousness and required to abide by His orders in goodness and fairness. (al Halabi 2011, author's translation)

Moreover, when some Salafists criticized al Halabi's support of the Message, his supporters defended him, emphasizing the importance of the Message and commending it. One example is an article by the Salafist, Yassin Nazzal, entitled *The Just Word: Sheikh al Halabi and the Purpose of the Hashemite Amman Message* (Nazzal 2009). Another

is presented in an article by the Salafist, Omar al-Btoush, entitled *Amman's Message: Proof, Evidence, and Refutation*. Here he states:

And since I am concerned with the blessed Amman Message, I have explicated it and explained what it contains in terms of grand ideals ... This pioneering message has been of much wisdom, moderation, and precision; ... at a time when many minds got confused or lost and when discord, wars, and injustice were abundant. One pedant [he means one of those who attacked al Halabi] tried to depict for the readers of his article that our Sheikh al Halabi has exclusively praised the Amman Message ... Indeed, the Amman Message was received with consent and approval by scholars, thinkers, and virtuous men from all lands and places. (Al-Btoush 2013)

### Opponents and attackers

The reactions of those followers of scholarly Salafism who opposed the Amman Message are concentrated in a book entitled *Strong Evidence in Exposing the New Positions and Judgments of Ali al Halabi*. In this book, its Salafist author, Abu Mo'adal Tahir, justifies his rejection of the Amman Message, saying:

And this Message consisted of many and big deviations that revoke the principles of the nation of Islam. This call is for the unity of all religions in terms of common denominators and the call for freedom of thought and equality in rights and duties and brotherhood among human beings. The Amman Message described non-believers like Jews and Christians and others as believers in other religions and brothers. It stated that the message of Islam is human brotherhood based on unity of human beings and that it is necessary to honour human beings regardless of their faith! (al Tahir 2010, p.222)

The same rejection of the Amman Message and the same extremist and condescending view is also emphasized by the Saudi Salafist professor of Islamic law, Rabe' al Mudkali, when he decries Ali al Halabi's support of the Amman Message, saying:

Finally, this man is disgraced by Allah since he praises this Message [i.e. the Amman Message], a message that incorporates a call for the unity and brotherhood of religions and brotherliness and affection among the followers of religions, equality of religions, abdicating

Jihad, and calling all nations to implement the regulation of the United Nations; and so he dedicated himself to justify his position and defend this message using falsities and deception, thus praising the Message and dismissing its opponents as fanatics. (al Mudkali n.d., author's translation)

As is characteristic of Salafists when it comes to solving internal disputes, they resort to settling issues by raising them as questions to sheikhs and eminent scholars who then issue legal *fatwas* in response. Sheikh Abdel Mohsen al-Abbad, an eminent scholar in Madina, Saudi Arabia, was accordingly asked his opinion regarding the statement that 'the origin of all religions is the same, and a Muslim believes in all creeds' (Al-Abbad 2011). It is clear in the context that the whole paragraph from the Amman Message is being implicated. His answer was:

After our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent, there is no true religion but Islam ... And as for saying that all religions after Prophet Muhammad's mission are all valid and true and equal, this is the most invalid and repellent of statements. (Al-Abbad 2011)

Similarly, the well-known Saudi *faqih* (jurisprudent), Salehal Fawwaz, a member of a distinguished board of scholars in Saudi Arabia, when asked about the same statement in the Amman Message, answered with the following:

This is misleading discourse, may Allah forbid. Yes we Muslims do believe in all messengers and divine books, but they do not. Jews do not believe in Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon him). Christians do not believe in the last prophet or in the Qur'an. How can we say they are believers? They disbelieve some messengers and divine books! Those are not believers. They are not among the believers, and this is confusing and misleading to people. It should be denied, yes. (al Fawwaz 2013)

### *Jihadist Salafism*

If scholarly Salafism, which is considered less extremist, attacked the Amman Message so strongly, how then might Jihadist Salafism react to this message?

Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, a key theorist and advocate of this approach, holds a strong ideological stance against the Message and has attacked it in terms of its views, content and exhortations. Indeed, he wrote a booklet especially to demonstrate his position and opinion, entitled *The Amman Message: A Correction of Concepts*. His criticism can be summarized in the following points:

- He claims that the Amman Message promotes human brotherhood as a product of Freemasonry, saying that ‘it is one among contemporary corrupt calls being promoted by Jews, Christians, and their followers from the ignorant and the misleading for our Muslim sons in order to destroy their religious bonds’ (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.6).
- Since the Amman Message considers Muslims and non-believers equal and does not distinguish among them, Al-Maqdisi asserts that ‘[t]his clarifies that those who wrote the Amman Message do not understand the true nature of Islam and what this message established in terms of religious brotherliness and the ties and attachments supporting Muslims’ (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.7).
- Al-Maqdisi considers *unity*, as presented in the Amman Message, to be different from the concept of *equality of messengers* in Islam. Indeed, he asserts that the latter concept ‘contradicts the unity of human beings the Amman Message ascribes to Islam. In fact, the equality of messengers in Islam unifies Muslims and distinguishes between them and non-believers’ (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.9).
- In response to the Amman Message’s call to spread amity and peace among all nations without exceptions, al-Maqdisi asks:

So what about loving Jews and Christians and pagans among others in the world!? Does the Amman Message want us to spread love among such people while they are killing our children and women in Ghaza and Afghanistan and Myanmar and elsewhere!... Even if they do not do this they should not be loved in Islam, so how about when they commit such atrocities against Muslims? The Amman Message has another say. (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.11)

- Al-Maqdisi considers the Amman Message to adopt a defeatist position that cancels required Jihad. He elaborates on this as follows:

And it is not surprising that after adopting such defeatist claims, required Jihad gets cancelled and Jihad becomes only a defensive measure to ward off aggression as they mention when they say: ‘the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, in principle, is one of peace. There should be no fighting when there is no aggression, but only amity, justice, and benevolence’. (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.13)

- He asserts that the Amman Message calls for ‘imitat[ing] the infidels in their [democratic] systems of governments with disregard to the laws of Allah, since democracy is the rule of people and nations and not a divine law’ (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.15).
- Lastly, al-Maqdisi has described those who wrote the Amman Message as ‘the ignorant’ who do not comprehend the verses of the Qur’an. He says: ‘it is due to their ignorance or their wickedness that they distort the words of Allah and confuse them’ (Al-Maqdisi 2013, p.16).

It seems that such positions adopted by different strands of Salafism towards the Amman Message present us with two completely different discourses. The Jihadist Salafist discourse reflects this trend’s development and presence both at the Jordanian national level and in the international arena through the armed confrontation evidenced by the Amman bombings in 2005 and the emergence of al Qaida and Daesh,<sup>1</sup> especially in the light of the Arab Spring of 2011. According to Bauchard, the French expert and ex-ambassador in Amman, this has made it possible for Daesh ‘to pose a new kind of mujahedeen different from those in the past’ (Bauchard 2014, p.10) when it expanded in Iraq first and in Syria second over a territory of about 200,000 square kilometres (inhabited by more than 10 million people), declaring a caliphate in 2014. Does this mean that the discourse of moderation adopted by the Amman Message has failed against the discourse of extremism and terrorism adopted by Jihadist Salafism in Jordan and in the Arab world, and even in the whole world?

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE – A SERIOUS IMPORT AND A LIMITED IMPACT

More than a decade after the inception of the Message, certain legitimate questions arise. Did the Amman Message achieve its ideological goal of clarifying the true nature of Islam, based on goodness, justice and humanism? Has this Message been able to counter the ideological, religious and political logic of the Salafist and Jihadist trends and movements?

Although the goal of the Amman Message was twofold – first, defending Muslims wherever they are and, second, clarifying the true picture of Islam for non-Muslims all over the world and, as such, denouncing extremism – observers of the events that followed its initial declaration will find that, during the years spanning 2004 to 2015, *the tendency towards extremism has increased*. Moreover, the range of terrorism adopted by the Salafist trend as represented by al Qaida, Daesh and the Al-Nusra Front has also increased, especially during the Arab Spring in 2011, which represents the stage at which a political void and weakness in authority in the Arab world became established.

The extremist trend sees this increase in aggression as a ‘brutalization’ that will enable them to build a caliphate (al-Shalabi 2010). Some terrorist organizations also expanded under a religious guise until they had developed enough to call themselves a ‘state’, as is the case with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/Daesh) which has become an important factor in the Middle Eastern region in particular and in the world in general (Atwan 2015).

It is difficult to ascertain the validity of the vision of the Amman Message in countering extremism unless we carefully examine whether Jihadist Salafism in Jordan, as the country of the Amman Message’s origin, has developed or receded. In other words, did this message achieve its ends in Jordan and is it therefore suitable to be adopted as a model by other states?

Jordan’s strategy for dealing with the rise of Jihadist Salafism in the 1980s and 1990s was limited to measures involving law enforcement and did not pay adequate attention to preventive measures, such as attempting to lessen the causes and conditions that give rise to such an extremist trend and its activities. However, since the bombings in Amman in 2005, more attention has been paid to the cultural and media dimensions of these issues: first, through the Message itself and,



second, through forums and conferences that point to the danger of extremism and terrorism (Abu-Rumman and Abu Hanieh 2009).

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Amman Message did not achieve its prospective goals in countering extremism and terrorism at the national level for two main reasons. On the one hand, many people in Jordan do not know about this message despite the repeated references to it in many of King Abdullah II's speeches. This absence of awareness can be ascribed to the fact that the task of spreading awareness of the Message was given to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments which, it seems, is not the most appropriate organization to spread the vision and goals of the Amman Message (al-Shalabi and Alrajehi 2011). In response to this inadequacy, other institutions – in particular, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies presided over by Prince Al Hassan – have held workshops and conferences on the Amman Message both inside Jordan and beyond its borders, in Lebanon, Beirut, Croatia, Greece and Egypt, all with the aid of the European Union (al Saqr 2013)!

On the other hand, there is an increasing number of people joining or supporting the extremist Jihadist Salafist trend. About 2000 Jordanians have *joined* Daesh and the Al-Nusra Front, and 350 of them have been killed (Alami 2014). In addition, the number of Jordanians *supporting* the ideology and path of extremist Islamic groups, mainly Daesh and the Al-Nusra Front, is about 8000 to 10,000 people; of these, we can say that the majority (80 per cent) of extremists residing in Jordan support Daesh.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, it is useful to refer to a study by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan that estimated the number of Jihadist Salafists in Jordan to comprise about 7 per cent of the population, while unpublished records by the Public Census Bureau estimated the percentage to be 20 per cent. By comparing the estimations mentioned in the previous paragraph with the rates coming from these official institutions, we may deduce that about 12 per cent of the people in Jordan support Salafism. Others put this percentage much higher: 'Mousa al-Abdelilat – a lawyer who has long represented Salafists – reported his opinion that if his clients participated in elections, they would secure no less than 30 per cent representation in parliament' (Schenker 2014).

According to Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman, specialists in Islamic affairs in Jordan, there are two main

factors that we should consider when discussing the reasons behind the rise of Jihadist Salafism regardless of the impact of the Amman Message. The first concerns religious sentiments resulting from the spread of a conservative social disposition that has become closely linked to religious commitment in the general social scene in recent years. Jihadist Salafism necessarily represents the main part of this due to its adoption of strict religious and legalistic views of Islam compared with more moderate and liberal views adopted by other individuals and groups regarding religious conceptions or political and ideological positions (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh 2009, p.143).

The second factor mentioned by Abu Hanieh and Abu Rumman specifically relates to the Palestinian case and its consequences. These play a major role in rousing people's sentiments – especially those of the youth – when tensions due to confrontations and clashes between Palestinian factions and the occupying Israeli forces intensify. It should be noted that Jordan has the longest borderline with Israel and, in addition to this, about half of the Jordanian community has Palestinian roots and is socially well connected to people in Palestine. Consequently, such people are particularly concerned with the question of political identity and with events taking place inside the occupied territories (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh 2009, p.143).

In the light of this, we can ascribe the failure of the Amman Message to achieve the crux of its goal of deconstructing the ideological makeup of terrorism and distancing it from the socio-political interior to a variety of factors:

- First, the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the fall of the regime in Libya through the NATO intervention, as well as the ongoing, destructive civil wars in Yemen and Syria, have all contributed to strengthening the Jihadist Salafist ideology in Jordan and the Middle East, something akin to the transformation of al Qaida into new forms (such as the Al-Nusra Front in Syria and Daesh in Syria and Iraq) in 2013 after the killing of its leader Osama bin Laden in 2012.
- Second, Jordan is the intellectual reservoir for Jihadist Salafist ideology and the masterminds of Salafism in the Middle East are Jordanians. These include Sheik Abdullah Azzam (Osama bin

Laden's mentor in Afghanistan), Mohammad Salem Arrahaal (who, in the 1980s, established the organization of Islamic Jihad in Jordan, an extension of the organization in Egypt) and Abu Mohammad Al-Maqqdisi (one of the main advocates of Jihadist Salafism in Jordan). There is also the Palestinian Sheikh Abu Qatada who, together with al-Maqqdisi, shaped Jihadist Salafism in Jordan after it was scattered and without ideological bonds. Another is Abu Mos'abal Zarqawi (from the city of Zarqa in Jordan) who established the Islamic State in Iraq in 2004 and was a living example of the perpetration of the most brutal violence and was considered the godfather of Daesh. His disciple, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, succeeded him. As for the spokesperson of Jihadist Salafism in Jordan, this is Mohammad al Shalabi (also known as Abu Sayyaf) from the city of Ma'an in southern Jordan. It is through Abu Sayyaf that the numbers of those participating in Salafism in Iraq and Syria can be known, as well as those killed in doing so. Hence, Jordanian cities have become associated with many well-known names in the Salafist/Jihadist ideology (al-Shalabi and Ali 2013).

- Third, there is no doubt that Jordan is not only the intellectual reservoir for extremist ideas and *fatwas* but also a human resource supplying extremist ideology with young fighters. It is known that 2000–2500 Jordanians are participating in the ongoing fighting in Syria; this might have been more without governmental measures penalizing anyone trying to join extremist groups in Syria with several prison sentences of 5–15 years (Schenker 2014).
- Fourth, it has been noted that the internet has significantly contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies to the extent that they have become instilled in the hearts and minds of many young men and women, not only in the field of ideas and ideologies but also in theoretical and practical aspects of security and military knowledge (Alrajehi and al-Shalabi 2015).

In short, Jordanian initiatives pioneered by King Abdullah II, such as the Amman Message as well as the open letter 'A Common Word between Us and You' in 2007 and the United Nations World Interfaith

Harmony Week, proposed by the King in 2010, are all examples of a multi-layered state strategy against extremism expressed in the King's statement that 'the war against terrorism is a military one in the short run, security-related next, and ideological in the long run' (*Rai al-Yaum* Newspaper 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The Amman Message is not a magic recipe capable of preventing extremism and eradicating it in the Middle East at religious, economic and political levels. However, it can be viewed as an early alarm, not only for Muslims (warning them against calls for terrorism and extremism) but also for the 'other', whether in America or Europe, to aid in extinguishing the spark of extremism in the Middle East. In particular, there is a need to avoid double standards when it comes to the situation in Palestine which forms a crucial case, attracting proponents of Jihadist Salafist discourse.

Through its realistic outlook regarding existing events throughout the world, the Amman Message warned us about the formation of organizations such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Al-Nusra Front in Syria, al Qaida in Morocco and the Arab Peninsula, and Daesh in Syria and Iraq, all of which espouse Salafist and Jihadist ideologies.

Ultimately, I agree with the well-known Lebanese thinker, Ghassan Salamé, regarding his analysis of 'the destructive self' that can contribute to the creation of extremist and terrorist organizations that claim to carry the 'word of Allah' in one hand and the 'sword of death' in the other. He says:

The world is no longer sharing with us our conception of ourselves as if we were the victims of such bloody transformations, but it is inclined to consider us complicit in words or actions, and especially complicit in a passive way, with each regime or group that adopts barbarism or practices it. (Salamé 2015)

It is, however, clear that Jordan and its statement, the Amman Message, cannot be viewed as belonging to the complicit category Salamé refers to. On the contrary, I would argue that Jordan belongs to the alert category that can sense what has happened or what might happen!

## NOTES

1. It should be noted that, as well as their different tactics regarding destruction and terrorism, al Qaida was established outside the confines of the Arab world (i.e. in Afghanistan) while Daesh was established in Iraq after 2006.
2. Personal interview with Marwan Shehadeh, expert on Islamic groups. Amman, 12 November 2015.

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# The Amman Message

A Counter-Narrative to Islamic Fundamentalism

*Moh'd Khair Eiedat*

## INTRODUCTION

The Amman Message is, in part, an Islamic response to the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. As such, it denounces violence and extremism as evil acts and underlines the positive ethical attributes of the Islamic religion. This denouncement of extremism is accompanied by an appeal to global justice and for the abandonment of double standards in global politics. This reflects the concern of its authors that a feeling of discontent among some Muslims could be exacerbated and utilized by extremist organizations. In this respect, the Message can be seen as an attempt to denounce violence and extremism on the one hand, while calling for the need to address injustice on the other. In other words, the Amman Message is a diplomatic document denouncing violence without compromising on rights.

Moreover, being partly directed at all Muslims, the Message emphasizes Islamic unity, which is reflected in the fact that representatives of eight different Islamic sects were signatories to the common document. The Message itself also repeatedly refers to the Islamic Nation (Ummah) and the need for unity and strength. The document, therefore, could be read as an appeal for an Islamic renaissance. Interestingly, it ends on this note ‘We ask God to prepare for our Islamic Nation the paths of *renaissance, prosperity, and advancement...to preserve its rights, sustain its glory, and uphold its dignity*’ (Abdullah II 2013, p.8; emphasis added).

If we take the Amman Message simply as a diplomatic Islamic response to terrorist attacks, nothing more could be added or

discussed. However, if we take the document as a point of reference for dialogue that involves Muslims and non-Muslims, then more serious intellectual efforts are required. In this chapter, I suggest an ethical framework that relates to issues that are raised in the document but which are not seriously explored there. These issues include the primacy of ethics in Islamic narratives, the issue of Islamic identity – both for individuals and groups – and an exploration of the implications of asserting morality as a major ethical principle for the idea of individual, social and political authority in Islam.

My intention in this chapter is not to offer a final say on these but simply to use the Amman Message as a platform for an open-ended process of dialogue with Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

## THE PRIMACY OF ETHICS

One major challenge facing any scholar attempting to construct an Islamic ethical framework is how to avoid the bias of selectivity created by choosing certain verses from the Qur'an or Hadith literature as evidence to support a particular argument, while still remaining authentically Islamic. Historically, and even in the present day, Islamic theologians and jurists have used a selective reading of both the Qur'an and Hadith to support whatever opinion or stance they favour. Such a method has serious disadvantages, in particular the possibility of developing competing and conflicting narratives that are impossible to reconcile.

Selectivity as a method is used both by Islamic fundamentalists and by those who profess more moderate forms of Islam, and choosing between conflicting narratives seems to have been an arbitrary and unsubstantiated process. These difficulties arise from scholars ignoring the historical context (Jueit 2008) and the occasion of revelation (al-Jabri 2006, 2009), and developing their understanding with no sense of process or evolution. In other words, for any meaningful ethical framework to emerge, one has to move beyond an *ad hoc* selection and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. At the same time, the unity and integrity of the Qur'an has to be maintained (Eiedat 2013).

Another significant consideration is the need to state clearly and explicitly the nature of the relationship between Islamic ethics and Shar'ia (Islamic law). Islamic fundamentalism, which relies heavily on the intellectual contributions of Ibn Hazm (994–1064) and Ibn



Taymiyyah (1263–1328), emphasizes the precedence of Shar'ia over ethics in its interpretation of Islam. Indeed, the primacy that is given to Shar'ia and its implementation is expressed in the names of certain extreme Islamic organizations, such as Ansar al-Shar'ia<sup>1</sup> (Defender of Shar'ia). Meanwhile, Islamic ethics has been placed far in the shadow of Shar'ia.

Moderate Islamists use the same method of selectivity as those of a more fundamentalist orientation. However, they have not, as yet, been able to develop a meaningful narrative that counters Islamic orthodoxy by emphasizing the primacy of ethics over Shar'ia. Although Islamic ethics are commonly used and referred to, no serious attempt has been made to place Shar'ia in the context of ethics by considering Shar'ia as an illustration of ethics, not as autonomous or independent from them. Moreover, the question of how to interpret Shar'ia in light of changing political, social and economic circumstances has been hinted at but never seriously and systematically explored. Moderation in this sense reveals intellectual hesitation.

The primacy and primary consideration given to the Islamic penal code has had two major consequences: first, it obscures (if not undermines) the idea that Islam in its very essence and spirit is an ethical doctrine; and second, it discourages the emergence of a genuine internal and sincere notion of morality both at the individual and societal levels. The obvious reason for this is simply that the emphasis on punishment as a defining feature of the penal code encourages hypocrisy and fear. Conformity becomes the manifestation and expression of morality, which also encourages dogma and undermines individuality. However, morality need not be dogmatic and conformity is not necessarily a virtue.

