



Blasphemy, Charlie Hebdo, and the Freedom of Belief and Expression

The Paris attacks and the reactions

RASHAD ALI

The horrific events in Paris, with the killing of a group of journalists, a Police officer, and members of the Jewish community in France have shocked and horrified most commentators. These atrocities, which the Yemen branch of the global terrorist group al-Qaeda have claimed the responsibility for,¹ have led to condemnations from across the political spectrum and across religious divides.

Some ubiquitous slogans that have arisen, whether *Je suis Charlie*, *Ahmed*, or *Juif*, have been used to show empathy with various victims of these horrid events. These different responses illustrate some of the divides in public reaction, with solidarity shown to various camps. For example, some have wished to show support and solidarity with the victims but have not wished to imply or show support to Charlie Hebdo as a publication, presumably because of the offense that they have taken to some of the cartoons or merely to take a contrary perspective to the mainstream reaction.

Other reactions highlight and emphasise the fact that Muslims are also victims of terrorism – often the main victims – a point which Charlie Hebdo made in an editorial of the first issue of the magazine published following the attack on its staff. Still others highlight that Jews were targeted merely because they were Jews.² This was even more relevant given how a BBC journalist appeared to suggest that there was a connection between how “Jews” treated Palestinians in Israel and the killing of Jews in France in a kosher shop.³

The most notorious response arguably has not come from Islamist circles but from the French neo-fascist comedian Dieudonne for stating on his Facebook account “*je me sens Charlie Coulibaly*” (“I feel like Charlie Coulibaly”). While “Charlie” refers to Charlie Hebdo, “Coulibaly” is the name of one of the terrorists rather than the victims. Dieudonne was arrested afterwards, presumably for showing support for terrorism and

1. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/al-qaeda-yemen-charlie-hebdo-paris-attacks-201511410323361511.html>
2. <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/je-suis-charlie-je-suis-ahmed-je-suis-juif/>
3. <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffeehouse/2015/01/the-bbc-blaming-the-jews-for-attacks-on-jews/>
4. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-30850879>

leading some quarters to question the precise nature of free speech in France.⁴

Some have gone as far as to blame the magazine itself for the violence, with one commentator stating that because Charlie Hebdo had offended Muslims through their cartoons, by either depicting the Prophet of Islam, or/and blaspheming by doing so in a crude and insulting manner,⁵ the outcome was to be expected.

Yet, influential members of Muslim communities and Muslim commentators have expressed precisely the opposite point of view. For example, Mohammed Amin said “Publishers must be free to publish.”. “If you don’t like a magazine like Charlie Hebdo, complain about it, boycott it, but that is the full extent of what you can do”.⁶ Most surprisingly the Pope, apparently in an attempt to explain why Muslims get offended and react, suggested that some form of violent reaction was “normal”.⁷

So what then is blasphemous and insulting about these cartoons? Why has such an extreme perspective on speech been used to explicitly justify murder and acts of terror in the minds of the perpetrators?

Defining and understanding blasphemy and the strength of reaction

When it comes to defining blasphemy in this context, as we have commonly understood it, it does not appear to be that relevant in the general sense (i.e., profanity or irreverent or sacrilegious speech about God or sacred things).⁸ In this case, it is very specifically speaking about making statements that are deemed insulting to the Prophet of Islam in various forms though technically, in Islamic terms, this applies to any prophet (i.e. Sab ul-Nabi).⁹ It is this specific offence that has led to the global Muslim protests on multiple occasions whether related to the Satanic Verses, the Danish cartoons incident, or the film *Innocence of Muslims*.¹⁰

However, it seems that some people – at least in public discourse – have questioned why this creates such a reaction. This has led to explanations, quoting Prince Charles, that we have lost a sense of the sacred in our public life, making it difficult for people to understand why such matters would generate such a personal feeling of revulsion or disgust. Left wing author and *Observer* journalist Nick Cohen picked up this sentiment. Seeking to explain to his readers why they should be able to understand the personal reaction and feelings whilst not justifying in any way the attacks or a violent reaction (which, in his view, the Pope had appeared to), he wrote:

“So let me concede acres of ground that are not worth defending. Yes, yes and obviously, there is no stupider cliché than sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. Most of us can remember words that cut deeper than wounds. The parent who says you are a failure. The lover who admits betrayal. The women who laugh at you. The men who humiliate you. The employers who dismiss your dearest ambitions with a snort. They leave scars that may never heal.

Likewise, religious belief can be so much a part of your identity that an assault on it is an assault on everything that makes you who you are. If Observer readers find religious offence hard to understand, ask: have you ever found criticism of the left from the right or the sight of a confident Conservative leader so unbearable you were physically repelled, as I was by the sight of Margaret Thatcher?

But understanding is not excusing in either the personal or the political.”¹¹

Recent events in Nigeria¹⁴ have demonstrated that these feelings and reactions can often lead to extreme

5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04yl86t/this-week-15012015> Comments of Nabila Ramadhani on the show ‘This Week in Politics’.

6. <http://www.mohammedamin.com/Politics/Charlie-Hebdo-attack.html>

7. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/19f31342-9cb6-11e4-a730-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3PChzHj00>

8. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blasphemy>

9. page 100, *al-Saif al-Maslul ala man sab al-rasul*, published by Dar Ibn Hazm 2005 Lebanon-Beirut, al-Subki, Taqi al-Din Ali Abd al-Kafi died 756 H/1355CE - This text by the pre-modern Muslim jurist is considered among Sunni Muslims as an orthopraxic work on the subject of rulings related to someone who insults the Prophet of Islam.

10. http://www.mohammedamin.com/Community_issues/Blasphemy-should-never-be-a-crime.html

11. <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/opinions/charlie-hebdo-attacks-time-for-reform-within-islam-shootings-paris>

12. <http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/media/speeches/speech-hrh-the-prince-of-wales-titled-sense-of-the-sacred-building-bridges-between>

13. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/17/punching-pope-francis-doesnt-understand-charlie-hebdo>

14. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4728616.stm>

and violent responses, provoking almost random acts of violence from sections of communities, and leading to the horrific taking of innocent lives. Whilst it goes without saying that the targeting of Jews and a Jewish kosher butcher demonstrates that this is more than just a feeling of offence and much more ideologically motivated than merely a heightened sense of grievances, the incidents in Nigeria raise questions about the nature of such cultures and what is it about their perception and understanding that leads to a reaction that includes the taking of innocent Christian and Jewish lives. If anything, it may not necessarily be their formal religious understanding as most Muslim scholars have argued that it is religiously objectionable.¹⁵

Takfir and apostasy

It is also true that the notion of blasphemy applied to Muslims can be considered apostasy, warranting excommunication from the religion (i.e., they should no longer be considered Muslims), which has repercussions both in countries where there are such laws and punishments – including, in places, capital punishment¹⁶ – and also for terrorist movements.

