Appendix 9:

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION: A REVIEW OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF BRITISH COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON REPRESENTING ISLAM

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This seminar on representing Islam in the media was held at the Queen Anne style Hunton Park in Watford from the 22nd to 27th June 2003. According to the British Council's press release the purpose was to respond to the need "to encounter the misrepresentation of Islam in Britain and Europe". Even though Muslims "have become an integral part and essential element in European societies", still "their presence in Europe has been marred by misunderstanding and, sometimes hostility". This could be attributed to "ignorance, the inability to tolerate other aspects of human culture as well as some actions and practices by Muslims themselves which does not necessarily derive from Islamic doctrine".

As a leader in organizing international seminars and with its innovative outfit the think tank-Counterpoint the British Council was able to assemble a team of erudite scholars and practicing journalists as contributors. Participants most of them sponsored by the British Council were from the UK, Europe, Asia and only one from Africa. The participants were made up of learned scholars, journalists and promising students. The event was directed by a distinguished Arab journalist Abdallah Homoda and well managed by Sandra Burford and properly coordinated by the two gentlemen Martin Ross and Nick Rodham-Smith Director and Deputy Director respectively of the Think Tank Counterpoint, that coordinates the thinking of the British Council and Felicity Harris the council's assistant director seminars.

The eminent scholars and journalists who contributed were, Dr. Mustapha Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rt. Revd Dr. Richard Harris, the Bishop of Oxford, Professor Alan Durant (Professor of Communications Middlesex University), Professor Mohammed Arkoun (Professor Emeritus of Islamic Thought, Sorbonne), Dr. Timothy Winter (Shaykh Zayid Lecturer Cambridge University), Dr. Ashuman Mondal (Lecturer in Contemporary Literature, Leicester University) and Dr. Ruqqaya Maqsood (a prolific writer). The prominent writers and journalists who contributed were Mr. Daoud Rosser-Owen, Yosri Fouda of Al-Ajazeera Television and co-author of the bestseller Masterminds of Terror, Fouad Nahdi publisher of Q-News and Mr. Chris Doyle of CAABU. Some of the distinguished guests at the seminar events were: Hon. Carole Ward, MP Watford, Rt. Hon. Baroness Uddin, House of Lords and David Green Director-General British Council.

Amongst the participants from outside UK were Professor Ali Ferroz, former Chancellor University of Teheran and one-time Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Kingdom, Dr. Bakhrom Abdulhalimov Deputy Rector Westminister

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International University Tashkent, Dr. Hamdi Murad, Assistant Professor Al-Balqa University Amman, Ms Milla Mineva Assistant Professor Sofia University, Dr. Farid Abu-Dheir, Head of Journalism Department Najah University Palestine, Abdul Wahab Soori, Lecturer Department of Philosophy University of Karachi Pakistan, A. K. M. Khademul Haque, Lecturer Department of Islamic History and Culture University of Dhaka Bangladesh, Ms Emine Kaya Senior Policy Advisor Ministry of Justice Netherlands and **my humble self from Nigeria.** The journalists amongst the participants were Shamsul Akmar Kamal, New Straits Times Malaysia, Ms Rachid Azough de Volkskrant Netherlands, Faisal Islam The Observer London, Ms Dina Hamdy Alwatan Saudi Arabia, Mrs Nong Darol Mahmada Liberal Islam Network Indonesia, Imad Karam International Press Center Gaza and Nova Poerwadi RCTA Indonesia. Many promising young participants from the UK enriched the seminar. It should be noted that identities of contributors are not disclosed in this review because of Chatham House rule.

As noted from the press statement of the seminar, the contributors and participants discussed extensively on how Islam is represented in the British media and the whole Western media Are actions of Muslims represented in the media correct representation of Islam or not? There was almost clear consensus that Islam should represent itself and not the Muslims representing Islam because Islam is an ideal way of life. Actions of most Muslims cannot be ideal representation of Islam. And ironically it is the media that makes some Muslims representatives of Islam by giving them titles of "Shaykhs" even though most Muslims never acknowledge them as leaders. It was also clear that Muslims are not monolithic in the United Kingdom just like other cultural groups therefore a unified representation of Islam from their actions could hardly be accurate.

A well-discussed issue was the identity of British and European Muslims. There is no doubt that British Muslims are from very diverse origins, largely because of the defunct British Empire where most of the Muslims originated. The British Muslim community is perhaps the most cosmopolitan in the world next only to Arafat. ***The history of Islam in Britain pre-dates the British Empire with the earliest Islamic influences dating back to King Henry who imported Islamic Law from Muslim Spain and modified it into English Common Law. This was quite interesting to me and I had to ask the contributor for the source of this information, which he readily gave[1]. He also added that most of the English barristers are aware of this fact but they never make it the public. (highlighting is Boer's)***

The diversity of the British Muslim community made most of them to give preference to the customs of their native lands, which they sometime elevate to status of Islamic precepts. One of the greatest tensions is linked to marriages whereby some go back to their native homes and marry, which sometimes result in culture shock that lead to marriage failures. Some take a Briton as second wife with the first wife in the native land. This crisis was well illustrated by one of the contributors. They are also documented in the British media, in fact a documentary by the BBC on the Birmingham Mosque concentrated on marriage crisis at the same time ignoring the many happy families.

