THE LOST STORY OF ISLAM
RECOVERY THROUGH THEOLOGY, HISTORY AND ART

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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to uncover some of the lost story of Islam's remarkable achievements and contributions to civilization, including to everything that has come to define the 'West'. It sets out therefore to restore justice to Islam by turning on their head conceptions that pit Islam against the West, such as connoted in the common phrase, 'Islam versus the West'. We the authors believe we represent the bridge between the West and Islam, one of us born into Western Christendom, the other into Middle Eastern Islam, yet very much of one mind about the overarching and mutually enriching relationship between the major religious movements of the West, Judaism and Christianity, and the civilization of Islam.

Our conception of the relationship between Islam and the West goes beyond even phrases like 'Islam and the West'. As much as anything, our story is about 'Islam within the West and the West within Islam', a story of Islam's reforming power in the development of Western philosophy, science and self-understanding. It is a story that promotes Islam to take its rightful place as a leader of reform, dialogue and dealing with difference in equitable and charitable ways. It is a story about not only a sibling of the West's most powerful religious forces in Judaism and Christianity, but about a sibling that, with renewed understanding by Muslim and non-Muslim, could turn around radically its current popular image as a recalcitrant, separatist and violence-disposed ideology to being the obverse of this.

Of course, we do not retreat from the reality that Islam is regarded widely in very different terms and we will attempt to uncover the causes and the ensuing troubling theologies that threaten to turn Islam into the very entity that so many people fear about it. Above all, however, we want to paint a picture of Islam as an indispensable part of what most Westerners take for granted. Be it about philosophy, theology, medicine, science, education, social welfare, the role of women, family, human rights and social justice, had there been no Islam, we quite likely would not be where we are today. The fact that so few Westerners recognize this is one of the tragic gaps in our education and self-understanding. The fact that, in all likelihood, so few contemporary Muslims understand this is also part of the problem we are attempting to rectify.

The book will take the form of an historical and documentary review aimed at recovering much of the positive story that has been lost, as well as understanding why so much of the positive potential in the story is being replaced by negative interpretations. Both aspects of this account are held to comprise justice issues in the West's perceptions of Islam. Finally, the book will provide a number of case studies based partly on the experiences of one of the authors, Ibtihal Samarayi, and partly on others whom she has interviewed. Dr Samarayi is an Iraqi Muslim who has been on the inside of detention owing to her own displacement. In turn, she introduces us to other displaced Muslim detainees through her research in art as cultural and therapeutic expression. In part, Dr Samarayi has used her own artwork as an attempt to restore justice to Islam and the many Muslims who have suffered from their own displacement owing to the struggle between
cultures that underlies so many of the issues of the day. Above all, for all her suffering, Dr Samarayi has never lost faith in Islam nor in its sibling traditions in the West.
Chapter One: EARLY ISLAM: AGENT OF REFORM

Evidence suggests that no religion is less appropriately exploited to justify intolerance and violence than Islam. No religion has such strong and explicit tenets about tolerance in its sacred text and other sources, and no other religion possesses such a strong track record of dealing with different religions and minority communities within its jurisdictions in an equitable and charitable way. In the early Middle-Ages, when tolerance of difference was far from the norm, Islam built model civilizations based on multi-culture and multi-belief (Nasr, 2002; Peters, 2003). By and large, a Jew, Christian or Hindu was better protected in most Islamic princedoms than in any other foreign state.

This tolerance was not accidental nor was it part and parcel of ancient Arabic culture for that culture had been as faction-ridden as any other in pre-Islamic times (Hoyland, 2001). The tolerance was practised because of the Muslim's strong belief that Islam truly was the fulfillment of God's ancient Promise to Abraham that He would establish a model community in the midst of the nations. This would be a community that would reflect God's deep desire that humankind should live in peace and practice all forms of personal integrity and social justice. This would be the community that would show the rest of the world how to live well and under God. In many ways, Islam can claim to be one of the world's great experiments as a welfare state and democracy, a claim which an important if unheralded portion of today's Muslim population sees as Islam's way out of the mire of its association with terrorism (Talbi, 1995; Salvatore & Eickelman, 2004).

Talbi (1995) highlights the clarity with which the Qur'an promotes the sibling relationship between Muslims, Jews and Christians. Because they share in the Promise made to Abraham, they were to be respected and accommodated by the new Islamic community. However, while the heartfelt Jew or Christian might share in the Promise, the institutions of Judaism and Christianity were both seen as having failed to do justice to it.

Hence, for Muhammad, it was Islam that submitted to the terms of the Promise most authentically and so fashioned itself around the concept that it was the nation that God had promised, the true 'People of God', or 'Ummah of Allah'. Inspired by Moses and
Jesus, Muhammad went on to establish the religion that he believed both Moses and Jesus had tried to establish, partly successfully but partly not. He therefore saw no contradiction in praising their efforts while showing up the failure of their followers to follow authentically the terms of the Promise. In his own mind, Muhammad seemed quite clear that Moses, Jesus and he were at one in their vision and their adherence to the Promise. They were all prophets of God and he declared himself to be 'the last and greatest', only because he finally established the model community (Ummah) in the form of Islam. As far as Muhammad was concerned, Moses and Jesus were Muslims (submitters to God) in the true sense, as was Abraham, the ancient prophets, John the Baptist and Mary the mother of Jesus, all of whom strove to do God's will. So too, any Jew who lived by the Ten Commandments or any Christian who followed Jesus' Great Commandment (to love God and neighbour) was a Muslim sibling, and so to be respected and accommodated as such in Islamic communities. By inference, the authentic followers of any religion could also be accommodated in this way, albeit not so clearly as could the fellow ‘People of the Book’, namely, Jews and Christians.

Importantly, Muhammad seemed bent on giving the benefit of the doubt to those who followed other religions, especially Jews and Christians. As fellow ‘People of the Book’ (fellow believers in the true God), they should be assumed to be genuine in their beliefs and so to be respected. For the era, this could be interpreted as a quite remarkable gesture of multicultural largesse. Within the great Islamic Civilization that went on to capture the hearts and minds of most of the Middle East and much of Europe, Africa and India, the concept of the dhimmi (important minority group) communities was unique. The dhimmi communities were those minority groups that lived within a Muslim society that followed another religion yet were tolerated, respected and indeed often regarded as an indispensable contributor to the richness of the Islamic Ummah. For hundreds of years, generations of Jewish and Christian communities lived, and even prospered in most cases, within Muslim worlds as dhimmi communities.

There is much debate in the scholarly world about the merits and de-merits of ‘dhimmitude’ in Islam (Bat Ye’or, 2002; Lewis, 2002). Some of the views one will find
are more clearly based on a pure interpretation of the historical source material, while others are more clearly influenced by recent events. Our own interpretation is that, human frailty notwithstanding, dhimmi in Islam deserves its reputation as a ground-breaking social attitude and practice, relative to its times. The important thing to note about this Muslim social ethic was that it came directly from the early Muslim community’s understanding of the will of Muhammad about matters of dealing with difference and especially minority communities. As such, the injunction towards tolerance was seen to have come directly from God and to be a defining feature of the model community that was established in God’s name. It was part and parcel of being the Ummah that it should respect difference in this way. To be Muslim was to be fair and to be just, in the way enjoined by God and interpreted by the prophets, finally by the last and greatest of these, Muhammad.

Hence, we are bold in the assertion that no religion is more inappropriately used as an instrument of intolerance, least of all violent intolerance, than Islam. One of the challenges for modern Islamic scholarship is the re-capturing of the story of Islam as one of social reform. In this spirit, in the foreword to Yahya (2002), we read:

*Muslims must recapture the true spirit of Islam, and reclaim it from those who have harmed its integrity and honour .... (Yahya) illustrates by using the core text of all Muslims— the holy Qur’an, that true Islam cannot in any way, shape or form be associated with terrorism.* (p. 13)

Similarly, Talbi’s (1995) view of Islam as being most properly a leader of interfaith dialogue and reform, and of an interpretation of the spirit of the Qur’an in impelling Islam in this direction, is clear:

*...the dialogue with all men of all kinds of faiths and ideologies is from now and onwards strictly and irreversibly unavoidable, Man has never lived in isolation, and man’s history may be considered as an irreversible process of an unceasingly extending communication. Man’s fulfillment is in community and relationship. And this is written in the Qur’an! “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know (be
friendly towards) each other . . ."

...it is not impossible to admit the plurality of the paths of salvation, both in and outside the Islamic tradition providing people are both sincere and righteous. If this can be admitted ... we can think of the whole of mankind as a brotherly 'community of communities' — or God's Family as the Hadith states — in which everyone has the right to be different, to be accepted, and fully respected in his chosen differences. To respect others in their chosen and assumed differences — not just to tolerate them on point of pain — is finally to respect God's Will Who willingly created man free to choose what he likes to be and to build with true liberty his own destiny... (And this is written in the Qur'an): "Thou wilt not guide the one whom thou lovest; but God guides those whom He will. And He knows best those who are truly guided."

... for me, dialogue is above all a mood, a spirit of openness, a disinteresting collaboration that does not challenge the presuppositions of the respective partners. We have to focus on cooperation in real and urgent issues confronting our human family, and the first step toward peaceful co-existence and cooperation among communities of different faiths and ideologies is to shy away from thinking in nationalistic or exclusive terms to believing in global and universal ones. We are, all of us, embarked on the same frail boat and, from now onwards, we can have only an interdependent future. (pp. 61-67)

Nettler (1999), in commenting on Talbi, says:

The Qur'an, as basis and foundation of the whole structure, is Talbi's ultimate source. He sees in his theory of pluralism a 'modern' idea from the depths of revelation. Despite his obvious debt to modern thought, Talbi's point of departure is from within the sacred text and its early historical context. His approach to that text and history presupposes there is a humanistic message of the Golden Rule and an empirical validity in historical sources such as the constitution of Medina which support that message. (p. 106)
Nettler’s reference to the Constitution of Medina is about the kind of community that Islam first established around the belief that it was the model community that God had envisioned. As suggested above, this community, together with most Islamic civilizations of the early Middle-Ages, was remarkable for its ethnic and religious tolerance. Similarly, other features that one associates with the modern welfare state and democracy, rather than with the modern stereotype of Islam, were to be found in early Islamic civilizations. Among these features were those concerned with social welfare systems, education and healthcare schemes, and many issues designed to promote the status of women. Almost a thousand years before the so-called Enlightenment in the West began the move towards these features, they were part and parcel of early Islamic civilization (Lewis, 1987).

As with ethnic and religious tolerance, these features were not there merely by chance. Muhammad had taken to heart the message of the ancient prophets that God did not want sacrifice and ritual but justice and mercy to flow like a river, and that his people should act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly (submissively) with their God. So, he wrote into the ‘Five Pillars of Islam’ (for him, the completion and fulfillment of the ethic of the Ten Commandments/Great Commandment), a practical social welfare scheme of tithing that saw everyone giving a percentage of their goods to the community. It was symptomatic of the practical morality implicit in Islam that the supreme ethic of the Muslim put as much store on charity, welfare and communal wellbeing as on obligations around prayer. For Muhammad, this would ensure that Islam could never stray into mere platitudinous practices in the way that he believed both Judaism and Christianity had strayed.

In contrast to what Muhammad saw as the structural weaknesses of Judaism and Christianity, the fact of tithing within Islam being constructed as a religious requirement guaranteed that, from the earliest days, healthcare and social support were made available to all, including in most cases to the dhimmi communities. Similarly, education was considered crucial as a religious as well as a social duty. It is not surprising then that the first ‘modern’ university was an Islamic university, generally regarded as the one
established in Cairo in the eleventh century. Finally, the issue of women's rights in Islam is predictably the most controversial of the many features of modern revisionist scholarship in and about Islam (cf. Ahmed, 1992; Haddad & Esposito, 1998; Armstrong, 2001). What is probably less debatable is that the issue was taken up more seriously in early Islam than in any religious establishment before its time and that early crafting of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) reflected this priority. The debate is more about the directionality of the attention that was given to the issue. Again, we side with essentially though not exclusively feminist Muslim scholarship that suggests that Islam represents a positive moment in the liberation and equality of women and that, as with its many other reforms, this came centuries before, and no doubt influenced, similar reforms in the West. We will explore further these issues of radical social justice, welfare and equity as the chapters of this book unfold (cf. Lovat, 2005, 2006; Lovat & Samarayi, 2008).
Chapter Two: MEDIEVAL ISLAM: AGENT OF REFORM AND SCHOLARSHIP

The essential reforming nature of Islam is not restricted to its earliest communities in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In many ways, the more decisive moments for Islam’s reforming power over the West came in the form of its European settlements and followers. Cultural relations between the Muslims and Christian Europe were established in two ways, first, via Spain and, second, by way of Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples. The translation of Arabic works into Latin was completed by the Christian Archbishop of Toledo, Raymond, in the mid-1100sCE. In Toledo, at this time, Muslims and Christians lived side by side in what was essentially an Islamic caliphate. Archbishop Raymond perceived the overwhelming benefits of Islamic thought and culture and so encouraged his Christian community to take an active interest in and dialogue with the intellectual life of the Muslims. In so doing, he established a translation bureau with the specific task of translating key Islamic texts from Arabic into Latin, the language of the church. In this way, the thoughts of great Muslim scholars like al-Farabi, Ibn Sīna [Avicenna], and Ibn Rushd [Averroes] were conveyed to the Christian West. Ironically, the same bureau translated the almost lost works of Aristotle which had been translated in earlier times from their original Greek into Arabic. All of this work, including most crucially the work of Aristotle, was the work that influenced the ground-breaking thought of arguably the West’s greatest thinker of the era, if not of all eras, Thomas Aquinas (Van Den Bergh, 1954).

Al Farabi

This translating work revealed the advanced scholarship of Islam as well as giving Westerners a sense of its enlightened social theory and practice. As a result, the perception by Western thinkers about Islam was broadened and Islamic thought acquired a newfound reverence. One key translation was around the work of al-Farabi. He had been influenced by the Arabic translations of Greek philosophers by Nestorian Christians in Syria and Baghdad in earlier times. Among these translations were the crucial works of Aristotle which, without al-Farabi’s revival of them, might well have been lost to future
generations. It was because of his grasp of Aristotle that al-Farabi developed renewed forms of Aristotelian logic, which would go on to form the basis of later Western philosophy's development of Formal Logic as a foundational sub-discipline of philosophy (Netton, 1989). Furthermore, al-Farabi placed emphasis on the ability of each person to discern and discriminate between good and evil on the basis of logic. The combination of this facility to discern the rights and wrongs of any human action, together with each person's free will, became the basis of a new form of moral thought that, through Aquinas, would go on to challenge the old, less-empowering basis of morality underpinned by the features of Augustinian conscience. Aquinas's concept of synderesis was of an inborn facility planted in each person by God that provided the facility to know the good and the capacity to pursue it (Aquinas, 1936).

Aquinas's conception amounted to a classic example of medieval neo-Aristotelianism (Aristotle, 1985) and his debt to al-Farabi is palpable. Justifiably, al-Farabi earned the nickname, Mallim-e-thani, understood as 'second master', or teacher, after Aristotle who was considered the first master and teacher. His book, Isha' al-'Ulum, was adopted in Christian schools, just as it had been in Islamic schools, as an indispensable reference in a range of academic disciplines. Roger Bacon [1214-1280 CE], the Franciscan scientist, made use of it in his attempt to reconcile religious and scientific thought and to pioneer a distinctively Christian approach to science (Amin, 2007). Moreover, it seems that al-Farabi's book led a revival in Arabic music in the very cosmopolitan atmosphere of Islamic Spain, as well as exercising great influence on Hebrew thinkers who translated his works into Hebrew (Randel, 1976).

Al-Farabi showed himself to be both a true Aristotelian and an authentic Muslim in his central political philosophy of happiness (sa'ada). The virtuous society (al-ijtima' al-fadil), which for him was perfected in Islam, he defined as that in which people cooperate to gain happiness. In turn, the virtuous city (al-madina al-fadila) was one in which there is cooperation in achieving happiness. The virtuous world (al-ma'mura al-fadila) would only occur when all its constituent nations collaborated to achieve happiness. As Aristotle had reasoned that supreme happiness was only to be gained by those who philosophized
in the right way, so al-Farabi conceived this potential to be supremely realized in Islam wherein the greatest happiness could come from the soul being united with the Ultimate Intellect, being God (Al-Jubouri, 2004). Farabian political philosophy then rested on a merging of an Aristotelian personal and social philosophy with the spiritual reality of Islam. For him, the reward for those who worked together for mutual happiness, and the harmonious and just state that would result from their corporate effort, was no less than salvation.

**Ibn Sina**

Another crucial medieval Muslim scholar was Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna. Gundisalivus (see below) translated his work, *al-Shifa* [The Book of Cure], into Latin while Gerard of Cremona translated *al-Qanun* which became a text-book for medicine in European colleges of medicine from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It was mainly because of this latter book that Ibn Sina achieved fame in the West, so much so that Dante put him on a level between Hippocrates and Galenus, while Scalinger went as far as to place him in the same category as Galenus in medicine, but on an even higher plane in philosophy.

The first Christian thinker to be influenced by Ibn Sina was Gundisalivus, the head of the translation bureau in Spain. He wrote his book, *The Soul*, in which he started with the theology of Ibn Sina and ended with that of Augustine. He adopted Ibn Sina's proofs of the existence of the soul, indicating that it was a substance and not an accident, immortal and spiritual. He also adopted from Ibn Sina his famous symbol known as 'the man suspended in space' with no relation with the outside world, and yet his mind revealing to him that he is a thinking being which exists. That symbol was mentioned by many authors of the Christian Middle Ages, and so it is thought that Descartes in the seventeenth century most likely received it from them, going on to express the same thought in his famous assertion, *cogito ergo sum*, deemed to have heralded the birth of modern science in the West (Butterworth & Blake, 1993).

Evidence of Ibn Sina's influence on the Christian Middle Ages can perhaps be revealed best in the strong attack launched by Guillaume d' Auvergne [d.1249CE] against Aristotle
and his ‘disciples’ [al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazzali]. This theologian mentioned Ibn Sina about forty times in his books, sometimes opposing his ideas, while at other times citing his definitions and examples. He adopted Ibn Sina’s definition of truth as ‘what corresponds in the mind to what is outside it’. He also adopted Ibn Sina’s distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘existence’, as well as his inference that the soul can be conscious of itself without resorting to the body. This is the proof mentioned by al-Shifa and al-Isharat as the ‘symbol of the suspended man’ (Amin, 2007).

Influenced by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina initiated a comprehensive inquiry into the question of being, distinguishing between essence (Mahiat) and existence (Wujud) in a more complete way than achieved by Aristotle. Ibn Sina contended that the reality of existence need not follow logically from essence. In other words, the fact that something can be conceived of in essential form does not mean it necessarily exists. For existence, there must be a cause, an agent of existence. This cause, or agent, is what makes something exist, not the fact that its essence can be understood. Furthermore, Ibn Sina proffered that the cause must be existent itself in order to impel existence in something outside itself. Thus was born the first combined ontological and cosmological argument for the existence of God, ontological in that ‘necessary existence’ of the cause is based on formal reasoning, and cosmological in that it relies on observation of the sensed world (Johnson, 1959; Armstrong, 1999).

Ibn Rushd

In mid-centuries Islamic Spain, the philosophy of Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes, would inspire and direct the thoughts of the West in ways that led directly to the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. It was Ibn Rushd who ultimately influenced Aquinas’s most crucial works around natural law, again with their genesis in Aristotle (Kogan, 1985). It was the stark clarity and purposeful intention of Ibn Rushd’s rationalistic account of religious belief that so impressed Aquinas and, in turn, provided theological and religious belief with the philosophical buttressing that it needed in a world faced with the advance of science. On Ibn Rushd, Landau (1962) has the following to say:
The western philosophers could have never reached the level we see today unless they had obtained the results of Ibn Rushd's research in philosophy. Muslim Spain has produced some of the brightest intellectual luminaries of the Middle Ages. One of them was Ibn Rushd ... who is universally acknowledged as the great philosopher of Islam and one of the greatest of all times. George Sarton in his introduction of history of science said that "Averroes was great because of the tremendous stir he made in the minds of men for centuries. A history of Averroism would include up to the end of the sixteenth-century, a period of four centuries which would perhaps deserve as much as any other to be called the Middle Ages, for it was the real transition between ancient and modern methods." (p. 32)

In turn, of course, Ibn Rushd was himself inspired and partly mentored by another great Muslim philosopher of the day, Ibn Tufayl, yet another native of Spain. Ibn Rushd reacted to what he saw as the over-reliance on the mystical thought of the likes of al-Ghazzalli, the much revered Muslim sufi, and was intent on demonstrating that the heart of Islam could be justified in rationalistic terms. It was Ibn Tufayl's philosophy, especially as expressed in his most famous work, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan [Walk on], that convinced Ibn Rushd of the potential for this rationalism and it was Ibn Tufayl's capacity to communicate his philosophical tenets in poetic, allegorical and other highly accessible literary forms that built into Ibn Rushd the surety and passion for common sense that he demonstrated throughout his life and for which he is so revered in Islam and in Western scholarship (Hawi, 1973; Irvoy, 1991).

Lastly, we must refer to the debt which Jewish philosophy owes to Muslim philosophy. Suffice it to say that Aristotle's works were not translated into Hebrew, but Jewish philosophers were content with what the Muslims wrote as summaries and commentaries. It was discovered by Western scholars that Jewish theologians followed in the steps of Muslim philosophers, and that thinkers before Maimonides owed their methods and ideas in religion to them. They also discovered that the work of the great Maimonides revealed beyond doubt the importance of Muslim influence on Jewish thought (Kasher, 1995; Kramer, 1999). The contribution of Islamic to Jewish philosophy and their general
interdependence continues to be a fascinating area of much needed scholarship in the present day (Nettler & Taji-Farouki, 1998).

Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Tufayl represent a coherent, assured and persistent intellectual force in medieval times that went beyond anything the West could muster at the time. A great Western thinker of the ilk of Aquinas relied on this Islamic force to forge the reforms of Western intellectual life that represented his quest in life and his great contribution. He relied on them as much as on their Aristotelian underpinnings, for these Muslims were the ones who had taken Aristotle and applied him to new and urgent circumstances. There is little doubt that Judaeo-Christian understanding of itself, as well as the entire West's self-understanding, would somehow be very different had these remarkable characters and their impelling ideologies not existed. If one truly understands the intensely sibling relationship between Islam and Judaeo-Christianity, then the inspirational works of these medieval Muslim scholars on the West were entirely consistent with the origins and purpose of Islam in the minds of the early Muslims.
Chapter Three: REALIZING ISLAM’S TRUE PLACE IN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE WEST

If one were of Jewish, Christian or just Western origin wishing to truly understand Islam in a way that did justice to the tradition, then one would attempt to study it from the Islamic, rather than the more familiar Judaeo-Christian/Western perspective. One would attempt, in so far as it is possible, to put on Islamic ‘spectacles’, to walk in Islamic ‘shoes’. One might begin with the common story of Abraham but temper the premise of Genesis, Chapter 17, that Isaac was the heir to the promise, with the Qur’anic view that Ishmael was the true heir. Once one opened one’s mind to this line of thought, one might well be challenged by the consistency of this view with Genesis, Chapter 16, wherein it is clear that Ishmael was in fact the first-born and in circumstances that, relative to the mores of the day, would likely have seen him as the unchallenged rightful heir to the Abrahamic heritage. This is the view endorsed in Islamic belief when Abraham returns to his ‘first family’ in Mecca and, together with Ishmael, establishes Islam’s most sacred site, the Ka’aba, on the very spot where God’s creative work began (Hoyland, 2001; Rogerson, 2003).

Once one takes this line, rather than the more familiar line on the origins of the tradition, one is put on a different track altogether in interpreting the rest of the story. One might begin, for instance, to be more sympathetic to the Islamic view that Moses was the direct descendant of the ‘Arabic’ Ishmael, and that his separation from the Pharaoh’s house was essentially that of an insider, rather than an outsider, and mainly about a rejection of the institution and institutional religions of the pharaohs in favour of re-discovering the ancient Promise made to Abraham and Ishmael. Furthermore, one might begin to contemplate the wisdom of the Islamic position that the people who finally entered the Promised Land, be they regarded in modern conceptions as Arabic or Hebrew, had rejected the spiritual interpretation of the Promise provided by Moses after Sinai, in favour of the more tantalizing institutional interpretation. By this latter, the ancient ‘Zionist’ State (as it would later be described) was effected, complete with kingship,
priesthood, standing army and, above all, the physical Temple, the supreme symbol of an earthly kingdom.

There is a significant and old Islamic perspective that the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel were established around a misreading of the nature of the Promise. The Promise was about establishing a people within a people, a people imbued with godly vision and godly ways, a people who would live and establish communities in ways distinctive of their beliefs and well captured in the ‘happiness’ thesis of Ibn Sina. According to this Islamic view, Moses foresaw the rejection of the spiritual interpretation of the Promise, especially after the people’s reaction to his Sinai message. The ancient prophets, whose constant cry was against the institutional interpretation, also understood the Promise in this way. Amos said the Lord does not want sacrifice and ritual but justice and mercy that flow like a river. Jeremiah said the Lord does not want the Temple on the hill but the Temple built in the hearts of his people. Micah said that the proof of being God’s Chosen People was in acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with their God. According to both the Christian and Islamic views, John the Baptist and Jesus held the same prophetic view, while both suffered violent deaths for conforming their actions and their prophetic knowledge.

