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*Islam Under Siege***i The Return of Anthropology and the  
Final Crusade**

Anthropology has much for which to thank bin Laden. After decades of criticism, anthropology was on the ropes not long ago. Its founding fathers and mothers were discredited: Bronislaw Malinowski for lusting after young natives and Margaret Mead for cooking up ethnographic accounts. Its own practitioners despaired and predicted “The End of Anthropology” (title of Worsley 1966; see also Banaji 1970). When the field appeared at its weakest, the powerful new voice of Edward Said emerged to denounce it as tainted by the dreaded word “Orientalism” (title of Said 1978). Perhaps the unkindest cut was that anthropology was not even seen as a bulldog in the service of the Western imperialists but rather as a mere puppy. Students of anthropology wandered aimlessly – sometimes into post-modernist literary conceit and sometimes into autobiographical excess. Like John Keats’s knight in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” anthropology appeared to be “ailing.” It appeared “alone and palely loitering.”

September 11 changed all that. The main interests of anthropology – ideas of ethnicity, group loyalty, honor, revenge, suicide, tribal code, the conflict between what

anthropologists call the Great Tradition of world religions and their local practice or the Little Tradition – were being discussed everywhere. Perhaps people were not even aware that they were discussing these issues as they were identified with traditional, even “primitive” societies, and therefore discredited; now they were front-page news. What was clear was the sense of hyper-*asabiyya* – and the accompanying paranoia and uncertainty.

Ironically, most religions and communities across the globe felt they were under siege. American television broadcast its news and discussions under the title “America under Siege”; Israelis felt the Arabs had besieged them; and Indians complained of being hemmed in by aggressive Muslim neighbors. The United States, Israel, and India appeared paralyzed in the face of Muslim suicide bombers. They had no answer to the violence except more violence.

With each killing the siege mentality spread. State strategy appeared to be to use more brute power and inflict more pain on the opposite side. Where vision and compassion were required, the state was seen to kill and maim people and destroy property. Its representatives did not even spare the mosque, the house of God.

The United States, Israel, and India were compromising hard-won ideas of a modern, thriving democracy. There were cases of illegal detention, suspension of civil liberties, and unauthorized surveillance. The victim was invariably a Muslim.

Muslims, whether living as a majority, or a minority, felt especially vulnerable after September 11. The fact that all 19 of the hijackers were Muslim appeared to condemn by association every Muslim on the planet. Any expression of Muslim identity risked the fear of being suspected as “terrorist” activity. Muslims felt that their religion Islam was under siege.

*The road to the Crusades*

In the last years of the 20th century a general if amorphous perception had begun to form in the West that with the fall of Communism the new global enemy would be Islam. The idea crystallized on September 11. Bush's declaration of a "crusade" against the "Islamic terrorists" followed. In the wake of the negative media response abroad to the word "crusade" Bush swiftly dropped it. However the Freudian slip had hinted to some that the war would indeed be a crusade against Islam. Other world leaders were less sensitive than Bush about the use of the word "crusade." Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, declared publicly that Islam was the main enemy of Western civilization.

But who represented Islam? Was it bin Laden and Al-Qaeda or a specific nation or nations or the entire Muslim world? If the definition of the enemy was vague, the length of the war was even vaguer; nor were the boundaries of the theater of operations any clearer. The full might of the United States would be used against the "terrorists" wherever they were to be found and the war would be indefinitely waged until the enemy was destroyed. Private media and official institutions came together in a formidable spirit of determined unity. Clearly this was going to be more than a military campaign managed by the Pentagon to fight a small group hiding in the caves of Afghanistan.

By thinking and acting in crusader mode Bush was rejecting ideas of multi-religious multiculturalism. He was rejecting postmodernist pluralism and reviving what writers and artists called the Grand or Meta Narrative, which underlines domination by a monolithic idea or culture. In pursuing his war on terrorism Bush, with his "You are with us or against us" approach, also was rolling back the postmodern age to a time of certitude, defined

borders, and monolithic ideas. He had turned the clock back a thousand years. Once again the West was launching armies against Muslim lands and people; once again the dividing line was to be religion; once again ideas of honor, revenge, dignity, culture, and community became important.

