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Dutch drama: 6 May 2002 and an animal rights' activist shoots to death the Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn, thus committing the first political murder in the Netherlands since World War II (see Karacaer, p.11). There was no single incidence of public support for the murder, but oddly enough many felt relief that the suspect was not a Muslim. Why?

In a fascinating one-man performance Fortuyn had shaken the foundations of the Dutch political establishment. Bald-headed, proudly gay, with a limousine as means of transportation, and often accompanied by two Yorkshire terriers, he used television as his main medium, disseminating his views with dramatic gestures and – at times funny – one-liners. For those who did not back his ideas it seemed a relief that he was sort of a court jester, too vain and witty to survive dreary Dutch political culture. However, his horrid death may well lead him to 'survive' longer than many anticipated. Nine days after his death his party, established three months earlier and simply called List Pim Fortuyn, became second to the Christian Democratic Party that profited greatly from the moral crisis that had hit the country. The dominant Labour Party lost nearly 50% of its seats, signalling the current spectacular decrease of support for social democracy in Western Europe. Not unsurprisingly, issues of immigration and (public) security, often interlinked, dominated the campaigns in the Netherlands, as in neighbouring countries.

The Dutch example demonstrates that globalization is not only the predicament of the Muslim world or Muslims migrants in the West (Levine, p.1), but also of European societies in general. Relentless in his critique on political correctness and bureaucratic imperative, Fortuyn mobilized public support by questioning the ability of Muslim migrants to integrate and by ridiculing Islam and its representatives. Fortuyn broadcasted mixed messages; he was not xenophobic, but he clearly abhorred Islam and everything associated with it. Islam has received very

bad press in the Netherlands – also because of series of incidents concerning imams and would-be imams expressing views which, to put it mildly, with some regularity transgress the local contexts of both believers and unbelievers. However few in number, these extra-local (and in the eyes of many, virtually extra-terrestrial) imams attract public attention and strengthen the belief of many that Dutch culture has nothing to gain from Islam. Moreover, the 11 September attacks have reinforced the idea that Islam is strongly associated with the outright rejection of Western lifestyles. Well before his calling to electoral politics, Fortuyn published

his views in columns and books, one of which was entitled *Against the Islamization of the Netherlands*. During the campaigns he defined Islam as a 'backward culture', claiming that conditions are terrible everywhere Islam rules. He held Islam responsible for the isolation of many migrants in the Netherlands. Moreover, he expressed

fear that the increased presence of Muslims poses a danger to the emancipation of women and of homosexuals because of their 'hypocritical and male chauvinistic' culture, notwithstanding his own sexist remarks made to female journalists. Nevertheless, he brought two formerly left-wing issues into a basically conservative populist discourse.

Fortuyn's uncompromising views, his camp if not eccentric behaviour, and his veritable martyr's death explain his posthumous popularity. His main ideas, the disciplining of immigrants into the national culture and the refutation of cultural relativism, have been voiced in many places before. Some argue that thanks to people like Fortuyn a number of taboos that frustrated a more pragmatic approach to the issues of immigration and integration, in particular in the field of gender relations, including marriage patterns, have been lifted. That may be true, yet, for the time being, his violent death precludes a more open exploration of the issue of migration and culture based upon the assumption that cultures are in flux and open to change, whether we like it or not.

Editorial

DICK DOUWES | Editor

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Your *ISIM Newsletter* issue no. 9 is as stimulating as ever, but I wonder whether it fully rises to the occasion. Granted, you strike a fine and imaginative editorial balance, including on the one hand, critiques of Euro-American hegemony, and on the other, attempts to introduce innovative ideas from the Arab-Islamic world to an Anglophone readership. Amr Hamwazy's article on the prospects for the 'intellectual isolation of radical Islamism' and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's piece on 'hate mysticism' are especially striking.

But do you not skirt around an urgent issue, which is whether or not – as recently argued in a lecture in England by the Dutch sociologist Emmanuel de Kadt – the undoubted tendency within all religions (and other dogmatic ideologies) towards violent extremism is particularly pronounced in contemporary Islam? The case he advances is not unfamiliar – that Islam has not yet undergone a Reformation and an Enlightenment, and that its modernizing voices have not yet consolidated into coherent intellectual movements comparable to Reform Judaism. I listened to De Kadt's lecture – which also addressed the much wider question of fundamentalism in general – with deep resistance, fortified by my reading of many anthropological warnings against denying 'coevality' to non-Western societies; by the knowledge that a huge majority of Muslims have no inclination whatsoever towards extremism, let alone violence; and by a recognition that Islam as a religion cannot bear responsibility for the repressive character of so many political regimes in the Islamic world.

