

# **Victims of Intimidation**

FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITHIN EUROPE'S MUSLIM COMMUNITIES



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**FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITHIN EUROPE'S  
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES**

**Douglas Murray  
and  
Johan Pieter Verwey**

**2008**

**THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL COHESION**

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ISBN 978-0-9560013-1-3

Printed in Great Britain by  
The Cromwell Press  
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank James Brandon, Houriyah Bashir, Carrie Arnott, Tom Parkinson, Mohamed Tarraf, James Kitching, George Readings, Robin Simcox and Hannah Stuart.





A world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

*Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*



# Introduction

Freedom of speech, expression and conscience are the rights of all human beings regardless of their race, religion or culture. These rights have been enshrined in the 1948 United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the post-war constitutions of many European countries in order to prevent the re-emergence of totalitarian governments in Europe. In the 60 years since then, these principles have played a key role in safe-guarding liberal democracy in Europe. However, in recent years, freedom of speech and expression in Europe have come under threat. This comes not only from governments seeking to respond to the increased terrorist threat but also from individuals who have sought to use violence and intimidation to limit people's ability to freely criticise and discuss Islam and /or the cultural practices associated with the religion.

Arguably the most famous example of such attempts to limit freedom of expression regarding Islam is the sustained intimidation that followed the publication of cartoons of Islam's Prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in 2005. In the months following the cartoons' publication, dozens of people around the world were killed in riots, demonstrations and terrorist attacks while the cartoonists themselves and their editor received numerous death threats which forced them to live in hiding under police protection.

Other prominent Europeans who have been obliged to live under police protection after criticising aspects of Islam include Gustavo de Aristegui, the foreign affairs spokesman for Spain's Partido Popular (Popular Party) and Robert Redeker, a French philosophy teacher who wrote an article critical of Islam in a French newspaper in September 2006. The worst type of this intimidation was when the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh was murdered in a street in Amsterdam in 2004 by an Islamist of Moroccan origin. One result of this intimidation and violence is that many commentators and even the most outspoken satirists now admit that they are afraid to treat Islam as they would other religions. For example, in April 2008, Ben Elton, a British comedian, said that there is a:

'Genuine fear that the authorities and the community have about provoking

the radical elements of Islam. There's no doubt about it, the BBC will let vicar gags pass but they would not let imam gags pass. They might pretend that it's, you know, something to do with their moral sensibilities, but it isn't. It's because they're scared.'<sup>1</sup>

One additional effect of this type of intimidation is to give the impression, often inadvertently, that many Muslims in Europe are broadly opposed to freedom of expression and that they often react violently and aggressively to open discussions of Islam as well as of practices and values associated with the faith. Yet in reality, there are many prominent European Muslims (and individuals of Muslim background) who also criticise or seek to reform aspects of Islam and cultural practices associated with the religion and who have also suffered threats, violence and systematic intimidation from extremists as a result. The threats against Salman Rushdie and the Dutch Muslim apostate Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and the murder of individuals associated with them, are two of the most well-known examples of this problem.

This report details the stories of 27 European individuals of a Muslim background – some believing and others not – who have suffered threats and intimidation as a result of their words and actions. The report highlights how their experiences underline the importance of safeguarding freedom of speech and freedom expression, regardless of cultural or religious sensitivities. Failure to uphold basic human rights would have important consequences, not only for European Muslims but also for European society as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Tryhorn, 'BBC "scared" of Islam jokes, says Elton,' *Guardian*, 2 April 2008. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/apr/02/bbc.television3>.

# Methodology

This report catalogues many of the most prominent cases where high-profile European Muslims have been subjected to intimidation or have received substantial threats of violence from their co-religionists. The criteria for inclusion are that the individual should have suffered significant and credible threats of violence from Islamists and radical Muslims on the explicit pretext that in their speech, writings or other forms of expression they had criticised Islam or that they had transgressed certain perceived Islamic and cultural values.

Also highlighted in this report are several cases where former Muslims have suffered intimidation or threats for criticising aspects of the Islamic faith. Their inclusion exemplifies how those who have apostatised from Islam can continue to suffer threats and intimidation from Muslim extremists.

The report catalogues individual cases by profession, and only covers countries in what has traditionally been called Western Europe with the aim of focusing on areas where large-scale Muslim immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon. It therefore excludes Turkey, the Balkans and most of Eastern Europe.



# Politicians

### ■ **Ahmed Aboutaleb:** Junior Cabinet Minister

The Netherlands  
b. 1961

Ahmed Aboutaleb is a Dutch politician who was born in Morocco in 1961 and arrived in the Netherlands in 1976. He currently serves as the Dutch State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment, a junior cabinet position, as a member of the Labour Party (PvdA). He previously worked as an alderman for Amsterdam City Council.

Aboutaleb is one of the most prominent and successful Dutch-Moroccan politicians in the Netherlands, who successfully combines his Islamic beliefs and cultural background with his overt support for the core tenets of Dutch society, such as secularism and tolerance. Because of this, Aboutaleb has frequently received written and verbal threats from Islamic extremists. Ian Buruma, the author of *Murder in Amsterdam: The death of Theo van Gogh and the limits of tolerance*, explains that for Islamic extremists, 'Aboutaleb's sin ... is precisely his success as a Dutch citizen. To take part in government, to promote integration, to speak out against the violent prejudices of religious zealots, is enough to make him a heretic, an enemy, a traitor.'<sup>2</sup>

In 2004 Aboutaleb was placed under 24-hour police guard when the police uncovered a plot to assassinate him following the murder of Theo van Gogh.<sup>3</sup> Police had found his name on a hit list compiled by Muhammad Bouyeri, van Gogh's murderer, along with the names of other prominent Dutch politicians and critics of Islam, including Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders.<sup>4</sup> Bouyeri had reportedly described him as a 'zindiq', or heretic who deserves to be killed.<sup>5</sup> Aboutaleb fiercely criticised the Dutch government for their weak response to the killing of

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2 Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 249.

3 'Dutch Alderman Ahmed Aboutaleb blasts government for weak reaction to van Gogh murder', *Expatica*, 21 December 2004. See: <http://www.expatica.com/nl/articles/news/ministers-blasted-for-weak-van-gogh-response-15274.html>.

4 Dina Temple-Raston, 'The "Dutch 9/11" Sends Leaders to Safe Houses', *The New York Sun*, 09 November 2004. See: <http://www.nysun.com/foreign/dutch-9-11-sends-leaders-to-safe-houses/4476/>

5 Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*, p. 249.



van Gogh, describing it as ‘totally unsatisfactory.’<sup>6</sup> He said at the time that:

‘Our task was to join in a dialogue with the public, but I didn’t see the government really get involved. I feel I was let down. We heard nothing from the heart of the cabinet. No minister came to Amsterdam, not even a state secretary [junior minister].’<sup>7</sup>

Partly as a result of his firm response both to van Gogh’s killing and the threats against him personally, Aboutaleb was tipped to become the Netherlands’ minister of integration, but instead was offered the position of State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment. He accepted the post, saying, ‘I don’t care about the honour or the title. I’m in it for the work.’<sup>8</sup> He continues to campaign in favour of integration.<sup>9</sup>

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6 ‘Dutch Alderman Ahmed Aboutaleb blasts government for weak reaction to van Gogh murder’, *Expatica*.

7 *Ibid.*

8 ‘New cabinet ministers announced’, *Expatica*, 16 February 2007.  
See: <http://www.expatica.com/nl/articles/news/mps-unimpressed-with-motion-from-pvv-36615.html>.

9 ‘Muslim minister in the Netherlands says he is integration pioneer’, *Reuters*, 08 March 2007.

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### ■ **Mimount Bousakla:** Senator and author

Belgium  
b. 1972

Mimount Bousakla is a Belgian politician and author of Moroccan descent. She is well known as an outspoken critic of conservative Islamic values, and also of violence against women and forced marriages. She first came to public attention in 2002 after writing *Couscous met Frieten*, 'Couscous with Fries', a book exploring her position between two very distinct cultures. Though some of her stories of life in Belgium were amusing, she also touched upon serious issues such as the place of women in society and forced marriages, topics that were hardly ever discussed publicly in Belgium.<sup>10</sup> As campaigner for the rights of Muslim women, Bousakla has received much criticism from traditional Muslim communities in Belgium. After she established herself in Belgian politics, this criticism evolved into threats and intimidation, forcing her to seek police protection.<sup>11</sup>

Born in 1972 in Louvain, where she attended a Catholic school, Bousakla joined the youth movement of the Belgian Socialist party as a teenager.<sup>12</sup> She then moved to Antwerp to pursue her further education and in 2000 she was elected to the city council of Antwerp, later becoming the first alderman of Moroccan descent. Antwerp, a city with a large immigrant population, was home to many of the problems Bousakla had been addressing for years and she quickly began to use her new position to talk publicly about these issues.<sup>13</sup> For example, she called for greater curbs on Turkish and Moroccan immigration to Belgium, criticised forced marriages and said that Islam is incompatible with democracy,<sup>14</sup> as well as openly opposing 'fundamentalist influenc-

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10 'Belgian Pol, Islam Critic, Goes Into Hiding', *Fox News*, 17 November 2004.  
See: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,138811,00.html>.

11 'Belgium death threat suspect held', *BBC News*, 19 November 2004.  
See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4025115.stm>.

12 'Belgian Pol, Islam Critic, Goes Into Hiding', *Fox News*.

13 Ibid.

14 'Belgium death threat suspect held', *BBC News*.

es in Belgian mosques.<sup>15</sup> In 2003 she was elected to the Belgian Senate, where she continued to draw attention to women's rights issues in the country's Muslim community – as well as calling on the government to help immigrants find education and employment.<sup>16</sup>

In November 2004, after Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was assassinated, Mimount Bousakla criticised the Muslim Executive, an umbrella group for Belgian Muslims, for not condemning the murder:

'The Muslim Executive should have protested in connection with Theo van Gogh's murder and called on the Muslims in Belgium to criticise the attack on a massive scale. However, it did nothing.'<sup>17</sup>

As a result she received threatening phone calls from a Muslim convert of Belgian citizenship, telling her she would face 'ritual killing.'<sup>18</sup> Bousakla subsequently sought police protection and went into hiding.<sup>19</sup> The suspect was arrested by police and discovered to be a member of a small radical Islamist party, which Bousakla had previously criticised, called the European Arab League, which is based in the northern city of Anvers.<sup>20</sup> Due to her increasingly outspoken and often controversial positions on immigration and integration, which often put her at odds with her colleagues, Bousakla left the Socialist party in 2007 to join a recently formed right-liberal party called Lijst Dedecker.<sup>21</sup>

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15 Anthony Browne, 'Belgian MP goes into hiding after criticising Muslims', *The Times*, 18 November 2004.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article392396.ece>.

16 'Belgian Pol, Islam Critic, Goes Into Hiding', *Fox News*.

17 Anthony Browne, 'Belgian MP goes into hiding after criticising Muslims', *The Times*.

18 Craig S. Smith, 'Belgium: Arrest In Threat Against Lawmaker', *New York Times*, 27 August 2008.

See: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D02E1DC1E3FF933A15752C1A9629C8B63>.

19 Anthony Browne, 'Belgian MP goes into hiding after criticising Muslims', *The Times*.

20 Craig S. Smith, 'Belgium: Arrest In Threat Against Lawmaker', *New York Times*.

21 Mimount Bousakla quitte le sp.a pour Dedecker', *RTL*, 13 May 2008.

See: <http://www.rtlinfo.be/rtl/archive/article/1281/?amp;archiveYear=2007>.

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### ■ Ekin Deligöz: Member of Parliament

Germany  
b.1971

When Turkish immigrant Ekin Deligöz was elected to the Bundestag in 1998 at the age of 27, she became the first and only Muslim in Germany's national parliament. A staunch secularist, Deligöz's public opposition to the headscarf and her calls for Muslims to integrate better into German society earned her many critics among Germany's large Turkish community and in Turkey itself.

Deligöz was born in Tokat, Turkey, and moved to Germany with her mother in September 1979 when she was eight years old. After attending high school, she studied public administration at the University of Konstanz and the University of Vienna. In 1988 she joined the Green Party as a youth member and was soon motivated to enter politics herself. She later said that:

'I wanted to change the world. I grew up with people and with books about people who didn't have any chances in life. I didn't understand why I had such opportunities. For example, all my Turkish girlfriends were getting married at a time when I was still studying. One told me that she was getting married and that it was the end of her life. I asked her, 'why, you love your husband.' She told me to not be so naïve. I wanted to change the world for such girls and for others without a chance.'<sup>22</sup>

In 1990, only one year after receiving her German citizenship, Deligöz was elected to parliament for the German Green party, known as Alliance '90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen). In October 2006 Deligöz and several other public figures of Turkish descent published an article in the popular *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper calling on all Muslim women in Germany to stop wearing the headscarf. Deligöz labelled the garment as 'sign of oppression for Muslim women', adding that, 'Those who require women to cover their hair with a veil, make it a sex object.'<sup>23</sup> Soon after the article was published, the authors began

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22 Jabeen Bhatti, "It is Okay to be Both Turkish and German", *Deutsche Welle*, 28 December 2006.

See: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2292259,00.html>.

23 'Legt das Kopftuch ab!' *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 October 2006.

See: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel/739/88651/>. Translated from German.

to receive dozens of threatening e-mails and letters.<sup>24</sup> In the following weeks, several Turkish newspapers, which also cater to the many Turks living in Germany, attacked Deligöz in a smear campaign directly related to her position on the headscarf.<sup>25</sup> For example, the newspaper *Yeni Safak* (New Dawn) wrote, 'Be ashamed of yourself', and *Türkiye* called her 'a disgrace to humanity'. *Türkiye* went as far as saying, 'Nobody should interfere with our religion'.<sup>26</sup> The media attacks on Deligöz lasted for several weeks and German authorities were forced to place her under constant police protection, initiating a national debate on the freedom of religion and freedom of expression in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

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24 'Drohbriefe gegen Kopftuch-Gegnerin', *Welt Online*, 20 October 2006. See: [http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article88513/Drohbriefe\\_gegen\\_Kopftuch\\_Gegnerin.html](http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article88513/Drohbriefe_gegen_Kopftuch_Gegnerin.html).

25 Ibid.

26 Suzan Gülfirat, "'Schämt euch": Wie türkische Blätter über die jüngste Kopftuch-Debatte berichten', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 October 2006. See: <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/art270,2189563>.

27 Yassin Musharbash, 'Politik unter Polizeischutz', *Spiegel Online*, 12 January 2007. See: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,459277,00.html>.

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### ■ **Ehsan Jami:** Founder of the Committee for Ex-Muslims

The Netherlands  
b. 1985

At the age of only 22, Ehsan Jami has become one of the youngest people in Europe to be granted police protection as a result of receiving threats from Muslim extremists. Born in Iran and raised in the Netherlands, Jami has been repeatedly threatened by Dutch Islamists because he has openly rejected his Islamic faith and he speaks out against traditional Islamic teachings which say that apostates from Islam should be punished.<sup>28</sup>

Jami spent his early childhood up within a traditional setting in Iran, receiving Koranic lessons, even though his parents were non-practising Muslims. After he moved to the Netherlands in 1994 he became increasingly exposed to Islamist and anti-Western ideologies, leading him to develop a militant understanding of Islam and he even recollects feeling joyful on 11 September, 2001.<sup>29</sup> However in the years following the 2001 attacks, Jami took an increasing interest in the discourse and politics surrounding both the terrorist attacks and broader issues of immigration in the Netherlands. He says that this wider experience slowly gave him a different perspective not only on terrorism but also on his ancestral faith and certain elements of his upbringing.<sup>30</sup> In 2003, Jami heard the leader of the Dutch Labour party, Wouter Bos, speak at an election rally and was impressed with his ideas on key issues such as terrorism and Islam. Jami subsequently joined the Labour Party and in 2006 was elected to the city council of Leidschendam-Voorburg. Subsequent events such as the murder of Theo van Gogh, the London bombings and the Danish cartoon crisis, gradually caused Jami to rethink his ideas on Islam, leading him to decide to renounce his faith.

Jami's public announcement of his apostasy and the subsequent dissemination of his views on Islam soon led Islamic extremists in the

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28 'Ehsan Jami met dood bedreigd', *NRC Handelsblad*, 09 August 2007.  
See: [http://www.nrc.nl/binnenland/article1826692.ece/Ehsan\\_Jami\\_met\\_dood\\_bede-reigd](http://www.nrc.nl/binnenland/article1826692.ece/Ehsan_Jami_met_dood_bede-reigd).

29 Ehsan Jami, Personal interview, 15 November 2007. Conducted by Johan Pieter Verwey.

30 Ibid.

Netherlands to issue threats against him.<sup>31</sup> This led Jami to found the Committee for Ex-Muslims to support other apostates from Islam in May 2007.<sup>32</sup> In an interview given to *The Times* newspaper in 2007 he said that the committee would seek to promote individual freedom of conscience, thought and religion:

'In 1965 the Church in Holland made a declaration that freedom of conscience is above hanging on to religion, so you can choose whether you are going to be a Christian or not. What we are seeking is the same thing for Islam ... In Islam you are born Muslim. You do not even choose to be Muslim. We want that to change, so that people are free to choose who they want to be and what they want to believe in.'<sup>33</sup>

On 11 September 2007 the committee launched a campaign for greater religious freedom in the Netherlands, effectively attempting to make it easier to choose to renounce one's faith. However, in April 2008, merely eight months after the Committee for Ex-Muslims was established, Jami was forced to end its activities following several threats to his life, including two counts of physical assault, and several other counts of intimidation of both current and potential members of the committee.<sup>34</sup> Unsurprisingly, after witnessing the consequences of a life surrounded by security in the cases of Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Jami said that he was greatly concerned at facing such restrictions himself.<sup>35</sup> In the wake of founding the Council, any support Jami may have expected from the Labour Party, which is to a large degree dependent on votes from those of Moroccan origin, was not forthcoming. Prominent party members advised him to moderate his tone and no request for security

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31 'Ehsan Jami: Ik wil geen evolutie, ik wil een evolutie', *Trouw/De Verdieping*, 22 June 2007.

See: <http://www.trouw.nl/deverdieping/dossiers/article735774.ece>.  
'Jami ontvangt steun per e-mail', *NRC Handelsblad*, 07 August 2007.

32 'Ex-moslims richten comité op', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 02 May 2007.  
See: <http://www.ad.nl/binnenland/article1338261.ece>.

