

**HIJAB & SPIN**  
**Part 2**

An open letter to the Muslims of  
the United Kingdom From

Shaikh Riyadh Nadwi M.A., PhD.



**Oxford Cross Cultural  
Research Institute**

A Think Tank for Muslims in the West

# HIJAB & SPIN

**Part 2**

© OCCRI (2004)  
All Rights Reserved

This publication remains the property of Oxford Cross Cultural Research Institute. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission of the Oxford Cross Cultural Research Institute.

**Contents:**

**Page**

<i>Preface</i>	2
<i>Hijab &amp; Spin Part 2</i>	3
<i>Hijab &amp; Spin Part 1</i>	22
<i>OCCRI Statement</i>	23

## *Preface*

I was asked a question a few days ago which made me realise that I owe an explanation to everyone, especially my students, as to why I have changed my approach with regard to political issues. Over the past ten years here in Oxford, we have been on the receiving end of a series of sustained attacks, ranging from smear campaigns and agent provocateurs to ‘Fake Shaikh Chaplaincy’ conundrums and policy intrigues, and my advice had always been to concentrate on improving your knowledge and practice of Islam and to ignore political rhetoric. But within the last few weeks you have witnessed a dramatic change in my *modus operandi*. I have written an open letter criticising an Oxford politician and I have called for him to be denounced by Muslims all over the country.

The reason for this big shift in my approach is due to significant changes in our circumstances as a minority community living in the West. It is easy to ignore the rhetoric against Islam and Muslims that emanates from fringe groups and people in far away places, as long as one is able to continue to practise Islam and conduct Da’wa. However, when the attacks come from people who represent mainstream parties in the country, and polls begin to show a significant shift in attitudes against our freedom to practise the very basic and personal aspects of our faith, it becomes incumbent upon all to stand up and speak out. This is especially true for me as an Alim in the city which this person represents in Parliament. I know of many Muslims who would have voted for him.

This is not primarily about politics but it has to do with the future of our freedom to practise Islam in the West and, by extension, to practise Islam anywhere in world. Having given much thought and consideration to the long term implications of entering this debate now, I have come to the conclusion that it is a debate we will have to encounter sooner or later, irrespective of whether we remain in the West or choose to migrate to a Muslim country. The effects of decisions taken in France can already be seen in some Muslim countries. The grand plan, as it appears, concerns not only *hijab* in Western countries but also much of what Muslims hold sacred, wherever they happen to be.

This additional component to my approach does not mean that I have abandoned my previous advice to you. The objectives remain the same – the best way to defend Islam is to practise it – but, as with so many things in life, extraordinary situations require extraordinary decisions.

Please pray that Allah protects and guides us through these difficult times and I request you all to participate in this endeavour as much as you can.

Wassalam

Riyad Nadwi  
Oxford, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2004.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Dear Brothers and Sisters

*Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh*

### **Re: Challenging the ‘spin’ on hijab**

Having written to you about the motives behind the ‘spin’ on *hijab* and having received a large number of letters and e-mails, I have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to write another letter to share my thoughts on the nature of this ‘spin’ and to suggest ways in which to deal with it both in your own minds and when speaking to others. I apologise in advance for the length of this letter but the gravity of the situation requires a detailed response.

May Allah reward all those of you who responded to my open letter of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004 and acted on the advice therein. It appears that your efforts have born fruit: Dr Evan Harris appeared on the BBC 2 Daily Politics programme (3<sup>rd</sup> February 2004), attempting to ‘spin’ his way out of his attacks on the religious freedom of children. He also appeared on the Radio Five Live programme again (12<sup>th</sup> February 2004) to protest his innocence. Apparently, he now claims that he had never argued for schools in the UK to have the right to ban *hijab*, but was simply supporting the French decision. Based on a bizarre logic, he hopes that his new-found ‘reluctance’ to ban the religious freedom of 2 million Muslims in Britain will exonerate him from the crime of supporting a ban on 6 million Muslims in France<sup>1</sup>.

### **Audacious gagging techniques**

In his defence, I had expected Dr Harris to resort to the usual gagging charge of anti-Semitism. However, this charge was difficult to level against me because my message was not anti-Semitic<sup>2</sup> in any way. So it appears that he decided to take a gamble and feed me bait. It is a well known fact that Dr Harris is a pro-Israel MP. He is **Treasurer** of the **All Party British-Israel Parliamentary Group** and he was part of a ‘**Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel**’ visit to Israel in June 2000. To claim that a ‘friend’ of Israel is pro-Israeli is not a tremendous leap of faith.

The bait I refer to was an audacious e-mail implying that I was completely wrong to assume that he (Dr Evan Harris) was a ‘pro-Israel’ MP. He wrote:

‘...Unfortunately, much of what is written in that open letter is factually wrong and also misrepresents my views. **In particular I would be grateful if you could explain how you would justify the assertion that I am ‘pro-Israel’** and - by extension - ‘anti-Palestinian’...’  
(E-mail dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2004 from Dr Evan Harris).

I suspect that he and his advisers were hoping I would respond with a deluge of ethnocentric rhetoric upon which he would be able to lay the usual charge of anti-Semitism. In our reply we

<sup>1</sup> ‘Sorry, I thought it was the King!’ exclaimed the girl having slapped the minister. (Arab Proverb).

<sup>2</sup> I know of many Jews (e.g. Rabbi Mordechi Weberman) who are appalled at Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, but seldom do we hear these voices owing to the constant bullying tactics employed by the pro-Israel activists against these Jews.

ignored the bait and focused instead on the hook. An e-mail was sent to Dr Harris stating the following:

‘Dear Dr Harris, It appears from your questioning of our, as you put it, ‘assertion’, that you wish to state that you are not ‘pro-Israel’. If this is your official position then would you please confirm it in unambiguous terms?’

Dr Harris did not respond but someone replied on his behalf with a carefully worded question. Instead of implying that he is not pro-Israel they requested

‘Any substantiation you may have of the claims you make that Dr Harris is pro-Israeli **in the way you suggest.**’ (My emphasis)

So far we have not received any confirmation from Dr Harris that he is not a pro-Israel MP, but he has sent us another e-mail saying that the BBC has played back the original Radio Five Live programme and it could not see any basis for my allegations. I too have played back the programme and I beg to differ, as will anyone who pays attention to his message as a whole in that programme. I am also keen to know who in the BBC played back the tape and who exactly was responsible for vetting the incoming live correspondence on the programme. The presenter had said that they had received an enormous amount of correspondence, yet he read only one single-sentence e-mail against the ban, whilst reading four lengthy e-mails and allowing an extremely Islamophobic phone call in favour of the ban. If any of you (Muslims) e-mailed or called the BBC during the first Five Live programme, I would like you to get in touch with us because we are going to ask the BBC producers to justify the 80% e-mail and 100% telephone bias towards the ban on *hijab* in that programme. We need to know exactly how many e-mails and phone calls they received during the programme and who made the decision to lean so heavily towards Dr Harris’s position. I could be wrong, but it seemed as if the selected correspondence was perfectly tailored to suit Dr Harris’s arguments.

### **Double-speak ‘*spinning*’**

With regard to the first programme (29<sup>th</sup> January 2004, BBC Radio Five Live) Dr Harris employed several ‘*spin*’ techniques that are used on a regular basis to manipulate public opinion against Islam. It requires advanced planning/scripting and the ability to use language in an unnatural and deceptive manner. It is popularly referred to as the ‘*double-speaking*’ of politicians when they are trying to please diverse audiences. In the case of Dr Harris, it is slightly more complicated, for he is not only keen to please the audience, but one gets the impression that there is a strong and almost irresistible drive to emphasise the negative aspects of anything to do with Islam and Muslims. Along a carefully chosen path, laden with double-speak and prevarication, there is a distinct pattern in the choice of words, examples and areas of mental focus.

