

A Creative Exploration of the Islamic faith in the 21st Century.

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Introduction

This creative project will delve into the differing aspects of Islam: the history of the final Prophet Muhammed SAW¹, the scientific discoveries mentioned in the Qur'an before Western science found them, and misconceptions surrounding the Islamic faith with the discussion of individuals converting to Islam. Whilst using the Qur'an, a religious text that Muslims recognise as the Divine Revelation from Allah SWT², as a prominent and primary source. The Qur'an was revealed 1300 years ago, to an uneducated man who could not read or write: Prophet Muhammed SAW. The main body of this project will contain primary and secondary sources. Including articles related to the critique of Islam, research data regarding scientific findings/discoveries, and books narrating the life of Prophet Muhammed SAW as a military/political/religious leader. The Qur'an will be the prominent source for my project.

The Arabic term 'Islam' meaning "surrender/submission" specifically refers to the obedience and submission to Allah (SWT), The Creator of all universes and mankind. Islam has always been at the forefront of religious conversation in the 21st century. Eid (2014) discusses how, "Despite some efforts by Western mainstream media to provide fair and objective portrayals of Muslims, the dominant portrayals tend to be negative". This project means to shine light on the aspects of Islam that are unknown to many, due to the stigma that has maligned the Islamic faith in modern times. This creative piece analyses the scientific developments that Islam discussed 1370 years ago. Whilst discussing the importance and relevance of Muhammed (SAW) as a powerful leader to Muslims /non-Muslims alike. It is important to empathise this project seeks to distance itself from contemporary views on Islam. Particularly the promotion of terrorism and primitive views that have been propagated in recent years.

¹ "*Sallallahu alayhi wa salaam*" (May God's prayers and peace be with him)

² "*Subhanahu wa ta'ala.*" ("*Glory to Him, the Exalted*")

Literature review

A prominent figure through history has been the Prophet Muhammed SAW. For Muslims, a greater individual has not existed since Islam began. One Primary source: *Response to the Negative Portrayal of The Holy Prophet in the Western literature*, written by Islam Ahmadiyya, an online website, shows that misinterpretation of Islam is a topic of discussion (Islam Ahmadiyya, 2021).

Islam Ahmadiyya states, “You ask what our policy is. I will say, it is to wage war with all our might, with all the strength that God can give us”, declared by Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister (quoted in Islam Ahmadiyya, 2021). Islam Ahmadiyya (2021) proclaims that when one hears these words without any contextual background, would assume that it was taken from any time period and aimed at any person/s or even uttered by an individual such as Osama Bin Laden. These words were in Churchill’s speech for WWII. Meaning these words are from a leader who was attempting to defend his country/countrymen. This proves how a statement taken out of context can change the whole meaning/translation of that subject matter and provide an untrue perception of the individual who utters those words.

Nevertheless, an opposing narration is provided in secondary source: *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion*, written by Robert Spencer. Spencer discusses the life of Prophet Muhammed SAW and the Islamic faith. Spencer’s book was emersed in negative criticism of Prophet Muhammed SAW. Spencer thought that Prophet Muhammed SAW’s teachings were inciting hatred and violence, causing terrorism in modern times. In addition to the belief that bloodshed and barbaric slaughter would continue if Muslims kept looking to Prophet Muhammed SAW as a role model (Islam Ahmadiyya, 2021).

This is evident in Spencer’s claims “for if he was indeed a man of peace, one may reasonably hope that his example would become the linchpin of reform efforts in the Islamic world that would eventually rollback the influence of jihad terrorists” (Spencer, 2006, p. 6).

An alternative view to Spencer is echoed through Napoleon Bonaparte, the famous political/military leader, who spoke highly of his respect for Prophet Muhammed SAW. Voltaire, a famous French Writer wrote a play: *Mahomet*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had translated Voltaire’s play to English. Upon hearing this, Bonaparte displayed his utter disgust and disapproval. Due to Bonaparte’s opinion that Voltaire’s play *Mahomet* portrayed a great military leader and charismatic individual in an untrue light. As such he declared in a conversation with Goethe: “It painted an unworthy portrait of a world conqueror, a great man who had just changed the course of history” (Tolan, 2019, p. 1).

Bonaparte’s view on Muhammed SAW proves the existence of varied opinions regarding Islam, depending on one’s own constantly evolving nature, or different cultures that hold diverse views of the Islamic faith. Additionally, taking into consideration the extent to which Islamic teachings are taken out of context, and misinterpretation of ideals, it could be argued that Islam is misrepresented in the contemporary world.

Another integral source: *The Holy Qur’an* provides extensive details on the nature of Muhammed SAW and provides proof of such incidents that glorify him in modern times. It states: “There has certainly come to you an Apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you and is most kind and merciful to the faithful”

(Salam Islam, 2019). When comparing Spencer's text against website: Islam Ahmadiyya, it is evident that Islam Ahmadiyya is successful in relaying the relevant information needed to prove its point regarding Muhammed SAW. As it is supported by Bonaparte's view and The Holy Qur'an. This provides insight into the misunderstood character of Muhammed SAW, and as such future examinations to prove the credibility of his character will be needed, when arguing against Spencer's opinion of Muhammed SAW.

Umar Nasser, a trainee doctor and advocate for Muslims embodies the importance of science and religion in the 21st century. Nasser (2020) discusses how the fast-paced developments of the 21st century in technology, science, and society leave no place for religion. As, time, and time again the conversation of God is forcefully shunned by Science (Nasser, 2020).

Nasser's view is debated in primary source: *The Holy Qur'an*, translated by Muhammad Ali, which is the religious text for Muslims. It portrays the integral role of a higher being who designed the universe. It educated Muslims on embryology in the seventh century, when Western Science was yet to discover these findings. It mentioned human embryology to such an intrinsic degree that extensive information and description is given in the Religious text: "We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed. Then We made the drop into an alaqah (leech, and suspended thing, and blood clot), then We made the alaqah into a mudghah (chewed substance) ..." (Qur'an 23:12-14).