Despite these diversities the British Muslims are very proud of being Muslim and British. They detest external influence from the "home countries" or from the center of the Muslim world-the Middle East. This was well illustrated in the video conferencing held with a group of participants from Cairo, when one of the Egyptian

scholars tried to show that there was nothing like "British Islam" and British Muslims were expected to take and learn from the source. The British Muslims rejected this. Their desire to have independent identity may not be unconnected to the political exploitation of British Muslims by governments of some Muslim countries, which caused many stresses for the British Muslim community. It has also made many to look for mainstream Muslims in some Muslim countries who have no political affiliation with any government or any Islamic movement committed to overthrow of any government. This emerging trend was variously described, as traditional Islam that respects the Islamic Schools of Law. Many British Muslims now look up to this understanding as the authentic route to establishing a viable Muslim community hence the renewed interest in Shafi'e and Maliki Schools.

This trend is also the anti-thesis of the modernist movement that seeks political power employing modernist tools of violence. Although there are paradoxes in the linkages the most important reason for the unpopularity of political Islamic movements in Britain and other parts of Europe is because of their failure to bring any meaningful change in the Muslim world through the violent means they have been employing. This has led to the breakdown of their alliances with the Western establishment since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Prior to that period the Western countries supported those they now term "fundamentalists" to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan[2]. And now such people are conveniently rejected and are categorized by Western scholars as "Wahabite" clients of the Saudi royalty. Throughout the cold war the Saudis exported their version of Islam to the West and other Muslim countries without any hindrance from their Western masters, because they had mutual interest in containing the energy of the Muslim youth. Afghanistan and other hot spots were available. With the collapse of Soviet Union and liberation of Afghanistan there was hardly anywhere to contain this energy. Saudi Arabia is now under pressure from both sides. The West has no Soviets to fight and therefore not in need of these youths full of energy. The other pressure is from the Saudi clerical establishments who have firm belief and conviction in the need to preach the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW). Although most of the Muslims accused of violence and fueling hatred in the West are closely linked to Saudi religious establishment through education and religious ideology, the major reason for their rejection by the Western establishment is because they are no longer needed for political expedience, hence the extensive propaganda against "Wahhabism" or Saudi version of Islam in the West. The Western propagandists were all aware of the strictness of Saudi education and religious establishment when U.S. President Reagan was praising leaders of a similar version of Islam as the moral equivalent of America's founding fathers. All the current rhetoric against Wahhabism is therefore a smokescreen. Most European Muslims want to avoid the headache associated with Saudi patronage because of its security liability but the most vocal critic of Saudi religious establishment during the seminar was a participant from the Middle East.

It is quite obvious that European and British Muslims cannot afford an intolerant version of Islam not because they are a minority but largely because the environment gives them enough space to practice their religion more than in most Muslim countries especially Turkey and Tunisia. Where the veil has become an issue. One could meet an immigration officer with Islamic dress in a British airport this is not possible in Turkey, Tunisia or Nigeria. British Muslims can start a housing project and name the streets after Muslim leaders. For example in London there are areas named after Danfodio, Bello and Abdullahi, this is not possible in some predominantly Muslim areas of Nigeria, where tribal xenophobes have vilified these great Muslim leaders[3]. There is no doubt that the level of freedom enjoyed by

European Muslims varies from one location to another. But Britain is acknowledged as one of the most liberal states, it has taken steps "to outlaw racial discrimination and promote employment" of Muslims ahead of France and Germany. And above all Britain prides itself as a multi-cultural society that promotes integration and unlike the French who believe in assimilation thereby making it compulsory for all "immigrants to give up all the cultural characteristics of their native societies"[4].

Another source of pride for European and British Muslims is the European experience of Islam. According to one of the contributors contrary to the common belief that the relationship between Europe and Islamic world has always been hostile there are many instances of mutual cooperation between the two. He emphasized that the European experience of Islam is not only of conflict but was exemplified by the pluralism of Islamic Spain and Ottoman Turkey. A Jew was the foreign secretary of Abdurrahman III of Andalucia. Sultan Mehmed Fetih issued the Ahdname (Book of Covenant) that guaranteed five fundamental rights to Franciscans of Bosnia on 28th May 1464. This contributor added that the Muslims of Bosnia did not get a similar treatment from any European ruler in 1995 or Butros Butros Ghali led UN hence they were left alone and were slaughtered by the Serbs. He noted that these perpetrators of genocide did not follow the footstep of Catholic monarch Francis Joseph I who in 1882 allowed "Bosnian Muslims to make further progress in their endeavor to adapt to European life with their strong Islamic identity". Instead they followed the steps of Catholic monarchs Ferdinand Isabella of the Iberian Peninsular who refused to tolerate Islam in that area after eight hundred years of civilized existence[5].

