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Gamal Abdel Nasser meets Malcom X in Antwerp. In response to the ongoing debate on the flaws of multiculturalism and the alleged deficiencies of Islam, preventing Muslims from embracing Western modernity, some migrant activists have started a counter-campaign in Western Europe. The most outspoken representative of a young generation of activists is Dyab Abou Jahjah, who left Lebanon for Belgium in 1990 to study political science. In 2000 he founded the Arab European League, a movement that claims to have over 400 members and many more sympathizers in Belgium. Today, the movement is gaining popularity in neighbouring countries, too, and the Netherlands' branch of the League will be formally opened soon. Unlike most migrant activists and representatives, forced into a defensive position, in particular after 9/11, Abou Jahjah calls for the restoration of Arab and Muslim dignity and pride among the migrant communities. Countering apologies, self-critique, and gestures of goodwill by most migrant representatives, Abou Jahjah has taken up the cause of migrant culture and faith demanding the acknowledgment and reproduction of cultural diversity. He equates integration with assimilation and therefore rejects it. He is severely opposed to the Belgian political establishment, accusing it of curbing Muslim inhabitants' civil rights and portraying Islam as a criminal belief. Antwerp's white right-wing Flemish Bloc party, being part of that establishment, constitutes his main antagonist. But given that mainstream political parties in Europe increasingly adopt right-wing issues and that the media are eager to cover any signal of Muslim maladjustment, the non-conformist Abou Jahjah is now empowered to provoke angry responses from among the nation's lite and that of its neighbours.

Abou Jahjah's fame is of very recent date. He first became known when the League was among the initiators of a complaint filed against Ariel Sharon and others for their responsibility in the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in 1976. The complaint was lodged with the Belgian Public Prosecutor's Office in June 2001 following the recognition of the principle of the exercise of universal jurisdiction by a Belgian court in a case against four Rwandan nationals for war crimes earlier in the same month. The case was dismissed last June, but by then Abou Jahjah had proven his talent for holding the lime-light; in a series of incidents and interviews within one year's time he evolved from a pro-Palestinian activist to a spokesperson of a disgruntled Muslim youth. In November he was arrested after riots in an Antwerp suburb following the murder of a Belgian citizen of Moroccan origin by a next-door (white) neighbour. Antwerp police accused Abou Jahjah of having incited Moroccan youth to rampage the neighbourhood and the Belgian Prime Minister branded the League as a criminal organization, also because it had taken up patrolling the streets of Antwerp in order to tape possible ill-treat-

ment of migrant youth by the police. High-ranking politicians in the Netherlands, including some ministers, joined the parade and vowed that they would do their utmost to prohibit the League from spreading to their country. In the meantime, lack of proof compelled the Belgian authorities to release the culprit after a few days: a migrant hero was born. However, many – also among the migrant communities – argue that Abou Jahjah is detrimental to the cause of these communities and that he represents no-one but himself. But in the 'soap opera' that migrant and identity politics in Western Europe has become, Abou Jahjah needs little effort to find his niche. His good looks, flamboyant style, and fluency in Dutch are well received among Moroccan youth and make him an attractive media personality. Some of his language comes close to that of hip hop and other modern music cultures (see Khedimallah, pp. 20–1, and Nawaz, p. 22).

Editorial

DICK DOUWES | Editor

In his political thinking Abou Jahjah combines Abdel Nasser's call for an Arab renaissance with Malcom X's demand for respect and justice for oppressed minorities, embracing the latter's appeal to seize these rights and not to wait patiently until they are granted (www.arabeuropean.org).

Abou Jahjah's shift from Nasserite Arab activism to migrant spokespersonship points to the emancipation of youth of Muslim background who are, unlike their parents, well versed in European languages and cultures, but who react against growing pressures to distance themselves from their heritage. Interestingly, they construe Islam as a cultural rather than religious and societal system, albeit that some Islamic notions are used to appropriate and authenticate notions such as democracy.