However, a source that differs from *The Holy Qur'an* is *God and Science: Can we believe in both?*, written by William Breitbart, which relays the opinion of renowned psychologist: Sigmund Freud. Freud argued that religion, was, but an infantile desire viewed as naive and pathetic. Freud believed that the idea of a 'Superman' in the sky was absurd as science relied on empirical proof for such findings. And there was as such no proof of a God existing. Freud asked for man to wake up. Freud believed as time went on many would educate themselves and fall away from the delusion of religion.

On the other hand, an alternative view embodied through the work of C.S. Lewis asked for humans to 'wake-up'. C.S. Lewis the famous novelist began his life as an atheist, and after a short period of time became a devout Catholic. Lewis as opposed to Freud, asked for humans to open their eyes to the beauty of God that surrounded mankind: "the proponents of intelligent design" (Breitbart, 2005). Freud shuns the existence of a higher power, whilst Spencer refutes the importance and status of Prophet Muhammed SAW, as integral to Islam. And instead portrays Muhammed SAW in a negative light. Much like Freud who uses satire and sarcasm when addressing the possibility of a God. When comparing *The Holy Qur'an* against Breitbart's text it is evident that there is a pool of differing opinions present in the argument of God, which can be used to further my project to cover all aspects of research.

In the 21st century many deem Islam as a severe and consistent threat and "a cancer spreading around the globe, undermining the legitimacy of Western values, and threatening the national security of the United States" (Frahler, 1994). However, statistics sourced by Mother Jones (2022), show data of mass shootings that occurred in the United States between 1982-2020, whereby 55% of white males were at the centre of mass shootings in America.

Another primary source: *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversation in the West*, written by Karin Van Nieuwkerk provides an alternative view on the violent image of Islam. "Despite all the negative propaganda regarding Muslim women, female converts to Islam outnumber their male counterparts by an estimated ratio of 4:1!" as uttered by True

Religion (quoted in Nieuwkerk, 2006, p.1). The first woman convert in Islam was Khadijah: wife of Muhammed SAW. The conversion of women is a greater conversation, as the social/cultural construct of women's roles and media have often portrayed them as confined and within boundaries (Nieuwkerk, 2006).

Alongside the image of Islam being associated with terrorism, the religious boundaries set for Muslim women have been painted into an image of oppression that many believe is the truth to this religion. Nonetheless, a view that opposes this opinion is Tony Blair's. Blair spoke of the Qur'an as being progressive and ahead of its time and acting practically when it came to women (Blair, 2007). This also provides an alternative view to Freud's view that religion is for the naive and something that cannot be proven due to empirical proof. As the Qur'an offers many incidents of practicality and proof that are also supported by the scientific discoveries found in the Qur'an before Western science had found them.

The conversation of the media misinterpreting Islam is a prevalent theme in secondary source: *Islam and Suicide Terrorism: Separating Fact from Fiction*, written by Reid Hutchins. Hutchins portrays the incorrect link the media has created between terrorism and Islam. The terms 'martyrdom' and 'Jihad'³ are repetitively and consistently linked with suicide bombers/terrorists. Due to real translation/contexts of these Islamic traditions being misunderstood (p. 7). As a result of this misinterpretation many hate crimes were perpetuated against Muslims after 9/11 occurring, leading to mosques being burnt, belongings being stolen/damaged, and Muslim women who adorned the hijab⁴ being abused (Kaptur, 2003). This source is successful as it echoes an aspect of my project that I have already discussed in the beginning of this review: misinterpretation. As, in this project it can be argued Muhammed SAW and Islam are misunderstood, resulting in a biased untrue verdict of them being presented to their world.

Although, an alternative view that adds to Nieuwkerk's findings is the fact that conversion rates for Islam increased post 9/11. This was classed as "the other September 11 effect", as defined by Sarah M. A. Gualtieri (quoted in Esseissah, 2011, p. 8). Due to Individuals who had not been exposed to knowledge about Islam wanting to educate themselves on it. As a result of this many conversions towards Islam have taken place since September 11, 2001. When comparing both views it is evident that the media plays a big part in the portrayal of Islam, be it positive or negative. As such, my project will need to offer a variety of views to support the narration of Islam being far from terrorism and barbaric acts.

To conclude, it can be argued that research mentioned in this review shows many aspects of Islam that have been altered/translated with inherent bias. Whether it be the media that plays an integral role in the narration of Islam that is projected to the public, in a distorted image. Or the criticisms that surround Muhammed SAW. Whereby, Muhammed SAW is painted as an individual who promoted violence and hideous acts, that in essence have led to terrorism in modern times: 9/11. In addition to the misinterpretation of Islam and Muhammed SAW, many see the religious book of Muslims: The Holy Qur'an as void and outdated. The Qur'an which contains proof of scientific findings such as embryology. Or Geology, the surfaces beneath the mountains, seas and oceans with barriers placed between them are all topics that need to be discussed in greater detail for this project. These sources in The Holy Qur'an coincide with the scientific findings Western science has discovered, and

³ An Arabic word which can literally be defined as striving or struggling.

⁴ A head covering worn by Muslim women, that carries religious value.

the ones discussed above. This will help in the conversation of these scientific ‘proofs’ and whether they are irrelevant/just a coincidence as many claim them to be in modern times. Therefore, a revisitation of these topics in my project may provide a view that creates greater insight into the information present in this review.

Creative Piece- An Exploration of the Islamic Faith in the 21st Century

“Ammi⁵, ammi. Where are you?” I asked as I stroll through the kitchen to the living room, and there she sat silent and still like a tree in the winter days. I guess it would be too much to ask for a reply from her as she chose to willingly ignore me, so I chose to not poke the bear (figuratively speaking of course, if she heard me call her a bear, she’d dash a slipper in my direction). My mother, a Pakistani born woman tries to decipher the code playing on the tv, also known as English, moving her lips as she read the subtitles to herself. My eyes fixate upon the screen. I squint as I attempt to understand the event that has just transpired on the television.