Thus, the need for emphasizing the primacy of Islamic ethics becomes self-evident. Shar'ia can only have meaning if placed in its ethical context. Shar'ia, alone, has no soul, no spirit. While I have attempted elsewhere to develop an Islamic ethical theory (Eiedat 2013), my contention has never been that such an attempt is the only possible framework, but rather to argue for the primacy of the ethical over the legal. Elements of a possible ethical framework include sincerity, protection of the weak and vulnerable in society, maintaining family and, finally, maintaining life. Other attributes that the Amman Message refers to can also be incorporated, including justice, forgiveness, tolerance, equality and compassion.

Ethical principles are general principles of morality and not legally binding rules. Unlike a legal code, ethical principles are by definition broad and flexible; they are not elements of dogmatic doctrine. Ethical principles allow, if not encourage, the search for common attributes with other ethical principles. This search for an overlapping consensus and for what is common with others is the basic principle of any meaningful ethical order. Advocates of Shar'ia emphasize difference and contrast with others, while asserting the primacy of ethics emphasizes commonality. Thus, the primacy of ethics provides credence to the Amman Message's assertion of common human attributes.

In the following two sections, I explore the notion of identity referred to in the Amman Message. I then look at the implications of issues both of ethics and of identity for our idea of Muslim individual, social and political authority.

## THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

The first part of the Amman Message states that evil is threatening the identity of the Islamic Nation, inciting disunity, tarnishing its religion and assailing its tenets.

There has always been an issue of contention as to how to approach the notion of identity in the Islamic narrative. Both in the Qur'an and subsequent Islamic thought, one can identify two traditions related to the idea of identity in Islam. One, which is comparative in nature, always draws on contrast and emphasizes difference with the 'other'. Pushed to the extreme, this led certain theologians and jurists, including Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiyyah, to ascribe adjectives of exceptionalism and uniqueness not only to Islam as a religion but also to the Umma.

According to this understanding, individuals are treated not as morally autonomous beings but rather as unrecognized faces in the collectivity known as the Umma or *jama'* (community). Moreover, society is not recognized as an autonomous sphere but rather as a product of political authority, creating the impression that society could not exist independently of political power.

It is this narrative of identity that highlights the centrality of Shar'ia as the defining feature of Islam and that forged the

link between religion and politics in Islam. Indeed, it is this that Islamic fundamentalism draws on to support its claim regarding the association between religion and political authority and that it represents the only acceptable interpretation of the Islamic faith. This has proven to be a major obstacle for any attempt to develop a counter-narrative to that of Islamic fundamentalism.

However, this need not be the case. Indeed, the thought of the famous Islamic jurist and theologian, al-Ghazali (1058–1111), could serve as a counter-narrative of identity to that advocated by Islamic fundamentalism (Eiedat 2014). Unlike those who advocate contrast and deference as defining features of identity, al-Ghazali underlined self-fulfilment and moral self-sufficiency both for individuals and for society. Thus, the morality of individuals and society is independent of political power. Indeed, one can detect in al-Ghazali's thought certain assumptions about the corrupting influence of political power on the morality of both individuals and society. Power and religion are not the same. Political authority may be needed to maintain peace and order but not for moral self-fulfilment – neither of individuals nor of society.

In this regard, the Amman Message falls somewhere in between the two narratives, in what one might call the 'grey zone' of religious identity. There is, on the one hand, a reference to brotherhood and humanity, the unity of the human race, equal rights and obligations, neighbourliness, respect for the other, and finally tolerance and forgiveness. Meanwhile, on the other hand, there is a reference to sustaining the Islamic Nation's glory and to upholding its dignity on the grounds that this is necessary to achieve the strength and steadfastness needed to build itself and ensure the preservation of right.

This has left the proposition regarding the association between religion and politics in Islam unchallenged. Moreover, while the Amman Message refers to identity, it never explicitly explores the notion. Instead, it continues to draw on existing and prevailing sentiments that politics in Islam and, more specifically, political power are part and parcel of our idea of faith. It also reflects the difficulty of reaching consensus among diverse Islamic sects and intellectual views. However, such a narrative leads to the dilution of a central tenet in Islam that asserts that identity is a positive attribute and that the morality of individuals and society, and by extension Islamic ethics, are not power-dependent.

## INDIVIDUALITY, POWER AND SOCIETY

If we accept the notion of the primacy of ethics in Islam, as well as the idea of Islamic identity as an essentially positive attribute related to individual and group self-fulfilment, then the implications for our understanding of individuality, power and society are profound. The most obvious consequence is that of the de-ideologization of religion. In a world where a major source of deadly conflict can be traced to ideology, this would be no mean achievement.

For religion to be a motive for good rather than evil requires the rejection of the idea that political authority can be religious. Individuals can be religious and communities may follow a religious path – but not one that also involves political authority. Arab–Islamic history is overloaded with examples of political authority using and abusing religion for political and power-related considerations with no regard for the morality of religion or its ethical parameters. It is fair to say that political power usually corrupts religion. Consequently, the association between religion and political power in Islam is not the simple product of theological disputation but, rather, of political power itself having always found in religion a cover for the mismanagement or abuse of the political. Thus, theological arguments and disputations were used selectively for clearly political ends.

Political power should then be seen as religiously neutral, although not aloof or disengaging. At one level, like political authority, it involves a moral responsibility to protect its community. This would amount to accepting the notion of the legitimate use of force referred to in the Amman Message. Self-protection is an operational and definitive example of the legitimate use of force. However, the idea that Islam ‘form[s] a righteous religion that embraces the entire sphere of human life’ (Abdullah II 2013, p.1) should not be taken to mean the political enforcement of such a comprehensive doctrine. Otherwise, that would compromise other ethical principles asserted by the Amman Message itself, including human rights and basic liberties that ensure the individual’s right to live in dignity and security. Thus, the comprehensive nature of Islamic doctrine must be seen as independent of political power. Moreover, the morality of the individual and that of society should only have meaning as a voluntary act since enforcement of morality could ensure conformity and encourage hypocrisy, but not sincerity. Thus the de-politicization of morality is, in itself, an ethical principle.

However, it should be emphasized that supporting the disassociation of religion and political power is not the same as advocating the notion of the irrelevancy of religion to political life. Religious ideas and principles that are relevant to a broad notion of the well-being of society should always be incorporated into the arena of public deliberation (Cohen 1989). Legislation should be judged not according to its source of origin or who is advocating it but, rather, according to notions such as justice and equality. Religious principles, ideas and doctrines are part and parcel of any meaningful deliberations and public debate. And so they should be. In regard to this, the Amman Message (Abdullah II 2013) asserts that Islamic principles 'are needed for humanity's own good' (p.2), and that 'Islam is a religion of ethics that seeks what is good for people in the entire world' (p.5). The Message also suggests that Islam acts according to the 'principles of justice and consultation benefiting from and strengthening the mechanisms of modern democracy' (p.8). Such assertions should be allowed to express themselves in open public debate. They should also be judged according to their declared purpose and intention; namely, 'the good of the whole world' and the 'good of humanity'.

If the separation between religion and political power is accepted as an Islamic ethical principle, the implications for our idea of the individual and society are far-reaching. An individual could only exist as an independent moral agent whose integrity could only be judged by the individual him/herself according to their beliefs. A morally conscious individual is not dependent on whether society itself is moral or not. This moral autonomy can give meaning to the idea that God is the only judge.

If this assumption of integrity is taken seriously, the morality of a society can only be understood/conceived in the plural, not in the singular. However, belonging to a moral community is very much a voluntaristic act that is not constant, and crossing from one moral community to another is by definition accepted if not encouraged. Moreover, unlike political borders, stability in moral communities is not necessarily a virtue and, according to this understanding, society would only advance morally if it allowed for the existence of plural moral communities, in which the right of membership is a matter of individual choice.

Clearly, individuals and communities should have the right to be moral and to pursue a moral path. Indeed, the right to be free

implies the right to be moral and ethical and, yes, religious. Political authority should save and protect that right. This is the only moral function political authority can claim to have.

## CONCLUSION

The Amman Message should be read as an honest attempt to develop a counter-narrative to that of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. However, for such an attempt to be sustainable and relevant, it needs to be supported by a more cohesive ethical framework. In this chapter, I have attempted to offer elements of such a framework, including an emphasis on the primacy of ethics in Islam. This aims to serve as a counter-narrative to the Islamic fundamentalist claim regarding the primacy of Shar'ia over ethics. Placing Islamic ethics as the primary point of reference in Islam undermines the claim that political power is indispensable to the idea of Islamic faith. Political power therefore cannot be justified as being an embodiment of the religious principle of the enforcement of Shar'ia.

The other element is that of identity, which the Amman Message also highlights. However, identity can be defined by two separate narratives – if not traditions – in Islam. One, which Islamic fundamentalists advocate, is supported by the intellectual contributions of famous jurists, including Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Hazm; this notion of identity is externally defined and essentially based on contrast and difference. Consequently, it is difficult not to notice its anti-‘other’ sentiment. However, there is another notion of identity, that which is associated with al-Ghazali. In this case, references to identity relate to positive attributes and individual self-fulfilment. Such a notion of identity requires no ‘other’ as an enemy. Rather, the essence and meaning of identity is the search and aim of being moral, living a moral existence independent of whether the rest of the society is morally inclined or not, regardless of whether there are others who share your sense of morality or not.

This chapter argues that disassociating religion from political power becomes a necessary prerequisite for moral individuals and communities to exist and flourish. So-called ‘religious’ political power encourages hypocrisy and conformity, neither of which are moral attributes. The right to be moral should be a matter of choice.

This right requires no specific notion of authority except respect for the right to be free, the right to be moral and, again, the right to be religious.

## NOTE

1. Ansar Al-Shar'ia is a Syrian fringe Islamic organization which advocates the establishment of an Islamic state, based on Shar'ia law.

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# 8

## The Amman Message as an Invitation to Interfaith Dialogue

A Christian Response

*Christine Seeberg*

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I consider the Amman Message as an invitation to interfaith dialogue and give a Christian response; however, this is meant more as a tentative individual attempt, rather than as an official or statutory representation of the interpretation of the various Christian churches. I later explain that this is problematic in itself due to some basic issues that have arisen (mainly) in modern Christian history. Giving an adequate response first of all presupposes an adequate understanding of what exactly is being responded to. I therefore begin with a summary of the Message's contents, supplemented by some context information that might be particularly revealing from a Western Christian point of view.

Introducing itself in '*the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*' (RABIIT 2004, p.1); claiming to be 'in accordance with the inherited spiritual and historical responsibility carried by the Hashemite monarchy, honored as direct descendants of the Prophet, the Messenger of God – peace and blessings upon him – who carried the message' (p.1); issued 'during the blessed month of Ramadan *in which the Qur'an descended as guidance to humankind*' (p.1); and, finally, calling itself the 'Amman Message', the text clearly seeks to remind the reader of the Prophet's Message itself, which it summarizes. Thus, it draws on great religious authority. It



is a statement of four pages, all characterizing 'Islam' or the 'Muslim faith' in a straightforward and statutory way. According to its authors, the most dangerous misunderstanding with regard to the Muslim faith is widespread worldwide ignorance – on the part of Muslims and non-Muslims alike – of Islam's essential message of 'brotherhood, humanity, and a religion that encompasses all human activity' (p.1), as well as other (monotheistic) belief systems. This is made very clear by the following lines from the Message's first paragraph:

Today the magnanimous message of Islam faces a vicious attack from those who through distortion and fabrication try to portray Islam as an enemy to them. It is also under attack from some who claim affiliation with Islam and commit irresponsible acts in its name. This magnanimous message that the Originator – great is His power – revealed to the unlettered Prophet Muhammad – God's blessings and peace upon him, and that was carried by his successors and the members of his household after him, is an address of brotherhood, humanity and a religion that encompasses all human activity. It states the truth directly, commands what is right, forbids what is wrong, honors the human being, and accepts others. (RABIIT 2004, p.1)

These basic statements on Islamic faith are taken up and explained further in the subsequent text. Muslim faith, it says, is first of all faith in *one* God and in the message of His Prophet Muhammad (p.1). Islam regulates 'human behaviour in all its dimensions'. The basic Islamic obligations have thus 'formed a strong and cohesive Nation and a great civilization' (ibid.). Islam leaves room for individual religious expression including the practical cultivation of one's connection with God through daily ritual prayers, 'training and rectifying the soul' (p.1), through fasting in the month of Ramadan, by helping others by paying the charitable tax, *zakat*, and by participating in the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, which represents the religious unity of the *umma*.

The Amman Message particularly highlights that the Islamic faith supports:

noble principles and values that verify the good of humanity, whose foundation is the oneness of the human species, and that people are equal in rights and obligations, peace and justice, realizing

comprehensive security, mutual social responsibility, being good to one's neighbor, protecting belongings and property, honoring pledges, and more. (RABIIT 2004, p.1)

The main part of the Message focuses on the universal dimension of Islam, specifically on what is considered to be universally valid for all human beings, supporting its statements with quotations from the Qur'an or Hadith literature. The main part of the text therefore gives the impression of an Islamic inventory of religious, ethical and political universalism.

In the first place, it refers to interreligious relations, asserting that, 'the origin of divine religion is one and Muslims believe in all messengers of God and do not differentiate between any of them' (p.1). Islam thus provides a vast 'common ground among different faiths and peoples' (p.1). Likewise, the Message asserts that Islam makes no distinction between people of different colour, race or religion. Furthermore, Muslims are committed to reason, to compassion, moderation and forgiveness towards others, as well as to universal rights and principles of justice. Most of all, the Message stresses the strict opposition of all orthodox Islam to 'extremism, exaggeration and intransigence', stating that Islam rejects these 'just as all noble, heavenly religions reject them – considering them as recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice' (p.2).<sup>1</sup> The last one and a half pages of the Message therefore call for a substantial reform of the religious discourse within the Islamic world, by 'renewing our civilization, based upon the guidance of religion, and following upon established practical intellectual policies' (p.3). Future religious education and scholars, it claims, need to be provided with 'knowledge of contemporary culture', as well as developing their 'interest in scientific research and working with the modern sciences', thus enabling them to benefit 'from modern achievements in the fields of science and technology' (ibid.). It stresses that this should be guided by an 'Islamic approach', consolidating the educational structure to support development of personal integrity and self-confidence of 'individual Muslims' that is 'founded upon [maintaining] the delicate balance between the spiritual, economic and social dimensions [of life]' (ibid.; brackets in the original).

Thus, as an educational programme, it advocates the importance of providing guidance for a *religious* perspective regarding developing

modern politics and a democratic society. In a *political* context, emphasis is placed on the development of future generations and ‘our scholars who illuminate for them the paths of tolerance, moderation, and goodness, and prevent them from [falling] into the abysses of extremism and fanaticism that destroy the spirit and body’ (p.4; brackets in the original). The last part of the Amman Message, thus, clearly demonstrates its political intentions, whereas the first and main parts are primarily a basic theological and ethical self-reflection.

There are two more important documents that need mentioning in this context. Like the Amman Message itself, both were initiated by King Abdullah II and his Special Advisor, HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal. Moreover, both may be seen as a direct and practical consequence of one of the Message’s central assertions: Muslims’ essential commitment to dialogue and tolerance both within Islam and between Islam and other religions. The first of these documents is the declaration entitled ‘The Three Points of the Amman Message’,<sup>2</sup> which was issued in 2005, one year after the Amman Message. This text is a historic document as, for the first time in the past 14 centuries of Islamic history, it formulates a universally binding Islamic consensus that is supported by Islamic scholars from all around the world, and that represents all the branches and schools of Islam.<sup>3</sup> By offering an official definition of the criteria of Muslim faith, it aims to consolidate Muslim unity in times of political and spiritual ‘disunity and thus weakness’, as the introduction to the document explains (Introduction, chap. V, pp.i and ii).

The second document is an interreligious initiative, entitled ‘A Common Word between Us and You’. This was addressed to the Pope and other Christian leaders in October 2007 and written by Prince Ghazi; signed by 138 Muslim scholars, it invites Christianity to share ‘a common word’ with Islam (Ghazi 2007). As indicated by the Qur’anic verse cited in the title (Aal-’Imran, 3:64), this proposes both religions’ belief in the *oneness of God* as common religious ground. The letter supports this by referring to Jesus’ double commandment of loving God and of loving one’s neighbour as oneself as written in the Gospels (cf. Mark 12:29–31),<sup>4</sup> which is conceived by the Muslim authors as being ‘what is most essential to our faith and practice’ (Ghazi 2007, p.3). This open letter has been responded to and supported by a vast number of Christian leaders, scholars and

churches, as well as Jewish scholars and authorities (Ghazi 2007). However, there has been no *common* Christian answer to 'A Common Word', issued representatively by all Christian confessions together. Possible reasons for this are proposed in the following paragraphs.

## GIVING A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE AMMAN MESSAGE – A BASIC APPROACH

At a first glance, as a European, one might appreciate the Amman Message because it generally embraces a standard version of modern liberal values. Making a public statement against terrorism instead of merely condemning it 'in the privacy of one's home' (Satloff 2005), as King Abdullah puts it, sounds very laudable – as does propagating an attitude of religious tolerance, respect for human rights and acceptance of international laws, as recommended in the Message. It is also in line with some contemporary Western perspectives, whether political, ethical or religious. From a Christian theological perspective, however, another aspect may be more important. Unlike most Christian statements regarding interreligious tolerance, the Amman Message does not merely underline that the practice of Islam is compatible with an ethical attitude of tolerance, or that tolerance is a possible attribute of Muslim faith. Rather, it states that tolerance is essential and indispensable for Muslim self-understanding as such.<sup>5</sup> The Amman Message asserts that being open to the one God, in accordance with the Qur'an, obliges us to remain open to diversity among human individuals, genders, races, nations and even religions. What is common to all of these in the ultimate religious perspective, the Message seems to be saying, is beyond these differences and, thus, essentially in God's hands.<sup>6</sup>

Although such thoughts are not alien to Christian belief, they would probably not play a central role in a process of Christian self-reflection, as they do for Muslim self-reflection and self-definition, based on the claims made by the Amman Message and its Three Points to authoritatively define what constitutes orthodox Muslim faith. Whenever present-day Christian churches seek to formulate an ecumenical consensus, they refer more specifically to the person of Jesus Christ, his concrete living and dying 'for our sins', and his resurrection as witnessed by the New Testament. Furthermore, unlike the Qur'an, the New Testament does not really discuss questions of

interreligious tolerance;<sup>7</sup> at any rate, this topic is not – or, at least, not literally – the centre of the gospel of Christ. We may say, therefore, that an explicit debate on religious tolerance has merely been added to Christian self-understanding as a result of the formation of modern societies rather than being part of its original self-definition. Thus, the basic problem a Christian faces when seeking to respond meaningfully to the Amman Message is the question of whether the insistent Christian confession of Jesus as the ‘Christ’, or incarnate son of God, does not ultimately contradict the Islamic plea for universal tolerance. It might seem as if Islamic faith in the one God relativizes all individual human qualities, differences and particularities – and thus basically allows for tolerance and diversity; but, for the same reason, this also excludes true familiarity between God and an individual human being, whereas Christian faith, quite on the contrary (as it might appear), places all the emphasis on the one God’s presence within *one individual* human being (and in all those individuals believing in that god) being inseparable from God himself. Thus, it might seem as if an attitude of interreligious and intercultural tolerance, though accepted by Christianity (at least since modern times), is in reality alien to the very core of Christian belief; and, as such, merely an unwelcome concession to the demands of modern societies’ secularism and pluralism.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the basic claim of this chapter is that the very essence of faith in Jesus as the Christ may be summarized as an attitude of tolerance, although it might differ slightly from the Islamic approach as it is presented within the Amman Message. The following reflections thus respond to the Message by developing a specific Christian understanding of tolerance since I understand the Amman Message as an invitation to interfaith dialogue, not so much as a static exchange of fixed dogmas on each side. This chapter thus takes up the Amman Message and subsequent initiatives<sup>9</sup> as Muslim formulations of an embracing and long-lasting task with high political relevance: searching for solid common ground between Muslim and Christian cultures and religion. What I try to do in the following paragraphs is to outline some important aspects of this task from a Christian perspective. As a Christian theologian, I will restrict my reflections to the Christian side – hoping for further dialogue with the Muslim side in order to strive for a more complete image, step by step. The perspective of this essay is both a Western European and a Protestant

one, because this is the region and denomination the author stems from; nevertheless, many of these aspects might concern the current Western situation in general.