He began by widening the scope of the target, albeit with creative language in order to secure a degree of ‘plausible deniability’. Instead of using the word *hijab*, the target was described as ‘*ostentatious religious symbols of all religions in schools*’. In reality, this would be the same as saying, ‘I do not support the banning of women but I do support the banning of all XX chromosome organisms’. At the beginning of the programme, Dr Harris was quite successful in employing his double-speak technique to conceal his motives. He even secured an apology from the interviewer with it. However, as the show progressed the act was hard to maintain and in the end unravelled itself. Instead of telling us what he meant by ‘ostentatious’ and discussing the ‘religious symbols in general’ that he was so keen to emphasise at the start, Dr Harris embarked on a multi-faceted attack on *hijab*. He began by casting doubts upon the

religious validity of *hijab* by quoting from a fatwa issued by Shaikh Tantawi in Egypt. This was followed by a series of unnecessary and opportunistic statements designed to reinforce a stereotypical perception of Muslims in the minds of the wider audience, for example ‘France is not a Muslim country’. This is not earth shattering news and he had already made his point by this stage, but by using the sentence in this way he reinforces the anti-Muslim perception that ‘these foreigners are trying to tell us how to live our lives while they don’t allow us to drink alcohol when we visit their countries’<sup>3</sup>. In a similar vein, he made a reference, whilst hedging heavily, to female circumcision, using it to direct the discussion towards the British context by saying:

‘We don’t allow that in this country...**We are, as a state, entitled to draw a line, particularly around state institutions, schools and particularly around minors.** I have no objection absolutely to an adult woman wearing a headscarf or indeed girls wearing them in their own homes or out or in the mosque or whatever’ (Dr Evan Harris, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2004, BBC Radio Five Live) [My emphasis].

He also tried to use the current legal powers afforded to schools in the UK to justify this position by saying:

‘Expressing their identity as individuals is all well and good but schools are allowed at the moment to put restrictions on that [facial jewellery etc] and I don’t think it is unreasonable for state schools to do that or definitely state schools that aren’t faith schools’ (Dr Evan Harris, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2004, BBC Radio Five Live).

Special attention should be paid to the fact that he mentions ‘*institutions*’ before ‘*schools*’ and ends his list with emphasis on ‘*minors*’. The question we have to ask is: why is Dr Harris so interested in our minors? The answer to this may lie in the fact that children who do not maintain an overt level of practice of a given faith during their minority are much more likely to drift away from their religious identity in adulthood and, more importantly, they are far less likely to teach religious traditions to their own children<sup>4</sup>.

It should be clear from these arguments put forward by Dr Harris that the issue is *hijab*, not ‘ostentatious religious symbols’. Some Muslims have accused us of making this a Muslim issue; they have been convinced that it is an equal attack on all religions. They have accepted the terms of reference expounded by the superficial ‘*spin*’ surrounding the debate, yet ignore the substance of the argument put forward by proponents of a ban (in France or the UK). I draw people’s attention to the BBC headline on the day of the debate for the proposed ban in France: ‘*Hijab* debate’ not ‘Debate on all religious symbols’! As for the argument that this affects other faiths as well, most of us should be familiar with the concept of ‘collateral damage’, and in the same way that we do not base our arguments against illegal wars on the inevitability of collateral damage, we should not allow policy ‘*spinners*’ to distract us away from the main objective of this ban.

Another classic example of double-speak was the outburst on the topic of *hijab* by the writer Toby Young on the BBC’s Question Time programme (12<sup>th</sup> February 2004). Having begun by saying, ‘it is such a difficult question to answer because it [banning *hijab*] seems like such an illiberal, intolerant thing to do’, he goes to on say:

<sup>3</sup> This implies that Muslims are also just ‘visitors’ in the West.

<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with Dr Harris’s admission that he is ‘on the secularist extreme’ of his party (12<sup>th</sup> February 2004, BBC Radio Five Live). Perhaps this extreme secularism is the cause of his concern with children growing up to be religious.

‘Muslim school girls at the moment don’t have the option of whether or not to wear head scarves, because if they don’t, members of their own community, in some cases their brothers and their fathers, will brutalise them, in some cases rape them. The persecution of women who don’t tow the conservative, hard-line, Muslim fundamentalist line, in these communities is appalling...’

Based on this analysis, he concludes that the *hijab* is a ‘symbol of just how oppressed women are in these communities’ and that Muslim women get ‘stoned to death if they are suspected of adultery’. He then rounds off his comment by confirming that what the French government is aiming to do via the ban is to address the oppression of Muslim women in our communities. Faced with these conclusions, should we respond to him by insisting that this is not about Muslims, but that it concerns all ‘ostentatious religious symbols’? I think not.

## Conspiracy theories

The charge of ‘conspiracy theorist’ has, of course, been levelled at me. However, it has not come as expected from the pro-Israel activists, but from a Muslim website. It rather strangely described my letter as ‘excellent’, even requesting permission to publish it<sup>5</sup>, only then to replace it with a barrage of criticisms before charging me with being a ‘conspiracy theorist’ six days later.

The issue of ‘conspiracy’ is a complex one and deserves some attention. In my observations of people’s attitudes towards this issue, they seem to fall into two broad categories and position themselves at one of the two extremes. At one are those who read conspiracies into everything whilst leaving very little room for Allah and His plans. I find these people exceedingly frustrating as they are despondent because they fail to grasp the complexities of our world, the sophistication of human nature and, more importantly, Allah’s ever present and gracious power over all forces and plans. Allah says in the Quran ‘...*They plot and plan and Allah too plans. But the best of planners is Allah*’ (*Al-Anfal* 8:30).

Having said that, I find those at the other extreme equally frustrating. These are the ‘accident theorists’: people who would like you to believe that all occurrences in our world are random, arbitrary and accidental. From the Big Bang to the Big Crunch and everything between the two, they refuse to accept the existence of any propensity in human beings to cooperate with one another in secrecy, and deny the existence of something known more popularly as ‘strategic planning’. These are the people who live in the bliss of ignorance, and revel in showing condescension to those who refuse to join them in placing their heads in the sand. For them, the pro-Israel activists are innocent victims of Muslim paranoia. Little do they realise the extent to which they are influenced, directly and indirectly, by the ‘*spin*’ theories of pro-Israel activists such as Daniel Pipes<sup>6</sup> and others.

Both of these extreme positions are unhealthy for the mind and are counter-productive for a vibrant and progressive society. The mind stagnates with the oversimplifications made by both groups. As Muslims we need to maintain a healthy balance between paranoia and naivety, acknowledging the possibility and probability of strategic planning, especially when the evidence is overwhelming. We cannot allow our minds to be kept in a straight jacket, fettered by the fear of being labelled conspiracy theorists or anti-Semitic. We should not become pawns in a global mind game designed and controlled by others. We must consider what it would mean for the pro-Israel activists to be given a guarantee that Muslims will not question

<sup>5</sup> IACN.

<sup>6</sup> Pipes, D., (1996) *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy*. St Martins Press. New York.

their motives, and whenever someone does, that he or she would be dismissed promptly as a conspiracy theorist by other Muslims. Fortunately, Muslims have a strong sense of history and are able to see through ‘*spin*’ to recognise the ulterior motives, such as when the ‘*spin*’ doctors use ‘**militant Islam**’ and ‘**Islam**’ interchangeably<sup>7</sup>. We know what they mean when they say, ‘**There are no moderates**’<sup>8</sup>.

## Why do we blame Israel?

Some people ask, ‘*Why do we blame Israel for everything?*’ I say to them, we do not blame-Israel for everything. Indeed, we have numerous faults of our own that we must recognise. However the frequency of interference from the pro-Israel activists in our affairs, and the reactions they receive, have caused it to appear that way. If they are allowed to continually blame and stigmatise entire communities (Muslims) and countries for the actions of a few, and if they are justified in their cherry-picking from our jurisprudential sources in an attempt to dictate the terms of *our* commitment to Islam, then we are certainly entitled to explore *their* motivations for this obsession with the details of *our* faith. For example, we are entitled to ask why there are so many pro-Israel activists at the forefront of this exercise. It is also not unreasonable to ask why someone who argues that ‘*just as Muslims rule an undivided Mecca, Jews should rule an undivided Jerusalem*’<sup>9</sup>, is also concerned about Muslim children and our schools in the West<sup>10</sup>. It is not by accident that it has become fashionable to bash everything to do with Islam and practicing Muslims in the West within a span of less than three years. Quite apart from the expediency that 9/11 offered to their cause, there has been a tremendous effort from pro-Israel activists to propagate their spurious theories about Islam. They have done this by being *bold*, *loud* and *persistent* with ‘*spin*’. It is time for us to respond by being equally bold, loud and persistent with the truth.

