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The Clarion Project's Advisory Board Plays Fantasy Islam - Part 2: The "Radical" Raheel Raza

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Raheel Raza with her Koran and prayer beads

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

Fantasy Islam: A game in which an audience of non-Muslims wish with all their hearts that Islam was a "Religion of Peace," and a Muslim strives to fulfill that wish by presenting a personal version of Islam that has little foundation in Islamic Doctrine.

Raheel Raza is the second Muslim on the Clarion Project's Advisory Board. According to the Clarion Project:

Raheel Raza is president of The Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, author of the book *Their Jihad – Not My Jihad*, award winning journalist, public speaker, activist for human rights, featured in the award-winning documentary *Honor Diaries...* Raheel bridges the gap between East and West, promoting cultural and religious diversity...A fervent advocate for gender equality...

Raheel Raza, along with Zuhr Jasser, was one of the "founding authors" of the Muslim Reform Movement, a small group of Muslim "reformers" I [wrote about](#) who also play Fantasy Islam and who have to rely on the non-Muslim world to help them "reform" Islam. But Raza is a fervent player of Fantasy Islam in her own right.

In her book [Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#), Raza wrote on p. 26 that the problem was:

[T]here are two Islams being practiced today – one, the Islam of Prophet Mohammad - the Islam of peace and love, of forgiveness and compassion, of tolerance and spirituality, women's rights and equality. The other Islam is the militant, extremist, fanatic cult of those who misappropriate religious teachings to justify murder, inflict destruction on human society in the name of Shari'a, subjugate and suppress minorities and women to promote injustice, and have a philosophy that fellow Muslims who don't subscribe to their brand of religiosity are heretics.

In subsequent articles she referred to this "other Islam" as [Political Islam or Islamism](#), and [Radical Islam](#).

By the Numbers

Raza provided us some specific examples of what she meant by Radical Islam when she narrated the Clarion Project's short film [By the Numbers – The Untold Story of Muslim Opinions and Demographics](#). In this film she stated that the "most important issue" of our time was "the rise of Radical Islam." The "Spheres of Radicalization" were discussed, with the outer circle being the largest and consisting of the "fundamentalists." Raza explained that these fundamentalists "hold beliefs and practices that no doubt will seem radical to you and me."

The first example she brought up was the support among many Muslims for the execution of apostates leaving Islam. She then asked:

Do you know anyone who has left their faith? Do you think they should be executed? Do you think that that's a radical belief?

In reality, in 4:89 of the Koran Allah commands Muslims to take hold of apostates who have left Islam and "kill them wherever you find them." In addition, Muhammad said that death was the penalty for a Muslim who left Islam (e.g. Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 9, No. 6878, p. 20). And Muhammad even specified the nature of that death:

If someone changes his religion - then strike off his head!

Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas, 36.18.15, in a section titled "Judgement on Abandonment of Islam."

Raza then talked about whippings and cutting off the hands of thieves, among other punishments. In terms of these punishments, she asked, "Do you think that's a radical belief?"

The punishment of "a hundred stripes" for adulterers is found in 24:2 of the Koran, and Muhammad even commanded it, specifying 100 lashes for an unmarried male or female adulterer (Sahih Muslim,

Vol. 5, No. 1690, p. 131). But Muhammad did suggest caution when it came to one's wife; he said:

It is not wise for anyone of you to lash his wife like a slave, for he might sleep with her the same evening.

Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 6, No. 4942, p. 392

And the command to cut off the hand of a thief is not only found in the Koran (5:38), but Muhammad said it was "one of the legal punishments prescribed by Allah" (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 5, No. 4304, p. 361), and on numerous occasions he ordered it to be done.

Raza then, with a tone of restrained wonder, talked about the support in the Muslim world for stoning spouses if they are unfaithful.

This support should come as no surprise. Raza's own prophet Muhammad ordered many an adulterer to be stoned to death. And Muhammad even spoke proudly about it being "the order of God" and that he was the first to revive its practice (The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah), p. 267). And, in an earlier, seeming act of prescience, Raza herself had provided an explanation for this support:

Muslims unanimously hold there is no greater example of conduct for us than the Prophet Mohammad.

[Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#), p. 38

Even though these punishments are found in the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad, Raza [criticized "versions" of Islam](#) which included such "archaic laws." Although she did [acknowledge](#) that some Muslims would consider folks like her to be "heretics."

If Raza believes that matters actually supported by the Koran and Muhammad are "radical" Islam, and if some Muslims consider her a heretic, then we need to take a look at how Raza understands Islam.