Among many Islamists, this process of *takfir*, or declaring a ruler or government as an infidel *kufri/kafir* regime, serves as a justification for political violence and terrorism in order to overthrow regimes. In other words, it is a fundamental cause and justification for *jihadist* movements to impose and implement their version of an ‘Islamic’ state,¹⁷ a pseudo-modern state which adopts one interpretation of *shariah* or religious rules and imposes it as law, thereby creating a modern amalgamation of the nation state and medieval interpretations of religious rules and laws.

The most extreme example of this in recent times is, of course, ISIS,¹⁸ which is arguably seeking to return to the political realities of the 7th century, modelling itself on the worst examples of the Ummayyad empire in its persecution of Shia, its exploitation of non-Muslims, and its imperial and expansionist ambitions. This is represented by explicit connections to the killers in Paris,¹⁹ both in the form of a video testimony and the presumed escape destination of alleged co-conspirator Hayat Boumeddiene. In a similar manner to the Ummayyad “Jihad State,”²⁰ ISIS wishes to seek legitimacy among Islamists as the modern incarnation of a Jihad State.²¹

Defending the Prophet – ideological justifications and grievances

The Paris murderers explained their own justification in clear ideological and religious terms, related directly to the notion of blasphemy and insulting the Prophet of Islam. One of them explained his motivations to a French TV channel by saying “We are not killers. We are defenders of the prophet, we don’t kill women. We kill no one. We defend the prophet. If someone offends the prophet then there is no problem, we can kill him. We don’t kill women. We are not like you. You are the ones killing women and children in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. This isn’t us. We have an honour code in Islam.”²²

Despite insistence by some to the contrary, this was the stated reason put forward by the killers. They saw themselves as “defenders of the prophets” as motivated by the notion of blasphemy and killing those who were blaspheming the Prophet of Islam or any other prophets. The man in the same interview²³ made a clear ideological connection to

15. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2015/01/07/World-leaders-condemn-Paris-shooting-attack-.html> - al-Azhar as stated in the article, is considered by many to be Sunni Islam’s most authoritative institution

16. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12621225> - What are Pakistan’s blasphemy laws?

17. For an exposition of the arguments and justifications put forward by Islamist terrorists and an analysis of these arguments from the classical Islamic sources see ‘A Guide to Refuting Jihadism’ by Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart <http://europeandemocracy.eu/2014/02/european-foundation-for-democracy-promoting-a-guide-to-refuting-jihadism-endorsed-by-leading-muslim-scholars/>

18. For a detailed explanation of ISIS can be found in: ISIS, inside the army of terror - Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan <http://www.amazon.com/ISIS-Inside-Terror-Michael-Weiss/dp/1941393578>

19. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2905302/Calm-stare-Jewish-deli-terrorist-Jihadist-s-ISIS-suicide-video-emerges-confirms-link-Charlie-Hebdo-killers-calls-fellow-vigorous-Muslims-defend-prophet-Mohammed.html>

20. It is argued that the ideology of expansionism and spreading Islam through the power of State and Jihad was the essential way in which the Ummayyad dynasty sought legitimacy of its rule which it acquired through force and maintained through force. See ‘The End of the Jihad State - The Reign of Hisham Ibn Abd Al-Malik and the Colla: Reign of Hisham Ibn ‘Abd Al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads. Sunny press, 1994 Blankinship, Khalid Yahya

21. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/25/inside-isis-training-camps>

22. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-magazine-attack/paris-killer-cherif-kouachi-gave-interview-tv-channel-he-died-n283206>

23. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-magazine-attack/paris-killer-cherif-kouachi-gave-interview-tv-channel-he-died-n283206>

Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQAP), outlining his recruitment by the infamous Al-Qaeda Yemen propagandist Anwar Awlaki. They also stated that they would not be killing women as that was presumably in line with the rules of Jihad in pre-modern Islamic discourse and a universally upheld prohibition. This also demonstrates their ideological beliefs in the superiority of Islam over what they saw as a Western lack of ethics in war, stating to reporters that “You are the ones killing women and children...”.

Though they made the incongruent exception for killing Jewish women, this is actually consistent with both al-Qaeda ideology and quasi-religious edicts, specifically with al-Awlaki, who had cited edicts allegedly given by Ibn Uthaymeen,²⁴ the former Saudi Mufti and major Salafi scholar, justifying killing Jewish women and children in revenge for the actions of Israel.²⁵ In fact, al-Awlaki specifically provided or attempted to provide scriptural justifications for murdering anyone who insulted the Prophet and his views are still widely available on YouTube for all to listen to.²⁶ It is this theology or ideology that provided the direction and motivation for these individuals, who ultimately affiliated themselves to either al-Qaeda or ISIS.

Many of the commentators who have sought to describe their motivations have desired to connect them primarily to the lack of integration, the disenfranchisement of French Muslim youth, or historic colonialism.²⁷ Whilst some of these may well be enablers for the indoctrination, it is the religio-ideological beliefs that justify, motivate, and oblige this specific type of murder and terrorism. The generic description of “us” and “them” and a general “you” fighting in Iraq and Syria, all point to an ideological mindset as well as the stated motivation of defending the Prophet. The French were not only against the war in Iraq, preventing the UN Security Council from passing a resolution justifying it, they have also been ardent opponents of the Assad regime in parallel with ISIS. These

facts undermine the simplistic analysis that this was a reaction to French society and politics alone.