Some people have written to warn me that Israel often assassinates those who criticise her injustices. Well, if that is the price we must pay, then so be it.

‘...*No soul shall taste of death before completing its sustenance...*’ (Ibn Majah)

In order to prevent an escalation of attacks on our faith, and protect our future in these countries, it is crucial that we stand up and call people’s attention to the fact that the same ‘*spin*’ which may have taken this country and others to war might also have a part to play in fashioning their fear of Islam and Muslims. There is an overwhelming body evidence to show

---

<sup>7</sup> ‘While **militant Islam** has uniformly aggressive intentions toward non-Muslims, Muslims themselves are the first victims of this movement. This has a profound implication: the battle against militant Islam amounts not to a clash of civilizations but a struggle for the soul of Islam. The West is engaged, but only in so far as it can help moderate Muslims defeat militant Islam, then work with them to develop a reformed, modernized, and moderate version of Islam. Like it or not, the message of September 2001 is that the United States is tasked with the indirect burden of bringing **Islam** into harmony with modernity.’ [My emphasis] Daniel Pipes in the 2002 preface to his *In the Path of God*.

<sup>8</sup> Pipes, D. (1995). *There are no moderates: dealing with fundamentalist Islam*. The National Interest, New York.

<sup>9</sup> Pipes, D. (2001), *The Muslim Claim to Jerusalem*, Middle East Quarterly. It is also pertinent to note here the historical fact of when Sayyiduna Umar (ra) received the keys to the city of Jerusalem. In 637 C.E. he signed the famous peace treaty with the people of the city and in so doing, opened the city’s gates to the Jews, who had been denied access for thousands of years. For the first time, Jerusalem, under Muslim rule, became a truly welcoming city for all three Abrahamic faiths. Throughout the period of Muslim rule – longer than *twelve hundred years* – members of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities were allowed to peacefully coexist in Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> ‘...I think there are something over a thousand Muslim schools in the country [USA]. The problem is that there was very little attention paid to them ... the vast majority of these schools have militant Islamic orientation.’ (Pipes, D., 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2002, *Centre for Immigration Studies Forum*).

that the *'spin'* against Islam in the current global situation is spear-headed by pro-Israel activists.

For those 'accident theorists' who deny the existence of strategic planning, the following passage needs to be carefully considered in the context of similar attitudes that are expressed on a regular and structured basis by the Neo-Conservative and pro-Israel activists around the world.

'Demographic, socio-economic, political and cultural-psychological shifting processes, together with the importance of a few rulers, assure instability in most of the domain of Islam, with much anti-Western insurgence. At the same time, technological and military capacities of Islamic actors are increasing, soon including mass killing weapons with global reach. Therefore, in the twenty-first century insurgent Islam in its aggressive and fanatic forms of state and non-state actors will pose a major threat to the West and humanity as a whole. Hence the need for a long-term grand-strategy to prevent, contain and counter-act it. Main components recommended for such a grand-strategy include: (1) relating respectfully to Islam; (2) selective accommodation, **with red lines**; (3) helping socio-economic development; (4) curbing aggressive actors; (5) reducing aggressive capacities; (6) holding states and rulers strictly accountable; (7) damage limitation; and (8) if all fails: moving towards a Global Leviathan. To work out and apply the grand strategy to shifting situations, much shared strategic thinking and planning by the West is needed in cooperation with other major countries and civilizations and with non-aggressive Islamic states, together with preparation of fitting action capabilities. The USA, together with the European Union, has to take the lead in doing so. **Tragic but imperative** is the necessity to adjust Western values so as to adopt 'immoral' measures, so as to avoid greater moral evil. But, first of all, fanatic Islam must be recognized as a serious threat justifying determined counter-action within a coherent fully considered and carefully applied grand strategy.' (Yehezkel Dror<sup>11</sup>, *Facing insurgent Islam: A grand strategy for the West*) [My emphasis].

One needs only to read the Neo-Conservative literature to be 'enlightened'. Most policy considerations, especially those concerning Islam, are all linked back to the need to protect and support Israel. Yet conversely, we are being told not to question the motivations of the likes of Richard Perle when he makes the detailed composition of the educational syllabus in the Muslim world a focus for his attentions! I suggest those Muslims who are still in denial should spend some of their time learning about the ideas of people like Laurent Murawiec, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Joshua Muravchik, Martin van Creveld, Meyrav Wurmser, David Wurmser, Douglas J. Feith, Colonel Yigal Carmon, Norman Podhoretz, Eliot Cohen, Midge Decter, Frank Gaffney, William Safire, Charles Krauthammer, Stephen Schwartz, Simon Henderson, Joseph Lieberman *et al.*

The average person in this country is looking for an answer: he/she wants to know why the USA and Britain went to war. People are far more perceptive than they are given credit for. In the same way, the truth about the motivation for attacking Muslims will replace the artificial fear and *'spin'* about Islam if we are able to muster the courage to be bold, reasonable and persistent. However, I fear that if we are unfortunate enough to have Muslims who are willing to stand up to defend the pro-Israel activists from valid criticisms, and to dismiss reasonable voices as conspiracy theory, then the momentum of attacks on every aspect of what it is to be Muslim from these quarters will only increase.

---

<sup>11</sup> Yehezkel Dror is a professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His fields of interest include policy planning and strategic issues. He served for two years as a senior staff member of the RAND Corporation in the USA, directed the Strategic Studies Section of the Davies Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University, and is a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and of the Club of Rome. He spent two years with the Israeli Ministry of Defence as Senior Policy Planning and Analysis Advisor, was a consultant of the Israeli Cabinet Office and advised several Israeli Prime Ministers.

I strongly believe that the fear of being dismissed must be weighed against the tremendous opportunity that silence provides for the pro-Israel activists to continue their attacks on Islam and Muslims with impunity. In my ten years here in Oxford, I have tried my utmost to avoid conflicts of this sort. But my restraint did not prevent them from launching sustained and multi-faceted attacks on every aspect of the Muslims' activities, to the extent that they began objecting to our proclamation of faith (*The Kalimah*). A few years ago, a pro-Israel activist came up with an argument to ban the *Kalimah* because it was, in his opinion, 'too dismissive of other gods' and should therefore not be displayed in a university exhibition.

In continental Europe, the *hijab* has been banned but it will not end there. The objective, it seems, is to force an artificial reformation within Islam, which will encompass everything from the way we think about the Quran, to the food we eat and the clothes we wear. I have come to the conclusion that this psycholinguistic war is being led largely by fervent pro-Israel activists and the only way to stop it is to challenge the '*spin*' head on, whilst asking legitimate questions about their motivation. If they have the right to question our motives by cherry-picking verses of the Quran, then we should have the right to respond with a similar level of scrutiny. They may do what they wish to their own faith but Islam is our faith and we will decide what it is and how we practise it. **We do not need the treasurer of the all-party British-Israel Parliamentary Group to present us with a fatwa from half way around the world to justify the uncovering of our daughters.** We have scholars here in this country who are more than capable of providing us with guidance on the importance of *hijab* in Islam.