Bush's adversary bin Laden was rejecting the West, which he saw as corrupting. He talked of the loss of honor among Muslim leaders, of the plight of the Palestinians and the Iraqis, and of the loss of dignity of his own people, the Saudis, due to the presence of American troops. To him the United States was evil and had to be battled. (For the story of another Muslim, Ajab Khan, who challenged – and temporarily shook – a Western superpower see chapter 2, section ii).

The protagonists recognized early in the struggle that this crusade was about changing minds, not conquering territory. But with wedding party guests being killed in Afghanistan by American bombing, it was hard to expect the good will earned in removing the Taliban to last. In the end, to ordinary Afghans, being killed by Bush's bombs or those of bin Laden made little difference.<sup>1</sup>

Matters were made worse because of the mutual lack of understanding. Americans associated empty caves in the Afghan mountains, the firing of weapons into the sky, and the storage of ammunition and weapons with terrorist activity. For the people of the region, however, for generations caves had meant nomadic tribes moving to cooler climes in summer; firing into the sky a mark of celebration at birth and marriage; and the storage of weapons an insurance against tribal rivalries.

So far, two crusades have pitted the West against Islam. The first began in the 11th century and, after several waves of European warriors were exhausted, ended in the 13th. The second, which took the form of straightforward

European colonization, occupied the 19th and first half of the 20th century. Both crusades began with triumph for the West and the capture of Muslim lands, but both ultimately failed.

Both have been seen as a clash of military forces but they were also a competition of cultural and intellectual ideas. The West was at a distinct disadvantage one thousand years ago as Muslim civilization was already established as the pre-eminent cultural and political force. It was the time of rulers like Saladin, who on recapturing Jerusalem from the Crusaders could show magnanimity in spite of vowing to avenge their bloody massacres. It was the age of the towering scholars and mystics of Islam – Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi,<sup>2</sup> Abdullah Ibn Sina, Abu Raihan Al-Beruni, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali, and Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, to name a few.<sup>3</sup> Their prose and poetry reflect inspiration from the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran; from Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them). When Rumi died, a Christian is on record as being asked why he wept so bitterly, and his answer: “We esteem him as the Moses, the David, the Jesus of the age. We are all his followers and his disciples” (Shah 1990: 149). Not surprisingly the early makers of European consciousness – Aquinas, Dante, and Cervantes – were influenced by what was seen as the irresistible global culture influenced by Islam.

As late as the 17th century, Muslim rulers were advocating tolerance. Akbar the Great in India ordered his governors to spend their spare time reading Al-Ghazzali and Rumi. On the main entrance to his grand city Fatehpur Sikri, soon to be deserted for lack of water, Akbar inscribed the following lines: “Jesus, on whom be peace, has said: This world is a bridge. Pass over it. But build not your dwelling there” (Jeremias 1964: 112; his section titled “The World is a Bridge” on p. 111 discusses the

origins of this saying and its attribution to both Jesus and the Prophet of Islam).

Akbar's grandson Dara Shikoh carried on the tradition of tolerance by wearing a ring inscribed with "Prabhu," the Sanskrit name for God, keeping the company of yogis, and patronizing translations of the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* into Persian. Dara Shikoh was not renouncing Islam, and his ideal remained the Prophet of Islam. But his tolerance cost him his life. The Muslim world was already changing.

The situation between Islam and the West was reversed two centuries later when Europeans slowly but inexorably colonized Muslim lands in the imperialist crusade. This time Europeans could dismiss with contempt Muslim culture and thought. Lord Macaulay, the author in 1835 of the famous "Minute on Education," which would influence the intellectual and cultural direction of South Asia, dismissed the entire corpus of Arabic literature – he threw in Sanskrit for good measure – as not equal to one European bookshelf. Even sensitive poets like Lord Alfred Tennyson dismissed the Orient in similar comparisons: "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay" (in "Locksley Hall," 1842).