The killing of Jews and Jewish women are also consistent with this extreme and warped belief system and are not explicable by mere grievances – despite the implicit assertions of BBC journalist Tim Wilcox, who was criticised for telling the daughter of Holocaust survivors after Paris attacks that ‘Palestinians suffer hugely at Jewish hands as well.’ It should be clear here that even far-left totalitarian advocates clearly see that the implied or explicit victim blaming negates the actual motivations. As the Slovenian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek stated, “...the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* was not a mere ‘passing accident of horror’. It followed a precise religious and political agenda and was as such clearly part of a much larger pattern. Of course we should not overreact, if by this is meant succumbing to blind Islamophobia – but we should ruthlessly analyse this pattern.”²⁸

Victim Blaming?

Arguably some of the more disconcerting statements have come from people who have stated that they advocate free speech even for terrorist groups,²⁹ yet consider those empathising with the cartoonists as bigots. Whilst the debate surrounding the cartoons and their content centred on whether they were targeting Islam or merely acting in the French tradition of an anti-clerical satire that mocks all religions, in fact, Charlie Hebdo railed against most religious and secular establishment thinking (the magazine was unsuccessfully sued 14 times by the Catholic Church).³⁰

Despite the assertions made to the contrary by those focusing on Islam the magazine has printed cartoons offensive to Jews.³¹ Often, these lampooned the far right, including Front National’s Marine le Pen, and were staunchly critical of Israel and its actions in Gaza.³² Charlie Hebdo was described though by Arthur Goldhammer, commenting on al-Jazeera,³³ as from the *gouaille* genre and as “an anarchic populist

24. <http://anwar-awlaki.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/meaning-of-gaza.html>

25. <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Refuting-Jihadism.pdf> page 59 - A Guide to Refuting Jihadism, Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart

26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jY27ozxBXis> The Ruling on insulting the Prophet

27. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/08/france-bloody-intolerant-history-bloodshed-muslims> for Nabila Ramadhani or see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/charlie-hebdo-paris-attack-brothers-campaign-of-terror-can-be-traced-back-to-algeria-in-1954-9969184.html> for Robert Fisk drawing the same conclusions.

28. <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity>

29. <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2015/01/09/solidarity-charlie-hebdo-cartoons/>

30. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-broke-taboos-defying-threats-and-violence.html?_r=0

31. <http://elderofziyon.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/some-charlie-hebdo-cartoons-that-are.html#.VLxrcSusWXs>

32. <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/olivier-tonneau/110115/charlie-hebdo-letter-my-british-friends>

form of obscenity that aims to cut down anything that would erect itself as venerable, sacred or powerful.” Left-wing historian Paul Berman also explained that despite views to the contrary they were often mocking the racist smears and the anti-immigration sentiments of the right wing in France, which some have mistaken for racism. One particular cartoon mocked the Front National for portraying, in their own cartoon, former French Justice Minister Christiane Taubira as a monkey. Although the creators of the cartoon mocking Front National were not sued, the publishers of the original comparison were, by Taubira herself. This can be simultaneously perplexing to understand, distasteful, and very offensive – let alone hard to appreciate – as has been pointed out by several authors.³⁴

None of this negates what Nick Cohen had said, that some of these cartoons and images may well be – and certainly have been taken as – extremely distasteful and hurtful to Muslims and those of other faiths. But the suggestion that they were racist, right wing, specifically anti-Muslim, or “baiting Muslims”³⁵ as some have said, is explicitly or implicitly victim blaming. This is both problematic from a moral perspective, but also a fundamentally false understanding of the factors that have led to these events, as we have outlined.

Free speech – caveats and contradictions

Many Muslims, including those in France and their representative community based organisations, have come out and condemned these acts and defended the legal rights to free speech, as pointed out earlier. Others,³⁶ however, have also pointed out that there are real contradictions in the legislation around these issues and have asked where to draw the line, especially in light of a case where an atheist activist was convicted in 2010 for “religiously aggravated harassment, alarm and distress”.³⁷ These are reasonable issues that need to be

addressed and ironed out. Equal application of such laws or the removal of them due to their subjective nature and restriction of the basic freedom to criticise others’ faiths and beliefs may well be what is required. Seen either way, the laws are contradictory to the ideal of free speech and the absolute right to offend which should be defended.

It is also true that many have argued that restricting publication of anything on the basis that people find it offensive to their core beliefs would require us not to allow any dissenting belief or even many religious scriptures which contain texts or ideas that can be construed as hate speech. Some have even tried to ban the Qur’an on such a premise that it contains “hate speech”, a proposition that was far from ever being realised but one that an increasing number of anti-Islam politicians, such as Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders, have put forward³⁸.

This is what highlights the core dilemma with restricting free speech in a multicultural society with different beliefs, ideologies, and attachments to sacred religious texts. The need both to appreciate the conflicting demands of free speech and to appreciate the deeply held convictions of others becomes apparent. As the former Chief Rabbi Johnathan Sacks explained in his book *The Home We Build Together*, we may not respect the beliefs of others, but we must respect their right to hold their own convictions and beliefs³⁹.

Shariah and the murders in Paris

Whilst we have stated that Islamic institutions such as al-Azhar University, condemned these incidents on religious grounds, it has also been said that Awlaki and al-Qaeda, have explicitly sought to justify their ideology and tactics based upon Islamic theology or more precisely Islamic religious ethics or jurisprudence, *shariah*. Muslims have defined this as the ‘speech of the divine related to human conduct’,⁴⁰ which is often translated into Islamic law. It

33. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/1/charlie-hebdo-gouaillesatireislamjournalism.html>

34. <https://ricochet.media/en/292/lost-in-translation-charlie-hebdo-free-speech-and-the-unilingual-left>

35. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9f90f482-9672-11e4-a40b-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3PChzHj00>

36. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11351280/Scorning-the-Prophet-goes-beyond-free-speech-its-an-act-of-violence.html>

37. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/merseyside/8549613.stm>

38. <https://kenanmalik.wordpress.com/2012/04/19/why-hate-speech-should-not-be-banned/>

39. <http://www.rabbisacks.org/books/the-home-we-build-together/>

40. These are common definitions taken by scholars and specialists of Usul ul-Fiqh or first principles related to understanding and deriving ‘fiqh’ - definition to follow -. This was given by scholars such as the famous jurist al-Ghazali and specialist in Usul Ibn Hajib, page 272 in his *Mukhtasar muntaha al-su’l wal-amal fi ilmay al-Usul wal-Jadal* published by Dar Ibn Hazm, Beirut - Lebanon 2006

is also often used interchangeably with what is known as *fiqh* or the ‘knowledge or understanding of the rulings of the *shariah* which have been interpreted from specific scriptural sources’.⁴¹

The difference between the two though is considerable and the mixing of the two is one that creates an analytical problem. *Fiqh*, for Muslim specialists of religious jurisprudence or ethics, is a human understanding of the *shariah*. This distinction is key in preventing the essentialising of Islam, or the belief that one specific understanding of the religious teaching *IS* Islam. It is important to understand that there are many diverse interpretations of the *shariah* from religious texts, be they verses from the *Qur’an*, prophetic traditions or citations of consensus, or the rationale in these texts or their purposive content, particularly when seeking guidance on human behaviour.