To outline a Christian perspective on the interreligious task formulated by the Amman Message and its followers, I proceed in three steps. First, I sketch a basic framework in which Christian self-understanding – faith in Jesus as the ‘Christ’ or ‘son of God’ – gains its importance. I claim that faith in God and his revelation in Jesus Christ principally implies two aspects: first, the awareness of being individually responsible for one’s own life before God himself – which implies the obligation to love one’s enemies as oneself, thus being ‘perfect like the heavenly Father’ (Matthew 4:43–48); and, second, the awareness of being confused, sinful and finite with regard to this vast responsibility, maybe even of feeling overcharged by it. Both aspects require Christians to rely on a merciful God being *individually* present for and within us, as he is God *and* a human being. God’s eternal word becoming flesh and blood in ‘Jesus Christ’, and thus transcending the difference between humankind and God, is in God’s hands – it transcends pure human understanding and capabilities. I will illustrate this in more detail with regard to some crucial passages of the New Testament. The conclusion of this first step is that tolerance, from a Christian point of view, is realized by faith in ‘Jesus Christ’, as a way of being aware of oneself as a sinner and as a beloved child of God at the same time, thus leaving room for confusion and non-understanding. Without this acceptance of sin and our finiteness as human beings, tolerance – towards other religions as well as towards oneself and one’s own community – would ultimately be impossible.

In my second step, I point out that this Christian understanding of tolerance, which has existed since the origins of the Christian church and its historical reflections, implies a specific but quite complicated idea of the basic difference between political and religious communities, but also of a link between both spheres. Jesus himself probably discussed this with the Pharisees (Mark 12:13–17; Matthew 22:15–22; Luke 20:20–26). Furthermore, he was crucified by the Romans because of his alleged intention to be ‘the King of the Jews’<sup>10</sup> – but in the Gospel we also find him saying that his ‘kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:28–40). The relationship between religious and political communities has since found its

classical formulation within Augustine's major work, *De Civitate Dei* (1998). In the following centuries, during the Middle Ages, the exact meaning of the relationship between religious and political authority was a persistent bone of contention between Christian leaders (mainly the Pope and the bishops) and their worldly counterparts (especially the Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, but also other secular rulers in Central Europe). Last but not least, it was one of the main factors that triggered the Reformation movement in the sixteenth century, which will be the focus of discussion in my second step. Exposing Martin Luther's 'doctrine of the two kingdoms', a specific interpretation of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, I will show that it is exactly this point that has led to the well-known fundamental splitting of the Christian church into two major confessions (Roman Catholic and Protestant). Since early modern times and its cruel and long-lasting inter-confessional wars, European Christians have had to deal with the fact that religious unity has been lost. This also creates a new controversial understanding of intra-Christian tolerance, which is still discussed in current ecumenical dialogues.

The loss of an all-embracing spiritual identity in and beyond political territories was most essential for the formation of Western European societies – and maybe modern Western societies in general.<sup>11</sup> In later modernity, however, the question of inter-confessional consensus drifts into the background. What becomes more and more important, from a religious point of view, is a radical questioning of the meaning of religions for society and human existence in general. This questioning is related to the rise of modern science and historical criticism since the Enlightenment era.

In a third step, I claim that later modernity, including present times, is marked by some sort of essential confusion – or speechlessness – when it comes to the question of what might unite the whole of society beyond pragmatic political interests such as economic prosperity, security and social assurance. It is the basic conclusion of this essay, in the light of this undeniable speechlessness, that a present Christian understanding of tolerance must look beyond these inner-European difficulties and seek interreligious and intercultural dialogue. I thus understand the Amman Message as a truly inspiring – and highly laudable – invitation to interfaith dialogue, which is essential to an international political context as well.

## BELIEVING IN JESUS AS THE CHRIST – AN ESSAY ON CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE

My basic claim is that believing in Jesus as the Christ implies an attitude of tolerance. To explain this, we first need to make clear the basic question that the Christian faith reacts to, as a form of framework to support its whole self-understanding. This question, in my eyes, concerns one's awareness of being individually and practically responsible for one's own life, knowing that life is unique and finite. I might formulate it as a three-part question: How should I live, knowing that I have to live this one unique life? What, or who, is the ultimate sense and purpose of this life? And: What makes it a good life – in a principal and universal way? This is actually a *self*-questioning, comprising queries that can be asked and responded to only by each individual person for him or herself. At the same time, this principal questioning is the best reason to speak honestly to others and learn from them. Now, Christian faith – belief in Jesus as the 'son of God' – in my eyes, gains its meaning exactly with regard to the following two aspects.

First, this belief gives most prominence to the necessarily individual character of this questioning. We need to ask and to respond to ourselves when it comes to the question of how we should live in the light of the finite uniqueness of our life. In this ultimate and individual perspective, we can neither base ourselves on any abstractly given law, commandment or rule that eternally prevents us from failing, nor can we avoid giving a universal response – a response that is true in a concrete situation but that transcends what is merely contingent in it. To illustrate this, I will give two examples taken from the New Testament. The first is Jesus' breaking of the Sabbath law when he heals a person with a withered hand during the Sabbath:

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come here.' And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was



restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (Mark 3:1–6)

A similar story is witnessed in the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark, ending with Jesus' famous words: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27).

Both of these passages focus on the question of how to apply the commandment to respect the Sabbath. The commandment, Jesus shows, must not be understood as a mere abstract rule or dogma. Rather, the one who holds it needs to realize both its meaning within a concrete situation and its rank with regard to other ethical obligations, as expressed in Jesus' phrase, 'to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill'. Thus, the main point is that the person who applies any of the Ten Commandments is responsible for his or her own actions. As 'man' needs to estimate how the Sabbath rule is best applied, the Sabbath is made for 'man' – and not 'man' for holding the Sabbath. Human beings, as such, are thus called to base their actions on their own hearts' judgement in each concrete situation – instead of merely sticking to the alleged security of an invariant law. It seems as if such laws or dogmas are basically intended to ensure that we avoid human mistakes; but, being fixed to them in a dogmatic way in reality first of all avoids inter-human compassion.

The only apparently invariant and embracing standard Jesus suggests is the famous double commandment of loving God with all one's heart and loving one's neighbour as oneself: 'On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22:40; cf. Mark 12:30–31). But even these commandments, taken from the Old Testament, are modified by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43–48)

Jesus' comment regarding the traditional commandment of loving one's neighbours must be seen as a universalization since it transgresses all conditions. Truly loving even one's enemies seems to be impossible, since our enemies are defined as those whom we do *not* love. So how can we suddenly love someone we do not love, if love is a feeling which is obviously beyond our individual control? There is no outward rule, no instruction to help us fulfil the commandment. Jesus simply demands from us to 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'. Instead of sticking to *any* well-known ethical rule or standard, attaching our behaviour to specific outward phenomena and our corresponding particular feelings (positive or negative, good or bad), we are called to let go of all of this and give love and kindness to *anyone*, even to those who want to harm us. Our ethical attitude must be strictly universal, independent, in a way, from what we find in the world. The life story of Jesus told by the Gospels gives a concrete example of a person acting, thinking and speaking like this. For an understanding of the Christian faith, however, our attitude towards this example is more important than the example itself, as an isolated and, yet, external event. The Gospel does not only, and maybe not even primarily, tell the story of a single perfect person (Jesus). It is not a new rule or dogma fixed in the person of Jesus, as a humanized God. Thus, it does not discharge us from the necessity of judging for ourselves whether we truly *want* to love even our enemies, and whether we *do actually* love them – thereby being or not being 'perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect'. This self-determination – regarding each of our own respective lives and beliefs – is the focus of the New Testament.

In other words, the Gospel's universal claims tend to overcharge us and thus make us feel vulnerable, possibly undignified, provoking us to wonder: *Who am I* to act like Jesus, the 'son of God' himself? Being 'perfect' like the 'heavenly Father' – being 'sons' of this Father – is however what Jesus clearly demands from his disciples. There is no way to circumvent our own responsibility. The unease and suffering this might cause, making us feel isolated, embarrassed or unworthy, is thus a part of our responsibility. We can say that the Christian faith essentially deals with this problem. This is the whole issue of the third example I will refer to, the 'Confession of Peter'. It plays a crucial role in the composition of the Gospel of Mark (which historically is the first written Gospel). In the middle of this Gospel, Jesus asks his

disciples what he himself 'is' – first in the eyes of other people, who take him for 'John the Baptist', or 'Elijah'; then, in his disciples' own eyes. It is Peter, the disciple closest to Jesus, who answers this question first: 'You are the Christ.' Jesus affirms this but strictly forbids his disciples to tell anyone. He then instantly turns to the crowd, plainly stating that he, 'the Son of Man', must 'suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again' (Mark 8:27–31). Peter, who has just recognized Jesus' real character as the 'son of God', cannot bear him saying this. He takes Jesus aside and criticizes his words. Jesus' response to this critique is quite brusque:

'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.' And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' (Mark 8:33–38)

Unlike the crowd, Peter clearly recognizes Jesus as the 'Christ', the one who brings God's presence and reign to the world. However, he is not ready to support this same 'Christ' publicly introducing himself as a person who 'must suffer many things, and be rejected' by the highest religious authorities and ultimately be 'killed', to rise again after three days. Jesus' response to Peter's rejection of this is one of the Markian Gospel's most important passages (see, for example, Kingsbury 1983, 135–137). While, previously, Jesus had 'strictly charged' his disciples 'to tell no one' about his being the Christ, he now plainly confesses that he will 'come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels'. He thus publicly confirms that he actually *is* the 'Christ'. The emphasis is nevertheless on the suffering as a result of this identity, valid not only for Jesus himself but equally for 'anyone' who 'would come after me', thereby fundamentally correcting Peter's lack of acceptance by asserting that the suffering of the Christ and those who come after him is nothing we must fear. Suffering 'for

Christ's sake and the gospel's', we do not lose but rather save our lives. Rejecting the idea that Christ, the son of God himself, could be suffering and dying one day is like setting one's mind 'to the things of man' instead of the 'things of God', which are related, we might add, to true life and eternal happiness.

In the Gospel of Mark, these statements come with great theological weight and, again, tend to overcharge the reader's mind. We thus need to consider the story's continuation, wherein we find that the structure we have just observed, in regard to Peter's recognition of Jesus being the 'Christ', is repeated in a modified manner. When it comes to the Last Supper on the eve of Jesus' passion, he announces to his disciples that they will all deny him. But Peter once again rejects his teacher's words, declaring that *he* will not deny Jesus for anything in the world, even if he must die with him (Mark 14:29–31). Again, Jesus contradicts him. This time, he simply states that Peter will deny him three times before the rooster crows twice. Some hours later, Jesus is arrested by the Roman authorities. Peter follows him, alone – at a distance, as it says (Mark 14:54). Waiting in the courtyard of the high priest's palace, where Jesus is interrogated and finally condemned to death, Peter warms himself at the fire with the guards. Then, suddenly, he is recognized by some servant girls standing around. Being asked if he was not one of those who were 'with the Nazarene, Jesus' (Mark 14:67), Peter denies this – three times; the last time he even swears to bystanders that he had nothing at all to do with this person. The rooster crows after the first and final denial, but Peter is not aware of this until it crows the second time. Suddenly acknowledging what he has done, having broken his own promise and thus fulfilled Jesus' prophecy, he begins to weep.

As in the first passage, the story comments on Peter's actions by turning the reader's mind to the person of Jesus. Being arrested and thus separated from his disciples, this time Jesus cannot speak to them any more. However, it is by his concrete deeds (and lack thereof) that he makes real what he announced in the first episode: condemned to death by the Romans, he voluntarily 'suffer[s] many things', is 'rejected by the high priests', mocked by the public and ultimately dies at the cross, having uttered his last words: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). Astonishingly, it is at this moment of Jesus' lonely death that, in the Gospel of Mark, a Roman centurion who was standing facing him recognizes that 'Truly, this

man was the Son of God' (Mark 15:39). For the first time, Jesus' identity as the 'Christ' or 'Son of God' is publicly acknowledged by a person other than his disciples. While the latter all fled from the cross, the 'son of God' is revealed to a Roman soldier – a mere bystander, representing the imperial political forces that consider themselves unconcerned with the 'Christ' and so condemned him to death. The Roman soldier's recognition of Jesus as the dying 'son of God' actually constitutes the theological climax within the Gospel of Mark. Correspondingly, the end of the original text of the Gospel of Mark provides only a brief account of Christ's resurrection.<sup>12</sup> After Jesus' burial, it merely informs the reader that when the Sabbath had passed, two women, Mary Magdalene and Salome, go to anoint Jesus' body and find the grave open and empty. A man in a white robe assures them that Jesus 'has risen' and asks them to tell Jesus' disciples that 'he is going before you to Galilee', where they will see him 'just as he told you' (Mark 16:7). The women flee from the tomb and say 'nothing to anyone for they were very afraid' (Mark 16:8). This lapidary comment on the two women's silence and fear is the end of the whole Gospel.

I have claimed above that the confession of 'Jesus as the Christ' essentially deals with the problem of being *individually* responsible for what we do and believe. The first two examples – the question regarding the Sabbath and the commandment of loving one's enemies and thus being 'perfect like the heavenly Father' – illustrate this inevitable individual responsibility, which is in fact the focus of Jesus' teaching. The last example, tracing the confession of Peter, his denial and Jesus' reactions to these then considered the inevitable suffering this responsibility brings about. This raises a basic question regarding why and how Christian faith in Christ's suffering is in fact a 'gospel', good news – a divine consolation, freely given to us as human beings. It may seem as if this Christian insistence on the passion of Christ was a mere resignation to human weakness, and as if divine almightiness, transcending human sin, was in some way bound to human finiteness and thus basically doubted. The last example puts the accent on the spiritual confusion, mistakes and fear of Peter and the two women, as well as that of the other disciples. Likewise, the consolation we get from believing in 'Jesus Christ' is not based on denying even Christ's own confusion and fear. It is rather based on the experience of God's presence and forgiveness within these sufferings. Christian confession

involves acknowledging that, yes, we may be weak and ashamed, for we see our mistakes in the light of our own responsibility. But there is an essential lesson to learn about this confusion, weakness and sin, which is the subject of Christian consolation: these experiences, though contradicting the will of God, do not separate us, neither from God, nor from each other as a human community, nor from our liberty to change our minds and actions.

So even though suffering, sin and confusion are present, so too are God's forgiveness and our freedom to repent. True faith involves leaving space for both of them. Believing in God's grace is thus our respective freedom to love our enemies as ourselves. Being sinners *and* God's beloved children at the same time, we have to love ourselves as our own enemies. This divine gift is given to human faith and realized by it at the same time. As faith, it transcends our human faculties and measures. We cannot completely grasp how and why a sinner, as his or her own enemy, is still fully free and able to be 'perfect like the heavenly Father'. Thus, from a mere human perspective, human and divine reality are separated, just as in Peter's rejection of Christ's suffering. Christian faith is based on faith in the relationship between God and human beings (not their plain identity), which is grounded in God himself. Accordingly, Jesus as our Christ, by God's will, is 'true man and true God' at the same time, as it says in the Apostles' Creed. Christians (but not only Christians, of course) believe in eternal life and in the possibility of ultimate human joy and happiness. They do so because they believe that actual human reality, their making mistakes and being confused, is included in and forgiven by God himself. That is the gospel.

We may conclude that this is exactly the basis for a Christian understanding of tolerance. From a Christian perspective, tolerance is based on the awareness of being individually responsible with regard to our own life and belief. Without this awareness, a religious commandment of tolerance would be a mere abstract dogma. Like Peter – whom Jesus calls the 'rock' on which he will build his church – Christians thus recognize Jesus as the *Christ*, or son of God. He is 'the path, the truth and the life', as it says in the Gospel of John (14:6). But again like Peter, they persistently need to be reminded of their own fallibility – not despite but because of their faith in God's (and thus Christ's) familiarity with confused and sinful human beings. It is in this sense that Christians are essentially called to be tolerant: to

accept their own boundaries and mistakes. Christian belief thus does not regard an isolated human being, Jesus, as absolute. Believing in Jesus as the Christ is, rather, a way of regarding ourselves, despite being sinners, as related to him. This means that, as Christians, we consider ourselves as related to those who are sinners (whatever their beliefs), and who, at the same time, by God's grace, are free from their confusion and sin – as we, ourselves, are. Therefore in the Gospel of John, immediately before the verse just cited, Jesus says, 'In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?' (John 14:2). Interreligious dialogue is essential to practising Christian faith, for it means being open to what truly connects human beings. It is a practice of loving one's neighbours and even one's enemies as oneself – and thus of seeking the gift of *universal* forgiveness, transcending even the boundaries of Christianity as a specific religion.

## THE 'DOCTRINE OF THE TWO KINGDOMS' – OR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

What I have just outlined, especially the story of Peter's denial, also provides the basis for a Christian understanding of spiritual community – that is, of the Christian church. As I mentioned above, Peter is addressed by Jesus as the 'rock', the solid ground on which the Christian community will be built (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, the Christian church is basically different from any political community. The exact meaning of a Christian distinction between religious and political communities, however, is not easy to grasp. I will restrict my reflections here to two crucial aspects, both relevant to the modern situation of Christianity (especially in Central Europe). The first aspect is the splitting of Occidental Christianity into Roman Catholicism and Reformation churches, which started in the early modern period (sixteenth century) because of their different understandings of the relationship between religious and political community. The second aspect is a fundamental ideological shift regarding this relationship, as well as regarding religion in general, brought about by the multiple processes of secularization in the late modern era, especially since the nineteenth century.



With regard to how this confessional splitting developed in Western European Christianity, we may say that the process of the Reformation, as the trigger for this division, was based in vehement criticism of the traditional church in so much as it mixed up political and religious issues and interests. The Protestant critique, however, went beyond the actual church practices of the time, such as the selling of indulgences and requiem masses, which provided exemption for temporal punishments for sin in exchange for money, and the combination of secular, juridical and ecclesiastical power within the episcopates and the Papacy. (These practices, by the way, have mostly been abandoned by the Roman Catholic Church.) The criticism, more basically, involved the theological self-understanding of the Christian church, in regard to its *religious* identity. For Martin Luther and other Reformation theologians, what is most important in New Testament theology is the idea that a believer, though being obliged to love God and his enemies as oneself, is not able to *reward* divine righteousness – including divine forgiveness – by his own personal ‘righteousness of works’.<sup>13</sup> The reason, according to Luther, is that in order to achieve God’s righteousness, we would need to fully assess what it means to realize divine justice and love; we would need to grasp divine love in terms of perceivable ‘works’. That, however, transgresses our faculties as human beings. For who knows for sure that he or she is ‘perfect’ like the ‘heavenly Father’ and thus truly deserves His forgiveness? Now – Luther argues – if we cannot know this for ourselves, how can we sincerely preach to others that they need to fulfil this commandment *by themselves*? Being unable to examine our fulfilment of God’s commandments, however, does not mean – in Luther’s eyes – that these divine commandments are not fully valid. On the contrary, they are God’s commandments, God’s law, because a human being is unable to give and to completely fulfil them by him or herself alone.

Astonishingly, Luther thereby does not mean that we cannot fulfil these commandments, despite being sinful human beings. Rather, we actually do fulfil God’s commandments when we stop predicating them on our own finite understanding and faculties alone. Thus, even God’s highest majesty, Luther says, is truly present within our faith in Christ. This means that we trust in God being concretely present in – and even especially in – those who are confused sinners. Faith in Christ involves divine majesty because believing in God’s faculty to humanly



overcome our own sins, we attribute more to God than we can judge and achieve alone. For as sinners, we are our own eternal enemies before God, and thus cannot ever love ourselves. Faith in the Gospel, however, means devoutly trusting in God's presence in our suffering, fear and even self-hatred. This is faith in God's incomprehensible presence in a human Christ. Such a faith is instantly our liberty to love our enemies as ourselves, including our own sinful and confused being. This fits with what we said earlier: believing in Jesus as the Christ means believing in the intrinsic relationship (not the complete identity) between God and human beings, which is made possible only by God alone.

The main point of contention between Roman Catholics and (Lutheran) Protestants has its roots here. Protestant teachings place all the emphasis on the basic insight that we cannot reward God's righteousness by our own works. Thus, not even the Christian church – in so much as it is a human creation – can guarantee God's righteousness and forgiveness *by itself*. According to Protestantism, the only true criterion of a Christian church is its faculty to clearly distinguish between two concepts: the visible, conceivable human laws and works on the one hand and what transcends them on the other – namely, God's own law and faith in Jesus as the Christ (i.e. God's concrete presence for and within *ourselves* as mere human sinners).<sup>14</sup> Protestants thus also need to clearly distinguish the core of the Christian church from the visible institution and the visible authorities representing it. Though Protestants admit that the Christian church is concretely and visibly present in the world, they insist on the fact that faith in the Gospel basically cannot depend on the work of humans and visible phenomena *alone*. From a Protestant perspective, it is therefore possible to accept a multitude of different visible churches without relinquishing the idea of one universal church, despite these visible differences. This corresponds to the idea of tolerance I expounded earlier: Christian tolerance is essential due to God being present within our sinful humanity, *including* our diversity and separation, but *transcending* it at the same time.