33 'Young Muslims begin dangerous fight for right to abandon faith', *The Times*, 11 September 2007.  
See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article2426314.ece>.

34 'Voorman ex-moslims vogelvrij verklaard', *De Telegraaf*, 09 August 2007.  
'Jami tientallen keren bedreigd met de dood', *De Volkskrant*, 10 August 2007.  
'Afshin Ellian heeft hele dag op NCTb ingeprepraat', *Dablad De Pers*, 07 August 2007.

35 Ehsan Jami, Personal interview, 15 November 2007. Conducted by Johan Pieter Verwey.

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arrangements was made directly by the party.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently his party membership was discontinued, and Jami now sits on the municipal council in Voorburg as an independent.

The Dutch anti-terrorism agency (NCTB) regards Jami's situation as highly critical and has stated that Jami now requires constant protection. Jami himself says that he is determined not to water-down his views on freedom of religion and to continue his attempts to fill the void in Dutch public discourse created by the emigration of Ayaan Hirsi Ali.<sup>37</sup> He thus continues to discuss important issues dealing with the treatment of women, homosexuals and apostates of Islam.

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<sup>36</sup> 'Ehsan Jami hoort in PvdA niet thuis', *NRC Handelsblad*, 15 August 2007. See: [http://www.nrc.nl/opinie/article1828371.ece/Ehsan\\_Jami\\_hoort\\_in\\_PvdA\\_niet\\_thuis](http://www.nrc.nl/opinie/article1828371.ece/Ehsan_Jami_hoort_in_PvdA_niet_thuis).

<sup>37</sup> Ehsan Jami, Personal interview, 15 November 2007. Conducted by Johan Pieter Verwey.



## ■ **Naser Khader:** Member of Parliament

Denmark  
b. 1963

In August 1974, at the age of eleven, Naser Khader, his mother and four siblings, moved from a small rural town in Syria to join his father in Denmark.<sup>38</sup> After completing his school education in Denmark, Khader went to college where he took a job working as an interpreter for asylum seekers.<sup>39</sup> During his work with political refugees he was exposed to stories of how many of them had been brutally persecuted by dictatorial regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> Since then, he has become well known in Denmark for his advocacy of Muslim secularism and his support for women's rights.

Khader first came to public attention in Denmark in 1996 when he came into conflict with Danish Islamists after he sought to draw attention to what he saw as negative aspects of traditional Arab and Islamic societies. Earlier in that year he had published a book entitled *Honour and Shame* in which he tried to introduce Danish readers to aspects of Middle Eastern culture that are based partially on ancient cultural traditions and partially on Islam. In response to the book, he was openly attacked by the imam of his local mosque, Abu Laban, and other leading figures of the Danish Muslim community, for supposedly insulting Islam and its culture.<sup>41</sup> In the wake of this controversy, his book became a best seller in Denmark. He quickly entered politics, first as an elected member of the Citizens' Council of Copenhagen and then as a member of the Danish Folketinget, or parliament, to which he was elected in 2001.<sup>42</sup>

During the Danish cartoons affair in late 2005, Khader spoke out in favour of the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* which had published the satirical drawings of Mohammed. By doing so he again came into conflict with

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38 'Background', Naser Khader website.

See: [http://www.khader.dk/flx/in\\_english/naser\\_khader\\_s\\_background/](http://www.khader.dk/flx/in_english/naser_khader_s_background/).

39 Orla Borg, 'A Prize Immigrant', *Jyllands-Posten*, February 19, 2006.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 'Naser Khader Biography', Folketinget website.

See: <http://www.ft.dk/baggrund/biografier/pdf/english/RVNAKH.pdf>.

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his old imam, Abu Laban, who was one of the driving forces behind the organised intimidation of the twelve cartoonists.<sup>43</sup> In the wake of the cartoon protests, Khader established a movement called Democratic Muslims in 2006. The group aimed to help Danish Muslims show their support for democracy and moderation and to act as a counterweight to the negative impression of Islam created by the Islamists' violent response to the cartoons. In May 2006, Khader said that he had established the group so that "for the first time Danes can see that a Muslim is not a monster ... and for the first time they can see Muslims saying that they are first Danes and democrats, and then Muslims."<sup>44</sup>

As a result of the creation of the Democratic Muslims group, and because of his support for freedom of expression during the cartoons crisis, Khader began to receive numerous threats against his life and was put under 24-hour police protection.<sup>45</sup>

One of the clearest examples of these threats was voiced by Imam Ahmed Akkari, a spokesman for the anti-cartoon lobby, who was secretly recorded on video in 2006 by Mohamed Sifaoui, a journalist, during a visit to France. Akkari was recorded as saying that 'If Khader becomes minister for immigration and integration, should we not send two guys off to blow him and his ministry in the air?'<sup>46</sup> When Akkari learned that the whole discussion had been recorded by hidden camera, he tried to explain away his remark as being a 'joke.' Following this, Khader decided to take a break from politics to consider the security implications of his work, as well as the effect on his political standing, reputation and even his family in the Middle East, who have been

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43 Karl Ritter, 'Controversial Danish Imam Abu Laban Dies', *International Herald Tribune*, 02 February 2007. See: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/02/02/europe/EU-GEN-Denmark-Obit-Abu-Laban.php>.

44 Andrew Stuttaford, 'Democratic Muslims: Denmark's Naser Khader and his band', 22 May 2006, *The National Review*. See: <http://nrd.nationalreview.com/article/?q=NDY4YmFiZjBlZjM1ZTc4NTY4NjUwZmRmNWlzMDFiM2E=>.

45 Anna Reimann, 'Muslim Politician could be surprise kingmaker', *Der Spiegel*, 09 November 2007. See: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,516492,00.html>.

46 'Politisk bestyrrelse over imam-udtalelser', *DR (Danmarks Radio) Nyheder/Politik*, 23 March 2006. See: <http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Politik/2006/03/23/112701.htm>.

subject to harassment because of his political struggle in Denmark.<sup>47</sup> He stated in relation to his forced sabbatical:

'The threats, they've been there for several years. That was a factor. And the more threats I receive, the more limits are placed on my freedom. And I also had to consider my general position; is it a condition for the rest of my life that I'll have to limit my freedom of movement? Is it also a condition for the rest of my family?'<sup>48</sup>

After deliberating his future in politics, Naser Khader left the Social-Liberal Party and founded the New Alliance party in May 2007. Its aim is to counter the growing influence of the Danish People's Party, a nationalist party with strong anti-immigration policies, while also promoting the issues which Khader has always championed.<sup>49</sup> In 2007 the New Alliance won five seats in the Danish parliament.<sup>50</sup> Khader remains under police protection.

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47 'Interview with Naser Khader in the programme *Søndag*', *DR's TV-Avisen*, 02 April 2006.

48 Ibid.

49 Gwladys Fouche, 'Danish PM hails narrow election win', *Guardian*, 14 November 2007.

See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/nov/14/gwladysfouche1>.

50 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

### ■ **Samira Munir:** Politician and Women's Rights activist

Norway

b. 1963 – d. 2005

Born in Pakistan, Samira Munir arrived in Norway with her family in the early 1970s and by the late 1990s had become a prominent defender of the rights of Muslim women in Europe. In November 2005 she was found dead near a railroad track in Oslo, having been killed by a train at Kolbotn station.<sup>51</sup> Despite the presence of surveillance cameras at the station, no tapes have ever been released, and there is no definitive account of the cause of her death.<sup>52</sup> Police have inferred that the case is one of suspected suicide, but the accuracy of this verdict has been questioned by the Norwegian think tank, Human Rights Service,<sup>53</sup> and other human rights organisations.<sup>54</sup>

Munir, who later became a politician, spent much of her life defending the rights of culturally oppressed Muslim women in Norway, becoming one of the first Muslims in Norway to publicly address sensitive issues such as forced marriages, honour killings and female circumcision. During her career she was elected to the Oslo municipal assembly as a member of the Conservative party. However, she did not always have the support of her political party. For example, when she attempted to ban the hijab in Norwegian schools, the leader of the Conservative party, then-Cabinet minister Erna Solberg, passed a law that would make it legally impossible to impose such a ban.<sup>55</sup>

During her life, Samira Munir received numerous death threats and suffered other forms of intimidation. On several occasions, she was followed, intimidated and attacked on the streets of the Norwegian capital

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51 'Samira Munir døde fredag', *Aftenposten*, 15 November 2005.

See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article1156829.ece>.

52 Rafia Zakaria, 'Veil and a warning', *Frontline Magazine*, January-February 2006.

See: <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2302/stories/20060210000605800.htm>.

53 Human Rights Service website. See: [http://www.rights.no/in\\_english/hrs\\_06.00\\_050401\\_101.htm](http://www.rights.no/in_english/hrs_06.00_050401_101.htm).

54 Hege Storhaug, 'Samira Munir', *Human Rights Service*, 07 September 2007.

See: <http://www.rights.no/publisher/publisher.asp?id=35&tekstid=487>.

55 'Minister urges anti-discrimination law', *Aftenposten*, 05 January 2004.

See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article702138.ece>.

and stated that at one point she was receiving threatening phone calls on an almost daily basis.<sup>56</sup> The most striking example of intimidation is the pressure put on her by the Pakistani ambassador to Norway, Shahbaz Shahbaz.<sup>57</sup> In 2004 Samira Munir was called to the Pakistani embassy on two occasions.<sup>58</sup> The Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* later reported that, during one of the conversations between Munir and the ambassador, the latter had remarked that ‘she still had family living in Pakistan’ – which she interpreted at the time as a veiled threat.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Zakaria, ‘Veil and a warning’, *Frontline Magazine*.

57 Dag Herbjoernsrud, ‘Oslo politician felt pressured by Pakistan’s ambassador’, *Aftenposten*, 23 March 2004. See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article758943.ece>.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

### ■ **Nyamko Sabuni:** Cabinet Minister

Sweden  
b. 1969

In 2006 Nyamko Sabuni became the first Swedish cabinet minister of African descent. Since her election to parliament, four years previously, she had fought fiercely for female equality and repressive cultural practises found in some Muslim communities, such as female circumcision and honour killings, and as a result has received numerous death threats from Muslim extremists.<sup>60</sup> Though her mother is a Muslim, Sabuni describes herself as 'not religious'.<sup>61</sup>

Sabuni arrived in Sweden in 1981 at the age of 12. Originally from Zaire, and born to a Muslim mother, her family fled the country for political reasons and took refuge in Burundi. When Amnesty International offered Sabuni's parents the opportunity to go to Sweden, they gladly accepted. The young Sabuni grew up in a town north of Stockholm, with her parents and six siblings. She performed well in school before going on to study law and migration policy at university. Her decision to become involved in politics came after the violent murder of an African asylum seeker by two young neo-Nazis in Sweden in 1995. Sabuni subsequently became a board member of the Liberal Youth of Sweden, and was later elected to a seat in parliament representing the Liberal People's Party in the 2002 election.<sup>62</sup> She has been Minister for Integration and Gender Equality since October 2006.<sup>63</sup>

Sabuni has been consistently outspoken in her views on issues surrounding immigration and integration, including those affecting Muslim communities. She has said, 'My mission is not to reform Islam, my mission is to say that certain traditions are unacceptable.'<sup>64</sup> Despite not

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60 David Charter, 'Young Black and Swedish – The Muslim minister for controversy', *The Times*, 21 May 2007. See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article1816494.ece>.

61 Charter, 'Young Black and Swedish', *The Times*.

62 'Nyamko Sabuni C.V.', Government Offices of Sweden website. See: <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/7575/a/70463>.

63 'Youth and diversity sets new government apart,' *The Local*, 06 October 2006. See: <http://www.thelocal.se/article.php?ID=5138&date=20061006>.

64 Ibid.

describing herself as a Muslim, she has often taken a strong stance on Islamic theological issues, telling the *Sunday Times* that an 'arranged marriage is not something recommended by Islam.'<sup>65</sup> In 2006 she proposed mandatory gynaecological exams for all Swedish schoolgirls, in order to discourage female circumcision.<sup>66</sup> She has also supported a motion to ban all women under the age of 15 from wearing the headscarf and proposed to identify honour killing as an independent crime in Sweden's penal code.<sup>67</sup> All these ideas met with strong resistance from many of Sweden's Muslim organisations which increasingly took steps to attempt to stop her gaining further influence in government. For example, when Sabuni was selected for a cabinet position after the 2006 elections, fifty Muslim groups signed a petition opposing her appointment.<sup>68</sup> In addition, she has often been accused of Islamophobia and racism by Islamic organisations in Sweden and her public stance has led to her receiving many death threats<sup>69</sup> As a result, her daily agenda is no longer posted on the official government website, and she is surrounded by security personnel at all times.<sup>70</sup>

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65 Ibid.

66 Helena Frith Powell, 'Sweden's Muslim minister turns on veil', *Sunday Times*, 22 October 2006.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article608929.ece>.

67 Ibid.

68 Charter, 'Young Black and Swedish', *The Times*.

69 Ibid.

70 James Savage, 'Sabuni "threats" lead to raised security', *The Local*, 06 March 2007.

See: <http://www.thelocal.se/6603/20070306/>.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

### ■ **Manu Sareen:** City Councillor and social worker

Denmark  
b. 1967

Manu Sareen, the son of Indian immigrants, is a leading campaigner against honour-based violence in Denmark's Muslim communities and is also well-known for encouraging immigrants to do more to integrate into Danish society. As a result of his campaigning on both these issues, he has received explicit death threats from members of Denmark's Muslim community.

Born in India, Manu Sareen moved to Denmark with his family in 1970. After completing his education, he began working as an integration consultant in the Danish capital Copenhagen. Specializing in working with Muslim families and with troubled Muslim youths, he co-founded the Ethnic Consultant Team in 1997,<sup>71</sup> which aims to provide advice and guidance to young people of an immigrant background and their families.<sup>72</sup> During these years Manu Sareen became familiar with the intricate social structures of the Danish Muslim communities. His daily work involved dealing with problems relating to arranged marriages, honour killings and youth crime in Copenhagen.<sup>73</sup> Gradually his experiences led him to reconsider Denmark's approach to integration as well as realise that the country's Muslim communities were themselves deeply divided on how to approach Danish society. In one interview in 2007 he stated that the capital's immigrants could be divided into two groups: one well integrated; the other isolated and unwilling to accept the values of democracy and equality.<sup>74</sup>

As a social worker, Manu Sareen got personally involved in many immigrant family disputes by placing women who fled from their arranged

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71 Carsten Ellegaard and Morten Vestergaard, 'Dødstrusler mod Manu Sareen' (Death Threats against Manu Sareen)', *Jyllands-Posten*, 01 December 2007. See: <http://jp.dk/indland/article1188883.ece>.

72 'Manu Sareen CV', Manu Sareen website. See: <http://manu.dk/?mid=30&navn=CV%20-%20>

73 Carsten Ellegaard and Morten Vestergaard, 'Dødstrusler mod Manu Sareen' (Death Threats against Manu Sareen)', *Jyllands-Posten*.

74 Ibid.



marriages in safe houses, and counselling criminal youths.<sup>75</sup> Because of his involvement in the former, he was often regarded by the families of female victims as an enemy of Islam who was interfering in the supposed religious structure of their lives. This attitude in some cases led to families issuing threats against him and seeking to intimidate him. In many cases, these threats came from the fathers and brothers of the people he was attempting to help. This situation dramatically escalated in October 2006. On the way into his office Sareen was approached by two well dressed men who had been waiting for him at the entrance. Sareen recalls their blunt manner: 'They said that if I helped more of their women, I would be killed.'<sup>76</sup> This very direct and specific threat made Sareen feel obliged to quit his job, and seek police protection.<sup>77</sup>

At the time, Manu Sareen was already serving on the Copenhagen City Council. Now he works in politics full time.<sup>78</sup> He has so far been successful in introducing new legislation to help counter honour-based violence and arguing for further measures to tackle other problems relating to Muslim integration. Sareen says that he is not the only social worker who has experienced intimidation by radical Muslims. In 2007, he told *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper that 'threats against people working with these issues seem to be increasing.'<sup>79</sup>

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75 Ibid.

76 Ibid. Translated from Danish.

77 Ibid.

78 Jakob Illborg, 'Danes battle the veil', *Guardian*, 09 May 2007.  
See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/may/09/danesbattletheveil>.

79 'Dødstrusler mod Manu Sareen', *Jyllands-Posten*. Translated from Danish.



# Journalists

### ■ **Magdi Allam:** Commentator and author

Italy  
b. 1952

Egyptian-born Magdi Allam is a prominent Italian journalist and the assistant editor of *Corriere della Sera*, a daily newspaper published in Milan. Raised as a Muslim, Allam was once an ardent supporter of Fatah and the Palestinian struggle, but now speaks in favour of Israel and its right to exist.<sup>80</sup> He describes this change as a 'slow and tortured path' toward a new world view, through which he came to realise the dangers of Islamism and the corruption of Middle Eastern politics.<sup>81</sup> Allam has also publicly rejected secular Arab leaders like Yasser Arafat and Gamal Abdul Nasser, whom he previously admired as 'the prophet of pan-Arabism' who could solve many of the Middle East's problems.<sup>82</sup>

Born in Cairo and educated at a Catholic school there, Allam immigrated to Italy in 1972. He first studied sociology at Rome's La Sapienza University, after which he began his career as a journalist covering the 1991 Gulf War and issues affecting Muslim immigrants in Europe for *La Repubblica*, one of Italy's most popular newspapers.<sup>83</sup> Initially his reporting focused mainly on the difficulties facing Muslim immigrants to Italy, such as racism and discrimination. However as he spent more time examining Italy's Muslim communities, he became increasingly pre-occupied by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as well as starting to re-think his previous support for multiculturalism and mass immigration.