Hence there is a multiplicity of schools of thought and divergent understandings. While the four major schools of thought, or *madhahib* (or *madhab* in singular), are considered to provide Sunni Muslims with sound orthopraxic rulings, many others are, in fact, considered acceptable as interpretations for Muslims to follow and apply in their life. Supplementing the formal positions of these *madhahib*, even interpretations of well-known companions of the Prophet or major scholars from the early generations⁴² are often cited. This is evident in Muslim practice of Islam, whether in relation to prayers and how to perform them or related to questions of law, such as how to deal with issues that are of interest to us here, namely apostasy or how to deal with those that insult the Prophet of Islam.

In fact, a key aspect of the ideology and the claims of extremists is that their understanding of Islam is the only sound or correct understanding of Islam or Islamic rulings. It is also one of the problems that both critics⁴³ of

Islam and extremists often fall into – either essentialising Islamic rulings and “law” to the most extreme view or claiming that the most reasonable or direct reading of Islamic law requires Islam itself to be reformed.⁴⁴

An example of the extremists could be seen in a lecture delivered by al-Awlaki who not only misrepresents the views laid out in pre-modern works, but also lays claim to the only sound view of Islamic religious ethic as transmitted through Muslim tradition and the only possible or sound view of Islam. He argues that those responsible for insulting the Prophet of Islam should be assassinated and that Muslims have a duty to engage in such murderous acts as a means to compete for the pleasure of the Prophet and of God – fundamentally a religious duty.⁴⁵

The classical position on blasphemy and Islamic law

As previously mentioned, blasphemy in the context we are speaking of is specifically related to disparaging, denigrating, or insulting the Prophet. In relation to the cartoons, they are seen as a disrespectful portrayal of the Prophet of Islam and in some instances gratuitously insulting. Whilst much has been said of the issue of depicting the Prophet in imagery, it is to some extent necessary to differentiate the issue of images of living beings, portrayal of the Prophet, and the issue of blasphemy as defined above. The former was traditionally forbidden by Sunni Muslims scholarship. This is based upon the view held by apparent majority of traditional Sunni schools that any image of a living person or one that possess a soul is forbidden.

This, however, is not an absolute consensus. Even among the early scholars, some had notably taken a position that two-dimensional images or portraits of

41. Page 15, *al-Bahr ul-Muhit fi Usul ul-Fiqh*, published by Dar ul-Kutb l-Ilmiyya, Beirut-Lebanon 2007. al-Zarkashi, Badr ul-Din Muhammad bin Bahadir, bin Abdullah died 794

42. The famous scholar and jurist Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, who is considered to be the soundest retention of the Shafi school, or madhab, one of the most widely followed of the Muslim schools of jurisprudence, states this in a Fatwa or religious edict where he states that this was the position of the early major scholars including the celebrated Imam al-Iz bin Abdul-Salam and Taj al-Din Ibn al-Subki and others. Whilst some did restricted it to the four schools the soundest view was that it was not restricted. This is recorded in the collection fatawa or non-binding religious edicts, in the chapter on ‘Qada’ or juridical verdicts, page 308 volume 4, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra al-Fiqhiya ala madhab Imam al-Shafi* published by Dar ul-Kutub ul-ilmiyya, 1997, al-Haytami, Shihab al-Din Ahmed bin Mohammad bin Ali bin Hajar al-Makki died 1565

43. A good example of this is the new atheist Sam Harris who describes Islam as ‘all fringe and no centre’ and that Islam itself is extreme. Whilst this is an intellectually problematic approach and indeed one stooped in simplistic assumptions, it is a good example of the prevalent type of criticism of Islam. http://www.samharris.org/site/full_text/the-reality-of-islam

44. An attempt to demonstrate that the hermeneutic approaches are not literalistic nor are they free of considerations of natural law, inductive scrutiny and principle based interpretations, which deal with or historically have dealt with problematic statements in scripture, is James A C Brown’s ‘Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and choices of interpreting the Prophet’s legacy’ http://www.amazon.com/Misquoting-Muhammad-Challenge-Interpreting-Prophe/dp/178074420X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1421642879&sr=1-1&pebp=1421642885881&peasin=178074420X

45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jY27ozxBXis> The Ruling on insulting the Prophet

living people were not forbidden. In fact, it has become the popular view with such an edict given by the Mufti of Libya, Sadiq al-Ghiryani, who represents the Maliki school.⁴⁶ It was also, according to Imam al-Nawawi,⁴⁷ a view among the *salaf*, or the earliest Muslims. Though this is one that he does not consider as sound in the Shafi school, even though it was one which was held by major Shafi jurists such as Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni⁴⁸ (al-Nawawi is a jurist who is considered the official representative of the later Shafi school and widely respected by all scholars and even Islamists).

This dichotomy was due to the distinction between merely two-dimensional pictures and three-dimensional statues. Though they were both prohibited, this was, according to the early *hadith* scholar and jurist Khattabi,⁴⁹ because they were worshipped besides God. It was this aspect that was considered problematic, even as the Prophet, according to sound *hadith* narrations, relaxed the prohibition on two-dimensional objects. This discussion is related by the major *hadith* master Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in his magnum opus, and commentary of the *hadith* collection of Imam Bukhari,⁵⁰ considered the soundest narrations of prophetic statements and acts.⁵¹ Still, he does take the view of the majority, which is that it *was* forbidden to depict any human being fully in a form that could be recognised as a human being, even as he mentions the Prophetic tradition relaxing such a prohibition.