Raheel Raza's Islam

Raza has [written](#):

...I am a believer and I do what I do because I want to take back the narrative from the jihadists and because the Islam I see today is not the Islam I grew up with. I am a staunch follower of the spiritual message of my faith...

So what is Islam to Raza? Here is how she summed it up:

If it's not moderate, progressive, enlightening, delightful or tolerant - then it's not Islam.

[Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#), p. 172

Here are some characteristics of Raza's Islam:

There is no compulsion in Islam: Raza wrote that

Tolerance is the cornerstone of Islam and has emerged out of the very nature and history of Islam.

[Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#), p. 30

For this she relies heavily on 2:256 in the Koran that starts off by saying, "There is no compulsion in religion." However, as I show in my latest book, *Islam's Militant Prophet: Muhammad and Forced Conversions to Islam*, the doctrinal authority of 2:256 lasted only from the time of its "revelation" in

August 625 until it was abrogated by the actions of Muhammad in December 627. From December 627 until Muhammad's death in 632, Islam was spread across the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad and Muslim armies offering most of the non-Muslim tribes the choice of Islam or the sword. And Muhammad's example has been followed over the centuries by Muslim rulers whenever the power relationship has allowed. The very nature and history of Islam refute Raza's claim about tolerance.

Individual Muslims have the right to personally interpret the Koran: Raza is explicit about this:

...Islam gives each one of us the freedom to logically research and interpret the Qur'an with reason and intellect.

[Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#), p. 40

However, this goes directly against the teachings of her prophet:

Muhammad bin Jarir reported that Ibn 'Abbas said that the Prophet said, 'Whoever explains the Qur'an with his opinion or with what he has no knowledge of, then let him assume his seat in the Fire.'

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33

Muhammad even said that it was disbelief (Kufr) to argue about the Koran based only on one's personal opinions (Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 5, No. 4603, p. 159).

Nevertheless, Raza has decided to ignore her own prophet, along with the established Principles of Tafsir (Koran Commentary):

The scholars have said: Whoever wishes to interpret the Qur'aan, he should first turn to the Qur'aan itself. This is because what has been narrated succinctly in one place might be expounded upon in another place, and what is summarized in one place might be explained in another...

If he has done that, then he turns to the Sunnah [teachings of Muhammad], for it is the explainer of the Qur'aan, and a clarifier to it.

If he does not find it (the tafseer) in the Sunnah, he turns to the statements of the Companions, for they are the most knowledgeable of it, since they witnessed the circumstances and situations the Qur'aan was revealed in...

An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan, pp. 299-300

Raza's approach to tafsir only has a single step: Come up with your own interpretation, just as long as it's moderate, progressive, enlightening, delightful, and tolerant.

Violence is prohibited in Islam: This claim can only be understood by remembering that Raza believes individual Muslims have the right to have their own personal version of Islam. This claim requires ignoring verses in the Koran that command violence against non-Muslims, e.g. 4:101, 8:57, 9:5,9:14, 9:29, 9:73, 9:123, 48:16, and 48:29. It also requires ignoring the well-documented, violent example of Muhammad and his Muslim armies as they conquered the Arabian Peninsula in the name of Islam.

Deception is a little known concept: Here is what Raza [wrote](#) about "deception" (taqqiya):

I first heard the word taqqiya when I came to the West. It's a little known concept (mostly in the Shia community) which gives Muslims the freedom to lie about their faith only if their lives are in danger.

Here Raza's Fantasy Islam ignores two relevant verses in the Koran: 3:28, which allows Muslims to pretend to be friends with non-Muslims, and 16:106, which allows Muslims to publicly "renounce" Islam; both are allowed only if the Muslims secretly stay true to Islam in their hearts. Regardless of

when Raza first heard the word taqiyah, 3:28 and 16:106 have been in the Koran since the 7th Century.

Conclusion

In her book [Their Jihad – Not My Jihad](#) (pp. 69-70), Raza wrote:

Since Islam is a way of life, everything we do is ruled by parameters laid down for us in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet.

However, we have seen a number of examples where Raza has simply picked and chosen among those parameters, and provided her own interpretation of Koran verses for the sake of creating her personal version of Islam. But aren't the jihadists and other "radical" Muslims regularly accused of doing this very same thing in order to create what is called a "radical" version of Islam? In reality, the jihadists generally seem to accurately understand, follow and quote from the "parameters" established in the Koran and the Sunnah. On the other hand, Raza does not.

Welcome to Raheel Raza, a "radical" Muslim playing an excellent game of Fantasy Islam.

In Part 3 we will look at the third Muslim on the Clarion Project's Advisory Board: Dr. Elham Manea.

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