Interestingly, the Qur’an offers a picture of Mary, Jesus’ mother, as a prophetic type as well. It is yet another illustration of the richness that Christians can uncover in studying Islam that the Qur’anic Mary is so much more powerful and substantial a figure than to be found in the canonical gospels of the New Testament (Rogerson, 2003). Of course, there could well be a reason for this. Many of the Christian forms and sources suppressed around the time of the Council of Nicaea (325CE) were of the more human Jesus to which many of the apocryphal sources were committed. The ideology that dominated thereafter was more heavily of the divine Jesus, about which having an earthly mother was clearly somewhat enigmatic. Again, one of the great benefits of understanding Islam is that it has kept alive many of these earlier forms and their sources. As Christianity itself continues to mature and become less defensive, one would hope that Islamic
sources of this type will prove to be of inestimable value in Christianity's own self-understanding.

The above Old Testament and New Testament characters are all prophetic heroes in Islamic folklore and, of course, the supreme prophetic hero is Muhammad who, understanding keenly the spirituality that inspired Judaeo-Christianity, established the perfect religion to restore its essential spirituality while rejecting the institutional forms in which it had become encased. For Muhammad, the Five Pillars of Islam were a dramatic re-statement of both the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Great Commandment, but were in the kind of practical form that could never be ignored by his followers in the way that Moses' and Jesus' followers had ignored their central tenets. In Islamic folklore, living by the Five Pillars truly did impel the kind of communal living to which the Promise to Abraham, Moses and Jesus had been directed. This was the Islamic Ummah, that community that lived by the rule of God (Hakkimiyyah Allah), wherein social living was characterized by the prophetic virtues of the Promise, namely, justice, mercy and tolerance, as well as scholarship and spirituality.

Among those Muslims who know and understand their own broader tradition, one would find huge amounts of confidence that they know, understand and relate more closely with both Moses and Jesus than does the average Jew or Christian, respectively. For most Jews and Christians, their faith and culture is wrapped up and bound by their status as citizens of the so-called 'West'. For the devout Muslim, the features of this are the non-Promise, non-prophetic cosmetics of secularism, wealth, opulence and imperialism. These stand in contrast to their understanding of Islam as being 'of the Promise', namely, God-centred, poor and humble, and, for many, especially those of the Shi'a tradition, inherently and most properly, victims, just like the prophets before them.

For the devout Muslim, the armament that maintains the fortification of Islam against all opposition is Jihad. As we will see in a subsequent chapter, Jihad is not the violent entity of folklore about Islam, although it must he said that there was, from the earliest days, a potential for Jihad to develop this way. Essentially, however, Jihad is best defined as the personal and corporate striving for submission to Allah, captured best by the Five Pillars
of Islam. By conforming their lives and the Five Pillars, the veritable conjunction between the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment, the Muslim becomes the heir to the Promise, one of the Chosen People of God. Within the original Islam, this is a Promise shared with Jews and Christians, as well as with others of authentic religious belief.

Of particular interest for those Christians who might wish to deepen understanding of their own tradition are the texts of the so-called ‘Muslim Jesus’. These are texts about Jesus (Isa) to be found in the Qur’an and other sacred writings of Islam that seem to be drawn from a knowledge and understanding of Jesus that both pre-dates and post-dates the establishment of Islam. Some of the texts are no doubt remnants from those earlier traditions of Christianity often expelled from the Christian canon in and around the Council of Nicaea (325CE) as much for political as for doctrinal reasons. Adang (1996) confirms the likelihood that the Jesus who inspired Muhammad was an 'apocryphal Jesus', rather than the 'canonical Jesus', when she verifies that “.... on the whole, the biblical narratives in the Qur’an reflect the influence of apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and midrashim, rather than canonical scripture.” (p. 3) Such narratives contain high potential, therefore, for offering insights into strands of Christianity lost for the most part to the mainstream tradition. For those interested in self-reflection about the true origins of Christianity, beyond the politically correct versions of these origins, the texts of the Muslim Jesus being available to us in translated form for the first time ever is a major advance (Khalidi, 2001).

Additionally, the texts of the Muslim Jesus provide insight into the central role played by the Jesus hero in the early development of Islam, including during a period when, by almost any impartial account, Islamic scholarship and spirituality were as open and vibrant as those of Christianity were closed. These were the dark ages of intellectual endeavour in the West, where virtually the only Christian scholarship was happening in the reclusive environment of the monastery while, at the same time, Islam was busy establishing universities with a measured charter of universal education. Similarly, Christian spirituality was static and controlled by the papacy where Islamic spirituality
was alive and very much in the market place. The Muslim Jesus of the early Islamic establishment period, therefore, is likely to contain some strands of the Jesus tradition lost, ignored or expelled from the mainstream Christian tradition. This fact alone presents a compelling reason for those Westerners interested to understand their own history, including those Christians who wish to understand their own faith, to make a study of this aspect of Islam. This is quite apart from what they might learn about Islam itself.

So, what is there to be learned from Islam about Jesus? Who is the Muslim Jesus, in contrast to the Jesus affirmed through the political events of the early church? From the Qur'an itself, we find much with which we are familiar, like stories of a virgin birth and other miraculous events surrounding the birth. We also find elements in these birth stories that are partly familiar, like the infant Jesus engaging in conversation with those who came to see him. Interestingly, many Christians will recall being told stories like this in their own infants' religious education and Sunday Schools, even though there is nothing in the Christian canon to confirm them. They too belong to the apocryphal tradition, that which was discarded along the way, not always for the best theological reasons, but which has been preserved in part through the texts of the Muslim Jesus.

We also find perspectives which might be quite challenging for many Christians, but which deserve some pondering, granted they probably reflect the kind of Christian thought about Jesus that was most influential on Muhammad. While there is talk of Jesus' resurrection after his death, there is a very explicit rejection of Jesus' divinity: "Allah forbid that he himself should beget a son!" The Christianity that most influenced Muhammad would seem at odds with the divinizing of Jesus that was one of the central events of the Council of Nicaea. In contrast to the supreme heresy of suggesting that there could be another God, the Qur'an makes it clear precisely who Jesus was, purportedly in Jesus' own words:

*I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the gospel and ordained me a prophet. ...He has commanded me to be steadfast in prayer and to give alms to the poor...He has exhorted me to honour my mother and has purged me of vanity and wickedness.*

21
Such was Jesus, we are told, he was the son of Mary and that is the entire truth.

So it is that we find the Muslim Jesus to be what Khalidi (2001) describes as a 'controversial prophet'. While the Qur'an depicts the other Judaeo-Christian prophets, like John the Baptist, fairly much as we would expect from our biblical knowledge, the Muslim Jesus spends much time contradicting what many of his followers (ie. the canonical church) believe about him. The Qur'anic account, and those of the entire Muslim Gospel, amount to what the Qur'an describes as a 'cleansing' from the perverted beliefs of his followers. The Muslim Jesus engages in polemic, sets the record straight and is an active agent in his own 'cleansing' from heresy. The combination of this cleansing role with the demonstrably revered status of Jesus leaves one in little doubt that, at the heart of this heartfelt belief about Jesus' true nature, there resides a strong Christian stream of thought, no doubt the form of Christianity most influential on Muhammad. For Muhammad, this was the authentic version, one that justified his own belief in Jesus as a prophet in the line of the Old Testament prophets. Like ancient Zionism, Roman Christianity was held to be in error, including about Jesus. Through the Qur'an and the broader texts of the Muslim Gospel, Jesus is given a voice again and, of course, we find him saying much of what can be found in the largely unknown apocryphal gospels, except that he says it more strenuously. The intention to distance himself from the triumphalist Roman interpretation of his role is quite explicit. The texts of the Muslim Jesus serve the purpose of giving Jesus the last word, and the authenticity of the triumphalist church of the early Middle Ages is called into question by this word.

There is much substance for self-reflection in the texts of the Muslim Jesus for the Westerner brought up to assume certain truths. This applies not only to religious truths, but the many truths about the entire Western tradition that have flowed from the religious assumptions of Judaeo-Christianity. The Jesus to be found in Islam stands as religious, historical and cultural critic of much that we take for granted. The challenge is to reject the critique or to be moved to a new knowing of one's cultural heritage and so find oneself in a different place, including in a different relationship with Islam. We would suggest that recovering the original Islam in an era that has lost touch with its rightful
heritage demands the latter approach. It is this rightful heritage and the story of its loss to which we now turn.
Chapter Four: ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND THE STORY OF LOSS

While the opposition between Islam and Islamism is not able to be defined in pure and uncontested manner, for the purposes of this book, we define Islam as the ancient tradition best attested to by its own sacred sources, principally the Qur'an, and the authentication of this tradition in the testimony of external reputable sources, such as to be found in the work of St Thomas Aquinas, as an example. This is the positive face of Islam that few seem to know and understand these days and that justice demands should be restored to its true place as an architect of the science, legal perspectives and cultural understanding that the West takes largely for granted. This is the Islam that, in many ways, made the West what it is today. On the other hand, we define Islamism as a reactionary skewing of this tradition, born of tragedy, displacement and sometimes resultant hatred and violence. It is bent, often misguidedly and unwittingly, on stripping Islam of its status as architect of the West to being fundamentally opposed to all things Western and, in some cases, to destroying all things Western on the basis of an ideology that the original Islam could only regard as godless fanaticism. It is this extreme fanatical Islamism that sadly constitutes the negative face of modern Islam, imported more than it deserves into our living rooms by a media that carelessly privileges it for its newsworthiness rather than its authenticity.

In reaction to the spectacular and violent events of 11 September 2001, many Western observers and policy-makers have tended to lump all forms of Islamism together, branding them fairly as radical and treating them unfairly as hostile. In truth, this approach is misconceived and unhelpful. Islamism has multiple streams with little to unify it other than aversion to the West, principally in the forms of the USA and Israel. In spite of the common perception however, only a handful of these forms are patently given to violence. It is a rarely acknowledged testimony to the inherent peace-loving nature of Islam that, in spite of the spate of Islamist movements that have characterized recent history, few of them are actually violent and only a small minority justify a confrontational response. The West needs a discriminating strategy that takes account of the diversity of outlooks within the politics of Islamism. This would be a strategy that
understands that, while even the most moderate of Islamists might be deeply opposed to
the West, and especially to U.S. foreign policy, only pockets of Islamism are bent on
violence to achieve their ends. At the same time, it would be a strategy that would be
cognisant of the fact that the festering Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the occupation of Iraq,
and the ways in which much of the ‘war against terrorism’ is being waged, will tend over
time to strengthen the appeal of the more virulent forms of Islamism. Why is this so?
What is the unfortunate heritage that explains how one of history’s most enlightened
ideologies could come to represent one of the contemporary world’s darkest forces?

Of what happened to begin the destruction of the Ummah of the Golden Age of Islam,
suffice it to say that, while Muslims were generally well-educated about their common
ancestry with Jews and Christians, and the majority of Jews and Christians who lived
within the Islamic world had come to appreciate their shared heritage, the Christian world
generally held no such sentiments. Again, it is important to note that education was
scarce in the West at the time, and that the old empire was held together through a
combination of fear and mutilation of Christian spirituality to fortify that fear.
Knowledge about Islam was restricted to age-old fears dating back to the successful
Islamic incursion into much of the former Christian world, including as far north as
Spain. For all the reality of it, Islamic civilization was believed to be godless and corrupt.
The overlay onto beliefs about Islam of fundamental Western Christian conceptions of
superiority, ‘salvation only within the church’ and ‘right to rule’ could not be overstated.
Add to this base conception the need of Western rulers, including bishops, to distract
their subjects from the growing calls for reform in areas of human rights, education and
the role of the laity in the church, and we have the formula for the series of partly random
events that went on to comprise the Crusades. The fact that the Muslim world held
effective control of what Jews and Christians referred to as ‘the Holy Land’ provided the
apparent legitimation and religious purpose essential to any effective crusade.

Over two centuries and eight Crusades, the original Islam was effectively destroyed.
Along with it went much of the credibility about Christianity (and to some extent
Judaism) that Muhammad had extended to it. Whole generations of Muslims came to see
Christians in much the same way that many Westerners today would regard Al Qa’eda, as artisans of mindless terror. Against their live experience of the worst kinds of barbarity that Christian civilization could heap upon them, the kindly and equable sentiments of Muhammad in the Qur’an became less and less believable. There are two points of immediate relevance to be made about the destruction of the original Islam.

First, there were consequences to the destruction of Islam that relate to its material prosperity. Beyond any religious considerations, the original Islam turned a part of the world that had been for the most part a backwater into one of the world’s most prosperous areas. Islam served as a glue to pull together especially the Arabic portion of its civilization. Out of the disparate and largely warring tribes of the pre-Islamic world, came a focus and a unity that not only spawned tolerance, social justice and creativity, but also wealth. Furthermore, it was a wealth that was largely shared among the people, courtesy of the Pillar about tithing, in a way that would not characterize Western societies until well after the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because Islamic civilization was prosperous in this distributed sense, it became powerful in a way that only wealth distribution can achieve. For the most part, Muslims believed in their world for reasons of both religious and social ideology (Lewis, 1987; 2002). While Muslim re-constructionists like Ali as-Sulami and Nur ad-Din (cf. Shatzmiller, 1993) remind us that there was also an element of complacency in Islam that might be blamed for the disintegration of the original Ummah, the dominant Islamic interpretation nonetheless is that it was the external incursion of the Crusades that destroyed the Golden Age of Islam.

Second, the bloody treatment meted out to Islam, with its associated long-term experience of being the ‘victim’ released a minority seed that had been in the roots of Islam from the beginning but had been relatively marginalized by the majority. The seed is particularly though not exclusively represented in Shi’a Islamic spirituality. Shi’ites make up less than 10% of Muslims in the world today, although it is much of Shi’a Islam that has become so well known in the West, especially through the revolution in Iran impelled by the 1979 return from exile of Ayatollah Khomeini. For many Westerners, it
was the spectre of the Iranian revolution that represented the beginning of the anger in Islam that culminated in 9/11. The Iranian Revolution turned what had been arguably the most Westernized of all Muslim countries into the most dramatically anti-Western Islamic theocracy. The venom towards the USA and the disregard for all Western convention that became obvious, best captured in the 1981 storming of the US Embassy and hostage-taking of its diplomats, came as a shock to most Westerners who had been led to believe that Westernization was something that most Iranians desired. Little did they know that the seeds of this anger and disregard had been growing for a thousand years, well fuelled by the deep suspicion of all things Judaeo-Christian and the associated ‘victim’ mentality of the Shi’ite Muslim. Central to this suspicion and growing conspiracy theory were events that came to a head in the re-establishment of Israel as an independent nation in May, 1948, an event that many Muslims regard as an aberration, a violent act of injustice and as further proof that the medieval Crusades by the West persist, this time taking the form of the installation of Zionism.
Chapter Five: THE STORY OF LOSS AND THE ‘WESTERN/ ZIONIST CRUSADE’

Amidst the deep and long-standing suspicion by a portion of the Muslim population that the medieval Crusades represented a persistent conspiracy on the part of the West to destroy Islam, the decision on the part of the international community, essentially driven by the most powerful Western nations, to re-establish a nation called ‘Israel’ in the years immediately after the Second World War was a watershed event. At the time, the full meaning of the event was masked by an overwhelming sense of guilt and compassion towards the events of the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The (largely Christian) West stood guilty. While disowned and condemned through the likes of the Nuremberg Trials, it was nonetheless one of their own (in the broader sense) who had perpetrated the horrors of the Holocaust. The Third Reich had functioned largely in a Christian regime, with a demonstrable level of complicity by the Christian churches and, at best, much in the way of turning a blind eye to some of the Reich’s grosser remedies. The decimated Jewish people had to be atoned and re-establishing their nationhood was seen as the ultimate political way of achieving this. The role of the USA and the UK in achieving this could not be overstated.

It was not the first time in 2,000 years that such a solution had been proposed, including with much enthusiasm in the period between the two world wars. Even earlier on, in the later parts of the nineteenth century, there had been heavy migration of Jews to Palestine, especially coming out of Europe. This was a fairly direct result of growing European nationalism that had two effects on European Jews. One effect amounted to an early marginalizing, such as would boil over into anti-Semitism some decades later. The other effect was seen in the renewed sense of the need for Jews to be reassembled in their own nation. Moreover, there had always been a powerful lobby within American Jewry that had interpreted its religious heritage as necessitating the ‘re-building of the Temple’ in the Holy Land of old.

At the same time, there was a growing concern in the Arabic world that the desire on the part of the West to restore the old Jewish state had potential to revive much of the
odiousness of the Crusades of old. Interestingly, the Jewish people were always divided among themselves about the desirability of re-establishing the physical nation. Many held that, religiously, the worst thing that had ever happened was the establishment of the physical kingdom in ancient times. The Natarei Karta is a Jewish movement associated strongly with resistance to the re-establishment of a physical state for Jewish people. As Muhammad had come to believe, so the Natarei Karta believe that the Promise to become God's Chosen People was not referring in any way to the establishment of a physical kingdom. It was to be a people among other people, showing others by the way they lived what God's ways were about. While even within the USA there was opposition to the notion of re-establishing the new nation, opposition was even more prominent in the Jewish communities of the Middle East.

As suggested above, most Jewish communities living in what was largely a Muslim world were living reasonably well. The dhimmi Jewish communities of Islam were treated far better than Jews had been treated in most of Europe. By and large, they were respected and, in many cases, even revered for the special part they had played in inspiring the original Islam. Many of these Jews had no desire to displace themselves from their ancestral homes to live together as Jews in what, for them, would be inevitably a difficult situation. These Jews were far more aware and foresaw the realities of the inevitable tensions than those coming from far away places like the USA, Canada and Australia, for instance. It was knowledge of these tensions and mixed feelings, together with the practical concerns over who would be displaced to make way for such a nation, which had led to a customary caution on the part of the international community towards any such solution. It was with the events of the Holocaust that the need to atone for the situation and to provide maximum protection for the Jewish people became an international imperative. At this time, the momentum for establishing an Israeli state became overwhelming.

There is rarely a solution to any problem that does not unveil another problem, and the case of the re-establishment of the Israeli state was no exception. It was not just the Palestinian Muslims whose claims were overturned and whose lives were disrupted. The
entire Arabic world had the balance accrued over 1400 years upset by this event. The single biggest upset was, of course, the displacement of the Arabic (largely Muslim) people known as Palestinians from a land that even parts of the Bible refer to as ‘Palestine’. The people known as Palestinians had ancestral and historical claims on this land that dated back thousands of years. In their place, and seen as invaders, came a largely foreign people drawn from the four corners of the earth, very few of them with claims on the land other than spiritual ones that were held by those being usurped as having no legitimacy. From an apparent solution, came at least one huge new problem.

In fact, the problems multiplied. As suggested, the concept of ‘Jew’ had been relatively unproblematic throughout the history of Islam (Nevo, 1995). Unlike the cataclysmic confrontations with the Christians throughout the Crusades and down through the ages, there had been no such violent confrontation between Jews and Muslims beyond a few skirmishes recorded in the very earliest Muslim settlements. By and large, Jews were experienced as a minority group wherever Islam had developed, and the strong tenets towards tolerance from the Qur’an had ensured a mainly compatible, largely protective relationship on the part of Islam towards the Jews. There is little evidence through history of major tensions or bigotry. In a word, there was nothing threatening about the Jews as far as the Muslim was concerned, and much to feel grateful for among those Muslims who knew their history. At best, the Jew was revered, at worst seen as quaint.

With the founding of the modern state of Israel, this all changed. For a start, ‘Jew’ quickly came to connote invader, foreigner, well-backed with powerful friends in the dubious West. Additionally, because of the friends they were keeping, the Jews became associated with a Christian alliance in a far sharper way than would have been seen by the average Muslim in the past. The history of Jewish-Christian relations had been at least as strained as those between Muslims and Christians. Where Jews and Muslims experienced Christianity as a powerbase, the Jews and Muslims invariably found themselves on the same side as the victims. Most recently, of course, Muslims had witnessed the attempted extermination of the Jews, largely at the hands of pseudo Christian-related followers and their anti-Semitic ideologies. If anything, this event had
increased the sense of protectiveness of the Muslim towards the Jew. To have the alleged Christian West now championing the cause of the Jew and, in so doing, imposing what they could only see as a foreign Jewish state at the expense of the displacement of their own Muslim siblings was bound to change the perception of the Jew by the Muslim in a way that we are probably still coming to terms with more than half a century on.

As if the situation was not challenging enough, the establishment of the Jewish state had a marked de-stabilizing effect on the Jewish dhimmi communities. Some of the members of such communities naturally felt attracted to the new state of Israel for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity to be part of a majority, to share their faith with a wider group, or just to take advantage of the opportunity afforded for greater power and prosperity. The loss of what was often the younger and more active sections of a community naturally weakened the dhimmi communities living within a Muslim state, at times making it less viable as a healthy minority in a society. Moreover, those who were left often became the victims of the kind of vilification and acts of revenge that resulted from the Muslim’s growing resentment and anger at the way events were transpiring. In turn, this often forced an even greater level of immigration to the new state of Israel and the eventual collapse of the powerful symbol of Islamic tolerance represented by the dhimmi community.

For the most part, the Jewish-Islamic dynamic that had functioned with balance and equanimity for a millennium and a half regressed into an internecine stand-off and occasional warfare. To complicate matters further, the glue that had been represented by cultural affinity was weakened when, for instance, a Syrian Jew found him or herself caught in the middle. On the one hand, of Syrian origin yet religiously Jew and basically pleasing to neither side, forced to leave the ancestral home yet an object of suspicion in their new one. This situation is no doubt even worse for the Palestinian Jew whose country folk and religious folk, so to speak, are each other’s prime enemies. To the Palestinians, these people were once a protected minority but are now seen to represent the hated majority. On the other hand, to many Israeli Jews, they can never be fully accepted as Jews. For these former members of a revered and fairly stable and secure
dhimmi community, life can be particularly lonely.

The establishment of the modern state of Israel did more than disrupt the current state of affairs in the Middle East. It also re-kindled ugly memories of the past, both the medieval and ancient past. Moreover, it had the effect of generating a whole new interpretation of the Abrahamic heritage and the positioning of Islam against, rather than as an allied part, of the Judaeo-Christian contribution to this heritage.

First, to the medieval history: especially because of the unhappy history between Islam and Christianity, the imposition by the (Christian) West of the Jewish state, complete with Western armies as part of the set-up phase, was altogether too reminiscent of the medieval Crusades. The festering resentment that was never far from the surface of Middle-Eastern Muslim consciousness was released. Especially for those caught up in the Palestinian cause, it became an imperative that memories of this ugly moment in Islamic-Christian relations be revived. As a consequence, there has been a growing awareness instilled in many Arabic Muslims over the past 50 years about the destruction wrought by the Crusades and the ‘Western conspiracy’ contained therein. The Crusades (and therefore the Christian West) have come to be blamed in renewed and strident fashion for the poverty, low levels of healthcare, education and social services that now afflict so much of the Middle Eastern Muslim world where, prior to the Crusades, the ‘Golden Age of Islam’ saw the opposite.

The Christian West, but especially the West represented by the USA and UK (most heavily involved in the setting up of Israel), came to be seen as a demon all over again. The Crusades were characterized as an attempt to destroy Islam but, having merely weakened it, the establishment of the new state of Israel was seen as a renewed attempt to destroy it, only this time under the camouflage of atoning for the horrors of the Holocaust. The more buttressed Israel became owing to the weight of financial and military support from the West, the more this scenario became plausible. By the time of the 1967 War when the Israeli military all but destroyed the allied Arabic forces (largely Islamic), the myth about ‘the establishment of Israel amounting to a Western conspiracy to destroy Islam’ had become a truth with any amount of prima facie evidence attached.
In the decades since, the evidence has simply continued to mount, if one is inclined to see things this way, with clear policy preference towards Israel’s claims and against the Palestinian claims, on the part of most Western states (especially the USA and UK), and with countless violent interchanges that, for instance, have pitted a well-trained and supported Westernized Israeli military against stone-throwing Palestinians. In time, the futility of stone-throwing, together with the impossibility of assembling their own military, has led to new forms of aggression, such as kidnapping, hijacking and suicide-bombing. Most recently, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, however justified, have added another layer of evidence (to those who choose to see it this way) that, one way or another, the West is intent on destroying Islam. In turn, the phenomenon represented by the suicide-bomber has expanded and been universalized well beyond the borders of the troubled Middle East. Acts of terrorism in New York, London, Djakarta, Bali, Madrid, Mumbai and Glasgow are representative of the expansion.

As suggested above, the re-interpretation of past events does not stop with the Crusades. For some Islamic scholars and agitators, the entire history of the tradition dating back to Abraham is re-interpreted in light of recent events. The effect, intentional or not, is to ramp up the conspiracy theory. So, even the account in the Old Testament of Abraham’s choice of Isaac (the Jew) over his older son Ishmael (the Arab and, by implication, de facto Muslim) is seen as a piece of literary piracy by the Jews to deliberately distort the record regarding the Promise and its proper heritage. The fact that the Christians have incorporated this ‘piracy’ into their own bible makes them co-conspirators in this distortion of the truth. Moreover, the institutional interpretation of the Promise that issued in the ancient twin kingdoms of Judah and Israel is seen as being at fundamental odds with the true (Islamic) interpretation represented perfectly by the warnings of the ancient prophets. These prophets were Muslims (submitters to God, literally) and the fact that they were rejected and often killed is further evidence that the Jews and Christians belong to a line of anti-Muslim crusaders and warriors.