The diversity in British Muslim society is like in most Muslim societies. The major difference as it affects the seminar is between those who think the problem of Muslim backwardness is because they have refused to secularize. This was articulated by one of the Muslim presenters who even lamented that in the Muslim world the intellectuals are not the ones steering the debate but religious scholars and he specifically mentioned people like Shaykh Qaradawi. He also praised the modernist Afghani and his student Muhammad Abduh. In other words he was calling for Enlightenment in the Muslim world similar to the European Enlightenment just as these Muslim modernist leaders (Afghani and Abduh) did in the 19th century. But he also rightly pointed out the lack of intellectual output in the Muslim world and other third world countries and he advocated an international effort to revive education. It was regrettable that there was little or no time for more debate on the issues raised by the eminent speaker, therefore this review will explore some of them as well those raised by the younger but equally competent speaker who discussed multiculturalism, liberalism, secularism and Islam. This erudite British scholar exhaustively reviewed Bikhu Parekh's theory of multiculturalism. One of the most interesting aspects of the presentation was Parekh's advocacy for 'weak secularism' that separates state from religion and not politics from religion. This speaker raised several questions. Drawing from the Rushdie affair he asked: "how far can Islam accommodate freedom of speech in a multicultural context?"

This contributor on multiculturism outlined its problems for Islam and vice versa. In theory Britain is attempting to be multiculturalist but in practice it is multicultural, with one culture supersedes others. This is because senior officials of the British government believe in some form of supposedly "British norms and values" that cannot be contested. For example the Home Secretary "who accepts what he calls plurality but he demands that ethnic and religious minorities in turn accept what he calls British 'norms and values'". The Home Secretary demanded that "in order to participate fully in the British way of life people of other cultures, faiths or traditions

must give moral priority to British values over and above their own". He also explained the contest between Islam and liberalism. They both have universal claims and answers to the organization of the society. The brilliant presentation was concluded with the fact that its goal was not to "find some theoretical or formal integration of Islam and liberalism but rather to find spaces of accommodation on both sides that may recognize the specificities and sensitivies of Islam within the social structure that have been profoundly shaped by liberalism".

Now going back to the issue of Enlightenment, do Muslims need any Enlightenment that would enthrone Man in place of God as the Europeans did? Was the Enlightenment the source of European power and dominance in the World today? Did the Enlightenment make the West an ideal for others to emulate? Would a similar Enlightenment solve the problems confronting the Muslims especially the appropriation of their resources by the ruling class of the financial oligarchy? These are important questions perhaps even beyond the capacity of this reviewer to answer nevertheless an attempt is made below.

Muslims have a different history from the West or Europe therefore Enlightenment ideas cannot be imported wholesale from Europe to the Muslim world as the West has attempted and been attempting by expecting European Muslims to be that vanguard. Enlightenment came after Reformation, which was necessitated by the Christian clergy's inability to manage the society by exceeding the limit prescribed by Paul. They went into the secular domain, which they were not equipped to handle. Going back to early Christian history Jesus (AS) did not come to destroy the Law of Moses but to confirm it and give glad tidings of the coming of Ahmad (SAW) the last Prophet therefore his followers remained Jews until the conversion of Paul. And eventually Jewish-Christians under leadership of James who upheld the Law were obliterated[6]. This paved the way for emphasizing only the teachings of Jesus relating to personal piety and people were encouraged to regard Caesar as supreme in worldly matters[7]. As time went on Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and the clergy wielded power and influenced decisions. In fact at sometime there was theocracy because the Pope crowned Kings. He was the head of the Christendom and in some areas the clergy ruled. Obviously this was abused because Pauline Christianity was not equipped for this purpose[8]. This necessitated a Reformation led by the Protestant fathers. In most parts of Europe the clergy were made to revert to the position intended for them by Paul. Many Christian scholars have shown how Protestant ethics led to capitalism[9]. The Catholic areas of Europe also followed these steps and the influence of religion in public life was gradually reduced. Europeans believe that they were backward in the Dark Ages because of the influence of the clergy, which caused the "Christian disease"[10].

With the curing of the "Christian disease" religion became marginalized in Europe and there was a shift from God as the pivot of philosophy to Man[11]. This was the Enlightenment philosophy. According to Kant, one of the greatest Enlightenment philosophers, that current facilitated the emergence of man from his self imposed infancy and inability to use his reason without the guidance of another[12]. The Enlightenment philosophy preached equality of citizens of the nation[13] but encouraged brutality and even genocide against others. This led to all the atrocities committed by Westerners who came to regard themselves as superior and all others as expendable. They lost the compassion of Christianity and became Christians in name only. And they were always willing to use Christian missionaries for this agenda. The missionaries who were extremists as confirmed by Pope Paul VI[14] were also willing to be associated with the European imperialists because they

regarded all non-Christians as heathen. The public aspect of Christianity was abolished this was the reason why Roy made his statement that: "Secularity and politics are born of a closing of Christian thought onto itself"[15]. Fukuyama also observed that: "Christianity in a certain sense had to abolish itself through a secularization of its goals before liberalism could emerge"[16]. This made it possible for some Western Christians to hate others and commit the worst crimes in human history: colonialism and Nazism. As a result of Enlightenment the western establishment has an imperialist epistemological vision[17], which is the cause of their contradiction, liberalism at home and for the dominant race and imperialism and racism against others.