“What have they done to us, now?” My mother asks with an aura of normality oozing from her soft petal-like lips.

“This white guy shot a few Muslims in the Mosque today in New Zealand.” I dismally utter. “Why?” My mother queries.

“Since when do they need a reason to kill us.” I scoff.

“I know, but I just thought for once, maybe they had a reason” Ammi’s speech is brought to an abrupt stop as she is interrupted.

“Maybe they had a reason? This will go on forever. They’ll keep killing us because they think we’re violent and evil. And they’ll kill our daughters, fathers, and they’ll continue invading our countries claiming to save us, but instead rendering us in a worse condition than we were before they entered our homes. They claim we’re the ones who breach borders and harm innocent people. But they penetrate the walls of our houses and dismantle our roots. Our Muslim brothers will continue being killed for standing strong in their faith and defying *their* commands. Bullets will leave their guns faster than the sharp double-edged words that reside in their mouths, tainting their very heart, as it tells them that all we deserve is a miserable death. I’m sick of crying because of this shit. I’m sick of thinking I’m going to bring my children up in a world where they can’t even practise their faith in peace man, without the idea of a thick-white man coming up and blowing the living daylights out of them”.

“It’s okay, let’s turn it off, I’ll make you breakfast. You’re getting late for university”. An attempt to distract me from my anger ensues as my mother tries reminding me of the education I so deeply aspired to gain.

“Turning it off, won’t make it go away.” I bitterly spout out of my mouth as my glare leaves her wondering where the timid, soft-spoken daughter she’s tried so hard to raise in this harsh world has gone. Disappointment and worry cloud her eyes, and don’t get me wrong, she has every right to be worried. But, I’ve learnt from my mother to embody the character of a lion when standing for justice but possessing the softness and scent of a rose when speaking to one with kindness. And if any white-crusty racist tried speaking to me like I was the very embodiment

⁵ Mother.

of him, his vulgar values, and everything he stood for, I'd make sure I left a dent the size of Jupiter in his face. Maybe, I wouldn't punch him, let's be honest. Because, then I'd just be proving all the Islamaphobes and racists right, but at least I could kick his knee and leave him flabbergasted for a quick second and run off into the distance. I'm sure I can outrun a racist. I mean, yeah. Their beer-bellies would probably get in the way of them finding their feet, and I could make it to the end of the road at least before I lost my breath. Anyway, moving on from my fleeting thoughts that leave me dazed. Point being, my mother worries that my anger will one day cause me distress, but part of me knows it isn't just that. Fear can be a driving force for many to curl up in a ball and stay scared their whole lives. Or speak up and fight for what they believe in, with nothing to lose. My mother was scared I'd one day wake up feeling like I had nothing to lose.

“Think of it like this, they're shaheeds.⁶ And as Muslims we know there's khayr⁷ in everything. It's okay to be angry and hurt. But, just never let your anger turn you into them”. Ammi advises me as she looks away and scoots over on the sofa, patting the cotton threads that bind the shroud on my couch, signalling me to sit next to her. The reluctance in my step leaves her silent, as she knows that comfort and emotion haven't come easy to me since birth. Legs dangling off the sofa, as I try to avoid looking at the screen, so I don't cry any more than I already have in front of her.

It would be a lie to say that I didn't feel anything when the news platform played the live stream of the white terrorist entering the Christchurch Mosque. I observed the actions of a Muslim brother that were befitting to the principles of Islam and filled my heart with pride and happiness. When the terrorist had entered the mosque, the first Muslim worshipper he encountered, unknowingly uttered his final words: “Hello, brother”, which were then followed by a cacophony of bullets that pierced his flesh, leaving splatters of his blood on the walls of the very mosque that was meant to be a safe haven for many. The irony of this is many ignorant people still after moments like this claim Islam to be a religion of violence and destruction. But this portrayal of compassion and kindness is an integral pillar to the core principles of Islam.

And what better way to speak of the side of Islam that many aren't familiar with than mentioning the most compassionate Muslim of all: Muhammed SAW⁸.

The patience and choice to avoid conflict with his enemies is portrayed in many incidents along his prophetic journey. But a man whose soft heart faced the hardest of persecution that would've broken the strongest of fighters, chose to time, and time again deal with trials he faced with patience. A man with the light of the moon that fell upon his blessed face, who faced harsh words from his own loved ones, and the plotting of his family who threw thorns in his path, swore, and strangled his delicate neck due to the belief of Ahad⁹ that he possessed. Yet, Allah states in the Qur'an, they plan and plan, but they forget that I am the best of Planners. And such was the truth that was portrayed through the noble and merciful reactions Muhammed SAW would have to those that dealt with him harshly. In modern times the sharp words of many pierce our souls and bruise our egos, causing us to lash out impulsively in a bid to repair the small percentage of pride we possess. Our human nature is to fight back to defend what we deem as important to us. Yet, a man of this stature, who

⁶ A Muslim martyr.

⁷ Goodness, positivity, or welfare.

⁸ "Sallallahu alayhi wa salaam" (may God's prayers and peace be with him).

⁹ “One”- Used by Muslims when referring to their God, Allah.

could've harmed his enemies if he so deeply desired too, chose the higher ground that is true to the beliefs of Islam.

This is evident in an incident that occurred where the Beloved Prophet of Allah SWT was praying in the courtyard of the Ka'bah¹⁰, and the enemies challenged one another to see who was brave enough to make a mockery of Muhammed SAW. Such was the power the Prophet had in Arabian times that the fortitude and presence of himself, even whilst praying, was enough to shake even the strongest of mountains and the sturdiest of fighters. The enemies nominated a man who proceeded to throw dead camel intestines on the Prophet SAW. Yet, he never moved from prostration, his forehead embracing the earth, like it was the closest place to Allah SWT that one could attain in this world. A man that carried the burdens and battles of Islam on his very shoulders, now lay with his forehead on the ground in the humblest position, with the dirt of a camel's intestines on his back, and yet he never moved. Fatimah RA¹¹, the daughter of the Prophet sees this act of cowardice that was committed by these men, and rushes to remove the intestines from her father's back, so he may get up from prostration.