In all of this potted history, one version of the conspiracy theory is contained in the notion of ‘Zion’, ‘Zionism’ or ‘Zionist’. In modern terms, the notion of Zionism was one
of the products of European nationalism of the nineteenth century. One of the titles associated with the Jews' renewed sense of needing their own nation was 'Zionism'. The European Jews who migrated to Palestine in the later part of the nineteenth century used the title freely. The title therefore became associated with invasion and ideological threat to Islam. It therefore became an appropriate way in which to label earlier empire-building on the part of the Jews (and Christians) (Nevo, 1995). There were therefore seen to be three Zionist establishments.

The first episode of Zionism was represented by the ancient kingdoms of Judah and Israel, complete with kings, armies, priests and temples. It was built on the back of invasion and hostility and, more importantly, set up in opposition to the warnings of the (Muslim) prophets. It represents the beginnings of the blight of Judaism and its false witness to the Promise, a blight that continues to threaten the Islamic world.

The second Zionism was seen in the events of the Crusades and the plundering of Islamic civilization and spirituality. Having replaced the ancient Zionist state with the Ummah, the great civilization of Islam, the Muslims (like their ancient prophetic forebears) were set upon again in a further episode of the grand conspiracy to destroy Islam. While the Christians were the obvious perpetrators this time, nonetheless the Jews are implicated as part of the grand Judaeo-Christian Conspiracy. The fact that the Crusaders tended often not to discriminate between Jews and Muslims in their raging is a fact conveniently forgotten.

The third Zionist episode then becomes the establishment of the modern state of Israel on May 14, 1948. This was done in the face of explicit failure to appease the Arab (largely Muslim) majority in Palestine. It was finally forced by a British resolution to drive home the agenda for Israel. It was done with strong support from the Western nations, but most especially the USA. Even the role of Australia, a current US/UK ally in the 'war on Terror', was quite prominent in that the United Nations Special Committee set up to deal with the issue was chaired by Dr H.V. Evatt, the then Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and later Opposition Leader, while Leader of the Australian Labor Party. Against events like this, one can easily imagine how one with a conspiracy theory of the sort
described is likely to interpret the events of the Iraq invasion of 2003. The fact that the invaders with troops on the ground were the USA, Britain and Australia, largely Christian countries, and that those being invaded were largely Muslim, does nothing to soften the conspiracy theory.

Finally, it must he said that, for those Muslims who hold to the conspiracy theory about the Western alliance and its being intent on Islam’s destruction, there are excerpts from the Qur’an that give credence to their views. The Qur’anic account of Muhammad’s establishment of Islam in Medina contains several references to the hostility of the Jewish clans already living there. This is fairly normal stuff, of course, when someone new comes to town, however, in the context of the conspiracy theory and in the absence of a balanced education about these things, these texts can be used to give the impression that, from the beginning and in a profound way, Judaism (and, by inference, Christianity) and Islam were in fundamental opposition to each other.

Moreover, there is an ongoing more scholarly debate in Islam about the role of the so-called Isra’iliyyat literature. This largely Jewish (but also partly Christian) literature had considerable influence on the corpus of Islam’s sacred source material. For most of its history, Islam has had this presented as a positive influence, as a way in which part of the Abrahamic heritage was communicated and the prophetic influence (including of Jesus) was fortified. With the conspiracy theory, however, more negative re-considerations of Isra’iliyyat have come. For some scholars, this influence is now construed as an insidious way in which Judaism and Christianity infiltrated the purity of Islam and infected it with a disease that has eventually weakened it. So, Isra’iliyyat and, by inference Judaeo-Christianity, are blamed for everything that has gone wrong for Islam and its people, including the destruction at the hands of the Crusaders, its subsequent regression into poverty and political weakness and the loss of Palestine to the modern state of Israel. Isra’iliyyat is constructed as what went wrong at the foundation of Islam, namely that it was too accommodating of outsiders, especially Jews and Christians, and this is what has to change (Nettler, 1999). For the radical Islamist, the vehicle of change is an equally radical form of Jihad, interpreted as being synonymous with holy war. Jihad as holy war
has become so associated with the violence-oriented end of radical Islamism that it is often referred to colloquially as Jihadism, and its devotees as Jihadists.
Chapter Six: ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND THE PLACE OF JIHAD

‘Jihad’ is a notion largely misunderstood because it also has been manipulated as part of the conspiracy theory. As we have seen, for Muhammad, being a Muslim was literally about submission to Allah (God) and Allah’s plan. This faith was not to be just a cerebral thing, but had to take the form of practical action, a ‘Jihad’ (or striving) to live the kind of life that Allah had revealed in the Qur’an. Jihad is then an essential aspect of Islam.

Jihad centers on the Five Pillars of Faith, the cornerstones of the religion. Beyond the spiritual duties of prayer and the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca, the Pillars are built around some very practical duties. These include the tithing of a portion of one’s personal income to be used to support those in less fortunate economic circumstances. Like many prophets before him, Muhammad had noted that the pious sentiments of religions do not always translate into action. So, he attached to the ‘care for neighbor’ principle a practical cost, as if to sort out the sheep from the goats among his followers.

As we have seen, it was this strong sense of social justice that was one of the defining features of the first few hundred years of Islam. Among other things, it was to issue in a status and respect for women that would rarely have been found in the Christianity of the day. Similarly, in early Islamic civilization, there was a tolerance towards the followers of other religions which defied the norm to be found elsewhere. This was all, in a sense, the result of Jihad, an individual and corporate striving to live as Allah had commanded.

It was the so-called Christian Crusades that wrecked this civilization. For the average Muslim of the time, the Crusades would have appeared as nothing better than abominable acts of terror committed in the name of religion. Through this event, a seed was sown in Islam which would have seemed quite unfamiliar to most Muslims of this period. While there had always been a minority view in Islam that Jihad could include ‘violent striving’ for one’s faith, the specter of seeing their largely peaceful and enlightened civilization
desolated in such a brutal way, and in the name of religion, added weight to the view.

While *Jihad* has nothing in and of itself to do with warfare, it has been used periodically in the past 1,000 years to stir up religious fervor in order to wage war against purported 'enemies of Islam'. There have been and are today those in Islam who are able to wrap a theology around their history and so re-establish that the ongoing supreme enemy is the 'Western Crusader'. Currently, no 'enemy' would represent this better than the largely Christian, wealthy and supposedly imperialistic USA, with Israel, its puppet, playing the role of a surrogate US nation established right in the middle of the heart of Islam. In this religious context, Osama Bin Laden is just one piece of the puzzle. More crucial is the belief, buttressed by a very cogent and socio-historically grounded theology that suggests that the establishment of Israel had nothing to do with compassion for a displaced people or atonement for the sins of the Third Reich. It was, and remains, a conniving scheme by which the old Crusaders could plant a fortress in the middle of Muslim territory and so, bit by bit, wear out and finally eradicate Islam.

While there was always an element of Islam rather disposed to the violent interpretation of *Jihad* (including especially the Shi’a faction in Islam's early history), the interpretation intensified with the Crusades. As illustrated above, the Crusades feature heavily in any interpretation of Islamic reaction, and over the issue of *Jihad* it is no different. Shatzmiller (1993), in introducing the work of Elisseeff in the former's edited volume, speaks of the rise of the concept of *Jihad* after the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders in 1099CE. Nur ad-Din was the first person to organize a Muslim counter-attack. There, the notion of *Jihad* became the embodiment of Muslim devotion, and Nur ad-Din spoke of himself as the truly holy warrior and martyr in the cause of Islam. Shatzmiller (1993) says:

> Under the Crusaders' impact, Muslim society had to discard many outlooks, and new attitudes had to be adopted. The Muslims needed to put their house in order, but that process implied more than merely military and political unification; it also required an inner rejuvenation. A new belligerence was inspired by the old Jihad ideology, which received new faces and new applications. (p. x)
Elisseeff (1993) seems actually to imply that the notion of a violent or warrior-like *Jihad* was initiated in the West, thanks to the Christian Crusaders. The Crusades therefore became known as the ‘Western *Jihad*’, when Muslims saw the similarity between the notion of *Jihad* (striving for religion), as they had understood it, and the religiously-motivated striving that seemed to underpin the Crusades. Nur ad-Din, the Muslim to dub the Crusades as a Western *Jihad*, actually used the Christians’ devotion to their bloody cause to try to inspire Muslims to do the same. In an ironic way, while classing them as infidels, he seemed actually to admire the Christians for being so dedicated to recapturing Jerusalem and coming to ‘free their fellow Christians from Muslim domination’ (as they were told). He used this to contrast the relative slackness of Muslim spirituality, as he saw it. Muslims had become too complacent with their cosy civilization and the Christians had taken advantage of that. He asserted that Muslims had been lured into a particularly weak form of *Jihad* by overly liberal and spiritual forms of Sufism (cf. al-Ghazzali, 1991). As it had been practiced in the early Islamic communities, therefore, *Jihad* was seen to be part of the complacency that allowed the Crusaders to wreak so much damage. Muslims had been ‘asleep at the wheel’ and their conceptions of *Jihad* were part of the problem. The true *Jihad* was said to be warlike; it was a case of fighting even to the death for one’s faith. Nur ad-Din actually exploited a Christian spirituality of martyrdom to make this point, a point he saw expressed perfectly in the Christian Crusader’s dedication to the cause, even unto death. He urged that Muslims should get away from their soft spirituality, obsession with scholarship and cosy communal living and be similarly devoted to holy war in the way of the Christians. Thus began in earnest the era of *Jihad* as ‘holy war’.

From this time, it has become difficult to distinguish between the more spiritually oriented *Jihad* and the warlike one. Even some of the former great characters, like al-Ghazzali, was quoted as having been critical of the laxness of Islamic civilization prior to the Crusades. While al-Ghazzali was clearly more concerned with spiritual laxness and urged the people to remember their call to the great Promise (expressed as *Jihad al-akbar* = the major striving), he nonetheless also spoke of *Jihad al-asghar* (=the minor striving), which was the struggle against the infidel. From everything we know of al-Ghazzali, it is
hard to imagine he would ever have sanctioned violence except in self-defence, however, his name became partly associated with legitimating the desirability of Holy War.

Apart from his concern with spiritual laxness, al-Ghazzali, together with many other prominent Muslims in the period prior to the Crusades, expressed concern at the many divisions that had developed in Islamic civilization. This fact also came to be blamed for the destruction of this civilization at the hands of the Christians. As well as connoting Holy War, Jihad also came to imply something about the unity of Islam. Part of the re-establishment of Islam as an assemblage of holy warriors implied the need for the various factions to forget their differences and fight together in the common cause against the infidel, being prepared for martyrdom in the course of this holy war. In short, the concept of Jihad became a major tool in the campaign to re-unite and re-ignite Islam after the destruction wrought by the Crusades. Eliseeff (1993) writes:

Ali as-Sulami saw only one solution which could save the Muslim provinces, the call to Jihad. Two preliminary phases were necessary. The first phase consisted of a 'moral rearmament' designed to end the 'spiritual decline' which had reduced the Muslims to their current situation... The second phase consisted of regrouping the Islamic forces by putting an end to the disaffection which had enabled the Crusaders to become so firmly established in the Orient ... Only when this psychological climate had been created, could the military Jihad commence ... (p. 164)

The twenty-eight years of Nur ad-Din's reign, 1146-1174, constitute a decisive phase in the evolution of the Jihad conscience in Syria ... The classical ideology of the Jihad appeared in all its strength during the course of his reign. Among the fundamental ideas which as-Sulami originally expressed in the first part of the 12th century and Nur ad-Din further emphasized, was the re-glorification of the Talab ash-Shahada - the search for martyrdom — which became the most important element of his propaganda. This talab turned the Muslim who died fighting a shahad into a martyr who had fallen on the battlefield, thus securing access to Paradise. The second and third objectives were new and instilled a certain vigor
into the movement. The first was to ensure the Holiness of Jerusalem and of Palestine, an objective implying the extermination of the rulers of the Latin orient ...
The second was the re-establishment of the political unity of Islam in the Near East. (pp. 167-168)

Taji-Farouki (1995) offers the case of the Islamic Liberation Party (ILP) as a modern and extreme example of how the concept of Jihad continues to be used as a tool for warlike zeal. It is part of the revolutionary Islamic Jihad-Palestine movement, proposing that a united caliphate should be established representing one worldwide Islamic state. It is merciless in its opposition to the West, in particular to Israel and the USA. It uses Qur’an 3:28 as proof that it is forbidden for any Muslim to maintain so much as friendly relations with unbelievers (= non-Muslims):

An unbeliever (Kafir) is anyone who follows a religion other than Islam ...
Idolators, Jews, Buddhists, Christians and communists are exactly the same in this respect — all will be consigned eternally to Hellfire on the Day of Judgement. (p. 40)

It ignores entirely other references from the Qur’an that endorse Jews and Christians as ‘(fellow) People of the Book’.

Taji-Farouki (1995) continues:

…the party sees Israel as a ‘Colonialist bridgehead’. It holds that the American and European unbelievers created it as a base through which to perpetuate their control and economic exploitation of Muslim lands. Israel also allegedly safeguards their vital interests there in the longer term, by guaranteeing the failure of any attempt to reunify these lands within an Islamic framework. Accordingly, it condemns Israel as a ‘cancer’ in the heart of the Muslim world, and a ‘poisoned dagger plunged deep into its breast’ ...

The creation of Israel allegedly represented the consummation of a plan devised some two centuries previously. However, the inspiration behind it derived from a much earlier period - that of the Crusades. The episode of the Crusades occupies an important place in popular Muslim consciousness, and has assumed paradigmatic
proportions in contemporary Islamic ideologies. The Palestinian Islamist groups find it particularly relevant to their circumstances: they uphold it as the epitome of unbeliefdom’s unprovoked aggression against Islam, and the ultimate Muslim triumph. ...

... the Crusaders' malice remained concealed in their hearts, till they disclosed it when they succeeded in doing away with the Ottoman Caliphal state and then establishing a Jewish state in Palestine....

According to this, a line of continuity is posited between the historical Crusades and European Colonialism which is construed as a strategy for tearing up the Muslim world as revenge for the ultimate failure of the Crusades. The party finds evidence of the continuing American and European 'Crusader mentality' in remarks... attributed to Generals Allenby and Gouraud during the period of the First World War, and in recent comments in the world press to the effect that Islam is the West's primary enemy, following the demise of Communism. ...

The Christian motive for the creation of Israel can thus be traced back to the Crusader wars. (pp. 40-41)

The ILP urges Muslims to destroy Israel through Jihad, described in its literature as the 'Islamic option', a holy war option sanctioned by God:

Israel, then, is a doomed nation: the Jews' fate is sealed, for no reason other than their Jewishness. Nothing can repel this destiny or avert God's wrath from them. Presently, it brands all Jews as 'enemies of God' who are contaminating Palestine' it makes no attempt to differentiate between... Zionist and non Zionist Jews... As frustration with the slow pace of the peace process mounts, Palestinian Muslims are increasingly willing to place their confidence in the Islamic option. (Taji-Farouki, 1995: 53)

In similar vein, Nusse (1993) takes us inside the mind of HAMAS, another Islamist group, this time with a powerful political front as well as a sophisticated and quite
convincing theological apparatus. The HAMAS ideology is a particularly potent form of Jihadic fundamentalism, apparently endorsed by a majority of Palestinians in open elections held in 2005. Central to its ideology is the destruction of Israel, held to be the supreme symbol of the West’s avowed intention to destroy Islam. Any moderate Muslim, including among the Palestinian brotherhood, who associates with Jews or Christians is complicit in the West’s grand intention and so becomes an enemy of ‘true Islam’ and able to be targeted along with their Western friends. This accounts for much of the tension in the Middle East and within Islam generally. As troublesome as its opposition to the West is the oppositional difference to be found within Islam. This became particularly obvious in the ten year Iran/Iraq war, where Iran, employing a revived Shi’a Islamism pitted itself against Iraq which, at the time, was essentially a Western ally, propped up by the USA. Ironically, Saddam Hussein, the US-backed leader of Iraq would, of course, go on to become the most hated object of US sentiments a few years later. In a further irony, it is the destruction of the essentially Westernized buffer state of Iraq that has spawned a newfound anti-US bridgehead in Iran. The tensions within Islam are also apparent in the oppositional difference between HAMAS and the other main Palestinian front, FATAH, the political movement that sits behind the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Unrest at the prolonged state of seemingly futile negotiations over the Palestinian question has led an increasing number of Palestinians to throw their support behind the more radical option in HAMAS, with an ideology designed to bring about a return to ‘True Islam’, including the restoration of a Palestinian state, at any cost including wholesale destruction of any opposition, Muslim or non-Muslim.

‘True Islam’ is what all Muslims must return to, according to HAMAS. It is conceived to be that rule of God (Hakimyyah Allah) that characterized the original Muslim communities. Gone are any sentiments about these early communities being sites of tolerance, peace and interfaith acceptance. Gone are the conceptions of Shari’a Law as being directed to human rights and social justice. The original Islam is held to be a place where Muslims ruled with an iron fist, where other faiths were not accommodated and where women knew their place of subservience and held to it. Shari’a was the law that
ensured the rule of God was maintained. Where alternative forms of early Islam are acknowledged, they are roundly criticized for not being true to Islam and being responsible for the deterioration of Islam that occurred via the Crusades. HAMAS’s unapologetic goal of restoring true Islam justifies the obliteration of Israel and the West and any Muslim leadership considered Jahili (not based on the Qur’an). Exacerbated by the defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967, the complete focus on the establishment of the Hakimiyah Allah was then on the successful imposition of a Palestinian state in Israel, an event known as the Intifadah:

...the Jews (are) 'the people upon whom God's anger came (= in the Qur’an). ... God's anger came upon them because they did not follow properly the religion He had sent them, but killed his prophets and distorted the original godly Jewish religion. They have, especially tried to harm and dominate the Islamic Ummah because this Ummah is the 'new international force bringing an authentic civilizing and godly programme to mankind,'

...Muslims are warned not to take Jews or Christians as friends because such people are 'friends only for each other' (Qur’an 5,51) ... they seek corruption in the land ... Jews tried to harm the Muslim community and its leader (Muhammad) ... Jewish rabbis strove to introduce confusion among Muslims by pretending to be converted to Islam, without having done so 'in their hearts' (= those who brought the Isra'iliyat to Islam). ...All these allegations are presented in the framework of the struggle of Jewish tribes against the (original and pure) Muslim community in Medina.

The evolution of these accounts into an international conspiracy theory was only possible in the context of 20th century world-wide communication. Nevertheless, these developments do not explain fully the major departure from the traditional Islamic stereotype of the Jews. The image of wretchedness amid humiliation which used to characterize the Jews in traditional Islamic thought, based on the strength and confidence of Islamic civilization until at least the 15th century, has been superseded in many modern Islamic writings on Zionism, Israel and Jewry by that
of the powerful Jew, seriously threatening both the Muslim community and the rest of the world. In terms different from the traditional descriptions, Jews are described as the 'Jewish Satan', the 'bloodsucker of mankind', 'racists', 'criminals of the tribe of Zion' and 'Nazis' ... This change in conceptions of Jews reflects modern European anti-Semitism. (Nusse, 1993: 102-104)

According to Nusse (1993), HAMAS claims to distinguish between 'Zionism' and 'Judaism'. Judaism is considered to be a 'religion that stipulates racism and hostility towards others in its books and incites falsely to take away Palestine under the slogan of the Holy Land'. (page 105) Zionism, on the other hand, 'represents the entity of the enemy' (Israel) and is 'responsible for the transformation of Jewish thought into a reality that is perceptible today in Palestine.' (page 105) Zionists are those Jews who want to realize their religious thought on Muslim soil. The theology that sits behind HAMAS Islamicizes history, assuming that Abraham was the first Muslim and, together with Ishmael, built the first mosque. This effectively subverts any Israeli claim to be the descendants of those with historical claim. The uncompromising goal is the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine. Here, HAMAS departs from an Islamic tradition that has not been strong on physical land; indeed, this has more regularly been seen as part of the Islamic critique of Zionism. HAMAS, however, has borrowed the land theology from the Jews in the notion of an Islamic state being fundamental to the fulfillment of the Promise:

For the Islamists, the question of Palestine is also pro-eminent in shaping the future of the Islamic Ummah: the Palestinian Jihad has had positive consequences for the Islamic awakening. Control over Palestine announces control over the whole world.

...Islamists reject the legitimacy of any decisions taken by the existing international organizations and do not expect not expect any support from them ... not only is the whole world order allied against Islam, but the Ummah itself is fragmented and does not play an active part in shaping the current world order. ...Arab countries fail to see that Jewish mass migration threatens them as well by the extent to which it strengthens Israel. Palestinians alone have to pay the price for fighting the
common enemy and attempting the transformation of the international order. ... Confronted with this perceived isolation of their struggle on all levels, the only means to reach the proclaimed goal ... is Jihad.

Any alternative way of finding a solution, such as an international peace conference, is rejected: 'such a conference would merely place unbelievers in the position of arbiters over Islamic territory. The Qur'anic verse quoted in support makes evident the ease with which certain texts and ideas can be used to express contemporary problems and feelings: 'but neither the Jews nor the Christians will be pleased with you until you follow their religion. Say: God's guidance is the real guidance. And if you follow their desires, after what has come to you as knowledge, you will not have God as either helper or protector.' The warning of the Qur'an against the tricks amid errors of enemies is easily transplanted to the present defensive situation of the Arab-Islamic world. Any Palestinian concession to the interests of the Israeli state is equated with apostasy through time acceptance of Western (Jewish and Christian) standards....The Intifadah, then, is the only truly Islamic way of winning back Palestine.

The link between Jihad and the purification of Muslim society is founded in the necessity of Islamic consciousness, and widens the notion of Jihad beyond simply military conflict. Intellectual elites are called to contribute ... by writing books and article. ... The role of women is emphasised as they give birth to new Muslims and prepare them for the Jihad. (Nusse, 1993: 109-113)

In this context, one of the key intellectual contributors to Islamism is Muhammad al-Ashmawi, Professor of Letters at Alexandria University. His work (cf. Nettler 1995), on the surface seemingly more moderate than many of his peers, could actually have potential to do more long-term harm to the sibling relationship between Islam, Judaism and Christianity than most. He appears to base his case on the need for Islam to rid itself of its political face and return to its true spiritual roots. While blaming Judaeo-Christian influence, and specifically the Isra'iliyyat, for infecting Islam with its current political agenda, he appears to exonerate Jews and Christians on the basis that they do not have
the benefit of the final manifestation that God revealed to Muhammad, a manifestation that clarified once and for all that the Promise was always to be understood in spiritual rather than political terms.

Because Jews and Christians do not have the benefit of this manifestation, they can be forgiven for clinging to their more primitive interpretations. He draws a heavy line between Islam and Judaism, in particular, in declaring that the latter was never intended to be more than the legislative and institutional force that many Muslims see today. While not blaming Jews and, by inference, Christians personally, he nonetheless relegates their religions to such an inferior status that it becomes inconceivable that they could have anything positive to offer to Islam. Hence, the entire history of Jewish and Christian influence on Islam is re-interpreted as being regrettable and in need of urgent redressing.

In trying to explain what has gone wrong with Islam and why it is imperative that Muslims unite to return Islam to its true roots, al-Ashmawi is quoted as saying:

*Isra’iliyat is ... the ‘Israelite thought’ which entered Islam in spite of its being completely alien to Islam ... Islamic thought has most certainly followed in the footsteps of Judaism, without being aware of the differences between the essence of Moses’s mission and the essence of Muhammad’s mission ... and that the former is a legislating mission and the latter a mission of mercy and ethics ... Confusing the foundation of the two missions and directing Islam in the way of Judaism is to alter the basis and nature of (the Islamic) mission, to corrupt it, and to repudiate it in order to make it adopt the colouration of the Isra’iliyat and the forms of Judaism.*

(Nettler 1995: 179-181)

The problem with Islam is, therefore, its ‘Judaization’, a problem that goes back to Islam’s foundations when it allowed the foreign influences of Judaism and Christianity to sully its mission. While one does not find the kind of vilification in al-Ashmawi that one finds in so much revisionist Islamic scholarship of the day, nonetheless there are none who revise the orthodox history more dramatically. Under al-Ashmawi, even some of Islam’s own traditional sacred heroes are effectively written out of the script. The inevitable logic would seem to be that neither Moses nor Jesus can be seen any longer as
Muslims in any sense, nor should they be allowed any influence. They become little more than unwitting functionaries responsible for wholly imperfect religious forms. One could only conclude that they, along with their imperfect traditions, must be expunged from Islamic thought and tradition if Islam is to return to its allegedly 'true roots'. Under the guise of an apparently moderate and non-punitive re-assessment of the history, al-Ashmawi has actually provided the theological rationale for the obliteration of Islam's long-held-to-be siblings, be it in terms of revisionist history or political solutions for today. For those who want to take it so far, he provides the perfect justification for the extermination of the modern state of Israel and for wholesale Jihad against the West.

Such Islamist views are naturally challenging to Westerners whose identity is wrapped around one of the traditions within Judaeo-Christianity. No less are they challenging to the average Muslim, however, who would find them unacceptably revisionist to the point of inventing a history and theology that has simply never existed. These views, however, are held by an increasing portion of those who describe themselves as Muslim, no doubt many of them with sincerity. Returning to the theme of education being the way through the morass created by this revisionist Islamism, it must be said that an education that took its charter of personal development and social education seriously would deal with these views, sensitively with their commonalities but robustly and boldly with their differences. Indeed, one is inclined to say that grappling seriously with the knowledge, insights and claims of Islam could well impel a more profound understanding of their tradition than the Judaeo-Christian Westerner would find anywhere else. As an important ancillary objective, it might well instil a greater appreciation of and sympathy towards Islam and its followers, and towards the huge contribution that Islam has made to the Judaeo-Christian West.