For dialogue to be successful Muslims must not behave like dogmatic Westerners, there are indeed many Enlightenment ideas that are laudable and must be separated from those that promote colonialism and exploitation because if we could recollect at the peak of the French revolution when "Toussaint L'Ouvetre led a revolt in Haiti based on the ideas of the French revolution, France turned imperial, restored slavery" jailed him and he died miserably[18]. But does Islam need any Enlightenment? I think more competent scholars have answered this question more especially Hoffman. Muslims achieved epistemological revolution before the West in the decisive defeat of the Mu'tazilite metaphysical speculation by al-Ash'ari. Muslims applied methodological rationality to the very sources of Islam even from the time of the Sahabah (the companions who took the right way). They identified the circumstances of revelation (asbab al-nuzul) and the issue of abrogation (naskh), historical analysis using Jewish legends (Israeliyat) was also common. Even to the Hadith, Muslim scholars developed ways of verifying the sayings of our beloved Prophet (SAW), more than any other people in human history. Hence the desperate attempt by a section of western scholarship to discredit the Hadith. And consistent with the authenticity of the Islamic message despite the onslaught against the Sunnah carried out by Western scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schatch, and "lately by a veritable pro-Zionist gang (e.g., John Warnsborough, Michael Cook, Patricia Crone, Andrew Rippin and "Ibn Warraq")"[19] their studies have been rejected as unscientific by even mainstream Western scholars such as Herald Motzki. Who concluded in his The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools that "the earliest orally transmitted Islamic heritage is highly reliable". The rationality of Islamic jurisprudence is also second to none and in terms of scholarly exposition at the particular time of its development especially with Ibn Rushd's Al-Bidayat al-Mujtahid it had no parallel[20].

The Muslims including European Muslims are not willing to accept the elevation of Man to status of God as was done in the West where human desires were elevated to transgress God's bounds. And what is the price? The atrocities committed in the World today are as a result of this elevation. The barbarian instinct survived under the layer of humanistic civilization of the West facilitated by the Enlightenment. All the evil 'isms' were products of that elevation of Man to the status of God-secularism as interpreted by a group of American scholars, who defined it as anti-religion[21]. It gave birth to fascism, Nazism, colonialism, neocolonialism, communism and the current American imperialism, which according to Professor Sheldon Wolin "is like previous forms of totalitarianism"[22].

So what was the cause of Muslim decline in relation to the West? Both Muslims and non-Muslims have given so many reasons. Muslim modernists believe as stated above that only a similar reformation of Islam as the West did to Christianity can save the Muslims while traditional Muslims believe only a return to pristine ideals of

Islam can save the Muslims. The reasons of the traditional Muslims are partially true as for the modernists most of their thinking as stated above is as a result of inferiority complex and most of the time it is unscientific and therefore worthless as far as Muslims are concerned. This reviewer agrees more with Professor Sachs who categorized most of the reasons given by both Muslims and non-Muslims as morality tale.

The Harvard scholar, Sachs excellently illustrated the rise of Europe in comparison to decline of the Muslim world:

In fact the role of culture in the relative decline of the Islamic world is vastly overrated. The difficulties in Islamic societies have more to do with geopolitics and geography than with any unbridgeable differences with the west...

Islam was both made and undone in part by its geography.

Over the course of centuries, the demographic balance shifted decisively in favour of Europe..[23]

He went on to demonstrate how the population of Europe supported by a better environment made it to over take the Muslim world which was arid and lacked natural resources compared to Europe. The population of the Muslim world was "nearly unchanged for centuries". The temperate zone Turks did better "demographically than the Arabic desert regions, and not coincidently Islamic leadership passed from Arabia to the temperate based Ottoman Empire". This led to the outnumbering of Islamic world by Europe and Vasco Da Gama also outmaneuvered it. The Muslim states lost the trade revenue while the Europeans accumulated capital, improved their military and captured more territories. "By the time Suez Canal restored trade through the Red Sea in 1869, it was too late for Islam. Europe had already won, and would assert control over Suez Canal and the associated ocean-based trade through military occupation and financial control". Without energy resources Muslim states could hardly compete thus "by 1900 at the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Europe had coal, hydro power, timber, and Iron ore. The Islamic countries had few stocks of these 19th-century necessities for industrialization. The oil fields were discovered and exploited only after the Europeans had seized control". European domination was further consolidated. "By the 20th century, then, the Islamic countries had lost control over trade routes, primary commodities such as oil and even sovereignty itself in much of the region". This "long, sorry story" of the decline of the Muslim world, "has led to grotesque mythologies on both sides of the divide"[24].

Muslims are indeed faced with several challenges especially of freeing their societies from poverty and neo-colonial domination, there is no doubt they have a share of the blame. But we must also not forget the neo-colonial role of the West. Sachs has noted that: "It is the network of civil society that will overcome the centuries of war, distrust, and manipulation by the dominant western powers"[25]. Western power is certainly not because of its liberalism and rationalism as some western scholars and Muslim modernists would want Muslims to believe but largely because of the historical circumstances explained above. And the Western world would not easily allow the Muslims to hold their destiny in their hands although gradually we are approaching the second nuclear and invasion of Muslim lands would become more difficult in the not too distant future[26]. The temptation to invade Iran could lead to major disaster because of the sophistication of Iranian society[27]. Western power is

maintained by imperialism and not liberalism as we can clearly see from recent American adventurism. Western confrontationist scholars have called for maintenance of Western conventional military superiority over the Muslim world[28]. Even though they recognize the role of a core state in the Muslim world Western policy makers are not willing to allow the emergence of any such state because it could lead to the end of their manipulation of the Muslim world. Nuclear deterrence against Western imperialism is the option Muslim countries are exploring the case of North Korea and Iraq is still fresh. Without a powerful core Muslim state in the world there would be no balance of power in the world and the Middle East crisis would never be resolved. The spiral of conflicts would continue.