After the events of 11 September 2001, Allam's concerns about Islamism in Europe increased. In 2002, he began writing articles and books supporting Israel, attacking Islamist ideologies and decrying the 'Islam-

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80 Saviona Man, 'Muslim, Italian and Zionist', *Haaretz*, 02 July 2007.  
See: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/877090.html>.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Jeff Israely, 'A Muslim Critic Turns Catholic', *Time Magazine*, 24 March 2008.  
See: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1725066,00.html?xid=feed-cnn-topics>.

isation' of Europe.<sup>84</sup> After defending Israel and publicly condemning Hamas' terror attacks, he received a number of death threats from the group's members in 2003.<sup>85</sup> He was immediately put under 24-hour police protection by the Italian government. However, these threats did not deter Allam from continuing to raise questions about Islamism in Italy as well as attacking those who dismissed the threat of Islamic extremists. For example, on 25 February 2004 he wrote mockingly of the 'revisionist process' pursued by those Italians who want to believe that there is no Islamic extremism in Italy:

'Al-Qa'idah? It does not exist. And what about Usamah Bin-Ladin? Just one of the many preachers. And Islamic terrorism in Italy? The product of deviant intelligence services and the *prima donna* posturing of some magistrates. Slightly more than two years from 9/11, our country is witnessing a revisionist process on a theme that continues to constitute a leading international emergency ... [these revisionists are] ignoring the fact that Italy is already a "suicide terrorist factory" and that at least five [Italy-based terrorists] blew themselves up in Iraq. That Italy is home to hundreds of Islamic combatants back from Bosnia and Afghanistan. That our courthouses have meted out sentences to scores of people charged with international terrorism. That several Italian mosques are branch offices of transnational fundamentalist and extremist organizations, infiltrated via the ideology of the jihad, the holy war, and of the shahid, the Islamic martyr. Places of worship turned into indoctrination, recruitment, financing, and sorting centres for would-be mujahidin ... Therefore, the revisionist process hinges on the assumption that, as long as no weapons are found, it means there is no terrorism. Proof of this lies in the fact that so far in Italy there have been no Islam-inspired terrorist attacks.'<sup>86</sup>

He has also called on the Italian state to stop the construction of new mosques throughout the country and in September 2005 he wrote an article in *Corriere della Sera* asking for the government to end Italy's 'mosque-mania.'<sup>87</sup> Despite the freedom of worship awarded to Muslims

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84 'Magdi Allam's "Long Live Israel",' *European Jewish Press*, 19 July 2007.  
See: [http://www.ejpress.org/article/in\\_depth/18430](http://www.ejpress.org/article/in_depth/18430).

85 Man, 'Muslim, Italian and Zionist', *Haaretz*.

86 Magdi Allam, 'An underestimated threat' *Corriere della Sera*, 25 February 2005. BBC Translation.

87 Magdi Allam, 'Moschea-mania, serve uno stop', *Corriere della Sera*, 29 September 2005.  
See: [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Cronache/2005/09\\_Settembre/29/moschee.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2005/09_Settembre/29/moschee.shtml).

by the constitution, Allam argued that building new mosques could lead to the radicalisation and ‘brainwashing’ of ordinary Muslims.<sup>88</sup> He uses the testimony of several Muslim women, including Samantha Lewthwaite, a British convert and the widow of 7/7 bomber Germaine Lindsay, to highlight this potential problem. Lewthwaite has repeatedly stated that her husband was an ‘innocent, naive and simple man’ who was ‘poisoned’ by radical preachers at his mosque.<sup>89</sup> For this reason, Magdi Allam has criticised some mosques as hotbeds of religious extremism and violence, which glorify terrorism, legitimise jihad and exalt suicide bombers as ‘martyrs.’<sup>90</sup>

At the same time, however, Allam has always distinguished between Muslims and Islamists, most notably through writing his ‘Open Letter to Oriana Fallaci’ which criticised his fellow journalist’s strident and often harsh attacks on Muslim immigrants. In 2007 Allam published his latest book, *Viva Israele (Long Live Israel)* in which he outlined his support for the Israeli state, as well as his opposition to Hamas and other Palestinian organisations.<sup>91</sup> The book’s publication was followed by threats of violence, both from within Italy and the Arab world. Speaking to *Haaretz*, the Israeli newspaper, Allam defended the book and its title, saying:

‘Those who don’t like me and condemn me for my opinions see this as additional proof that I am a traitor to the Arab cause and an enemy of Islam, have sold myself to Israel and work for the Mossad.’<sup>92</sup>

Despite the obvious dangers, Allam has refused to change his message or halt his critique, telling one newspaper that, ‘those who cut out tongues and slit throats will not subdue me’, in an apparent reference to the violent assassination of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh.<sup>93</sup> In 2008 Allam converted to Christianity and was baptised by Pope Ben-

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88 Ibid.

89 ‘Widow of bomber “abhors” attack’, *BBC News*, 23 September 2005. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4273804.stm>.

90 Allam, ‘Moschea-mania, serve uno stop’, *Corriere della Sera*.

91 ‘Magdi Allam’s “Long Live Israel”,’ *European Jewish Press*.

92 Man, ‘Muslim, Italian and Zionist’, *Haaretz*.

93 Ibid.

edict XVI in a highly-publicised Easter ceremony at the Vatican.<sup>94</sup> In an open letter Allam explained his conversion and suggested that he had come to believe that Islam and Islamism were no longer as distinct as he had once believed:

'I asked myself how it was possible that those who, like me, sincerely and boldly called for a "moderate Islam," assuming the responsibility of exposing themselves in the first person in denouncing Islamic extremism and terrorism, ended up being sentenced to death in the name of Islam on the basis of the Quran. I was forced to see that, beyond the contingency of the phenomenon of Islamic extremism and terrorism that has appeared on a global level, the root of evil is inherent in an Islam that is physiologically violent and historically conflictive.'<sup>95</sup>

His conversion and his subsequent comments drew severe criticism from many Muslims in Italy and throughout the Islamic World, leading to numerous death threats over apostasy.<sup>96</sup> A scheduled appearance in Spain, where Allam was to present the Spanish translation of his book, was cancelled as Spanish authorities were unable to provide an adequate guarantee of security.<sup>97</sup> In Italy, Magdi Allam remains heavily guarded by the national security agencies.

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94 Richard Owen, 'Pope Converts outspoken Muslim who condemns religion of Hate,' *The Times*, 24 March 2008.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3606109.ece>.

95 'Magdi Allam Recounts His Path to Conversion', *ZENIT*, 23 March 2008.

See: <http://www.zenit.org/article-22151?l=english>.

96 'Christian convert cancels Spain trip due to poor security', *ADNKronos*, 09 April 2008.

See: <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=1.0.2054837256>.

97 *Ibid.*

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

### ■ Reda Hassaine: Investigative reporter

United Kingdom  
b. 1961

Reda Hassaine, born in Algeria and currently living in London, is a former journalist who also worked as an informant for the intelligence services in Algeria, France and Britain during the 1990s. Most famously, he spent five years as an undercover informant at Finsbury Park mosque, monitoring the behaviour of militant Islamists such as Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada.

In 1990 Hassaine was loosely affiliated with the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), an Islamist political party in Algeria, but he soon 'decided that they were militant Muslims bent on turning his homeland into an Islamic state' and that he would not support them.<sup>98</sup> In 1992, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a violent Islamist group, launched a campaign of violence across the country aimed at eliminating its secular rivals and establishing an Islamic state in Algeria. According to Hassaine, the GIA kept lists of its political enemies who it intended to assassinate: 'The policemen first, then the journalists.'<sup>99</sup> As widespread violence erupted across Algeria in the following months, several of Hassaine's friends and fellow journalists were killed by the GIA and he himself began receiving threats from the Islamic militants. Soon afterwards he fled to Paris with plans to publish a weekly newspaper, *Magreb Hebdo*, for the exiled Algerian community living in France.

In June 1993 Hassaine was attacked on the street in Paris by a man who apparently sympathised with the GIA. During the attack Hassaine was slashed with a knife and threatened to death. In December of that year he was threatened with death again, receiving a threat from the GIA, and he was placed under police protection. Several months later, in an effort to gain 'revenge' against his Islamist attackers, he volunteered for an undercover operation with Algerian intelligence.<sup>100</sup> He was determined to fight back against the death threats he had received:

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98 Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory, *Suicide Factory*, (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 129

99 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

100 'Muslim spy who infiltrated Bin Laden's terror network in London', *The Times*, 16 January 2003.

See: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/article812572.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article812572.ece).



'I decided I would become a radical. Here were my enemies, they admit it to my face. I decided there and then I would work against them. They justify what they do with a verse from the Koran, but they only cite half the verse.'<sup>101</sup>

In 1994 the Algerian intelligence services sent Hassaine to London, where he posed as a GIA supporter and made contact with another Algerian intelligence agent operating in the area. He spent several years in London gathering information on Algerian extremists, later working with the French intelligence services who promised him citizenship in return for his assistance. When the deal fell through and the French stopped using him, he contacted Scotland Yard. Between July 1999 and November 2000 Hassaine served as an undercover agent for MI5 and Scotland Yard's Special Branch. As part of his assignment, he infiltrated Finsbury Park mosque in north London. Abu Hamza had taken over the mosque in 1997, and Hassaine spent nearly every day at the mosque recording his sermons.<sup>102</sup> Hassaine even began publishing a radical newsletter filled with pro-Islamist propaganda, in order to gain credibility within the mosque. During that time he was able to gain valuable information, which he relayed to MI5. Yet, he says, British intelligence was uninterested in acting against the extremist leaders of Finsbury Park:

'I told them Abu Hamza was brainwashing people and sending them to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, that he was preaching jihad and murder and that he was involved in the provision of false passports. I told them he was a chief terrorist. The MI5 officer told me Abu Hamza was harmless and that MI5 thought he was a clown. They told me not to bother, that they weren't interested.'<sup>103</sup>

In April 2000 Reda Hassaine was attacked at the Four Feathers community centre in London, where Abu Qatada was hosting a prayer meeting. The assailants physically abused Hussaine and accused him of being a spy, perhaps aware that Hassaine had recently provided information to the *Sunday Times* about jihadi groups assembling in Birmingham, and had given details about a terrorist warlord collecting monthly payments

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101 O'Neill and McGrory, *Suicide Factory*, p. 131.

102 Ibid., p. 132.

103 'Agent says MI5 dismissed Hamza as "harmless clown",' *The Times*, 12 February 2006.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article730018.ece>.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

from the British Welfare system to the *Daily Mail*.<sup>104</sup> He was able to escape from his attackers, but his cover was obviously blown: 'They tried to kill me. I didn't have time to ask them why they were doing it ... I was very scared.'<sup>105</sup>

After receiving minimal support from British intelligence, Hassaine feared for his life. Despite maintaining a low profile after the attack, he received several death threats from those associated with the mosque. In an interview on Canadian television in 2001 Abu Hamza was asked about Hassaine, and stated that anyone who spied on Muslims was a legitimate target: 'It's OK to kill them by slitting their throats or by shooting them. Any way you can deter them or others from doing such a thing.'<sup>106</sup> Since his attack at Four Feathers, Hassaine says the extremists have 'destroyed' his life, and that he feels 'betrayed' by British authorities.<sup>107</sup> In 2008 he finally won his campaign for British citizenship, having been denied asylum several times before.

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104 O'Neill and McGrory, *Suicide Factory*, p. 148.

105 'Muslim spy who infiltrated Bin Laden's terror network in London', *The Times*.

106 O'Neill and McGrory, *Suicide Factory*, p. 151.

107 Jason Burke, "'How I was betrayed by the British'", *Observer*, 18 February 2001. See: <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/focus/story/0,,439639,00.html>.

■ **Nosheen Ilyas:** Columnist and activist

Italy

b. 1983

Nosheen Ilyas, currently the only Pakistani woman working as a columnist for an Italian newspaper, is well known in Italy for her efforts to improve the social and economic position of Pakistani women in the country.<sup>108</sup> As a result of her attempts to challenge traditional gender roles, she has received several death threats from members of Italy's Pakistani community.<sup>109</sup> Living mainly in Capri, Ilyas has also become the first person of non-Italian descent to join Capri's commission for equal opportunities, a result of her active stance on reform and education.

Since an early age, Ilyas has been an active supporter of the emancipation of immigrated Pakistani women, as she believes many of them to be socially disadvantaged in Italian society.<sup>110</sup> As a columnist for newspapers and magazines, she has sought to bring these issues to wider public attention. In particular, Ilyas believes that many Pakistani women in Italy are socially and economically disadvantaged due to a lack of language skills and general education which are, in turn, partly due to the religious and cultural restrictions set by the men in their households. She has argued that many such women are not allowed to leave their homes without male supervision and that they may not even be allowed to do grocery shopping alone or to visit a doctor. She also says that when they are permitted to leave unattended, their lack of knowledge of the Italian language makes even the most basic communication impossible. Hence, Ilyas believes that the next generation of Pakistani women brought up in Italy should be educated, independent and fully literate, particularly as the women will be able to pass on their education and knowledge to their children.<sup>111</sup> For example, she has said that:

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108 Magdi Allam, 'Minacce a Nosheen, aiuta le pachistane a studiare', *Corriere della sera*, 27 November 2007.

See: [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Cronache/2007/02\\_Febbraio/28/nosheen.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2007/02_Febbraio/28/nosheen.shtml).

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

'It is important for Pakistani girls to go to school. Only thus will they succeed in learning Italian and in future be able to help the family and the husband independently.'<sup>112</sup>

Even though Ilyas wears traditional Pakistani garments, is engaged to be married to a Pakistani man currently studying in Lahore and considers herself to be a devout Muslim, this has not prevented her from receiving threats from traditionalist or conservative Pakistanis in Italy. In 2005 a group of Pakistani men reportedly assaulted and seriously injured her brother, hitting him over the head with a glass bottle, in an attempt to force her family to stop her from speaking out in public.<sup>113</sup> In 2007, Ilyas herself began receiving death threats. One letter written in Urdu which she received said: 'At the first opportunity we will slit your throat and cut your tongue out if you do not put a halt to your activities.'<sup>114</sup> The letter also referred to a murder that had taken place in Italy a year earlier, when 21 year old Hina Saleem was killed by her Pakistani father because she had begun wearing western clothes, working in a bar and having a relationship with a non-Muslim.<sup>115</sup>

Ilyas has filed a police report on the threats and has said that she will not be intimidated by what she calls 'ignorant Pakistanis.'<sup>116</sup> She continues her work teaching Italian to Pakistani women, writing widely to draw attention to issues affecting immigrant women, and urging young girls to attend school and receive an education.

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112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ed Vulliamy, 'Death in Brescia', *Guardian*, 29 October 2006.  
See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/oct/29/italy.features>.

116 Allam, 'Minacce a Nosheen, aiuta le pachistane a studiare', *Corriere della serra*.

■ **Mohamed Sifaoui:** Investigative reporter, author and commentator

France  
b. 1967

Before moving to France in the 1990s, Mohamed Sifaoui was a political reporter in his homeland, Algeria, where he investigated Algerian Islamist movements for the newspaper *Le Soir d'Algerie*. In 1996 a car bomb planted by insurgents from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) exploded near the offices of *Le Soir* in Algiers, killing 17 people and wounding 52 others.<sup>117</sup> Sifaoui narrowly escaped the attack, but soon fled to France because he felt that his work in Algeria had become too dangerous. After being granted political asylum in 1999, he began investigating radical Muslim organisations in France.

In 2002 Sifaoui infiltrated a mainly Algerian Islamic terrorist cell in Paris, posing as a religious fundamentalist to gain entry.<sup>118</sup> One of the cell's members, Karim Bourti, had attended high school with Sifaoui in Algeria, and therefore quickly came to regard him as an ally of the group.<sup>119</sup> For three months Sifaoui covertly recorded conversations with Bourti and his fellow extremists.<sup>120</sup> He learned that the cell, which was connected to al-Qaeda's global network, played a major role in the recruiting of young Muslims for the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya.<sup>121</sup>

In 2003 Sifaoui presented these findings to the public, writing a book called *Inside Al Qaeda: How I Infiltrated the World's Deadliest Terrorist Organization*. He also produced a 70-minute documentary based around audio and video footage taken during his time with the fundamentalists.

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117 '17 Are Killed And 93 Hurt By Car Bombs In Algiers', *New York Times*, 12 February 1996.

See: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03E1D61539F931A25751C0A960958260>.

118 Mohamed Sifaoui, *Inside Al Qaeda: How I Infiltrated the World's Deadliest Terrorist Organization* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004).

119 'Journalist penetrated Islamic extremist groups in Paris', *CNN*, 20 February 2003.

See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/02/19/alqaeda.undercover/index.html>.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

Soon after the exposé, Karim Bourti was arrested by French police for his alleged involvement in the beating of a Muslim cleric and terrorist activities.<sup>122</sup> Sifaoui began receiving regular death threats from Islamist extremists, and was eventually forced to accept 24-hour police protection.<sup>123</sup> However, these developments seem to have only hardened Sifaoui's opposition to Islamists. In early 2008, he told one interviewer that:

'I certainly am one of the first Muslims to consider Islamism to be fascism. This is not a subjective decision but rather a serious, academic argument. Fascism and Islamism are comparable in many aspects: Fascism, without evoking all its particularities, bears similarities to trends also present in Islamism. I am, of course, making a reference to their will to exterminate the Jews. On this point, the Islamists may go even further in their doctrine than the Nazis did, considering that the end of the world could only occur when there are no Jews left on earth ... Whereas it is written nowhere in the Qur'an, exegetes describe the end of the world as the day when even the trees and rocks will be able to talk and tell the Muslims: 'Come here, there is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him.' And this would go on, until there would not be any Jew left on earth. This ideology is pure fascism.'<sup>124</sup>

Since 2003 he has released another documentary, as well as a book entitled *My Brothers the Assassins*, about his experiences with Islamic extremists. In March 2006 he secretly recorded a conversation in a French taxi in which the Danish Imam Ahmed Akkari, who instigated the cartoon crisis in 2006, made a threatening remark about a moderate Danish Muslim politician (see section on Naser Khader).<sup>125</sup> Such reporting has consistently angered many radical Muslims, who see Sifaoui's work as treachery. Indeed the fact that Sifaoui regards himself as a practicing Muslim, whilst speaking out against Islamist terrorism, makes him a significant target for fundamentalists.

In January 2008 police protection for Sifaoui was withdrawn by the French government, despite continuing threats against his life and

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122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Sophie Fernandez Debellemannièrre, 'Mohamed Sifaoui: I consider Islamism to Be Fascism', *Middle East Quarterly* Spring 2008, pp. 13-17. See: <http://www.meforum.org/article/1870>.