The fact that a religion of the import of Islam should employ the key heroes of Judaeo-Christianity to challenge its own institutional tenets is not to be rejected lightly. Especially when one considers that much of the critique provided by Islam is to be found within the Judaeo-Christian tradition itself (eg. Natarei Karta within Judaism, the Reformation within Christianity), the Islamic critique might well be taken as an
opportunity for Judaeo-Christian Westerners to ponder on the integrity and authenticity of many of their own claims. This would be a noble and mighty contribution of education, not only in fostering an appreciation of an important alternative set of views in multi-faith societies and so fostering enhanced dialogue, but also in deepening understanding of their own broader faith and cultural tradition. This would be the kind of education bound to make a difference. It is difference that we want this book to make and, in that quest, we now turn to putting forward the case for the contemporary importance of Islam to addressing a range of those societal, environmental and religious issues that threaten our world’s peace, sustainability and security. Islam, that is so often couched as one of the problems, could well be in fact one of the solutions. This can happen only if its true reforming power can be released and its essence understood anew by non-Muslim and Muslim alike.
Chapter Seven: THE CONTEMPORARY IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM

As we have seen, in spite of a stereotype that presents Islam as reactionary and fighting many of yesterday's battles, a balanced appraisal shows it to be a vital faith that was ahead of its times in its origins and that has potential to contribute more than most faiths to twenty-first century imperatives. As we have also seen, Islam was founded on a reform movement and was a thousand years ahead of the West in addressing issues normally associated with the Western Enlightenment. Its earliest civilizations were characterized by remarkable levels of intercultural and interfaith tolerance, as well as universal forms of education, healthcare and welfare.

Of greatest import in Islam's foundational ethos were its principles of equity and fairness, many of them safeguarded by its unique law, the Sharia. Islam developed one of the world's first structures for ensuring the protection of minority groups and some of the world's first laws for ensuring the rights of women. The recovery and restoration of these features of Islam is an urgent task, for the purposes of both historical accuracy and global harmony. Understanding Islam as a very twenty-first century faith has potential to address one of the contemporary world's sorest points and, at the same time, to release the energies of one of the world's most potent forces to work with its other forces in solving rather than exacerbating the twenty-first century's major challenges. These major challenges will be outlined below, together with Islam's potentially authentic responses to them.

In contrast with late nineteenth century sociological views that religion would not survive once scientific and social scientific knowledge dominated our thinking, religion and issues of faith are in fact as prominent as any issue in the twenty-first century. Indeed, they are issues with potential to make or break civilization as we know it and so interfaith dialogue built on mutual respect and inclusivity is more important than ever. Islam is ironically often perceived as an adversary of interfaith dialogue, while a study of its origins and foundational ethos would suggest it should be the opposite. Indeed, as Talbi (1995) shows, there are few if any religions with such claims to be a leader in the field dealing positively with matters of religious difference. In fighting against the very
negative stereotypes of Islam that are promoted by both non-Muslims and Muslims whose understanding of their faith is skewed and misrepresentative, Talbi (2002) argues strenuously for what he sees as the authentic Islam, a faith that was always ahead of its time and so should be at the forefront of addressing and solving contemporary challenges. Far from the view promoted by the radicals and fundamentalists that Islam is the only faith and that those who do not conform to it are damned, Talbi (2002) goes back to the Qur'an to show that the authentic Islamic belief is that all revealed religion is equal in status so long as it is faithful to its essential charter to be a spiritual and ethical force in the world. He cites the prophet Muhammad in suggesting that the Qur'an is 'God's Banquet' to which all are invited but none is compelled to attend. Indeed, to attend through compulsion is not to attend in the way God intends. One can only truly attend if one is free and willing to do so.

On this basis, there should be no Islamic claims made towards exclusivity or being a sole pathway to salvation. For Talbi, these are the beliefs that cause so much strife in a world where faiths intersect and interact in ways that were not so common in the past. In a world of mass communication, rapid transport and instantaneous intercultural exchange, the world needs faith positions that are attuned to difference and pluriformity, and so impel dialogue, understanding and peace between peoples. For Talbi, Islam should be at the forefront of such faiths, rather than 'dragging the chain' in the way of the popular stereotype. As we have seen, the central importance of Talbi's scholarship is in the fact that he draws on the Qur'an, which is so often misquoted and misrepresented by the radicals and fundamentalists, to project his view of Islam as a 'best fit' faith tradition for the issues confronting the contemporary world:

"...the dialogue with all men of all kinds of faiths and ideologies is from now and onwards strictly and irreversibly unavoidable ... Man's fulfillment is in community and relationship. And this is written in the Qur'an ..."

If this can be admitted ... we can think of the whole of mankind as a brotherly 'community of communities' – or God's Family as the Hadith states – in which everyone has the right to be different, to be accepted, and fully respected in his
chosen differences. To respect others in their chosen and assumed differences — not just to tolerate them on point of pain — is finally to respect God’s Will. (Talbi, 1995: 61)

Talbi’s (2002; Talbi & Jarczyk, 2002) quest is to re-establish the ethics of tolerance and inter-faith dialogue that, for him, lie at the heart of the Islamic tradition and are the key to Islam’s ongoing relevance in the pluriform world of the twenty-first century. Talbi’s theology is vital therefore to those whose commitment is to an Islam that can only be understood as an inextricable part of the tripartite ‘People of the Book’ tradition, to Judaism, Christianity and Islam as a mutually inclusive trinity of Semitic monotheism and all that it has spawned. The true believer, Jew, Christian or Muslim, will therefore be committed to dialogue with fellow ‘People of the Book’ in order to understand more fully the totality of the tradition, and therefore come to know fully the God who lies behind the complete tradition. Claims to superiority of one of the religions of the Book over the others, be it from Judaism, Christianity, Islam or, least of all, one of the denominations within any of those religions, is for Talbi another sign of ignorance and indeed lack of true faith.

Talbi is highly critical, therefore, of some forms of modern inter-faith ecumenism that seem to him to be none too subtly mere indirect efforts at proselytizing. He singles out the contemporary Roman Catholic approach to dialogue for his harshest treatment in this regard, not because it is the worst representation of Christian proselytizing but largely because he expects so much more of the Roman tradition of Christianity, granted the common intellectual thread between it and Islam. For Talbi, failure to deal with difference and its legitimacy simply perpetuates the tensions that have torn so many generations apart around the divisions between Jewish, Christian and Islamic belief. As far as Talbi is concerned, God’s plan was always intended to be unfolded in many stages, with, at its centre, Judaism, Christianity and Islam as a troika of beliefs, complementary to each other rather than competitive. Only through the most profound acceptance of this truth can age-old misunderstanding and violence, including the forces that threaten our civilization today, be turned around.
Islamic scholarship of Taibi’s species is at the forefront of challenging the relative ease with which radical and fundamentalist Islamic agendas have become the Islamic stereotype, something that Taibi sees as betraying profound ignorance about Islam. Furthermore, the ignorance is all pervasive, infecting both the non-Muslim and Muslim worlds and exacerbating tensions and conflicts that would be unnecessary if this ignorance did not exist. Above all, the ignorance, and the resultant tension between Islam and the West, is robbing the world of one of the forces that could assist most effectively in dealing with twenty-first century challenges. The theology of a Taibi, with its capacity to interpret anew the most sacred of Islamic texts, is therefore of profound importance not only to the future of Islam and to a twenty-first century challenged by Islam, but to twenty-first century progress itself.

Taibi’s approach to dealing with difference, and his belief that Islam should be a leader in such matters, illustrates the importance of theology in such a quest. In contrast with the optimism of nineteenth-century social science that the ethnocentrism characteristic of the past would give way to intercultural understanding and acceptance as modern societies formed around difference rather than homogeneity and as modern forms of education took hold, the reality of the twentieth-century was that some of the vilest forms of ethnocentrism and xenophobia spawned among some of the world’s most diverse societies, invariably impelled by their better educated populations. The Holocaust resulted from centuries-old European anti-Semitism that became progressively worse as Jewish populations became more embedded in European societies’ infrastructure and as educational forms in Germany and elsewhere reacted to the neo-liberal sentiments anticipated by nineteenth-century social science. Similarly, South African Apartheid represented a particularly harsh and cruel reaction to the issue of racial difference by the better educated but powerful minority population.

While these particular aberrations were eventually corrected at great human cost, the twenty-first century is hardly characterized by instances of outstanding success in dealing with intra or inter-societal difference. Not only are there the stark examples of Jerusalem, Sudan, Somalia and Sri Lanka but, moreover, in the heartlands of Europe, North America
and Australia, there persist issues of alienation, lack of educational attainment and healthcare access, and sometimes blatant and violent forms of victimization meted out to minority populations. These latter states, by and large, pride themselves on their social inclusion policies that are often institutionalized in their laws but, nonetheless, spawn endemic problems in dealing fairly with matters of difference. In Europe, there are problems around immigration and the rights and incorporation of minority communities, including invariably Muslim populations; in the United States, there are ingrained issues around the provision of justice and fair treatment to Black, Indigenous and Hispanic populations and, in Australia, there are similar issues of access, equity and justice for Aboriginal and non-native English speaking peoples. It seems that we are better at formulating social inclusion policies and anti-discrimination laws than in effecting the ideals that lie behind them. There is a lesson here for contemporary societal planning that we need more than sentiment; we need highly practicable models of how to deal with difference and so to effect social inclusion.

Once again, the popular image of Islam is that it would be the last ideology that could be called on to address practical issues of dealing with difference. This image, fuelled by the radicals and fundamentalists, is of an extremely intolerant movement, bent on internal conformity and exclusion of outsiders. As we have seen, in a Hamas newsletter (cf. Nusse, 1993), the blind cleric, Yassin, is quoted as saying that Muslims must keep to themselves for non-Muslims will always conspire against Muslims and try to destroy them. Meanwhile, as also seen, Muhammad al-Ashmawi, Humanities Professor at the University of Alexandria, says that the current problems that Islam faces can all be traced back to its own overly tolerant origins. His thesis is that Islam is such a distinctive calling that Muslims cannot mix with others without their devotion to God being diluted. Hence, the inclusion of the followers of other religions in Islam's early cities in the Middle East and the pride with which Muslim leaders hailed the intercultural tolerance of their Southern European civilizations in the Middle Ages were misguided actions that have ended up weakening Islam (cf. Nettler, 1995). Yassin's solution was to eradicate non-Islam as far as possible, with special focus on Israel and the United States. Al-Ashmawi's solution is more peaceable but equally xenophobic; it is that Muslims should simply
retreat into their own religious haven and set up structures that ensure their faith is not sullied by mixing in wider populations.

The most interesting feature of positions like those of Yassin and al-Ashmawi is that they are so clearly reactions to a very different Islam from the one they seek to promote. The very different Islam is the one that Talbi regards as the authentic version, and Talbi has history on his side. The testimony for both the earliest civilizations of Islam and of the Islam that settled in Southern Europe centuries later is clear that, wherever it went, Islam revolutionized social mechanisms for dealing with difference. The most cherished and revered aspect of this tradition of institutionalizing tolerance is in the concept of *dhimmi*, those minority communities that were incorporated into Islamic states in a way that gave them a special place and made them part and parcel of the total community. As we noted above, generations of Jewish and Christian communities in particular lived and prospered within Muslim worlds as *dhimmi* communities in ways that were far from replicated when the situation was reversed.

As also noted above, there is debate in the scholarly world about the merits and de-merits of 'dhimmitude' in Islam. Some views are more clearly based on a pure interpretation of the historical source material, while others are more clearly influenced by recent events which have soured estimations around the genuineness of Muslim claims to tolerance. There are also appraisals that tend unfairly to compare and contrast the *dhimmi* tradition with modern standards (of policy and law if not practice) of social equity and justice. In the end, historical context and human frailty notwithstanding, *dhimmi* in Islam deserves its reputation as a ground-breaking social attitude and practice, relative to its times. The important thing to note about this Muslim social ethic was that it came directly from the early Muslim community's understanding of the will of Muhammad about matters of dealing with difference and especially minority communities. As such, the injunction towards tolerance was seen to have come directly from God and to be a defining feature of the model community that was established in God's name. It was part and parcel of being God's People that difference should be respected in this way. To be Muslim was to be fair and to be just, in the way enjoined by God and interpreted by the prophets, and

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finally by the last and greatest of the prophets, Muhammad.

History and tradition are with Talbi and stand as witness against the jaundiced Islam of Yassin, al-Ashmawi and the Islamists. On this basis, no religion is more inappropriately exploited as an instrument of intolerance than Islam. Indeed, granted the persistent problems in the contemporary world of dealing with difference, a vigorous recovery of Talbi’s authentic Islam would seem to have potential to show how difference can not only be tolerated but celebrated. It was through the institutionalizing of acceptance of difference that early Islam became so strong, that followers of all religions came to have loyalty to the ideology that was guiding their common destiny, and that allowed those remarkable civilizations, such as to be found in Toledo, Cordoba and Granada some four centuries after the birth of Islam, to spawn such a surfeit of groundbreaking intellectual, cultural, scientific and theological advances.

One of the challenges for modern Islamic scholarship therefore is the re-capturing of the story of Islam as one of social reform. This entails more than merely recovering the story of old but rather reviving the spirit of the tradition so that it can be released to be a similar force for intellectual, cultural, scientific and theological advancement in the twenty-first century. Granted the depth of skepticism about Islam that abounds in the early years of the century, this might seem a futile dream. This makes it ever more important that the authentic message of Islam be promoted in educational, political and media circles and that those in the West especially join forces with those courageous Muslims, like Talbi, who risk so much in speaking out against the radical and fundamentalist interpretation. Other courageous voices include those of Yahya (2002) who says, as cited above, “Muslims must recapture the true spirit of Islam, and reclaim it from those who have harmed its integrity and honour.” (p. 13), and Soroush (2000) who, in reference to his own critique of Islam as it has developed in recent times, says, “A religion that is oblivious to human rights (including ... freedom and justice) is not tenable in the modern world.” (p. 143)

As Soroush (2000) suggests, a radical approach to ensuring human rights is another of the prime challenges for the contemporary global community. It will be a vital notion and a
major ongoing challenge to find structured and effective ways in which whole populations might gain access to the goods of a society. Exponential population growth, together with the strong trend in the twentieth century that saw wealth and resources distributed increasingly unevenly, will make this challenge a particularly potent one. Granted its foundational ethos as an institution that promoted and developed practical means for dispensing radical forms of equity and justice, an authentic Islam, conscious of and loyal to its origins, would seem to have a vital part to play in showing how this challenge might be met.

As with the other features of its social reform, Islam would seem to offer much inspirational thought, together with practical mechanisms, for a twenty-first century charged with the imperative of lifting levels of educational access and equity, nationally and internationally. Islam’s scholarship was unique in its combination of the elite with the universal. It was, at one and the same time, the boldest, most advanced and most effective scholarship in the world as well as in its attempts to make education accessible to all members of the community. This combination is the effective education that modern societies seek and need, an education of sufficient quality to inspire society’s most capable scientists and social scientists to address and solve its challenges while, at the same time, providing an education capable of lifting those with the least of life’s chances to new levels of achievement. Islam would seem uniquely placed to model this kind of education but, as with the other features identified its potential to contribute in such a way relies on its original spirit being recovered and revived.

A particularly pertinent example of the ways in which the original inspiration of Islam can be restored to have impact on its modern re-construction is seen in the women’s movement within Islam. The modelling of women’s rights in the early Islamic communities is being used increasingly by this movement to reform much of the present-day practice that brings popular disrepute to Islam (Hirsi Ali, 2006, 2007). There is increasing boldness among Muslim women in taking the case to repressive chauvinistic conceptions and harsh political regimes that, in spite of what has often become popular social and political rhetoric, the hard evidence is that Islam is the last religion that should
be used routinely to oppress women. Since the early 1990s, there has been, across the Islamic world, a movement of revival of women’s rights among devout Muslim women, rapidly becoming one of its many quieter revolutions designed to withstand the assault of the radicals and fundamentalists (Ahmed, 1992, 2006; Ebadi, 2006; Eickelman, 1998; Grieve, 2006; Haddad and Esposito, 1998; Memissi, 1975, 2006; Wadud, 1999, 2006, 2006a).

The issue of women’s rights in Islam is predictably the most controversial of the many features of modern revisionist scholarship in and about Islam (cf. Ahmed, 1992, 2006; Haddad and Esposito, 1998; Armstrong, 2001). What is probably less debatable is that the issue was taken up more seriously in early Islam than in any religious establishment before its time and that early crafting of Shari’a reflected this priority. As with so many other areas of social reform, Islam represents a positive moment in the liberation and equality of women and, yet again, this came centuries before, and in turn influenced, similar reforms in the West.

Leila Ahmed (1992, 2006) offers an informed and balanced view of the issue of women in Islam, acknowledging some apparent inconsistencies in the testimony provided by the sources. In spite of some source material that suggests chauvinism, she maintains that the overall message about women to be taken from the Qur’an and the testimony of the original Ummah is that the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings is the overwhelming ethical imperative to be found in them. The importance of her work in the face of the radical and fundamentalist position is in illustrating that, while it is plausible that the hierarchical interpretation can be held, it is nonetheless based on a misunderstanding of the essence of the Islamic reform.

According to Ahmed, the dominance of the hierarchical view throughout much of Islamic history owes more to the forces that gained control over the centuries than to a true understanding of the reform that Islam implied. Especially when one takes account of the social context and heritage, the innovation to be found in the Qur’an and Ummah is in the exhortatory discourse around the moral and spiritual equality of all people, including between women and men. Ahmed regards the interrelationships between Islam and the
West, emanating essentially from the colonial era of the nineteenth century, as crucial to the recovery of this essential voice of Islam. Among other things, it is forcing Islam to reassess the role of women and so, in her view, to re-discover that it was in fact Islam, not the West, that first proposed the equality of women and enshrined in its own laws a level of rights, including to inherit and own property, that would only come to the West a thousand years later.

In similar fashion, Amina Wadud (1999, 2006, 2006a) asserts that the issue of women is the central social issue to be found in the Qur'an and that the entire testimony of the Ummah was aimed at reversing the beliefs of the surrounding tribes that women were somehow less than human. She infers that Judaism and Christianity did not always help in this regard because their stories of the origins of the world prioritized the creation of man and left woman as an apparent afterthought. In contrast, she points out that the Qur’anic expression of creation, while similarly constructed, carefully presents man and woman as a single pair, with a picture of perfect equality in the Garden of Eden and equivocal sharing of guilt when the forbidden fruit is taken. Most crucial to Islam is that man cannot be created in God’s image, as Judaism and Christianity would have it, because Allah is beyond being personalized, least of all gendered, in the way to be found in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. For Wadud, this de-gendering of God and the assertion of equality and equivalent rights for women is central to the reform that Islam represents. Like Ahmed, Wadud believes that the current struggle to recover the voice of women is crucial to no less than a recovery of Islam itself.

Ahmed and Wadud are just two of a growing chorus of voices being raised by Muslim women about the role of women in Islam. Others include: Fatima Mernissi (1975, 2006), the Moroccan sociologist and author of Beyond the Veil; Majida Rizvi, the first female Judge of the High Court of Pakistan and later Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women, most famous for her leading the successful opposition to the Hadood Ordinance in Pakistan that all but stripped women of their Shari'a rights; Shirin Ebadi (2006), Iranian former jurist deposed to secretarial work after the Iranian Revolution and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, most famous for her support
of women's rights in Iran and Islam generally; and, Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2006, 2007), Somalian writer of *the Caged Virgin* and *Infidel*, former Muslim and converted atheist who challenges the very foundations of Islam with especially sharp criticism of the malevolent effects of political Islam on women in Muslim societies. While the others mentioned remain devout Muslims, Hirsi Ali has abandoned the religion over its alleged failure to protect the rights of women and others. Her impact on the quest to recover the voice of women in Islam is nonetheless profound through her political and literary influence. As gender equity across nations will continue to be one of the burning issues of the twenty-first century, again it would seem that an authentically interpreted Islam has potential to play a positive role in addressing this issue, especially because so many of the aberrations around gender equity are within its borders.

In spite of the unhelpful stereotype held commonly about Islam as a reactionary and outdated force, its original story is of a faith that revolutionized the social policy, practice and ethics of its day. Furthermore, many of the issues relevant to the social policy, practice and ethics of Islam's origins and early history are issues relevant to the twenty-first century and the capacity to forge peace and security among world communities in this century. It would seem there is a potentially vital leadership role therefore for a reformed, re-discovered and authentic Islam to play in directing twenty-first century debates and ventures. This will require a renewed scholarship in and about Islam, a well-founded and bold leadership in Muslim societies and communities that confronts and exposes inauthentic expressions of Islam, and fair and even-handed treatment of Islam by the world's media and politicians. In this way, Islam can be released to fulfill its birthright and true destiny as a model of the just, righteous and caring society and as a leader in forging interfaith dialogue and peace among the peoples of the world. There can be no more relevant and urgent role than this to be played by any religious force in the contemporary world.

We now turn to a series of live case studies, first of one of the authors, Dr Ibtihal Samarayi, and second to other case studies compiled by Dr Samarayi. These case studies capture in part the heroism that often lies behind the tragic events that most of us simply
read about in the newspapers. They also capture in part the true story of so many contemporary Muslims caught up in the loss of their traditional homelands and their consequent status as refugees, a story that is rarely told by a media that prefers to demonize the victim. Furthermore, and of especial importance to the purpose of this book, they capture much of the faith expression of Islam by Muslims who, in spite of all that has been hurled at them, maintain faith in the essential spirit of their tradition and its sibling relationship with the West.
Chapter Eight: A CASE STUDY TO CAPTURE THE CONTEMPORARY STORY

Sound education cannot be merely intellectual and conceptual, no matter how historically and theologically validated. Part of adequate education about Islam and the West must engage people’s emotions, communicative capacities and their artistic and expressive selves. Only in this way can we truly enter into the minds and experiences of the other. It is in this light that we offer the following case study of one of the author team, Ibtihal Samarayi, an Iraqi Sunni Muslim who escaped the horrors of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, suffered as a refugee in Iran and Turkey and finally found her way to Australia where she went on to complete her education, including through two theses in Fine Art, one a Master of Fine Art and the other a Doctor of Philosophy (cf. Samarayi, 2002, 2007). Dr Samarayi’s knowledge of Islam, in conjunction with her unique experiences and her expertise as an artist, has allowed her to capture and express the unusual circumstances of her life and of those many other Muslims caught up in similar circumstances. In particular, her artistic sense and expressive capacity has allowed her to analyse the experiences of young children caught up in the displacement that is the fate of many young Muslims today. Her work offers rare insight into the mind of the young Muslim faced with the trauma of detention, homeland loss and refugee status. One can see through the artwork that emanates from such trauma how easily current Western solutions to the problems of displaced Muslim populations could facilitate rather than stem the cause of Islamism and create in fact an expanded problem that will haunt the West for generations to come. The following kernel of her doctoral work will be told in Dr Samarayi’s own words in the form of a case study, and accompanying her words are her case studies of two other detainees who have also used their artistic focus as a way of living with their own experiences in the warzone:

Case Study: Ibtihal Samarayi

I was born in the town of Ba’quba, 60 kilometres north of the city of Baghdad in Iraq. I was the youngest in a family of ten children, having eight brothers and only one sister. My father was a successful businessman, owning a chain of large department stores around Baghdad. This made it possible for me, as well as for all my siblings, to complete
university studies. My chosen study was Cinematography in which I received a degree from the University of Baghdad in 1990 just a few months before the commencement of the Iraqi Gulf War in 1991. In achieving first place in the Department of Cinematography [June 1990], I was offered the position of tutor to the first year students in the course while pursuing the Masters Course in Cinematography. The Gulf War changed everything.

I was three years old when, in 1967, Israel stretched its boundaries further into former Palestinian territory. This was considered a black day in the annals of Arabic history; in Iraq, this was presented as an unlawful seizure of Palestinian land. It sparked a renewed determination by the Palestinian forces to re-capture their land and so the streets of Iraq rumbled to the sound of tanks on their way to Jordan. The television monitors brought into Iraq by the British in 1956 screened unending scenes of warfare and exhortations by the Iraqi military to join the fight for 'justice and the honour of the Palestinian people'.

In 1980, a few months into the Iraqi-Iranian war, my brother, just seventeen years of age, was reported 'lost in action'. We were eventually to learn that he had been taken prisoner in Iran, where he was held captive for eight years. Shortly after my brother was discovered missing, my father was arrested – being accused of political agitation – and thrown into prison. Within months of his release, he died, partly as a result of his treatment in jail.

Another incident, throwing light on the sham surrounding Hussein’s much publicised birthday celebrations, occurred at about this time. It was Saddam Hussein’s birthday in 1988. I was an eighteen-year-old University student and, as such, was obliged to attend the public function. The entire student body was marched to Baghdad’s Celebration Square, along with all students from other schools in the city and indeed the entire civilian population, to honour the ‘Great Leader’. A friend and I decided not to join in the celebration and made our way to the bus stop. Here we were confronted by a group of Hussein’s personal guards who forced us into a security van and drove us away to a place of detention inside one of Hussein’s palaces, where we were verbally abused, interrogated, and held for eight hours.
During my time at high school, I was obliged to include some aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian war in every piece of artwork. Always, the work had to depict the Palestinians as victorious, even when they were being defeated. European art was studied at art colleges at university level and was generally held up as an example to be prized and emulated.