This concept of tolerance is the main and still existing difference between Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church. The latter is based on the idea that Christianity needs to be represented in *one visible* institution within the world and throughout Christian history.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Roman Catholicism puts more weight on

the *visible*, or tangible, presence of the church sacraments, whereas Protestants prioritize the teaching of the *word* of the gospel over the tangible events performed by the priest. The Catholic Church thus also attributes a special religious dignity to its priests: priesthood is based on a specific sacrament that, through the inspired laying on of hands by legitimate church office holders, ensures the concrete and sensible succession of Christ's own followers, beginning with Peter and continuing in an unbroken chain into the present. From a Protestant perspective, by contrast, a priest's office is not transmitted by a sacrament and thus does not involve any spiritual difference with regard to other believers; it is a simple question of theological qualification and of being selected for this office by the community. Martin Luther thus speaks of the concept of a 'priesthood of all believers' (Luther 1520, p.407).

These different understandings of the Christian church also include different visions of the relationship between religion and politics. The Protestant concept of tolerance, having its roots in the basic distinction between human works and God's righteousness, including but transcending human sin and confusion, has consequences also with regard to the political sphere. It is characteristic of traditional Protestantism that – on the one hand – political decisions and laws are strictly distinguished from religious statements and decisions. On the other hand, it is possible, according to Luther and others, to live a Christian life *within* the political sphere. Thus, it is not necessary to reject the political world and its principles, although these are fundamentally different from the spiritual sphere. Classical Protestant theology speaks of two different 'kingdoms': the 'kingdom of God', on the one hand, and the 'kingdom of the world', on the other. As Christian religion essentially accepts human sin, fear and confusion, intrinsically related to each person's individual responsibility and included in God's own forgiveness of human sin in Jesus Christ, true faith cannot be realized by means of political legislation, judicial judgement and its executive enforcement. Based on each believer's free and individual acceptance of his or her own sins and confusion, the religious community is necessary because of the need of a mutual reminder of the divine gift of forgiveness, allowing for the individual liberty to be 'perfect like our heavenly Father', within and despite confusion and sin. This is the essential difference with regard to political communities, since the latter cannot – and thus must not

– presuppose their citizens’ actual will to deal with their confused consciences. Rather, they need to do the opposite: to be alert to each citizen’s unreflected egoism, that is, his or her tendency to win advantage at the expense of others’ liberty and well-being, thus also damaging the whole community (or state). Political communities, represented by their laws and legislation, thus aim at preventing their citizens from selfishly harming each other and the state, thereby presupposing everyone’s egoism. A political community thus at times uses violence to enforce its laws, if this is considered necessary – which is unacceptable for religious communities, as they seek to remind each person of his or her individual responsibility and freedom given by God. Thus, using violence in religion would wrongly pretend that individual responsibility, as well as spiritual peace, could be enforced by outwardly keeping fixed laws, which stands in opposition to Jesus’ teaching.

From a Protestant perspective, this basic insight does not mean that being engaged in a state according to its own, non-religious principles contradicts the principles of spiritual responsibility and peace. It is, rather, asked of a person to accept and to assess political principles for what they actually are: a necessary concession to human sinfulness and egoism that would not be necessary if all of its citizens actually loved their enemies as themselves. But accepting the existence of human egoism, as it is presupposed by political principles, does not mean being resigned to it. It is very much the same as accepting our own sin and confusion, which coincides with the acknowledgement that transcending and overcoming these is not in our hands alone. It is thus possible to freely support the political world without being caught or bound by the egoism it refers to. Indeed, supporting the state is a way of supporting one’s neighbour in as far as he or she is caught by their egoism, and thus needs to be either protected or formally punished by state laws. Nevertheless, according to Protestantism, it is most important to consider that political actions do not have any spiritual meaning or influence on citizens. Working in and for the secular realm means working for outward peace and well-being but it does not realize spiritual peace. Being able to distinguish between both of these spheres is beneficial not only for religious but also for political life. Being able to fathom political actions for what they actually are – that is, a way of implementing/achieving external goods – avoids inadequate expectations such as, for example, realizing paradise on

earth. Being able to make this distinction is therefore a requirement for both spheres, political *and* religious, at the same time; it involves a sort of link, and – once again – an attitude of mutual tolerance between them. From a Roman Catholic perspective, this distinction is also made, but the state is not (or not as clearly as in Protestantism) accepted as a sphere in its own right that is basically different from religious reflections and principles. Roman Catholic political votes thus usually involve a self-understanding superior to a secular (and mere particular) party's voting, as they are claimed to be universally valid and ensured by God's own authority. Protestant self-understanding, by contrast, involves (or should involve) the awareness that even the Christian church is fallible, like human beings or other groups. The Protestant church, however, is called to remind the public, whenever it is necessary, of what it basically shares with the secular society: the necessity of clearly distinguishing between political and spiritual reality, thus being in touch with both spheres. It is according to these two understandings that the Christian church is meant to take part in public deliberation.

At this point, I want to return to the Amman Message. From a Western Protestant perspective, it is quite striking that the Amman Message claims both religious and political weight, without explicitly distinguishing between the two. The text refers to the 'inherited spiritual and historical responsibility carried by the Hashemite monarchy, honoured as direct descendants of the Prophet, the Messenger of God', and thus having a particular mission for reforming the worldwide 'image' of Islam and supporting the 'solidarity' of the world's Muslims (p.1). This corresponds to Jordan's constitution defining Jordan as an Islamic state,<sup>16</sup> and to the Amman Message's approach of 'guiding' all political processes by the standards of Islamic religion. From a Protestant Christian perspective, such linking of political and religious authority is problematic. A Protestant would place more emphasis on the individual character of all true religion and – thus – also on the fallibility of those who represent the spiritual community. Both points establish the necessary distinction between religion and politics.

This being said, it is remarkable that in the introduction to 'The Three Points of the Amman Message' (the intra-Muslim consensus document), Prince Ghazi clearly points out that both spheres,

spiritual and political, have to be distinguished. The main problems affecting the Ummah today, he says, are 'worldly weakness, disunity and inability to protect ourselves', which result from 'worldliness and forgetfulness of God and the next world' and are, thus, due to 'spiritual weakness'. He then explains that spiritual strength – true faith – is something 'one cannot impose...on the Ummah'.<sup>17</sup> It is only 'possible for Muslims themselves individually to work to increase, with God's grace, their own sincerity and faith, through practicing righteous deeds, virtue and piety' (Introduction VI.i–ii). To support this, he cites Al-Qasa 28:56, as well as Al-Ra'ad 13:11, Yunus 10:9 and Al-Nahl 16:128. This sounds strikingly similar to a Protestant understanding of Christian faith and community. With European historical experience in mind, the question remains as to whether and how this approach ultimately fits with the 'guidance of (Islamic) religion' in the *political* world – which is defined by laws and rulings that may and must be controlled outwardly and, if necessary, through violence.

### MODERNITY AND SPIRITUAL CONFUSION: THE AMMAN MESSAGE FROM A CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The explanations given above regarding Christian confession and church have also shown that, since early modern times, it is no longer possible for European Christianity to officially or representatively speak with one voice.<sup>18</sup> As I pointed out, the confessional dissent between Roman Catholics and Protestants concerns not only secondary but central aspects of Christian theology and practice: for instance, the acceptance of human sin and fallibility even of the church itself, in so much as it is a worldly institution represented by finite human beings. As these denominations disagree at this theologically crucial point, and have done so since early modern times, Western European societies are marked by the experience of losing a unifying spiritual identity. This loss is not only a product of theological debates. It is also and rather a result of the confessional wars that afflicted vast parts of Central and Western Europe following the Reformation Era, such as the Eighty Years' War in the Low Countries (1568–1648), the French Wars of Religion (1562–98), the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (England, Scotland and Ireland, 1639–51) and, especially, the Thirty

Years' War (1618–48), to name but the most serious and long-lasting conflicts. The result of these wars was a common political – though not at all voluntary – acceptance of two matters of fact: the separation of Christianity into different denominations (mainly Protestant and Catholic) and, as a consequence, the splitting of Europe into many nation-states without any one embracing identity, neither national nor religious. Correspondingly, the religious peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the latter terminating the Age of Reformation and the Thirty Years' War, both affirm the *political equality* of Christian confessions, despite their fundamental *theological disunity*, as a concession to the effects of war and the necessity of restoring external peace.<sup>19</sup> This actual loss of religious unity and common spiritual identity was (and still is) a most involuntary result for Protestants as well as for Catholics. Both confessions did not, and still do not, want Christianity to be split into a multitude of conflicting denominations but were struggling for their unity (as they still do today in ecumenical dialogue). As I explained earlier, the main and still existing conflict is their respective understanding of what constitutes religious unity, which remains different.

The confessional splitting was but a first loss of spiritual identity in Central Europe. The second, though associated with the first, reaches even deeper. Later modernity – the time following the big religious wars that was marked by the impressive progress of natural sciences and technology – has triggered a process of secularization in the Western world that preoccupied political enlightenment theories in the eighteenth century as well as the nineteenth-century political and social revolutions. There are currently extensive debates on the concept of 'secularization', and scholars disagree as to whether this implies a subtle vanishing of religion, its mere pluralization, de-institutionalization, or even whether or not a secularization took place at all, to name but four possible differentiations (see Bruce 2002; Casanova 1994; Norris and Inglehart 2004, pp.3–32; Taylor 2007).

At any rate, later modernity brings with it a deep 'transformation of the public sphere' (Habermas 1989) – and a new problem with regard to spiritual or religious self-understanding. This problem is not easy to grasp, hence it has been extensively discussed since the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> From a religious perspective, it is obviously not sufficient to reduce this problem to the disunity of Christian confessions, or even to religious and ideological pluralism

in general within contemporary Western societies, which also includes other religions such as Judaism, Islam and Buddhism as well as agnostic and atheistic worldviews.

The problem, more fundamentally, is the experience that there seems to be no common language at all with regard to what had previously been universally shared, making it inexpressible, at least by the majority of society. It is difficult to say whether, in modern times (in Europe and maybe in the whole Western world), there is anything we share as a human community apart from our respective egoistic interests, such as health, prosperity and social assurances. And even letting go of the idea of something 'we all share' (beyond private advantages for everyone) seems to be problematic, since even negatively stating this as a matter of fact seems to imply a knowledge of what is missing – which we do not seem to have.<sup>21</sup> The idea standing behind what we all share, thus, easily sounds like some vague romanticism or nostalgia, which tends to overlook what is actually experienced, or shows a lack of scientific sense and precision; or merely expresses a private wish or belief without any universal implications.

In earlier times, for example in the Middle Ages and probably continuing during the Reformation Era, this problem did not exist in the same way. The term 'God', for example, would definitely involve, for the vast majority of all members of these societies, an awareness of some ultimate importance in a personal as well as a universal perspective. This awareness of ultimate importance does not necessarily demand the acceptance of some homogeneously fixed dogma or consensus. The Middle Ages, like the Reformation period, were marked by hard theological controversies and conflicts. Nevertheless, the term 'God' implied, in those times, a sense of something crucial, shared by everyone of integrity as an undeniable human concern. This is no longer valid for modern self-awareness, since it is marked by its consciousness of something that is difficult to say, but implying at least a fundamental difference with regard to earlier times.

What exactly *is* this difference? Contemporary Western European philosophers and theologians often merely *describe* modern societies. They do so as though it were enough to describe what happens within social and political processes, and as though it were a perfectly objective reality that more or less follows empirical laws. This is misleading insofar as it suggests that those who describe this reality are merely



unconcerned bystanders. Speaking about the society one lives in is, rather, a way of acting within this society and thus being responsible for what one communicates to others. The same is obviously valid for the members of the society itself, being the issue of these reflections: they actually do not mechanically follow empirically given laws, as nature does. Rather, as human beings, they are responsible for what they decide and do. Even if this is taken to be true, it remains a painful open question for the European public as to what such social responsibility means, where it points to, what it is good for – that is, if one does not reduce it to ensuring maximum outward security, health and prosperity. Is there a language for talking about anything it is worth living for, not only as an individual but together, as equal and free members of society?

The basic problem that contemporary Western European societies are facing, in my eyes, is a complete inability to speak in this field. From a Western perspective, it often seems as if there actually was no (universal or essential) problem at all because there really is no specific problem one can outwardly perceive and thus scientifically prove. Thus, it may often seem as though Western Europeans are simply unconcerned by problems like ‘spiritual weakness’ or ‘dangers’, such as mentioned in the Amman Message. In the eyes of many, this may appear as a problem religious people have – but not of a modern public in general, which is first of all a non-religious sphere. Western European societies are thus easily reduced to their political, that is, their merely pragmatic or outward interests. The question of whether there is anything we universally share apart from our material interests is an unwelcome guest. It is unwelcome because the question is cloudy, instable in itself, and thus reveals no concrete path, no particular task or issue one could follow. Thus, it easily leads to denying the problem altogether, or to confining it to a private – religious or psychological – world where it might still have its designated place (i.e. among friends and family, particular religious communities, or psychotherapy).

On the other hand, this ‘putting aside’ is obviously but one part of it. The other is the corresponding individual experience itself: while seeking for what might be universally shared, individuals, isolated from what is commonly accepted, find themselves in a sort of diffuse speechlessness, oscillating between indifference on the one hand and gloomy despair on the other. Thus, being overstrained,



one easily bears the wish to once and for all terminate this unclear and unfounded situation, thereby using violence against oneself or others, sometimes even against the whole society. One should not forget that the phenomenon of terrorism is typical and specific to modern Europe, beginning with the Jacobin terror during the French Revolution and extensively practised, among other examples, by the twentieth-century totalitarian states. Today, quite a number of IS – and other – terrorists have grown up in wealthy European countries, such as Germany, France, Belgium or Denmark.

Given all these problems – the actual confessional diversity within Christianity, together with the fact that Christianity no longer naturally represents what people universally share – it is quite clear that proposing a solution is, in a way, an overstraining task. It is overstraining because from a Christian perspective, we can neither deny the existing problems nor authoritatively prescribe religious or ethical values, nor simply resign ourselves to the cloudy chaos and despair as it is. The language in which Christian faith is traditionally expressed seems to have lost its universally inspiring power for the current European public. Using this traditional language, one immediately appears as a member of a mere particular group within society instead of representing a universal sphere.

This does not mean that ‘finding a common word’ is currently not possible; since we do not need to fully understand this possibility as a political programme that can be planned and controlled. Furthermore, it is possible that we do not need to resolve the problem on our own. ‘Finding a common word’ obviously includes more than one single group (e.g. Europeans on the one hand and the Arab-Islamic world on the other). Thus, it is possible that the problems outlined above are, in the end, perfectly understood by – in this case – a Muslim or Arabic public; and that, vice versa, Europeans might perfectly understand and share Muslim ‘weakness’, ‘dangers and challenges’, such as they are exposed by the Amman Message. The above explanations are meant as a small step in this direction. Such mutual understanding might turn out to slowly transform both sides’ difficulties. This is not thoroughly under our individual control alone, and thus means taking a path we cannot completely foresee by ourselves. It is a path of patient and persistent dialogue, which is grounded in both sides’ openness to unpredictable developments

and thus includes the possibility of mutual non-understanding and conflict. We might find out that we actually do not understand and remain strangers to each other. We might get the impression that European societies' principles are incompatible with those in the Arab and other Islamic worlds. In the field of interreligious dialogue, a basic disunity – between Muslim faith in the one God and Christian faith in the one, but triune, God – might be revealed. All this possible non-understanding cannot be excluded. It is, however, exactly at this point, in my eyes, that a genuinely religious aspect – an aspect of universal dialogue and tolerance – comes in to play. This religious aspect is, first of all, a certain confidence in an ultimate reality (God himself) being intelligible and open to human beings, instead of remaining foreign or hostile. Thus, it leaves room for humans to understand each other and become reconciled – in the end. This does not mean that the existing difficulties, such as non-understanding, confusion and even violent conflicts, are denied or excluded as matters of fact.<sup>22</sup> Rather, Christianity and Islam are both asked to remind themselves of their faith in the light of these existing difficulties, not apart from them, thereby believing in God being present both in paradise *and* hell.

To conclude my 'Christian response' to the Amman Message, I would like to draw on a Qur'anic verse, cited at the very beginning of the Amman Message, thus serving as a form of headline for the whole text:

God Almighty has said: O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know each other. Truly the most honored of you before God is the most pious of you. (Al-Hujurat, 49:13)

Addressed to 'humankind', the verse clearly adopts a universal perspective – but also points to the basic differences between human beings as a result of divine creation, such as the contrast between males and females, and tribal or national diversity. (The Amman Message also mentions religious diversity in this context.) The divine purpose when faced with this diversity is 'that ye may know each other'. Although this has often been mentioned in the context of interreligious dialogue, the Western public is mostly unfamiliar with the essential importance of religious tolerance for Islamic belief. Unlike early Christian tradition, a vast number of verses in the Qur'an *explicitly* accept and thus affirm the existence of different

religions next to one another.<sup>23</sup> They suggest, in the name of God himself, a way of peacefully dealing with these differences and taking them as chance occurrences. By ‘knowing each other’ or ‘finding a common word’ (to mention but these two Qur’anic phrases), a way of practising universal tolerance – or ‘brotherhood and humanity’, as it says in the Amman Message – is proposed. Writing this essay, I realized that this whole Islamic initiative is indeed an inspiring invitation – not only to verily trust the essential Islamic openness to other religions, but also to re-examine Christian faith from an Islamic perspective, especially in the context of present (modern) times.

Nevertheless, from a Christian perspective, a stronger concentration on each person’s individual responsibility, and thus on individual confusion and sin arising from this responsibility, should be added (as demonstrated in the story of Peter). This is crucial for the understanding of Jesus as the Christ and of the Christian church as a truly universal and tolerant community, being open even to transcending the bounds of Christianity, as far as it is understood as a mere particular group. This understanding also leads to a stronger distinction between the religious and the political community. The essential Christian idea is the acceptance of God’s presence *within* individual human confusion and sin, and thus of overcoming these difficulties in God, who is intrinsically related to humans – in Jesus as the ‘Christ’. Christian faith thus connects human and divine reality, but also confesses that this is more than one can express and explain in terms of human understanding alone. In this faith, the ‘Holy Spirit’ – God himself – is present as something more than we can reach by our individual understanding alone. This is probably the most difficult point when it comes to Muslim–Christian dialogue. It is, however, the basis for a Christian understanding of universal community and tolerance as it leaves room for our non-understanding, confusion and isolation. Thus, it also reminds Christians of their obligation to understand the ‘problem besetting the Ummah’ today as if it were their own problem, which is – as described in the introduction to ‘The Three Points of the Amman Message’ – the experience of ‘disunity and (spiritual) weakness’ and the inability (of Muslims) to ‘protect themselves’, thus leaving them feeling, according to Prophet Muhammad’s prophecy, ‘like the foam on the ocean’, due to ‘love of this world and hatred of death’ (Abu Dawud, Sunan Kitab al-Fitan wal-Malahim, Hadith no. 4297).

Reading these phrases, one is encouraged to take them as an invitation to Christian self-knowledge as well. From a modern Western European, and possibly a 'Western' perspective in general, feeling 'like the foam on the ocean' is a familiar experience (though it might still differ from the Islamic experience in some aspects). The Amman Message describes this experience in terms of spiritual weakness and as a loss of unity within the Islamic community, but also with regard to peaceful international relations. A similar loss of unity and religious self-confidence is familiar to Western Christians. The Amman Message's call for universal tolerance, as an appropriate religious reaction to this experience, thus also engages Christians, not only in the field of religion, but also in the field of international relations. This is especially significant, as Christians and Muslims together represent a majority (around 55 per cent) of the world's population. From a contemporary European and probably global Western perspective, feeling like the foam on the ocean is, in my eyes, the experience of painfully *losing one's language* when it comes to the question of what might universally transcend particular political agendas. This is a self-contradiction of sorts, since it is partly because of this loss of language that the lack of it is not perceived as a universal problem. Rather it is unstable and unclear in itself, swaying from a sort of scientific indifference to extreme and violent rejection. Religion is not only distinguished from the political sphere but has lost its power to speak for everybody. What remains is quite diffuse; one could describe it as a lack of liberty: a certain inability to speak freely and representatively as a human being in the public sphere. It often seems as if there is no way out of this loss of freedom. The Amman Message's Qur'anic invitation to 'know each other' is thus a spiritually liberating call as it seeks and finds a certain language for something both religions – Christianity and Islam – might truly share and so, in fact, transcends the particularity of each religion, even in the light of modern Western secularism and scepticism. Faced with the above-mentioned difficulties, Muslims and Christians are kindly invited by the Amman Message to transcend their speechlessness, weakness and isolation by 'knowing each other', and freely seeking 'a common word between us and you'.