Ostensibly in contrast is the Somalian-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who came into the spotlight by publicly declaring that she no longer considers herself a Muslim, principally because of the inferior status of Muslim women who are, in her view, lowered to son-bearing machinery. Her step was no doubt a brave one, but the way in which she was readily adopted by the main conservative party in the Netherlands and offered a seat in parliament, indicates that her situation is not totally different from that Abou Jahjah: their individual careers largely depend on the agitated state of public debate and rapidly changing political moods. The processes of inclusion and exclusion dominate the political field and various notions of being Muslim or being Western, or both, compete. In the 1990s the position of Muslims living as minorities in the West and elsewhere came under discussion among *shari'a*-oriented thinkers (see Masud, p. 17). This discussion poses daunting challenges to Islamic legal reasoning, which is founded on the assumption that Muslims are (or will or should be) a majority population. Minorities and majorities, dominating cultures and minor cultures – new vocabularies and frames of reference are in the making.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Professor Henry Munson has made some thoughtful and important contributions to the study of politics in the Islamic world. Unfortunately, his latest contribution descends into a facile and false dichotomy between Daniel Pipes and John Esposito. Daniel Pipes, Martin Kramer, et al have become notorious for espousing the most militant and extreme views of Jabotinskyite ultra-nationalism. In the case of Pipes, this has led to blatantly racist diatribes in publications like the *National Review*, where he complained of a Muslim 'invasion' of the West. In his latest book, he accuses American Muslims of a nefarious plot to take over the US government and national institutions in order to establish an 'Islamic state' in the US. Esposito has never indulged in such sweeping and inane bigotry against any group and it is frankly insulting to counterpose him with someone like Pipes.

It is disturbing to see that Munson has partially incorporated some of the ideologically driven claims of Likudniks like Pipes and Kramer. This is a broader transparently orchestrated campaign to discredit academics who might stand in the way of the current hate campaign against Muslims being conducted in the neo-conservative-evangelical mass media owned by the likes of Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black. This has included attempts by Kramer, a scholar based in a right-wing Israeli think-tank, to testify before Congress that American scholars who do not share a foreign Likudnik agenda should have their funding cut. It is ironic that Kramer in his latest monograph claims that the field of Middle Eastern Studies has failed because it did not predict the 9/11 attacks. A colleague of mine,

Mujeeb R. Khan, was with Kramer at the University of Chicago during Operation Desert Storm. While Khan explicitly warned in lectures (and subsequent articles) that massive US-led destruction in the Islamic world would inevitably lead to radicalization and devastating attacks upon America, Kramer, both at the time and subsequently, discounted the danger for the US of following a neo-conservative agenda of destructive interventionism in the Islamic world. John Esposito has also long warned that the failure of the United States to support democratization and equitable socio-economic development in the Islamic world would also lead to extreme radicalization and nihilistic violence as represented by al-Qa'ida, Gamaat Islamiya, and the AIG of Algeria. It is instructive that most scholars of Egypt, Afghanistan, and Algeria note how brutal repression of efforts at democratic reform directly led to the spawning of such extremist groups and the marginalization of moderate voices. It is also instructive that both Pipes and Kramer in their journal *Middle East Quarterly* have repeatedly warned against promoting democracy and human rights in the Muslim world because insufficiently pliant regimes would be elected.

Finally, I remain disturbed that Munson failed in his scholarly duty to carefully read Esposito's oeuvre, which is considered by a great many scholars of Muslim politics to be at the forefront in its pre-science and analysis. Esposito in his earlier work and latest book *Unholy Wars* has repeatedly pointed to the danger of intolerant and extremist radicals. More importantly, he has pointed out that such militancy is a direct result of brutal tyrannies

that forestall the possibility of gradual and pluralistic reform. Esposito's path-breaking work is now more important than ever. If we are to forestall murderous and unwinnable 'clashes of civilization' involving billions of people around the globe, it is vital that mainstream reformist and democratically inclined Muslim thinkers and movements – which have always existed and to which Munson seems suddenly oblivious – in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco be engaged by Western scholars and institutions. This sort of scholarly engagement was pioneered by John Esposito and it offers humanity the only course for escaping horrific cycles of violence along racial, religious, ethnic, or ideological divisions.

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RETRACTION

An error was made in *ISIM Newsletter* 10, which we would like to hereby rectify. On page 19, in Dr Farian Sabahi's article 'The Literacy Corps in Pahlavi Iran (1963–1979)', the author was referred to as 'He', but should have been 'She' in the following: 'She is author of *The Literacy Corps in Pahlavi Iran (1963–1979): Political, Social and Literary Implications*'. We apologize for this oversight.