125 Thomas Lauritzen, 'French Journalist: Danish Imams are Extremists', *Politiken/ Agora*, 28 March 2006.

against his wife and children.<sup>126</sup> Several months later, in June 2008, Sifaoui was attacked by a group of Algerian Islamists in Paris.<sup>127</sup> Writing on his blog, he described the attack:

'Seated at the terrace of café, in the middle of speaking to a friend who I was meeting, I was engaged first verbally, then physically and, naturally, by surprise, by a fanatic, a brother of two members of the Algerian GSPC, one of whom is serving a prison sentence in France for criminal association in relation to a terrorist enterprise.'<sup>128</sup>

He also called the attack 'predictable' and wrote sarcastically:

'I am certainly at fault. I had forgotten that it was certainly not acceptable to go to 133 Rue Oberkampf in the 11th district of the capital. It was but two steps away from the mosque in Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, the same home of fanatics of all kinds for the past two decades.'<sup>129</sup>

He also noted in his blog that other customers at the café did not intervene in this attack by one 'Arab' on another 'Arab' which he said that this was a reflection on the 'époque' of French society. He also wrote that the customers' indifference was 'the beginning of the trivialisation of the death of a man' and blamed the French government for causing his life to be endangered by withdrawing his police protection. However, Sifaoui wrote that although 'such aggression can reoccur at any time', he would stand by his actions and beliefs 'until my last breath', saying 'I do not retract any of them but I do not know if the French state is willing to assume its responsibilities.'<sup>130</sup> He also said:

'This is to say [that], when I receive a death threat, I am reinforced in my convictions and in my positions and I can finish by my saying, in all humility, I

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126 'Je suis toujours là! (I am still here)', Mohamed Sifaoui website, 14 June 2008. See: <http://www.mohamed-sifaoui.com/article-20438070.html>.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

was justified (or I had reason) to devote my life to this sprawling fight against this fascism, which is also known as 'Islamism'.<sup>131</sup>

A petition to restore Sifaoui's police protection has been launched on his behalf.<sup>132</sup>

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131 'Les islamistes me menacent, les idiots utiles me poussent au suicide', Mohamed Sifaoui website, 06 June 2008. Translated from French. See: <http://www.mohamed-sifaoui.com/article-21037567.html>.

132 'France must ensure police protection for Mohamed Sifaoui', *Secularism is a Women's Issue*, 19 August 2008. See: <http://www.siawi.org/article507.html>.



# Activists

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

■ **Mina Ahadi:** Human Rights activist & founder of German Council of Ex-Muslims

Germany  
b. 1963

A life-long human rights activist, Mina Ahadi started the Central Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany in 2007, as a support mechanism for those wishing to leave the Islamic faith. She established the group 'to highlight the difficulties of renouncing the Islamic faith which she believes to be misogynist.'<sup>133</sup> Ahadi's initiative prompted many threats from Muslim extremists in Germany, which proved sufficiently alarming for the German authorities to grant her permanent police protection.

Mina Ahadi grew up in Iran during the reign of the Shah, becoming a Communist activist during her student years, only to see the Shah's secular regime replaced by the totalitarian Islamic regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the revolution of 1979. Her husband was a public critic of the Islamic regime and was executed in 1980.<sup>134</sup> Soon after, Mina Ahadi was also sentenced to death by an Islamic court for treason, without her being present at the trial.<sup>135</sup> She had no option but to leave Iran and after ten years of fighting the Iranian government from the Kurdistan province of northern Iraq, Ahadi finally escaped to Europe; first to Vienna and later, in 1996, to Cologne.<sup>136</sup>

From Germany, Ahadi continued her fight against what she saw as oppression and injustice committed in the name of Islam. In 2001 she founded the International Committee against Stoning, affiliating over 200 international organisations in the fight to prevent the practice of

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133 "Not Possible to Modernize Islam", *Spiegel Online*, 27 February 2007.  
See: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,468828,00.html>.

134 'As religious strife grows, atheist seizes pulpit', *NorthWest Herald* (Illinois), 13 April 2007.  
See: [http://www.nwherald.com/articles/2007/04/13/news/nation\\_and\\_world/doc461f5d01d7acb042697268.txt](http://www.nwherald.com/articles/2007/04/13/news/nation_and_world/doc461f5d01d7acb042697268.txt).

135 Mina Ahadi, 'Stop labelling us Muslims!', *Scoop.co.nz*, 26 March 2007.  
See: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0703/S00427.htm>.

136 'Biography of Mina Ahadi', German Central Council of Ex-Muslims.  
See: <http://www.ex-muslime.de/indexArchiv.html>.

stoning in countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Nigeria.<sup>137</sup> The International Committee condemns stoning as ‘execution by torture; an inhuman and barbarous act condemned throughout the world as a clear example of savagery and crime against humanity.’<sup>138</sup> In 2004 Ahadi also established the Committee against Capital Punishment.<sup>139</sup> In its four year existence, the organisation has helped to save the lives of numerous people sentenced to death all over the world.

In January 2007 Ahadi, along with 29 others, launched the Central Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany. According to Ahadi, the new group represents the secular mindset of many hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Germany.<sup>140</sup> Ahadi also said she founded the group because the religious and social ramifications of leaving the Islamic faith are not only a problem in Muslim states where sharia law is officially upheld. In Germany, where the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, many Muslims who have abandoned their faith are pressured to hold on to their Muslim identity publicly out of fear of being ostracised, or even violently attacked by other members of their community.<sup>141</sup> The following month, Ahadi told *Der Spiegel* that:

‘I don’t think it’s possible to modernize Islam. We want to form a counterweight to the Muslim organisations. The fact that we’re doing this under police protection shows how necessary our initiative is.’<sup>142</sup>

At the official launch of the organisation, she and the other members openly stated they had left Islam, and were no longer Muslims.<sup>143</sup> This declaration triggered an immediate response in the form of numerous death threats.<sup>144</sup> Speaking in London in 2007 at the launch of Maryam

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137 Ibid.

138 ‘International Committee Against Stoning’, Maryam Namazie website. See: [http://www.maryamnamazie.com/campaigns/end\\_Stoning.html](http://www.maryamnamazie.com/campaigns/end_Stoning.html).

139 ‘Biography of Mina Ahadi’, German Central Council of Ex-Muslims.

140 “Not Possible to Modernize Islam”, *Spiegel Online*.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Hartmut Kistenfeger, ‘Wir haben abgeschworen’, *Focus*, 12 December 2007. ‘Wir haben abgeschworen’, German Central Council of Ex-Muslims. See: <http://www.ex-muslime.de/indexKampagne.html>

144 Mina Ahadi, ‘Stop labelling us Muslims!’, *Scoop.co.nz*.

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Namazie's British Council of Ex-Muslims, Ahadi described the situation after the establishment of her own group earlier that year, saying:

'I receive 250-300 letters daily – most of which congratulate me and call me brave. 3% say they will kill me with god's poison. 3 hours after my picture and interview was published in Focus where I said I was born into a Muslim family by accident and that I was 14 when I turned away from Islam, the German police were at the door of my home saying I had to be protected because the Islamists had threatened to kill me. The political Islamic movement is an international movement and assassination is one of the important means they use.'<sup>145</sup>

Ahadi has said that she sees such threats as proving her point: that true freedom of religion does not exist in Germany. She does not only blame the Islamists; the other guilty party, she says, is the German government, with its overly sensitive approach to culturally and religiously traditionalist Muslims.

'I haven't been a Muslim for 30 years. I'm critical of Islam in Germany and of the way the German government deals with the issue of Islam. Many Muslim organisations like the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD) or Milli Görüs engage in politics or interfere in people's everyday lives. They were invited to the conference on Islam (hosted by the government in Berlin last year). But their aims are hostile to women and to people in general.'<sup>146</sup>

Ahadi has said that the response to her creation of the Council of Ex-Muslims showed that she was correct to establish it; in the weeks following its public launch, the Council received hundreds of membership applications.<sup>147</sup> As a result of this success, other Councils for Ex-Muslims have also been introduced in the Netherlands, Great Britain and Scandinavia.

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145 Ibid.

146 "Not Possible to Modernize Islam", *Spiegel Online*.

147 'Wir sind jetzt eine Stimme', *Der Westen*, 16 February 2008.

See: <http://www.derwesten.de/nachrichten/nachrichten/politik/2008/2/16/news-24001049/detail.html>.

■ **Ayaan Hirsi Ali:** Author & former Dutch Member of Parliament

The Netherlands  
b. 1969

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, of Somali descent, was raised in a Muslim household. As a young child she was subjected to female genital mutilation. In 1992, while living in Kenya, she was forced by her father to marry a distant cousin she had never met. She refused to attend the ceremony and escaped her marriage by fleeing to the Netherlands as an asylum seeker, where she was eventually granted citizenship. She subsequently earned a degree in political science from the University of Leiden, and thereafter became actively involved in politics, serving as a member of the Dutch parliament for three years. Throughout this time, Hirsi Ali declared herself to be an apostate and gradually became an active critic of Islam, as well as a women's rights activist. She has since been a target of death threats by violent Islamists, forcing her to leave the Netherlands and to permanently reside in the United States under constant security protection.<sup>148</sup>

Hirsi Ali was born in Mogadishu, Somalia and grew up in Kenya, where her family were in political exile for opposing the Somali dictatorship. She received a good education compared to many other Somali children, learned to recite the Koran and wore the hijab (headscarf). In addition, she grew to admire and support the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as support the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie in 1989. However, after refusing to submit to a forced marriage and fleeing to the Netherlands, Hirsi Ali found herself starting to question her faith in Islam. Whilst studying at the University of Leiden and learning Dutch, she found that the Netherlands, as a secular and democratic society, provided far greater freedoms than dictatorships in Africa and the Middle East. In 2002 Hirsi Ali removed her hijab and subsequently became an apostate of Islam.<sup>149</sup>

Once elected as a member of the Dutch parliament in 2003, Hirsi Ali focused on addressing issues relating to integration and Dutch society. Specifically, she campaigned for the rights of immigrant Muslim women in the Netherlands by raising awareness about honour killings and female genital mutilation, practices then largely ignored by the Dutch

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148 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, (New York: Free Press, 2007).

149 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

legal system. According to her own explanation, she wanted to serve as 'a voice in parliament' for disadvantaged women and young girls in the Netherlands.<sup>150</sup> This work gained her considerable criticism within Dutch politics, as well as wider Muslim communities.

Hirsi Ali also gained attention for her controversial views on Islam. Having renounced her faith, she is now outspoken and critical of its teachings:

'I see no difference between Islam and Islamism. Islam is defined as submission to the will of Allah, as it is described in the Koran. Islamism is just Islam in its most pure form. Sayyid Qutb didn't invent anything, he just quoted the sayings of Mohamed.'<sup>151</sup>

As for Mohammed, Hirsi Ali has stated:

'All Muslims believe in following his example, but many of the things he did are crimes. When he was in his fifties, he had sex with a nine-year-old girl. By our [Western] standards, he was a pervert. He ordered the killing of Jews and homosexuals and apostates, and the beating of women.'<sup>152</sup>

These outspoken comments have attracted the ire of radical Muslims across the world. Yet Hirsi Ali continues to defend the right to free speech. In 2003 she said:

'If I were to say the things that I say now in the Dutch Parliament in Somalia, I would be killed ... So I am going to make use of this huge opportunity – that I am protected and I can say what I want, that it gets published and spread.'<sup>153</sup>

In 2004 in The Netherlands, Hirsi Ali published *The Caged Virgin*, a collection of essays on the emancipation of women from religious and cultural oppression. Originally included in her book as a transcript, later that year Hirsi Ali produced *Submission*, a short film directed by her

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150 'Moving stories: Ayaan Hirsi Ali', *BBC News*, 23 December 2003.  
See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3322399.stm>.

151 'Ayaan Hirsi Ali: My life under a fatwa', *The Independent*, 27 November 2007.  
See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/ayaan-hirsi-ali-my-life-under-a-fatwa-760666.html>.

152 Ibid.

153 'Moving stories: Ayaan Hirsi Ali', *BBC News*.

friend Theo van Gogh.<sup>154</sup> The film denounced domestic violence against Muslim women. Hirsi Ali warned van Gogh of the risk of potential reprisals from violent Islamists, due to the film's criticism of the treatment of women in Islam.<sup>155</sup> Soon afterwards Van Gogh's photo was posted on an Islamist website under a photograph of Hirsi Ali, which called them both infidels.<sup>156</sup> Just over two months after the short film was broadcast, van Gogh was assassinated in Amsterdam by Mohammed Bouyeri, a radical Islamist of Moroccan decent. A letter written by Bouyeri and pinned to van Gogh's chest with a knife threatened Ayaan Hirsi Ali with death.<sup>157</sup> The killer made it clear that his original target was Hirsi Ali, but because she was under heavy protection and therefore inaccessible, he resorted to killing Theo van Gogh.<sup>158</sup>

Immediately after the assassination, Hirsi Ali and Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who was also mentioned in Bouyeri's letter as a future target, were taken to a safe location. This decision by the Dutch authorities made it impossible for her to return home. She was forced to live in Dutch navy barracks and government safe houses as well as having to leave the Netherlands on a number of occasions. Only from January 2005 was she able to return to The Hague and resume her functions as Member of Parliament, having been away from her work for several months. Once back in Parliament she continued to criticise aspects of Islam. Her remarks often caused fierce reactions from Muslim communities, but also created friction within her own political party, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD).

In May 2006 the Dutch integration minister, Rita Verdonk, decided to investigate Hirsi Ali's Dutch nationality application because she had previously given a false name and date of birth when she had applied for citizenship in 1997.<sup>159</sup> Verdonk argued that because Hirsi Ali lied,

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154 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin* (The Free Press, 2006) p. 141.

155 Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, p.317

156 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, 'Victim of Islamists: Grief and anger over Theo's murder', *International Herald Tribune*, 11 November 2004. See: [http://www.iht.com/articles/2004/11/11/eddali\\_ed3\\_.php?page=1](http://www.iht.com/articles/2004/11/11/eddali_ed3_.php?page=1).

157 'Van Gogh killer jailed for life', *BBC News*, 26 July 2005. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4716909.stm>.

158 Aart Brouwer, 'De lachende doden', *De groene Amsterdammer*, 16 February 2007. See: [http://www.groene.nl/2007/7/Radicale\\_moslimjongeren](http://www.groene.nl/2007/7/Radicale_moslimjongeren).

159 Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, p.337

her Dutch citizenship remains invalid. This investigation resulted in the controversial fall of the government several weeks later. Although Hirsi Ali retained her Dutch passport, her career in Dutch politics was over, as she resigned from being a member of parliament and subsequently took up an offer to work with the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank based in Washington DC, in the United States. Since, Hirsi Ali has published her memoir *Infidel* (2007).

After a number of speeches and public appearances, Hirsi Ali then began receiving threats from American Muslims, which meant that stricter measures were once again required for her personal safety. Following an appearance at the University of Pittsburgh, Imam Fouad el-Bayly, president of the Johnstown Islamic Centre, openly stated:

‘She has been identified as one who has defamed the faith. If you come into the faith, you must abide by the laws, and when you decide to defame it deliberately, the sentence is death.’<sup>160</sup>

Hirsi Ali has responded to these and other threats by saying, ‘I’m not intimidated by the threats and the attempts to make me shut my mouth ... I’m not going to allow people to intimidate me.’<sup>161</sup> She has even suggested making a sequel to her film, *Submission*, because, ‘By not making “Submission Part II,” I would only be helping terrorists believe that if they use violence, they’re rewarded with what they want.’<sup>162</sup>

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160 Robin Acton, ‘Johnstown imam ousted over “death” remarks’, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, 10 May 2007.

See: [http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/s\\_506958.html](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/s_506958.html).

161 ‘Moving stories: Ayaan Hirsi Ali’, *BBC News*.

162 ‘Slaughter and “Submission”: Creator of Dutch Film Vows Sequel Despite Muslim Death Threats’, *CBS News*, 20 August 2006. See: [http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/11/60minutes/main679609\\_page3.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/11/60minutes/main679609_page3.shtml).



■ **Seyran Ates:** Human Rights activist & lawyer

Germany  
b. 1963

Seyran Ates is a lawyer and one of Germany's most prominent civil and women's rights activists. She has fought for more than two decades against what she sees as oppressive practices within culturally traditional immigrant communities in Germany. As a lawyer she has represented many Muslim women struggling for greater autonomy from their families, leading to her receiving multiple threats from some members of those families and others who see her work as challenging traditional patriarchal structures.<sup>163</sup> She has also spoken out strongly and publicly against growing Islamist influences within Germany's Turkish community. As a result of her stand, Ates has suffered several brutal physical attacks and as a consequence of this and other intimidation, she was forced to give up her work as a legal representative in 2006.

Born in Istanbul and raised in the suburbs of Berlin, Ates lived with her parents and brother in a one-room apartment in an immigrant community within the capital.<sup>164</sup> Beaten regularly by her father, she was forced to stay indoors much of the time and do house work for her family.<sup>165</sup> When she was 17 she ran away from home to a women's shelter, where she lived among physically abused Turkish women.<sup>166</sup>

After this, Ates studied law at the Free University of Berlin while also working at a women's safe house for victims of domestic violence in Kreuzberg, a district of Berlin with a predominantly Turkish population. It was during her work at that centre where she first experienced intimidation and violence. As Ates became more committed to helping abused Turkish women she became increasingly exposed to threats. In 1984 Ates and another Turkish woman were shot at in an attack by a group of Turkish youths, who were part of the nationalist Grey Wolves

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163 Donald Snyder, 'Turkish Women in Germany Lose an Advocate', *Fox News*, 05 January 2007.

See: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,242040,00.html>.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

166 Sylvia Poggioli, 'Muslim Activist Critical of "multicultural mistake"', *NPR*, 22 January 2008.

See: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17847605>.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

group, at a women's centre. Ates was shot in the neck; the woman next to her was killed. Ates spent five years recovering from the attack,<sup>167</sup> but she continued to fight for women's rights:

'After the attempt to kill me I decided that no man has the right to destroy my dream of becoming a lawyer and fighting for women's rights. The shooting strengthened my determination to succeed.'<sup>168</sup>

After completing law at Berlin's Free University and recovering from the attack, Seyran Ates started her own practice, which primarily offered legal assistance to abused women from her own community.<sup>169</sup> Ates has blamed what she sees as the growing separation between many Turkish immigrants and mainstream Germany communities on the rise of political Islam in Europe. She believes that this is a 'multicultural mistake' caused by 'excessive tolerance, both by the left and the right, of repressive traditions of minority cultures – and a widespread unwillingness to integrate immigrants into mainstream society.'<sup>170</sup> She has also said that her litmus test for the integration of Muslim communities in European societies is the status of Muslim women. Using this measure, Ates has said she believes that Muslims are becoming less integrated into German society as a result of growing Islamist influence, telling National Public Radio in 2008:

'If we don't stop the political-religious movement, I'm sure we have much more Islamization in Germany in [the] next five to 10 years ... If we are going to stop that movement and separate politics from religion, then we will have chance for Islam to be compatible with democracy.'<sup>171</sup>

As a result of Ates' outspoken views, she has often been confronted by family members of clients, mostly Turkish Muslims, and she has also

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167 Christopher Caldwell, 'Where every generation is a first generation', *New York Times*, 27 May 2007.