The Maliki school, as stated earlier, has taken this as a standard view, mentioned in of several views of the school by al-Zarqani in his commentary on the *Muwatta*, the famous collection of traditions, legal judgements and *hadith*

as accepted by the early Muslims of the city of Medina and collected by Imam Malik bin Anas, the eponym of the Maliki *madhab*.⁵² This does not necessarily translate into a permission to depict the Prophet. But, it does raise the issue of its possibility, as it doesn't appear to be a question that is explicitly discussed widely in Islamic jurisprudence.⁵³

Historically, though, there does appear to be evidence to suggest that Muslims did have devotional portraits and pictures. These are still available to be viewed around the world. This was seen historically both among Sunnis and Shia cultures and specifically, but not exclusively, the Ottomans.⁵⁴

Again this does not in any way negate the fact that most Muslims would not see that the cartoons would have been acceptable in Islamic terms, or that Muslims should not take offence. All it demonstrates is that there are diverse views about what appears to be, at first sight, an obvious and apparent consensus. Similarly, Muslims have had various reactions to the latest depiction in Charlie Hebdo's first magazine after the murders of their staff. This was seen in the debate on the BBC's 'This Week in Politics',⁵⁵ where there were diametrically opposed perspectives on the latest cartoon by Muslims themselves.

The Rulings on blasphemy

Classical Islamic jurisprudence similarly has a number of different positions on legal sanctions and the various complexities in the manner in which they are implemented. Unsurprisingly, these positions are at various ends of the legal and political spectrum and manifest themselves in

46. The various views, ranging from permissibility; prohibition; permission of incomplete pictures or without the head; that which was in a venerated position was forbidden - are all mentioned, with the third preferred by al-Zarqani in his commentary on the *Muwatta*: page 429, volume 4, *Shar'h ul-Zarqani ala Muwatta al-Imam Malik*, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut - Lebanon 1997, Mohammad Abdul Baqi bin Yusuf al-Zarqani Died 1122

47. Imam Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawi died in 1277 and officially is considered the reference for the soundest position in general, of the later Shafi school. A scholar who is cited by Sufis, traditional scholars, and respected by salafis and Islamists as well as across all schools of Sunni jurisprudence

48. Imam al-Haramayn Diya ul-Din Abdul Malik bin Yusuf al-Juwayni, was the teacher of the famed mystic, scholastic theologian and jurist al-Ghazali. He was a theologian (*mutakallim*) and legal theoretician (*usuli*) and jurist. His works on jurisprudence bridge the gap between the early and later school and he is considered a major scholar within the Shafi madhab. He died in 1085

49. Abu Sulayman Hamd bin Mohammad bin Ibrahim known as Khattabi was a scholar of hadith literature as well as Fiqh and theology. He is widely quoted by scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and al-Nawawi in their respective commentaries. Died 988

50. Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari is considered by Sunni Muslims one of the greatest of scholars of Hadith or collections of reports of the Prophet's sayings, actions or incidents in his life. His collection is considered the soundest of collections of Hadith followed by those of Imam Muslim bin al-Hajjaj. Died 870

51. pages 2623 to 2629, volume 3, *Fat'h ul-Bari bi-Shar'h Sahih al-Bukhari*, published by Bait ul-Afkar ul-Dawliya, Jordan and Saudi Arabia 2004. al-Asqalani, Hafidh Ibn Hajar died 1372

52. See footnote 46 for elaboration.

53. Shia clerics have issued edicts stating that it was in fact permissible in principle to do so, as stated by a leading shia cleric Ayatollah Sistani. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/01/economist-explains-12>. There has been some debate some of these issues among Sunni clerics also in modern times. <http://www.abigmessage.com/fatwas-against-visual-depiction-of-the-prophet-and-his-companions.html>

54. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/10/drawing-prophet-islam-muhammad-images> Drawing the Prophet: Islam's hidden Mohammad images

55. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04yl86t/this-week-15012015>

different understandings of the world. As it was explained to this author by a *mufti*, or specialist in issuing religious edicts, Muslim society was historically centred around religion and organised society around it. Blasphemy was not merely a violation of the sacred in religious terms but also was considered a political act aimed at undermining the glue that bound society, differentiating loyal subjects from those whose loyalties laid elsewhere.

In such imperial times, it was also the case that the standard in political life was warfare and imperial expansion. Conflict on political, and therefore religious, identities was the norm. As such, undermining the religious foundations was seen as undermining the foundations of the society, possibly leading to treason and war. This is the way in which Muslims perceived their society and looked at preserving their integrity and empire. In such a context, blasphemy was considered a capital punishment necessary for the fundamental preservation of not just belief but the integrity of Muslim society as a whole, or so some jurists had argued.

This was and can be seen as an extreme perspective in modern multicultural societies. Alongside other rules such as those on apostasy, this perspective was also viewed in the same light by scholars such as Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, the former rector of al-Azhar and widely respected *mufti* who lived through the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries. He hence viewed them completely inappropriate today, against the principles of Islam, and against the decisive verses of the Qur'an, which gave absolute freedom of faith and forbade coercing people into embracing the Muslim faith.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, today's extremists and conservatives who do not wish to contextualise their view still advocate the pre-modern point of view, often without considering the caveats laid down by pre modern jurists as should be demonstrated through this paper.

Evidences used to substantiate this viewpoint – a critique

The key evidences put forward are generally found in specific texts or statements attributed to the Prophet of

Islam and incidents during his lifetime. The most famous ones are apparently commands of the Prophet and general rulings. There is a statement, for example, that is attributed to the Prophet saying, "whoever insults the Prophet should be killed/kill them". This is an oft-cited narration from those that advocate such a view, such as Taqi al-Din al-Subki of the Shafi *madhab*.