War influenced every aspect of my teenage years, especially through the Iraqi-Iranian war that was at its height between 1980 and 1988. During this time, the media ran endless pro-Iraqi propaganda relating to the war. Cinemas rarely showed anything other than war films designed to stir the population to fight for Iraq. All Iraqi youths, upon completion of high-school, were conscripted to fight against the Iranian forces. I was fourteen years of age when my brother, Bassim, then seventeen years of age, and having just completed high school, was confronted in the street near my home by a group of uniformed officers and conscripted on the spot to join the Iraqi Army.

There was no escape. To refuse military service in Iraq would mean instant imprisonment. My brother had strong feelings about the moral justification of Iraq's involvement and refused to serve in it. So desperate was my brother to avoid participating in this war that he attempted to kill himself rather than siding with the government. Discovering him bleeding and nearly unconscious, my family rushed him to hospital. Police guards at the hospital removed him to another section of the building reserved for those attempting to avoid military conscription. The gash in his chest had been deep and the doctor reported that he had come within a centimetre of his life. Barely had Bassim's wound healed, when army officers on duty at the hospital rushed him off immediately to fight in the front line at the Iraqi-Iranian border, where fighting was at its height. Our family was informed that he had been 'lost in action'. Some months later, we received notice that he had been taken prisoner in Iran. With the end-of-war political agreement between Iraq and Iran for the mutual release of war prisoners, eight years from the commencement of the war, Bassim was finally released. He was then twenty-six years of age.
Another incident, which deeply shocked my family, occurred when another brother, Kassim, a practising medical doctor, was confronted in his clinic by officers who ordered him to serve at the front line as a medical doctor. He was also ordered to fight against the Iranians in the North of Iraq towards the end of the Iraqi-Iranian War in 1987. He refused. At 1am the morning after his refusal, army officers arrived at his home and began shouting and kicking noisily on the door. When Kassim answered the door, he was grabbed and kicked about the stomach and dragged to a waiting jeep, in front of the entire family. My father rushed to his assistance shouting abuse at the government officers and threatening them with his gun. Almost immediately, the house was surrounded by army personnel. My father was called, marched off to the jeep, blindfolded, and taken to the army headquarters where he was interrogated and thrown into jail. Here, he was short-listed to be tried by the military court and, almost certainly, hanged. He remained in prison for eighteen months and was released only through bribes of money offered by my brothers to avoid my father’s case reaching the high court of the Iraqi military. The corrupt senior officers of the Iraqi Intelligence Department were quick to receive the bribe. Nevertheless, my father remained in the prison. He was then seventy years of age. Broken in spirit and health, he died within a few months of his release from prison in 1988.

However, it was the second Iraqi war, the Gulf War of 1991, to which my artwork principally relates. Circumstances relating to my personal safety as well as that of my husband, Sadraddin, precipitated our escape from Iraq. Since he, too, had refused to fight in the Gulf War, Sadraddin was immediately blacklisted by government agencies as a deseter, the punishment for which was summary execution. As his wife, I would have shared a similar fate. We had no choice but to escape from Iraq. This meant, for us, having to cross the snow-covered North Iraqi mountains. There was no transport available, which meant we had to go by the most unfrequented passages known only to a few merchants who also acted as ‘people movers’ that is, paid ‘people smugglers’. For people, such as we, whose lives were in jeopardy by reason of involvement in some form of anti-government protest, these so-called smugglers attained an almost hero status in Iraq, since they also put their own lives in danger. The arranged passage was through the
most rugged and difficult terrain, much of it covered in snow, and had to be negotiated on foot. Only the most basic items could be carried on our backs. Sleeping in freezing conditions, and surviving on the minimal food supplies, some days eating only some small edible plants growing through the snow or even on some old left over scraps of bread found on the mountain trail, we finally arrived some days later, bedraggled and exhausted, at the small village of Shnoya in Iran. It was February, 1991. Friendly village people assisted us on the second leg of the journey. Disguised in local Iranian dress and mixing with local townfolk, we were taken on board a large passenger van and driven right to the Chashma Gul Refugee Camp in Iran, situated close to the Iraqi border. However, we were not permitted to enter the camp, which had been set-up by the United Nations in 1991. First, we had to get permission from the Iranian government. This meant a further two month wait, accommodated at the small camp at Zeally village, especially set up by the local village people, to accommodate families and soldiers escaping from Iraq during the war.

Once permission was given, thousands of refugees from Iraq, especially Kurdish people from North Iraq, poured into the camps. Conditions here were basic. There were no showers or hot water. Even cold water for drinking or washing was at a premium. For us inmates, it meant a daily trek, walking for miles on foot to carry water in jugs drawn from wells in the mountains, back to the camp. Long queues for canned food were an everyday experience. Sleeping conditions on the hard ground were difficult and uncomfortable. We had only a few folded garments between us in the hard ground underneath us. Only one blanket was issued to each adult. One of the most difficult aspects of the refugee experience was that of having to share a very limited space with other people. We had been obliged to share our very small tent with another couple, together with their two small children. Sleeping in these conditions was well nigh impossible.

After a year in Chashma Gul Camp, at the end of the Gulf War, the Iranian government announced that all Iraqi refugees should return home. However, we all suspected that our return to Iraq would mean execution for every one of us, being refugees despised as 'deserters and traitors'. None of us trusted Saddam Hussein, so that when the Iranian
trucks arrived at the camp to return us to Iraq, and forced us all in, my husband and I planned to jump out on the way back. Arriving at a crowded village market, we both jumped out of the truck, and went into hiding. When it was all clear, we were able to contact an old family acquaintance, a merchant, who was able to arrange for a guide to take us on foot across the hazardous passage through the rugged mountain ranges of south-west Turkey. In negotiating the difficult terrain, we were confronted by armed border guards who immediately opened fire on us. Diving for cover behind rocks, we were able to escape from their view and proceed with great caution along the mountain trail. To enter Turkey, we needed permission from the government. The merchant sent us on to his merchant friend in a Turkish village, where it was thought we would be most unlikely to encounter Turkish police, who would have had to deport us, as illegal entrants, back to Iraq. The merchant, accepting my gold necklace for payment, helped us to go to Ankara. From there, we heard that the United Nations (UN) was no longer accepting Iraqi refugees. The UN had been told by Hussein’s Government that the Iraqi refugees would be able to return safely to Baghdad. Coming from Hussein, we were naturally suspicious of this offer, so we tried once again to hide in Ankara, in Turkey, for a few months. We heard later, as we had suspected that Saddam had hanged those refugees who had chosen to return to Iraq. After that, the UN re-opened its doors to Iraqi refugees. Finally, after waiting in the camps for five years, we were accepted as refugees and allowed to enter Australia. This, then, is the backdrop of my own personal experience and the source of all my subsequent artwork, an analysis of which will form the major part of the next chapter.
Chapter Nine: THE CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM EXPERIENCE IN ART

My hope, in expressing myself through my art, is two-fold. In the first place, I felt I needed to get my whole war experience out of my system, particularly my time as a refugee, held at limbo, in sometimes inhumane conditions at the Zeally and Chashma Gul camps. The former camp was located on the Iraqi-Iranian border; the latter being several hundred miles inside the Iranian border. To accomplish this, I decided to physically involve myself in reconstructing a representation of those same dwelling places, which had been my homes for over five years. I have also included representations of other refugee camps such as the one at Rafha in Saudi Arabia in which Ali (one of the refugees I interviewed), was held for five years.

The physical involvement in the construction of the camp Installations, I am arguing, contributed quite substantially to my own healing process, eliminating the worst aspects of my personal trauma, a constant fear of deportation back to Iraq and certain execution. I have felt that, in revisiting scenes of terror and horror through my art, I have, to a large extent, been able to lessen their pernicious hold on my conscious and unconscious mind.

My second reason for choosing to interpret the impact of the wars in Iraq, as experienced by me and my family, was to shed light upon the situation for refugees in Iraq as it affected me personally, and to tell some of the untold stories of suffering and tragedy experienced by my fellow countrymen and women.

Before I begin to describe the installations, I should explain that the final work consists of five separate dwellings, representing the five different types of accommodation, which were the wartime homes of many of the refugees of Iraq. Related to my Installation work, is the separate installation, These were my Homes.
My work attempts to express and document my passage through war trauma. The sudden jolting and abrupt change of lifestyle that was thrust upon me, was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the war to deal with. For me, it meant the complete and absolute severance from my family and friends and from the generally happy life I had been used to in Iraq. To be thrown in with strangers of many different backgrounds, in sometimes appalling conditions, necessitated an enormous personal adjustment. I have not seen or heard from my family since 1991 and, as blacklisted persons, my husband and I will never be able to return to Iraq as long as the present situation persists.
The Military Boot is set against a quotation from the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book. The large boot in the centre of the picture, representing the power of war and also the military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, smashes down indiscriminately, crushes the flattened image of the Iraqi family underneath it. The flames leaping from the ground represent what seems to be an attempt by the forces of war to destroy Iraqi culture. The Muslim quotation in Arabic which forms the backdrop to the image is: “Allah we depend on you, to you we return. Our destiny is in your hands”. The creation of this image was my way of coming to terms with the trauma which resulted in the destruction of my family. It helped me to clarify the cynical nature of politically motivated war and to place the burden of guilt on those governments which can find no other solution to their problems than a military one. Instinctively, I chose to “open the box and inspect the content for
what it really is.” This confrontation therapy has helped me to talk about events which initially I was unable to face.

Figure 3. Ibihi Samarayi-Manipulated digital image, *Retreat into the Past*, 1999 2mx1.5m.

The Gulf War of 1991 changed Iraqi society. Before the war, almost all younger Iraqi women were wearing Western fashions and were seen moving freely about the cities of Iraq, mixing with the opposite sex and, for those who wished to attend University,
competing equally with male students for academic places. From the time the war began until now, it is as if time has moved backwards several decades to the 1940s when most women were obliged to wear the traditional top-to-toe black Abaya. Immediately after the close of the Gulf War, women returned to the old style covering and were segregated from the male population in most social situations. The reasons for this are many. Psychologically, there was a widely felt need to seek protection from the unpredictable and frightening world they had experienced through the war. There was also a widespread sense of guilt, that they were being punished for some lapse in their religious duties and that they must make a special effort to try to purge themselves of their sins and return to their traditional God. There is also the factor of ‘existential guilt’, when many would be asking themselves, for example, “Why should I be alive when so many young people, even children, were killed?” My image attempts to illustrate the present status of the Iraqi woman. Fear has made her socially anonymous. For her personal security, she clings to what seems to be the comparative safety of tradition represented here by the Islamic patterned backdrop behind her.

The US trade embargo on Iraq had tragic consequences for the Iraqi family during this time. Although it was widely reported in the Western press that the embargo was for the specific purpose of preventing goods which could be used in building ammunition from reaching Iraq, the fact was that the real impact was on the Iraqi family through the effective ban on basic foods such as flour, rice, sugar, and cooking oil. It was also extremely difficult to get enough petrol to run the family car. Car tyres were simply not available as it was assumed that the materials used in their manufacture could be used in the making of chemical weapons. Food and medical supplies to Iraq were also drastically cut. Many families were unable to feed their children adequately and thousands of them were forced to remove their young children from school, even at primary level, to assist in augmenting the family income. Many children were consequently malnourished and many others, deprived of essential medicines, were dying.
This image has special meaning for both Australians and Iraqis, as it concerns the plight of many of the world’s asylum seekers. The image of the three little girls, drowning in the sea is a reference to the three little sisters who lost their lives in October 2001, when the crowded refugee boat in which they were travelling sank in rough seas off the Australian coast.

I have related the image to an aboriginal story surrounding the ‘Three Sisters’ of the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney, Australia. The Aboriginal legend tells of the father’s attempt to save his three daughters from harm during a monstrous tribal war by turning them into stone. Likewise, the father of the three girls who lost their lives had hoped to save them from the tragic situation in Iraq (a figurative monster of war) in order to give them the chance of a better life in Australia. The story was well-publicized in the Australian media. The father, a hard-working baker living in Sydney, had received a phone-call from his wife and children the night before they set off and warned them
strongly against attempting the dangerous journey from Indonesia. However, the family, being desperate to join their father after five years of separation, decided to risk the journey. The rest is history.

Figure 5. Ibtihal Samarayi-Manipulated digital image, Letter from a child, 2002, 160x2 m.

I created this image as a personal protest against the treatment of children, many of whom have been themselves victims of war trauma in their own countries. At the time of writing, many children are still being held in detention centres in Australia. I have selected a desert-like backdrop to symbolize the sterile and barren nature of life within the confines of these camps.
The image here expresses the tragedy of war from the Iraqi child's point of view. The faded image of the child, his leg held in a chain, peers out from his hiding place. He does not understand the meanings of the destruction around him or of the various political interpretations placed upon it. He only knows that his home is being destroyed, together with everything dear and familiar to him. This is represented by the traditional Islamic backdrop which seems to be threatened by the terrifying juggernaut of war. The flames of destruction have also swallowed up his right to a normal childhood. Survival of the family, or what remained of it, was the only consideration. He would be pulled out of the school, and set to work to augment the family income, whether selling seeds, beans, items of clothing, used furniture or even prized family heirlooms; these would all be sacrificed in a desperate fight for survival. A child in this situation would have to grow up very quickly. He might be only seven or eight years of age but, with his father killed in the war, he could be promoted instantly to family bread winner. In some cases, a child thrown into a demanding and difficult situation such as this might respond positively, quickly gaining confidence in his ability to handle anything that fate might throw his way. Indeed, a high percentage of people undergoing traumatic experiences reported that,
having survived an enormous challenge, they felt they were better off for the experience. While this might have been the experience of some of the more emotionally mature children, it would be impossible to calculate the psychological damage visited upon many of the more vulnerable children experiencing the horrors of wartime Iraq and of detention if their parents were successful in escaping the war.

At another level, this image represents my own reaction to the wars that seemed to dominate my childhood. I was the trapped child caught up in the tragic results of almost unceasing warfare in my own country. Like many children in my situation I was deeply troubled and confused about the reasons why this calamity should have come upon me. What had I done wrong to deserve this punishment? Feelings of irrational guilt followed me through my childhood and caused endless nightmares and restless nights.

The following artwork will explore my artistic response to the psychological and physical impact of long periods of incarceration in refugee detention centres. In particular, it will examine the resultant behaviours of war trauma, the loss of basic human rights and the imposition of constraints upon freedom of expression experienced by three male detainees in the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia, another male detainee in Port Hedland in Western Australia and three children detained with their parents, also at Woomera in South Australia.

The circle of the huge padlocks is already symbolic. When the viewer is inside the circle, the single eye is depicted as looking through each keyhole, for which the key itself is for ever just out of reach. This is intended to evoke a feeling of empathy with the detainees, but in what seem to the viewer to be a piece of imaginative montage, these eyes become the eyes of the watchers, the guards watching the inmates of the centres, and these locks become also a Benthamite Panopticon. This multi-layered representation of eyes raises the more open question in the viewers' minds as they watch, namely, who is it who sees? The circle of the watchers and the watched remains held inside the locks, and does not emerge to be seen by the eyes of, for example, the general public. No one knows what is happening.
“Locked Inside I” is my first padlock of the Installation. It represents a child locked inside the detention centre. You can see the child’s eye watching you, begging you for help. It is the psychological feeling of the prison for both the actual prisoner and the audience.
This symbolic image represents the emotions of any child kept away from playing on the beach like normal children. The dove represents a child kept inside a cage. The background presents a contrast between the normal life and the abnormal, like that between the desert and the beautiful beach.
The installation’s signifiers, metaphors and symbols acknowledge and reinforce the anxiety of detention as a perplexing state or space of anticipation, hostility, rupture and affirmation of the refugee’s state of non-being. The installation engages and references the modality of space mediated through temporality – where the refugees are caught or suspended in time and space, in a state of an in between-ness that defies cultural logic, international law and the respect for human dignity where the already traumatized are further detained in a state of disenfranchisement and exist in a condition that is never fully constituted. As with the Out of Reach Key, the suggestions are confined within political contingency that is bureaucratically policed and articulated from outside their grasp. In the Installation, there is no shared history, no past, but a schizophrenic present dislocated in difference displacement. The padlocks I constructed are big; bigger than the viewer and bigger than the interned. They are monumental in scale and unequivocally state the determined function of authority that imposes on them their forced enclosure, deprivation and alienation. The circle of padlocks is representative of both a
psychological and political prison. The padlocks are an expression of suffering and traumatic isolation, as well as a representation of the political and military power of the nation. However, when I surround the padlocks with emblematic images of guards, fences, razor wire and 'big fire' produced by children from the detention centre, it reflects clearly the enormity of the psychological problems and distress that impacts upon the delicate innocence of children caught in the delirium of war and detention.

Figure 10, Ibthal Samarayi-The complete work of Locked Inside Installation with the out of reach key, 2005, tin pipe, wood, patina liquid, Iron Powder, Wood, Foam, Digital Image. photograph by Sadraddin Ahmed-Aziz
Figure 11, Ibtihal Samarayi-Image of the installation, photograph by Sadraddin Ahmed-Aziz, Locked Inside, 2003, Wood, Foam, Digital Image, 1.6m x 2m.
Islam in Arabic means 'submission' and derives from a word meaning 'peace', a peace only to be found in submitting to God's Will, the ultimate peace to be found in this world and the hereafter. Islam is a universal message revealed in the sacred book, the Qur'an, through the Prophet Muhammad. It shares with the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, their ethical teachings and belief in the One God. Islam is both a religion and a way of life.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the actual Word of God revealed through the archangel Gabrielle to the Prophet of Islam during the twenty-three year period of his prophetic mission. It was revealed in the Arabic language, which became therefore the language of Islam even for non-Arab Muslims.

From the Qur'an: “All that happens to us is ordained by God”. It is entirely traditional to surround sacred texts with decorative design.

This artwork dramatically describes the panic felt amongst the forces for hope, symbolized in the meaning of the words as a prayer to Allah, circling red flowers, panicking in the face of the barb wire. The flowers, representing the forces for peace and hope, find themselves enveloped in between the words of prayer. The colour has
seemingly turned to blue, which could be a reference to the signs of peace in heaven, which would signal the coming of life on earth. The familiar black background can be glimpsed in the bottom right of the painting. Here it refers to the endless passage of night and day in detention, of lost time and wasted lives.

Figure 13. Hameed, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 1m. x 1.5m. Acrylic on Paper, Liverpool, NSW, 2003.

_Honour your Mother and your Father._ This style, called *Naskh*, which means ‘copying’, was developed in the tenth century and refined into a fine art form in Turkey in the sixteenth century. Since then, it has become the generally accepted script for writing in the Qur’an. *Naskh* is legible and clear and was adopted as the preferred style for typesetting and printing. It is a small script whose lines are thin and letter shapes are round. For Hameed, these words in Arabic had special meaning. His widowed mother, whom he contacted regularly by phone, was still living in Iraq and this is a source of constant concern. As much as he would have liked to bring her out to Australia, he knew it would be impossible for her to obtain a visa to go there. Equally, he was worried that he would never be granted a permanent visa to remain and to work in Australia. Even though in his own country he was a qualified mathematician, his temporary visa in Australia prevented him from obtaining permanent employment. He was obliged to take on whatever job, usually low paid menial work, that was available.
Figure 14. Luay, Allah has the Last Word, Water Colours, 1mx1.3m, Liverpool, NSW, 2003.

Figure 15. Luay, Blessed are the Merciful, Water Colours on Paper, 1m x 1.5m, Liverpool, NSW, 2003.
Figure 16. Luay, A Refugee's Dream, Ink on paper, Woomera Detention Centre, South Australia, 2002.

Figure 17. Art therapy Program for the children from Woomera Detention Centre, Liverpool, Sydney. 2003, Photograph by Ibtihal Samarayi.
It has been through the telling of my story that I have found the greatest release of negative emotions. This strategy has so far proved to be the most expedient in allowing me to focus on the positive aspects of the experience, that is, the insight and understanding I have gained concerning the plight and needs of other war refugees attempting to find safety in Western countries like Australia. In creating series after series of sketches relating to war memories in preparation for my paintings, I feel I have finally ‘opened the box’ on all my hitherto repressed memories. Finally, it has been the direct confrontation of traumatic memories that has helped immensely in creating for me a psychological distance from the troublesome events of war. Thus, by means of this strategy, I have derived a triple advantage: first, it has been a means of exorcising the most pernicious of my intrusive memories; second, it has comprised a solid piece of psychological armoury for my own protection; and, third, I have gained through the experience an effective means of assisting fellow refugees through a sympathetic
presentation of the similar difficulties they have faced as traumatized migrants escaping from their own countries’ horrors.
Chapter Eleven: THE IRAQI WARS AND THE ARTISTIC RESPONSE

This chapter will explore Adnan’s artistic response to the restrictions imposed by the military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and the events of the wars in which he was directly involved. How did this artist cope with the severe restrictions placed upon him in wartime Iraq? How can an understanding of his personal experience as a political prisoner in an Iraqi jail, and of his subsequent experience as a conscripted soldier in Hussein’s army, lead to a better understanding of the refugee’s flight to Australia, or indeed to freedom from any similar dictatorship?

In searching for answers to these questions, this chapter will first consider the political restrictions imposed on the School of Art programs of Iraq and later upon the freedoms of the practicing artist. Reference will also be made to: the introduction and influence of European art after 1918; a few examples highlighting the hazardous nature of the Hussein dictatorship as it directly affected freedom of speech; and, the personal expression of the working artist.

The chapter will trace Adnan’s own anti-government activities related to his involvement in an Iraqi underground newspaper, undertaken to protest against the restrictions of free speech and free artistic expression and to decry the excesses of a corrupt and irresponsible government. It will then explore the swift consequences of his discovered anti-government activity, in being thrown into jail in Baghdad and held there as a political prisoner for three years. It will then explore the circumstances surrounding young Adnan’s conscription to the government army forces and of his experiences in fighting at the front during the Iranian-Iraqi war, in which he incurred serious injury. Finally, it will document his escape from the army, his hazardous passage to the comparative safety of Turkey, his experience of a refugee camp, his final granting of refugee status and subsequent arrival in Australia.
The many strategies which Adnan employed in his attempts to cope under the extreme circumstances in which he found himself will be the subject of this chapter. Noted in particular is his technique of direct confrontation, the deliberate re-experiencing of trauma through art. This technique, frequently employed by such leading psychotherapists as H. de Wit and Franlk M Ochberg, will be discussed in this chapter. This will be balanced by other theories regarding the healing of war trauma victims, including considerations of spiritual involvement and other diversionary techniques also employed by the artist. Especially relevant to Adnan’s own experiences are those coping strategies discussed by psychiatrists, Victor Frankl, Peter E. Hodgkins and Van der Kolk, all of which will be explored in the chapter. Midst these mixed stories is a story of persistent belief in the essence of Islam, even in the face of a cosmetic of horrendous cruelty and corruption.

In reviewing the circumstances of his wartime trauma, with all their psychological ramifications, access to Adnan’s personal story has been gained principally through a series of face-to-face interviews with the artist on video camera over a two-year period from January 2001-2002. Long telephone conversations with the artist were of assistance in eliciting not only the artist’s own comments on his war paintings and on his psychological responses to various aspects of war trauma, but also occasional reviews of his steady progress towards healing, in large measure, by means of the therapeutic outlet provided through his art.
Figure 19, *Ishtar Magazine*, designed by Artist Adnan, 1998/1999
Translation Uday, son of Saddam Hussein (then Minister of Education and Editor of "Babylon") threatens the Ministry of Education that he will "severely punish any person (within the Ministry) who continues to publish any book or articles, which fails to glorify the revolution and its leader, Saddam Hussein and his party". [He had noticed a shift by a large number of educated journalists away from the politically correct articles coming from the media towards an emphasis on humanitarian subjects.] (Hussein 1998)

The situation had not improved in 1990 when American citizen and journalist Farzad Bazoft of The Observer was shot in March on a pretext of spying. This incident turned world press opinion fiercely against Saddam Hussein. Even Iraqi top political journalist Hassan Alawi, in expressing political opinions considered offensive to the government [he tried to dissuade Hussein from the Kuwaiti attack], was threatened with execution but managed to escape to England (Alawi, 1995).
Adnan was born in 1950 in Karkook, a city in northern Iraq. He was the second son born into a large privileged and well-educated family, his father being a prominent citizen of that city. From a very early age Adnan's art talent was recognized by his teachers who encouraged him to enter every available art competition for his age group. Young Adnan, as did both the other artists under study, experienced a school art program severely restricted by government regulation. It was a requirement in any piece of work, for example, to depict the Palestinian or Iraqi soldiers as martyrs prepared to give their lives for their country. The Israeli soldier, on the other hand, always had to be depicted as the enemy who drove the Palestinians from their homes and confiscated their lands. This politically directed program was in place in all Iraqi schools in these days.

The world of art to which Adnan was introduced as a student entering the College of Fine Art in Baghdad in 1980 was already showing the influence of the modern Impressionist
and Expressionist art styles of Europe. In fact as early as 1918, with the British occupation of Iraq, both the English language and European art and culture were introduced into Iraqi schools. British customs and fashions influenced every facet of daily life. With numbers of young Iraqi art students being encouraged to study in Europe, it was not long before one could observe the influence of such artists as Picasso, Dali, Miro, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse, and Renoir upon the most adventurous practicing Iraqi artists. German Expressionist artists, too, left their mark, particularly Kirchner, Kandinsky and Beckmann (Al-Said, 1988).