See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/27/magazine/27immigrant-t.html>.

168 Snyder, 'Turkish Women in Germany Lose an Advocate', *Fox News*.

169 Caldwell, 'Where every generation is a first generation', *New York Times*.

170 Sylvia Poggioli, 'Muslim Activist Critical of "multicultural mistake"', *NPR*, 22 January 2008.

See: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17847605>.

171 *Ibid.*

received threatening e-mails, letters and phone calls.<sup>172</sup> Things became significantly worse when the Turkish daily *'Hürriyet'*, which is widely read among Turks in Germany, started publishing articles condemning Ates for her criticism of Islamic traditions and Turkish culture. After the publication of the articles, the number of threats made against her increased.<sup>173</sup> The hate mail she has received gives an insight into why she is vilified. One reportedly read 'You should receive the highest punishment possible for your nasty, dirty existence,' whilst another said, 'How can you betray us, you whore.'<sup>174</sup>

In June 2006, on their way back from a court proceeding, Ates and a client were violently attacked by the client's husband just outside the courtroom. At first the husband shouted profanities and threats, but then began physically striking both women in public. According to Ates, onlookers offered no assistance to the women; however, they were able to attract the attention of a police officer who helped them flee the scene. The women's attacker was later apprehended, but was not convicted of assault due to technical errors in his prosecution.<sup>175</sup>

For Ates, this latest attack was the breaking point and in August 2006 she announced that she was giving up her legal practice due to fear of more attacks. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Ates stated that she came to this decision because 'my life and the life of my daughter, Zoe, must take priority,' adding that 'I did not want to end up like Ayaan Hirsi Ali.'<sup>176</sup> Ates also said that she hoped her resignation would bring people's attention to what she saw as Islamist intimidation in Germany. In June 2007 she received the Federal Order of Merit Cross (Bundesverdienstkreuz) for her work in the women's rights movement and in as-

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172 'Women's Rights Lawyer Quits, Says She Feels Threatened', *Deutsche Welle*, 04 September 2006.

See: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2155805,00.html>.

173 Ibid.

174 Snyder, 'Turkish Women in Germany Lose an Advocate', *Fox News*.

175 Anna Reimann, 'Ich werde es Dir zeigen', *Spiegel Online*, 09 June 2006.

See: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,420266,00.html>.

176 Anna Reimann, 'Ich wollte nicht enden wie Hirsi Ali', *Spiegel Online*, 06 September 2006.

See: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,435261,00.html>.

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sisting the integration of immigrants,<sup>177</sup> and in September 2007, wrote that she would once again take up the cases of abused Muslim women.<sup>178</sup> Since the attack on her in 2006, Ates has received 24-hour police protection.

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177 'Verdienstkreuz: Bundespräsident ehrt Seyran Ates', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 16 June 2007.

See: [http://www.welt.de/welt\\_print/article950550/Verdienstkreuz\\_Bundespraesident\\_ehrt\\_Seyran\\_Ates.html](http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article950550/Verdienstkreuz_Bundespraesident_ehrt_Seyran_Ates.html).

178 'Frauenrechtlerin Ates arbeitet wieder als Anwältin', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 06 September 2007.

■ **Mansur Escudero:** Islamic religious leader & community activist

Spain

b. 1948

Mansur Escudero is a Spanish Muslim leader who converted to Islam in 1979.<sup>179</sup> He previously served as the secretary-general of Spain's Islamic Commission, the country's largest Muslim organisation, until being replaced by Felix Herrero in 2006.<sup>180</sup> Currently he holds a variety of posts, including chairman of the Islamic Board of Spain, which he founded in 1991.

In 2005, on the first anniversary of the Madrid bombings, Escudero – along with the Islamic Commission – released a fatwa condemning Osama bin Laden for his use of terrorism. The fatwa, which was widely seen as being the first of its kind, called bin Laden an apostate and urged fellow Muslims to denounce him.<sup>181</sup> The fatwa quotes numerous verses from the Koran and says:

'The terrorist acts of Osama bin Laden and his organisation, Al Qaeda, that look to fill the hearts of defenceless people with fear; that entail the destruction of buildings or properties, that entail the death of civilians like women and children, or similar things, they are prohibited and they are the subject of a full sentence within Islam. Therefore the accomplishment of terrorist acts under the pretext of 'defending the oppressed nations of the world or the rights of Muslims' has no justification in Islam. There is no doubt that the Muslims have a legitimate right to react to an aggression or a situation of oppression. Nevertheless, such reaction does not have to give rise to a blind or irrational hatred.'<sup>182</sup>

Escudero elsewhere explained: 'We see this as our contribution, a dec-

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179 Tracy Wilkinson, 'Catholic-Muslim strife still echoes in this marble forest', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 2007.

See: <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/mar/28/world/fg-cordoba28>.

180 Geoff Pingree and Lisa Abend, 'Spanish Muslims Decry Al Qaeda', *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 March 2005.

See: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0314/p06s01-woeu.html>.

181 'Muslims in Spain under cloud of suspicion', *USA Today*, 09 March 2006.

See: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-03-09-muslims-spain\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-03-09-muslims-spain_x.htm).

182 J. Michael Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader* (Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), p. 249.

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laration from the Muslim community that says that bin Laden and Al Qaeda are not Muslims – they are outside of Islam.<sup>183</sup> Because Escudero was the fatwa's primary author, he has been the chief target of violent Islamists seeking to respond. One of the most notable threats appeared on a website associated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which named Escudero as an 'infidel'. The statement was believed to have come from Abu Maysara al-Iraqi, the so-called media coordinator for Zarqawi, and declared that members of the Islamic Commission would 'be defeated and never be victorious because Allah has promised us victory.'<sup>184</sup> Escudero has also received a string of e-mails which has been regarded as death threats.<sup>185</sup> Despite this intimidation, Escudero has said that he is not frightened: 'I'm a Muslim. A Muslim only fears God. And his protection is with God.'<sup>186</sup> He believes that the fatwa is an important 'call to conscience' for Spanish Muslims, and has been supported by several religious leaders in Morocco and Libya.<sup>187</sup>

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183 Pingree and Abend, 'Spanish Muslims Decry Al Qaeda', *Christian Science Monitor*.

184 Ibid.

185 'Muslims in Spain under cloud of suspicion', *USA Today*.

186 Pingree and Abend, 'Spanish Muslims Decry Al Qaeda', *Christian Science Monitor*.

187 Ibid.

■ **Maryam Namazie:** Human Rights activist and founder of Council of Ex-Muslims in Britain

United Kingdom  
b. 1967

Maryam Namazie is an Iranian born human rights activist, commentator and broadcaster. She is recognised internationally for her work with the Federation of Iranian Refugees, for her campaign against stoning, sexual discrimination and women's rights violations in Islamic societies, and for her discussion on the veiling of children and the imposition of sharia law.<sup>188</sup> More recently she has come to public attention through the founding of the Council of Ex-Muslims in Britain. Her actions have led to death threats from Muslim extremists.

When Namazie was a 12 year old child in Iran, she witnessed at first hand the overwhelming changes forced by the new revolutionary Iranian government which took power in 1979. Her school, which she remembers as being co-educational, was closed down 'for Islamisation'. Namazie also recalls being stopped in the streets by supporters of the government because her head was uncovered. She also became aware of the punishment inflicted on other women who did not abide by the Iranian government's new 'Islamic' rules, telling *The Times* that: 'There were beatings and acid was thrown in women's faces, and there were executions on television every day.'<sup>189</sup>

Soon after the Iranian revolution, her family fled first to India and then the UK, before they were finally granted residency in the US, where Namazie attended university.<sup>190</sup> Initially, she paid little attention to religious issues and focused more on humanitarian work. However, it was during her work for the United Nations Development Programme in Sudan in the 1980s that she began to question her identity as a Muslim. During her time there, Namazie, along with others, started an unofficial human rights organisation gathering information on Sudan's new

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188 'Biography', Maryam Namazie website. See: <http://www.maryamnamazie.com/biography.html>.

189 Juliet Rix, 'It's time to take a stand against Islam and Sharia', *The Times*, 12 March 2008. See: [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/the\\_way\\_we\\_live/article3530256.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/the_way_we_live/article3530256.ece).

190 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

Islamic government. On one occasion, she was called in for questioning by Sudanese security services but recalls that she was not 'very respectful.' She was subsequently threatened by the authorities and had to be quietly evacuated by the UN.<sup>191</sup> She later made the decision to apostatise from Islam and become an atheist.<sup>192</sup>

Following this she became increasingly active in seeking to draw attention to how she thought Islamists living in the West were seeking to use Western tolerance to promote a regressive and oppressive form of Islam. In 2005 she became involved in Homa Arjomand's successful campaign against the creation of a sharia court in Canada,<sup>193</sup> and is similarly adamant that no form of sharia should be allowed in the UK, telling *The Times*: 'It is fundamentally discriminatory and misogynist.'<sup>194</sup>

In early 2007 Namazie founded the Council of Ex-Muslims in Britain (CEMB) to represent former Muslims who have renounced their faith.<sup>195</sup> She said at the organisation's official launch in June:

'We are establishing an alternative to the likes of the Muslim Council of Britain because we don't think people should be pigeonholed as Muslims or deemed to be represented by regressive organisations like the MCB.'<sup>196</sup>

In March 2008, she said that the group had over 100 members, and told a seminar in London on Women's Rights, the Veil and Islamic and Religious Laws that:

'In my opinion, it is therefore impossible to address the status of women

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191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 'Biography', Maryam Namazie website. See: <http://www.maryamnamazie.com/biography.html>.

194 Rix, 'It's time to take a stand against Islam and Sharia', *The Times*.

195 Jonathan Petre, 'New group for those who renounce Islam', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2007.

See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1555263/New-group-for-those-who-renounce-Islam.html>.

196 Jonathan Petre, 'New group for those who renounce Islam', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2007.

See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1555263/New-group-for-those-who-renounce-Islam.html>.



under Islamic laws and defend women's rights without addressing and denouncing the veil. And this is why the veil is the first thing that Islamists impose when they have any access to power ... Similarly, the veil is a symbol of sexual apartheid and the segregation of the sexes.<sup>197</sup>

Elsewhere, she has told *The Times* that she believes that Muslim apostates were in a better position than non-Muslims to criticise political Islam, saying:

'Ex-Muslims are in a good position to challenge political Islam...We must not let little girls or anyone else lose their human rights. We can't tolerate the intolerable for any reason – including religion.'<sup>198</sup>

She added that:

'A child is swathed in cloth from head to toe every day. Everything but her face and hands are covered for fear that a man might find her attractive. At school she learns that she is worth less than a boy... This is clearly unacceptable, yet it is accepted when it is done in the name of religion.'<sup>199</sup>

Namazie has also said that she sees cultural relativism and present day liberalism as preventing the West from effectively tackling religious fundamentalism. This phenomenon, she wrote in the *New Statesman* in February 2008, has led to the promotion of:

'...tolerance and respect for so-called minority opinions and beliefs, rather than respect for human beings. Human beings are worthy of the highest respect, but not all opinions and beliefs are worthy of respect and tolerance. There are some who believe in fascism, white supremacy, and the inferiority of women. Must they be respected? I've always said that criticising Islam and its political movement is not racism in any way shape or form... You cannot be racist against a belief or idea, no matter how much that criticism may cause offence.'<sup>200</sup>

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197 'What's all the fuss about the veil?', Maryam Namazie blog, 21 March 2007. See: <http://maryamnamazie.blogspot.com/2007/03/whats-all-fuss-about-veil.html>.

198 Rix, 'It's time to take a stand against Islam and Sharia', *The Times*.

199 Ibid.

200 Maryam Namazie, 'The Necessity of Criticism', *New Statesman*, 07 February 2008. See: <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-faith-column/2008/02/iran-rights-religion-criticism>.

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As a result of publicly announcing her apostasy from Islam, setting up an ex-Muslim organisation and strongly criticising many aspects of Islamic practice, Namazie has received numerous threats to her safety and life. For example, on one occasion she received a text message on her mobile phone which read 'You are going to be decapitated.'<sup>201</sup> She reported this to the police but feels that they were uninterested after initial inquiry. She told *The Times* that:

'They were very attentive at first because they thought it might be linked to the attempted bombings in Glasgow. But when they realised it wasn't, they never bothered contacting me again.'<sup>202</sup>

She added that she remains concerned for her safety:

'I worry about whether I will live, especially now I am a mother. If I see someone looking at me strangely, I wonder.'<sup>203</sup>

However, she has said that she will not go into hiding or adopt a pseudonym, saying: 'They can find out who you are anyway. And the point of the Council of Ex-Muslims is to stand up and be counted.' Yet despite these alarming threats she enjoys no police protection.<sup>204</sup>

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201 Rix, 'It's time to take a stand against Islam and Sharia', *The Times*.

202 Ibid.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

■ **Kadra Noor:** Investigative reporter and activist

Norway  
b. 1980

Kadra Noor is a Norwegian-Somalian activist known for her work on behalf of women's rights in Norway's Muslim communities. She has also served as deputy director of a Somali women's group in Norway, campaigning against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in particular.<sup>205</sup>

Born in Somalia, Noor travelled from there to Canada with her family when she was seven years old, arriving as a refugee. Later she moved to Norway where her family had relatives. While at school she first became aware of the differences between traditional Somali culture and Western European values. In 2008, she told a Norwegian magazine that she felt that she was asked to choose between being Somali and being Western.<sup>206</sup> Instead, she felt that the two should not be comparable, asking 'why should everything be either/or?' During her teenage years, she became aware of female circumcision after several of her school friends were taken back to Somalia to have the operation carried out. She refused to be circumcised, leading local Somalian men to call her a slut and threaten her with violence.

In 2000 Noor took part in a hidden camera documentary for Norwegian television, which showed several imams from Oslo privately condoning the practice of female circumcision, despite making public statements to the contrary. The broadcast had a huge impact, earning Noor national recognition and eventually sparking new legislation in Norway to enforce a ban on ritual mutilation. However, Noor's work has attracted negative attention from some fundamentalist Muslims, along with traditionalist Somalis living in Norway, who regard her attitude toward female circumcision as a betrayal of her culture. In addition, some left-wing Norwegian anthropologists described her campaign against FGM as 'cultural imperialism' and compared FGM to ear-piercing.<sup>207</sup>

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205 '2 men arrested in Norway after attack on critic of Islam', *International Herald Tribune*, 16 April 2007.

See: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/04/16/europe/EU-GEN-Norway-Assault.php>.

206 'Kadras Tilstand,' *Where2Go magazine*, Vol 16, September 2008. See: <http://www.where-2-go.no/arkiv/374320>.

207 Ibid.

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On 10 April 2007 Norway's largest newspaper, *Verdens Gang*, published an article in which Noor said that the Koran should be re-interpreted to allow a greater understanding of women's rights. She was quoted as saying that 'The Quran's view of women should be interpreted again ... I miss a debate over the rights and duties modern Muslim women have.'<sup>208</sup> Several days later, she was attacked by a gang of Somali men outside a pub in downtown Oslo.<sup>209</sup> Shouting verses from the Koran and yelling '*Allahu Akbar*', they beat her unconscious, breaking several ribs and severely bruising her body and face.<sup>210</sup> She later described the attack to the *Verdens Gang* newspaper saying, 'I was terrified. While I lay on the asphalt, they kicked me and screamed that I had offended the Quran.'<sup>211</sup>

Shortly after the attack Noor spotted two of her assailants in Oslo. With her help, they were immediately arrested by police, and charged with gross assault and battery. It emerged that both Somali men were convicted criminals who had been formally expelled from Norway in 2003, but refused to leave on account of the political crisis in Somalia.<sup>212</sup> Noor believes she was targeted because of her statements in *Verdens Gang* calling for a re-interpretation of the Koran's view of women.<sup>213</sup>

Since the attack, she has received multiple death threats and now lives under police protection.<sup>214</sup> She also lives at a secret address and admits to avoiding areas with large Somali populations.<sup>215</sup> In 2007, she told a

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208 '2 men arrested in Norway after attack on critic of Islam', *International Herald Tribune*.

209 'Kadra attacked in public', *Aftenposten*, 13 April 2007.  
See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1734869.ece>.

210 Ibid.

211 '2 men arrested in Norway after attack on critic of Islam', *International Herald Tribune*.

212 'Assailants "expelled" in 2004', *Aftenposten*, 18 April 2007.  
See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1743649.ece?contentType=tips%20-%2053k%20->

213 'Assailants "expelled" in 2004', *Aftenposten*.

214 Nicola Smith, 'Divided By A Common Faith', *E! Sharp*, a 'bi-monthly magazine on European Union affairs', September-October 2007. See: <http://www.peoplepowerprocess.com/images/magflash/sept07/pdfs/page52.pdf>.

215 'Kadras Tilstand,' *Where2Go magazine*.

journalist that 'I'm scared to go out right now. It's much more dangerous to be a feminist in Norway in 2007 than in Morocco. It's ironic.'<sup>216</sup> Despite this, she has continued to call for the Koran to be re-interpreted to allow a greater appreciation of women's rights as well as challenging Norwegian feminists and leftists who are unwilling to confront issues such as FGM.

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216 Nicola Smith, 'Divided By A Common Faith', *E! Sharp*, September-October 2007. See: <http://www.peoplepowerprocess.com/images/magflash/sept07/pdfs/page52.pdf>.



# **Writers & Academics**

### ■ Afshin Ellian: Law lecturer

The Netherlands  
b. 1966

Born in Iran, Afshin Ellian fled to Pakistan in 1983 after being sentenced to death by Iran's Islamic government on account of his opposition to the new regime. He then moved to Afghanistan, where he studied medicine in Kabul until 1989, before moving to the Netherlands as a political refugee. There he studied Dutch law at the University of Tilburg, graduating in 1996. Currently he holds a chair in philosophy of law at Leiden University. Ellian is today well known in the Netherlands as a prominent critic of political Islam and as a passionate supporter of free speech and religious freedom. He writes columns for many Dutch magazines and newspapers and regularly appears on television as an expert on legal and Islamic issues.

After the 11 September 2001 attacks, Ellian became an increasingly prominent figure in the Netherlands for his outspoken views on Islamic extremism. In June 2002 he was invited on NOVA, a popular Dutch news show, to discuss aspects of Dutch law. The news programme aired an item exposing hatred against the West being disseminated in some Dutch mosques by radical Imams. In response, Ellian said that 'Allah is a fictional idea for which people are willing to commit murder' and that 'Allah does not have the ability to commit murder, he needs people to carry out that task for him.'<sup>217</sup> Immediately after the broadcast Ellian received several threats against his life, and an arrest was also made in relation to the threats against him.