Some people have asked as to why I singled out the Lib Dems when they were the only party to oppose the war on Iraq. My response is that we should not forget that the French government – that has just banned *hijab* – was also a fierce opponent of the war. Should we therefore refrain from criticising the French also? No, I don't think so either. We need to go beneath the surface of this divide and examine the reasons for these different attitudes towards the Iraq war. On the one hand, many supporters of the war were obviously aiming to provide long term security for Israel and at the same time secure control of oil reserves. But on the other hand, many of those who opposed the war did so *not* because they wanted to protect innocent Iraqis, but because of their fear of Islam. For them, Saddam Hussein's extreme secularist ideology, with its barbaric track record, deserved protection against the then slim possibility of Islam surfacing in Iraq. Calming the fear that Islam (rather than Saddam's secularism) would be on the rise, the Californian Democratic representative Tom Lantos said, candidly, to an Israeli member of the Knesset 'You won't have any problem with Saddam. We'll be rid of the b\*\*\*\*\*d soon enough. And in his place we'll install a pro-Western dictator, who will be good for us and for you.' (Akiva Eldar, *Ha'aretz*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2002).

My criticism of the Lib Dems concerned the contrasting treatment of Jenny Tonge and Dr Harris. For being a voice of reason, Jenny Tonge was sacked from the front bench. However Dr Harris's unacceptable inference that schools should have the right to ban *hijab* in the UK, didn't result in even a reprimand from the party leadership.

The Leader of the Party, Charles Kennedy, succumbed to pressure from the pro-Israel activists in the case of Jenny Tonge. My demand was for consistency. Had this occurred in any other party my response would have been the same. My main objective was to defend our freedom to practise Islam in this country. A further source of anger within the community is the way Dr Harris, in his second appearance on BBC Radio Five Live, chose to go on the attack and claim that he had never supported a ban on *hijab* in the UK (see quote three paragraphs below). He urged Muslims to 'debate the issues...play the ball, not the man' and not to antagonise people [like himself] who 'agree with you [Muslims] on practically every issue'. Some important points need to be made concerning this '*spin*':

- Dr Harris has to address whether he has now retracted his earlier view, as expressed in his first Five Live appearance (and quoted in this letter), which clearly makes a case for the State drawing a line around state institutions, schools and minors. He must clarify whether he intends to continue using ‘*spin*’ and double-speak to attack practising Muslims in this country and around the world.
- As for being a friend of the Muslim community and agreeing with us on ‘practically every issue’, this does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. Indeed, Dr Harris is a well-known supporter of banning faith-based schools in the UK.<sup>12</sup>
- We do not believe Ariel Sharon when he says he wants the Israeli government to leave the occupied territories. Why should we believe Dr Harris when he says the same thing?<sup>13</sup>

The concern caused by this silence of the Party leadership is amplified when one considers the history of the Neo-Conservative influence in the United States. A large number of the first-generation Neo-Conservatives were liberal Democrats<sup>14</sup>, or even socialists and Marxists, often Trotskyites. They drifted to the right in the 1960s and 1970s as the Democratic Party moved to the anti-war McGovernite left.

“One major factor that drew them inexorably to the right was their attachment to Israel and their growing frustration during the 1960s with a Democratic party that was becoming increasingly opposed to American military preparedness and increasingly enamoured of Third World causes (e.g., Palestinian rights)”<sup>15</sup>.

I have also been asked why I did not refer in my letter to the violation of human rights in the context of banning *hijab*. I think we need to realise that this debate is not merely about the law. Relying solely on relatively static legal arguments in a fluid psycholinguistic war is not only naive but futile, as we have seen in France. Every French politician who voted for the ban did so in full knowledge of the human rights legislation. I suspect that they voted as they did (ostensibly against the grain of human rights) primarily because their perspectives have become dominated by the preponderance of ‘*spin*’ surrounding Muslims and Islam. In addition, these laws are open to wide interpretation, and can be easily changed or manipulated to suit emerging conditions and changing perceptions. One need only look at the implications of the Patriot Act in America on human rights legislation to appreciate this point. Our primary focus should be to defend ourselves from the onslaught of ‘*spin*’ by challenging it with solid arguments and exposing the motives of those who create and propagate it.

If the truth of this strategy was ever doubted, the Muslim community should note the unprovoked legal defence of the French ban put forward by Dr Harris during his second Five Live appearance.

---

<sup>12</sup> Dr Harris accused faith schools which discriminate against pupils on religious grounds of harming race relations. But his school admissions (prohibition of religious discrimination) bill was labelled an "attack" on people of faith and was defeated by 157 votes to 33. (The Guardian Newspaper 26<sup>th</sup> February 2004). The failure to grasp the distinction between ‘*faith*’ and ‘*race*’ is a common characteristic among many pro-Israel activists. They seem to find it extremely difficult to comprehend the fact that Islam is a faith with people from different ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Harris distributed a pamphlet in Oxford on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2004 in which he made this claim.

<sup>14</sup> No comparison of party names intended.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 231. See also Peter Steinfels’s *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America’s Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

‘I am not supporting a ban on the *hijab*, I am supporting the French decision – because they have a constitution that refers to secularism in their schools<sup>16</sup> – and I even would only support the French decision if it was compliant with the Human Rights Convention. **The Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights**<sup>17</sup> has said that he thinks it [the French decision] would be<sup>18</sup> because it doesn’t restrict the right to religious worship or belief but there’s a state policy that wants to restrict some degree of freedom of expression in respect of religious wearing of clothes in schools. We have that protection, that fallback in Western Europe of the European Convention on Human Rights... My concern about the British situation is that, in schools of all places, we should not be discriminating against people on the basis of their religion...’

I note that the Muslim representative of IACN, who appeared on the same Five Live programme as Dr Harris, did not mount any challenge to the legal position put forward by Dr Harris. This contrasts with the IACN public criticism of my article because

‘The ban on *hijab* is a blatant violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and that would have been sufficient grounds to argue the case.’ And ‘laws that are being violated through this *hijab* ban would be a much better focus for the UK Muslims’ (IACN mailing list, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2004)

Unfortunately the Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights thinks no laws are being broken. I do not mention this in order to antagonise, as the brothers at IACN appear to be sincere Muslims, but rather to highlight the futility of a response based merely upon interpretations of law.

### **The nature of the ‘*spin*’**

The principal arguments advanced by the ‘*spin doctors*’ with regard to *hijab* (thus far) are:

1. *Secularism is at risk*
2. *Ostentatious religious symbols are offensive*
3. *School is no place for religion*
4. *Muslim girls, by virtue of wearing hijab, are reflecting their fathers’ view rather than their own*
5. *Hijab is not sanctioned by the Quran*
6. *Some Muslim scholars say hijab is not necessary (e.g. Shaikh Tantawi)*
7. *Hijab is a threat to national cohesion*
8. *Hijab was banned in Turkey - A Muslim country*
9. *Most Muslims in France support the ban*
10. *Hijab is a symbol of radicalism*

---

<sup>16</sup> Does the French Constitution *specifically* refer to secularism *in schools*? The answer would appear to be no. Secularism is only referred to in Art 1 of the Constitution: ‘France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. **It shall respect all beliefs...**’

<sup>17</sup> M. Jean-Paul Costa

<sup>18</sup> ‘A potential obstacle to a law enforcing secularism is the European Court of Human Rights, which could rule that it violates basic freedoms. But the vice president of the court...has told the Stasi Commission that such a law would not be contrary to the European Declaration of Human Rights because, ‘In a democratic society the state can limit the freedom to demonstrate religious affiliation by, for example, wearing the Islamic headscarf, if by exercising this freedom the objective of protecting the freedom of others is threatened.’ *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

These ten arguments are all carefully designed to divert attention away from the absurdity of the original suggestion (to ban *hijab*) by indulging the audience in discussions that are peripheral and in many cases irrelevant. It is important that we refrain from allowing the ‘*spin*’ doctors to set the parameters of the debate, especially when they are the ones inventing the problems in the first place. We have to develop a conscious defence against ‘designer’ arguments and terminology.

It needs to be made clear that the actual proposition is **to force young girls to remove a piece of clothing and thus reveal parts of their bodies that they do not wish to expose in public**. The symbolic value of *hijab* is secondary to its functional and primary purpose, which is to cover a significant part of the body. The whole debate about religious symbols is irrelevant until we discuss the primary purpose of *hijab*. It appears that all fathers from all cultures are allowed to be protective towards their daughters except Muslim fathers. Let us turn the argument on its head and ask how many French fathers, irrespective of their religious persuasion, would tolerate it if someone were to say to them: ‘*We want your daughter to reveal in public more of her body than she is currently showing because we find her covering offensive*’. This is the question we should have been asking from day one.