My mind attempts to conceive the image of a young child who rushes to save her father from being oppressed. Tears instantly form on my lash line, staining my pillowcase as this story weakens the tissues of my heart. This vision sends shivers down my neck, causing sweat to caress my limbs, and provoke me to question my faith and patience, in times of trials that bear no comparison to those that the Prophet Muhammed SAW experienced. The cries of Fatimah RA were heard by the Prophet SAW, as this young girl sees the suffering these men put her father through continuously, day after day. But his reply to this incident was to console his child and tell her that indeed Allah will suffice for your father and make him victorious. Yet, the disbelievers believe the Prophet to be a man of chaos and debauchery. Does this story of him praying in the courtyard and his reaction to the act the enemies committed depict the barbaric narrative that many push forward in the media or society? For Muslims, there isn't a man that endured more than Muhammed SAW, even from his own kin, yet his constant need to deal with problems with softness and patience allowed him to remain steadfast on Allah's path. And I don't care what anyone else says, but how can this be a man that hurt others? How can this be one who incited hatred? A man that is disliked and misunderstood by many for no reason at all, yet this hatred never overpowers the love Muslims and non-Muslims alike feel for him. If this isn't a role model for all Muslims and disbelievers alike, then I don't know what is.

And this very essence of the teachings of Muhammed SAW were echoed through the Muslim brother who even when faced by a coward like this terrorist, managed to portray the peaceful and loving nature of our Islam, and uttered words of kindness that welcomed that shameful creature into the mosque. Why isn't this side of Islam ever mentioned? Why, time and time again is Islam depicted as the destroyer of men, and white people the victims destroyed by their mental health. Silence lingered in the air as tears flowed from my ducts like canyons that knew no end. My mother shuffles in her seat and I see the hurt in her eyes that we've become so accustomed to experiencing. And just like that she suddenly stands upright and says:

"Right, what do you want for breakfast".

"I'm not hungry. I'm just going to go back to bed."

¹⁰ "Cube"- Building located inside Islam's holiest mosque.

¹¹ "Radhi Allahu 'anhu" (May Allah be pleased with her).

I declared as I trotted up the stairs wanting to just crumble down on this very carpet that absorbed my tears many a time when walking upstairs after an argument with Ammi or my sister. Lord knows how I willed the ground to swallow me whole, just so this hole in my chest would leave me numb to feeling any of this pain. And just like that I reach my bed. I fall like a corpse that demands for its body to embrace the ground and meet its end. You know that feeling when you cry so much, you get tired and just fall asleep. Yeah. That was exactly what happened. A few hours later, the constant buzz of my phone interrupts the sleep that had taken me away from reality for a short while. I pick the phone up and my eyes scan the countless notifications that have consumed my home screen. My social media group chats with my friends are going wild at the news of the Christchurch shooting. Breathing becomes hard, as my raspy throat dries up like the Saharan desert. One message in particular hit me right in the gut and leaves me silent. I read it out aloud in hope of reciting it into the existence so that it'd come true:

***Asia:** I wish they didn't want to kill us all the time. Will they ever let us follow our religion in peace? We can't even practise behind closed doors privately in our own mosques anymore, without getting shot in our places of worship. I pray the day comes where we awaken from our sleeps and our religion is seen for the truth that it is.*

Seen

And I wonder to myself if these people who hate us so much, would feel the same if they knew the truth. The truth of how we are similar to them. Wanting to live our daily lives in peace, to be able to afford the luxury to hug our children when we get home. To even make it home safe was a feat in itself. The sound of my phone buzzing sends vibrations through my thigh, as I sit in anticipation. Tender limbs twitching as my eyes fall upon the flurry of messages that travel down my spine sending goosebumps through my body. My irises scan the messages swarming my chat, as I read everyone's replies to this incident.

***Ahmed:** A child died in the shooting.*

Seen

***Asia:** my sister was her age.*

Seen

***Haris:** Imagine the type of coward you need to be to kill a 5-year old bloody child.*

Seen

Ahmed: *I hate them man. I. Hate. Them.*

Seen

The Narrator: *The shooter chased the 5-year-old girl whilst her father held her in his arms running away from the coward, and they both were shot and killed.*

Delivered

I sit patiently, fingers twiddling, waiting for a response to my text. But no one replies, and it isn't a shock. We're all angry, and just sad. Amid the emotions and words spouted out of anger by everyone in the chat, we, the Muslims forget that there is a non-Muslim in the group chat. I notice that all the messages have been seen and read, and maybe we may have intimidated and overwhelmed our non-Muslim friend. But a part of me pauses and questions why I should feel guilty. And then with no delay, my mother's words hit me like a car, and I'm left with her voice stuck in my head replaying the same words again and again like a cassette player.

"Never let your anger turn you into *them*". And so, with these words I type a message out in the chat, in hopes of living up to the image my mother desires me to be:

The Narrator: *Hey, Em, sorry about this. We're all just very upset, and our emotions got the best of us.*

Seen

I type. Erasing and typing, repeatedly attempting to choose the correct words, so I don't let my emotions take hold of me. Within seconds, I see her typing in the chat, and she sends her reply.