## NOTES

1. It needs to be mentioned, however, that Shar'ia does not seem to accept equal rights and laws for Christians and Jews (though these are appreciated by the Qur'an as 'people of the book'); in a political context, they are considered as Dhimmis, 'protected persons' with limited rights and duties. See Glenn (2007), pp.218–219.
2. The edition used here is again taken from the 'Official Website of the Amman Message', <http://ammanmessage.com>.
3. According to the introduction to this document, written by Prince Ghazi, chap. 1, <http://ammanmessage.com>.
4. All references to passages from the Bible refer to the English Standard Version.
5. The word 'tolerance' is only mentioned once in the Amman Message – at the very end (p.4). What I understand by this word in this chapter is, however, described many times in the text of the Message: an intrinsic Islamic attitude of moderation and respect for others, including the acceptance of 'all messengers of God' (p.1) without differentiating between them, and the invitation to 'know each other' as different nations and to find 'a common word' with (in this case) Christianity.
6. In regard to our special interest in interreligious tolerance in this context, it has to be added that the Qur'an mainly restricts this to the other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity; polytheism, on the contrary, is probably the most attacked theological enemy in the Qur'an.
7. One might still think of Saint Paul's discussion of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in his 'Letter to Romans', Chapters 9–11, or of certain passages in other letters, such as Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' The main difference with regard to the Qur'anic passages cited above is that the existence and acceptance of other noble religions besides (the developing early) Christianity is not a question that the New Testament is particularly interested in.
8. This is, of course, a generalization – there have been some important Christian writings on tolerance, such as Peter Abaelard's *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum* (ca. 1140) or Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* (1453). Nevertheless, more extensive Christian reflection on tolerance only started in modern times and is connected with the confessional wars in Europe. Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) is a good example of this. The debates on tolerance reached their climax during the Enlightenment era with works such as Voltaire's *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763), or Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (1779), to name but a few famous examples that were followed by many other writings of the time.
9. I am particularly thinking of 'A Common Word between Us and You' (2007) and the Amman Interfaith Message, published parallel to the Amman Message in 2005 by HM King Abdullah II. This message does not want 'merely to diffuse tensions between Muslims, Christians and Jews...nor simply to promote tolerance between them, but rather to establish full acceptance and goodwill between them. For Muslims, Christians and Jews together comprise around 60 per cent of the world's population, and establishing acceptance and goodwill between them means in effect establishing peace and friendship over most of the world' (p.9); [http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=54](http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=54).

10. According to all four Gospels, 'King of the Jews' was the inscription on Jesus' cross, indicating the charge against him, as it states in the Gospel of Mark. See Mark 15:26, Matthew 27:37, Luke 23:38, John 19:19.
11. I mentioned earlier that our reflections mainly refer to the modern Western European situation which, in the field of relations between religion and politics, is marked by the Reformation, the religious wars and the whole process of secularization following it. The effects of these long-term events certainly reach beyond Central Europe and include at least North America; in a different manner, they also influenced the former colonies of Western European countries, and are finally – in some way – related to the whole process of globalization, which is however restricted to the economic sphere.
12. Later text editions have added the story of the resurrection.
13. For the whole context, see Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*, especially his commentary on verses 2:14–21; see [www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/gal/web/gal-inx.html](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/gal/web/gal-inx.html).
14. This basic distinction constitutes the golden thread in the main Lutheran confession, the Augsburg Confession or *Confessio Augustana* (1530), available at [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iii.ii.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iii.ii.html).
15. In the Nicene Creed, the church is professed as 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church'; these are the four marks of the church, inseparable and intrinsically linked to each other. In the introduction to the *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)* of the Second Vatican Council, it is said that all Christian communities necessarily 'long for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and set forth into the world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God'; available at [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).
16. See [www.kinghussein.gov.jo/government1.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/government1.html).
17. This corresponds to the famous Qur'anic verse, Al Baqarah 2:256: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion', which is also cited in Ghazi (2007, p.14).
18. Saying this, I do not mean that, in earlier times, European Christianity has always spoken with one voice only; of course, there have been deep conflicts and even splits during the Middle Ages. The difference is, however, that in modern times, the confessional splitting (roughly) into Protestants and Roman Catholics is connected with an *all-embracing* loss of religious unity within European territories in general.
19. The religious peace of Augsburg, however, expressed the hope that religious unity of the Holy Roman Empire, though being lost for the moment, could be restored in the future.
20. See Habermas (1987). Habermas begins his 12 lectures with Hegel's and Nietzsche's understanding of modernity, before analysing the work of twentieth-century philosophers including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Cornelius Castoriadis and Niklas Luhmann. Habermas, however, does not regard the loss of a representative religious language in modern societies as a universally problematic phenomenon.
21. This phenomenon has especially been the issue of modern art works and of philosophy of art. Among some famous examples is Hugo von Hofmannsthal's fictional 'Lord Chandos' Letter' in which Lord Chandos declares his 'inability to think or speak coherently'. Chandos writes that he has 'lost the ability to use words' and construct and convey abstract thoughts, which instead 'disintegrated

in my mouth like rotten mushrooms'. Dreading conversation altogether, he stopped speaking, as 'everything broke into pieces'. Another well-known example is Adorno's (1992) essay, 'Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry'. Here Adorno interprets Hölderlin's late poetry as an artistic – though paratactic – expression of modern brokenness and speechlessness. This corresponds to what Samuel Beckett states in a correspondence with George Duthuit about the nature of contemporary art ('Three Dialogues', 1949; available at [www.opasquet.fr/dl/texts/Beckett\\_Three\\_Dialogues\\_2012.pdf](http://www.opasquet.fr/dl/texts/Beckett_Three_Dialogues_2012.pdf)), striving towards the 'expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express'. Last but not least, Martin Heidegger's later work has to be mentioned, which essentially deals with poetical language and its meaning for modern philosophical speechlessness; see, for example, *On the Way to Language* (1971).

22. Saying this, I somewhat contradict Marshall G.S. Hodgson (1960). In his brilliant essay 'A comparison of Islam and Christianity as Frame-Work for Religious Life', he works out and compares the respective 'special total atmosphere' and the 'integrating principles of each faith' (pp.2 and 18). At the end he concludes that 'these are in contradiction. Only in some higher synthesis – which cannot be said to be currently available – might a true unity be possible' (p.18). This being conceded, Hodgson, in my eyes, seems to neglect that a faith (of any specific religion) that sincerely claims universality must be open to such a 'higher synthesis', for genuine religious reasons. This openness and confidence, the Amman Message claims in my eyes, is what essentially makes religious faith *true* faith – instead of being a mere instrument of one religion's self-affirmation against the other.
23. Apart from the verses cited in the Amman Message and 'A Common Word', see the following Qur'anic passages: 2:62, 2:148, 2:256, 2:272, 3:20, 3:64, 3:73, 3:111–114, 3:199, 4:88, 4:94, 4:140, 5:43–48, 5:66–69, 6:164, 7:87, 10:42–43, 10:99, 22:67–69, 25:63, 28:56, 29:46, 39:3, 42:15 and others.

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# 9

## *Charlie Hebdo and the Amman Message*

A Counter-Narrative to Violent  
Fundamentalism?

*Steve Rose and Faith Matters*

*'I just want to tell you that we are defenders of the Prophet. I, Chérif Kouachi, was sent by al-Qaeda in Yemen.'*

Lichfield (2015)

### INTRODUCTION: THE EVENT

The murder of the Charlie Hebdo staff was one of the most significant European events of 2015, one that reopened the public debates surrounding the right to freedom of speech versus respect for religious feeling, which have been so hotly discussed in Europe over the past decade. It also cast a spotlight on the diversity of France's Muslim communities as well as the prevalence of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment in France.

This chapter, first, introduces the events of Charlie Hebdo and the motivations underlying them, indicating their justifications and causes. After exploring how both the media and extremists frame the issues in terms of simplistic binaries of free speech versus religious belief, and extremism versus Islamophobia, in the final section we consider how the Amman Message opens the debate into a more pluralist arena. In particular, we consider how Islamophobia and terrorism are interlinked. The chapter closes by considering the implications of the Amman Message, providing a possible counter-narrative to violent fundamentalism.

At 11:30a.m. on 7 January 2015 tragedy struck in Paris. A black Citroen C3 arrived at the offices of the controversial satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Rue Nicolas-Appert (BBC News 2015a). Chérif Kouachi and his brother Saïd, both dressed in black and armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles, approached the building (Harding 2015).

Initially, the Kouachi brothers burst into the wrong office at No. 6 in Rue Nicolas-Appert. Yve Cresson, who works at this address for the media production company, Bayoo, tweeted: 'At 11:25a.m., taking advantage of the mail carrier's arrival, two armed men wearing balaclavas entered our offices. They were looking for Charlie' (Cresson 2015).

The brothers then located the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* on the second floor of No.10. Once inside, they murdered caretaker Frederic Boisseau. A cartoonist who works for *Charlie Hebdo*, Corinne Rey (also known as Coco), then granted the brothers access, under pain of death. She told local press: 'They wanted to get inside, go upstairs. I tapped in the entrance code... They spoke perfect French. They said they were from al-Qaida' (Henley and Wellsher 2015).

An ensuing hail of gunfire killed Franck Brinsolaro, the police bodyguard of *Charlie Hebdo's* editor, Stéphane Charbonnier. The brothers identified Charbonnier and four cartoonists by name and murdered them, alongside three other editorial staff and a guest attendant.

The deceased included the cartoonists Jean Cabut (Cabu), Georges Wolinski, Bernard Verlhac and Philippe Honore; the economist Bernard Maris; the psychoanalyst and columnist Elsa Cayat; the copy editor Mustapha Ourrad; and a visitor, Michel Renaud (BBC News 2015b).

As they singled out individual staff members, witnesses recalled hearing the gunman shout in Arabic: 'We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad' and 'God is greater' (BBC News 2015a). After leaving the office, both Kouachi brothers drove north and exchanged gunfire with police – killing one officer (Harding 2015).

## THE CONTEXT SURROUNDING THE *CHARLIE HEBDO* INCIDENT

The *Hebdo* event prompted discussions of extremism, free speech and Islam's place in Europe against a background of Islamophobia.

An in-depth discussion of France's specific form of Islamophobia is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is important to recognize that many anxieties around Muslims and integration have roots in their colonial legacy. In particular, many news outlets soon looked to the history of France's interventions in Algeria in response to the Kouachi brothers' Algerian origin. The concomitant discussions both reinforced and challenged colonial stereotypes of the violent Muslim.

Algiers was a French colony for over a century, during which Algerians did not officially exist in French colonial law and colonialists homogenized Algiers' Arab and Berber society as Islamic and antithetical to France's Christian and secular identity, thus laying the roots of a binary perception of the two nationalities. It also fuelled anxieties that nationalist movements would use Islam as a unifying force in anti-colonial revolts; a fear that re-emerged a century later with Algeria's struggle for independence (Shryock 2010). For some French writers, the related violence was in part due to the inherent nature of Arabs in Algeria. One writer described them as 'vindictive and cruel in nature' and 'thieves and assassins by taste' who 'know no other law than that of the strongest' (Hamelin n.d., originally published 1833).

The war for Algeria's independence (1954–62) split Algeria and left over a million Algerians dead; it also led to the collapse of the French Fourth Republic. In the decades ahead, competing acts of terror and civil war in Algeria gave life to domestic terror on French soil (Channel 4 News 2015a). Meanwhile, Islamic identity politics meant that younger generations shifted their political consciousness towards Iraq and Palestine, which they perceived as resonating with their own experiences of racism and discrimination (Shryock 2010).

This brief summary gives some indication of the complicated and multifaceted background to the growth of Islamophobia in France and the French–Islam encounter, which are now significant influences in the cultural context within which the *Hebdo* attack took place.

To understand the significance of the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting requires some knowledge of its recent history. This was not the first time the magazine had come under fire, nor the first time it had chosen to make a provocative comment relating to Islam. Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that *Charlie* restricted its satire to Islam; the magazine often attacked the far-right Front National party, French politicians and organized religion in general. Indeed, for Charbonnier,

satire had become a means to undermine taboo to the extent that he had asserted that mockery of Islam had to continue 'until Islam is just as banal as Catholicism' (quoted in Greenhouse 2012).

In 2006, the satirical weekly had republished 12 cartoons of Muhammad that first appeared in Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper in 2005 (Jolly 2011). In response, Jacques Chirac, then president of France, argued that free expression formed a cornerstone of the French Republic but should not be abused. He called for respect and tolerance towards all beliefs (BBC News 2015c).

When *Jyllands-Posten* had first published the caricatures in September 2005, under the headline 'Muhammads ansigt' (Muhammad's face), it had taken more than a week to draw any meaningful response inside Denmark, and many Danish Muslims had ignored it (Malik 2012). Overall, the 'crisis' which emerged in its wake (resulting in over 200 deaths) took almost five months to occur. As journalist and author, Jason Burke, noted, it took 'the concerted efforts of individual clerics seeking personal advancement and of states to manufacture a confrontation' (Burke 2011).

In publishing the cartoons, the editors at *Jyllands-Posten* ostensibly wanted to test the idea that self-censorship regarding criticism or ridicule of Islam was widespread in Europe. This was in part a response to the murder of outspoken film-maker, Theo van Gogh, by a Dutch-born Muslim in Amsterdam a year earlier, as a revenge act for producing a controversial documentary, *Submission*. This film projected Qur'anic quotes across a naked female body with a commentary of stories from abused Muslim women (Burke 2004). A note attached to van Gogh's body accused him and co-creator, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, of 'terrorizing Muslims and Islam' with their documentary.

The decision by *Jyllands-Posten* to publish cartoons of Muhammad was specifically inspired by the story of a local author's difficulty in finding an illustrator for his children's book on Muhammad; *Jyllands-Posten* invited 25 cartoonists to 'draw Muhammad as you see him', as a means to test their self-censorship theory. Twelve cartoonists agreed.

Following publication, it was only after the editors approached Ahmad Abu Laban, Denmark's most prominent imam, for comment that the 'crisis' emerged. Laban, who had once described Osama bin Laden as a 'freedom fighter', saw an opportunity to extend his support base by demanding an apology.

When *Jyllands-Posten* refused to issue one, Laban and others organized a protest in Copenhagen. It attracted between 3000 and 5000 people (Burke 2011). However, even if the participants were all Danish Muslims, in 2005 this represented less than 2.5 per cent of Denmark's Muslim population of 270,000 (BBC News 2005). The manufactured outrage then seemed to wilt. Even when the Egyptian newspaper, *al-Fagr*, reprinted the cartoons alongside an editorial calling it a 'racist bomb', nobody protested (BBC News 2006).

Undeterred, Laban and other like-minded imams toured the Middle East in December 2005 with the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, as well as drawings from other sources that depicted the Prophet as a pig and as having sex with animals and children (BBC News 2006). Meanwhile, protests emerged in various countries in response to journalists across Europe reprinting the Danish cartoons (Ruthven 2011). His experiment to investigate self-censorship having borne fruit, Flemming Rose, then cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, accused Laban (and others) of manufacturing the crisis in order to trigger a campaign of senseless hatred.

When, in February 2006, *Charlie Hebdo* published the special edition featuring the Danish cartoons, the Great Mosque of Paris and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France, with support from the World Islamic League, then took legal action against *Charlie Hebdo* for 'public insults against a group of people because they belong to a religion' (Fouché 2007). This was specifically in relation to three of the cartoons.

Judges eventually acquitted the editor, Philippe Val, of racial injury charges relating to the three images, saying that the cartoons did not incite religious hatred (Fouché 2007). Meanwhile, prior to Val's acquittal, another special edition of the magazine featured caricatures of a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim shouting in unison '*Charlie Hebdo* must be veiled!' (Love 2011a). Yet, pursuing legal action somewhat missed the point that *Hebdo* was trying to make; rather than aiming to incite hatred, the magazine intended to satirize the role of fundamentalism and extremism. Thus, the front cover of this latter edition depicted a crying Muhammad lamenting fundamentalists like Laban. Its headline read: 'Muhammad Overwhelmed by Fundamentalism'. Muhammad's speech bubble read: '*C'est dur d'être aimé par des cons*' (or 'It's hard being loved by jerks') (Ross 2015). Charbonnier, who was already working at *Charlie Hebdo* at the time

of the Muhammad cartoons incident, said that he did not consider the front cover a true depiction of Muhammad – because the figure's hands obscured his eyes (Lambert and Picard 2015). (The speech bubble later inspired the title of a 2008 documentary about the controversy, in which Daniel Leconte took an in-depth look at the legal case against *Charlie Hebdo* in 2007 (Leconte 2008).)

Following this, there were further examples of the magazine's anti-religious and satirical approach. In 2010, it looked at the controversial ban on women wearing the burqa in public, and featured a naked woman with fabric between her legs under the headline, 'Yes to wearing the burqa...on the inside!' (Krule 2015). In 2011, the cover featured the headline, 'All religions down the shitter' (Cabut 2011). This front page specifically rallied against the Catholic fundamentalists who destroyed Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* – a plastic crucifix inside a jar of urine – in an anti-blasphemy campaign in Avignon, southern France (Chrisafis 2011).

It was only in November 2011 that the reprisals started. The offices of *Charlie Hebdo* were burnt out in a petrol bomb attack after the publication featured a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad as 'guest editor' of one issue to celebrate the electoral success of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda Party (Krule 2015). The magazine also had its website hacked and Facebook page suspended for 24 hours. Stéphane Charbonnier, who had taken over as editor in 2009, received death threats via social media and, for a brief period, staff shared office space with France's left-leaning daily newspaper, *Libération*. Prominent French Muslims – including Dalil Boubakeur, head of the Paris Mosque – condemned the fire (Love 2011b).

A week after these attacks, their front cover depicted a male *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonist kissing a Muslim man under the headline '*L'Amour plus fort que la haine*' or 'Love is stronger than hate'. This cover did not generate a backlash (Willsher 2011).

In 2012, *Charlie Hebdo* satirized the film *The Intouchables*. This had been selected as France's Academy Awards nomination for best foreign film, and featured a rich white middle-class quadriplegic man who hires a black ex-prisoner as his assistant. The cover offered a crude depiction of an Orthodox Jewish man pushing a Muslim man in a wheelchair under the title 'Intouchables 2' (Taylor 2012). Inside the pages, though, a deeper controversy awaited in an article that satirized a contentious amateur video, *Innocence of Muslims*. The French

government implored staff not to publish the cartoons that illustrated the article, depicting Muhammad in pornographic poses; but to no avail (Sayare and Clark 2012). One image had him naked and bending over, seeking admiration. Another depicted Muhammad on all fours, with genitals visible. The article provoked international protests and, in response to its publication, the French government closed embassies, schools and cultural centres in 20 countries (Greenhouse 2012).

Editorials in the French media were divided in their response to this edition: some championed free speech over respect for religious sensibilities, while others opined that ‘claiming to defend the freedom of expression by in turn engaging in a game of contempt, sarcasm and stigmatization is very wrong’ (BBC News 2012). Laurent Léger, a journalist at *Charlie Hebdo*, explained the journal’s position: ‘We want to laugh at the extremists – every extremist. They can be Muslim, Jewish, Catholic. Everyone can be religious, but extremist thoughts and acts we cannot accept’ (Payne 2012).

In 2014, the League of Judicial Defence of Muslims (LDJM) attempted to sue *Charlie Hebdo* for blasphemy after it published a front cover headlined ‘The Koran is shit – it doesn’t stop bullets’ (Mezzofiore 2014). The front page discussed the recent crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Egypt. Since France had removed blasphemy laws in the nineteenth century, the LDJM took the case to Alsace-Moselle, a region in France close to the German border which has a local law that differs from France’s penal code on a number of points.<sup>1</sup> One of these concerns blasphemy, which can be penalized; however, Article 166 of the Alsace-Moselle penal code only covers blasphemy when it concerns Catholicism, three forms of Protestantism and Judaism. As such, there was no precedent to try a case where blasphemy concerned Islam and so the case was eventually dropped (Mezzofiore 2014).

## THE BACKLASH TO THE CHARLIE HEBDO SHOOTINGS

Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) is a project set up by the interfaith and counter-extremism NGO, Faith Matters, one of the co-authors of this chapter, to monitor anti-Muslim prejudice and support victims of Islamophobic crimes and abuse in the United Kingdom. Over the two days following the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings,

Tell MAMA mapped violent Islamophobic reactions that occurred throughout France. It subsequently produced an infographic that presented 12 incidents; these included a suspected arson on a mosque in Aix-les-Bains, an explosion of 'criminal origin' that targeted a kebab shop near a mosque in Rhone, and gunshots fired at a prayer room in Port-La-Nouvelle. In Corsica, a boar's head and entrails were left outside a prayer room alongside a threatening note that read 'next time it will be one of your heads' (Tell MAMA 2015a).

Ten days after the Paris atrocities, the anti-Muslim backlash continued in paroxysms of rage and violence. Tell MAMA mapped 51 incidents within this timeframe (Tell MAMA 2015b). In contrast, in the United Kingdom, the backlash did not prove as violent, but parents contacted Tell MAMA staff to report cases of bullying. In one reported case in Oxford, ten-year-old school children had their history class disrupted as the teacher wanted to discuss the terrorism in Paris. In another case, the *Independent* newspaper obtained an official letter of complaint alleging that a teacher 'expressed his desire to purchase t-shirts with cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad as a way to challenge Muslims who are offended'. In Brighton, a playground incident was reported in which a Muslim student was singled out and targeted by other students who labelled him 'Charlie'. In a separate incident at the same Brighton school, the local authority investigated allegations that a teacher held up a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad inspired by the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons and began mocking it, causing offence to a young Muslim pupil. The pupil also asserted that the same teacher had argued that the cartoons should be 'promoted' widely to 'reduce the level of offence' (Tell MAMA 2015b).