Who controls the media in the West including Britain? This question is necessary for proper understanding of the representation of Islam in the media. The power elites who control the economy control the media. Western societies are now economic societies whereby those who control the economy control power. Bernard Lewis believes that this type of corruption is less dangerous to the polity than the corruption of looting the treasury[29]. They take power to consolidate their economic gains. The present U.S. administration has paved the way for U.S. companies to take over Iraq in fact "U.S. President Bush unilaterally declared Iraqi oil to be the unassailable province of U.S. oil corporations"[30]. The power elites who control the media since the collapse of the Soviet Union were looking for an enemy to fill the gap and continue the defense spending. The best targets were the countries of the Muslim world and what became known as "political Islam" provided the opportunity. Muslim activists all over the world turned to Islam as their source of inspiration for liberation from imperialism and they became targets of media demonization but this is not to say that they do not have problems. Many are indeed power maniacs and opportunists. In fact most of the time the Muslim activists were unable to deconstruct the society hence they always fall into the trap. The recourse to violence by some of them is programmed to fail by the dynamics of the society, which they do not understand[31]. These violent Muslim activists provide the stereotype for the media arm of the Western establishment, which they use against all Muslims. The Western media representation of Islam mostly depicts the violence of some of the Muslim activists and the position of women in Islam. These are deliberate strategies for political gain by the oligarchs who control the economy of Western societies and by extension the media.

Constructivist theory has been used to explain the role of epistemic communities in shaping foreign policy in the U.S. The media is an important segment of the epistemic community that influences the U.S. foreign policy also by extension Britain and the rest of the Western world. Broadly categorized into confrontationist and "accomodationist". The confrontationists are very influential and they control the media because of their patrons who control the economy[32]. Herman and Chomsky's model of deconstructing media technique is relevant for understanding how the media in the West control public opinion[33]. They identified five filters that reinforce each to ensure specific agenda. The first filter is the commercial basis of the dominant news organization. In this case the interest of the owners is protected, any issue that threatens their survival and perpetuation of profit is not fairly treated but anything that promotes their interest is promoted. Islam is a threat to the neo-conservatives in America and the West, because of their interests in military industrial complex, commodities (particularly oil) and banking-which is the usurious institution and all the three are closely related in a complex network that rules the world. There is no conspiracy theory about it. And in fact high caliber intellectuals of Jewish origin are now actively engaged in this discourse. The facts are there for

anyone to see. Bankism the new religion of these global elite involves Muslims, Christians and Jews, all committed to stealing and holding mankind to ransom[34]. Usury is the root of all evils "and the highest form of exploitation for such disparate figures as" Prophet Muhammad (SAW) "and Marx". The "Judaic prophets, Christ and Muhammad knew what they were talking about"[35] when they taught their followers to abandon usury and engage in legitimate trade. The usurers caused the misery of the poor countries of the world where people are dying of hunger, diseases and wars for the appropriation of natural resources[36]. All those engaged in usury whether they are Muslims, Christians or Jews are the cause of the problem of mankind, restricting it only to Jews is racism and lack of wisdom. British Muslims and others must engage in this discourse to deconstruct the system of the power elites or else extremists from both sides will manipulate the society.

The second filter relates to the influence of advertising, what do the advertisers want? It involves both their commercial and political interests if at all they are different therefore there "is a strong preference for content which does not call into question their politically conservative principles or interferes with the buying mood of the audience". The third filter is reliance on government and corporate expert sources there is a symbiotic relationship between journalists and these sources because "they provide reliable flow of raw material of news, thereby allowing news organization to expend their resources more efficiently"[37]. Some of these raw materials could however be "sexed" we can clearly witness this from the Iraqi crisis although the Blair government denied, "sexing" the dossier. But "Lewis Moonie, the former defense minister who lost his job in the recent reshuffle, gave the game away" when he noted: "People seem to equate spin with lying. It is not. What we are talking about here is trying to put the best gloss on your case to ensure people accept it"[38]. From recent happenings Muslims in Britain and elsewhere in the West are easy preys of these filters.

The fourth filter according to Herman and Chomsky (1988) is the role of "flak or negative responses to media content as a means of disciplining news organizations". They include complaints and punitive actions, and may take "the form of letters, telegram, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before congress"[39]. Individuals and powerful influential groups and lobbies could produce these responses. According to one of the journalist contributors to the seminar a Muslim attempt in Britain to use the flak strategy against a BBC documentary without adequate plan backfired. Muslim protest against the documentary by phone calls and Internet alerts made the documentary popular and many viewers watched it this gave the BBC an advantage. The Muslim protest should have come after the documentary with a demand for another documentary. The final filter is the political control mechanism for example the communist scare during the cold war era and now the terrorist scare, most Muslim countries are now targets of negative coverage because of this.