In addition, the question to what extent the human body should be exposed, and in what way it should be exposed, is a valid and hotly debated issue in Western society<sup>19</sup>. The heart of this debate lies in who decides where the line should be drawn between decency and vulgarity. In a land of equals, no one should be told how much of his or her body can or cannot be exposed, say the nudists<sup>20</sup>. Others argue that ‘experts’ should be the ones who decide, whoever *they* may be. But even if people argue that in many cases it is the government that decides by consensus what is acceptable in terms of decency and what is not, the debate has seldom been about forcing people to wear *less*; it is most often about forcing people to wear *more* (e.g. the nudists are forced to wear clothes etc).

Muslims stand apart from both of these poles by defaulting to the guidance of their Creator. As for the list of ten arguments used to ‘*spin*’ attention away from the real issue, I believe we need to be cognisant of the following:

## 1. Is Secularism really at risk?

We live in a multi-cultural and multi-faith society in which **secularism** is the dominant ideology. To all intents and purposes, secularism is a ‘belief system’ in its own right with its own sacred texts, prophets, high priests and evangelists. The towering edifice of secularism in Western democracies above all other belief systems is growing day by day with the increasing retreat of the Church from the lives and minds of the masses. A recent ICM poll conducted for the BBC suggests that the UK is among the most secular nations in the world. The results of the poll confirmed that levels of belief and religious activity in the UK are consistently lower than in many other countries. In fact, only Russia and South Korea produced results similar to the UK<sup>21</sup>. The suggestion that the headscarf of a minuscule percentage of children constitutes a danger to secularism, whilst the entire curriculum in schools remains firmly grounded in

<sup>19</sup> On the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2004 football's most senior administrator Sepp Blatter, the president of the world governing body Fifa, attracted the wrath of women's organisations when he suggested that female players wear skimpier shorts.

<sup>20</sup> Their philosophy is that the naked human body is inherently decent, beautiful and dignified and should therefore be on permanent display.

<sup>21</sup> Please see article at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wtwtgod/3518375.stm>

secularist ideology, is a totally fallacious proposition but a clever piece of '*spin*'. A pertinent fact to note here is that this is not the first time secularism has been used in conjunction with more fervent religious ideology and goals. The founders of Israel also declared themselves to be secularists and atheists, whilst at the same time laying claim to land based entirely on their interpretation of Biblical text. It is this interpretation of Biblical text that remains at the heart of the justification for usurping Palestinian lands with impunity until today.

## 2. **Ostentatious? What does it mean?**

This adjective is derived from the Latin *ostentationem* (nom. *ostentatio*), which means 'vain display'. In modern usage it is often employed to describe extravagant, excessive, vulgar or pretentious display and boastful showiness. The word is not only pejorative connotatively but all of its denotations are surrounded by explicit negative semantic fields. The first question we need to ask here is: why do some people perceive *hijab* as offensive while others clearly do not? One reason, of course, is insecurity in one's own belief system. However, the other reason, which I believe is the dominant one in this current crisis, is the preponderance of '*spin*' that has an ulterior motive. As we have seen, the pro-Israel activists are keen to force into existence an artificial **reformation** of Islam. Covering the head with a plain piece of cloth is far less ostentatious than a fashionable hairstyle that can cost more than £50 per week in a beauty salon. The word 'ostentatious', with its meanings of extravagance and showiness, is far more applicable to the competitive teenage culture from which emanates the pressure to choose from over four thousand teenage hairstyles. If anything, the simplicity of *hijab* places it in stark contrast to this. Wearing *hijab* is, in fact, the polar opposite of ostentation but sadly this is the nature of the upside-down world of '*spin*'.

## 3. **Schools are no place for religion**

A principle, such as this is trying to be, must be applied with uniformity, if it is to be applied at all. If we believe that banning *hijab* will keep religion out of schools then we need to think again. *Hijab* is not the only overt religious component in the identity of a Muslim. Food, names and behaviour are also conspicuous components. The question is, if we accept that schools should be free from all explicit aspects of religiosity then it would mean that children should not be allowed to bring halal food into school or consume it on the premises. All the arguments against *hijab* are applicable to halal food, as halal food is defined by religious guidance and is visible and different from non-halal food. The same applies to general conduct: a Muslim girl may want to avoid holding hands with boys in a playground game because of her religious upbringing. According to the above principle, she must be forced into holding hands, for if not she would be guilty of practising religion on school premises. I wonder how many Jewish parents would agree to a ban on the consumption of kosher food in schools<sup>22</sup>? Or how many Christian parents would agree to a ban on Christmas trees in schools? Or a ban on nativity plays or Easter eggs?

This spurious argument is rooted in '*spin*' rather than common sense. Religion plays a much larger role in people's lives than merely the garments they wear. The entire thesis of

---

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that the Grand Rabbi Joseph Sitruk, whilst 'opposing' the ban on religious symbols says he is **satisfied with the way Chirac has explained the reasons for the proposed legislation to the French people** (*Sunday Herald Online*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2004).

separation between religion and school is questionable<sup>23</sup>. While some people campaign for schools and other institutions to be sterile from anything to do with religion, the extreme secularists are constantly trying to increase their interference in the private and personal affairs of religion: the clothes we should wear, our choice of religious figures, the level of our religious conviction, the interpretation of our sacred texts and our attitudes towards them, the structures of our scholastic authentication mechanisms, our methods of teaching religion, our attitudes towards tradition, our rituals, and the list continues. It appears from the evidence that these secularists wish to rid the world of what they call ‘*organised religion*’. In its place we are expected to practise a ‘*disorganised religion*’ with maximum interference from them, to the extent that they even dictate to us our choice of clothes and the syntax of our *kalimah*.

#### **4. Muslim girls, by virtue of wearing *hijab*, are reflecting their fathers’ view rather than their own**

Girls from all backgrounds, be they Christian, Muslim, Jewish or ‘Secular’, in terms of their appearance and behaviour, often reflect the views of their fathers *and mothers*. This ‘novel’ concept is called parenting. Every Friday night in homes across the United Kingdom and beyond there are thousands of fathers who protest over the skimpiness of skirts and blouses when their daughters leave for the night clubs. It is a natural human instinct for parents to be protective towards their daughters and particularly the extent to which their daughters expose their bodies in public. Dr Harris quotes from the results of the study conducted by the Commission in France, which recommended the ban, saying:

‘[T]hey found that in many cases girls were being forced to wear [the *hijab*], to cover their hair, by the men in their community, and I think that France recognises that in school, at least, girls should be free from that sort of cultural persuasion’ (*Sunday Herald Online*, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2004).

Given that Dr Harris and others have found no qualms to justify what he calls ‘freedom from cultural persuasion’ – i.e., preventing parents from having a say in the appearance and behaviour of their children whilst in school – I believe it is necessary to remind him and his friends of the secular family law in this country (which is not dissimilar to that of most Western countries). Rights of parents are guaranteed through ‘Parental Responsibility’ even when children are in school. The Latey Committee accepted that disciplinary rules in colleges could only be justified by reference to the concept of *in loco parentis*<sup>24</sup>. The Children Act 1989 defines a child as ‘a person under the age of eighteen’. According to the Act, children under 18 may not enter betting shops<sup>25</sup> or be tattooed<sup>26</sup>. Children under 17 may not purchase crossbows<sup>27</sup> and those under 16 cannot obtain the ‘morning-after pill’ without prescription<sup>28</sup> or buy a National Lottery ticket. We argue that these are all rationalised by the aim of preventing harm to children because of their presumed inability to make wise decisions<sup>29</sup>. In the same way, Muslims will argue that *hijab* is a means of preventing harm. The harm is two fold: spiritual and perceptual. We do not allow children to purchase lottery tickets because of the

<sup>23</sup> Even though France defines itself as a strictly secular state, the wearing of ‘small crucifixes’ [sic] will be permitted in schools under the proposed ban on *hijab*.