Following a spate of bullying, a male Muslim pupil experienced multiple incidents of bullying which included the slurs 'paki' and 'bomb'. It culminated with an alleged death threat that resulted in a police investigation. The verbal bullying then increased and another student made an accusatory reference to 9/11 (Tell MAMA 2015b).

On an anecdotal and street-based level, some of the cases reported to Tell MAMA highlight a growing frustration among young Muslims who perceive an added burden of responsibility to condemn acts of terrorism. One service user reported verbal harassment by an individual who had learnt of her Islamic faith. Other Muslims reported hearing the word 'Charlie' shouted in their direction (Tell MAMA 2015b).



In the week following the second Paris atrocity in 2015, on 13 November (the coordinated terrorist attacks at the Stade de France and various cafés and music venues, including the Bataclan Theatre), Tell MAMA staff recorded 115 Islamophobic attacks and incidents, a spike of more than 300 per cent.

While these anti-Islamic reactions indicate an underlying Islamophobia that could be argued to be a potential source of resentment for some, an equally influential issue is that of blasphemy and, specifically, whether it provides a justification for violence. To understand the various strands of Islamic belief regarding this, the next section looks more closely at the main ways that blasphemy is understood in Islamic thought and how it is perceived by ordinary Muslims; in particular, those that extremists might feel compel them to commit violent attacks such as that on *Charlie Hebdo*.

While under siege in the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, shortly before his death, Chérif Kouachi told a French journalist, ‘We are defenders of the Prophet... We took vengeance’ (Lichfield 2015). What is clear from these words is that they chose to avenge perceived blasphemy. There are many different perspectives within Islam concerning what actually constitutes blasphemy in relation to representations of the Prophet Muhammed and figurative art in general. Some consider blasphemy to reside in the insult portrayed in a message or image, while for others the figurative portrayal of the Prophet is, in itself, blasphemous and Islam requires aniconism – the rejection of people and animals in art.

Sheik Ibrahim Mogra, assistant general to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), supports this understanding: ‘Islam in general specifically forbids the usage of imagery, and when it comes to depicting the messenger Muhammad, peace be upon him, that prohibition becomes even more relevant: we are not allowed to depict him in any shape, any way or form’ (Graham-Harrison 2015a).

According to Professor Hugh Goddard, director of the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in Edinburgh, there has been a significant change in the blasphemy debate over the last 300 years (McManus 2015). A key factor in this change was the rise of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1791) who founded the ultra-conservative Wahhabi movement, the dominant form of Sunni Islam practised in Saudi Arabia (Esposito n.d.a). Wahhabism proclaims a strict understanding of *tawhid* (the doctrine

of the uniqueness and unity of God) and consequently it specifically rejects (sometimes with violence) the popular cult of saints, idolatry, and shrine and tomb visitation (Esposito n.d.b). The concept of *tawhid*, a key tenet of all schools of Islam, can also be applied as forbidding the creation of any images of God, or of the Prophet Muhammad.

Others highlight that there is no direct ruling against depictions of the Prophet in the Qur'an; rather, they point out that the idea arose from the Hadith literature – a collection of reports of the approved words and deeds of the Prophet in their totality (McManus 2015). Omid Safi, director of the Islamic Studies Centre at Duke University in North Carolina, points to a rich tradition of pietistic depictions of Muhammad. Similarly, according to Safi, over the past thousand years, Muslims in different parts of the world depicted prophets, including Muhammad, in miniatures. Artists decorated these miniatures with Qur'anic verses and the biography of Muhammad's life. A common compromise between the two approaches involved figural images in secular or private spaces but not in a religious setting. Small-scale art was considered to help individuals in private worship (Safi 2010).

Dr Taha Jaber al-Alwani (1935–2016), former President of Cordoba University in the US, supported this, noting that there is no single text in the Qur'an that asserts that the making or possessing of images is 'forbidden' but that study of Hadith reveals Muhammad's disdain for images – although he suggests that this may be more concerned with idol worship than portrayal of the Prophet (al-Alwani n.d.).

Jonathan A.C. Brown, author and Associate Director at Georgetown's Center for Muslim–Christian Understanding, notes that depictions of the Prophet appeared in Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and India between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some art kept Muhammad's face behind a veil; some did not (Brown 2011). Yet, in the courts of the Ottoman Turks, Indian Muslims, and the Safavid Persians, these works of art were considered a private, not a public matter. This position only reversed once the artworks entered museums (Klausen 2009).

Classical Shar'ia contains grey areas for the whole spectrum of 'blasphemy', whether in image or text form. The above has focused on the pictorial dimension of blasphemy; however, any perceived insult to Muhammad also falls under this category. For instance, in medieval

Islamic law, non-Muslims could devalue the Prophet in a manner consistent with their faith. A Christian could remark that Jesus was their prophet, not Muhammad; yet, to deny that Muhammad was a prophet, or that he received revelation, invoked death. In this context and period of history, such an assertion violated *ahd al-dhimma* (the pact of protection) (Safran 2013).

Whether the offence lies in the image itself or in an intended insult, the reaction depends not only on the form of blasphemy perceived but also on the various responses to it – including legal action, self-censorship and vengeance. The rest of this section considers the discursive context in which the Kouachi brothers chose violence as a response.

Prominent Islamic scholar, Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, explains that we may expect a violent response to what many consider to be insulting behaviour:

For Muslims, the Prophet reminded us, ‘None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than his own parents.’ Hence, to slander our Prophet is a greater injury than an attack on our mothers. If the Pope will punch someone, even his close friend, should he insult his mother, then what are we to expect from uneducated and volatile street urchins with the same sense of honor? (Sandala 2015)

The latter part of his quotation refers to comments made by Pope Francis: ‘curse my mother, expect a punch’, in response to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. Yusuf brings the sociodemographic dimension into the question of retaliatory action. Yusuf also makes clear, however, that no reasonable legal system (Islamic or otherwise) supports retaliatory murder. Cambridge academic, Tim Winter (also known as Abdal Hakim Murad), also stated in 2006 that there is ‘no consistent tradition in classical Islamic law which specifies a penalty for Muslims or non-Muslims who portray the Prophet’ (Winter 2006).

On the other hand, a 2012 study by the Pew Research Center found that 22 per cent of countries and territories (both Muslim and non-Muslim majorities) had anti-blasphemy laws or policies, with punishment for legal transgressions ranging from fines to the death penalty (Theodorou 2014). For example, Pakistan’s blasphemy laws carry a possible death sentence, which dates back to colonial rule. Between 1980 and 1986, the dictator General Zia-ul-Haq strengthened these laws with an Islamic bias so as to legally separate

the Ahmadiya community from the mainly Sunni and Shi'a Muslim population, declaring them to be non-Muslim in 1974. The stigma attached to this law can mean violent reprisals from hardliners. Moreover, individuals often politicize the law for personal gain or the settling of old scores (BBC News 2014).

The caricatures of the Prophet, regardless of satirical intention, did cause great offence. While framing the blasphemy debate within the boundaries of free speech, Winter states that the 'scabrous and comedic' depiction of the Prophet is, for him, 'a violent act surely conscious of its capacity to cause distress, ratchet up prejudice and damage social cohesion' (Murad 2015). The BBC polled 1000 British Muslims after the Paris atrocities. A vast majority (78 per cent) took deep personal offence at the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet. However, 68 per cent said such an offence could never justify a violent response and 85 per cent thought that organizations publishing cartoons of the Prophet did not deserve to be attacked (ComRes 2015).

In relation to the legal context, the same poll found that 93 per cent thought Muslims should obey British law (ComRes 2015). Consequently, since Britain abolished its blasphemy law in 2008, a legal response to blasphemy is out of the question in the United Kingdom, as it is in France (Beckford 2008).

Thus, while many were insulted by the cartoons, this survey indicates that the majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom did not support a violent response. However, the lack of legal redress must cause considerable anxiety, if not a sense of alienation. So why is it that a minority turn to a violent solution? And how can we distinguish them from law-abiding citizens before they undertake violent actions?

While the status of blasphemy within Islam is subject to a number of different interpretations, the Kouachi brothers believed they were acting in the interests of their faith. This was not so perceived by the vast majority of Muslims, and the atrocities in Paris were immediately followed by widespread condemnation from all corners of the Muslim world, alongside attempts to disassociate Islam from the actions of the Kouachi brothers. The Al Azhar University in Cairo, the most prestigious centre of learning in Sunni Islam, condemned the 'criminal act' and said that 'Islam denounces any violence' in statements picked up in Egyptian media. The Arab League also condemned the

atrocities. Iran, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Indonesia all issued similar statements; countries including Iran also condemned the caricature of Muhammad published in response to the shootings.

In some circles, the events surrounding the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings re-energized calls for 'moderate' Muslims to root out (potentially violent) extremists in their midst; merely publicly condemning the attacks was not viewed as sufficient. On 9 January, media mogul, Rupert Murdoch, tweeted: 'Maybe most Moslems [are] peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing Jihadist cancer they must be held responsible' (Murdoch 2015). Muslims and non-Muslims then also took to Twitter to challenge this narrative.

However, as noted by Dan Murphy, a veteran Middle East journalist, Muslims who seek out violence often fall into disagreements with their own communities and leave their mosques, consequently making it difficult for other Muslims to identify them because they have already distanced themselves from their faith community (Murphy 2015).

The Islamic Society of Boston's Cultural Center revealed that Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who attacked the Boston Marathon runners with his brother Dzhokhar in 2013, had previously had two outbursts. During a sermon that included praise for Martin Luther King Jr, Tsarnaev shouted out, calling the imam a 'non-believer' who was 'contaminating people's minds'. This upset the congregants who disagreed and asked him to leave, which he did (Mulvihill 2013).

Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who murdered Corporal Nathan Cirillo at the National War Memorial in Ottawa in 2014, had previously openly challenged his mosque's inclusive policies (CBC News 2014). After this, staff at the mosque had asked him to pray at a different mosque if he disagreed with the policies. Despite this, he had remained there for a time, even sleeping at the mosque while battling legal issues. When this was discovered he was ordered to leave (*Dallas Morning News* 2014).

Mohammed Benali, who runs the mosque in Gennevilliers, near Chérif Kouachi's Paris apartment, said the brothers attended Friday prayers, 'not assiduously but regularly'. Benali told *Le Figaro* that he knew Saïd Kouachi better than Chérif, although Saïd had 'not set foot in the mosque in two years'. He also recalled an incident where Chérif Kouachi caused problems at the mosque after Benali advocated voting in the French elections; Benali commented, 'For

these lunatics, when we practise and teach moderate Islam – actual Islam – we’re non-believers’ (Martinez, Mullen and Levs 2015).

## THE TRAJECTORY TOWARDS TERRORISM

The vast majority of Muslims already abhor the terror created by groups like the so-called Islamic State, and individuals drawn to their violent messages already overwhelmingly attract criticism and condemnation. Rather than lack of control by the Muslim community, such individuals’ worldviews can in part be understood in terms of Olivier Roy’s concept of neo-fundamentalism. Roy posits neo-fundamentalism as a fusion of ‘technical modernism, deculturization, the rejection of both traditional Muslim and modern Western cultures, and globalization’ (Daudazam 2013). Thus, it reflects the methods, aims and influences that are known to be associated with extremist activity and so functions like other forms of fundamentalism where individuals believe their version of faith is the most ‘authentic’ and, as such, offers little room for alternative viewpoints.

To enter this universe, according to Roy, is to re-imagine religion through the lens of violent individuals’ personal experiences. These often incorporate the loss of cultural identity, isolation, and the rupturing of social and family ties (Roy 2007). Furthermore, their religious identity places emphasis on a set of codes and values rather than theology. Neo-fundamentalists champion the transnational Ummah, which seeks to address the crisis of identity for Muslims who cannot identify with any given culture or nation. The loss of these cultural barriers then creates a justification for a concept of a universalized Islam. For Roy, global Islamic-inspired terrorism stems from these anxieties as well as from interactions between Islam and the West (Roy 2015).

Farhad Khosrokhavar, from the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris, notes that elements of Islamist ideology inspire a similar utopianism towards Islam as middle-class leftist youth held towards communism in the middle of the twentieth century (Khosrokhavar 2010). He argues that the pathway towards political violence takes four steps:

Alienation from the dominant culture, thanks partly to joblessness and discrimination in blighted neighborhoods; a turn to petty crime, which leads to prison, and then more crime and more prison; religious awakening and radicalization; and an initiatory journey to a Muslim country like Syria, Afghanistan or Yemen to train for Jihad. (Khosrokhavar 2015)

Khosrokhavar argues that criminals such as Amedy Coulibaly, who shot dead a policewoman and four Jews in the second Paris atrocity in 2015, are likely to have embraced extremism when in prison (Astier 2015). He attributes prison radicalization to three factors: overcrowding, understaffing, and high turnover of staff and prisoners (Khosrokhavar 2013). Khosrokhavar argues that young French Muslims in deprived areas adopt Jihad to justify their hatred of society. For the most part, this occurs in prisons and many following this approach lack a basic understanding of Islam (Burgis 2015). Furthermore, a lack of prison imams can compound this lack of positive religious influence and guidance (Astier 2015).

Around 60 per cent of France's prison population of 70,000 have Muslim origins. The growth of Islam in French prisons is in part due to what Silverstein describes as the localized characterization of Islam as a religion of protest. This, in turn, draws on broader French political and media characterizations that depict Muslims as intrinsically homophobic, anti-Semitic, sexist and culturally violent (Shryock 2010).

The Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly are known to have been part of the 'Buttes-Chaumont network' that helped send radicalized French youth to fight Western forces in Iraq in the early 2000s (Shryock 2010). In 2013, Coulibaly received a five-year prison sentence for his role in the prison break-out of Smain Ali Belkacem, a former member of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group and mastermind of the 1995 Paris Metro bombing that killed eight people and wounded 117. Coulibaly, however, would serve just one year of this prison sentence since he was viewed as a 'model' inmate (Chrisafis 2015). Meanwhile, the Kouachi brothers escaped a prison sentence altogether for their part in the break-out, due to insufficient evidence. Two days after the murder of *Charlie Hebdo* staff, Coulibaly shot four Jewish shoppers at a Paris kosher store (Samuel 2015a).

Court papers revealed that in 2007, Chérif Kouachi wanted ‘to go and combat the Americans’. In a deposition, he stated, ‘I got this idea when I saw the injustices shown by television on what was going on over there. I am speaking about the torture that the Americans have inflicted on the Iraqis’ (Martinez *et al.* 2015). In 2008, the radical imam, Farid Benyettou, and Chérif Kouachi found themselves in prison after police broke up the network. Chérif also spent time in prison from January 2005 to October 2006 after police arrested him on a plane bound for Syria (BBC News 2015b).

Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly also bonded with Djamel Beghal when in prison. Beghal was jailed in 2001 for plotting to blow up the US embassy in Paris. According to Jean-Charles Brisard, former counsel to France’s chief anti-terrorism prosecutor, Beghal educated both men about Islam and Jihad; however, Beghal denies any links to the Paris atrocities (Burgis 2015).

For Chérif Kouachi, the path towards extremism was also in part due to the influence of Benyettou, from whom Chérif learnt how to wield Kalashnikovs. Prior to this association, Chérif had not considered himself a ‘good enough’ Muslim as he rarely visited a mosque and smoked cannabis (Bronstein 2015). In a 2005 documentary, *Pièces à Conviction*, which aired on the public television channel, France 3, Chérif discussed Benyettou’s influence: ‘Farid told me that the scriptures offered proof of the goodness of suicide attacks. It is written in the scriptures that it’s good to die a martyr.’ The documentary claimed that it took Benyettou a matter of months to radicalize Chérif Kouachi (Channel 4 News 2015b).

The Kouachi brothers’ trajectory highlights the influences that contribute to disaffected individuals becoming radicalized into terrorism. However, the trajectory into terrorism is not a linear process as asserted by those supporting ‘conveyor belt’ theories of radicalization; according to these, individuals who have adopted a radical/extremist ideology follow a direct course into terrorism. However, this can be better understood in the light of more complex conceptualizations that take into account individuals’ specific psychological makeup (Kundnani 2015). Clearly, each individual has numerous personal reasons to be susceptible to these influences. For instance, the woman who supported the Kouachi brothers when they were growing up spoke of their personal trauma following their mother’s suicide and suggested that Chérif found the family



he lacked in religious fanaticism (Samuel 2015b). Moreover, the fact that others with an Algerian background take a very different course challenges the polarized view of Islamophobia and extremism, as made poignantly clear in the case of Ahmed Merabet.

As well as murdering *Charlie Hebdo* staff members, the editor's bodyguard and the caretaker, the Kouachi brothers also gunned down and killed a policeman named Ahmed Merabet. In relation to this, it is worth noting that, while it is well documented that the main victims of Muslim violence are Muslims themselves,<sup>2</sup> most Western media all but ignore this – and so help to perpetuate the binary oppositions. Being connected with such a high-profile incident in the West, Merabet's death is significant because it introduced a counter-narrative involving a Muslim victim which could not be dismissed by the mainstream Western media. Indeed, the Kouachi brothers and Merabet are all of Algerian descent – but their paths in life are otherwise completely dissimilar. Little is known of the older Kouachi brother after his mother's death but Chérif is known to have grown up in various orphanages in Rennes, in western France. However, by the early 2000s, he had moved in with his brother near Paris and worked as a pizza delivery man (Beckford 2008).

Ahmed Merabet, on the other hand, had spent eight years as a policeman and had qualified as a detective just before his death. Colleagues described him as quiet and conscientious (Penketh 2015). Friends remembered him as a 'straightforward, modest, super kind and adorable' man. He planned to get married in the summer and start a family (Watt and Gardner 2015).

In the British press, Merabet's murder was framed in contradictory terms. On 8 January, the *Sun's* front-page headline read 'NON! A policeman is murdered in cold blood for defending free speech. This evil in the name of Islam MUST STOP'. Merabet's body dominates the page – but missing from the headline is his shared Islamic faith, which was only mentioned in the second sentence in a smaller text box (Chakelian 2015). A day later, the *Daily Star's* front-page headline read 'Hero Muslim cop executed by terror brothers' (Henderson 2015).

The story of Ahmed Merabet's life and subsequent murder created its own counter-narrative and, as news of Merabet's faith spread, the hashtag #JeSuisAhmed trended in solidarity. The user @Aboujahjah tweeted: 'I am not Charlie, I am Ahmed the dead cop. Charlie

ridiculed my faith and culture and I died defending his right to do so' (Jahjah 2015).

Days later Merabet's family held an emotional press conference attended by members of his family (Sabin 2015). Ahmed's brother, Malek, pleaded for tolerance; a rejection of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment and of antisemitism – and condemned the murderous 'false Muslims'. He continued:

Islam is a religion of peace and love. As far as my brother's death is concerned it was a waste. He was very proud of the name Ahmed Merabet, proud to represent the police and of defending the values of the Republic – liberty, equality, fraternity. (Graham-Harrison 2015b)

## CONCLUSION: THE AMMAN MESSAGE AS A WAY FORWARD

When one considers the above, a number of issues become clear: in particular, that violent extremism within radicalized Islamic youth in Europe is a product of a variety of prevailing discourses based on narratives of simplistic binaries. Furthermore, Islam remains a decentralized faith without an overarching legal system or pivotal religious figure to regulate what constitutes a 'true' expression of Islamic faith (see Chapter 1).

Beyond these points, the Paris atrocities provoked a general interest regarding Islam, both in France and Europe. An initiative that can be employed to build on this interest can help shape the debate about Islam and combat some of the drivers of violent fundamentalism and Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment. In particular, the Amman Message, as an initiative that emerged from Jordan in recent years, can help address many of the issues associated with the regulation of orthodox Islam. Though published in 2004, it is still relevant over a decade later. The Amman Message and its accompanying Three Points offer guidance – based on scripture – as to the true nature of Islam, responding to many misconceptions about Islam within and external to the Islamic community. In the 'Frequently Asked Questions' accompanying the Message, it is explained that:

The Amman Message is merely a concrete restatement and crystallization of the common principles of traditional, orthodox,

‘moderate Islam’ – in all its traditional schools of thought and law – the Islam to which over the vast, overwhelming majority of the world’s approximately 1.4 billion Muslims belong.

Thus, in some ways, the Message reasserts the fundamentals of Islam, as it reminds readers, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, that ‘Islam is a religion revealed by God, and therefore not changeable by man’ (Amman Message 2007).

This message also calls to mind that ‘the primordial religion of Islam is founded upon equanimity, balance, moderation, and facilitation’; Islam, as a religion, recognizes and values human life. The Amman Message reiterates that the nobility of Islam ‘can only be defended in ways that are ethical’, thus disavowing the terrorism of the Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly.