Stuart Allen (1999) suggested that Herman and Chomsky's model could only be accepted wholesale if media practitioners are not journalists but propagandists and on the contrary most of them are journalists who believe what they doing is the right thing therefore there is the need to "problematize, in conceptual terms, the operational practices in and through which news values help the news worker to justify the selection types of events as newsworthy at the expense of alternative ones". This is necessary because among other reasons there is the similarity of coverage amongst various media and with the filter methodology there is the possibility of a kind of conspiracy theory. Allen drew factors affecting unspoken rules

or codes that are applied by most news organizations. They are "conflict, relevance, timeliness, simplification, personalization, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, cultural specificity and negativity". The "professional ideals of impartiality and objectivity are operationalized" in ways that "they privilege the largely internalized journalistic standards appropriate to the news organization's ethos and its priorities"[40].

Therefore it is very clear that media operations are complex and are tied to the society. It would certainly be very difficult to expect the dominant Western media to appropriately represent Islam within the current context of geopolitical reality and the alliances of the neo-conservative political class and those who control the world economy. But the space provided by the organizations like the British Council could certainly influence relations between both societies and the debate in the long term. Al-Jazeera is the outcome of similar discourses in the past that call for more Arab media and openness and certainly as noted by one of the contributors at the seminar it is now more "Western" than CNN if "Western" means openness and providing more time for discussion and not tailoring the opinion of the audience. Above all "Al-Jazeera offers an opportunity to bypass censorship without having to fall back on western news services, thereby making the management of public opinion increasingly difficult for those Muslim states that seek to take a pragmatic, relatively pro-western, stance"[41].

There is no doubt that the effort of the British Council in encouraging this discourse is commendable. It is also in the spirit of English tradition of seeking understanding or the third way of humility and rejection of arrogance as eloquently articulated by Izetbebogovic[42]. An English Muslim contributor to the seminar also noted this and emphasized that it is because of English history. Whereby the British Isles has always had a dissimilar experience from European mainland the contributor observed that:

The British laisser-faire attitude certainly helps. It was also suggested to me that because we live in Island - or a complex of Islands to be precise - and because we are so warlike, if we hadn't evolved a culture of minding one's own business and letting the other fellow do what he likes as long as he doesn't infringe my interests we would have probably exterminated ourselves with internecine warfare by now. Perhaps there is something in this. And perhaps this has contributed to the British general respect for the law; or maybe it is the other way round. Nevertheless, there's something intangible almost metaphysical - in British culture that helps.

The contributor also noted the historical ties between the British and the Muslim world beyond the British Empire and dating back to the Muslim Spain. The continuous interactions between the Britain and Muslim world affected their cultures. There were wholesale importations from the Muslim world to Britain, such as "Henry II's Common Law, the thirteenth century parliament, the university system, constabularies, chivalry, the architecture of the wool churches, the guild system, some music such as plainsong, some music instruments like the guitar, and many more". Therefore he made a very sweeping observation: "British culture is profoundly indebted to Islam, to the extent that it would be possible to see it as Islamic". Thus it is not surprising the extent to which the British accommodate Muslims it is by far a more receptive society than any of the European countries. This is also related to history as noted by the contributor: "Britain was never part of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, and even when it became a Roman Catholic country for a while it was always a source of heresy and trouble for Rome". This

British spirit is clearly different from that of the American establishment even though they share many things in common and the American society is an offspring of the older Anglo-Saxon tradition. The Americans have proved to be more intolerant considering recent experience of attempting to host a similar discussion in Nigeria. To Americans once you disagree intellectually with their imperialism you are a "fanatic" or "fundamentalist" and a future terrorist as long as you are a Muslim. Even the BBC has been termed anti-American by American sympathizers because of its recent coverage of the second gulf war[43] so what more of Muslims who want justice for oppressed people.

With this background of accommodation of Islam in the British establishment the British Muslims who attended the seminar have every reason to be proud of being British and resist attempt by Muslims especially from the repressive societies of the Middle East to export their militant version of intolerance into Britain. Muslims especially from Nigeria have many things to learn from British Muslims since we both speak the same language. A British Muslim woman Aisha Bewley has translated more classical Arabic books to English than any Muslim. Her translations of the important classical works such as Muwatta of Imam Malik, Ashifa of Qadi Iyad, Awasim minal qawasim of Qadi Abi Bakr ibn al-Arabi and two volumes of Tabaqat of Ibn Sa'ad are lucid and they convey the actual meanings in simple language. Apart from the literary output Nigerian Muslims who have little to show in terms of literary contribution to the world of Islam have much to learn from Aisha's determination with her limited resources.