In the decades leading to the First Gulf War, Iraqi art students continued to study contemporary art styles, particularly those of Europe and the United States of America. There were freedoms, at least in respect to choice of subject and style that applied in Iraqi art schools where students were encouraged to experiment in all forms of art including Surrealism and even Dada. Surrealism and Expressionism were popular art styles practiced by some of the leading artists in Iraq, such as Hamied Al Attar, Sadiq Toma and Hoshyar. However the younger graduates, having to make a living from their art, continued to express 'correct' political themes in posters and paintings. This continued to be encouraged by the government through grants and prizes, and naturally opens doors to a comparatively lucrative career path.
Normally, a student enrolled in a Fine Art Diploma course would expect to study for five years before completing the degree. A newly graduated student would arrange to have as many solo exhibitions as possible. Successful artists were occasionally invited to exhibit their work in one of the major venues in Baghdad. Adnan, as a graduate student, had the honour of exhibiting his work at a major venue in Baghdad in 1979, Caet Al – Rewake. For young Adnan, however, it was not the study of art, but that of engineering to which he turned initially. Completing his degree in this discipline in Turkey five years later, he worked as a civil engineer in Baghdad for four years. Over the same period he studied for and completed a Fine Art degree through evening college in that city.

Before moving to an examination of Adnan’s paintings it is necessary to consider briefly some of the events of the war, which most deeply affected him and impacted significantly on his art work. In 1986, Adnan witnessed horrific scenes of devastation in his hometown, with dead bodies, friends and acquaintances amongst them, lying about in the street, poisoned by the inhalation of chemicals enveloping the area (Adnan, 2001). In much the same way he had used chemical weapons against the Iranian army in 1984, 1985 and 1986, this had been Saddam Hussein’s answer to putting down an uprising of the Kurdish population there. Not surprisingly, Adnan was personally affected by this tragedy in which he lost many family members.
When Saddam Hussein conscripted all available young men to fight in his army and put down the Kurdish uprising of 1986, Adnan, being Kurdish himself, refused to participate in inflicting further punishment upon his own people, and was summarily arrested on 12 September, 1986. At the same time, he was accused of disseminating anti-government propaganda through underground newspapers. Adnan had, in fact, contributed articles and political cartoons to the underground newspaper, Freedom during that year, protesting against the unacceptable tactics being employed by Hussein. All criticism of the Government was strictly outlawed and, consequently, Adnan was thrown into jail in Baghdad early in 1986, where he languished in miserable and at times sub-human conditions for three years. Torture of prisoners was not uncommon, and Adnan related many incidents of human cruelty upon his own person and those of his fellow prisoners, alluding to these in many of his paintings. Yet Adnan proved himself to be a survivor. His coping strategies were many and varied. Instinctively choosing the most positive way to view his predicament, he was able to avoid some of the most extreme psychological symptoms of war trauma.

While Adnan himself admits to a degree of psychological and neurological damage as a direct result of the war, he has nevertheless involved himself in positive community activities, not only continuing with his own studies. Even though he still exhibits symptoms of extreme nervousness and, for example, overreacts at a sudden loud noise, he has been able to distance himself from his traumatic experiences to a remarkable degree. It is interesting that he has instinctively programmed himself very closely along the lines suggested in the treatment of trauma victims by such leading psychologists as Bessel, Van der Kolk, and Tick (Van der Kolk et al., 1995). In the first place, Adnan showed a willingness to confront traumatic scenes through his painting. This helped him to clarify his feelings about his involvement in the war, to acknowledge his fears, placing blame and responsibility on the perpetrators of the trauma [Saddam Hussein and his government] and therefore to dismiss any feelings of personal guilt. The technique of direct confrontation, particularly relevant in Adnan’s case, is explored by Frank Ochberg in his paper on post-traumatic therapy, Gift From Within. Ochberg states: "PTSD is never complete if the client has not told the details of traumatisation... As a therapist, the
purpose of hearing the details of the trauma story is to re-visit the scene of terror and horror and, in so doing, remove the grip of terror and horror... It is painful and it is necessary and unavoidable.” (Willson, 1993, p4).

Victor E. Frankl, in his work *Man's Search for Meaning*, provides an almost opposite argument, emphasizing the positive aspects that reside within even the most traumatic situations (Frankl, 1963). In some ways, he appears to advocate the sublimation of traumatic experience. In looking for the possible good that can come as a result of the experience and in attempting to discover the inherent purpose of that accumulated experience, Frankl argues that the insights gained into the practical use to which such experiences might be put in the future is in fact a powerful coping mechanism. Such was the case with Adnan.

With his rich educational background, especially in his extensive knowledge of literature, Adnan quite instinctively made use of many of Frankl's diversionary techniques. It was no trouble for him to contemplate the beauties of nature. He loved poetry and considered it to be the source of inspiration for his painting. Even when things seemed to be blackest, Adnan always clung to the hope of a future in art in which he would put to use some artistic expression of his traumatic experiences. He understood both the healing value of the aesthetic experience for himself as well as its value as a powerful vehicle for the telling of the war story in the future.

Spiritual values are also fundamental to war trauma survival, according to Frankl. Basic to his Logotherapy theory is the development of a contemplative inner life in which to meditate on the real meaning of human existence. Speaking of people's capacity to heal themselves, Frankl said, “Man has both potentialities (for good or evil) within himself; which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions” (Frankl 1963, p 213). Instinctively, Adnan acted on these principles. Almost completely fulfilling the conditions of Frankl's healing theory, Adnan had always been deeply interested in the discovery of the meaning of life and never lost his faith in the power of good over evil or his faith in God.
One of Adnan’s most important paintings, *The Vein*, was initially published in *Ishtar* in 1996, two years after his arrival in Australia. This painting documents his experience as a political prisoner in Iraq, surviving in one of the underground cells built under Saddam Hussein’s orders during the war between Iraq and Iran. At first glance, one is reminded of Picasso’s ‘Guernica’ of 1947. In both cases, gaunt mask-like faces speak of the horror and despair experienced by the interred prisoners. In Adnan’s painting, the yellowed complexions of the inmates suggest the unhealthy, pasty, look of people deprived of sun for long periods. They also symbolize the grip of death, which seems to threaten them. All the figures are depicted as stiff cardboard cut-outs, suggesting the severely traumatizing effect of their incarceration. The truncated arms of two inmates suggest the utter sense of helplessness they felt. Implied too, are the amputation of the mind and the means of expression. Without arms, a painter cannot paint, nor can he express himself in writing. Graffiti scattered throughout the painting alludes to life outside the prison, such as the image of the dancing child, the cat and the flower. The image of the prayer beads represents the consolation to be found in a spiritual world. It also represents Adnan’s personal faith in God to save him from his present predicament. As does Frankl, psychotherapist Frank M. Ochberg also speaks of the therapeutic benefits to adherents to the major religions: “This spiritual dimension may be conceptualized as a feeling of God’s love. For others, spirituality may be described as a transcendent feeling of harmony and communion with humanity or nature or the unknown reaches of space.” (Willson, 1993, p9)
The images of dice suggest the precarious nature of the situation in which Adnan and his fellow prisoners found themselves. Their fate, whether they would live or die, depended merely on a throw of the dice, on chance. Numbers, as well as counting off the passing days, might also suggest mathematical puzzles employed as a means of distraction and 'killing' time.

*The Vein* records not only Adnan's own traumatic experiences but also those of his fellow inmates. The encompassing image of the vein which provides the basic structure of the painting symbolizes the life force, the hope of an on-going meaningful life, of a personal successful and fulfilling future, that each of the prisoners tried desperately to cling to. It also refers to the claustrophobic and frightening dark cells in which they survived day after day. A confusion of arrows, pointing first this way and then that, suggests the terrible confusion experienced within the darkened cells and the fruitless attempts of the prisoners to find a way out, both physically and psychologically. The checkerboard
patterns, linking the design theme of the work, denote the seemingly endless sequence of days, yet there was also no available sunlight to record the passing of time. These endless nights seemed to merge into the black flow of time, represented here by the dark, almost black, 'blood' coursing through the vein. The checkerboard also represents the loss of time, days, months and years wasted for no apparent reason. The freezing conditions of winters endured, without heating of any form, is suggested in the blue feet of the prisoner at right. The blue colour of the feet also alludes to a method of torture suffered by many of the prisoners who were beaten about the feet by the prison guards. Asked if he had any idea where he had been taken when he was first thrown into prison under cover of darkness in 1986, Adnan said: "No. I had no idea at all. I was blindfolded. I couldn't imagine that our prison was underground and that we had been down there for three years. We lost all sense of time. We wondered, though, if the slight sounds we heard from time to time could have been traffic passing overhead." (Adnan, January 2001)

The cramped condition of the prison, expressed through the image of the vein, is further emphasized by the fore-shortened figures of the inmates who all share his fate. The fore-shortening of the figures also suggests the psychological or mental fore-shortening resulting from the severe restrictions placed upon the prisoners. Their faces of the inmates are all similarly expressionless, suggesting the psychological numbness experienced by all of them, the numbness masking emotions of fear and confusion. This numbness is documented by many psychotherapists, including Edward Tick in his observation of the victims of war trauma. The painting suggests, in the wide-eyed expressions of the prisoners, a desperate searching; first one way and then the other for some small sign of hope. The reaching hands, two from an escape route from the top of the cell and two from the bottom, describe their attempts to comfort and support each other, to keep alive the possibility of their eventual escape into the sunlight – and life – represented here by the two circles of light.

Again, a repetition of symbolic graffiti against the yellow ground in the top of the painting (the eye, the chicken, the dice, the cockroach, the prayer beads and the text), along with other images, suggest some daily occurrences or rituals, some of the means
perhaps by which the prisoners tried to pass the time of day. The image of the watching eye accompanying the arrow symbols, repeated throughout the painting, suggests the prisoners' frightening awareness that their every movement was being observed. This recalls Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon', a viewing tower within the prison complex which, as Foucault explained "... left the prisoners with no means of concealment and no means of telling whether they were being observed". (Lloyd & Thecker, 1996, pp. 70-83)

The graffiti in the centre of the painting against a dusky pink ground includes images of flowers, the prisoners perhaps recalling the season outside. The graffiti in the lower middle ground includes a dancing figure, a child remembered – or a dream of freedom, and again, an eye, this one humanized with an eyebrow and a suggestion of dark flowing hair, a glimpse of his girlfriend waiting outside for his release.

The stream of graffiti at the right of the picture again represents the fantasies and sensations of the prisoners, of traffic passing in the distance, distant sounds of cars, a bicycle bell, and animals passing overhead. Surely, one might be thinking, there is a busy road up there. Perhaps there is a lane or track from there leading into the prison and, hopefully, providing a possible means of escape. The blackened hands of the prisoner on the right suggest some physical activity or intention to dig an escape route, a tunnel, or a hole through or under the wall. Again, they may allude to a form of torture and beating. According to Adnan, in my interviews with him between 2001 and 2002, prisoners were also beaten about the hands on the slightest pretext or on no pretext whatsoever.

The slabs of colour across the top and bottom of the painting serve both to encase the vein and also to emphasize the crushing, claustrophobic effect of the prison cell. Equally, they could represent the crushing of mind and spirit deprived of any form of mental stimulation. Kafka’s jaded emotional outlook, in which he views art as through the eyes of a beetle, seems appropriate here in this uncompromisingly dismal place, judging by the look of despair on the mask-like faces of the inmates (Thorlby, 1991, p. 39).
Three years later, on Saddam Hussein's birthday (28\textsuperscript{th} April, 1989), all the political prisoners in the jail, including Adnan, were 'forgiven' and released in a burst of 'generosity'.

Adnan was able to continue his work as a civil engineer for the next two years during which time he became engaged to an Iraqi girl from Baghdad. With the beginning of the Gulf War in 1991, Adnan was once again conscripted to fight in Hussein's army. An incident occurred at about this time which deeply affected him and changed the entire course of his life. As a continuation of his punishment for his initial refusal to fight against the Kurds, Hussein ordered Adnan to fight at the front during the American-led \textit{Desert Storm} attack in February, 1991. Adnan was severely wounded a few weeks into this war and hospitalized with severe damage to his leg. Barely recovered from his war wounds, he was once again ordered to fight at the front.

Adnan had had enough of war. Soon he decided to escape from Baghdad with his new wife. His options were very few. Only one way remained for a former prisoner of the Iraqi government to leave the country, the illegal way. Adnan, accused of anti-government activity and already having served three years as a political prisoner, had no option other than to seek out an Iraqi 'guide' (an illegal people-smuggler), and pay him for arranging a safe, if illegal, passage from Iraq to the comparative safety of a village on the Turkish border. It was with the co-operation of the fruit-pickers of the mountainous region of north Iraq that both Adnan and his wife, disguised as farmers and travelling in the community jeep, were eventually able to reach a Turkish village located on the Turkish-Iraqi border. A second guide arranged false Turkish identification papers. Adnan and his wife were thus able to pass successfully through the border control and into the UN Headquarters in Ankara. Once there, they enlisted as refugees along with thousands of others from Iran and Iraq. After succeeding in obtaining an interview with the UN authorities in Turkey, Adnan was advised to find a place to stay with his wife in the city, being warned that as an illegal entrant to Turkey, they could guarantee no protection for him from the Turkish police during his stay in the city. Three long years later, Adnan received word to say that his application for refugee status had been approved. Placed by
the UN for a short period in the refugee camp on the Turkey-Iraqi boarder, Adnan and his wife were given refugee status and visas enabling them to enter Australia in 1994. Adnan had put his three years in Ankara to good use in preparing preliminary sketches and drawings for many of the paintings he was later to complete in Australia. The painting, *The Coming of War*, was actually completed in Turkey and brought to Australia as a rolled canvas. Many of the completed works were subsequently published in *Ishtar*, the Australian Iraqi magazine (Adnan, *Ishtar* 1999).

The theme of fear, despair, and suppression of artistic and psychological expression which characterize the *Vein* painting continued in Adnan's ink and wash drawing, *Iraqi's Involvement* (Adnan, *Ishtar* 1999). It is a symbolic representation of his own experience as a soldier in Hussein's army in Iraq. The soldier peers out from behind the image of a date palm, a symbol for Iraq. It offers him no protection, and shows him to be totally vulnerable. The soldier's emotions are emphasized in the elongated facial features and in the heavy lines under the one visible eye, suggesting both weariness and grief. Texts written in Arabic describe his fear and anxiety. The red colours in the lower middle ground, 'blood', represents the war going on around him, while the blue, above, behind, and in front of him, tells of his hope of freedom and serenity existing beyond the war zone. According to Adnan, "... it symbolizes the artist's spirit and will to survive" (Adnan, June 2001). There is evidence here of the artist's determination to live in the hope of a productive future regardless of the negative aspects of life going around him. Frankl emphasizes the importance of systematically visualizing aspects of a positive and meaningful future as an effective coping strategy in dealing with what might seem a hopeless situation (Frankl, 1963). Many other pen and wash drawings in a similar vein complete the series.

The drawing series entitled 'Stations of Worry' emphasizes the weary and fearful face of finding no security and personal covering under 'the shelter' of the Iraqi government, symbolized here in the date palm.
Figure 23, Adnan, *Stations of worry*, Ink, 1m x 0.8m each, 1999
The drawing, *Exile* in the 'Stations of Worry series', 1999, expresses the anxiety felt by the artist in his attempts to find his voice. This refers to his aborted attempts to protest against the corrupt Hussein Government years earlier. The symbol of the feather represents the writer, or expressive artist, who is completely thwarted by the threat of personal annihilation, both psychological through his loss of freedom, and physical. Nobody in Iraq during this time could openly criticize the Government and expect to live. Thus, the turned face with its huge eye, clearly on full alert, characterizes many of
Adnan's drawings. His frustration shows itself in the stabs of ink, looking dangerously like spurts of blood from gun-shot wounds, which threaten every attempt to give expression to his thoughts.

The images come together again in the next work, in the series Stations of Worry, Waiting, 1999, but with the addition of the prison bars in the background of the drawing. The sad and weary eye of the prisoner looks wistfully from behind the symbolic feather, the creative motif common to many of the drawings, through which he hopes, eventually to give expression to all his pent-up emotions. For Adnan, the creative motif might just as easily have been a paint brush, as the means by which he did eventually find his 'voice'.

_The Homeland_, 1999, another work in the ink and wash series, incorporates the symbol of the soldier's boot. In fact, it takes centre stage. Blood, the ever-near threat of death, seems to flow from the boot of the soldier (representing the government forces), which stomps brazenly over the hand-written letter (again, symbolizing the creative spirit) and splashes it with blood. The four screws in the corners of the text also suggest a posted public notice, and adds further to the statement of severely suppressed public opinion under the Iraqi dictatorship. Fear is expressed in the huge eye observing its callous destruction.

Adnan added a further word of explanation: "The Iraqi artist lives in a climate of worry between the past of his home country and his present. As an immigrant in exile, he is worried how he is ever going to fulfil his dreams and ambitions, what with finding himself in an unfamiliar situation in a strange country and having the barriers of a second language to deal with as well" (Adnan, Sept 2001). The educated artist in this situation, belonging to a generation which values personal and artistic freedom and dreams of escape from a psychologically crushing dictatorship, suffers more than anybody.

_The Coming of War_, a mixed media work on canvas, completed in Turkey 1993 and later smuggled into Australia where it was published in Ishtar magazine in July, 1998 (Adnan, Ishtar, 1998). The painting dramatically describes the panic felt amongst the forces for peace, symbolized in the circling white horses, panicking in the face of the terrifying signs of imminent war. The white horses, representing the forces for peace, find themselves enveloped in a black cloud of evil and confusion. The sun has seemingly
turned to blood, which could be a reference to the signs in the heavens described by Christ, which would signal the coming destruction of life on earth. The familiar checkerboard pattern, disappearing into the black cloud, can be glimpsed in the bottom right of the painting. Here it refers to the endless passage of night and day which will be caught up in the insane confusion of war. Time lost and wasted lives appear to swirl into the dark cloud.

In his second large collage, "Culture" 1997, Adnan refers to his beloved Islam as a culture under threat. The scattered letters of the Arabic alphabet over a background of Arabic news text, suggest a shattering of that ancient culture, further stressed in the background image of crumbling Moorish buildings typically found in the older parts of many Islamic cities. Will the creative spirit, the writer, the poet, the intellectual and the artist, so characteristic of the high age of Islamic culture, prevail or will they crumble away too like so many ancient buildings under the suffocating conditions of a military dictatorship? That seems to be the question implied in this, as indeed in many of the other images described above, most especially in the series of pen and wash drawings.
Figure 25, Adnan, *The Coming of War*, 2.5m x 2m, Mixed Media, 1993
More recently, Adnan discussed his works completed in Australia. In a painting, shown early in 2001 at the Power House Museum, Sydney, entitled *The Uniform*, he referred to a significant event in his life as a soldier conscripted into the Iraqi army. The image includes a soldier's uniform and a headscarf hanging from a hook on a wall. The uniform, hanging limply against the wall, represents himself as a disillusioned and broken young soldier. It speaks of his own spiritual depletion and exhaustion from the rigours of army life over which he had no control.

Describing the work, Adnan said: "It's about my own experience as a rebellious young soldier forced to fight in a war I didn't believe in. I decided that my shouts of disapproval were about as useful as most underground newspapers, a lot of noise that no one heard (a reference to Adnan's activities, as a contributor to *Freedom*, an underground newspaper in Baghdad circulating in 1986 - 1987). The painting speaks of my desertion without leave from the army. I finally hung up my uniform and walked away, simply disappeared" (Adnan, July 2001). The image of the two soldier's boots at the bottom of
the picture, one of them collapsed against the ground, conveys a painful personal meaning for Adnan. As described earlier, his left leg was permanently damaged in that war. It was a traumatic experience for him and one which he struggles to come to terms with to this day.

Figure 27, Adnan, The Uniform, 2m x 1.8m, Mixed Media, 200~

Adnan's background as an engineer and graphic designer is evident in Horror. Geometric lines and circles, Cubist style, cross the canvas behind which peers a huge, staring eye (Adnan studied graphic design at Sydney College in 1996): “The staring eye represents the horror of the prisoner who seems to be looking up from a hole in the jail”, he explained. “The choice of the blue is two-fold: It symbolizes a state of depression, the darkness of the mind, and also alludes to the dark and sunless cells of the prisons of Iraq. The lines and circles also represent the psychological prison experienced by the Iraqi
people under a military dictatorship, especially during the war in Iraq." (Adnan, October 2001)

"The bright colours I've used in Horror and some other of my war paintings are colours associated with Kurdish tradition. Our national costumes reflect these bright colours. Faiq Hassan, our famous Iraqi artist and one of my greatest influences, favours red. The bright yellow background of The Uniform, for example, represents Kurdistan, my country, even though mood of the painting, for me at least, is tragic and sombre. I found it very difficult coming here as a refugee into a strange culture, to find I had to explain everything, my background, why I paint the way I do, my choice of colours, and so on". Asked if he felt free in Australia to express himself the way he wanted to, he said, "Yes, but it was very different in Iraq. Yet I am an Iraqi to the core. If I had a choice, and if there had not been those two long wars in Iraq, I would have chosen to live there with my family and friends. I would wish to die there, not here in a strange country. However, I was not free, as an artist, there. I was under constant pressure. Here you are free, and that, for an artist, is as important as breathing" (Adnan, October 2001).
Images of bloodstained hands appear in two of the paintings. The first of these two paintings is constructed in a somewhat similar manner to the painting discussed above, from crossing lines, a central circle and square. Both refer to the blood of the martyrs, the young men who died in the war and whose heavy sacrifice is symbolized as a hand coming up from the grave in protest of their wasted lives. There is a double meaning to the blood symbol within the Iraqi culture. It can symbolize death, martyrdom, as it generally does but blood can also represent good luck, according to an ancient tradition which is less commonly practiced these days. It used to be common when, say, someone bought a new car, for a lamb to be slaughtered and its blood was smeared on its wheels. This was supposed to give protection and bring good luck to the owner of the car.

"In the second painting", Adnan explains, “the images of both the crumbling graves and the ancient buildings suggest the final judgment of time. They are based on real ones found in a certain Iraqi city. Both paintings are based on a poem by Mahmood Darwish. It is mothers who suffer in the loss of their sons in the war, more than anyone else” (Adnan, October 2001). This aspect, the grief of the mother, is emphasized in Darwish’s poem (Darwish, 1995). Darwish, an important Syrian poet, was exiled from his homeland as a teenager during the Israeli occupation in 1948. The poem, translated from Arabic, speaks of the tragedy of the family torn apart by war:

I long for my mother’s bread,
my mother’s coffee
and my mother’s touch.
Memories of childhood
haunt me, day after day.,
Yet I love my life,
for if I die
I will be shamed
by my mother’s tears.

![Arabic translation](image-url)
"Ah, my mother’s tears.

"Poetry" Adnan said, "has been an important inspiration for my art".

In the large painting, "Bearing' or 'Suffering', 1998, Adnan relinquishes his Iraqi colours to express the deep personal pain he felt as a refugee, seriously maimed, cut off from his family, frightened, homesick, and dislocated, in an unfamiliar country. Cast in dark, metallic shades, the tortured image seems to scream from the canvas. Huge and cruel metal spears pierce and tear at his flesh, gaping holes in the torso referring, in a semiotic sense, to that missing part, the right leg. The artist under extreme duress and suppression feels agony in every part of his body and mind. Instruments of torture seem to crush down on his head referring again to the agony of creative and mental suppression. Adnan characterizes himself in his superhuman attempt to free himself from the shackles imposed by an uncompromising military dictatorship. He is locked in, trapped, and feels powerless to free himself from his painful predicament. He is literally screwed into it.

Figure 29, Adnan, Blood Stain (series), 1.5m x 1m, Mixed media, 1994
Summary

As this chapter has shown, Adnan's paintings, taken together, sum up his personal feelings about war, its futility, its tragedy, its waste of time, its destruction of families, and loss of young lives. On the other hand, they demonstrate the resilience and resourcefulness of the human spirit determined to use for good whatever can be salvaged from a bad situation. They also show Adnan's persistent belief in the core of his Iraqi Islamic culture.

In order to cope with the political restrictions imposed by the military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, Adnan used a range of coping strategies, many of which have been outlined above by leading psychotherapists and psychologists in the field. Adnan, however, adopted many of these strategies instinctively, using his natural creative impulse.
This chapter has compared Adnan’s coping mechanisms with those suggested by these experts and we would argue that the most efficacious feature of his personal healing strategy was his willingness to confront the worst aspect of the war experience directly through artistic expression. Even in the most appalling circumstances of the war, in his ability to retrieve something positive from the seemingly impossible, Adnan had, as had Victor Frankl before him, instinctively included this mental discipline in his own survival kit, a habit of thinking which assisted him in his on-going struggle in coming to terms with the completely “foreign” culture which confronted him in Australia.

Yet it was art, the inherent therapeutic qualities experienced through a direct involvement in image making, that Adnan cites as being perhaps the most valuable crutch in his path to complete recovery. He would agree with other theorists quoted earlier that the very fact of transferring his emotions to canvas was in itself an experience of emotional release, and had the added effect of creating an emotional distance from the scene described: “It helps you to realize it was an event that happened in the past and you can file it away if you choose, like a discarded painting,” he explained. Adnan himself emphasized many times throughout the course of the interviews with him precisely how the physical transference of emotion into expressive art work had helped him to get rid of a great deal of ‘steam’, helping him to achieve a measure of control over his own emotional reaction to traumatic events of the Iraqi wars.

