

## Representation of Islam and Muslims in post 9/11 Orientalist Narrative

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### ABSTRACT

Since the attacks of September 11, hundreds of novels have been written on and about Islam. Such novels attempt to explain Islam or portray Muslims. Some of these novels have tried to explain the true Islam as opposed to fundamentalism, as a religion of peace, tolerance and charity while others have depicted Islam as an evil religion, a religion of Jihad, death and terrorism. One of these novels which belong to the latter category is John Elray's *Khalifah: A Novel of Conquest and Personal Triumph*. The novel attempts to portray Islam as a religion which purportedly harbors hostility towards other religions and races. It tries to convey the idea that Islam, a harsh and intolerant creed, spread by the sword. The present article attempts to analyze the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in *Khalifah*. It examines the ways in which Elray has represented Islam and Muslims in his novel. The aim of the article is to explore how Islam is depicted and Muslim identities are constructed in the novel. The article argues that *Khalifah* nudges the reader toward viewing Islam as a danger to Western interests. The main purpose of the novelist is to demonize Islam and dehumanize Muslims particularly the first generation of Muslims.

**Keywords:** Orientalist, Islam, Muslims, Post 9/11 narrative

### INTRODUCTION

Since 9/11, Islam, fundamentalism, terrorism and Muslims have become central to political debates and policies in America and Europe. Since then, there has been an incremental growth of concerns about the nature of Islam and its relationship with non-Muslim countries. And due to violence, terrorist acts, and new fundamentalist groups, Muslims in the west have been demonized, stereotyped and marginalized, and put under massive scrutiny. Muslims, writes Peter Morey, "have been the object of heightened levels of criticism, intolerance, and abuse—their cultures homogenized and vilified and their religion depicted as backward and warlike. The same vitriol has passed into mainstream currency, finding outlets in journalism, film, and television dramas, in political statements, and in the outlaw spaces of the Internet" (Morey, 2018, p. 2). Writers, journalists and Academic experts are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas about Islam on media where they are portrayed as sex-addicts, barbaric, savage, treacherous, and bloodthirsty. Islam is described as a religion

of war, violence and fundamentalism. The attitude of these writers is always "ethnocentric or Eurocentric" (Ahmad, 2002, para. 19). These writers, as Ishtiyaque Danish (1992) writes, regard

*Their civilization as normative. They further believe that their Eurocentric standards – religious and cultural – are not only a fitting scale to judge other people but also universally applicable. Obsessed with their erroneous attitude they have always failed to fully understand 'other people' in an objective manner. With regard to Islam the question is not that they failed to grasp its real meaning and message but that they intentionally and impudently tried to disguise and distort its true image. (pp. 76-77)*

They generally treat Islam "within an invented or culturally determined ideological framework filled with passion, defensive prejudice, sometimes even revulsion" (Said, 1997, pp.6-7). They have distorted many Islamic concepts and created inaccurate preconceptions about the principles of Islam. They have created new images as well as recycling the old ones.

However, this systematic distortion of Islam is not a recent phenomenon and cannot be solely attributed to 9/11 attack of the World Trade Center but goes back for centuries. Edward Said (1997) writes:

*For most of the Middle Ages and during the early part of the Renaissance in Europe, Islam was believed to be a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy, and obscurity. It did not seem to matter that Muslims considered Muhammad a prophet and not a god; what mattered to Christians was that Muhammad was a false prophet, a sower of discord, a sensualist, a hypocrite, an agent of the devil. Nor was this view of Muhammad strictly a doctrinal one.*(p. 5)

Roger Du Pasquier in *Unveiling Islam* (1992), writes: “The West, whether Christian or dechristianised, has never really known Islam. Ever since they watched it appear on the world stage, Christians never ceased to insult and slander it in order to find justification for waging war on it. It has been subjected to grotesque distortions the traces of which still endure in the European mind” (pp. 5-6). Two points can be summarized here: first the image of Islam is intentionally distorted and second, Orientalist negative writings on Islam go back at least to the middle Ages since which Islam has been maligned and severely misunderstood.