After the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, with security in the Netherlands raised to the highest level, a group of Dutch politicians receiving personal protection from the government demanded that Ellian receive the same level of police protection as themselves. However, the Minister of Justice Piet-Hein Donner refused their requests, despite evidence that the Islamist group Hofstad Network, one of whose members murdered van Gogh, was keeping files on Ellian and publishing threats against him on radical websites. Ellian has suggested that this refusal may have been a deliberate act to silence any person critical of Islam in the Netherlands.<sup>218</sup>

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217 Published on NOVA website on 12 June 2002.

218 Afshin Ellian, Personal interview, 23 November 2007. Conducted by Johan Pieter Verwey.



It was only after the 7/7 bombings in London that the Dutch government finally agreed to arrange security measures for Ellian. Police and intelligence agencies took the threats directed at Ellian seriously, providing special protection and making one arrest.<sup>219</sup> It was the first time in Dutch history that such security measures had been taken to protect a member of the public; previously only politicians or members of the royal family were afforded police protection.

Currently Ellian lives under heavy police protection, which severely restricts his freedom of movement. The threats against Ellian have increased both in number and severity, and he has stopped using public transport due to a high risk of attacks by extremists.

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219 Ibid.

### ■ **Salman Rushdie:** Novelist

United Kingdom  
b. 1947

Salman Rushdie is a British novelist of Indian descent, born to a Muslim family in Mumbai. He is most famous for his 1988 book *The Satanic Verses*, which was seen by many Muslims worldwide as containing blasphemous depictions of Mohammed and other key Islamic figures. Following the book's publication Rushdie was forced into hiding after receiving death threats and a fatwa from the Iranian government, which condemned him to death. In 1999 he returned to public life and has since published several other books, some of which have also dealt with Islamic themes. Rushdie is the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships and honorary doctorates. For his literary achievements, Rushdie was honoured with a knighthood from the British government. This award, bestowed in June 2007, led to some renewed protests against him and his book.<sup>220</sup> Currently he serves as Distinguished Writer in Residence at Emory University near Atlanta, Georgia.

After initially going to school in India, Rushdie received most of his education in England, and studied history at King's College, Cambridge. After graduation he went to live in Pakistan. In 1975 Rushdie released his first novel, *Grimus*, followed by the critically acclaimed *Midnight's Children*, which earned the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1981.

In 1988 Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*, a work of fiction that drew parallels to an alleged incident where Mohammed uttered Koranic verses inspired by Satan rather than God, then later retracted them and repented. Rushdie's allusion to the Satanic Verses angered many Muslims in the UK and abroad who saw his book as blasphemous and anti-Islamic.

Shortly after its publication *The Satanic Verses* was condemned by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which called Rushdie an apostate of Islam.<sup>221</sup> Their declaration was followed by numerous public protests around the world, and in January 1989 the Bradford Council of Mosques led a 1,000-strong televised rally at which protestors burnt

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220 'Day of Pakistan Rushdie protests', *BBC News*, 22 June 2007.  
See: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6229506.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6229506.stm).

221 Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7: The Radicalisation of Islam in Britain* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2006), p. 10.

copies of the book outside police headquarters.<sup>222</sup>

In February 1989 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's supreme leader, issued a fatwa,<sup>223</sup> saying that Rushdie and anyone associated with producing *The Satanic Verses* could lawfully be killed:

'In the name of Him, the Highest. There is only one God, to whom we shall all return. I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses* – which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran – and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content are sentenced to death. I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.'<sup>224</sup>

Several days later Salman Rushdie went into hiding, a state in which he would remain for nearly a decade. During this time riots and violence regularly took place in protest of the book. In August 1989 an explosion killed a bomber in London whilst he was working with explosives. According to a Beirut newspaper, Mustafa Mahmoud Mazeh of Guinea died preparing an attack 'on the apostate Rushdie.'<sup>225</sup> This failed assassination attempt was followed by the murder of Rushdie's Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, who was found dead in July 1991.<sup>226</sup> Other translators were also seriously injured in Italy and Norway, whilst another in Turkey only narrowly escaped a fire set in his hotel to kill

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222 Robin Lustig, Martin Bailey, Simon de Bruxelles and Ian Mather, 'War of the Word', *Guardian*, 19 February 1989. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1989/feb/19/race.world>.

223 'Timeline: Iran', *BBC News*, 27 August 2008.  
See: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/806268.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/806268.stm).

224 Jonathan Rauch, 'In Hindsight, the War on Terror Began with Salman Rushdie', *The Atlantic*, 01 March 2005.  
See: [http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200503u/nj\\_rauch\\_2005-03-01](http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200503u/nj_rauch_2005-03-01).

225 Anthony Loyd, 'Tomb of the unknown assassin reveals mission to kill Rushdie', *The Times*, 08 June 2005.  
See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article531110.ece>.

226 Steven R. Weisman, 'Japanese Translator of Rushdie Book Found Slain', *New York Times*, 13 July 1991.  
See: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/04/18/specials/rushdie-translator.html>.

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him.<sup>227</sup> *The Satanic Verses* was also banned in over twenty countries, including India, Bangladesh and Indonesia. It was not until September 1998 that the Iranian government began to distance itself from the fatwa. In a formal statement Iran's then-foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, announced that:

'The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has no intention, nor is it going to take any action whatsoever, to threaten the life of [Rushdie]...nor will it encourage or assist anybody to do so.'<sup>228</sup>

In response Rushdie stated 'This looks like it's over...It means everything, it means freedom.'<sup>229</sup> However, other groups refused to repeal the fatwa. In October 1998 an Iranian religious foundation raised its original \$2.5m bounty on the head of Rushdie by \$300,000: 'This increase is aimed at encouraging the carrying out of the fatwa,' stated Ayatollah Hassan Sanei, director of the radical Khordad-15 Foundation.<sup>230</sup> In 2005 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also reaffirmed the ruling, telling Muslims that the author of *The Satanic Verses* was an apostate whose killing would be authorised by Islam.<sup>231</sup> Khamenei declared that, because the fatwa was issued by Iran's revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, who had since died, it could not be revoked. In fact Rushdie has said that he continues to receive yearly notes from Iran, 'letting him know the country has not forgotten the vow to kill him.'<sup>232</sup> He refers to these notes as 'a sort of Valentine's card', because of the 14 February anniversary of the fatwa.<sup>233</sup>

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227 'Commentary: "How Dare You Defame Islam"', Daniel Pipes website, November 1999.

See: <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/321>.

228 'Iran disassociates itself from Rushdie death sentence', *CNN*, 24 September 1998.

See: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9809/24/iran.rushdie/index.html>.

229 Ibid.

230 'Rushdie death bounty raised', *BBC News*, 12 October 1998.

See: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/191724.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/191724.stm).

231 Philip Webster, Ben Hoyle and Ramita Navai, 'Ayatollah revives the death fatwa on Salman Rushdie', *The Times*, 20 January 2005. See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article414681.ece>.

232 'Rushdie's "Valentine's card"', *The Herald* (Scotland).

See: <http://www.theherald.co.uk/news/foreign/display.var.1190793.0.0.php>.

233 Ibid.

In a recent interview Rushdie commented on the outcome of *The Satanic Verses* controversy:

'In the end, it was pretty much a victory... There was this attempt to murder a writer who was not murdered. There was an attempt to suppress a work, which was not suppressed. And in the end, the people issuing those threats were forced by international opinion and by political realities to withdraw those threats. And it seems to me that's a remarkable achievement, not just of mine but of many, many people working on my behalf with me and, indeed, of the American and British governments working together. Really a collective achievement by publishers, by booksellers, readers, politicians and just ordinary people who got very agitated about this matter. It would have been, in my view, a news story worth writing that it's possible to defeat these threats... You don't always have to lose. It's actually possible to win.'<sup>234</sup>

At the same time, and in hindsight, Rushdie insists the fatwa made him stronger. He explains that he reached rock bottom during his time in hiding, but adds: 'After that, it cleared things up in my head.'<sup>235</sup> He says he stopped being a 'prisoner' of the fatwa because he realised that 'there are people who are not going to like me and do you know what? I don't like them.'<sup>236</sup> This realisation allowed Rushdie to continue his critiques of aspects of Islam. He now calls for a 'reformation' of the faith, saying that it needs to 'move beyond tradition', and that it requires 'nothing less than a reform movement to bring the core concepts of Islam into the modern age.'<sup>237</sup> He also advocates treating the Koran as a 'historical document' open to various types of interpretation, rather than an infallible religious text.<sup>238</sup>

Since the September 11th attacks, Salman Rushdie has been increas-

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234 Dan Webster, 'Interview with Salman Rushdie', *Spokesman Review*, 20 April 2005. See: <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/breaking/story.asp?id=3821>.

235 Jonathan Owen, 'Rushdie: how the fatwa made me a much nicer man', *Independent*, 04 May 2008. See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/rushdie-how-the-fatwa-made-me-a-much-nicer-man-820863.html>.

236 Ibid.

237 Salman Rushdie, 'Muslims unite! A new Reformation will bring your faith into the modern era', *The Times*, 11 August 2005. See: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article553964.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article553964.ece).

238 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

ingly vocal in his political views. Indeed, he has come to see a connection between current acts of terrorism and *The Satanic Verses*:

'When people first started to make a connection between me and 9/11, I resisted it because of the disparity of the scale. But I have come to feel that what happened with *The Satanic Verses* was a kind of prologue and that now we're in the main event. At the time there was an unwillingness to see it as representative of a larger phenomenon...This is happening to writers all over the world. But what happened to me is no longer the story – there's a different story now, and I don't think anybody gives a damn about *The Satanic Verses* anymore.'<sup>239</sup>

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239 Ginny Dougary, 'The incredible lightness of Salman', *The Times*, 20 August 2005. See: [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/article1081011.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article1081011.ece).

■ **Mohammad Anwar Shaikh:** Author

b. 1928 – d. 2006  
United Kingdom

Mohammad Anwar Shaikh, who was born in India and died at his home in Cardiff, Wales in 2006, was an author and commentator on Islam. Throughout his life he published several books and articles critical of Islam, which earned him many threats and fatwas from Pakistani clerics and other religious figures.

In his early life Anwar Shaikh was a fervent Muslim, raised in a very religious household in British-ruled India. During the partition of India he took part in violence against non-Muslims, a fact which he later came to regret deeply. In the riots of 1947, while living in Lahore, Anwar Shaikh murdered three Sikhs. He explained:

‘We were told that murdering the non-Muslims, seducing their wives, burning their properties, was an act of Jihad, that is Holy War. And Jihad is the most sacred duty of a Muslim because it guarantees him a safe passage to paradise where no fewer than 72 houris, that is the most beautiful virgins, and pearl-like boys wait for him. Such a reward is a great temptation!’<sup>240</sup>

However, Anwar Shaikh later felt remorse:

‘Often memories of those terrible days haunt my mind, I feel ashamed, and many a times have I shed tears of remorse. If it had not been for my fanaticism, engendered by the Islamic traditions those people might have been alive even today. And I might not have felt the guilt which I still do.’<sup>241</sup>

After this event he began to read the Koran critically and later started to question his belief in Islam. As a result, at the age of 25, he privately renounced his faith:

‘I was no longer willing to study the Koran, through faith. I started reading it critically and rationally, and as I went through it, I realised the Koran did not

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240 ‘Anwar Shaikh: The Autobiography of an Apostate’, *Institution for the Secularization of Islamic Society*. See: [http://www.centerforinquiry.net/isis/islamic\\_viewpoints/anwar\\_shaikh\\_the\\_autobiography\\_of\\_an\\_apostate/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/isis/islamic_viewpoints/anwar_shaikh_the_autobiography_of_an_apostate/).

241 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

appeal to me anymore the way it used to do, the way it had for the last 25 years.'

'The moment I started reading the Koran critically, it looked entirely another book to me ... the Koran was not a book from God, it would contain many contradictions or inconsistencies ... I subjected the Koran to its own definition. And I found that all the important points had been contradicted by the Koran itself. I have written a book called "Faith & Deception" which demonstrates all these contradictions of the Koran. So you see when you read something rationally instead of blindly as most of the faithful do, then the same verses, the same words, will have different meanings. That is how I went away from Islam gradually, simply by reading the Koran itself.'<sup>242</sup>

Anwar Shaikh then worked as a teacher and headmaster of a high school in Pakistan, before moving permanently to Great Britain in 1956. While there he held a variety of jobs, including a successful stint as a property developer. After several years he began publishing his own journal, entitled *Liberty*, in both English and Urdu. This periodical included not only an open discussion of Islam, but also Urdu poetry and other writings, which reflect his self-described philosophy of liberal humanism and religious freedom.<sup>243</sup>

In the early 1990s Anwar Shaikh published a variety of books at his own expense, the most famous being *Islam: The Arab National Movement* (1995).<sup>244</sup> This work was fierce in its criticism of Islam and Mohammed, with Anwar Shaikh claiming that its purpose was to 'expose Islam'. By making public his controversial views on Islam, he incurred a variety of threats. In October 1995, large numbers of Muslim leaders in Pakistan issued a joint fatwa against him. According to an article in Pakistan's *Daily Sadaqat*:

'All Pakistani clergy demand extradition of the accursed renegade Anwar Shaikh from Britain to hang him publicly. A renegade must be murdered – this is a fundamental rule of the Islamic Law – Anwar Shaikh must be called back, some lover of the Prophet is bound to kill him. America [sic] protects every insulter of the Prophet. If he (Anwar Shaikh) is not eliminated, more Rushdies will appear. He is an apostate for denying heaven, hell, revelation, Koran,

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242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.

244 Anwar Shaikh, *Islam: The Arab National Movement* (Cardiff, Wales: Principality Publishers, 1995).



Prophet and angels. The Muslims of the world are ready to behead the accursed renegade to defend the magnificence of their Prophet.<sup>245</sup>

Anwar Sheikh received numerous threats and death sentences during his life, but he continued to critique Islam and the future of secular Britain:

'Britain is my home and unless you do something about Muslim fundamentalism there is going to be a huge fifth column in our midst. England must wake up. You [the British] spent hundreds of years getting Christian fundamentalism out of this country. Don't let fundamentalism come back.'<sup>246</sup>

Living his life as an ardent humanist, in October 1995 Anwar Sheikh told Tariq Ali in an interview that:

'Whatever happens now, I will die confident in my humanist and rational beliefs and, if my writings have weaned even a few dozen people away from religious hatred and fanaticism, I feel I will have partially redeemed myself, even though nothing, nothing can bring my three victims back to life.'<sup>247</sup>

Anwar Sheikh was asked by another journalist if he thought he would be likely to die violently, to which he replied, 'I want to die honourably.'<sup>248</sup>

Anwar Sheikh's other publications include *Faith and Deception* (1996), *Islam: The Arab Imperialism* (1998), and *Islam and Terrorism* (2004). His testimony of leaving Islam also appeared in a book by fellow ex-Muslim Ibn Warraq, entitled *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (2003) (see next entry).

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245 Quoted. in Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, The Ayatollah and the West* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), p. 283.

246 'Anwar Shaikh: The Autobiography of an Apostate', *Institution for the Secularization of Islamic Society*.

247 Ibid.

248 Ibid.

### ■ Ibn Warraq (pen name): Author

b. 1946  
United Kingdom

Ibn Warraq is the pen name of a prominent and widely-published critic of Islam, most famous for his 1995 book entitled *Why I Am Not a Muslim*. Though raised in a Muslim household, Ibn Warraq has since renounced his faith, and has said that he considers himself an agnostic and a secular humanist.<sup>249</sup> He has been described by the *Boston Globe* as ‘among the most prominent and outspoken Muslim apostates alive today.’<sup>250</sup> The name ‘Ibn Warraq’ (lit. ‘son of the paper maker’), which has been used by Islamic dissidents throughout history, was adopted by the author on the publication of his first book in 1995.

Ibn Warraq was born in Rajkot, India, and moved with his family to Pakistan after the Partition.<sup>251</sup> He attended Koranic schools in Pakistan, but was sent to boarding school in England as a teenager.<sup>252</sup> At the age of 18, Ibn Warraq entered the University of Edinburgh to study Arabic with William Montgomery Watt, an English Orientalist whom Ibn Warraq now sees as an apologist for militant Islam.<sup>253</sup> After university Ibn Warraq held a variety of jobs, including teaching in a primary school, opening an Indian restaurant and working for a travel agency in France during the early 1980s.<sup>254</sup>

By his own account, Ibn Warraq initially began to have doubts about Islam in the mid-1980s, but it was not until the Salman Rushdie affair that he began to openly express his true opinions about Islam. In addition, he was appalled by the lack of Westerners, as well as fellow Muslims, who publicly came to Rushdie’s defence after the release of

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249 Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. xiii.

250 Lee Smith, ‘Losing his religion: Apostate Ibn Warraq campaigns for the right not to be a Muslim’, *Boston Globe*, 17 August 2003. See: [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2003/08/17/losing\\_his\\_religion\\_boston\\_globe?mode=PF](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2003/08/17/losing_his_religion_boston_globe?mode=PF).

251 Ibid.

252 Ibn Warraq, ‘Democracy in a Cartoon’, *Spiegel Online*, 03 February 2006. See: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,398853,00.html>.

253 Smith, ‘Losing his religion’, *Boston Globe*.

254 Priya Abraham, ‘Dissident Voices’, *World Magazine*, 16 June 2007. See: <http://www.worldmag.com/printer.cfm?id=13052>.

*The Satanic Verses* in 1988.<sup>255</sup> Warraq today cites this event as a turning point in his faith:

‘Rushdie wrote his book and trusted in freedom of expression. Whether one likes the book or not – he has the right to write it. Or as Rushdie put it, freedom of opinion also means having the freedom to upset people. Otherwise this freedom would be meaningless. I felt that freedom of opinion is a value that has to be defended. A value that we have to defend in the West. Like freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, true pluralism, the Western judicial system.’<sup>256</sup>

Several years later, in 1992, Ibn Warraq published an article in *Free Thought* magazine, which laid the groundwork for his bestselling book on Islam.<sup>257</sup> In *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, published three years later in 1995, he compares Islam to totalitarianism,<sup>258</sup> and says that its teachings ‘have been a disaster for human reason and social, intellectual, and moral progress.’<sup>259</sup> Instead he calls for freedom of expression and belief, which he regards as the foundation of democracy.<sup>260</sup> Ibn Warraq has said that one of his main goals is to ‘win the right to criticize the religion without fear of retribution’ from Islamists and radical Muslims.<sup>261</sup> His other publications include *The Origins of the Koran* (1998), *What the Koran Really Says* (2002) and *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (2003).