The Three Points extrapolated from the Message provide a broad definition of who can be considered a Muslim, stating that alongside ‘true’ Salafism and Sufism:

Equally, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare as apostates any other group of Muslims who believes in God, Glorified and Exalted be He, and His Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him), the pillars of faith (Iman), and the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-evident tenet of religion. (Amman Message 2004a)

Accepting that a minority of Muslims interpret Qur’anic scripture as encouraging violence does not require an Islamic reformation. The Amman Message denounces terrorism on religious and moral grounds, asserting that it ‘transgresses the rulings of God’ and threatens the security of the innocent. The paragraph ends with the Qur’anic verse: *Do not kill the soul that God has made sacrosanct, save for justice* (6:151) (Amman Message 2004b).

The Three Points also makes a clear statement concerning declarations of apostasy: namely, that they are neither permissible nor possible. The religious experience comes from practice and cultural norms. How faith is defined will vary from one person to the next. A person will not always adhere to a religious text as if it were an instruction manual. Indeed, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi were men of faith. And the Amman Message warns against labelling others apostates or ‘fake Muslims’. In the case of the Kouachi brothers, the

apostates were those who had committed blasphemy against Islam through insulting its Prophet.

Extremists such as Laban and Farid Benyettou exploited sensitivities regarding depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. Chérif and Saïd murdered in revenge and defence of their interpretation of Islam. A great number of Muslims took offence and felt humiliated at this form of blasphemy perceived in the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons but would never follow their example. However, the brothers transformed broader feelings of anger and humiliation into murderous violence.

For Fathali Moghaddam, a professor of psychology at Georgetown University, modern Islamic terrorist groups frame grievances through radical interpretations of faith. In part, this framing concerns narrative and who defines the 'correct' interpretation of Islam. In this context, religion becomes the most basic form of identity. When this identity comes under threat, violence becomes a tool to protect dignity and prove strength. This pathway involves a complex process but, in essence, it remains contingent on entrenching a divisive 'us versus them' mentality (Moghaddam 2005). Although Moghaddam's theory is situated within the contested space of linear 'conveyor belt' theories, it remains a useful guide to understand how terrorists come to offer simplistic narratives and solutions to perceived grievances. Kundnani (2015) posits that linear terrorism theories stipulate that religious ideologies turn individuals into terrorists.

The so-called Islamic State follow a similar pattern to this. Although most Muslims abhor their violent totalitarianism, the idea of a caliphate – a political entity governed by Islamic law and tradition – resonates with many ordinary Muslims (Hamid 2014). The so-called Islamic State consolidates some parts of this support through a sense of anger and humiliation at what it considers to be a great civilizational decline.

While the Amman Message provides a corrective narrative, it would be ineffectual if only directed at this group of self-selective extremists. Their proscriptive view of Islam regards outsiders as apostates. Nor would it be useful for the Message to aim it solely at individuals who claim that if enough Muslims condemn loud enough it will reduce extremism.

Rather, the Message will have greatest impact if it is also and primarily aimed at the middle ground. Some within that space have a desire for answers – and this can also bring non-Muslims closer

to an understanding of Islam. In doing so, it can provide a possible framework for addressing the issue of Islamic identity.

After all, the Amman Message and its Three Points were signed by over 500 leading Islamic scholars and authority figures, and ratified by a number of Islamic councils. Properly utilized, they can provide guidance and also set boundaries for regulating and distinguishing between the various expressions of Islamic faith. Moreover, the Three Points could be strengthened. For instance, they seek to define 'real' Sufism and 'true' Salafism, yet make no clear distinction. To reach its desired audiences, this distinction needs clear explanation. The same would also apply to 'correct' *fatwas*. What is a 'self-evident tenet of religion'? If the Amman Message intends to achieve its aims, it must answer such questions since, while religious guidance has the power to enrich and educate, to do so it needs to provide a clear understanding of such significant issues.

The fear of collective (or individual) humiliation is a powerful tool for violent extremists to exploit by framing the debate in simplistic binaries. A pursuit of indiscriminate violence is motivated by aspirations towards their interpretation of a utopian society which they aim to define by purging antithetical elements. In the case of *Charlie Hebdo*, those insulting the Prophet were antithetical to the 'correct' behaviour and so, according to this viewpoint, must be humiliated and avenged.

The events of *Charlie Hebdo* raise many questions that relate both to the ongoing debate regarding freedom of speech versus respect for religious beliefs and to questions regarding extremism and Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment, particularly in the French context. In particular, the murder of the Muslim police officer after the *Hebdo* attack brought an important new dimension into a polarized discussion.

The above discussion highlights a variety of narratives about religious and cultural co-existence in Western Europe. On one hand, there is the issue of the violent expression of radical Islam and, on the other hand, rising Islamophobia/anti-Muslim sentiment. These contested spaces represent a common search for identity amid different and dangerous forms of expression. Some in society will always reject dialogue and constructive or conciliatory narratives. Those with access to weapons will on occasion act upon them. However, in the interests of social cohesion and building a common future, initiatives such

as the Amman Message can pave a way forward through providing guidance in a true understanding of Islam and, in the words of King Abdullah II:

to take back our religion from the vocal, violent, and ignorant extremists who have tried to hijack Islam over the last hundred years. They do not speak for Islam any more than a Christian terrorist speaks for Christianity and the real voices of our faiths will be and must be heard. (Cooperman 2005)

## NOTES

1. This was a result of the territory being annexed by Germany between 1871 and 1918. During this period significant changes were made to France's penal code while Alsace-Moselle preserved laws that were considered to be beneficial to the territory, and were in existence prior to 1871 or implemented under German annexation.
2. In 2013, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism's Global Terrorism Database – a joint government–university programme on terrorism, hosted at the University of Maryland – noted that between 2004 and 2013, about half of all terrorist attacks, and 60 per cent of fatalities due to terrorist attacks, took place in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – all of which have a mostly Muslim population. See [www.globalresearch.ca/muslims-are-the-victims-of-between-82-and-97-of-terrorism-related-fatalities-us-government/5516565](http://www.globalresearch.ca/muslims-are-the-victims-of-between-82-and-97-of-terrorism-related-fatalities-us-government/5516565). See also [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30883058](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30883058).

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# 10

## The Amman Message ‘Other’

Repositioning Identity Politics  
for Dialogue and Justice\*

*Kristin Shamas*

Promoting a ‘common ground’ reason based on dialogue and the pursuit of justice, the Amman Message provides new boundaries for identity politics: it constructs a position from which all people united in their concern for collective responsibility and human survival can mutually contest the destructive fragmentation of religious and political extremism, in whatever form. Thus, as portrayed in the Amman Message, identity politics transcend what Sen (2006) calls the ‘little boxes’ of East versus West and Muslim versus non-Muslim identities in order to restore, as per the Message, ‘delight in human life’ (RABIIT 2004).

In an era of global media saturation, fixed, oppositional identities underpin the sensational media content capable of drawing contemporary audiences. Yet, as described below, dialogue constitutes a necessary precursor to forming identities outside pre-given pockets and categories. Within this paradigm, the Message dialectically constructs a tolerant subject that is ‘respectful’ and dialogic. In this chapter, I consider some implications of dialogic identity in relation to representation and collective empowerment. I question whether the Information Age processes of dialogue might not require a higher level of accountability from information outlets, and I position the Amman Message’s dialogic subject as a starting point for timely

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\* This chapter was originally published in al-Shalabi and al-Khalayleh (2007, pp.25–32).

conversations on media, violence, and what the Message refers to as 'humanity's own good' (RABIIT 2004).

## IDENTITY AND DIALOGUE

Identity construction is strategic, with individuals and collectives constantly assessing and contributing to the symbolic systems in which they are situated (Brunt 1989). As used here, identity is a verb (Bauman 1996). It connotes the relational process by which the subject positions itself /is positioned through language, representation or performativity (Butler 1990; Hall 1996). Besides being strategic, identity also constitutes a potential site of ideological domination: as 'personhood' is constructed through forms of expression, the thoughts and principles setting the codes and meanings of language simultaneously work to shape the construction of the individual subject (Althusser 1994). Thus, identity functions both as a process of being 'acted upon' and as a process of agency.

Contemporary academic writings on identity fall largely into two categories: the 'clash of civilizations' discourses as noted in Sen's comments above, in which the subject is ideologically positioned according to fixed meanings, and theories related to 'hybridity', a creative/productive process in which subjects shift boundaries and signify them with multiple meanings. According to a range of post-colonial writers, hybridity can be the most effective means of individual and collective empowerment as subjects own, re-appropriate and redefine dominant symbols through their construction of self and groups (Achebe 1996; Bhabha 1995; Mudrooroo 1990). Unlike the process of adhering to pre-determined 'little boxes', constructing a hybrid identity is predicated on dialogue and active exchange. Thus, due to its potential to realize new forms of identity, a dialogic subject can herald the undoing of the 'clash of civilizations' paradigm. It is just this undoing with which the Amman Message is primarily concerned. Advocating an embrace of 'the entire sphere of humanity' (RABIIT 2004), the Message seeks to replace division with unity. Arguably, as depicted in the Message, it is the intolerant who are 'othered' outside of 'civilized' realms, rather than the adherents to any particular nation or faith. Yet, while the Message aims to transform the East versus West paradigm, in dealing with contemporary representations of Islam and the pragmatic situation of Muslims in 'modern society', the Message inevitably also confronts the historical trajectory of Oriental–Occidental relations.

## COLONIZATION, REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

In keeping with its pursuit of justice, the Amman Message proclaims a mission to 'ward off Muslim marginalization and isolation in the global movement of human society'. Yet, as Edward Said (2000) revealed, Muslim marginalization extends beyond the realm of the social into various currents of 'modern' human consciousness. Since the Enlightenment, Western scholarship, literature and art have represented an exoticized Muslim/Eastern 'Other' in order to simultaneously construct a 'rational' non-Muslim/Western subject. In doing so, Western representations of 'the Orient' have (re)produced imperial power by justifying the colonization of supposedly uncivilized, non-Western groups. Said and other post-colonial scholars describe how such representational practices have deeply affected the identities of both 'Western' and 'Eastern' subjects: constructed as dialectical counterparts, they each depend on the other for distinction. Thus, both identities incorporate the prevalent, functioning ideologies of domination (i.e. civilized/uncivilized, rational/irrational, modern/non-modern) that arose from the colonial/imperial situation. Fortunately, post-colonial philosophy and theories have highlighted the myriad ways in which self-articulation can displace inherited, oppressive identities. Both Frantz Fanon (1963) and Jean Paul Sartre (1961) demonstrated processes of self-representation to be a means of (re)centring the marginalized. Fanon, elaborating on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical distinction between the Real and the Symbolic, wrote that colonial authority is undermined by not being able to replicate itself perfectly in the act of representation. Fanon named this gap between the Real and the Symbolic as a site of resistance, and described how, through processes of representation, the colonized subject consciously shifts away from the colonizer's oppressive positioning/depictions. In the process, a psychological ambivalence is produced as 'an utterly naked declivity from which an authentic upheaval can be born' (Fanon 1967, p.8). In Sartrean terms, it is a movement away from ideological alienation or 'false consciousness' towards the freedom to choose how to be.

The very existence of the Amman Message reveals that Orientalist thought can be challenged. The Message comprises a textual representation of Muslims by Muslims that seeks to re-rationalize and re-centralize Muslim subjects. Besides inherently addressing the

need for Muslim self-representation, the Message explicitly calls on Muslims to participate in 'the communication revolution' (RABIIT 2004). Emphasizing dialogue, the Message advocates a global sharing of knowledge and experience through media and technology. Thus, the Message acknowledges and promotes the essential role of dialogic communication in the formation of a collective, transnational civil society.

Due to the post-colonial emphasis on self-articulation as a defence against marginalization, the Information Age has heralded the conceptualization of communication as a basic human right. Various global movements and activists are promoting the 'right to communicate' as both a right to information access and a right to means of self-representation (World Forum on Communication 2003). Yet, as described earlier, information gathering and self-articulation constitute processes of ideological domination when enacted by the intolerant other. Therefore, in an effort to confront and transform the historically perpetuated Oriental/Occidental divide, the Amman Message frames media and communication within the context of tolerance and dialogue. It advocates a 'sound' and reasoned use of information and communication technologies for the pursuit of justice and collective good.

## MEDIA JUSTICE

A similar impulse to situate media and communication issues within the context of history and power led to the recent formation of the Media Justice movement in the United States. Born out of the fragmentation of US society, Media Justice reflects the demand of marginalized communities for the physical, structural and symbolic violence to which they are subjected to be articulated rather than suppressed. A key assumption of Media Justice is that in the twenty-first century, social justice and media/communication are deeply intertwined. As asserted on the Media Justice website:

Why Media Justice? Media Justice speaks to the need to go beyond creating greater access to the same old media structure. We are interested in more than access, more than rights, more than taking up space in one more cyber car along the corporate information highway. Media Justice takes into account history, culture, privilege

and power. We seek new relationships with media and a new vision for its control, access, and structure. (Center for Media Justice 2006)

Similarly, by extending the realm of discourse from the right to communicate to broader issues related to history, representation and power, the Message's dialogic subject can provide a starting point for two particularly salient discussions related to contemporary Muslim/non-Muslim relations: (1) What constitutes professional standards of media 'objectivity', and (2) How can media best serve the public interest when covering violence? While analysis of such issues rests outside the scope of this chapter, I will conclude by positioning each point for future elaboration in terms of the dialogic subject:

1. Through examining literature, art, philosophy and media, Edward Said demonstrated that knowledge produced by individuals embedded in a colonial relationship can never be 'objective', as both subjects are engaged in constructing 'the other'. However, the continued dominance of Western, 'rational', neoliberal standards of journalism has foreclosed any interrogation of 'objectivity' as a process of ideological domination that suppresses dialogic speaking/agency.
2. As an intentionally destructive force, violence 'unmakes the world' for both its victims and witnesses (Nordstrom 1995, p.138). It not only interrupts the process by which the subject is constructed, it also interrupts the realm of the intersubjective, where individual subjectivities are performed and recognized (Jackson 2002). Thus violence redefines the subject and interrupts its interpersonal relations. Through processes of narration, however, victims and witnesses of violence remake themselves from someone who is acted upon to someone who acts (Das and Kleinman 2001; Jackson 2002). In other words, they remake their world. We should therefore broaden our definition of 'collective empowerment' to include the sharing of experiences of suffering. Such dialogic 'subjectivity' disempowers the forces of violence and emphasizes humans and their interrelations: a necessary first step to (re)constructing society on the basis of justice and collective good.



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# 11

## Looking Forward

An Impossible Road?

*Mike Hardy, Fiyaz Mughal  
and Sarah Markiewicz*

At the time of editing, in the summer of 2016, when a Catholic priest in Normandy has recently been murdered by disaffected young North African men who have digested a toxic view of the world, laced with extremist rhetoric, the Amman Message has never been more relevant. Indeed, it is ideally placed to make positive and constructive contributions to discussions concerning how European society can work towards a more peaceful and more stable future.

There are many barriers that must be overcome to ensure that the Amman Message and its Three Points become influential forces within the European context and help promote both a pluralism and harmony that appear to be absent in our turbulent times. Dangerous narratives intentionally seeking to contradict the view that Islam is part of Europe's culture and identity are evident on all sides, and these actively espouse an understanding of Muslims as standing apart from other communities in European society. These barriers are not insurmountable, though in this volume we have highlighted some that must be seriously engaged with, which will form the basis of work to be undertaken in communities in the future. Both initiatives can be seen as potential dialogue tools able to act as a counterbalance to the many and recurrent instances of extremist violence so often perpetrated in the name of Islam. In doing so, they present an alternative image of a generous, accommodating and forgiving faith that can counter those who would portray Islam as an enemy to them and their way of life.

It seems that too many of Europe's Muslims feel isolated from the mainstream of European societies, and a few who feel especially disaffected search for a sense of belonging outside of the way of life they find in Europe, for instance in a more radical form of Islam. So, a key issue is that of the identity of Muslim individuals in Europe and, indeed, the identity of Muslim communities in general. These are not separate nor constitute a unique community distinct from other Europeans, whether of faith or no-faith. They are an integral part of communities and societies within Europe today and will contribute to the shaping of Europe's future economic, social and civil society.

Moreover, this influence will increase since projections indicate that the Muslim proportion of Europe's total population is likely to grow by 50 per cent by 2030 (to become 8 per cent of Europe's population). In addition, Muslims in Europe are, on the whole, younger than those without religious affiliation, with a median age of 32 compared with 40, and a large proportion are still in their teens or younger (Pew Research Center 2011). It is young people, being in their vulnerable and formative years and often lacking access to adequate religious education at school, who seek quick and accessible theological, pastoral and religious support within Islam and access this in multi-media forms, including the internet. What could be a clear and helpful journey for knowledge and understanding is problematized by the many anti-Muslim websites and others that publish malicious and inflammatory, often false, information about Islam, or that have no understanding of the specific context of Muslim communities in Europe. This reinforces feelings of ostracism and social rejection. Equally as problematic is the advanced online presence of sites promoting the cause of violent ideologies.

Offering a counter-narrative is difficult when overall knowledge and understanding is limited. This is exacerbated when contrary views (about Jihad, apostasy and sectarian divides) are propagated by those with different agendas or by those, such as the broadcast, print and social media, who are uncomfortable with acknowledging the role and importance of faith in almost every aspect of life. Added to this is the difficulty of creating a convincing counter-narrative due to Islam having no central authority, so that it is often one person's word against another's. This reinforces the importance of the consensus gained on the Amman Message and its Three Points (see Chapter One), meaning that it is not only mainstream, it is also credible.

Other key barriers are the contemporary (real and felt) fault lines within and between Muslim communities as well as the spread in 'civilizational' discourse, one popular expression of which is the notion of Islam's inherent incompatibility with life in the West. This means more than establishing bridges between the past and the present, and even between communities; we also need to engage with the myths and fantasies that inform perceptions and impact upon how Muslims and Islam are viewed.

## BREAKING DOWN MISCONCEPTIONS

In today's world, authentic and modern contextual resources that are seen to come from the heart of Muslim-majority countries are a rarity. The Amman Message helps to fill this void and provides a rich and easily accessible information source to Muslims, regarding how intra-Muslim pluralism, freedom of thought and opinion, and other faiths sit within Islamic theology. It also provides a resource for the social media generation whereby the inspirational content within the Amman Message and its Three Points can be circulated to capture the attention of young Muslims and direct them to the 'message behind the Message' about the true qualities of Islamic teachings and values. This potential has not been adequately highlighted in Europe but it is a vital resource for breaking down misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in Europe at a time when Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attacks are increasing.

Furthermore, at a time when there is a rise in populist politics in Europe that seeks to present migrants, asylum seekers, Roma, Sinti, other minority communities and Muslims in a perversely negative light, the Amman Message and its Three Points can provide a tool for Muslims, both in the Middle East and within Europe, to reach out to other communities. The text of the Amman Message, its Three Points and its legitimacy due to the associated consensus among Muslim authority figures and scholars can make a real impact in the hearts and minds of Muslims across the globe. Added to this is its ability to provide encouragement to counter hatred through dialogue, self-reflection, patience and persistence and its strong reminder of the long tradition within Islam of dialogue and engagement, which is the polar opposite of the violence enacted in its name or some of the Islamophobic myths in circulation.

This also means that the Amman Message has potential as a resource to overcome many contemporary challenges, including supporting social cohesion and integration between Muslim and wider non-Muslim communities, while tackling narratives of extremism by removing the legitimacy of physical violence and undermining notions of 'us and them'. By distancing these narratives from those associated with Islam and Islamic tradition, the Message highlights the 'middle way' of moderation between extreme positions as the only way for Muslims to ensure co-existence and mutual dependency with other communities in the future. For non-Muslim communities it provides an accessible source of information about Islam, quite often in a local language (see Chapter 1), which will, it is hoped, act as a counterweight to polarized accounts about Islam.

Such noble notions promoted by the Amman Message mean that initiatives such as by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 – where cartoonists were asked to draw Muhammad as they saw him (see Chapter 9) and which resulted in an international scandal and over 100 deaths – are not interpreted through the prism of antagonism and do not incite a response of anger, intimidation and violence. Instead, the Amman Message promotes engagement, discussion and education as tools that can change the heavy hearts of men and women who turn against Islam and Muslims, while reframing resilience within Muslims away from a response motivated by anger, impulsiveness and hatred. 'Draw Muhammad' cartoons can then become an opportunity for dialogue instead of points of division, and so can provide an opportunity for Muslims to reach out to others and to highlight the true roots of Islam as outlined within the Message. As Christine Seeberg demonstrated in Chapter 8, the Amman Message can also be used as a dialogue tool to help deepen theological understanding between and awareness of different faiths. This is an important dimension to keep in mind as religion is still a significant social factor in Europe and certainly in the Middle East. Worldwide over 80 per cent of people profess a religious affiliation. Interfaith dialogue can also help in transitioning from a position of tolerance towards the other to one of appreciation, where the common heritage and values are highlighted.