One of the interesting encounters of the seminar came up when a contributor spoke about Nigeria. This was based on his experience with a Nigerian Muslim doctor who was so committed to his pediatric profession and was very caring and loving to his patients even during the month of Ramadan and he died of exhaustion. The contributor was also concerned about a Christian magazine that always reported conflict between Muslims and Christians in which Nigeria featured prominently and he even wrote to the magazine on the need to report positive encounters. He expressed his concern over Shari'ah implementation in Nigeria and he advocated caution to prevent the persecution of Christians. After his presentation this reviewer intervened by appreciating the commendation of the Nigerian Muslim doctor. And also drew the attention of the audience that the Shari'ah in Nigeria is a legal and constitutional issue whereby the Shari'ah Laws passed by the states are within the limit of the Nigerian Constitution. The Shari'ah Law of apostasy is not applied in Nigeria. Christians have the right of opting out of Shari'ah jurisdiction as noted by even the 'Nigeria International Religious Freedom Report released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor' published in 2001, which says: "Non-Muslims are not subject to Shari'a statutes; however, a Christian was tried for assault in a criminal Shari'ah court in Kano state after he voluntarily chose that jurisdiction, apparently because the penalty of canning was less onerous than the potential penalty under common law"[44]. Professor Ali Ferroz (from Islamic Republic of Iran) noted that there was no difference between Islamic and Christian teachings as far as the prohibitions of the Shari'ah are concerned but that some Christians are against the Shari'ah because they want to promote libertarianism such as ordination of gays as bishops which is against the teachings of the Bible. Also a European Muslim contributor made similar observation by noting that the European Union assembled European Muslim leaders and called on them to condemn Shari'ah implementation in Nigeria but he objected by stating that there are more pressing problems in Europe that affect the lives of European Muslims that need attention. For example the ordination of a gay as a bishop has more impact on the moral upbringing of their

children than the Shari'ah in Nigeria therefore such issues must be addressed. The contributor who triggered the discussion on Nigeria noted that he was pleased that Shari'ah Law of apostasy was not applicable in Nigeria but he did not speak further on the libertarian challenges facing the societies.

Among the workshops of the seminar was the one on 'Hejabs and hair', which followed a discussion on: 'What can women tell us about Islam?' Other workshops include; 'Saladin, chivalry and Holy Terror' and 'Hook and hands' relating to the intolerant preaching of one of the mosque Imams in Britain who lost his hand and was replaced by a metal hook. His photograph on the front page of 'The Sun' with the hook is a very scaring picture that depicts intolerance and widely used by the newspaper as a portrayal of Muslims. Ironically a study has shown that that paper is the most widely read by British Muslims, thereby contributing to the demonization of their faith but do they have any choice? People like that Imam and others provide the opportunity for the press to use them. Another similar fellow is standing trial for hate preaching whereby he blames Jews for most crimes. He tries to justify his hatred by quoting Islamic sources and misinterpreting them in contemporary context because of his failure to deconstruct the basis of oppression, which is usury. Many Jews, Christian and Muslims are involved in this crime. One of the greatest usurers and by far ahead of many Jews is a Saudi prince. To blame the Jews alone is therefore a clear manifestation of intolerance and lack of wisdom because Europe cannot afford any hate wave having barely recovered from Nazism. This kind of preaching or demagoguery is an exhibition of lack of wisdom because Muslims cannot afford to antagonize any group in Europe on the basis of race or religious categorization because they are also victims of segregation and xenophobia.

The preaching of Imams like those mentioned above lacks insight as eloquently explained by one of the distinguished European Muslim leaders who counseled at the seminar that if Muslims are against the use of crusade by U.S. President George Bush they must also consider the use of the word jihad which raises similar sentiment in the West. Why can't those Muslim preachers for example emphasis the greater the jihad which is against the selfish desires of the individual but they keep on emphasizing the lesser jihad to attract attention. At the moment if Muslims are seeking for justice for oppressed Muslims they must cooperate with other allies who are also interested in justice for all oppressed people of the world. One of the contributors argued persuasively that:

Islam can only gain if, in receding from the project for a new American century, relying on its ancient prophetic traditions, it allies itself with the growing opposition to that project being voiced by other sacred traditions as well. Such an alliance, breaking free both from Pentagon's vision of human civilization, and from that proposed by the Saudi universities, could have immense healing power. It would also facilitate a better understanding of Islam in the West, and greater appreciation of the West among Muslims, who for too long have assumed that greed, hegemony and godlessness are only active principles of Western civilization.

It is a fact that Muslims and Westerners have many things in common the most important of which is the monotheistic origin of their faiths Islam and Christianity. There have been several years of interactions between the two peoples. Both have enriched each other. From the Abbasid era, Islam was the "modernity" and since the Enlightenment the West remained the "modernity". This has led some Western academics to demand that Islam must westernize in order to become "modern" and "acceptable". The American power elites also hide under this "mission" of

"modernization" to conquer the Muslim world for economic reasons. Even though the Muslim world is not monolithic these American power elites consider it monolithic for the sake of this conquest. U.S. President Bush while declaring his war in Iraq noted with sweeping generalization that "It's not just about disarming Sadam; it's about what the President considers a "battle for the future of the Muslim world"[45]. The future of the Muslim world is obviously tied to the future of the rest of the world nobody can imagine reshaping the Muslim world without reshaping the world. What is essential is dialogue and not imposition as the Americans always wanted. They attempt to use their power at every given opportunity even while discussing with people. The British have since realized the futility of this arrogance, hence this seminar by an important cultural arm of the British society.

Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is not only desirable but also essential. So, the issue is the motive. If it is to arrive at a theological middle ground then it will fail because of their theological differences that cannot be solved and any attempt to do that would lead to conversion. Therefore the only acceptable motive should be utility namely peace, which could be achieved by recognition of each other's faith. The dialogue is therefore brief because of Islam's rejection of the libertarian culture of modernity as evil and decadent. "The fact that Islam has a strong legal side and that Shari'ah defines the permissibility and the limits of human activity leaves no room for a gray area in which a dialogue" on these limits "can occur"[46]. Back to the Rushdie affair Muslims cannot compromise the integrity of the Prophet (SAW) this does not limit freedom of speech, Muslims also recognize the integrity of others hence blasphemy under Islamic law extends to other Prophets and Muslims are not allowed to discrete other religions. Decency therefore demands that other societies also respect Islam therefore in this respect the British polity must recognize the integrity of the Prophet of Islam after all the British Muslim responded to the Rushdie affair within the limits of British law.

British Muslims have a great responsibility to the world in their efforts of negotiating their identity in the British society because they serve as models for others to follow. It is commendable that their effort of securing better representation of Islam in the media is recognized by the mainstream British society through the British Council. They have every reason to be proud of being Muslims and British because of the opportunities they have, which are more than those in Muslim majority countries.

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[1] The source is Makdisi 1999

[2] U.S. President Ronald Regan once called the Mujahidun fighting the Soviets "the moral equivalent's of America's founding fathers" (See Mamdani 2002: 3), the same groups fighting against Karzai, the new foreign puppet are now termed "terrorists" or fundamentalists.

[3] Peel 1996: 611 has noted how Christian born again literature considered the date of the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate by these leaders as a negative milestone in Nigerian history even though the Caliphate was a great African achievement in statecraft.

[4] The Economist Leaders: 'Europe's Muslims Islam is now firmly established in Western Europe. Don't be afraid of it'. August 10th 2002

[5] Hitti 1970: 556 has noted that "between the fall of Granada" to the Catholics "and the first decade of the seventh century it is estimated that about three million Moslems were banished or executed".

[6] Wilson 1984 : 126-127 for more information see Ado-Kurawa 2000: 69-82 where this issue was argued

[7] Mark 7: 17

[8] Yahya 1978

[9]Raghuram 1999

[10] Lewis 2002

[11] Aminrazavi 1996: 384

[12] Inwood 1995: 236-237

[13] The French revolution which was a product of Enlightenment brought about the republic, but that republic based on "liberty, equality and fraternity" restored slavery after it jailed Toussant L'Ouverture the leader of the revolt in Haiti who was inspired by the French revolution (Time, December 31, 1999 p. 164).

[14] The Pope made expressed his views at conference on Islamic-European Dialogue held at the Vatican see Yamani 1997: 94

[15] Roy 1994: 8 quoted in its review by Abdullah al-Ahsan 1996: 414

[16] Fukuyama 1992: 216

[17] Al-Masseri 1994

[18] Time December 31, 1999 p. 164

[19] Hoffman 2002: 5

[20] Hoffman 2002 is the source of information in this paragraph and the quotations are from him.

[21] Atlas 2002

[22] Wolin, S. 2003 'A Kind of Fascism is Replacing Our Democracy' Published July 18, 2003 by Long Island NY Newsday

[23] Sachs 2001

[24] Sachs 2001 for the quotations in this paragraph

[25] Sachs

[26] Bracken 2000 notes that Asia countries are developing their military this development would certainly reach the Muslim countries. He emphasized that: "Seen

more broadly, what the world was actually entering was not a post-Cold War era but a post-Vasco da Gama era - period wherein the final trappings of Western military superiority fell away as Asia's industrialization and wealth supported a military effort that could not easily be defeated by a more modern outside power" (Bracken 2000: 149). For example the U.S. dares not to attack North Korea.

[27] Kaplan 2002 noted the sophistication of the Iranian society and suggested a kind of shock therapy to induce a change

[28] For example Huntington 1998

[29] Lewis 2002: 63 notes: "In the West, one makes money in the market, and uses it to buy or influence power. In the East, one seizes power, and uses it to make money. Morally there is no difference between the two, but their impact on the economy and on the policy is very different".

[30] Kretzmann and Vallette 2003

[31] As-Sufi 2000

[32] See Bokhari 2002 for more information

[33] As explained in Allen 1999

[34] As-Sufi 2000

[35] Jones 2003

[36] New Africa September 2001 edition, the cover story is on American meddling in African affairs the American companies caused the war in Congo that has consumed four million lives.

[37] Allen 1999

[38] Richard Norton-Taylor 'Tell us the truth about the dossier' The Guardian of London July 15, 2003 see also Russ Baker 'All Spin All The Time' Friday July 11, 2003 published by TOMPAINE.COM Russ Baker is a New York based award wining journalist.

[39] Allen 1999

[40] Allen 1999

[41] Mondal 2003: 5

[42] For information see Izetbegovic 1989

[43] Crook 2003

[44] Available at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5687pf.htm

[45] Time 'Looking Beyond Saddam' cover story March 10, 2003, emphasis mine.

[46] Aminrazavi 1996: 386.