<sup>24</sup> i.e. teachers are only empowered to administer punishments to children because they are ‘in the position of a parent’. Hence the right of parents (to ensure the well-being of the child in school) is supreme.

<sup>25</sup> Betting, Games and Lotteries Act 1963, s.21.

<sup>26</sup> Tattooing of Minors Act 1969, s.1.

<sup>27</sup> Crossbows Act 1987 s.1.

<sup>28</sup> Prescription Only Medicines (Home Use) Amendment (No.3) Order 2000 S.1.

<sup>29</sup> Melton, G., Koocher, G. and Saks, M. (1982) Children’s competence to consent. pp 14-16

long-term dangers this practice could have on the child's character. Muslims believe, and people are free to disagree, that excessive exposure of the body has long-term negative consequences on the identity of female Muslims. Muslim girls, and naturally their parents, should have the freedom to choose.

## 5. *Hijab* is not sanctioned by the Quran

The Quran was not sent down on its own. It was revealed to the Prophet (SAWS) who exemplified its teachings. His entire character was based on the Quran and so is the guidance he gave to his companions. This body of knowledge is conveyed to us in an unbroken chain of scholastic authority that has survived the test of time and continues to play its role in the modern world. As time progresses and needs change, the scholars of these traditions decide, after rigorous consideration and with an acceptable level of consensus, on the importance of certain aspects of religious practice. This is certainly not the territory of self appointed pseudo-experts or freelance activists with their own political motivations. *Hijab* is one of the inalienable aspects of practice by virtue of being rooted in clear textual Guidance. Allah says in Quran:

قل للمؤمنات يغضضن من أبصارهن ويحفظن فروجهن ولا يبدين زينتهن إلا ما ظهر منها وليضربن بخمرهن على جيوبهن ولا يبدين زينتهن

*'And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that they should not exhibit their beauty and adornment except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their khimar over their bosoms and not exhibit their beauty ...'* (Al-Nur 24:31).

يا أيها النبي قل لأزواجك وبناتك ونساء المؤمنين يدنين عليهن من جلابيبهن ذلك أدنى أن يعرفن فلا يؤذين وكان الله غفورا رحيما

*'O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their Jilbab above themselves (when they go out). That is better so that they may be recognised and not molested. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.'* (Al-Ahzab, 33:59)

The meaning *khimar* and *jilbab*, and the precise parameter of their function is clearly explained by the Prophet (SAWS) in the hadith narrated by Abu Dawood on the authority of Aishah (RA), who said: 'Asma the daughter of Abu Bakr (r) came to see the Prophet (SAWS) wearing a thin dress. He turned away from her and said: 'O Asma, once a woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen but this – and he pointed to his face and hands.'

Our scholastic heritage includes thousands of female scholars. There is scholar here in Oxford who is in the later stages of compiling an encyclopaedia of more than ten thousand female hadith scholars some of whom are teachers of Imam Bukhari and that is in only one discipline. It is a sign of gross ignorance for people to argue that Islamic sciences are built entirely on male scholarship.

## 6. Some Muslim scholars say it is not necessary (e.g. *Sh. Tantawi*)

Given the difficulties we have had recently with the misuse of ‘global reach fatwas’, I think it would be wise to pay more attention to the actual spirit of this practice. The purpose of ‘*Iftaa*’ is to deal with emerging situations faced by Muslims in different contexts. There is a list of criteria that must be met before a *fatwa* is issued. One of those prerequisites is to be ‘*basiran bi makr al-nas*’<sup>30</sup>, ‘conscious of the trickery of those who seek fatwa’, which falls under the broader requirement of ‘*ma’rifatu al-wad’a*’, ‘familiarity with the context’. One’s theoretical knowledge may be of the highest standard but failure to recognise the complexity of a given situation or the motive of a leading question can result in serious misjudgement. In this instance, with all due respect for the Honourable Shaikh Tantawi, if he decrees, directly or indirectly, that *hijab* is not a requirement for Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, I believe his fatwa would be wrong and I know that the vast majority of recognised Muslim scholars around the world would agree with me on this point.

## 7. *Hijab* is a threat to national cohesion

Is there such a thing as national cohesion when it comes to dress, anywhere in the world? Perhaps long ago in Chairman Mao’s China but today this is far from the case. Just a tiny survey of variation in dress sense conducted at two primary schools in Oxford revealed some 18 different styles of dressing among children. They ranged from ‘*baggy boy*’ to ‘*sleek man*’ and ‘*bling girl*’ to ‘*posh witch*’. This argument is nothing but a clever piece of ‘*spin*’. Perhaps an extract from the newsletter (23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004) of the National Secular Society, to which Dr Harris has so proudly stated his affiliation as an Honorary Associate, will shed more light on this strange need for cohesion. It states:

‘Secularism is under sustained threat from a resurgent Islam - and not just in France. In this country, too, it is becoming difficult to even discuss minority religions in critical terms without landing in trouble. We need to resist. We can only do that if we are an organisation with a significant body of support. That’s why we need you to join. We will never be taken seriously unless enough people are prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder and make this a movement to be reckoned with...’ (National Secular Society Newsletter 23 Jan 2004)

This Newsletter was published prior to the first BBC Five Live programme and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that it was intended to prepare the public for the launch of Dr Harris’s attack on *hijab* and pre-empt criticisms from Muslims. Special attention should be paid to the first sentence: the threat is from Islam and not ‘*ostentatious religious practice*’. As a community we need to know how many more secular and right wing organisations are strongly influenced by pro-Israel activists?

## 8. Most Muslims in France support the ban

This is blatant propaganda based on questionable statistics. Muslims in France sadly find themselves between a rock and hard place. Speaking out about something that is clearly set to become law in an increasingly hostile Islamophobic environment is not an easy task. If someone walks up to you in the street and pushes a camera in your face and asks point blank

قال البهوتي – أثناء حديثه عما ينبغي أن يكون عليه المفتي - : ‘ .. معرفة الناس .. ينبغي له أن يكون بصيراً بمكر الناس وخداعهم، ولا ينبغي له <sup>30</sup> أن يحسن الظن بهم، بل يكون حذراً فظناً مما يصورونه في سؤالاتهم لنلا يوقعوه في المكروه - أنظر (كشاف القناع) 299/6.

‘do you support the ban’, it is likely that many Muslims would have said ‘*I don’t know*’ or ‘yes’ out of fear for their future in France. There were several calls to repatriate those who want to wear the *hijab* if they insisted on it. The sanction of immigration is a very powerful and compelling stick with which to beat migrants into submission. Aside from that, Muslim women with *hijab* are facing hardship in many everyday settings. They have been forced to take off their *hijab* in court rooms, hospitals, etc. There are cases of Muslim women being denied access to hospitals, clinics, banks and shops because they were wearing *hijab*. I personally know of many cases of well-qualified Muslim women (including French reverts) who have been forced to leave France and come to Oxford because the only jobs they could get in France were as toilet cleaners, simply because they wore a head scarf. This is the context behind the compilation of such statistics. We will be examining the details of the CSA/Le Parisien survey that appeared in the *Economist* (February 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> edition) and in particular, who commissioned the poll. We need to know if the data has been subjected to inferential statistical analysis.

## 9. ***Hijab* was banned in Turkey - A Muslim country**

The suggestion is that if the Muslims in Turkey are happy with a *hijab* ban there, then why are Muslims complaining about a similar ban in a non-Muslim country? If the Muslims in Turkey ‘could not muster enough public support’ (or so we are led to believe) to stop the secularists there from banning *hijab*, why should Muslims then object to a ban in Western countries? These are spurious arguments. The truth is that there has never been popular support for a *hijab* ban in Turkey and it is common knowledge that if there were to be a referendum on the issue, the ban would be lifted. So why does a ban exist at all? The reason is that the military in Turkey are secular extremists and yield phenomenal power. *Hijab* was banned in Turkey without popular support among Muslims and down the barrel of a gun. Is this the kind of example proponents of a ban want Western countries to follow?