Today, Adnan is continuing his work as a designer and contributing journalist to the Australian Iraqi magazine, Ishtar. Now, having completed his third degree (Graphic Design, Sydney University 2001), he is involved in community work, teaching Art to retired people in his local community of Auburn in Sydney. Although Adnan still admits to occasional intrusive flashbacks and nightmares, to bouts of depression and homesickness, the degree of his interaction with the community and his clear intention of playing a positive role within it demonstrate the extent to which he has grown towards complete recovery. For this, Adnan gives full credit both to the support of his wife and, significantly, to psychological healing properties inherent in the physical expression of art.
Chapter Twelve: PAGES FROM THE DIARIES OF TWO BROTHERS

This chapter will explore the various means by which two Iraqi Muslim artists, Ali and Jamal, managed to cope under the most extreme circumstances in wartime Iraq. In particular, it will demonstrate the therapeutic value of creative expression, in these cases both visual and verbal, in providing the mental and psychological space necessary to ward off the negative effects of war trauma and to preserve faith in their traditional religion and culture. It will also compare the coping methods employed by many contemporary psychotherapists and psychiatrists involved in the treatment of war trauma victims, with reference to those methods adopted by these brothers. Reference will be made to their findings in relation to the treatment of trauma victims and also to the psychological theories relative to these treatments. Included will be the work of Dr. Edward Tick, Frank M. Ochberg, Bessel A. van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, Victor E. Frankl, Sigmund Freud and others.

Ali

War trauma was not an unfamiliar experience for Ali. As an eighteen-year old student recently released from an Iraqi prison on suspicion of anti-government activity, he witnessed the slaughter of hundreds of his townsfolk in the square of Suk Al-sheuk in 1991. Just previously, he had experienced the bombing of Al Nasiria Bridge in his home city when hundreds of civilians, crossing the bridge on foot, were hurled into the river and drowned directly in front of his eyes. How, then, does a young person, exposed to such trauma, cope with the emotional shock of such experiences? We explore here the personal resources, mental, spiritual and creative which, taken together, assisted in the healing process and enabled Ali to distance himself psychologically from the destructive elements of these events. It will explain how one young Iraqi Muslim, confined to his tent in the crowded refugee camp in the desert of Rafha, managed to convey, through opening the pages of his personal diary, a real understanding of his thoughts and frustrations, as well as those of the similarly traumatized refugee population held within the camp. It will explore how his personal faith in a meaningful future life both as a productive artist, poet and, possibly as a journalist, contributed to his relative success in maintaining his
personal stability in seemingly impossible situations. Meditation, too, and the richness of an inner life fostered in him by his Islamic upbringing, had much to do with his on-going healing.

This chapter will also document the various ways in which Ali has continued to make inroads into the Australian population in his determination to report on the ongoing plight of hundreds of refugees who continued to be held in the camp at Rafha. As a contributing journalist to the Arabic newspaper *AD-DIYAR* (Sokarno, ed., 2002) he continued to voice his opinion not only on the status of refugees, both here and at home, but also on the political situation in the Middle East. For Muhammad, as indeed for each of us, it is fundamentally important to tell the story of the Iraqi refugees’ fight for survival; the life-imprisonment-or-death choice available to those who had chosen to remain in Iraq under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

To begin the analysis, some personal details, including Ali’s family background and a notable early experience of family trauma, will be discussed. Ali’s education, particularly in relation to the school art program, will also be included to demonstrate its influence on his future creative development. As we have seen, the teaching of art in Iraq had been influenced by the British from 1918, the end of the First World War. It had introduced European customs and contemporary art movements to the school systems of Iraq. Following this, an examination of Ali’s personal diary recorded in the desert refugee camp at Rafha will be made in order to help clarify the predicament of the civilian population and particularly of the creative artist under a military dictatorship. Each diary entry will include the original pencil sketch along with his personal comments written in Arabic and translated into English. A selection of his original poetry, describing his personal trauma, will accompany some of the diary pages. Some of his personal initiatives, such as his organization of poetry reading groups and mixed art exhibitions within the camp, their therapeutic value and psychological effect will be assessed in the light of contemporary theory related to healing processes of war victims. Therapeutic mechanisms commonly used by major psychotherapists in their treatments for the healing and normalization of their patients will be referred to in assessing the ‘normal’ syndrome.
of psychological symptoms observed both in Ali himself and in his fellow refugees in the camp at Rafha.

Figure 31, Ali at Rafha Camp in Saudi Arabia 1991

Ali was born in southern Iraq in the small city of Suk Al Shuke, in 1965. He was the middle child in a family of eight, born into a middle class family. His father owned a factory producing mosaic tiles and building materials. All six sons worked in the factory, which financed their education. From a very young age, Ali showed an interest in art. At ten years of age, he was busy making portraits for his friends. His method was to project a small photo or image onto the wall, and copy and enhance it with coloured pencils.

Ali’s artistic talents were noticed and encouraged at primary school in Suk Al Shuke. It is interesting to note that this city was partly built by the British during their occupation of Iraq after the First World War (Abdul Kareem, 1990). Indeed, the city’s entire irrigation system was built by the British who employed many Iraqis in the scheme; Ali’s father was employed in the scheme. British influence can be seen today in the architecture of the city which, for the most part, retains its traditional style. Importantly, the British occupation impacted greatly on Ali’s education in his hometown, as indeed it did throughout Iraq. It was the British occupation that was responsible for the introduction of
the English language throughout Iraq and, with it, many aspects of European fashion and culture (Abdul Kareem, 1990). English soccer, for example, became the major game played throughout all Iraqi schools. This British influence accounted for young Ali’s exposure to European art, including the introduction of such major artists as Picasso, Miro, Renoir, Gauguin, Dali and Van Gogh, as well as the study of European art movements as he progressed through high school. The school art program, beginning at the primary school level, was highly controlled by the government. Political bias inevitably favoured the government line. All student art, for example, was required to show the superiority of the Iraqi government forces and to depict some aspect of the current wars in Palestine against the Israeli forces.

Below is an example of young Ali’s high school artwork. The compulsory victory sign, supposedly commemorating Iraq’s victory over Iran, clearly is an example of government propaganda. In fact, the Iraqis were defeated in the Iranian-Iraqi war. The poem expresses a traditional theme of victory extolling Iraq’s success in re-capturing, from the Iranian forces, the little seaboard town of Al-Fau in the Iraqi Gulf.
One event of young Ali’s childhood (he was about nine years of age), which deeply affected him was the arrest and imprisonment of his father on a charge of political anti-government collusion. His father happened to have some friends who were Communists and on this evidence alone, he was jailed, beaten and tortured over a period of two years.

“I can never forget the sight of the terrible bruises and scars on my father’s feet,” Ali said, “or forget the sound of my mother’s sobbing over the two years when she sat at home waiting for his return. My first sense of the injustices served on innocent people, later familiar under the military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, stemmed from this experience.”

Another notable event in young Ali’s life occurred when, as an eighteen year old and just commencing a course of study in Economics at Baghdad University, he was arrested on
suspicion of anti-government collusion. At the time, he was merely visiting student friends in Baghdad at about nine o’clock in the evening. Suddenly, there was the sound of a loud crash against the door. Three secret police kicked open the door and marched in, accusing Ali and his friends of being secret Communists plotting against the government. They refused to listen to the boys’ protests of innocence, blindfolded them, bundled them roughly into a jeep and drove off to the headquarters where they were savagely beaten with a length of hose. Also, Ali suffered heavy kicks to the stomach before being thrown into the jail in Baghdad. Three months later, having survived frequent beatings and the inhumane conditions of the jail, Ali’s name was called. In the investigating officer’s room, after a long interrogation, the authorities found him to be innocent and he was released. No apology was made. The only parting words were “[y]ou’re lucky, because if we had found you guilty of plotting against the government, even the blue fly would never find your carcass” (The blue fly is attracted to dead bodies). This experience so deeply affected young Ali that he was unable to talk about it for years after the event. He says that “[e]ven now whenever I think about it I feel sick in the stomach.”

The situation in Iraq in 1990 had become desperate. The general expectation, once the Gulf war had begun, had been that the American forces would have killed Saddam Hussein and destroyed his dynasty. Ali, along with thousands of other Iraqis, saw their chance of opposing the Government and staged an enormous uprising in his own city of Suk Al-Shuk. However, the war ended and Saddam Hussein remained in place. It was no longer safe for any of the revolutionaries to remain in Iraq. Thus it was that young Ali, along with thousands of refugees, fled from Iraq and headed south into Saudi Arabia, wearing on their backs their only set of clothes and carrying their white flags, hoping for acceptance in the camps set up by the UN and the American Army.

“American forces, pursuing in helicopters, blocked us off at the Saudi-Iraqi border and were prepared to shoot us until one of our number, a medical doctor fluent in English, was able to explain that we were refugees who had been involved in anti-government demonstrations and were fleeing for our lives. The Americans held us for three days until
they were able to check our stories and finally give us permission to cross the border into Saudi Arabia, to set up camp there."

The camp, a joint project set up and run by American army personnel in collaboration with United Nations military staff, is located about 400 kilometres south-west of Baghdad on the Saudi-Arabian boarder. The perimeters of the camp now enclose an area of hundreds of square kilometres, the area of a small city. When Ali, along with the refugees from Baghdad, first arrived at the American army post at Rafha, they were confronted by a vast area of desert. There were no dwelling places there at all. The United Nations staff simply allocated a small area and a few basics materials to each refugee group and told them they would have to construct their own dwelling places as best they could. This meant that every adult person would be engaged in the difficult work of clearing out the tough, stubborn, and prickly akul plants and preparing the area for the construction of the dwellings. Useful materials were scarce and every piece of wood, every wooden box, used for storing food cans and cartons etc., every timber board or log that could be found, was put to use in making the basic frame of the tent. Next came the arduous work of making mud bricks – hundreds were required for each dwelling. The brick-making activity was a concerted effort with a whole group of adults working together on each tent. The canvas canopy was supplied by The United Nations. Once the dwellings were completed, the UN staff left the area, placing the newly formed Rafha camp in the care of Saudi-Arabian forces. From time to time, American staff and army personnel would arrive by helicopter to check on any reported problem within the camp. They also came periodically with staff from other embassies to interview prospective applicants for refugee status.

The following is a selection from the original pages of Ali’s camp diary. Paper was scarce in the Rafha camp in the desert of Saudi Arabia. Often the only available writing surface was on the backs of recycled labels from food tins and cardboard packets, such as the insides of cigarette cartons. Ali recorded his diary entries on any writing surface that was available, whether this should be the inside of a can wrapper or a cigarette packet or, if he was lucky, a piece of note paper procured by purchasing it from one of the camp
guards using the monthly meagre allowance given to each refugee. All of the diary entries are illustrated with pencil drawings symbolizing the conditions in which the refugees found themselves. The only writing tool available to Ali was a lead pencil, which he carried in his pocket from Iraq to the camp. In these conditions, even a lead pencil was a vital and precious commodity and to lose this in the sand, as he often did, was the cause of great distress to him. His greatest fear was that the lead in the pencil would break and he took great care to put only the lightest pressure on it. This explains the very tentative, stark, and economical style of the drawings.

The diary was begun very early in 1991, almost as soon as he completed the building of the tent which was to be his home for the next five years. Having ambitions to one day taking up a journalistic career, and telling his story to a much wider public, Ali was determined to record his personal response to the traumatic consequences of the military dictatorship in Iraq. Many of the diary illustrations, which will be analysed in detail throughout the chapter, characterize him as a prisoner even when, as a refugee in the camp at Rafha in Saudi Arabia, he was supposedly in the care of United Nations personnel. More often than not, the camp was left in the so-called protection of armed Saudi Arabian guards who had little sympathy with Iraqi refugees. Ali attaches great importance to his diary in which he continues to record events of special significance to him. It has proven to be a source for much of his writing, especially his poetry. "The experience", he said, "has given me a deep appreciation of the plight of so many Iraqi refugees who continue to survive in subhuman conditions, not only in Iraqi jails but also in refugee camps like Rafha" (July 2002).
In this sketch, entitled *The Exodus*, Ali infers all the emotional trauma of a people escaping from a hostile country but nevertheless hopeful of finding peace and security in some land ‘flowing with milk and honey’, reminiscent of an aspect of his religious upbringing: “How well I remember the long and arduous journey through the desert between Iraq and Saudi Arabia,” Ali said (July 2002).

Ali’s sketch of the *Exodus* proved to have psychological and mental ramifications extending far beyond the tiny pencil sketch here. In being able to relate his own desperate circumstance to a distant historical event which, for the escaping Jews, finally had a positive outcome or at least the hope of one, he drew some consolation in the thought that perhaps some good might come of his experience. It seemed, too, that the simple physical act of converting the experience to paper helped Ali to distance himself from all the negative associations attached to it including, at one point, the threat of sudden execution.
Throughout the discussions, Ali revealed that he experienced many of the severe symptoms of deep inner anguish which psychotherapist Edward Tick observed in his study of "Vietnam grief" (Tick, 1985). At various times he had suffered from depression, intrusive flashbacks, recurring nightmares and sleep problems, but there was never any sense of 'psychic numbness' which characterized so many of Tick's patients who had encountered traumatic situations at the front. Nor was he ever "stuck in early emotional patterns" as observed by Alice Miller (1983) as characteristic of victims of trauma. Tick holds that "grieving is necessary in order to release the self from long-contained heaviness of spirit" (Tick, 1985, p. 112). Ali, it seemed, was able to dissipate his grief through his ability to analyse accurately, and express through visual art the situation in which he found himself. Furthermore, he demonstrated the ability to separate himself from his present situation through his faith in the future in which he visualized his own active participation and the future possibilities of a career in economics, art or creative writing. Victor E. Frankl, psychiatrist and survivor of the concentration camps at
Auschwitz in World War II, included the practice of the positive visualization of meaningful future activities as an important strategy in coping with trauma (Frankl, 1963).

Ali’s image of the date palm, with its roots reaching down deep into the earth and penetrating into his brain, represents his longing for some connection with real life and living things. This line of thinking, showing a desire to link to the natural world, is an indication of normal behaviour in conditions of deprivation, according to Schneidman (1980). “The chain, fastened to the trunk of the palm tree, has a double meaning for me”, Ali explains. “On the one hand, it binds me emotionally to my homeland, the palm tree being a symbol for Iraq, and on another, because of the military situation in Iraq, it imprisons me here in the camp. The water in the middle of the drawing, flowing from the direction of some distant town represents, for me, the Tigris River which flows through my home city of Suk Al Shuke. For me, it symbolizes the very source of life” (March 2001).

The fact that Ali placed a large image of himself in the centre of the drawing, relative to the binding chains, seems to indicate not only his self awareness of his physical situation but also his belief in his ability to think his way out of his present situation. The chain here also takes into account his strong emotional ties to his homeland and family. As van der Kolk argues, “[e]motional attachment is the primary protection against the effects of trauma” (Van der Kolk, B. et al, 1995, p8). Ali had the advantage of a strong supportive family back home in Suk Al-Shuk, even though communication with his parents was completely severed during his incarceration in the Rafha refugee camp.
The difference between being in the state of numbness, as alluded to by Tick (1985) in his appraisal of war trauma damage, and that of being able to stand back and express normal fearful thoughts, is demonstrated in Ali's following comment on this accompanying drawing of Rafha camp: "Looking out across the desert I see what seems to me to be a city of the dead, a huge cemetery of graves, standing shoulder to shoulder. It was my constant fear that I would die in this place. Often, I felt as one of the living dead. In this sketch I am looking at the desert camp at Rafha. The tents, standing virtually wall-to-wall, offer a living space, in many cases, of no more than 1.5 square metres. Our personal identities have been lost. We are not known by our names but by our numbers and the blocks into which the camp is divided" (March 2001). Ali implies this lack of identity in portraying himself in the sketch as a cast shadow: "Barbed wire surrounds the entire perimeter of the camp, making it seem more like a prison than a place of refuge. My one sustaining dream here is that one day I will look back on the camp as a free person, and my memory of this place will seem just like a mirage in the desert" (March 2001).
Clearly, Ali’s ability to mentally extricate himself from a psychologically damaging situation had proven an effective coping strategy.

Figure 36, *Time Warp*, Pencil on A4 paper, June 11th 1991

Ali’s sense of presence, even in enduring the most oppressive and unrelieved boredom is evident in *Time Warp*. This has everything to do with his ability to analyse his situation in terms of visual symbols.

As Han F. de Wit (1991) emphasizes in *Contemplative Psychology*, the very act of attempting to translate a situation visually, results in the externalizing of psychological insights into the real nature of the human experience: “What I am trying to express here is a sense of timelessness, or rather, emotional timelessness”. (Sept 2001). In simple symbolic language, Ali has expressed the overwhelming oppression experienced by the captive refugees being held in limbo without any indication of a meaningful time-frame regarding their release from the camp. It is as if the time here had been ordered by one of
Dali’s drooping and dying clocks. Ali has attempted to symbolize this stretching of time in the huge stop sign which seems to imprison the clock, the hands of which seem to have frozen over. “Simply filling in the time of day, when there were no amenities available within the camp, was an on-going problem for us.” (Sept 2001) The rigid figure dwarfed by the seemingly enormous weight of timelessness, represents the feelings of many that they were caught up in a time warp: “We all wanted to scream out to the world that we were innocent people being held like criminals in conditions that were dehumanizing to say the least, but it seemed that the world was deaf or didn’t care and didn’t bother to find out. We wanted the world to know that camps like ours, even when run by the United Nations, leave much to be desired. We wanted the world to understand the near impossibility for many of us to obtain refugee status even though we had no hope of being accepted back in our own countries. We all feared that the best part of our lives, our youth, was being drained away and we could find ourselves old men and women by the time we were released ... The drawing speaks clearly of the only choice available to each one of us, that is no choice at all, standing rigidly between ‘a rock and a hard place’ that is, between the so-called security of the UN refuge, the barbed wire, and the very vulnerable dwelling places”. (Sept 2001)

In a separate interview, Ali stated, “[o]ften the tents proved to be no match for the extreme weather conditions of the desert. Often they were blown down in the high winds or simply crumbled away in heavy rain.” (Sept 2001) Ali’s quotation from Jean Paul Sartre, written in Arabic underneath the drawing, might be translated as “human beings, like Gods, demand complete freedom” [Jean-Paul Sartre’s books were banned in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s era, owing to their atheistic perspective. Before Hussein came to power, the books had been widely read throughout Iraq]
Round-the-clock boredom is the subject of this illustration. Sitting, stretching first one leg and then the other, shifting position, then doing the whole thing all over again became an on-going ritual of day to day existence”, Ali explained. Depression, from my own experience, affected all of us refugees and it was a constant battle to fill what seemed to be a mental and emotional and spiritual vacuum. “Probably the anxiety of not knowing was the worst thing to bear, not knowing when or if we would ever be given refugee status, whether we would ever find a place of freedom when we were finally released, and whether we would ever see our families again”. (Sept 2001)
Ali's ability to reach deeply into a mental and spiritual world, and then to express his emotions creatively, either as visual symbols or in word pictures, proved to be a most efficacious technique in lifting himself above the misery of camp life. This coping strategy, that is, the ability to focus mentally away from a negative and stressful environment, was one which psychiatrist, Victor E. Frankl (1963), relied on himself as a prisoner at the Auschwitz concentration centre of Nazi Germany. On the most basic level, prayer or meditation involves a focusing away from the present. Even a brief respite from the hardships and troubles of camp life brought some therapeutic benefits. Further to this, as Frankl emphasized throughout his analyses of his healing theory, the active prayer and meditation involves the mind in possibility thinking and therefore tends to result in an inner sense of peace and acceptance of even the most distressing circumstances once the idea of the final purpose of the experience has been grasped. Ali had been prepared for such through his heritage as a Muslim: "The accompanying sketch represents the stark
reality of my situation, a virtual prisoner in my 'home'. My posture, the position for Muslim prayer and meditation, refers to my practice of continuous prayer for physical, mental, and spiritual freedom," Ali said. (Sept 2001) The huge image of the eye looming faintly in the background is a reference to the all-seeing eye of Allah to whom Ali looked constantly for justice and mercy. Allah's eye appears to suggest some feminine attributes. This may be a reference to the dual nature of God, his spirit encompassing both feminine and masculine features. For instance, his love and caring may be seen as a feminine attribute whereas his power and strength are generally accepted as masculine traits.

![Figure 39, Reach the Bell. Pencil on A4 paper, 2nd November, 1991](image)

One of the constant prayers of refugees everywhere is to get their message out to authorities in the outside world of their plight and the need for rehabilitation in a safe and caring environment. The sketch here symbolizes the frustrations of the refugees to ring
the bell, which represents both alarm and freedom. Even the combined effort of the inmates to reach it fails.

Figure 40, *The Web. Pencil on A4 paper, November 3rd 1991*

"This drawing expresses the feeling I had of being caught in governmental red tape which I have symbolized as a huge spider's web" Ali said. (March 2001) There is no evidence of self-blame here. Clearly, it is the political ramifications inherent in the governmental red tape which Ali blames for the excessive time of his retention in the camp. Personal guilt, as experienced by many victims of war trauma, has never been part of Ali’s experience. Discussing the drawing, he explained: “At first, once we received our identification cards, we imagined that the officials would begin to process our applications for refugee status. Yet, as time went on, and our situation went from difficult to desperate, we had the feeling we were enmeshed in a powerful and sticky political web from which there
appeared to be no escape.” (Sept 2001) For Ali, however, a way of escape, at least a partial one, was always open to him – the creative escape expressed symbolically either in visual images or in the word pictures of poetry. He explained that the physical and mental effort required in creating a poem or a symbolic drawing had the effect of seeming to give him control above his circumstances and was the source of great personal satisfaction.

Even under the most distressing circumstances, Ali made a personal vow that he would never allow himself to indulge in self-pity. Every afternoon in the unlikely surroundings of Rafha Camp, he would dress himself in his best clothes and go to visit his friends, armed with his latest poem (July 2001). His fellow camp inmates, who were generally completely overwhelmed by the wretched situation in which they found themselves, did not always appreciate this positive approach. Indeed, frequently they expressed open hostility towards him. It is interesting to note that the better-educated inmates in the camp seemed able to cope better than the less-educated ones. To a great extent, then, it appears that Ali’s well-rounded education and his rich resource in a literary background, as well
as his political awareness, allowed him to express his feelings by any means of creative expression available to him.

![Image of a drawing]

Figure 42, Guilt and punishment, Pencil on A4 paper, December 12th 1991

It is interesting to note that Ali deliberately inserted the Islamic date of 1412 BC on this drawing. This refers to the practice of self-flagellation, illustrated here, which was commonly observed by strict Muslim people in 1412 BC. The flagellation was originally practiced as an expression of sorrow and grief at the death of a martyr. It has not been practiced in Iraq for three decades.

In the handbook, Coping with Catastrophe, Hodgkinson & Stewart (1991) suggest that one of the causes of guilt derives from imagined or real sins of omission, another, from the awareness of sins of commission. It is possible that a misplaced sense of guilt felt by many of the Rafha Muslims, a sin of omission, in not keeping up with traditional
religious practices, or in failing to do as much as they could, and therefore deserving of severe punishment from God, was the underlying reason for reviving this barbaric ritual. It is possible too that the ancient Jewish ideas of guilt and punishment, which inform much Islamic thought, weighed heavily on their minds, as they considered the desperate situation in which they found themselves. Surely this was a punishment from God? An experiment conducted at the Trauma Clinic at Harvard Medical School found that "both adults and children who have been traumatized are likely to turn their aggression against others or themselves" and, further, "problems with aggression against others have been particularly well documented in studies of war veterans." (Van der Kolk et al., 1995, p. 4)

Ali was severely disturbed and repulsed at being surrounded by extremist Muslims, being unable to escape the horrible sights and sounds coming from these people: "It was terrible", he said, "I tried to block out the sounds of their screams. Many would flog themselves with chains until blood streamed from their flesh. Some even knocked themselves unconscious by smashing shovels on their heads. Many persisted until they had achieved deep wounds in their skulls." (March 2001)

It is the practice of self-mutilation, which is observed in the Muslim's month of Ashur [Ashur is a holy month observed by Al-Shea Muslims], that Ali refers to in his sketch. These religious extremists are seen, hands raised in unison, slapping their heads and screaming and weeping. Others are brandishing knives especially made for the purpose of self-mutilation as was practiced in ancient times as a sign of grief and atonement. It is perhaps relevant to Ali's personal healing that he was able to separate himself from the fanatical demonstrations of the extremists. He claims to have found some release of his feelings of distress in recording the barbaric practice, in the hope of exposing this inhumane tradition at some future time. Ali's personal coping strategies discussed throughout this paper, helped to dissipate his reaction to this soul-destroying experience. The fact that he was able to plan future paintings based on his sketches was an ongoing consolation to him, as was the writing and reading of poetry. Ali is not religious in the conventional sense, but he does have that necessary survival ability defined as spirituality by Merwin and Smith-Kurtz as "a state of being fully alive and open to the moment. It
includes a sense of belonging and of having a place in the universe; a deep appreciation of a natural world, an openness for surprise and a capacity for joy and wonderment". (Merwin & Smith-Kurtz, 1988, p. 57)

Figure 43, Sardines in a Tin, Pencil on A4 paper, December 15th 1991

Even in the extremely trying conditions of Rafha, Ali always retained his sense of humour. This is apparent in the Arabic text underneath the illustration. The caption reads "Warning: Freedom is a health hazard. We advise you not to indulge in it". It is a wry comment on the conditions at Rafha camp. Here, he characterizes the inmates as assembly-line products, all stamped with the same lifeless expression, all frozen like automatons. Every aspect of life is squeezed into a cramped compartment. The small icon on the top of the cigarette packet, which bears down on each of their heads, is the inevitable outline of the tents, implying a constricted hope and squeezed imagination oppressing every aspect of their lives in the same way that an unfeeling and uncaring humanized puppeteer might have total control of their minds and bodies.
Ali described an incident that led to a serious disturbance there at that time. Drinking water was scarce. Trucks carrying water tanks came only spasmodically to the camp. In the heat and dust of the desert, people were becoming increasingly desperate to get water. When finally the water truck arrived, hundreds of very thirsty people hurried towards it carrying their water cans or whatever receptacle they could lay their hands on. Without
warning, the Saudi Arabian guards opened fire into the crowd. Their reason was that the people had not formed a proper queue to get their water, as was expected of them. Many, towards the front of the line, were wounded in the gunfire, and six were killed. Ali, in a state of shock and disbelief, witnessed the entire event.