However, even these authors are aware of the fact that such narrations are at least considered highly problematic to say the least, if not outright false. al-Subki himself states that if these narrations were sound, they would be the strongest evidence for this interpretation, yet he himself cites the Shafi *hadith* master who states in no uncertain terms that "this *hadith* is [completely] unknown" because Ibn al-Salah did not find a chain for it at all.

al-Subki cites a similar narration by the prophet's cousin Ali bin Abi Talib that says "whoever insults a Prophet, then you should kill them". He recognises this narration as being equally problematic and cites Ibn Hibban and others as having criticised the narrators. In fact Ibn Hibban stated that Abdul Aziz bin Hasan bin Zabala narrated unfounded narrations from the 'Madinans' that were not to be relied upon at all. Al-Dhahabi also cites other narrators that are problematic and criticised them. Hence the contemporary Salafi *hadith* scholar and editor of the work, Salim bin Eid bin Muhammad al-Hilali, states that the narration is fabricated (*mawdu*) and should be forbidden to be attributed to the Prophet.

Interestingly, al-Subki states that if these narrations were authentic then they would clearly provide a foundation for the ruling and executing of someone for insulting the Prophet, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, without the lengths he had to go to in the book to attempt to derive such a ruling.⁵⁷ This makes the *hadith* side of the evidence, or at least the alleged explicit injunctions and declarations of the rulings, unfounded or weak at best.

Al-Awlaki also attempts to cite the rulings from Qadi Iyad al-Yahsubi,⁵⁸ the Maliki judge, as a general ruling

56. Pages 280-281, *Islam - Aqida wal-Shariah*, published by Dar ul-Shuruq Cairo - Egypt 1992. Imam al-Akbar Mahmud Shaltut Died 1963

57. pages 1180119 al-Subki

58. Qadi Iyad bin Musa al-Yahsubi was a famous judge and jurist and scholar of Hadith traditions from Muslim Spain. He was known for his work on Prophetology commonly known as the *Shifa* and his commentary on the Hadith collection of Imam Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, al-Jami al-Sahih, which was widely cited by later scholars and upon which Imam al-Nawawi heavily relied. Died in 1149

advocating murder. However, what should be clear is that neither Qadi Iyad, al-Subki, or even Ibn Taymiyya,⁵⁹ whom he cites extensively, actually saw this as a vigilante action or justification for terrorism. The ruling was one that could only apply after being established in a court and applied by the judge.⁶⁰ Iyad states that it could only be applied if established (in thabit) which was explained by Khafaji the commentator as *bil-shahada aw iqnar*- or “by testimony or confession”. Furthermore, it has been claimed that historically when there were cases of deliberate blasphemy aimed purely at creating martyrs for the sake of making a point, the judges in Muslim Spain from where Qadi Iyad hailed, stopped applying the penalty so as not to create martyrs, as the purpose of the ruling was not merely to kill people for martyrdom’s sake.⁶¹

This was also justified on the sound narrations of the Prophet not exacting any penalty for blasphemy and moreover forbidding his companions from doing so against non-Muslims who had cursed him. Thereafter, those that assumed there was a punishment sought to reconcile this, arguing that the Prophet dropped the punishment in order to soften their hearts. So for the sake of the *Maslaha*, or public interest, it was acceptable to not apply such punishments.

In fact that was the explanation given by Hafidh Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani of the *hadith* (whose authenticity is agreed upon), in the collection of Imam al-Bukhari.⁶² Hence, even according to these jurists the course of action was aimed at bringing people together and for a public benefit rather than applying punishments indiscriminately. The former was not necessarily the correct application of their *fiqh* or subjective

interpretation of the *shariah*. The *maslaha* of public interest and bringing harmony to the society was more important and congruent with the purpose and spirit of Islam, at least according to the Prophet. This is definitely not the attitude of terrorists such as those that we have seen.

The proponents of such a view also argue through incidents that took place or allegedly took place during the Prophet’s own life. Commonly cited at least are two incidents including the order to execute Kab bin Ashraf and the infamous story of the killing of Asma bint Marwan. Regarding the narration of Asma bint Marwan, despite the fact that they are contradictory, the narrations themselves were also considered fabrications, as they were attributed to infamous narrators of *hadith* known to fabricate stories.

Ibn Uday states in his *Kamil fil-Duafa wal-ilal ul-Hadith* that one of the narrators, “Muhammad bin al-Hajjaj... was accused of just forging *hadith*”. Ibn ul-Jawzi the jurist and *hadith* scholar in his *Kitab ul-Ilal* likewise quotes Yahya bin Ma’in the famous contemporary of Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal, eponym of the Hanbali school, as saying this narrator was a “liar and repugnant (*khabith*),” al-Daraqutni considered him a “total liar,” and Imam al-Bukhari stated in no uncertain terms that he was a “*munkar*” or one who rejected *hadith*. As such as he is the only narrator to transmit the narration from Majlad from Shabi to Ibn Abbas, leaving it an extremely weak story or apocryphal, i.e., a fabricated narration. These discussions can be found in the works of Salafi *hadith* scholar al-Albani, considered by them as their major *hadith* scholar of recent times, in his collection of weak and fabricated *hadith*.⁶³

59. Ibn Taymiyya was a controversial figure among orthodox Muslims of his time. He did not always conform to the prevailing consensus on matters of creed, religious practice and political edicts and was imprisoned several times. Famously, he criticised the Mongols’ conversion to Islam as insincere and as a means of justifying the occupation of Muslim territory. His life and works are often seen as contradictory: at times he appears to advocate tolerance of differences in juristic positions; other times he ascribes deviancies to people in minor juristic disputes. His student, the polymath Imam al-Dhahabi, stated that he took a more tolerant view towards the end of his life. He is considered the putative authority of modern jihadism and an inspiration for Qutbist Islamists as well as austere Salafi-Wahabism. Some believe this to be a misreading of his edicts: his *fatwa* concerning the status of the city of Mardin, for example, was allegedly subject to a copyist error changing the meaning. While many believe he wrote that Muslims should be treated as they deserve and unbelievers should be fought as they deserve, the original edition only contains *yu’ama* (should be treated) which was mistakenly rendered *yuqatal* (should be fought) in a subsequent edition. Nevertheless, the incorrect *fatwa* has been used to justify indiscriminate violence, terrorism and the excommunication of Muslims; and Ibn Taymiyya remains a reference point among contemporary Jihadists. For a thorough study of his thinking and work see *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, eds Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press 2010) [footnote taken from ‘*A Guide to Refuting Jihadism*’, by Rashad Ali and Hannah Stuart]

60. See pages 270 onwards of Khafaji’s commentary on the Shifa of Qadi Iyad, Nism ul-Riyadh fi shar’h ul-Shifa Qadi Iyyad of Shihab al-Din Khafaji volume 6 Dar ul-Kutub ilmiyya