## 10. ***Hijab* is a symbol of radicalism**

The Neo-Conservative ‘*spin*’ doctors have been relatively successful in scaring large parts of the Western world into believing that Islam is a global suicide cult. They claim that Islam is a relic from the past and should not be allowed to exist (at least without an artificial reformation) in the modern world. What this argument fails to explain is how Islam managed to survive the changes of the ages and continue to become ever more widespread in the modern world? One quarter of the world’s population is Muslim. Islam is a faith with fourteen hundred years of history. Were we all to be suicidal fanatics, as some would have everyone believe, the Muslims would have ceased to exist on the face of the planet, hundreds of years ago. We would have become extinct by now. If murder and suicide were intrinsic teachings of the Quran we would have preceded the Reverend Jim Jones<sup>31</sup> suicide cult record by a thousand years. Radicalism is just another word the ‘*spin*’ doctors use to describe practising Muslims. *Hijab* is not specific to any particular group or sect; it is a universal practice among all sections of the Muslim community worldwide. Admittedly there are some Muslim women who do not wear the *hijab* but most of them also, at least until recently, recognise its importance in Islam.

---

<sup>31</sup> On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1978 over 900 members of Reverend Jim Jones’s religious cult committed mass suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, South America.

## A word of caution to the Muslim Youth in Britain

I know that there are many of you who are very concerned about the oppression of Muslims around the world and you are justified in your anger and frustration. I stand with you in sharing that concern. However, you should bear in mind that nothing would please the pro-Israel activists around the world more than to see an ‘attack’ on innocent men, women and children in this country perpetrated by Muslims. Britain has one of the strongest Muslim communities in the world. Many of the freedoms we have here to practice our faith are not available in some Muslim countries. We have all seen the reports of the Israelis who were arrested for dancing and celebrating on the roof tops in New York when the planes struck the towers<sup>32</sup>. Please think about the joy you will bring to Sharon and his followers on the one hand, and the consequences to the Muslim community in this country and beyond on the other, if you embark on such a course.

It is not improbable that the person who might approach you in a mosque and try to convince you to do something of this sort will be an *agent provocateur*. These are individuals who are sent within communities in order to push naive members of that community ‘over the edge’ in order to serve the purpose of an external body or group of people.

The way to protect Islam and our future is to practise it. We must make use of the legal channels available to challenge these attacks on our right to practise Islam. I also think we should be alert and respond in unison to this sort of ‘*spin*’ on Islam whenever it surfaces. Do not allow the likes of Dr Harris to get away with double-speaking on this or any other issue. I believe that one of the major reasons he is publicising his views on talk shows and debates is to shift public opinion in this country against practising Muslims. It is also important to note that there are a few misguided ‘Muslim’ organisations in the UK that are providing more material for the ‘*spin*’ doctors to use against us. They are doing a disservice to the community and should be avoided at all costs. The damage they cause is similar to that of those self-appointed pseudo-scholars amongst us who believe that the best way to defend Islam is to give up faith in the Quran and pour scorn on our scholastic heritage.

Finally I would like to return to where I began and that is to raise awareness about the danger of complacency. In April 2002 the Israeli army besieged the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem for weeks. Eventually they used explosives to gain entry by blowing up one of its doors. The reaction in the Christian world was little more than a whimper. This, I believe, is what the pro-Israel activists hope an artificial reformation imposed on Muslims in Europe via France, and on the Arab world via Iraq, will eventually achieve. They hope that a day will come when they will be able to demolish *Masjid al-Aqsa* without fear of protest from Muslims around the world. This will only happen if we neglect the Quran and its teachings. My advice is that you make a firm commitment, now more than ever before, to dedicate time and effort to learning and practising your faith. Set aside forty minutes every day, if you can, to read the Quran. Find a teacher who will help you improve your reading and study the biographies of the Prophet (SAWS), his companions and those who followed in their footsteps. The sisters of our community in particular should consider very carefully the long-term implications of their decisions. As I mentioned above, one of the arguments used by the politicians in France was that many Muslims do not really care about *hijab*. Please do not let your temporary lapse in

---

<sup>32</sup> *Sunday Herald*, Glasgow, UK: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2003 p 1. Note also Benjamin Netanyahu speaking about the 9/11 attacks: ‘It’s very good...Well, not very good, but it will generate immediate sympathy.’ (Reported in the *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/international/12ISRA.html>)

obeying Allah in this matter become a source of justification for banning it. If that should occur then we may all have to shoulder the burden on the Day of Judgement.

Living as we do in this century, we have missed the opportunity to become companions of our beloved – the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), *Rahmatul li al-'alamin*. But we do have the opportunity to learn and practise his message, and become companions of the Quran.

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ يُقَالُ لِصَاحِبِ الْقُرْآنِ اقْرَأْ وَارْتَقِ وَرَتِّلْ  
(الترمذي) كَمَا كُنْتَ تُرْتَلُ فِي الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّ مَنَزَلَتَكَ عِنْدَ آخِرِ آيَةٍ تَقْرَأُ بِهَا

*Abdullah ibn Umar relates that the Messenger (on who be peace) said that the Companion of the Quran would be told: 'read the Quran slowly as you used to do on Earth, and continue to climb the stages of Paradise. Your highest station will be at the last verse you shall recite.'* (Tirmizi).

Despite the pressures of living in the modern world, you can still become a *hafiz*, a preserver of the Quran, in four to five years. All it will take is a little discipline and giving up half the time spent watching television<sup>33</sup>.

I suggest a new wave of letter writing should begin. Both the media and politicians should receive your detailed letters of concern. I must stress that the debate is far from over and people should refrain from falling into the trap of feeling triumphant over extremely shallow achievements. Hundreds of Muslims in Oxford have signed a petition in opposition to Dr Harris's comments. They do not think this matter has been brought to a 'conclusion' as suggested by some. Charles Kennedy cannot simply dodge the issue by claiming to be surprised in a private e-mail while Dr Harris continues to march on in his campaign to turn public opinion in this country against practising Muslims. Charles Kennedy's office sent an e-mail to some Muslims saying:

'...it must be emphasised that Dr Harris was speaking in a purely personal capacity; his views on supporting the head scarf ban are not party policy. As a backbench MP, Dr Harris is entitled to express his opinions in a manner he sees fit - he is not subject to the political and parliamentary constraints that frontbench spokespeople for the Party are. However, [Mr Kennedy] was surprised by his comment...' (E-mail from Charles Kennedy's Aide, Siân Norris-Copson, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004).

This is by no measure a success. At the very least, we should demand a public pronouncement from Charles Kennedy that he disagrees with the views of Dr Harris and a positive commitment that his party will demonstrate firm opposition to any moves to ban *hijab* in this country either now, or in the future. It should be noted that there are many Muslims who have received no response at all to their e-mails from Charles Kennedy on this issue.

Dr Harris is not 'merely' an obscure back bench MP. Until recently (13<sup>th</sup> October 2003) Dr Harris was the Liberal Democrat front bench spokesman on Health. Dr Harris is currently the **Liberal Democrat spokesman on Higher Education, Science and Women** and is a member of the important **House of Commons Education Select Committee**. Mr Kennedy must

<sup>33</sup> Try to memorise one page or a few verses every day, working your way from al-Fatiha towards al-Naas. The important point to bear in mind is that you must revise daily all that you have memorised, until it reaches the amount of one juz (one thirtieth). Thereafter, daily revision should be structured into portions equivalent to a juz. *It is the greatest honour to become a carrier of Allah's word. On the Day of Judgement your parents will be given a crown that would outshine the sun in brilliance. Imagine what your reward will be.*

explain if he was also acting in a ‘personal capacity’ when he took action against Jenny Tonge for her reasonable comments in favour of the Palestinians.

Muslims around the country should form local groups to keep the community informed and coordinate with Muslims in other cities. Mr Kennedy should also make public the names of those in the Labour and Conservative parties who wrote to him demanding action against Jenny Tonge. Mr Kennedy cited such pressures as having a bearing on his decision with respect to Jenny Tonge. As a community, we need to know, in advance of any election, if Mr Kennedy or the leader of any other party intends to maintain this policy of giving priority to the unreasonable demands of pro-Israel activists over and above to the voice of two million British Muslims.