Out of concern for his personal safety, Ibn Warraq currently lives in hiding as he has received many serious death threats. Because of his apostasy and criticism of Islam, he has never revealed his true name and identity. Ibn Warraq’s pen name also allows him to freely visit relatives in the Middle East without seriously jeopardizing his security or restricting his admittance to Muslim majority countries. He says:

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255 Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, xiii-xiv.

256 ‘Interview with Ibn Warraq: “Many Muslims React to Criticism of the Qur’an with Hysteria”’, *Qantara.de*, 2007. See: [http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/\\_c-478/\\_nr-688/i.html](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-478/_nr-688/i.html).

257 Smith, ‘Losing his religion’, *Boston Globe*.

258 Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 163.

259 Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 159.

260 Smith, ‘Losing his religion’, *Boston Globe*.

261 Ibid.

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'I have to be careful, I'm on several death lists. And I don't want to upset the Muslims in my family. They don't know I've written all these books. But as I'm speaking in public more and more often now, someone is bound to recognise me at some point.'<sup>262</sup>

With the help of an anonymous stipend arranged through his US-publishing house Prometheus Books, Ibn Warraq lives as an independent writer.<sup>263</sup> He has also founded, along with other ex-Muslims, the Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society (ISIS), which promotes freedom of religion for all.<sup>264</sup> He has only recently begun to make appearances in public, though he still takes constant security precautions.<sup>265</sup>

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262 'Interview with Ibn Warraq', *Qantara.de*, 2007.

263 Smith, 'Losing his religion', *Boston Globe*.

264 Ibid.

265 'We should not be reluctant to assert the superiority of Western values', past debate, Intelligence Squared website, 09 October 2007. Ibn Warraq took part in the Intelligence Squared Debates at the Royal Geographical Society in London opposite Tariq Ramadan.

See: [http://www.intelligencesquared.com/event\\_future.php?d=20071009](http://www.intelligencesquared.com/event_future.php?d=20071009)

# Artists

### ■ Rachid Ben Ali: Painter

The Netherlands  
b. 1978

Rachid Ben Ali is a Dutch artist who was born in the town of Taza, Morocco, in 1978.<sup>266</sup> He has lived in Amsterdam since 1988 where he began exhibiting his work in 1999.<sup>267</sup> Ben Ali's own website describes his art as being gory, raw and erotic, highlighting social and political issues such as 'oppression, fundamentalism, discrimination and racism.'<sup>268</sup> He was physically attacked by Dutch-Moroccan youths after appearing on the front cover of *Gay Krant*, a gay lifestyle magazine.<sup>269</sup> In early 2005, two months after the murder of Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic militant, Ben Ali was forced to go into hiding. This was in response to death threats he received following an exhibition at the Cobra Museum of Modern Art in Amstelveen, in Amsterdam.<sup>270</sup>

The January 2005 exhibition at the Cobra Museum, organised as part of a series of cultural events entitled 'Morocco-Netherlands 2005' was intended to showcase Ben Ali's work and present it as an example of the success of Dutch multiculturalism. It featured 40 of Ben Ali's recent artworks which were described by the *New York Times* as being 'angry sketches that include suicide bombers and "hate imams", evil-looking preachers, vomiting excrement or spitting bombs.'<sup>271</sup> Ben Ali's art had previously been shown widely in the Netherlands, such as his art work being personally selected by Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands for dis-

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266 Marlese Simons, 'Militant Muslims act to suppress Dutch film and art show', *New York Times*, 31 January 2005. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/31/international/europe/31netherlands.html>.

267 'Rachid Ben Ali CV' (online pdf). See: <http://www.artfacts.net/pdf-files/inst/CV%20Rachid%20Ben%20Ali.pdf>.

268 'Biography', Rachid Ben Ali website. See: <http://www.rachidbenali.com/>.

269 Thomas van den Bergh, 'Moroccans in the Arts', *Elsevier*, 14 April 2005. See: <http://www.elsevier.nl/web/artikel/cabaretlachenomtasjesdieven.htm>.

270 Simons, 'Militant Muslims act to suppress Dutch film and art show', *New York Times*.

271 Simons, 'Militant Muslims act to suppress Dutch film and art show', *New York Times*.

play in the Stedelijk Museum in 2005.<sup>272</sup>

Soon after the opening of the Cobra Museum exhibition, Ben Ali received death threats from Islamic extremists and had to avoid returning to his home and workshop. Despite this, John Frieze, the Cobra Museum's curator, defended Ben Ali's work and refused to remove it from the gallery. He told the *New York Times* that 'We've been pleased with the show, not only because the work is good, but also because it generated much debate with young Muslims attacking and defending it.'<sup>273</sup> He added that, 'It would be very regrettable if we had to start accepting self-censorship, if we could not show this kind of protest art.'

Ben Ali was publicly supported by Ahmed Aboutaleb (see Politicians), who was accompanied by personal bodyguards to publicly open the exhibition with a speech. He was subsequently given additional police protection after he continued to support Ben Ali.<sup>274</sup> Ben Ali himself was also given police protection. On 21 January 2005, Ben Ali was quoted by the Dutch news agency NIS News Service, as saying that 'I have a couple of guards around me continuously.'<sup>275</sup> He was also quoted as saying that he had received several death threats from strangers on the streets and on Internet forums.<sup>276</sup> Although the Cobra Museum did not remove Ben Ali's work from display, the artist was rarely present at his own exhibition.<sup>277</sup> Frieze, director of the Cobra Museum, said the artist was 'keeping a low profile. The controversy and reactions have unsettled him deeply.'<sup>278</sup>

One of the rare interviews given by Ben Ali during this period was to *El País*, the Spanish newspaper. In the article, published in February 2005, Ben Ali explained that he saw his art as a deliberate attempt to 'break

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272 'Islam Critical Artist in Hiding after Threats', *NIS News Bulletin*, 21 July 2005. See: [http://www.nisnews.nl/dossiers/royal\\_house/210105\\_1453.htm](http://www.nisnews.nl/dossiers/royal_house/210105_1453.htm).

273 Simons, 'Militant Muslims act to suppress Dutch film and art show', *New York Times*.

274 Ibid.

275 'Islam Critical Artist in Hiding after Threats', *NIS News Bulletin*.

276 Ibid.

277 Simons, 'Militant Muslims act to suppress Dutch film and art show', *New York Times*.

278 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

taboos' and challenge Muslim 'social controls':

'I want people to see that being of Muslim origin, like me, a person can be absolutely free in their way of thinking. The Muslim world does not give you space as an individual. There is a terrible social control. And in order to convey this message and get people talking, what needs to be done is to break taboos.'<sup>279</sup>

When the newspaper asked him if his own freedom had been reduced as a result of the threats and whether he regretted the decision to publicly exhibit his art, Ben Ali replied:

'Absolutely not. I do not allow myself to be intimidated. I do not practice self-censorship. I would rather give up painting than do that.'

More recently, Ben Ali has begun publicly exhibiting his work again. From June to September 2008, the Cobra Museum again displayed his work as part of their *Just Different!* exhibition. The gallery's website says that the exhibition will be 'about sexual desire, gender and identity construction in the visual arts. Disregarding for the moment the heterosexual dominance of our daily life, it addresses instead alternative life styles, such as homosexuality and trans-sexuality.'<sup>280</sup> There have been no reports of any threats or disturbances in response to this latest exhibition.

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279 John Carlin, '¿Pueden convivir en paz el islam y Occidente?', *El País*, 20 February 2005. Translated in English.

280 'Just Different!', Cobra Museum website. See: <http://www.cobra-museum.nl/en/home.html>.



■ **Sooreh Hera (pseudonym):** Photographer

The Netherlands

b. 1973

‘Sooreh Hera’ is the pseudonym of an Iranian exile currently living in the Netherlands. Born and raised in Iran, Hera studied design in the Academy of Art and Architecture in Tehran, before reluctantly deciding to emigrate to Europe after the government tried to censor her work. In 2007 she graduated from the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, the political capital of the Netherlands, and was voted the most promising student of the year. Soon afterwards, she was selected to exhibit her work in the Gemeente Museum in The Hague as part of an exhibition of young artists’ work. Her collection included photographs of gay Iranian men wearing painted masks of Mohammed and his son-in-law Ali. Through these photographs, Hera said that she wanted to express and expose the ‘hypocritical’ attitude apparent in Iran where homosexuals are regularly executed.<sup>281</sup> However, death threats against Hera and the museum authorities prompted the museum director to remove the most controversial exhibits.

Hera’s attitude to religion and art pre-dated her arrival in the Netherlands. While still studying in Iran in the 1990s, Hera began reading Western literature and poetry and increasingly sought to express her own thoughts and ideas through publishing poems and books highlighting her non-conformist attitudes towards sexuality and religion. By 1999 Hera was receiving frequent threats from both the government and individual Iranians attacking her for her views. Subsequently, the Iranian government banned Hera from printing any of her literary works. A year later, she was forced by Iran’s government, and by her family, to flee the country, leaving behind all her possessions.<sup>282</sup> In 2000 Hera had the choice to board a plane to either Germany or the Netherlands, but chose the latter though she knew little other than the country being the birthplace of Vincent van Gogh and Rembrandt.

After being accepted as a political refugee in the Netherlands, Hera enrolled in the Academy of Art in The Hague to further her training as

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281 Matthew Campbell, ‘Woman artist gets death threats over gay Muslim photos’, *Sunday Times*, 06 January 2008.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3137510.ece>.

282 Campbell, ‘Woman artist gets death threats over gay Muslim photos’, *Sunday Times*.

an artist and photographer. She excelled in her studies and travelled extensively. Her first public exhibition 'Adam & Ewald, Seventh-Day Lovers' was to run at the 7-up exhibition at the Gemeente Museum in The Hague for a three month period from December 2007.<sup>283</sup> Hera borrowed the term 'Adam & Ewald' for her collection from the remarks of a Dutch Parliament member who has said that 'if homosexuality were allowed, the Bible might have mentioned "Adam and Ewald," instead of Adam and Eve.'<sup>284</sup> The director of the museum, Wim van Krimpen, had personally selected Hera's work for this exhibit, along with seven other up-and-coming Iranian artists. He deemed the pieces as important contributions to the exhibit as well as highly artistic. Her display shows two partially naked homosexual men wearing facemasks of Mohammed and his son-in-law Ali who is revered by Shia Muslims.<sup>285</sup>

Speaking to the *Sunday Times*, Hera said that she aimed to exemplify how 'works of art can be provocative. It is not an artist's job just to paint flowers. Art should shine a light on social issues.' She added that 'in countries like Iran or Saudi Arabia it is common for married men to maintain relations with other men.'<sup>286</sup> However, she noted, homosexuality is publicly and widely condemned in many Muslim countries and societies, which she sees as hypocritical.

Initially van Krimpen, the museum director, expressed his delight with the photographs, which he described as 'exceptional.'<sup>287</sup> However, shortly afterwards he announced that he would remove the pieces featuring Islamic figures from the exhibition, saying that 'certain people in our society might perceive it as offensive,'<sup>288</sup> and adding that he 'did not wish [the museum] to become part of a political debate.'<sup>289</sup> Hera criticised the move as censorship saying that van Krimpen 'gave in to

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283 Jana Winter, 'Iranian Artist Fights to Have Muhammad Art Displayed in Dutch Museums', *Fox News*, 03 May 2008. See: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354075,00.html>.

284 Ibid.

285 Ibid.

286 Campbell, 'Woman artist gets death threats over gay Muslim photos', *Sunday Times*.

287 Ibid.

288 Ibid.

289 Winter, 'Iranian Artist Fights to Have Muhammad Art Displayed in Dutch Museums', *Fox News*.

pressure from the Islamists. It is censorship.<sup>290</sup> She also wrote to Ronald Plasterk, Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science, asking for his support, which he agreed to give in principle, but said that he would not help to reinstate her photographs at the exhibition. The response from elsewhere was mixed. Wouter Bos, the deputy Prime Minister, defended her, saying: 'In a democracy, we do not recognise the right not to be insulted.'<sup>291</sup> However, the left wing newspaper *De Volkskrant*, said the museum has shown 'great professionalism' by removing the images.<sup>292</sup>

As a protest against what she saw as censorship, Hera withdrew the rest of her photographs from the exhibition. Ranti Tjan, director of a museum in Gouda, meanwhile agreed to put Hera's controversial photographs on show.<sup>293</sup> However, Tjan himself received death threats from extremists and was put under police protection. Hera also started receiving death threats, forcing her to leave her residence in Amsterdam and go into hiding. In an interview, Hera says she received threats such as 'We're going to burn you naked or put a bullet in your mouth.' She was also told 'Now you are locked in your home and you cannot go out any more.'<sup>294</sup> Hera was also said to be the subject of a fatwa condemning her to death which was printed in Iranian newspapers.<sup>295</sup> Iranian newspapers also ran stories about Hera, implying she worked for Dutch intelligence (AIVD) and that the exhibition was part of a plot by the Dutch government to defame Islam.<sup>296</sup> Today, Sooreh Hera says that she not only fears violent reactions from Dutch Muslims but also worries about branches of the Iranian authorities that operate internationally.<sup>297</sup> Many of the threats she receives every day originate from outside of

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290 Campbell, 'Woman artist gets death threats over gay Muslim photos', *Sunday Times*.

291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.

294 Ibid.

295 Winter, 'Iranian Artist Fights to Have Muhammad Art Displayed in Dutch Museums', *Fox News*.

296 Sooreh Hera, personal interview, 10 January 2008. Conducted by Johan Pieter Verwey.

297 Ibid.

## VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION

the Netherlands, specifically, she says, from radical Italian Muslims.<sup>298</sup> She says 'Freedom of expression has become an illusion in Europe ... we think we have freedom of expression, but in fact we live under a sort of hidden censorship.'<sup>299</sup> In 2008, Hera's art work was accepted to be displayed in the Art Amsterdam festival – on the condition that the offensive photos were omitted from the exhibit. Hera agreed to these conditions and said: 'Under difficult circumstances I had to agree to this exhibition because there [would have been] a lot of anxiety and unrest ... about these photos if they would be shown at Art Amsterdam.'<sup>300</sup>

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298 Ibid.

299 Winter, 'Iranian Artist Fights to Have Muhammad Art Displayed in Dutch Museums', *Fox News*.

300 Ibid.

## ■ Shabana Rehman: Comedian

Norway  
b. 1976

Pakistani-born Shabana Rehman is a columnist turned stand-up comedian who is presently one of the most controversial public figures in Norway. She is noted for being both provocative and outspoken during her acts, which have included stripping off a burqa to reveal a tight red cocktail dress, physically lifting up the founder of the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group at an event to publicise his book and threatening to burn the Koran onstage.<sup>301</sup> She has also joked about other taboo subjects such as female circumcision and suicide bombing – as well as targeting Norway’s ‘multiculturalists’ who she thinks often overlook the abuse of women in the country’s immigrant communities.<sup>302</sup>

Rehman was born in Karachi, Pakistan, but moved to Norway with her family when she was one year old.<sup>303</sup> She has said that she became aware of the difference between European and South Asian cultures at an early age – particularly at school.<sup>304</sup> In 1999, she began her career as a comedian, playing largely on issues related to her joint Norwegian-Pakistani background, as well as writing columns for newspapers. Her family initially objected but then became more supportive when it was clear that she could make a career out of tackling the subject.<sup>305</sup> Rehman gradually seemed to realise that she could draw greater attention to issues that mattered to her through humour and public acts as well as through her columns.

In 2000, in one of her first provocative acts, she posed nude on the cover of the tabloid newspaper *Dagbladet*, with her body painted with

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301 Matthew Campbell, ‘Heard the one about the rebel Muslim girl?’, *Sunday Times*, 09 February 2003.

See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article869830.ece>.

302 Ibid.

303 Jeffrey Fleishman, ‘Norway Integrating Muslims at Glacial Pace’, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 2003.

See: <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jun/28/world/fg-norway28>.

304 Charles P. Wallace, ‘Nice Witch of the North’, *Time Magazine*, 22 August 2004.

See: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,685999,00.html>.

305 Ibid.

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the colours of the Norwegian flag. On her blog, she has described this as 'a two-pronged statement, both against common Western chauvinism, and against religious fundamentalism.'<sup>306</sup> She also told the *Sunday Times* that:

'I wanted to make it clear that even as a Muslim woman I am free to dispose of my body as I wish. I wanted to demonstrate to Norwegians that you can be Scandinavian even if you were born in the Punjab.'<sup>307</sup>

In April of the same year she again tackled serious subjects through her writing and co-authored an influential article in Norway's VG newspaper. The article accused Norwegian Muslim leaders of covering up problems in their communities, saying that many progressive Muslims in Norway were engaged in 'a life and death struggle to secure fundamental human rights,' against the wishes of some reactionary elements within their communities.<sup>308</sup> She added:

'The Norwegian public has let itself be fooled by the [Muslim] community's dissemblers ever since the beginning of the integration debate. In one voice, they have delivered an unambiguous message: that the problem for today's immigrants, both young and old, is discrimination and racism in Norwegian society. This is a lie – a distorted picture that conceals the real obstruction to integration. That obstruction is found within the immigrant community itself: in its lack of respect for human rights and its prevailing notions of honor and shame.'<sup>309</sup>

In 2002 Rehman led a protest against honour killings in response to the murder of a Kurdish woman, killed by her father for falling in love with a Swedish man. The *Sunday Times* reported that, as a result, a group of traditionalist Muslim women staged their own protest against Rehman and symbolically 'excommunicated' her.<sup>310</sup>

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306 'Norwegian Flag Bodypaint', Shabana Rehman website. See: <http://www.shabana.no/TopMenu/Productions.aspx>.

307 Campbell, 'Heard the one about the rebel Muslim girl?', *Sunday Times*.

308 Quoted in Bruce Bawer, 'Tolerating Intolerance: The Challenge of Fundamentalist Islam in Western Europe', *Partisan Review*, Autumn 2002. See: <http://www.brucebawer.com/tolerating.htm>.