Subjugated and humiliated, Muslim culture still showed flashes of tolerance. But the choices – and subsequent dilemmas – were tearing Muslims apart. Mirza Ghalib, Urdu literature's greatest poet, wrote in the middle of the 19th century: "My belief (Islam) constrains me while the acts of the non-believers attract me. The Kaaba (house of Islam) is behind me and the Church (the house of Christianity) in front."

*The final crusade*

Irrational hatred of others, the primordial urge to take revenge, the obsessive humiliation of women, and the declaration of holy war – this was familiar to us from the two crusades I have mentioned. However, the current crusade – because of our world’s cultural complexities and the apocalyptic nature of our weapons – threatens to be the final round. It promises to resolve the unfinished business of subjugating or subduing Islam begun a thousand years ago.

Bush’s notions of a crusade met, head on, those of bin Laden, who was already engaged in a holy war against America. Bin Laden, like many in the present generation of Muslim activists, is influenced by men like Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian cleric executed by the state for treason in 1966 (see chapter 4, section i). Anti-Semitism, hatred of Israel and America, and a violent interpretation of Islam – the ideological stanchions that we recognize in many young Muslims today – were being set in place half a century ago. Muslim society has come a long way from the tolerant brotherhood of Rumi and the magnanimous chivalry of Saladin.

After September 2001 prominent Muslims – especially those living in or influenced by the West – denounced bin Laden and pronounced him and his politics “dead” (for example the Paris-based Amir Taheri in “A Perverter of Islam: Bin Laden and his Politics are dead,” in the *International Herald Tribune*, July 12, 2002). They are wrong. Bin Laden has become a larger-than-life symbol of many things, including standing up to the West, to Muslims throughout the world. Muslim parents in their thousands are naming their sons Osama. Most important: Bin Laden has helped to trigger the present crusade.

As an idea, the present crusade is a powerful one

especially as it brings with it such deep historical, cultural, and religious memories. It is also a severely problematic and limited idea in its application. As enunciated by Bush, the philosophy of this crusade – “You are with us or against us” – appealed to as many as it repelled. Too many Muslim leaders, wined and dined in the capitals of the West, were vying with each other to sign up with Bush as his standard-bearers; many were loathed by their people for their blind obedience to America (Pakistanis contemptuously called Musharraf, “Busharraf”); many Western voices denounced Bush’s campaign as it promised an open-ended, unending, and uncertain global conflict.

Because of the importance of cultural and intellectual ideas, the media, including film, are seen by both sides as key participants in the present crusade. The important voices for interfaith dialogue and understanding continue to speak up but find it difficult to be heard amid the noise.

After September 11 commentators on Islam were suddenly everywhere in the media. Much of what they had to say was racist and religiously prejudiced; it was hostility disguised as serious comment. Even the more scholarly voices were divided. Some, woefully few, wrote with sympathetic objectivity.<sup>4</sup> Some even talked of Islam as essentially a religion of peace and gave the historical example of Muslim Spain. They spoke of the grave misunderstanding between Islam and the West today. Others were more dominant and aggressive; they spoke of Islam as a terrorist religion and as the main threat to the West in the clash of civilizations.<sup>5</sup> The debate exacerbated the already existing divisions in what in the United States is called Middle East Studies (Kramer 2001).

There was open talk of the United States invading Muslim nations beyond Afghanistan. Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya – even Saudi Arabia – these were discussed in the media as potential targets. Bush pointedly included Iraq



and Iran as part of what he called an “Axis of Evil.” Bin Laden, like the Cheshire cat, began to fade from the horizon as public enemy number one and was replaced by Saddam Hussein. Bush also emphasized the concepts of “pre-emptive strike” and “regime change” in his foreign policy. The world was alarmed at where and how all this would end.

Nelson Mandela, on the eve of the first anniversary of September 11, publicly rebuked the United States. It was, he said, creating “international chaos in international affairs.” A few days later the German justice minister compared Bush to Hitler. This was absurd and unfair. It caused a furore, which exposed the complexity of the post-September world.

America’s global war on terrorism had splintered into a dozen little battles that fed into local conflicts. Lines had become blurred. Confusion prevailed. There was a danger of the world descending into a Hobbesian nightmare; a war of all against all.