However, some facts do seem to support De Kadt's case. It is true that at the centre of Oxford University is a memorial to Christian bishops who were burnt at the stake as recently as four and a half centuries ago. But it does seem odd today that the editor of *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000) should have had to publish his book under a pseudonym, Ibn Warraq, presumably for fear of retribution. Yes, he may be biased and polemical, but is not the free exchange of ideas a prerequisite for fruitful co-adaptation with the modern world? He has cleverly echoed the title of Albert Schweitzer's pioneering *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, published in 1906. Surely an anthology of academic texts by such venerable authors as Renan (d. 1892), Lam-

mens (d. 1937) and Schacht (d. 1969) deserves to be publishable in the ordinary way.

Secondly, the extent of mind control exercised by some of the armed Islamist groups in Algeria over their recruits during the civil war has probably been underestimated. I found *Moi, Nadia, femme d'un émirdu GIA* [Groupe Islamiste Armé], by Baya Gacemi (Algiers: Editions L'Epoque, 1998) such a shocking book to read that I hoped it would turn out to be an insidious forgery. 'Nadia' is a pseudonym; the story, told to a journalist, is that of a girl who fell in love with a young hooligan who was indoctrinated into becoming a ruthless killer and petty tyrant in the GIA hierarchy. Her village, initially sympathetic to the Islamists, changed to opposing them, so that eventually her husband was killed by the police and she was abandoned by all her family and friends. During a visit to Algiers in 2000, I was assured by university sociologists whose opinion I trust that it is an authentic account. Similar techniques of indoctrination are commonly used by cults and similar organizations in the West, but the extent of their use in Algeria in the 1990s under the auspices of Islamism testifies to a serious crisis in religious authority. This must be a central problem today in a country whose population is nearly 100% Muslim by birth.

If the question posed by De Kadt is indeed the serious issue that I believe it to be, it is one for Islamic theology, not merely for social and political science – for only a minority of the world's Muslims seem likely to suddenly give up their religious beliefs and become liberal humanists after the English or Dutch model. Special attention should be given to such movements as Islamic feminism, as in your conference report by Martin van Bruinessen; but also to the work of modernizing sheikhs such as Zaki Badawi in London and Soheib Bencheikh in Marseilles, whose intellectual commitments, now criticized by some commentators as élitist, may well have an immense long-term influence. And surely De Kadt's argument should be faced straight on, so that we can assess the evidence for and against.

JONATHAN BENTHALL

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NEWS

Four Freedoms Medal

On Saturday, 8 June 2002, Prof. Dr Nasr Abu Zaid received the Franklin D. Roosevelt Freedom of Worship Medal. In 1941, US President Roosevelt proclaimed that four freedoms are essential for democracy to flourish: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. In order to encourage leadership in fulfilling this vision, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute honours individuals who have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to these ideals. Nelson Mandela was among the other recipients. The trustees of the award stated that Abu Zaid's career and work exemplify the importance of continued commitment to freedom of religion and conscience. In his acceptance speech Abu Zaid expressed his great concern about the ongoing repression and violence associated with religion.

'As a Muslim and a scholar of Islamic Studies, the first Muslim to receive such an honourable award, I feel obliged to explicate what I think is the double message implied in awarding me the medal of freedom of worship. The message is to address both the Western world and the Muslim world as such. Islam is not static, non-dynamic, or a fixed set of rules. It is not a violent terrorist religion by nature. Any religion can be misused, politicized and manipulated to serve a certain ideology. The Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, is silent; it does not speak by itself, but people speak it out. As the Word of God to man, its understanding and interpretation reflect the human dimension of religion. It is then unacceptable to ascribe to Islam whatever problems Muslims might have in their socio-historical existence.'

Among his many other activities, Prof. Nasr Abu Zaid participates in the ISIM 'Rights at Home' project.