61. In the article Shaykh Hamza Yusuf attempts to explain that some elements will inevitably react to what he sees as provocation and praises the Popes pronouncements. He also cites the incidents of the ‘Martyrs of Cordoba’. There are of course hugely disputed versions of these events. <http://seekershub.org/blog/2015/01/on-the-passing-of-the-young-abdullah-abdullatif-alkadi-and-a-postscript-on-charlie-hebdo-sh-hamza-yusuf/>

62. Pages 3081-3082, volume 3. al-Asqalani

63. These discussions can be found in the major collections of Hadith analysis by these authors. Many of the comments can be found in Nasir al-Din al-Albani’s collection of weak and fabricated Hadith. whilst he has been criticized he is in good company here with major masters of Hadith scholarship throughout the ages. See his collection *Silsilat al-ahadith al-da’ifa wal-mawdu’a wa atharuha al-sayyi’a fil-Ummah*, published by Maktabat al-Arif, Riyadh - Saudi Arabia 1988. Died 1999

As for the incident with Kab bin Ahsraf, al-Awaki tries to assert that there is no other reading of it that should be considered as reasonable. This is actually quite difficult to accept as it is such a well-known incident from Muslim historians. He was killed, as other scholars have asserted, for a number of reasons, including conspiring with the Meccans in their war against the new city-state in Medina, which was revealed by others when they converted, i.e., an act of treason. He was also narrated to have attempted to assassinate the Prophet and hence fled and was later killed for those reasons.⁶⁴ In fact the famous exegete and jurist of the Hanafi school of *fiqh*, Badr ul-Din al-Ayni, states in his commentary on Imam al-Bukhari's collection of *hadith* that "he [Kab] was not killed merely for insulting the [Prophet], but rather it was surely for the fact that he was an aide/spy against him, and conspired with those who fought wars against him, and supported them".⁶⁵ Hence the facts disagree with the explanation of the events and incidents as presented by al-Awaki, these are well known and well documented in the prophetic biography and *hadith* collections, hence commentators like al-Ayni, which are relied upon by Muslim jurists, explicitly refute the assertion made by others.

Alternative positions

Imam al-Ayni is also representative of the Hanafi *madhab*, which states not merely that there was no such punishment for blasphemy but that such an action by the authorities was forbidden. They use the above evidences in the Sahih of Imam al-Bukhari, which stated that the Prophet was cursed by non-Muslims and yet he did not do anything. When people asked if they

should kill them, the Prophet explicitly forbade it. Badr al-Din al-Ayni states that this was the opinion of Imam Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari⁶⁶ and he stated so by placing these *hadith* under the chapter of "Dealing with non-Muslims under Muslim governance who insulted the Prophet such as by saying 'death be upon you'." This was his *fiqh*, as al-Ayni explained. This was also the view of Imam Abu Hanifa the eponym of the largest school of *fiqh*⁶⁷ based on the soundest *hadith* on the subject.

al-Ayni also explained that people are not punished or killed for greater than such a blasphemy and insult against the Prophet of Islam, which was from an Islamic perspective that they were committing *shirk* or did not give God His due, but rather associating others in His lordliness in Islamic terms. Yet this was not deemed a criminal act and they were not punished for it. This was why they were not punished for the blasphemy in the time of the Prophet as that was a greater matter.⁶⁸

It was also the position of Sufyan al-Thawri⁶⁹ another major scholar who had his own school or *madhab*⁷⁰ and was a contemporary of Abu Hanifa. Additionally, it was one of the transmissions from the Shafi *madhab* according to the Qadi Abu Tayyib, who was a well-respected jurist and judge of the Shafi *madhab*.⁷¹ Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya the Hanbali jurist also cites the Hanbali scholar Imam al-Hulwani as stating that was also a view attributable to Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal.⁷²

There is also an additional consideration from the Shafi school that advocates capital punishment. It does not consider that such punishments applicable upon people if states had treaties to not apply such punishments, such as international treaties which would have been signed making such agreements. In such a scenario, then they

64. These reasons were elucidated by the scholar and Qur'an specialist Nouman Ali Khan, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzP8e9b_OT8 My thoughts on Paris Shooting. He also elucidates that this understanding is in complete violation of the Qur'an in multiple verses and the entire life of the Prophet in Mecca and Medina

65. page 121, volume 24, *Umdat ul-Qari Shar'h Sahih al-Bukhari*, published by Dr Ihya Turath al-Arabi Beirut - Lebanon 2003, al-Ayni, Badr ul-Din Abu Muhammad Mahmood bin Ahmad. Died 1360

66. Page 120, al-Ayni.

67. The perplexing factor here is that Pakistan is arguably a country which suffers from the abuse of blasphemy laws and sub cultures which exploit them and has led to horrific incidents which are far too well known, is a country whose Muslims claim to follow the school of Abu Hanifa i.e. the Hanafi madhab

68. Page 121, al-Ayni

69. Page 537, Volume 31, *al-Tawdih li-Shar'h al-Jami al-Sahih*, published by Wizarat ul-Awqaf Qatar 2008. A commentary on Imam al-Bukhari's collection of Hadith authored by the famous Hadith and Fiqh specialist Siraj ul-Din Abu Hafs Umar bin Ali bin Ahmad al-Ansari. Died 1402

70. Sufyan al-Thawri was a major scholar from the second generation of Muslims and was considered a Tabi'i i.e. a scholar who had met companions of the Prophet. He had his own school of thought and madhab, and a major scholar of Hadith also. See *al-Imam Sufyan al-Thawri wa ara'uhu fiqhiya muqarana bil-madhab al-ukbra*, published by Obeikan, Riyadh - Saudi Arabia, 2007. al-Thawri died 778

71. Pages 206-207, al-Subki. al-Subki himself argues though that Shafi has more of a right to be followed than Qadi Abu Tayyib, whose position he narrates but does not advocate following - page 208

72. Page 190. The editor also cites Ibn Taymiyya's work *al-Sarim al-Maslul* volume 2 page 23 on the same page footnote 4. al-Hulwani is Muhammad bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Uthman bin al-Buraq al-Hulwani. Died 1111.

mention that if they were to make an agreement to allow them to call to their beliefs or if they had an agreement that said their covenants and treaties were not repudiated by such acts as blasphemy or the above, then the *mutamad*, a relied upon position in the *madhab*, was that such a Treaty could not be violated and remained intact without the punishment being applied. This was stated by Shaykh Zakariya al-Ansari in his commentary on the *Minhaj*.⁷³

However this is all irrelevant to universally agreed upon rulings across Sunni schools for Muslims living in a country that was predominantly non-Muslim. In those cases, they would have had to obey the social agreements that they entered into implicitly by living in such countries, a “covenant of security” which would apply more so today living in multicultural societies.⁷⁴

Effectively, international agreements would preclude having such impositions upon people according to the agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and others protecting people of different religions, nations, and their citizens, and would be considered when seeking to apply such punishments according to this point of view.