Figure 46, *Slaughter in Rafha Camp*. Pencil on A4 paper, 15th December 1991

His illustration recording the aftermath of the incident was made at the actual burial site. The bodies of the dead had been left lying on the ground and were removed by their
relatives and carried to an area some distance from the camp. Fearing for his life, since he intended to report the incident to the UN officials, Ali made his way to the grave site under cover of dusk, a cardboard wrapper from a tuna can hidden in his shirt. Standing in front of the freshly dug graves, he made a hasty sketch on the back of the tuna label, noting the location of the graves. Returning to the camp, he completed the symbolic drawing shown here. In the illustration, the image of the dead, six-branched tree has taken on the form of a Christ figure with arms lifted to heaven, its body bleeding and riddled with bullet holes. Ali, like many Muslims, reveres the character of Jesus and regards him as a major prophet. The image symbolizes the death of the innocents, the tree roots reaching down into the graves of the six victims. The Christ figure, raising his eyes and his arms towards heaven, offers the six lives to God: “I was determined that this story would be told and that these six lives would not be cut off in vain, also, that action would be taken to investigate the incident and punish the responsible people. Nothing was done, even though I informed the representatives of the UN who attended my art exhibition in the camp where my illustration of the burial graves was on display.” (February 2001) Political considerations had much to do with Ali’s failure to achieve any useful action in investigating and acknowledging the shooting tragedy. It was simply covered up. Since all of the so-called ‘United Nations’ staff were American, it is not surprising that very little sympathy was given to the Iraqi population in the camp [This incident occurred immediately following the end of the Gulf War, 15th December 1991].

Submitted to this treatment for five years, Ali had begun to experience some of the psychological problems common to victims of trauma. For example, he often experienced what American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton has called the ‘death imprint’ (Stewart, 1991, p. 3), experiencing nightmares which brought back in vivid detail all the sights and sounds associated with traumatic war experiences.

All of the psychotherapists and psychiatrists referred to in this study have included a program of social interaction as a strategy in the healing of trauma victims. “Lieberman, Borman, and their colleagues (1979) described and evaluated self-help groups, noting how effective they are...Self and mutual support groups tend to be specific, rather than
The Rafha Camp poetry group initiated by Ali was certainly specific. He had sought out like-minded friends and spread the word about the camp of a poetry group to which any interested person was invited. Fellow poets contributed and read their own work. He even organized public reading performances and competitions. Lively discussions followed each performance: "I found that the process of sharing our own creations was vital in my own healing process. Other participants also expressed positive effects resulting from the experience," he said. This sits well with Frankl's theory of healing through his logotherapy system (Ochberg, 1993, p. 136), which emphasizes the value of positive shared experiences and the choice for good available to every human being. Another aspect of Frankl's theory which was observable in the camp was the healing power of a sense of humour which some managed to retain regardless of the circumstances. It was not uncommon for one of the poets, for example, to perform a funny poem sending up events at the camp or commenting rudely about the food. On the question of suffering, again, Frankl insists that it is the attitude in which we take our suffering upon our self which can give meaning to our lives: "Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning." (Ochberg, 1993, p. 179)

A Poem by Ali written in Rafha Camp.

To My Friend, Salah ... (A fellow Poet at Rafha Camp)

[A translation from the original Arabic]

Even knowing you briefly,
you inspired me with hope,
through art, and the beauty of language.
Reminding me
of the beautiful glass windows
in our homes, back there in Karbala,
full of colour and sparkling light.
You gave me a dream to hold on to.
And I will miss you greatly.

[Ali’s friend, Salah, was given his refugee status by the UN and was given permission to enter Holland a year before Ali was accepted to enter Australia as a refugee in 1995]

This poem is an example of a longing for beauty as if there were times when he did want to blot out the entire war experience. This is evident both in his poetry and in many of his diary drawings. Some psychotherapists would consider this tendency as evidence of ‘avoidance’ associated with ‘numbing’, and suggest that this might be an example of delayed response (Hodgkinson & Stewart, 1991). Ali himself admits to some persistent, if less serious problems. He claims to have some residual guilt feelings over the fact that he was given refugee status and now has all the advantages of a safe and free way of life whereas his family, having fled to the safety of Syria, are still being interrogated by Iraqi authorities. They are being questioned about the whereabouts of their son. Their future therefore is fraught with danger. Also, he is occasionally bothered by intrusive flashbacks and nightmares, and sometimes talks about memory loss and general forgetfulness.

Van der Kolk and colleagues discuss the prevalence of both intrusions of traumatic images and various indications of amnesia as generally characteristic of post-traumatic syndrome disorder PTSD patients (Van der Kolk et al., 1995). Could Ali’s apparent periods of amnesia be an example of the PTSD repression, as referenced by psychiatrist and editor Frank N. Magill (1993), who considers it to be a defence mechanism that keeps unacceptable thoughts and impulses from becoming conscious. In this theory, anxiety acts as a signal to the ego, the rational, conscious part of the mind that a forbidden impulse is trying to force into consciousness. The signal alerts the ego to try to repress the unwanted impulse. In Ali’s case, this is perhaps the intrusion of a traumatic memory. According to Freud, if the ego cannot successfully repress the forbidden impulse it may try to transfer the forbidden impulse to a relevant object. Ali discussed his contemporary fear of Australian uniformed police officers. Could this be an example of Freud’s repression theory?

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In summation, the sentiments expressed in Ochberg's own poem, used in the treatment of traumatized war victims, to a great extent parallels Ali's own personal philosophy. Even under the most distressing circumstances, Ali made a personal vow that he would never allow himself to indulge in self-pity. As suggested, every afternoon in the unlikely surroundings of Rafha Camp, he would dress himself in his best clothes and go to visit his friends, armed with his latest poem.

Meditation, A Prisoner's Wings. October 16\textsuperscript{th} 1991

\begin{quote}
Awaking from dreams
finding myself still a stranger
in an unfamiliar place
is the worst nightmare
Yet in our flight to freedom
our saddles will never slip
even if the world should rock
we will look forward to a new sunrise
and the sound of our native songs.
\end{quote}
Images of corpses, dismembered bodies in pools of blood screaming people rifles pointed into faces, recur over and over again in nightmares and day dreams of the people who experienced such sights in real life as the ‘death imprint’ mentioned above. These images appear in his poem, *Corpse in the Desert*.


A voice calls from a ruined land

Rafha you are a corpse

Lying in the sand

In death all colour is drained from you

Birds fall, crushed.

Only silence reaches above the pale light

of your lamps

Lifeless days stretch like train tracks

which I, the train, am forced to drag along

You, Rafha, corpse, lying in the sand.

Summing up and illustrating, among other things, his persistent belief in the good of his beloved Islam, Ali had this to say; “Four things saved me from complete mental collapse; first, I had two really good friends who were both poets; second, the fact that I was able to express my feelings creatively both in poetry and in symbolic drawings; third, that I was able to plan my future as an artist or journalist and discuss other possibilities with my friends; and last but not least, that I was able to keep my faith and my belief that Allah
would see to it that good would finally come out of this terrible experience”.

(March 2002)

Figure 47, Ali’s article about the Iranian artist Hossein Valamanesh Printed in the Australian Arabic newspaper, AD-DIYAR, 23rd April, 2002.

Ali particularly identifies with the work of this expatriate artist with the implied sense of rootlessness in his image which can be read both as a suspended symbol of life as an expatriate and also as an experience of a culture which seems to be turned on its head. Hope exists as a candle flame persisting in the memory even though all contact with
home and culture has been severed. The burned carpet also speaks of the destruction not only of a culture but also of irrevocable emotional ties.

Although he is only just beginning work as a freelance journalist, Ali’s future in this discipline seems assured. In April, 2002, the editor of the Australian Arabic Newspaper, AD-DIYAR, called him by phone and invited him to come in for an interview regarding his work. So impressed was he with his written articles on the subject of art and movies, that he invited him to accept a permanent position as a reviewer on his newspaper. To the present day, he continues to publish for this and other newspapers.

**Jamal**

Jamal was interviewed by phone and by letters in January 2002 and September 2003 after the Western Australian Detention Centre, where he was interred, had rejected Dr Samarayi’s application to visit him for the interview. His three brothers, who lived in Sydney, helped to initiate and maintain contact.

Born in Al-Nasiriya in the south of Iraq in 1957, Jamal completed a degree in Archaeology in Al-Mustansirya University in Baghdad under the tutelage of the famous Archaeologist, Taha Baker. He specialized in Acadian, Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations. On completing his studies, he was appointed Director of the large museum at Al Nasyria in southern Iraq. Later, he was promoted to the position of Chief Director of Archaeological Investigations of Al-Nasyria. Married in 1994 and the father of three children, Jamal resigned his position as director because he objected to continuous requests from Oday Hussein, son of Saddam Hussein, to hand over some of the treasures from the museum: “As I could not, in conscience, allow these treasures to leave the museum, and since Oday’s response was known to be dangerously unpredictable, I had no choice but to escape with my family to Jordan in January 1999, where I was able to buy a fake passport to Syria. After staying one month with my family in Syria and, being by now in some financial difficulty having paid several thousand US dollars to a guide, I decided that the safest plan would be for me to first make the journey to Australia alone, and later, when it was safe to do so, to bring my family to live with me there. I had three
brothers who, some years earlier in 1991, just after the Gulf War, had been involved in anti-government demonstrations and, for that reason, had no choice but to seek asylum outside of Iraq. After spending five long years at the refugee camp at Rafha on the Saudi Arabian/Iraqi border, their applications for passage to Australia had finally been approved. Since that time, they had frequently reported to Jamal that they had found Australia a safe and wonderful country in which to bring up a family. Jamal had tried many times to apply to the United Nations in Syria for legal passage to Australia, but had been rejected each time.

Jamal told me of the situation: “I considered it was too dangerous in the current situation to remain in Syria and decided to make my way to Djakarta en route to Australia. With the help of illegal ‘people guides’, further fake passports were arranged for the passage by boat to Australia. It was a dangerous and difficult journey. We had been crowded together, men, women and children in a fishing boat 8 metres in length; tossing about in rough seas on the way to Ashmore Reef. A helicopter transferred us to Port Hedland, (Western Australia) on 16/6/1999. At Port Hedland, by accident, I was ushered into a small room along with 17 Turkish men who were being sent back to Turkey. I was not able to make the authorities there understand that I was not Turkish, but Iraqi, even though I spoke to them in English. As a result, I was forced to wait in isolation in a small separate room for five months and ten days. I had been forbidden to use the phone or to write a letter or even to speak to any other person.”

Jamal continued: “I heard later that all the Iraqi refugees who had come with me in the boat had been given temporary visas and had been allowed to leave the detention centre. I was told that my name had been called over the intercom to join the other Iraqis to receive my visa. However as I was absent from the group and nobody had bothered to find me in the room in which I had been confined, I missed the opportunity. Finally, when I did have a chance to speak to the authorities, I was told that I was free to go back to Syria.”

“My case was heard in the Federal Court in July 2002. Once the authorities were satisfied that I really was Iraqi, they took me out of isolation and insisted that I return to Iraq.
Since your wife and children are already there, they insisted, you could go back to Syria, if only on a temporary basis. I explained that if I should be returned to Iraq in the current situation, my life would be in grave danger. After this, I applied to the government lawyers at the detention centre to examine my case. However, they refused outright. Subsequently, my three brothers approached a private lawyer who demanded a fee of $10,000 to take my case. The lawyer applied to the Syrian ambassador asking if I could return from Australia to join my family in Syria. The application was refused on the grounds that, since I am not a native of Syria I have no legal right to permanent residency in Syria. This put me in an extremely difficult situation. Not only had I been rejected as an Australian immigrant but I had also been rejected by the Syrian authorities and to return to Iraq was out of the question. I felt stripped of my basic human rights, being denied a country to call my own and having apparently no personal identity. Having strong emotional ties to my homeland, Iraq, in whose ancient history I had immersed myself for decades, I was keenly aware of the injustice to which I had been subjected. All I wanted was a safe place in which there was some hope of a future for me and for my family. I requested that my lawyer, Mr. C Jayawardena, send the details of my case to the Australian Minister of Immigration and any other organization claiming to support human rights of refugees escaping from an impossible situation in Iraq. Some indications of the difficulties facing Iraqi refugees in Australia might be gleaned from the brief details included in my letter to Mr. P. Ruddock, the Minister of Immigration.

A letter from Jamal to his brother Talib, living in Sydney, Australia, September 1999:

My dear brother,

As I write this letter I am thinking about Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s book ‘No Letters for the Colonel’.

Unlike the Colonel, I have plenty of people like you who could write to me, but like the Colonel I have no hope of ever receiving them while I am in this place. We are denied mail, the use of the phone, TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. The one exception is the occasional video film which we are sometimes permitted to watch. We are denied access to visitors, even family members. Our questions regarding our future are ignored.
so we have no means of knowing whether or when we might be released from the centre. The only things we are permitted are regular meals and physical exercise. No consideration is given to our social, emotional and psychological needs. So many people here are deeply depressed, being unable even to make one simple phone call to let their families know of their whereabouts. Many times I witnessed inmates sobbing uncontrollably in front of visiting supervisors who nevertheless ignored their pleas for help in getting word to their families and failed to offer them any assurance that their cases would be considered.
Two months ago I witnessed two Iraqi inmates, after being rejected and denied an opportunity for a second interview to ascertain their prospects, attempting to draw attention to their appalling treatment by commencing a hunger strike. For five days they went without food or water. Although they were seen everyday by supervisors who were certainly trying to get them to eat, they continued to fast until a doctor examined one of
them and found his kidney to be in a serious condition and warned him that unless he began eating at once it would break down completely. Both reluctantly began to eat. The shame is that no good came from their hunger strike. They were not given an interview. Had they died, the authorities would have said simply, "they died because they refused to eat the food provided to them. It's nothing to do with us."

Ninety days have passed since my first interview on the 17th of June 1999. Since that time I have sent three letters to the Department of Immigration, each one containing an application for an interview and permission to contact our families. Unfortunately, all my letters were ignored as were all those of my Iraqi friends. Since my first application I was moved to Block E where all those whose applications had been rejected were placed.
Jamal asked Ibtihal Samarayi to translate all of his letters to English and send it to Department of Immigration, 2003.
As a result of all this I find myself sinking into deep depression, especially seeing group after group of young refugees being forcibly deported from the centre. I can't help feeling that I will be next to be deported to Iraq and that I would certainly be executed by this Hussein government since I had incurred the wrath of Oday Hussein in rejecting his request for some precious items from the Nassyria Museum of Antiquities. Over and over again, day and night, I ran through every possible scenario that might await me in Iraq, or hopefully, in Auburn NSW (Australia), with my three brothers and later, uniting with my wife and two children.

Imprisonment, torture, the threat of execution, hunger, isolation, homelessness, etc.- what words to describe man's inhumanity to man? On top of all of this, I am worried about my
pregnant wife left behind in Syria with her two children with my elderly parents. I have run out of patience. I curse Saddam Hussein. I curse all governments who force their people to flee from their homeland to become hopeless refugees all over the earth forced to rely on charity. Day after day we continue to wait for news that never comes, conscious that our lives are slowly wasting away with only more gloom and more grey hair to mark the passing days and months.

Please give my regards to my dear brothers Ali and Laith and my love to my parents in Syria, also all my love to my wife and two little ones Euphrates and Ali. Tell her I am thinking of her constantly and hoping that all goes well for her at the birth of our child.

Your loving Brother,

Jamal 15th September 1999

Jamal’s letter to his brothers describes in detail the appalling conditions which existed at the time in many of Australia’s detention centres. Jamal arrived in Port Hedland Detention Centre in February 1999 and was deported to Syria in December 2002.

A Selection of Poetry by Jamal

This is a kind of experiment. What we have below is the raw material taken from Jamal’s poem. The piece is about his pain inside Port Hedland Detention Centre. Had someone else written the piece, it would have been different; maybe not wildly different, but different. At any rate, this should enable the reader to get at the truth of the subject. Having his poem by itself and nothing more shows us a scene of pain inside Port Hedland Detention Centre.
My Brother Ali [free translation from the original Arabic]

**Collapse (2003)**

*Your kindness warms me*

*and begins to lift my spirits on*

*wings of doves*

*reminding me of our endless*

*search as children*

*for that elusive key in the face of*

*the Messiah.*

*It seems the doves are offering*

*their prayers to God,*

*trying to still my unsettled heart*

*only to collapse suddenly*

*and die*

*like the Man of Peace.*

---

Figure 53, Poem by Jamal, Port Hedland
The unifying framework of storytelling in Jamal’s poem is to allow people to understand his frustration while he is waiting for a release from detention. Jamal said that he realized that the liberation that he felt in writing some of his poems was and is something that he wanted to share with people: “I feel that I must tell my stories in order to preserve the memories of my pain. Because I remember, it is my duty to preserve my memories in Port Hedland Detention Centre [and others’] stories via written poems and letters” (September, 2003).

*Figures 54, Poem by Jamal, Port Hedland, 2003*
like yoked bullocks tied to a wheel.

As an asylum seeker, Jamal finally began to realize that much of the detention experience had made him a strong and independent person. Then, he felt different because the authorities rejected him as a refugee. Now, in spite of that, he cherishes his difference. It is this perspective that he had hoped for.

At this point, the brief is to tell Jamal's story. Jamal become motivated to write in order to preserve his cultural and personal identity and to find a common ground, a way to speak of his pain. Perhaps the most valuable lesson that may be learned is his plea to respect all asylum seekers; they don't have to necessarily like each other, but they should “all get along.”

_Between Yesterday and Today_

_Between yesterday and today age has touched everything_

_Memories have faded, some lost forever_

_The city no longer seduces me_

_Its clouds bring no relief_

_Age creeps like polluting smears across my forehead_

_Only the distant memory of the Euphrates has meaning for me_

_But even this fails to stir my heart as before_

_yet it lingers in my senses like a sad love song_
reflecting my own melancholy and

as foreigner in a strange country.

Figure 55, Poem by Jamal, Port Hedland 2002
While watching asylum seekers protesting inside detention by hunger strike, it became almost impossible to silence Jamal — not that he would have wanted to. Almost every day in detention, he would start writing poems, letters or even listening to other asylum seekers' stories. As much as he told us in his poem, he still saved the story with the most impact for himself. His brother Ali showed Dr Samarayi a picture of Jamal when he was a director of the museum south of Iraq. His pride and deep personality were obvious. His sense of pride inside detention was undiminished, his style in poetry eloquent.

_Desert Palm Tree (2002)_

_Barren palm tree bearing no fruit,
my roots locked in rocky ground
I have become brittle unable to bend in the wind
Ahoy! You people who live between the two great rivers!

_The moon no longer speaks to me
And these dull and distant stars
only reflect my failing dreams and hopes.
What could block my memories?
Is there a person who would offer me
A drop of love?_
Ahoy! You people who live between the two great rivers!

Your son is lost in a child's dream

Flying like a seagull over the sea.

Breathing in the scent of the sea

Healing all the invisible wounds

Spreading through his body

Reviving his broken spirit

Restoring his heart.

Amazement crosses his face

How is the sun rises over the ocean?

How could time die there on the beach rocks,

breathing the invigorating scent of the sea,

slumbering peacefully

breathing in the sea's perfume of freedom?

Summing up, Jamal had this to say: "Four things saved me from complete mental collapse in Port Hedland Detention. First, I had my family, my wife and three children, to think about. Second, the fact that I was able to express my feelings creatively, in poetry. Third, that I was able to plan my future as an archaeologist and journalist. Last, but not
least, that I was able to keep my faith and my belief that Allah would see to it that good would finally come out of this terrible experience.” (March, 2002)

Van der Kolk et al. (1995) discuss the prevalence of both intrusions of traumatic images and various indications of amnesia as generally characteristic of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder patients. Jamal reported that sometimes he was afraid of forgetting details of his life inside detention. Could Jamal’s apparent periods of amnesia be an example of the PTSD repression, as referenced by psychiatrist and editor, Frank N. Magill (1993)? He considers it to be a defence mechanism that keeps unacceptable thoughts and impulses from becoming conscious. In Freud’s second theory, he states that anxiety causes repression. In this theory, anxiety acts as a signal to the ego, the rational, conscious part of the mind that a forbidden impulse is trying to force itself into consciousness. The signal alerts the ego to try to repress the unwanted impulse. In Jamal’s case, this was perhaps the intrusion of a traumatic memory. According to Freud, if the ego cannot successfully repress the forbidden impulse, it may try to transfer it to a relevant object. Jamal discussed his fear of Australian uniformed police officers. Could this be an example of Freud’s repression theory? (Magill, 1993).

In summary, the sentiments expressed in Ochberg’s poem, used in the treatment of traumatized war victims, could be seen to have parallels with Ali’s and Jamal’s own personal philosophies.

_Survivor Psalm_

_I have been victimized.
I was in a fight that was
not a fair fight.
I did not ask for the fight.
I lost.
There is no shame in losing
such fights, only in winning.
I have reached the stage of
survivor and am no longer a
slave of victim status.
I look back with sadness
rather than hate.
I look forward with hope
rather than despair.
I may never forget, but I need
not constantly remember.
I was a victim.
I am a survivor. (Ochberg, 1993)

Although only just beginning work as a freelance journalist and poet, Jamal’s future in this discipline seemed assured, however the Syrian government deported Jamal with his wife and three children to Iraq in February, 2006.

Summary

Chapter Twelve has explored two case studies that illustrate the various strategies, physical, mental and psychological, by which Iraqi Muslim artists and poets, Ali and Jamal, have been able to withstand the most extreme conditions in wartime Iraq. In particular, the chapter has focused upon the therapeutic attributes inherent in creative expression, particularly in relation to expressive, semiotic art. It has compared coping strategies employed by many contemporary psychotherapists and psychiatrists involved in the treatment of war trauma victims. The chapter refers not only to their findings in the application of various treatments, but also outlines basic psychological theories relative to them.

In setting the stage for an examination of the effects of war trauma, a brief account of an early experience of trauma, as well as a reference to the restrictive effect of school art programs under a military dictatorship, has been added. The main focus of the chapter, however, is the exploration of Ali’s and Jamal’s visual diaries, in which they record responses to a range of psychologically repressive experiences as well as some expressly traumatic ones during incarceration in the refugee camps.
In keeping with the principles of Frankl’s *Logotherapy*, Chapter Twelve demonstrates the similarities between many of his suggested strategies employed in the treatment of trauma and the move towards mental and physical healing, to those instinctive choices which they made for themselves. The same can be said of many of the suggested coping and healing methods employed by Ochberg especially in relation to his holistic healing program. Ali and Jamal had the ability to sublimate their emotions to a large extent through the vehicles of poetic expression and semiotic drawing.

Of special relevance is much of the work and psychological theory of Van der Kolk in underscoring the importance of creative art in facilitating fresh insight into the interpretation of a given situation. It is this added insight, he claims, that fosters a more accurate grasp of the situation and has the effect of permitting a degree of distance from it. As the chapter demonstrates, the usefulness of this technique was borne out by Ali’s and Jamal’s experiences in transferring emotional response to paper both through semiotic or symbolic drawing and through the word pictures of expressive poetry. Above all, the chapter illustrates well the tragic circumstances that have befallen so many ordinary Muslims and the Islamic civilization itself, a civilization unmatched in its enlightened splendour for so many centuries, but equally unmatched for the travesty and misunderstanding that characterizes so much of its contemporary standing and the lives of its adherents. The simple stereotype of ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ held by so many in the West is profoundly uninformed, unfair, mis-representative and as guaranteed as anything else to ensure the persistence of the War of Terror. In a word, the so-called ‘War against Terror’ is at least partly within each uninformed and xenophobic individual.
CONCLUSION

This book has attempted to restore the lost story of Islam, an Islam currently under siege. The siege is the result of a number of factors, not always related. Some of the factors are cynically motivated by people who deliberately and knowingly exploit the tragic circumstances concerning Islam and its followers to pursue their own unworthy goals. Even so, they would not be able to do this so effectively were the misunderstanding and lack of education about Islam so profound. The book has attempted to do this restoration utilizing a range of disciplinary strategies from historical and theological appraisal through to artistic expression and analysis. In doing the latter, it has provided just the smallest of insight into the horrendous situations endured by so many current-day Muslim refugees, even when they finally land in a country that boasts tolerance and fairness to all. Such is the xenophobia about Islam that some of the most tolerant regimes on earth have been soured. Throughout the book, the consistent theme has been that better understanding of Islam will serve to enhance the West's self-understanding, to draw us closer to the plight of countless millions who suffer one way or another through the displacement that characterizes so many contemporary Muslims' experiences, and to inch just a little closer to solving what is arguably the world's current most threatening conflict between peoples.
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