Em: *No, I'm sorry. I just didn't know what to say to make everything better. So, I didn't speak, in case I made it worse. I'm sorry for what you and countless others have to go through. Don't apologise for feeling hurt or angry".*

Seen

I would be lying if I said Em's reply didn't leave me speechless. I mean I know she's not a shitty person, because of the time our university group went out into the Square. The Square was a fifteen-minute trek from the university, and positioned right on the Corner, next to the pub. We strolled down the road in a bid to get to Nando's and get a table before we ended up waiting in a queue. The typical buzz of conversation ensues between us as we're consumed in the topic of the menu. When suddenly, one of the white boys unaware of the fact that Ahmed and I are behind him, jovially says to his friend:

"Look at that woman. This is a car crash waiting to happen".

To which his square-headed friend replies:

"This is going to be fun".

Chuckling follows between them both, as Ahmed and I look at one another, deciding if we should kick these idiots in their faces or go and prevent a situation that may affect this woman.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" Ahmed asks.

The boys are alarmed, due to being unaware of mine and Ahmed's presence when they had so comfortably displayed their stupidity.

"I-I-" The boy hesitantly utters.

"I-I what? Cat got your tongue. Or are you embarrassed that you got caught being a low-life idiot. Imagine that was your mother". Ahmed infuriatedly claims.

I am focusing on this woman and have no time for these idiots. But, Ahmed, reliable Ahmed, is always ready to put on his Superman cape, and fight idiotic losers at any time of the day. I leave him to fight our case as I walk towards the woman, on edge, ready to pounce if anything is to happen to the innocent gazelle. Who is adorned in a black garment from head-to-toe. She walked past us a few times before making eye contact with the man standing outside of the pub, who has been staring into her soul since she became visible to the human eye walking down this road. The others and I look at this woman, and then at one another, worrying for the gazelle like woman who may become the prey of a vicious animal, that oozed nothing but the desire to shred her to pieces and watch her destruction.

"Hi, I'm lost, would you happen to know where the courtyard is?" The soft-spoken woman uttered.

"Na, get out my face. Do I look like google maps to you?" This Caucasian man yells.

Shoulders broad, hovering over this 5ft 4 woman, as she lowers her gaze and timidly attempts to walk away. The prominent fear stains the irises of this woman, who forgets the question she had asked in the first place out of fear of this beast of a man. The beast moves forward to impose his dominance and the gazelle is stuck in the daylights, frame locked, and unable to move due to fear of what may transpire. We've all seen the news, right? The prime minister calling Niqabi¹² women *letterboxes*. And endorsing this kind of behaviour to the public allowing them to feel comfortable with disrespecting women who want nothing to do

¹² "Niqab"- A veil donned by Muslim women covering their face excluding their eyes.

with their ignorant ways. Well, I'm thinking about this exact topic, lost in my thoughts, when all of a sudden, a voice emerges through the beer-filled air and curiously asks:

"Hi, are you okay? Is this man bothering you?"

"No, it's okay. It's okay, I was just asking for help", the gazelle replies.

"What do you need help with? And if I'm able to help you, I can if you'd like that?" Em empathetically reassures the woman.

"I just wanted to know where the courtyard was. That was all," the woman remorsefully expresses.

"Oh, that's a ten-minute walk. Would you like me to write it down for you if that's easier for you?" Em recommends.

The conversation ensues between both these women, as my mind tells me that this one act of kindness might just have restored this woman's faith in humanity. Yes, I might sound dramatic. But no. This is the kind of world we live in. Where kindness is harder to find than disrespect. I know we are told never to judge a book by its covers, but the idea of Em sticking up for this woman was the last thing I ever imagined happening. Despite the number of people that surrounded us in the group, to go over and make a stand for someone who is helpless, really solidified the opinion I had of her. These kinds of incidents must occur all the time for Muslim women that don the niqab, and it must be daunting every time when faced with a bully, and no help at hand.

However, that being said, apart from this one instance I don't really know Em well enough to make such a bold judgement on her character. Whenever the discussion of islamophobia or politics took place in the past in the group chat, she'd refrain from debating or speaking, so I just assumed she had a laissez-faire attitude on it. But, hearing her say I didn't have to feel guilty for feeling angry and wanting to set fire to the whole world, everything and everyone in it, including myself, made me feel somewhat at ease. It forced me into the sea of recollection as I was taken back to the day, she had helped that woman in the Square. My hands chuck the phone to the side of the bed as I attempt to sleep again, just to be interrupted by a notification sound. I decided to leave it and not check my phone, but a part of me wills me to pick the phone up and check who it is, hoping it is anything but another update on the Christchurch shooting. My eyes are left confused with the event that occurs in this very moment, I open the chat and read the message that was sent in the chat:

Em: *Hey, I know this won't change anything that's happened. But I'd really like to be educated on Islam and why you follow it. If you don't mind, that is?*

Seen

Even though Em wasn't sitting Infront of me, I know, I just know that it must have taken a lot out of her to write that. The part of me that my mother nurtured and moulded

speaks to me and forces me to allow this moment to take place. So open dialogue can ensue and a conversation that is so overdue and needed can occur. And thus, with this thought in mind I reply to her and tell her that she can ask us anything she wanted with no fear of rebuttal or offence. That it would be an honour for us, to speak of Islam and depict its beauty to one who's never been accustomed to it. I had been waiting for this moment since the first time I had been witness to any Islamophobic attack, to speak to my heart's content, and destroy any misconceptions many had of my religion. I ask her what she would like to know, or where she'd like any of us to begin from.

Em: Well. Why are you Muslim?

Seen

I'm left at a standstill, as I'm confused on how to answer this question. But I tell myself that if I speak from my heart, she'll understand it from her heart too. And so, I tell her that I believe in One God, the same God who in Surah¹³ Fussilat, stated that He would show the disbelievers signs in the universe and internally within themselves, until it is evident to them that the Qur'an is the truth.

Em: What signs?"