It is high time we stopped running after ‘scraps’ of favourable statements; it is time to demand concrete policy, commitments and action. The leaders of our major organisations must give serious consideration to the current and long-term potential influence of pro-Israel activists on the various political parties in this country before aligning themselves with anyone. Our failure to address the attack on hijab now may yield dire consequences in the future. The situation in France is not as far away as some would have you believe. *Hijab* is just the beginning: beards, Quran, books, prayer mats, hats and the *kalimah* will soon follow. Let us not forget that Britain and France are part of the EU and if this case is argued successfully in Europe, public opinion could change here too if the ‘*spin*’ doctors such as Evan Harris are allowed to continue their campaign unopposed. Act now before it is too late. May Allah guide and protect us all from the designs of evil, and grant us eternal bliss in the Hereafter. Aameen.

وقد مكروا مكراً وعند الله مكراً وإن كان مكراً لتزول منه الجبال (إبراهيم 14:46)

Mighty indeed were the plots which they made, but their plots were well within the sight of Allah, even though they were such as to shake the hills.

ومكرو ومكر الله والله خير الماكرين (آل عمران 3:54)

They plotted and planned and Allah is the best of planners

Please remember me in your duas.

Wassalam.

Yours faithfully

**Shaikh Riyad Nadwi**, M.A., Ph.D.

**OCCR Institute**

**Oxford UK, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2004.**

P.S. As for responding to the ‘*spin*’ on this issue of *hijab* please consider the following bullet points to use when explaining our position to the wider British community or when writing to protest or addressing the media:

1. Extreme secularism is not at risk in the West; it is the dominant belief system
2. Extreme secularism is the fastest growing ‘belief system’ in the West

3. *Hijab* is not ostentatious; it is the opposite of ostentation.
4. The only way to keep religion out of schools is to make disbelief an admission criterion.
5. Girls generally conform to the wishes of their fathers and mothers to varying degrees in all cultures.
6. The necessity of *hijab* is agreed on by a consensus of recognised scholars.
7. The scholars who differ on this issue are either confused or misinformed.
8. There is no such thing as ‘national cohesion’ when it comes to dress.
9. Turkey has banned *hijab* down the barrel of a gun. We should not follow that example.
10. *Hijab* is a symbol of Muslims all around the world regardless of sect and is not a symbol of radicalism. It is perfectly normal to wear it if you are a practising Muslim.
11. The actual proposition is to force young girls to remove a piece of their clothing to reveal parts of their body which they do not wish to expose in public.
12. The symbolic value of *hijab* is secondary to its functional purpose, which is to cover a significant part of the body.
13. The whole debate about religious symbols is irrelevant until we discuss the functional purpose of *hijab*.
14. If all fathers across all cultures are allowed to be protective towards their daughters, why not Muslim fathers?
15. How many French fathers, irrespective of their religious persuasion, would tolerate it if someone were to say to them, ‘I would like your daughter to reveal in public more of her body than she is currently showing?’
16. If Islam were a fanatical, dangerous, suicidal cult, then Muslims would have ceased to exist many hundreds of years ago.
17. Pouring scorn on your entire heritage makes you look cheap in the eyes of those you seek to impress.
18. The best way to defend Islam is to practise it.

## Appendix A1

**HIJAB & SPIN****Part 1**

Dear Brothers and Sisters

*Assalamu alaikum and Eid Mubarak*

**Lib Dems: Anti-Muslim and Pro-Israel ?**

We have all heard of the banning of the Muslim head scarf (*hijab*) in France and many Muslims have since found themselves on the defensive in a debate that has focused almost entirely on the validity of *hijab* in *Shariah*, despite a consensus among the recognised Muslim scholars upon the importance of *hijab*. The question as to why *hijab* has suddenly become the focus of attention has so far been skillfully avoided.

However, given that the pro-Israel Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford – Mr Evan Harris – has also joined the bandwagon against *hijab*, I believe the time has come for a more comprehensive analysis. **Mr Harris appeared on a BBC Radio Five Live programme on Thursday (29.01.04) arguing for the right to ban Muslim girls in British state schools from wearing *hijab*.** At the same time, we have seen French Ministers arguing that the new legislation should include beards as well. In the ensuing debate, proponents of the ban have put forward spurious arguments about the role of religion, freedom of speech and the values of a secular society. Many Muslims have been engaged in debate about these issues. What we must ask is whether these arguments are all a front for the real objective behind such moves. An objective that is so politically incorrect that it cannot be mentioned openly, outside of select circles. Well, if we cannot be told the real driving force behind attempts to institute such measures, maybe we can make a suggestion. And remember, the context is ‘why now?’

The motive, it seems, is to make life difficult for practising Muslims in Europe. Practising Muslims around the world are the most vocal in their condemnation of Israel for its illegal and racist occupation of Palestinian lands. Preventing their children from practising Islam concurs with the Neo-Conservative ‘*doctrine of pre-emption*’. The argument runs as follows: if Muslim girls in Britain are prohibited from wearing *hijab*, their belief will receive less focus in their lives. As such, their belief in the Quranic sanctity of Jerusalem and the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque will be eroded. As a result, their stance against Israeli oppression will be neutered. The invasion of Iraq was also based on this ominous ‘*doctrine of pre-emption*’. This argument is reinforced by the fact that many of the prime movers behind this doctrine are clearly identifiable as being staunch supporters of the Zionist State.

If we do not act now, this attack on our freedom will not stop with *hijab*. It will spiral into an intolerable situation. Two weeks ago Mr Charles Kennedy (leader of the Liberal Democrats) was forced by complaints from the Israeli Embassy and others to seek the resignation of senior MP Jenny Tonge, simply because she expressed reasonable and much-deserved sympathy with the Palestinians.

Mr Charles Kennedy must be warned that the Muslims of Britain, and of Oxford in particular, will find it completely inconsistent if he refuses to seek the resignation of Mr Evan Harris. They will make the comparison between his treatment of Mr Harris and Mrs Tonge, and they will draw their own conclusions as to whether voting Liberal Democrat is really in the best interests of Muslim voters. Attacking the religious freedoms of Muslim children, at a time when the pro-Israel lobby is exploiting ‘freedom of speech’ to justify the racist comments of Mr Kilroy-Silk, is unacceptable. Every Muslim should stand up and be counted now before it is too late. My advice is to pray to Allah for protection, organise public meetings to discuss your concerns and write letters of protest to the relevant bodies.

Yours faithfully  
*Wassalam*

**Shaikh Riyad H. Nadwi M.A., PhD.**  
**OCCR Institute**  
**Oxford UK, 01.02.04**

## Appendix A2



### OCCRI Statement on Shaikh Riyad Nadwi

Following the online publication of the first letter on 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2004, OCCRI has discovered that the pro-Israel activists have launched several attacks on the credibility of Shaikh Nadwi's character. Given that we are expecting this to intensify after the publication of this second letter, we thought it best to provide you with a short list of smear tactics used.

The following allegations have been made thus far:

1. Shaikh Riyad Nadwi 'does not exist'
2. He does not have a presence in Oxford
3. He is not affiliated to the OCCRI Institute
4. He is not qualified
5. No one knows him in Oxford
6. He is Labour Party supporter

All of these allegations are utterly untrue. Shaikh Riyad Nadwi is known to the Muslims here in Oxford and around the world. He is a qualified Alim from one of the most prestigious and highly recognised Muslim institutions in the world (Nadwatul Ulama) and he also holds a doctorate in the cognitive science of psycholinguistics. He speaks seven languages and has extensive experience in Da'wa. He has been living in Oxford for the past ten years. He has no affiliation to any political party. His sole objective was, and continues to be, to defend our right to practise Islam in the West. OCCRI would request those Muslims who know Shaikh Riyad Nadwi, personally to help dispel these myths.

[www.occri.org.uk](http://www.occri.org.uk)