## **ii The Sense of Muslim Siege**

Never before in history, it appears, has there been a conjunction of factors that has allowed Muslims to kill and be killed on such a scale, with such extraordinary frequency, and in so many gruesome ways. If the actions of the hijackers had nothing to do with Islam, the causes and consequences of their actions will have everything to do with how and where Islam is going in the 21st century.

### *The day the 21st century began*

Islam was at the heart of the events of September 11. On that extraordinary day, the president of the United States

was on the run, zigzagging across America in Air Force One, escorted by F-16s and F-15s, until he returned to the capital late in the day to take charge. The stock exchanges were closed, all flights were suspended, emergency was declared in several states, and false alarms sent people scurrying for their lives. The scenes of panic on television would have seemed far-fetched in a Hollywood film.

But America began to recover quickly from the unprecedented carnage and mayhem; its native optimism struggled to reassert itself. The stars and stripes appeared everywhere, and interfaith dialogue was heard across the land. The president made a welcome visit to the Islamic Center in Washington DC, the city where I reside.

Dramatically, imperceptibly, the miasmic pall of uncertainty, of our lives being vulnerable and out of control, that hangs over much of the world now descended on Americans. People were aware that something had changed fundamentally. Like birds that vanish from the sky after a natural calamity the planes over Washington disappeared; the skies became eerily quiet except for the urgent sound of the helicopter, which added to the tension. When the flights resumed it was a relief to see something of normalcy return, but it was not the same.

In the weeks to come, the media stoked the sense of panic and even hysteria. Anthrax cases, fires in the subway, even a tremor in California – everything was instinctively being blamed on the “terrorists.” This Pavlovian response would soon be embedded in the American psyche. A year later commentators without hesitation linked John Allen Muhammad, the deadly sniper who killed and wounded thirteen people in and around Washington DC, to Al-Qaeda even before he was caught and identified as an Afro-American convert to Islam.

War was declared on “terrorism” and in early October 2001 the bombing of Afghanistan began. In the highly charged atmosphere of the United States at the time no voice was raised to point out that not a single one of the nineteen hijackers was an Afghan; neither was bin Laden an Afghan. It appeared as if someone almost at random had to be selected and sacrificed to avenge September 11. Afghanistan was the most convenient choice at hand.

The war began with imprecise objectives and no stated duration; it suggested perils that could not be calibrated and unpredictable consequences. While the leaders of the Western alliance appeared bold and principled to their supporters they appeared reckless and impetuous to their critics.<sup>6</sup> Muslims protested in many parts of the world.

Wars are usually a consequence of the breakdown of communication between the protagonists. In this case it was a totally asymmetrical war in the most profound ways possible: the two different societies, one highly industrialized and world-dominating, the other still pre-industrial, impoverished, and tribal, spoke different languages and lived in different cultures. The only thing in common was the mutual incomprehension with which they viewed each other.

Government and media commentators pointed to Iraq, Syria, and Iran as other “terrorist” states and potential targets. Pakistan, which had nurtured and supported the Taliban, escaped the wrath of the Americans by hastily abandoning the Taliban and siding with the United States. This did not prevent many Americans from keeping a close and critical eye on Pakistan.

Bin Laden, in an extraordinary video broadcast on American television,<sup>7</sup> argued that this was a war between Islam and the West. The main grievances he listed struck a nerve in the mosques, shantytowns, and bazaars of the

Muslim world. The idea of Islam as an enemy was gaining ground in the West in spite of Western leaders insisting this was not true.

From the beginning, bin Laden, who had threatened the United States with mass terror on several occasions, was widely believed to have been the mastermind of the attacks. If a Peruvian or a Japanese cult stepped forward and claimed that it had organized the attacks, it would have been hard to accept. In the public mind Islam was to blame. Reports of the harassment of Muslims and attacks on mosques began almost immediately. In some cases, Sikhs were killed. They had been mistaken, because of their beards and turbans, for Muslims.