Seen

I tilt my head and chuckle to myself, where do I start? Which sign do I start from? The miracles? The facts? Or our beloved Prophet Muhammed SAW¹⁴, that many misunderstand and abuse so much? How do I explain these miracles to a non-believer? Em's a psychology student, and I'm pretty sure the work of Sigmund Freud comes as no surprise to her. So, I choose to start with him, and just get lost in the current of knowledge and go from there. My fingers start typing and discussing Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Who claimed that religion was but a child's infantile rambling, and that desire within us for protection that was provided to a child from infancy. My 'naive' mind as Freud called it is left standing on the conclusion that maybe it is the existence of a greater being that scared Freud, or us? I don't know Em, maybe the idea of something/someone out there that's more powerful than humans, was an idea that didn't bide well with Freud. And I know I'm going on a tangent, as Freud isn't really a sign of Islam or its power. But there is a link, I once read that Freud classed his view on religion as 'scientific', because he believed that the premise on which science is built is that knowledge is only derived from empirical evidence. But the irony of this statement was lost on Freud, because he didn't realise that all the signs and miracles of Allah are empirical.

¹³ The equivalent of a chapter in the Qur'an.

¹⁴ May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him.

One example of a sign proving the existence of Allah and power of the Qur'an is the study of embryology which was somewhat in its infancy in the 7th century.

Em: So, wait, embryology is mentioned in the Qur'an? What?

Seen

I nod through the screen hoping she's psychic and can see me moving like a bobblehead. I type back that I'm just going to go into that and that this was the first of many miracles that were going to knock her socks off'.

Em: Wait, can we please call, so it's easier to ask questions. This sounds so interesting so far.

Seen

Emma types rapidly, as I sense her confusion and excitement through the screen. I reply and tell her of course and I press the call button. To be honest with you, I'm happy that she is so interested in a part of me that many have made me feel like I should be ashamed or embarrassed about. I dial her digits and hear the tone playing, till she picks up and before I open my mouth to make small talk, she asks me to carry on and continue the topic of embryology. And so, I do. The first embryological knowledge that anyone knew about was discussed by Dr. Galen, who had an inaccurate view on the topic of semen and the development of the embryo. And so, Islam saved the day with accurate proven Qur'anic accounts of the Embryo that modern observers have verified and still utilise till this day. Imagine that?

Em: Woah.

Seen

I hear the shock in her voice as she's made aware of knowledge that she didn't even know existed in Islam, let alone the Qur'an. I reply and tell her that this isn't even the end of the argument. I continue and mention how the Qur'an describes Allah making man from an extract of clay, and how Allah put the sperm in a depository, fashioning a clot derived from sperm. That was once a shapeless lump, and Allah thereby covered the lump with skin and flesh and created an entity that was the human life today. So blessed is the best of creators, Allah. My emotions grab hold of me as I'm reminded of the love I have for my religion and my Lord. I just feel

lucky to be a Muslim man, and that no matter what I say in the path of God, it's not even going to be an atom of what can be said in the glory of my religion. But I continue and explain the in-depth and breath-taking descriptions of the development of human life. Which are mentioned in the Qur'an, that Western science now accepts as fact came from no one other than My God, Allah.

Yet, time and time again the beauty of this great religion is placed before the eyes of many but is still denied and refuted. I chuckle at the idea of Western science not having a clue regarding the description of the embryo, at a time when knowledge and resources were limited, yet the Qur'an still spoke of these miracles, and not only mention but provided details varying to a great extent on this and many other topics. I mention the leading scientist in anatomy: Dr. Keith Moore who was renowned in his study of Anatomy and delved deep in his findings, just to be led down the same path that Muslims were on in the 7th century. Whereby his belief and findings consisted of the notion these verses and facts that were revealed to Muhammed SAW, who is our last and final prophet, had to come to him most definitely, from God, or Allah. Because of no clear knowledge on this subject matter being present in or discovered in those times, until many centuries later. It's wild, isn't it? I take the silence between us as a sign to continue, and I mention the next example of a miracle that we, Muslims believe came from Allah.

And just like that the beauty of the two seas that reside side by side, but never meet engulfs my mind. I discuss the flowing water of both seas one sweet, and the other salty and bitter, yet the barrier between them separates these two bodies through a partition that is formidable. One could stop here, and not choose to delve deeper into the description of the two seas, but Allah chose to show his wisdom through mentioning the difference between both waters and why both seas refrain from integrating into one another.

I briefly made a short reference to Muhammed SAW before, and the incident that occurred whilst he was praying. And his courage in staying silent against the oppressors. My heart spoke of the delicacies that surrounded this great flower of Islam, but never of the stature and decorum that were prevalent throughout history for even the non-Muslims, who knew of Muhammed SAW's existence.

History shows that even the greatest of intellectuals can respect a being like Muhammed SAW, for who he was and not what people made him to be. Individuals like Henri de Boulainvilliers, Voltaire or Rousseau. But above all a leader like Napoleon who somewhat shared the same vision with Muhammed SAW in regard to the common man feeling equal to his brethren. The desire to break the mould and change what was written in stone, to fit what was right for man at the time and till this day. A message that speaks to the spirits of many and pleases those who fan the flame of equality. One where Muhammed SAW was deemed as one of the greatest *legislators* to ever exist by these intellectuals. I was brought up believing a man should build more than he does break. Muhammed SAW did exactly that, he built empires and a state for lost individuals who had no way of life. The gift of equality was given to those who had been oppressed and stripped of their basic rights. When he migrated to Madinah, he took the hopes and ambitions of many and gave them a home. And maybe that was what enticed Napoleon to see the presence and character of such

a being, who encompassed what it meant to be a Man. In a time where the leaders of today struggle to bind countries and relations together, a man in a period of Jahiliya¹⁵, provided us with a manuscript to provide peace to those who are suffering, but also live in peace with all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

I think of everything I have just said, and I am reminded that in addition to proving the character of Muhammed SAW, an opposing side to the narration of Islam always being classed as a threat was depicted through intellectuals like Napoleon, Voltaire, or Rouesseau. As they too were non-Muslims but chose to enlighten themselves with the knowledge of objectivity in religion, social construct of society, and history. And understand a crucial part of Islam that many non-Muslims had chosen to ignore out of sheer hatred for the religion.