So we should be clear then on the following:

There were those that considered such matters as serious crimes that required a capital punishment. However, the actions of terrorists and extremists seeking to carry out such actions are not justified even by such pre-modern interpretations that believed that there were punishments for these acts. Arguably, the modern world and political realities would make the same scholars see that the political agreements that we make may well preclude such an approach.

In fact it may well be that the *Maslaha* and the purposes of the *shariah* and the spirit of Islamic teachings does not favour such an approach and would be considered perfectly consistent to the understanding of the same jurists and schools.

The basis for these positions is not necessarily the most authentic view, and certainly not the only view of

pre-modern Islam. In fact, these positions are held across various schools of thought and *madhab* from across the spectrum, which includes major jurists and *hadith* scholars even of the more scriptural traditionalists (*ahl al-hadith*). Some may have described these scholars as scriptural literalists, but it was through their literalism that they opposed such punishments.

None of the transmitted positions of Islam in any way justify the horrific acts that we have seen. The ideological and pseudo-theological narrative of al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their pseudo clerics do not have a justification for their positions and should ironically be seen as not medieval but modern and heretical distortions, of pre-modern theology, combined with the modern tactics of terror.⁷⁵

Concluding thoughts

Ibn Daqiq al-Eid, the famous scholar who almost uniquely was considered a jurist in his own right able to deliver edicts – *fatawa* – from the sources directly and derive from more than one *madhab*, wrote extensively on *hadith* and Islamic jurisprudence. His works are known for independent rigour, fairness in dealing with various position and schools, and the presentation and disclosure of differing perspectives. He was also known for personally striving for justice and when, in his time, there occurred an accusation of blasphemy taken against another scholar, he defended them and challenged those injustices even as they were made in the name of religious interpretations, i.e., *fiqh* or ruling of the Shariah.

Ibn Daqiq al-Eid also commented extensively on the well-known *hadith* of the Prophet, relaying that among seven quintessential commands given to the companions was to come to the ‘aid of the oppressed’ – ‘*Nasr ul-Mathlum*’. One of the points he makes is that justice should not come in rushing to seek to apply punishments on people. He does however give a scenario of aiding the oppressed. For example, when two judges are present in a sitting/hearing (*majlis*) and they are both judging and yet

73. Page 316, volume 2, *Fat'h ul-Wahhab bi-Shar'h minhaj ul-Tullaab* al-Ansari, Shaykh Zakariya, was a major scholar of the later school in the Shafi school whose works are widely studied today. Died 1520

74. Both the above reference and the consensus of Sunni schools can be found in the Hanbali author's *Kashf ul-Litham Shar'h Umdat ul-Ahkam*, volume 7, pages 198- 207, a commentary on the most authentic Hadith found in the collections of Bukhari and Muslim, when discussing the meaning of the Hadith: “traitors will be known on the day of judgement by carrying the flag of treachery”. Published by Dar al-Nawadir in Syria - Lebanon - Kuwait. Imam Shams al-Din Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Salim al-Safarini. Died 1774

75. For an elaborate but brief explanation of this see *Bombing Without Moonlight - The Origins of Suicidal Terrorism*, Published by Amal Press, Bristol - London, 2008. Murad, Abdal Hakim.

differ in their positions on a case which may involve the taking of life or punishing and/or condemning them as a heretic (*zindeeq*), then the one who can see that he could prevent the punishment/condemnation or taking of life should rush forth to protect the individual from the harsh judgement of the other. This means that the one who could protect this person would be fulfilling the command of the Prophet to come to the aid of the oppressed.⁷⁶

We need more than slogans and the short-term reactions of shows of unity and shows of empathy to the victims. We need to challenge the narrative of extremists and highlight its ideological flaws, its simplistic view of the world and skewed nature of politics, while dismantling the pseudo-religious arguments. We need to prevent not just of those on the Islamist right but also those on the far right from seeking to essentialise Islam, helping create and further cement civil tensions, or even justifying attacks on Muslims. The middle ground must be radically fought for.

Inconsistencies and contradictions must be addressed at a wider level so that justice is not only done as a society but, as the saying goes, must be *seen* to be done. We are in danger of losing the society we have fought for and struggled to build, societies where we at least attempt to bring communities of competing traditions, cultures, and sensibilities together but also where we share a common humanity.

We can see that those on the ends of the political spectrum will seek to divide us. We have seen the horrific

attacks and the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, attacks on Jews in France and other places. We have also seen the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric and attacks on Mosques across Europe. We need to make sure that whilst we must build our society together and respect each other's right to believe and practice our faith and religion and express ideas, even if they are from diametrically opposed places, we also live together and, as a result, must fight the extremes together, on all sides together.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not represent those of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

About the author

Rashad Ali is an ISD Fellow and a counter-terrorism practitioner. He works on de-radicalisation initiatives alongside prisons, probation programmes, police and community groups. He is classically trained in Islamic theology and jurisprudence and modern studies in Islam, and is an external lecturer for Derby University Master Class courses on Radicalisation and Counter Terrorism. He has been consulted by various think tanks and Governments in the EU and the US. He works across Europe

76. Page 169, volume 2, *Shar'h ul-Ilmam bi-abadith ul-Abkam*, published by Dar al-Nawadir, Beirut - Lebanon - Kuwait, 2010. Imam Ibn Daqiq al-Eid, Taqi ul-Din Muhammad bun Ali bin Wahb al-Qushayri al-Misri. Died 1302