The years of negative press, news of hijacking or hostage-taking or honor killings, reinforced by big-budget Hollywood films like *True Lies*, *Executive Decision*, and *The Siege*, had conditioned the public to expect the worst from a civilization widely viewed as “terrorist,” “fundamentalist,” and “fanatic.” Muslim “terrorists” had even featured in *The Simpsons*, one of the most popular television shows in America, when Mr Burns sold plutonium to terrorists wearing turbans, beards, and Arab headdress. In mainstream culture “Muslim” had become synonymous with “terrorist.” The explosion in Oklahoma City six years earlier also had been blamed on Muslims, although as everyone now knows, it was the work of a white American man, Timothy McVeigh.

Observers described the hijackers as “extremists,” “fundamentalists,” and “terrorists,” terms that told us little about the hijackers. Others described them as belonging to a cult, like the one headed by Jim Jones in 1970s’ Guyana. That was perhaps getting nearer to the truth. But I suggest that McVeigh is the better comparison. The cause of Jim Jones was Jones himself. McVeigh believed he killed and died for a bigger cause. He had a distorted

understanding of Christianity, nationalism, honor, and patriotism. A cold, calculating anger appeared to drive him.

Like McVeigh, the hijackers of September 11 defied conventional ideas of what motivates people to acts of violence. They came from middle-class backgrounds. They were educated in Western ways and familiar with the West and had everything to gain from living there. Their rage had as much to do with Islam as McVeigh's had to do with Christianity: very little.

Muslims were not helping their case after the attacks. Muslim guilt seemed to be confirmed for Americans as many Muslims refused to accept that the nineteen hijackers were even Muslim; they blamed the events of September 11 on a Jewish or Christian conspiracy against Islam. Americans reacted with disbelief to the jubilation they saw in parts of the Muslim world, where people distributed sweets and chanted slogans against America.

Egypt's privately owned "independent" press also celebrated the terrorist attacks against the United States: "Millions across the world shouted in joy: America was hit!" wrote *Al-Maydan* (an independent weekly) columnist Dr. Nabil Farouq. "This call expressed the sentiments of millions across the world, whom the American master had treated with tyranny, arrogance, bullying, conceit, deceit, and bad taste – like every bully whom no one has yet put in his place." (Pearson and Clark 2002: 374)

The insensitivity of the Muslim reaction rubbed salt into American wounds and, for some Americans, removed any doubts about taking revenge. Few recognized the humiliation, terror, and neurosis in Muslim society from the decades of emotional and physical violence to which they had been subjected; fewer still understood that many Muslims blamed America for their plight. The idea of

Islam set on a collision course with America triumphed over any other ideas of global peace and dialogue.

The Muslim world seems to be torn between those who would shake heaven and earth to get a green card and become Americans and those who would shake heaven and earth to destroy or damage Americans. For both groups, the United States is the most important, most visible, and most powerful representation of all that is good or bad in Western civilization.

#### *The rising tide of Islamophobia*

The rising tide of Islamophobia encouraged incidents against Muslims, and these incidents further fed the Islamophobia. For evidence, Muslims needed only to look at the shocking killings of some Muslims in the West, where many were picked up for interrogation and many others felt harried and humiliated. Several Muslim charities were shut down; women wearing the *hijab* were harassed. Fox television commentator Bill O'Reilly equated the holy book of the Muslims, the Quran, to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*; so much for the channel's self-description as offering "fair and balanced" coverage.

The fear of and loathing against Islam were even more pronounced in religious circles. The Reverend Jerry Vines, former leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, denounced the Prophet of Islam as a "demon-possessed paedophile." To the Reverend Jerry Falwell the Prophet was a "terrorist." The Reverend Franklin Graham, who offered the invocation at Bush's inauguration, called Islam "a very wicked and evil religion." Islam's God was not the God of Christianity, declared Graham, the son of Billy Graham. Pat Robertson said much the same thing.

The marginal, obscure, and even academically dubious

work of a group of so-called “new historians” of Islam, who sought to undermine the foundations of Islam, was further cause for alarm. They suggested that the Prophet was not a real historical figure and that the Quran was patched together centuries after his supposed death in 632 AD. Most controversially, these researchers argued “The religion may be best understood as a heretical branch of rabbinical Judaism” (see “The Great Koran Conrick” by Martin Bright in *New Statesman*, December 10, 2001: 25).