*

“Maryum! Are you up?” My sister yells from the staircase.

My sleep is disturbed by the shrieks of my sibling. Body turned as my limbs reach for the pillowcase on the side, to cover my ears, in an attempt to ignore her screams. Rays of the sun slip through the clear blinds of my room and force my eyes open, and I take this as a sign from the universe to get up and get out of bed. I check my phone as I always do as part of my daily routine in the mornings, and I see a message:

***Em:** Hey Maryum, thanks for yesterday. It was one of the best experiences ever to see a side of you, many Muslims have but aren't given the opportunity to share. Thank you for trusting me with something that mattered so much to you. I can't wait to share these things with everyone I know.*

Seen

***The Narrator:** Thank you, for asking questions and caring. It meant a lot.*

Seen

Suddenly, a renewed desire to get out of bed and begin my day hits me like the sun in mid-June. There's something different about today. I don't know whether it's the air filling my chest with hope for a better day or the bright-yellow sun smiling down on me, giving me the promise of better tomorrow. The promise of a beautiful flower, that builds its roots gradually after the time it is sowed. Until the day comes where it is fully grown, reaching the sky, holding the sun in its petals. I too shall grow and touch the sky. Slowly. Slowly, but

¹⁵ In Arabic the word means “ignorance” or “barbarism”

surely, I will. Maybe the fragmented pieces of my heart that broke at the news of the Christchurch shooting, will heal as time goes on, and this rage will die down. I know that one day I will see the horizon showing at the end of this tunnel that I am travelling down. And, yes, I don't know how long this journey is going to take, or whether there'll be any more suffering that befalls me, befalls us Muslim. But what I do know is that one day the sparks from the fire burning deep inside of me, from this Christchurch shooting will give in to nature telling me it is time to let go and heal. To give healing a chance. To give people a chance. Perhaps, the *them* Ammi spoke of were the ones that needed healing too. Aren't we all broken in some way shape of form, just constantly seeking the knowledge that will make us whole again? And maybe that's what Ammi meant when she said I shouldn't let my anger turn me into *them*. That I should remember to always preserve the softness of a flower, but the courage of a lion regardless of any situation I am faced with. Maybe, softness can heal us all? I saw that yesterday. I saw it in Em. I saw it in me. But above all, softness was echoed in the embodiment of the greatest Muslim to ever exist, Muhammed SAW. Whether it was the incident that took place with his enemies, or the choice to forget the wrongdoings of a woman who would daily without pause throw the remaining of her rubbish on this great man, and yet he chose to visit her when she was ill. And yeah, I'm going to meet a lot of a mean people in this world too, like Muhammed SAW did, but I just have to remember that we cannot become those that hate us, nor allow their hatred to change our ideals and principles that make us who we are. But we must instead with our kindness in one hand, and patience in another persevere against all that stands against us and hold hope for a better tomorrow.

Commentary

The initial idea for my creative piece was influenced by my passion for theology, but one religion in particular: Islam. Before I delved into the creative piece of this process the dire need for research was integral to understanding the differing aspects of Islam that aren't acknowledged by many or are heavily misinterpreted. As Eid (2014) states how, "despite some efforts by Western mainstream media to provide fair and objective portrayals of Muslims the dominant portrayal tends to be negative". I had to bear this in mind when writing my literature review and creative piece. As the themes of misunderstanding and misinterpretation in regard to Islam, are crucial elements of my article. The literature review helped in gathering a large vessel of credible sources that would act as the backbone of my dissertation. But the structure of my creative piece didn't allow me to make use of most of the references I had gathered for this project, as some of them were too dense and concise literary wise to suit the genre of journalism I was writing in. Whilst I struggled with analysing which

references would suit the format of my writing better, I realised that the references could still come in use in particular parts of my writing, that discussed certain scientific facts in the Qur'an. Such as: "we created man from and extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed..." This source was mentioned in my article, but I had to adapt to the format of my article and replace the academic reference with creative lexis. Which is depicted in my article through the following: "I continue and mention how the Qur'an describes Allah making man from an extract of clay, and how Allah put the sperm in a depository, fashioning a clot derived from sperm. That was once a shapeless lump, and Allah thereby covered the lump with skin and flesh and created an entity that was the human life today. So blessed is the best of creators, Allah."

I had studied my primary and secondary sources and found that some weren't best suited to use for my article. Clarity was offered through the literature review as it established facts from fable and allowed me to gather my resources and information needed to support my findings. However, I struggled with finding sources that supported my opinion, and found many sources that opposed the positive narration of Islam and instead added to the negative views that are commonly spread in the media or society. Such as the secondary source: *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion*, written by Robert Spencer. As Spencer offered an opposing view to my opinions as depicted through his claim regarding Muhammed SAW, whereby he states, 'if he was indeed a man of peace, one may reasonably hope that his example would become the linchpin of reform efforts in the Islamic world' (Spencer, 2006, p. 6). But this doesn't correlate to the positive image of Islam I am trying to narrate to others. But instead reinforces the stereotypical negative opinions some people have of Islam. I didn't use this source as the purpose of my article is to clear any misconceptions many might have of Islam and offer an alternative view to this religion that many might not be familiar with. So, I chose to stick with using the verses from The Qur'an, as they supported and correlated with the message that I wanted my creative piece to embody.

I struggled with breaking away from the formal and academic structure of the literature review to a stripped-back prose format. This required me to delve deep into my writer's bank of creativity and envision a piece that distinctly carried my writer's voice throughout the development of the writing. It was hard for me to break away from this tone and envision my project as a creative piece and not an academic one. This challenge was hard to overcome, as I struggled with getting out of this mindset for a long time.