309 Ibid.

310 Campbell, 'Heard the one about the rebel Muslim girl?', *Sunday Times*.

On 27 April 2004, Rehman accosted Mullah Krekar – a reformed extremist, who co-founded the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group – at an event where he was promoting his autobiography, lifting him off his feet in what she called the ‘fundamentalist test.’<sup>311</sup> Krekar became angry and spoke into the microphone stating ‘I do not have the right to carry her like that, she has no right to carry or touch me. She displays contempt for me. I cannot accept this.’<sup>312</sup> Rehman responded that she wanted to see if the cleric was as tolerant as he was now claiming to be. Rehman’s action was criticised by several Norwegian leftists. Lar Gule, secretary general of Norway’s Humanist Ethic League reportedly said, ‘The audience does not understand what an insult Krekar has been exposed to. This is very, very serious for Krekar, and Rehman especially should understand this’.<sup>313</sup>

However, Rehman has equally been critical of such multiculturalists, saying on one occasion that ‘If an Asian country dropped a nuclear bomb on Norway, these people would run to the nearest book store to buy a book about oriental culture.’<sup>314</sup> Arguably Rehman’s most provocative act so far occurred in May 2008 when she threatened to burn a copy of the Koran onstage at a literary festival in the rural town of Lillehammer. According to the Norwegian tabloid *Dagbladet* she held a burning candle close to the book before putting the book down and telling the audience that ‘this book has more power than any other book of our time. If I burn it, it may get ever more power.’<sup>315</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Rehman has endured a considerable amount of hostility from some Norwegian Muslims as a result of her actions. She told the *Sunday Times*:

‘I’ve received loads of hate mail ... They tried to frighten me. They wanted

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311 Craig S. Smith, ‘Militant Mullah Meets Match in Comic at Norway Nightclub’, *New York Times*, 30 April 2004. See: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9902E4DE143DF933A05757C0A9629C8B63>.

312 Per Kristian Bjørkeng and Jonathan Tisdall, ‘Immigrant comedienne maddens Mullah’, *Aftenposten*, 28 April 2004. See: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article783368.ece>.

313 Ibid.

314 Campbell, ‘Heard the one about the rebel Muslim girl?’, *Sunday Times*.

315 ‘Truet med å brenne koranen’, *Dagbladet*, 27 May 2008. See: <http://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/2008/05/27/536463.html>.

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to kill me. They said I had been corrupted by western culture. They called me a whore.<sup>316</sup>

On 24 August 2008 – three months after she had threatened to burn the Koran onstage – unknown gunmen fired at the Oslo restaurant owned by Fahrina Rehman, Shabana’s sister.<sup>317</sup> More than a dozen shots were fired at the restaurant, which was closed at the time. Although no-one was injured, Shabana Rehman described the attack as ‘an appalling act of terror.’<sup>318</sup> A week earlier, Rehman had made headlines in Norway by dropping her pants and baring her buttocks at a film festival in Haugesund, in southwest Norway. She was reported as saying at the time:

‘I want to show that in Norway, you can do such things without being lynched or arrested. I get really angry when I see cultural conflicts, suicide bombers, all these kinds of threats. You can’t do a stunt like this in Karachi or Kabul.’<sup>319</sup>

At the same event, Rehman had made a show in publicly kissing Norway’s female culture minister, Valgerd Svarstad Haugland.<sup>320</sup> On her blog, she wrote that

‘The background and rationale for this seemingly odd stunt, was to draw attention to, and physically comment on, the gruesome fact that some Pakistani girls growing up in the west have been killed for deciding to marry a Norwegian, or someone with a different faith.’<sup>321</sup>

Despite the frequent controversies that Rehman has created, her family remain supportive of her career. She is married to Norwegian author Dagfinn Norbn and they have both been listed among the most influential people in Norway by the *Dagbladet* newspaper.<sup>322</sup>

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316 Campbell, ‘Heard the one about the rebel Muslim girl?’, *Sunday Times*.

317 ‘Shots fired at Pakistani-born comic’s Oslo restaurant’, *Daily Times* (Pakistan), 25 August 2005.

See: [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story\\_25-8-2005\\_pg7\\_39](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_25-8-2005_pg7_39).

318 Ibid.

319 Ibid.

320 Ibid.

321 ‘Kiss-my-ass’, Shabana Rehman website. See: <http://www.shabana.no/TopMenu/Productions.aspx>.

322 Wallace, ‘Nice Witch of the North’, *Time Magazine*.



## ■ Omar Sharif: Actor

France & Egypt  
b. 1932

Omar Sharif is a popular and renowned Egyptian actor who became famous for his roles in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago* in the 1960s. Originally named Michel Demitri Chalhoub, Sharif was born and raised as a Catholic in Egypt but converted to Islam and changed his name when marrying Egyptian actress Fatan Hamama in 1955. However, he is now an atheist and enjoys a decades-old reputation for gambling and playing poker.<sup>323</sup>

In 1968 Sharif sparked controversy and received harsh criticisms throughout the Arab world for kissing Barbra Streisand, who is Jewish, in *Funny Girl*. As a result his movies were banned in Egypt. Similarly, in 2003, Sharif's role as a Muslim shopkeeper who befriends a Jewish teenager in the French film *Monsieur Ibrahim et les Fleurs du Coran* also stirred controversy. However, it was his role playing Saint Peter in 2005 in an Italian television production, *San Pietro*, which triggered violent threats against his life. A website associated with al-Qaeda members, included this statement:

'Omar Sharif has stated that he has embraced the crusader idolatry ... He is a crusader who is offending Islam and Muslims and receiving applause from the Italian people. I give you this advice, brothers, you must kill him.'<sup>324</sup>

Despite this, in December 2005, Omar Sharif publicly defended the Muslim Brotherhood from charges that it threatened artistic freedom in Egypt. Speaking to Islamonline.net, a Qatar-based news website closely affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Sharif said:

'The Muslim Brotherhood does not threaten artistic freedom and I don't think

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323 M<sup>a</sup> Eugenia Yagüe, 'Entrevista: Omar Sharif', *El Mundo*, 2002.

See: <http://www.el-mundo.es/magazine/2002/120/1010744886.html>.

324 John Hooper, 'St. Peter role prompts death threat', *Guardian*, 31 October 2005.

See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/31/film.alqaida>.

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that in the areas of innovation and art there is anything to fear from their strong presence in parliament.<sup>325</sup>

Sharif currently lives in Paris and Cairo.

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325 Hamdy al Hussein, 'Muslim Brotherhood Poses No Threat to Arts: Omar Sharif', *Islamonline.net*, 04 December 2005. See: <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2005-12/04/article03.shtml>.

## ■ Deepika Thathaal: Singer

Norway and United Kingdom  
b. 1977

Born in Oslo to Sunni Muslim parents of Afghan and Pakistani origin, Deepika Thathaal signed her first record deal at the age of 13 and later produced two successful albums in Norway.<sup>326</sup> Her father, a great admirer of Pakistani and north Indian music, encouraged her to become a singer and helped her with her career since she was seven years old. When she began performing live, Thathaal incorporated modern dance and revealing costumes into her act which many conservative Muslims in Norway objected to, calling her a disgrace to her people and culture. As Thathaal began appearing on television and in the media more frequently, her family began to receive nuisance calls which forced them to change their phone number on five separate occasions. One day five men burst into her school and began cursing and threatening her. However, as Thathaal later told the *Sunday Times*, her teachers and most other pupils ignored them:

'I could see all the other students leaving extra fast and the staff pretending that they didn't see what was going on. The men started cursing me, calling me a slut, a whore, a prostitute. I couldn't see why they were so upset, because mine was the first time that a brown face had appeared on the front of newspapers with a positive story. I thought, "how can you not be proud?"'<sup>327</sup>

At around the same time, Thathaal was also attacked on stage during a concert in Oslo by an angry conservative Muslim man. On another occasion was attacked with pepper spray. She has also been warned, several times, by some traditionalist Norwegian Muslims that if she did not tone down her act, she and her family would suffer the consequences. In an interview with CNN in 2006, Thathaal said that she had experienced such pressure ever since she was a child:

'I remember my dad having to defend the fact that I was doing music, even as a child ... And we would have various people come to the house, talk about,

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326 Amanda Craig, 'Pop star in the hate zone', *Sunday Times*, 06 February 2005.  
See: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article510963.ece>.

327 Ibid.

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you know: “We don’t even let our sons do this. Why would you let your daughter do this?”<sup>328</sup>

As she was receiving increasing abuse in Norway, Thathaal decided to move to the United Kingdom. She took up residence in London and started using the stage name ‘Deeyah’. However, it soon became widely known that she was of Muslim origin. When she visited schools, she began receiving abuse from Muslim pupils and on occasion she reportedly had to be escorted out of a school after Muslim pupils became ‘enraged’ that she had danced with a black man in one of her videos.<sup>329</sup> Thathaal later said that she was amazed that ‘one minority, which knows the pain of prejudice, should attack another. To me it wasn’t a question of his being black, white or Asian. He was just a cool guy and an incredible dancer.’<sup>330</sup>

Gradually, Thathaal’s problems escalated again and she was increasingly forced to travel with bodyguards after receiving numerous threats and being spat on in the street.<sup>331</sup> In March 2006, she told CNN that:

‘One of the creepiest and scariest things that I’ve been told to my face was how this person would like to cut my stomach so that another whore like me is not born. And that the same should have happened to my mom.’<sup>332</sup>

On 19 February 2006, the *Independent* reported that Thathaal had ‘been forced to hire bodyguards to protect her during a visit to Britain next month after she received a string of death threats from religious extremists.’<sup>333</sup> The newspaper quoted her as saying ‘I can no longer walk around without specially assigned bodyguards ... I would be lying if I said abuse from religious fanatics didn’t upset or scare me.’ She also said:

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328 ‘Transcript: Paula Zahn Now’, *CNN*, 24 March 2006.

See: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0603/24/pzn.01.html>.

329 Craig, ‘Pop star in the hate zone’, *Sunday Times*.

330 *Ibid.*

331 Wersha Bharadwa, ‘Fanatics tell Muslim singer: We’ll kill you’, *The Independent*, 19 February 2006.

See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/fanatics-tell-muslim-singer-well-kill-you-467075.html>.

332 ‘Transcript: Paula Zahn Now’, *CNN*.

333 Bharadwa, ‘Fanatics tell Muslim singer: We’ll kill you’, *The Independent*.

'Middle-aged men have spat at me in the street and I have had people phone me and tell me they were going to cut me up into pieces. I am this figure of hate simply because of what I do and wear.'<sup>334</sup>

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) responded to the *Independent's* report by issuing a press release on 20 February 2006 which accused the singer of manufacturing a 'publicity stunt' and 'stirring up hostility towards ordinary British Muslims.'<sup>335</sup> In the press release Inayat Bunglawala, the MCB's media spokesperson, accused the *Independent* of reporting 'unsubstantiated' allegations which would only 'contribute to the current anti-Muslim atmosphere', before asking:

'Which Muslim groups have stated that they are 'outraged' by Deeyah's single? I wonder how many of them have even heard of her ... Bharadwa [the journalist from The Independent] then claimed that Deeyah has 'received a string of death threats from religious extremists.' Did Mr Bharadwa check whether these 'death threats' had in fact been reported to the police by Deeyah? It is interesting to note that at this time last year – when coincidentally Deeyah was also promoting a new single – she made the very same allegations. When I asked her on live television on GMTV about why she had not reported these 'death threats' to the police she was unable to give a coherent response. It is quite regrettable that a paper like the Independent on Sunday appears to have fallen for an apparent publicity stunt by a wannabe pop star at the expense of stirring up hostility towards ordinary British Muslims.'

Thathaal later told the *Sunday Times* that immediately prior to the GMTV interview, Bunglawala told her that he would support her but once the programme was on air he had criticised her instead.<sup>336</sup> Previously, in February 2005, the *Independent* had quoted an un-named MCB spokesperson as casting doubt on whether Thathaal was even a Muslim.<sup>337</sup> The spokesman was quoted as saying:

'Her real name is Deepika Thathaal. That's not a Muslim name: it's identifiably Hindu ... We haven't heard any evidence of the attacks she talks about, and

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334 Ibid.

335 Ibid.

336 Craig, 'Pop star in the hate zone', *Sunday Times*.

337 Guy Adams, 'Pandora: Kilroy in a veritable pickle over his new party's name', *The Independent*, 09 February 2005. See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/columnists/pandora/kilroy-in-a-veritable-pickle-over-his-new-partys-name-482578.html>.

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there is no independent witness. My suspicion is that this is a publicity stunt, timed to coincide with the release of her new single.'

In August 2006, Thathaal gave an interview to Freemuse, a Copenhagen-based organisation 'which advocates freedom of expression for musicians and composers worldwide.'<sup>338</sup>In the interview she attacked British religious and community leaders such as the Muslim Council of Britain for failing to support her, saying:

'What's been a hard and sad thing for me to realise is how not one single person from the religious establishment within the community (as in official organisations or so-called spokespeople) has shown any support or attempted to reach out to me. In fact, I asked for help from a representative of a very prominent Muslim organisation in the UK and he coldly declined while his body language showed his clear disgust of me as if I was diseased ... These people show through their inaction that problem solving is of no interest to them because in practice they have shown that they'd much rather sweep it all under the carpet. To me, these people are either extremely out of touch and ignorant about what's really going on within their own community, or they choose to ignore the realities that we are constantly faced with on a daily basis. It really is a sad state of affairs when these are the types of people supposedly representing us ... Who do they represent – their own personal interests or Muslims? They have pulled every trick in the book to discredit me in the hopes that what I'm saying will somehow not be heard. It's apparently much easier attacking people like me than to support me.'<sup>339</sup>

Much of the anger against Thathaal was sparked by her music video 'What Will It Be', which was released in early 2006. The video shows the singer walking in a *burqa* that slips off to reveal her dressed in a bikini and also shows the faces of women who had become victims of honour killings or other similar violence. The video also featured Irshad Manji, a Canadian Muslim reformist. Manji wrote on her blog that she had taken part because she was impressed at Thathaal's 'integrity and independence of thought.'<sup>340</sup> When the video was aired on the British Asian music channel B4U TV, traditionalist Muslims reportedly started contacting the station to ask them to stop playing the song. B4U

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338 'About Freemuse', Freemuse website. See: <http://www.freemuse.org/sw184.asp>.

339 'Breaking this wall of silence', *Freemuse*, 09 August 2006. See: <http://www.freemuse.org/sw14311.asp>.

340 'Your letters – posted October 1, 2005 (part 1)', Irshad Manji website. See: <http://www.irshadmanji.com/im-muslim-refusenik-letters-archive-part-203>.

TV succumbed to the pressure after receiving what CNN described as ‘undisclosed complaints.’<sup>341</sup> CNN also reported that one message left on a website had told Deeyah ‘You insult Islam, blood spills. Kill you. Kill your family. You are an insult. Wait until the day of judgment. Allah will throw you in hell. You deserve to get raped. You should be killed.’<sup>342</sup>

Following her problems in the UK in 2006, Thathaal left London for the United States, where she is now based. In 2008, she launched a project called Sisterhood to support unsigned female Muslim rappers and singers to release their music through her website. Thathaal says on her website that the project ‘is just the first small step towards encouraging these artists and others like them out there to pursue their dreams and hopes, and [is] a way to let them know they are not alone in their struggles and hardship to get their music and message out there.’<sup>343</sup>

The MCB’s Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Daud Abdullah, objects to the Sisterhood Project by saying that it goes against traditional Islamic teachings and values:

“Many Muslim women do perform to audiences of other women at weddings, for example, because the sexes are strictly segregated. Those performers enjoy a good career. It’s when women perform for wider, mixed audiences that differences of opinion emerge... These objections are based on the Islamic view that women should not draw unnecessary attention to themselves, because of the impact this will have on a male audience. The moral framework of Islam has already been laid down and women should not push beyond its boundaries for the sake of commercial gain.”<sup>344</sup>

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341 ‘Transcript: Paula Zahn Now’, *CNN*.

342 *Ibid.*

343 ‘Deeyah Presents SISTERHOOD’, Deeyah website. See: <http://www.myspace.com/deeyahpresents>.

344 Vic Motune, ‘Sing out sisters’, *New Statesman*, 10 July 2008. See: <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2008/07/female-artists-muslim-women>





## Conclusion

Many of the individuals featured in this report say that intimidation and threats of violence from Islamists is making it increasingly difficult for them to openly criticise or freely discuss certain interpretations and aspects of Islam as well as traditional practices associated with the religion. Many of them have also said they were surprised that governments and European intellectuals have not been quicker to defend their rights to freedom of speech and expression. European governments, and many private citizens, may not like or approve of what these individuals have said about Islam and its associated cultures and traditions, but they should at least recognise that these individuals should be able to express themselves peacefully without fear of violence and to enjoy the rights afforded to them within a liberal democratic society.

Indeed, when many of these individuals began to receive threats from members of their own communities and their co-religionists, many governments began to treat them not as full citizens who deserved the full support of the law but as a people apart; as people who are not expected to enjoy the same rights and freedoms as native Europeans, who should not aspire to the same goals of self-expression and self-determination; who should not expect the same freedom to criticise and satirise their own religions and traditions. Without this vital support from their governments, and from the European intelligentsia, some have stopped addressing such issues, some have emigrated in order to speak more freely abroad; while others have continued to express themselves – regardless of the risks. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the individuals whose cases are profiled in this report and whose cases have been reported in the media are representative of a wider problem of intimidation towards free expression. Some have suffered in silence while there are also those who have seen public figures being intimidated and have chosen to remain silent themselves as a result.

A situation in which significant numbers of Europe's ethnic minority citizens are unable to peacefully express themselves is clearly unacceptable. It is the duty of European governments to protect the rights of all their citizens regardless of their race or religion. European governments need to do more to actively promote and defend every individual's right to freedom of speech and expression as well as raise the

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level of tolerance towards all those of immigrant backgrounds, many of whom have come to Europe to escape repressive and despotic regimes. Governments also need to pursue and prosecute those who actively seek to intimidate others through threats of violence. Through doing so, European governments will be able to promote greater religious and social harmony by demonstrating that they see Muslims and those of Muslim background as full and complete citizens, neither restricted in their freedoms nor unduly permitted to issue threats against others, being free instead to enjoy the right to peaceful self-expression, self-determination and existence: the birthright of all human beings.

# The Centre for Social Cohesion

The Centre for Social Cohesion is a non-partisan think-tank that was set up by Civitas in 2007 to examine issues related to community cohesion in Britain. Fully independent since June 2008, the Centre is headquartered in London and it was founded to promote new thinking that can help bring Britain's ethnic and religious communities closer together while strengthening British traditions of openness, tolerance and democracy.