Certain Christian groups launched an offensive to “eliminate Islam” altogether (see “False Prophets: Inside the Evangelical Christian Movement That Aims to Eliminate Islam” by Barry Yeoman in *Mother Jones*, June 2002). Richard Lowry, the editor of *National Review*, created a storm of controversy when he came up with a “final” solution to the Muslim problem: “Nuke Mecca” and force the remaining Muslims to accept Christianity (see *National Review Online*, “The Corner”, March 7, 2002).

Modern communications made it possible for intelligence agencies throughout the world to work together efficiently in hunting down those they were calling terrorists. On that list were some people legitimately demanding their rights but now seen by governments as trouble-makers.<sup>8</sup>

After September 11, local authorities could pick up any young Muslim male anywhere in the world without questions being asked. On the contrary, the only power that mattered, the United States, was seen as aggressively anxious to pursue “terrorists” wherever they lived. It did not take long for those who wished to discourage their Muslim populations from demanding an entire range of rights to figure out that if they labeled the Muslims “terrorists” they could request support and even aid from Washington. Sure enough American troops were soon deployed against a variety of local Muslim groups who

normally would have looked to Washington for help as they faced human rights violations. The Chechens in Russia are an example. The Uighurs in China, the Kashmiris in India, the Palestinians in Israel – after September their cause became a lost cause. The ongoing suppression of their population had aspects of genocide. No one appeared to be able to do much to stop the slaughter. No one appeared to be really interested.

As a result too many Muslim civilians are being killed and too many homes being blown up across the world with impunity. Too many people are being picked up and humiliated or tortured. Many simply disappear. There is a great deal of anger among ordinary Muslims at the injustices perpetrated against them that they see on their television sets and within their own societies.

Muslims have seen how for half a century UN resolutions aimed at alleviating the suffering of Palestinians and Kashmiris were ignored. Yet, conversely, the UN was swift to act against Muslim states like Iraq for their transgressions.

It is the failure to redress the injustices of the Muslim world that has caused the marginalization of the more liberal, even secular, nationalist movements, which dominated the postcolonial era after the Second World War. Only a generation ago, the rulers of the Muslim world seem to emphasize different aspects of modernity. They talked of dams, highways, and industries. They avoided talking of religion and tribes. Their failure has meant the fading of the hopes and aspirations of the post-independence period and the return to atavistic themes. Over the last decades, but quickening in the last few years, such shifts have encouraged among Muslims the emergence of and support for men like bin Laden and their discourse of violence.

The so-called “moderate” leaders supported by the



West, like Musharraf and Mubarak, continued to claim that the extremists instigated the increased unrest against their governments in the Muslim world after September 11. But while saying this, their police and security apparatus were firmly locking up anyone who would disagree with them at home. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan, both mainstream parties, and no longer viewed as the extremists they were when they appeared on the political landscape half a century ago, were gagged and their leaders jailed. Ordinary people blamed the Americans for the increased repression.

In early October 2001, with the start of America's all-out "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan, and the subsequent hunt for "Muslim terrorists" elsewhere, the perception among Muslims began to grow that the "war on terrorism" was in fact "the war on Islam" (the title of Masud 2002, written by an American Muslim living in Washington DC). In the din few non-Muslims or Muslims were heeding the eternal message of the mystics of Islam – *sulh-i-kul* or "peace with all."

#### *A new Andalusia?*

Professor Tamara Sonn, president of the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies, had several discussions with me before September 2001 in which she spoke of the United States as a new Andalusia – a tolerant society in which the great faiths live in harmony and contribute to a rich, mutually beneficial culture.<sup>9</sup> She was right. But after September, the freest, most welcoming country in the world for Muslims turned threatening to and suspicious of Muslim belief and practice.