Initially I had intended to use my primary source: The Qur'an to verify my claims of Islam being an intellectual religion and one that contributed to science in regard to specific scientific discoveries before Western science had a chance to find these discoveries. The Qur'an was meant to be a prominent and underlying layer of my literature review and creative piece as it embodied the core purpose of my whole dissertation. I believe I succeeded in this aspect, as I used many examples of scientific discoveries in my article that are mentioned in The Qur'an such as: It is He Who has Let free the two bodies Of flowing water: One palatable and sweet, And the other salt And bitter ; yet has He Made a barrier between them, A partition that is forbidden To be passed (Holy Quran 25:53).

The beginning of Postmodernism was first briefly introduced to society in the forties and fifties. There is no fixed definition of the term, as many scholars have debated on its consensus. Some may deem postmodernism as avant-gardism, and others modernism (Hassan, 1980, p. 120). Postmodernists are seen to have a 'military-industrial complex' (Wark, 1998, p. 28), with their writing. Postmodernism was a topic of interest when trying to plan my creative piece, but after delving deep into the genre and its complexities, I concluded that I didn't want my creative piece to be rigid or constrained. As this genre wasn't the most efficient means of showcasing the moral of my article.

I found that a specific form of journalism was perfectly matched to the content of my

writing and my voice as a writer: Gonzo journalism. Which can be defined as “bold, exaggerated, irreverent, hyperbolic and extremely subjective” (Franklin, 2005).

Caron (1995) when discussing Hunter S Thompson, the pioneer of Gonzo-Journalism states that ‘Gonzo-style stories bear a marked affinity to traditional yarnspinning’, whilst this may be true to some extent, one can’t deny the quality of Thompsons’ writing. Whether it’s his artistic flair of covering normal, ‘mediocre’ events and breathing life and imagination into them or narrating all aspects of a situation and providing an omniscient presence in a piece. An aspect of Thompsons’ journalism that spoke to me as a writer; inspiring me in writing my creative piece, was the emphasis placed on the participation of the author in the narrative of the writing. Which is crucial to the integrity of Gonzo journalism. Thompsons offer a personal take on incidents through his subjective opinion. An example of this is present in Thompsons’ *The Kentucky Derby is decadent and depraved*, which is claimed to have launched his career in Journalism. Whereby he states, “They might be less conspicuously drunk nowadays but the only people who claim to be more pure-bred than the horses at a derby are the people who breed them.” This is evident in my piece where I, the narrator state, “if any white-crusty racist tried speaking to me like I was the very embodiment of him, his vulgar values, and everything he stood for, I’d make sure I left a dent the size of Jupiter in his face”.

Whilst the 1960s drug movement that Thompson had taken so fondly too allowed his writing to be filled with comedic laughter and memorable incidents, I had to make use without these vices, and find my inner writer’s voice by remaining intact with my emotions and relaying incidents from my personal lens. It was integral to the whole piece, to make sure that my writer’s voice was distinctively evident throughout the beginning till the end. So, when planning the piece, I decided to treat it as a diary entry, and initially deemed the creative piece to be a ‘rage piece’. But once I had generated specific ideas in regard to the moral I wanted to put across in my article, I chose to change the intention behind the article. And instead chose to educate many on the aspects of Islam that are unknown, rather than project anger onto the readers provoking them to hate the piece.

In addition to adding my personal view on situations, I chose to invert the norms of journalism and add diversity to the format of my creative piece. As evident in the choice to split my writing in smaller chunks, so the content is easily digested by the reader. I too like Thompson broke away from the norms of an article. I chose to add some text messages between myself and one of the characters in the piece. I believe this offered a personal note that had not yet been discovered in my article. And allowed it to develop into what it had become in the end. Fluctuating between two mediums: regular prose and text messages, allowed me to showcase diversity and innovation in my writing. But also show growth in not only the writing, but my writer’s voice.

The writing of Thompson is ‘loose and free’ (Hirst, 1998). Whilst embodying the sharp and visually observant eye for detail in the environment around him when writing. This differs to mainstream media, as the core focus is to push forward biased views and concise language, instead of concise experiences. But Thompson defied the accepted norms in journalism at the time and reported on incidents in a tone where it wasn’t limited to the typical structure of articles. The free reign to write objectively and without literary constraint allowed me to create a piece which echoed the nature of this project, whilst also preserving the narrator’s voice and integrity. This was an aspect I most certainly didn’t struggle with as I am a vocal and expressive character.

A key aspect I struggled with when creating the article was not hesitating to paint the whole piece in my biased view, and not worry about sources and scholars supporting my argument. Which differed from the literature view as the articles carried a creative free-form structure. As, I am not used to writing from a personal view and am constantly linking my work to credible scholars that verify my claims. But this piece allowed me to voice my

unfiltered opinions and ideals with no fear of backlash or judgement. As this piece echoed an aspect of my life that I am deeply passionate about. To drift away from the academic tone that was used to write the literature review, I listened to spoken word poetry and went on walks frequently to observe my surroundings. The walks helped my development of senses in writing, as I expressed this through the characters mentalities and bodies. These also helped with developing a consistent plot to be carried throughout my narration.

Conclusion

To conclude, this project discussed the elements of Islam that I had thoroughly researched, and it allowed my purpose for this dissertation to be echoed throughout the piece from beginning till end. Which was to provide an alternative narrative to that negative opinion of Islam that many tend to believe in modern times. I believe this project was a success as the academic body of this dissertation embodied the literary content needed, and evaluations that were crucial in writing my creative piece. I found contrasting and supporting references, that spoke to each of my points in this project, but also adapted well to the norms of journalism and articles and placing bursts of innovative methods in my piece when they were needed in the forms of text messages. Whilst I believe I was successful as a writer in depicting the creative aspects of my article and developing consistently as I progressed in the journey of the piece. I don't believe this article ends the conversation of the numerous misconceptions and stigmas that portray Islam in a negative light. There were many topics that I had created notes and references for, but due to the limitations of my word count for this project, they were unable to see the light of day in my project. And thus, I believe further research and evidence can be shown to further support my project.

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