It is also clear that the Amman Message offers the opportunity for local populations in Europe to draw out key messages that may be contextually relevant for them. For example, for minority

Muslim communities in non-Muslim majority countries in Europe, the Message provides a basis for thinking about integration while also actively challenging extremism within a theological framework that provides clarity and focus. It also underscores the sanctity of the individual and one-to-one relationships with God, which breaks down 'groupthink' through stimulating believers into exploring their relationships with their faith within their communities. It is 'groupthink' that is potentially at the heart of the grooming of young men by charismatic radicalizers who have access to their hearts and minds. By reinforcing religious understanding, the Message helps to discredit those who seek to divide and promote hatred and extremism, and undermines their ability to influence others, while it also supports resilience against them.

## SHARED VALUES

The Amman Message was conceived in response to the brutal Beslan massacre in September 2004. Realizing that such terrorism struck at the heart of communities, at cultural and community relations and at the moral basis of Islam, Jordan's King Abdullah II spoke out and instigated the coming together of Muslim scholars to produce a 'media friendly declaration' for Muslims and for the world. Even in these first steps, King Abdullah II realized the power of mass media and the need to ensure that the message was effectively disseminated. He further recognized that Islamic values had to be framed in a way that would give the message appeal and make it accessible to non-Muslims and, in doing so, could pave the way towards better relationships between people, built on mutual understanding and shared values. The Amman Message provides an opportunity for these values to be explored much more deeply.

Given that much of the current debate within policy-making circles is about shared values, the exploration of these from an Islamic perspective, as a specific form of the universal values that are shared within Europe, means that the future does not have to be based on pessimism or an inevitable 'clash of cultures'. Such fatalism contrasts with the deeply nuanced and reflective essence and text of the Amman Message, which provides hope rather than despair and points to dialogue instead of conflict or extremism.

## INCLUSION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Notions of inclusion and identity go side by side and much work has been done on the links between identity – or the lack of identity – and feelings of alienation and exclusion. It is these feelings of alienation and exclusion that so deeply affect our capabilities for co-existence and sense of belonging, and through which people may develop a sense of detachment from their local communities, their jobs and even their relatives.

Identity and extremism also are linked together in many ways and at the core of the Amman Message are two key social issues that relate to these: those of inclusion and extremism – since a failure in the former may lead to the prevalence of the latter. However, the Message comes into its own in both these areas by framing elements of identity through an Islamic perspective. In doing so, the Amman Message draws on a more fluid and less rigid Islamic identity than that promulgated by extremists and much of the media. Through its holistic perspective, the text provides the reader with a deeper insight into Islamic values and offers regular opportunities for self-reflection on what it means to be a Muslim in today's world. This is one of the greatest strengths that the Amman Message has: its ability to facilitate the reader in framing their understanding of Muslim identity through awareness of pluralism, change, modernity, and consensus in a very powerful counter-narrative. It may well be that we must take this power and apply it within whatever small spheres of influence we each have – in communities, schools and on campuses, for example – by thinking and acting with clarity to promote religious literacy; or by working across generations to enhance the skills and understanding needed for more resilient communities.

There is a growing body of research that focuses on the lived experience of people in their everyday lives (Lentin and Titley 2011). Much of this demonstrates that even the most diverse communities develop relatively successful strategies for 'rubbing along' through a process of mutual adaptation. In this, they are helped by a focus on common ground and the shared values referred to above. Along with the Three Points, the Amman Message can be used to show that social interacting across differences can be life-enhancing and enriching. Moreover, by providing more compelling evidence, understanding and clarity about how transferable this practice is to different contexts and places, the mixed communities within Europe

(and beyond) might be more able to put prejudice to one side and promote pluralism in their daily lives.

The policy implications of promoting the Message may then be more about how to help people to build confidence in their sense of belonging and identity within permanently, inevitably and desirably diverse communities. We do not have to resort to publicly celebrating or actively highlighting diversities, nor to promoting a 'permissions' culture where the 'other' is 'tolerated'. Rather, the essential aim of mobilizing the Amman Message with its Three Points is to focus more on learning to live with diversity than in fearing it. This powerful reaffirmation of the 'broad church' of Islam has yet to gain the traction that we all need. However, for the Amman Message to be made accessible and applicable to audiences in Europe, it will need to be championed within civil society groups, faith institutions and other non-governmental agencies. At the very least, as a resource, it warrants being widely read, shared and discussed.

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## Appendix 1

# The Amman Message<sup>1</sup>

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Peace and blessings upon His chosen Prophet, and upon his household, his noble blessed companions, and upon all the messengers and prophets.*

God Almighty has said:

*O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know each other. Truly the most honored of you before God is the most pious of you. (49:13)*

This is a declaration to our brethren in the lands of Islam and throughout the world that Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is proud to issue during the blessed month of Ramadan *in which the Qur'an descended as guidance to humankind and as clarifications for guidance and discernment (2:185).*

In this declaration we speak frankly to the [Islamic] nation, at this difficult juncture in its history, regarding the perils that beset it. We are aware of the challenges confronting the nation, threatening its identity, assailing its tenets (*kalima*), and working to distort its religion and harm what is sacred to it. Today the magnanimous message of Islam faces a vicious attack from those who through distortion and fabrication try to portray Islam as an enemy to them. It is also under attack from some who claim affiliation with Islam and commit irresponsible acts in its name.

This magnanimous message that the Originator – great is His power – revealed to the unlettered Prophet Muhammad – God's blessings and peace upon him, and that was carried by his successors and the members of his household after him, is an address of brotherhood, humanity and a religion that encompasses all human activity. It states the truth directly, commands what is right, forbids what is wrong, honors the human being, and accepts others.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has embraced the path of promoting the true luminous image of Islam, halting the accusations

against it and repelling the attacks upon it. This is in accordance with the inherited spiritual and historical responsibility carried by the Hashemite monarchy, honored as direct descendants of the Prophet, the Messenger of God – peace and blessings upon him – who carried the message. For five decades, his late Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal – God rest his soul – demonstrated this way with the vigorous effort that he exerted. Since the day he took the flag, His Majesty King Abdullah II has continued this effort, with resolution and determination, as a service to Islam, fortifying the solidarity of 1.2 billion Muslims who comprise one fifth of humanity, preventing their marginalization or extrication from the movement of human society, and affirming their role in building human civilization and participating in its progress during our present age.

Islam is founded upon basic principles, the fundamentals are attesting to the unity of God (*tawhid Allah*); belief in the message of His Prophet; continuous connection with the Creator through ritual prayer (*salat*); training and rectifying the soul through the fast of Ramadan; safeguarding one another by paying the alms tax (*zakat*); the unity of the people through the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to God's Sanctified House, [performed] by those who are able; and [observing] His rulings that regulate human behavior in all its dimensions. Over history these [basic principles] have formed a strong and cohesive nation and a great civilization. They bear witness to noble principles and values that verify the good of humanity, whose foundation is the oneness of the human species, and that people are equal in rights and obligations, peace and justice, realizing comprehensive security, mutual social responsibility, being good to one's neighbor, protecting belongings and property, honoring pledges, and more.

Together, these are principles that provide common ground for the followers of religions and [different] groups of people. That is because the origin of divine religions is one, and Muslims believe in all Messengers of God and do not differentiate between any of them. Denying the message of any one of them is a deviation from Islam. This establishes a wide platform for the believers of [different] religions to meet the other upon common ground, for the service of human society, without encroaching upon creedal distinctions or upon intellectual freedom. For all of this we base ourselves upon His saying:

*The messenger believes in what has been revealed unto him from his Lord as do the believers. Each one believes in God and His angels and*

*His scriptures and His messengers. We make no distinction between any of His messengers – and they say: ‘We hear, and we obey. [Grant us] Your forgiveness, our Lord. Unto You is the journeying.’ (2:285)*

Islam honors every human being, regardless of his color, race or religion: *We have honored the sons of Adam, provided them transport on land and sea, sustained them with good things, and conferred on them special favors above a great part of our creation (17:70).*

Islam also affirms that the way of calling [others] to God is founded upon kindness and gentleness: *Call to the path of your Lord with wisdom and a beautiful exhortation, and debate with them in that which is most beautiful (ahsan) (16:125).* Furthermore, it shuns cruelty and violence in how one faces and addresses [others]:

*It is by some Mercy of God that you were gentle to them. Were you severe – cruel-hearted – they would have broken away from you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them in the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, put your trust in God; truly God loves those who trust [in Him]. (3:159)*

Islam has made clear that the goal of its message is realizing mercy and good for all people. The Transcendent has said, *We did not send you [Muhammad] but out of mercy for all creatures (21:107).* And the Prophet Muhammad – blessings and peace upon Him – said, ‘The Merciful has mercy upon those who are merciful, be merciful to those on earth, He who is in heaven will be merciful unto you.’

Islam calls for treating others as one desires to be treated. It urges the tolerance and forgiveness that express the nobility of the human being: *The recompense for an evil is an evil equal thereto, but who forgives and reconciles, his recompense is from God (42:40). Good and evil are not equal. Repel with what is most virtuous. Then he between whom and you there is enmity will be as if he were an intimate friend (41:34).*

Islam confirms the principle of justice in interacting with others, safeguarding their rights, and confirms that one must not deny people their possessions: *And let not the hatred of others make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is closer to piety (5:8); God commands you to return trusts to their owners, and if you judge between people, you shall judge with justice (4:58); So give [full] measure and [full] weight and do not deny the people their goods, and work no corruption in the land, after it has been set right (7:85).*

Islam requires respect for pledges and covenants, and adhering to what has been specified; and it forbids treachery and treason: *Fulfill the covenant of God when you have entered into it, and break not oaths after they have been confirmed and you have made God your surety; truly God knows what you do* (16:91).

Islam recognizes the noble station of [human] life, so there is to be no fighting against non-combatants, and no assault upon civilians and their properties, children at their mothers' bosom, students in their schools, nor upon elderly men and women. Assault upon the life of a human being, be it murder, injury or threat, is an assault upon the right to life among all human beings. It is among the gravest of sins; for human life is the basis for the prosperity of humanity: *Whoever kills a soul for other than slaying a soul or corruption upon the earth it is as if he has killed the whole of humanity, and whoever saves a life, it is as if he has revived the whole of humanity* (5:32).

The primordial religion of Islam is founded upon equanimity, balance, moderation, and facilitation: *Thus have we made of you a middle nation that you might be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves* (2:143). The Prophet Muhammad – peace and blessings upon him – said: 'Facilitate and do not make difficult, bear good tidings and do not deter.' Islam has provided the foundation for the knowledge, reflection and contemplation that has enabled the creation of this deep-rooted civilization that was a crucial link by which the West arrived at the gates of modern knowledge, and in whose accomplishments non-Muslims participated, as a consequence of its being a comprehensive human civilization.

No day has passed but that this religion has been at war against extremism, radicalism and fanaticism, for they veil the intellect from foreseeing negative consequences [of one's actions]. Such blind impetuosity falls outside the human regulations pertaining to religion, reason and character. They are not from the true character of the tolerant, accepting Muslim.

Islam rejects extremism, radicalism and fanaticism – just as all noble, heavenly religions reject them—considering them as recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice. Furthermore, it is not a trait that characterizes a particular nation; it is an aberration that has been experienced by all nations, races, and religions. They are not particular to one people; truly they are a phenomenon that every people, every race and every religion has known.

We denounce and condemn extremism, radicalism and fanaticism today, just as our forefathers tirelessly denounced and opposed them throughout Islamic history. They are the ones who affirmed, as do we, the firm and unshakeable understanding that Islam is a religion of [noble] character traits in both its ends and means; a religion that strives for the good of the people, their happiness in this life and the next; and a religion that can only be defended in ways that are ethical; and the ends do not justify the means in this religion.

The source of relations between Muslims and others is peace; for there is no fighting [permitted] when there is no aggression. Even then, [it must be done with] benevolence, justice and virtue: *God does not prevent you, as regards those who do not fight you in religion's [cause], nor drive you from your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: truly God loves the just (60:8); Then if they cease, let there be no aggression, save against the oppressors (2:193).*

On religious and moral grounds, we denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices, whatever their source and form may be. Such acts are represented by aggression against human life in an oppressive form that transgresses the rulings of God, frightening those who are secure, violating peaceful civilians, finishing off the wounded, and killing prisoners; and they employ unethical means, such as destroying buildings and ransacking cities: *Do not kill the soul that God has made sacrosanct, save for justice (6:151).*

We condemn these practices and believe that resisting oppression and con-firming justice should be a legitimate undertaking through legitimate means. We call on the people to take the necessary steps to achieve the strength and steadfastness for building identity and preserving rights.

We realize that over history extremism has been instrumental in destroying noble achievements in great civilizations, and that the tree of civilization withers when malice takes hold and breasts are shut. In all its shapes, extremism is a stranger to Islam, which is founded upon equanimity and tolerance. No human whose heart has been illumined by God could be a radical extremist.

At the same time, we decry the campaign of brazen distortion that portrays Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalizes terrorism. We call upon the international community to work earnestly to implement inter-national laws and honor the

international mandates and resolutions issued by the United Nations, ensuring that all parties accept them and that they be enacted without double standards, to guarantee the return of rights to their [rightful] holders and the end of oppression. Achieving this will be a significant contribution to uprooting the causes of violence, fanaticism and extremism.

The way of this great religion that we are honored to belong to calls us to affiliate with and participate in modern society, and to contribute to its elevation and progress, helping one another with every faculty [to achieve] good and to comprehend, desiring justice for all peoples, while faithfully proclaiming the truth [of our religion], and sincerely expressing the soundness of our faith and beliefs – all of which are founded upon God's call for co-existence and piety. [We are called] to work toward renewing our civilization, based upon the guidance of religion, and following upon established practical intellectual policies.

The primary components of these policies comprise developing methods for preparing preachers, with the goal of ensuring that they realize the spirit of Islam and its methodology for structuring human life, as well as providing them with knowledge of contemporary culture, so that they are able to interact with their communities on the basis of awareness and insight: *Say, 'This is my way. I, and those who follow me, call for God with insight'* (12:108); taking advantage of the communication revolution to refute the doubts that the enemies of Islam are arousing, in a sound, intellectual manner, without weakness or agitation, and with a style that attracts the reader, the listener and the viewer; consolidating the educational structure for individual Muslims, who are confident in their knowledge and abilities, working to form the integral identity that protects against corrupting forces; interest in scientific research and working with the modern sciences upon the basis of the Islamic perspective that distinguishes between creation, life and the human being; benefiting from modern achievements in the fields of science and technology; adopting an Islamic approach for realizing the comprehensive development that is founded upon [maintaining] the delicate balance between the spiritual, economic and social dimensions [of life]; providing for human rights and basic liberties, ensuring life, dignity and security, and guaranteeing basic needs; administering the affairs of society in accordance with the principles of justice and consultation; and

benefiting from the goods and mechanisms for adopting democracy that human society has presented.

Hope lies in the scholars of our Nation, that through the reality of Islam and its values they will enlighten the intellects of our youth – the ornament of our present age and the promise of our future. The scholars shield our youth from the danger of sliding down the paths of ignorance, corruption, close-mindedness and subordination. It is our scholars who illuminate for them the paths of tolerance, moderation, and goodness, and prevent them from [falling] into the abysses of extremism and fanaticism that destroy the spirit and body.

We look to our scholars to lead us in partaking of our role and verifying our priorities, that they maybe exemplars in religion, character, conduct, and discerning enlightened speech, presenting to the nation their noble religion that brings ease [in all matters] and its practical laws in which lie the awakening and joy of the nation. Among the individuals of the nation and throughout the regions of the world, they disseminate good, peace and benevolence, through subtle knowledge, insightful wisdom and political guidance in all matters, uniting and not dividing, appeasing hearts and not deterring them, looking to the horizons of fulfillment to meet the requirements and challenges of the twenty-first century.

We ask God to prepare for our Islamic Nation the paths of renaissance, prosperity and advancement; to shield it from the evils of extremism and closed-mindedness; to preserve its rights, sustain its glory, and uphold its dignity. What an excellent Lord is he, and what an excellent Supporter.

God Almighty says: *This is My straight path, so follow it. And follow not the [other] ways, lest you be parted from His way. This has He ordained for you, that you may be God-fearing* (6:152–153).

And the last of our supplications *is that praise be to God, Lord of the worlds* (10:10).

*Amman Ramadan  
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*

*1425 Hijri  
November 2004 A.D.*

## NOTE

1. There are at least two official English translations of the Amman Message. The translation printed here is taken from the Official Website of the Amman Message ([www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com)). The Amman Message was also translated into English for the Promotion of the Amman Message Project and can be found at [www.riifs.org/index.php/en/projects?id=109](http://www.riifs.org/index.php/en/projects?id=109).

## Appendix 2

# The Three Points of the Amman Message

### THE OFFICIAL TEXT OF THE THREE POINTS (VERSION 1)

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

*May peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad and his pure and noble family*

(1) Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ja'fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thabiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and property are inviolable. Moreover, in accordance with the Shaykh Al-Azhar's *fatwa*, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to the *Ash'ari* creed or whoever practices real *Tasawwuf* (Sufism) an apostate. Likewise, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to true *Salafi* thought an apostate.

Equally, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare as apostates any group of Muslims who believes in God, Glorified and Exalted be He, and His Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him) and the pillars of faith, and acknowledges the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-evident tenet of religion.

(2) There exists more in common between the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence than there is difference between them. The adherents to the eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence are in agreement as regards the basic principles of Islam. All believe in Allah (God), Glorified



and Exalted be He, the One and the Unique; that the Noble Qur'an is the Revealed Word of God; and that our master Muhammad, may blessings and peace be upon him, is a Prophet and Messenger unto all mankind. All are in agreement about the five pillars of Islam: the two testaments of faith (*shahadatayn*); the ritual prayer (*salat*); almsgiving (*zakat*); fasting the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), and the *Hajj* to the sacred house of God (in Mecca). All are also in agreement about the foundations of belief: belief in Allah (God), His angels, His scriptures, His messengers, and in the Day of Judgment, in Divine Providence in good and in evil. Disagreements between the *'ulama* (scholars) of the eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence are only with respect to the ancillary branches of religion (*furu'*) and not as regards the principles and fundamentals (*usul*) [of the religion of Islam]. Disagreement with respect to the ancillary branches of religion (*furu'*) is a mercy. Long ago it was said that variance in opinion among the *'ulama* (scholars) 'is a good affair'.

(3) Acknowledgement of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Mathahib*) within Islam means adhering to a fundamental methodology in the issuance of *fatwas*: no one may issue a *fatwa* without the requisite personal qualifications which each school of Islamic jurisprudence determines [for its own adherents]. No one may issue a *fatwa* without adhering to the methodology of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. No one may claim to do unlimited *Ijtihad* and create a new school of Islamic jurisprudence or to issue unacceptable *fatwas* that take Muslims out of the principles and certainties of the *Shari'ah* and what has been established in respect of its schools of jurisprudence.

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**Faith Matters** was founded by Fiyaz Mughal OBE FCMI in 2007. The organization provides a variety of grassroots and research programmes to promote dialogue, understanding and peaceful co-existence between and within faith communities and to provide a positive counter-voice to challenge extremist or discriminatory narratives and overcome intercommunity tensions on multiple levels including individual, community or government, as well as local, national, regional and international or transnational. Faith Matters is currently implementing a number of core and ongoing programmes, such as Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks); undertaking advocacy on anti-Muslim prejudice at government and media

levels; implementing capacity-building programmes for women and youth to support their participation in countering anti-Muslim hate, extremism and in safeguarding of youth; as well as additional programmes to provide platforms for engagement within a variety of thematic areas between communities and policy-makers.

**Mike Hardy** CMG OBE FRSA is a founding and Executive Director of the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, UK. Following overseas postings in the Arab world and Asia, and as member of the British Council Senior Management Team, Mike framed and led the British Council's global programme in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Through his leadership the British Council's work worldwide increased its emphasis on working with difference and with inter- and intra-community relations. He was active in policy advocacy in international affairs and public diplomacy, most notably in Muslim-majority countries and headed the European arm of the EU–Government of Jordan-sponsored Promotion of the Amman Message Project from 2012 to 2014. Mike is active with UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilizations; he is lead advisor to the World Forum for Intercultural Dialogue in Baku and the World Peace Forum in Indonesia, and directs the RISING Global Peace Forum at Coventry. Professor Hardy has been twice honoured, awarded the OBE in 2001 for his peace-building work in the Middle East, and appointed a Companion of Honour of St Michael and St George in the Queen's Birthday Honours, June 2010, for his work internationally in intercultural dialogue. Mike is a trustee of 3FF, the leading interfaith charity in the UK, and a board director of the US-based International Leadership Association.

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**Steve Rose** is a freelance writer and journalist who largely focuses on racism, Islamophobia and the far right. Rose has written for *The Huffington Post* and Tell MAMA, a project set up by Faith Matters to tackle anti-Muslim hate crime. He blogged about related issues on his own platform, <http://stevenplrose.wordpress.com>, but his writings now mainly appear on [religiousreader.org](http://religiousreader.org) and [tellmamauk.org](http://tellmamauk.org).

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