America compromised its own idea of a democratic, pluralistic, and open society after September 11. The

voices that objected were too isolated to be heard clearly (for example see “The Troubling New Face of America” by Jimmy Carter in the *Washington Post*, September 5, 2002; also see Goldberg, Goldberg and Greenwald 2002; Cole, Dempsey and Goldberg 2002). There were stories of Muslims, or what the media called men of “Middle Eastern appearance,” being detained or disappearing. It was alleged that some even died in interrogation. Racial profiling in the United States meant that Muslims could be interrogated, questioned, and deported if necessary with little or no outcry in the media. In any case, polls showed that about 80 percent of Americans believed that this was the way forward. Polls in the United States and in some Muslim nations confirmed the distaste they had for each other.

The general antipathy to Muslims was so great then that when suspected Taliban and Al-Qaeda captives were brought as prisoners to the United States army base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba – to the place known as Camp X-ray – and some organizations raised the question of rights, American media commentators responded by saying, “These are not prisoners of war and therefore, have no rights.” Noted legal personalities advocated the official use of torture in dealing with Muslims (Dershowitz 2002). Images of the prisoners shuffling about with shackles binding wrists, ankles, and waists, with hoods on their faces and masks on their mouths, guarded at all times by burly-looking soldiers, and sleeping and living in six- by eight-foot open-air cells, did not even stir the slightest sympathy in societies that had talked so much about human rights. Even the significance of the fact that the beards of the Muslims were forcibly shaved did not register in the public debate. The beard is the very symbol of Islamic identity, revered in Muslim culture because of the sayings and practice of the Prophet of Islam. That is why

when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey, wished to identify something as essential to Islam, he launched a campaign to ban the beard. He was rejecting a core symbol of Islamic identity in an attempt to create a new identity. In the early part of the 21st century, the Americans were doing the same with impunity. Although the Americans were removing Islamic identity and Atatürk had set out to create a new identity, the effect was the same – a perceived assault on Islam.

Perhaps most disappointing was the American failure to see that Americans themselves were damaging something essential in their own society when they claimed that their treatment of the Afghan prisoners was to be compared to the Afghan treatment of Afghan prisoners. Unwittingly, they were comparing themselves to one of the most brutal regimes in modern times, a tribal, illiterate, and backward group. They were dismissing from their own history the struggle and evolution of modern political thought over the last three centuries. The practice of the midnight knock had arrived in the United States after having been discredited with the fall of the Soviet system, and people were not even aware of it. September 11 was changing the world in all sorts of unexpected ways.

Bush's exclusivist policy of "You are with us or against us" was creating complications abroad too. Bush demanded hard boundaries in societies where so many different identities – tribal, sectarian, national, and religious – over-lapped, merged, and lived side by side. It was difficult to locate where one identity ended and another one began. Where seeing nuances and living in gray areas was an established way of life, it was virtually impossible to change in the way Bush demanded.

Bush himself changed overnight in the minds of most Americans; his popularity ratings remained extraordinarily

high after September. Americans now saw Bush as the simple but heroic Texan sheriff determined to protect his town and bring the villain to justice. Bush even spoke the language: he would take bin Laden “dead or alive”; bin Laden was a “slithering snake.” But this was speaking to the anger of the people. There was no room for compassion and understanding. Like most people in the United States, Bush was coming to September 11 with an absolute idea of good and evil.

But it was not long before Bush became aware of the complexities of global society. A year after September 11, on November 7, 2002, he invited a group of Muslims, which included ambassadors, to have dinner with him at the White House during the holy month of Ramadan (see “Sighting of the Crescent Moon at the White House,” my Religion News Service column dated November 20). In his brief welcome he emphasized the Abrahamic origins of Islam and that the war he was waging was “on a radical network of terrorists, not on a religion and not on a civilization.” These were the two important points that needed to be made, and the president made them. I was privileged to be seated on his table and during the dinner he emphasized these points with conviction. He admitted that before September 11, like most Americans, he knew little about Islam. He was making determined efforts to understand Islam with compassion. Predictably, Muslim critics of the United States condemned Bush’s initiative: “Uncle Toms dine with Uncle Sam,” proclaimed *Ummah News* (November 27, 2002), one of the main media outlets of the mainly UK-based Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a prominent and active Muslim political organization which has vigorously supported Osama bin Laden (see chapters 4 and 5 below).

*Another face of America*

There is another face of America. Unfortunately it is not seen in the Muslim world. I saw it in Santa Fe in August 2002.

Santa Fe is an anthropologist's paradise. It is where three major cultures meet: Hispanic, Native American, and what people here call "Anglo." With its opera, museums, and art galleries, Santa Fe provides high culture for those who at the same time wish to be well away from the major cities of the country. Santa Fe attracts the rich and famous (the movie stars Gene Hackman and the late Greer Garson, for example), artists, scholars, and retired diplomats. Situated at 7,000 feet in the Rocky Mountains the town is also popular among skiers. Its name, "The Land of Enchantment," is well deserved.

While there, I saw Zia Drive and was taken aback. Why would Santa Fe honor the military dictator of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq? The name of the road and the sun design on the state flag are influenced by the Native American Zia symbol, I was told, and had nothing to do with the general.

Santa Fe boasts the oldest mission church in the United States. It is also proud of the fact that long before it was the capital of New Mexico, it was made the capital of the northeastern province of New Spain in 1610; it is therefore the oldest capital city in the United States. The Palace of the Governors is the oldest public building in the United States.

The magnificent cathedral dedicated to St Francis of Assisi, which was founded when Santa Fe was declared the capital, dominates the centre of the town. St Francis is an appropriate symbol for Santa Fe, as he symbolizes compassion and tolerance. I was told of a Judaic symbol at the entrance of the cathedral and went to look for it.

Indeed, at the entrance I found a triangle and in it, in Hebrew, "Yahweh," the word for God.

I was in Santa Fe at the invitation of Lee Berry on behalf of the Santa Fe Council on International Relations. Although the Council is one of many throughout the United States, for the small population of Santa Fe, its membership of 900 suggests a high level of participation.

The Council had arranged a Special Project on Islam which stretched over three days. It began with a public lecture that I delivered at the Greer Garson Theatre at the College of Santa Fe. About 300 people participated. There were three other sessions on Islam. The questions were sharp and intelligent and revolved around Islam and its relations with the West: questions about women in Islam; the future of democracy in Islam; the role of the United States on the global stage and its relationship with the Muslim world. There was a general unease about where the war on terrorism was heading and where it would end.

I was constantly surprised at the level of sophistication and links to my own world: Lisl and Landt Dennis gave me their coffee-table book *Living in Morocco: Design from Casablanca to Marrakesh* (2001); Michael Hoyt, who had been a consul in the American Embassy in Karachi, presented me his *Captive in the Congo: A Consul's Return to the Heart of Darkness* (2000); and William Stewart, who had been a consul in Bombay and then a correspondent for *Time* magazine, gave me his columns which he writes for the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. He startled me at a reception by suddenly speaking to me in Urdu/Hindi, the languages of South Asia.

The warmth and welcome of these writers reflected the warmth and welcome I received from my host, Lee Berry, and his wife Sandy. A successful oil businessman, who held senior positions in London, Tokyo, Libya, and Indo-

nesia, Lee symbolizes the spirit of the people I met in Santa Fe: the goodwill and generosity of friendship, the curiosity about other places and peoples, and active commitment to understanding. Unfortunately, this is the face of America that many people abroad do not see.

Lee introduced me to his twelve-year-old grandson Kyle, who studies at the prestigious Albuquerque Academy in Albuquerque. Harry Potter is overrated, he thought. He preferred *The Lord of the Rings*. Kyle's favourite subject is poetry. I asked him if he had read *If* by Rudyard Kipling. He hadn't. I recommended it. Lee reinforced my advice. I was confident that if Kyle got round to reading *If*, he would soon discover the wonderful adventures of *Kim*, also written by Kipling (1960; originally published in 1901). Although Kipling is out of fashion and rejected – sometimes unfairly – as imperialist, sexist, and racist, I believe *Kim* encourages a young readership to enter imaginatively into the lives of others. Kim, about the same age as Kyle, would help Kyle discover a world at once far and near: far because it is set in the distant lands of Afghanistan and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent; near because America is now involved deeply in what Kipling called “The Great Game” in that part of the world. The discovery would assist the young American in appreciating that, in spite of our differences, we are all part of what Kim calls the same river of humanity.