Such images are the creation of the western imagination and have no reality at all. They are “intentionally and impudently” (Ahmed, 2002, Para. 19) disguised and distorted portrayals. Juri Dutta writes, “Representation can never be exactly realistic. It can never be completely objective. Instead, they are just constructed images/ideas which need to be questioned for their ideological content” (Dutta, 2014, p. 18). Khawaja Ahmad Farooqui recaps almost the same point. He affirms “that the Orient is the creation of Western imagination in which there is sheer romance, heightened sexuality, plenty of luxury, hunger and mercilessness” (qtd in Ahmed, 2002, para. 22 ). Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in *Framing Muslims* (2011) argue that such “images are distorted abstractions. Extrapolating from context-specific controversies, they paint Muslims as a homogeneous, zombielike body, incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward worldview” (p. 1). Speaking of the coverage of Islam in the west, Edward Said (1997) writes: “But, as I have

implied, this coverage -and with it the work of academic experts on Islam, geopolitical strategists who speak of ‘the crescent of crisis,’ cultural thinkers who deplore ‘the decline of the West’ - is misleadingly full. It has given consumers of news the sense that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material” (p. li). Norman Daniel, in his book, *Islam and the West*, is “shocked by the wild inaccuracy and patent hostility of what he found in the medieval texts – crude insults to the Prophet, gross caricatures of Muslim ritual, and scurrilous portrayals of Muslims as libidinous, gluttonous, savage, bloodthirsty and semi-human” (Jubb, 2005, p. 229).

In fact, such negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims are used for political purposes. Deliberate and concerted efforts are made by the American Orientalist writers to justify America’s imperialist dreams and designs. Hence, such a distortion is part of American policy. These writers brainwash the American common people and arouse in them a feeling anger, resentment, and fear of Islam and Muslims. “And it is this combination of feelings that,” as Edward Said (1997) says, are “instantly aroused and exploited for domestic commercial reasons” (pp. 3-4). Said adds, “Insofar as Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient, its particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear.” (p. 4). They fear Islam and Muslims because “the Islamic world by its very adjacency evoked memories of its encroachments on Europe, and always of its latent power again and again to disturb the West” (Said, 1997, p. 5). Oil price rises of the early 1970s and Islamic terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s and the attacks of 9/11 have deepened this fear. Besides Said, John Esposito has discussed such fear in his book *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (1999). Esposito writes: “Fear of the Green Menace [green being the color of Islam] may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism” (p. 3). The general opinion of Americans and that of the Europeans is similar: Islam constitutes a threat to ‘us’. In this connection, the West has the right to defend itself against such a ‘menace’. Further, the west have indulged in such a systematic distortion of Islam because, as Edward Said (1997) says: “Islam represents not only a

formidable competitor but also a late coming challenge to Christianity” (p. 5).

Another goal of distorting the image of Islam is to make Muslims themselves indifferent towards and averse to their religion and past. Efforts are made to intellectually overawe the Muslims so that they turn toward the West for guidance and inspiration. The goal is to instill skepticism in them and paralyze them mentally. Depicting the first generation of Muslims in this way makes today’s young Muslims especially those living in the west feel ashamed of their violent religion and ancestors. They feel the need to blend in and give up their faith so that they can be accepted in western societies.

Actually, Islam has been the object of studies by orientalists who have published an extensive learned literature on the subject. It also has inspired many orientalist fictional writers. One of these writers is John Elray, the author of *Khalifah: A Novel of Conquest and Personal Triumph* (2002). In this novel Elray has narrated events that support the western pre-conceived notions of Islam and Muslims. The novel is a mere outburst of Muslim fanaticism and a demonstration of the bigotry and violence of the Muslim mind. It depicts Muslim early wars as wars of conquest and expansion launched by fanatic Muslims against non-Muslims. Further, Elray’s novel tries to convey the idea that ‘conversions to Islam were made at the point of the sword’. The conquered peoples had the choice of conversion or death. Though many fictional works have been written Muslim after 9/11, *Khalifah* is totally different and this difference lies in the fact that all the characters are *Sahaba* (Prophet Muhammad’s Companions).

### MUSLIMS: PLUNDER AND PERSONAL GAINS

The novel presents early Muslims as a race of combatants living on pillage and the exploitation of other nations. Undoubtedly, the first generation of Muslims already had war experiences as warriors before they embrace Islam. They fought as raiders for plunder, booty, and spoils. But all this came to an end after Islam. However, the novel presents Muslims as plunderers and pillagers with pre-Islamic mentality. It shows “that the early heroes of Islam were, in fact, not at all interested in religion” rather than in plunder. Islam itself is portrayed as entitling its followers to appropriate the possessions and belongings of the defeated enemies as booty. Throughout the novel, Elray attempts to show the hypocrisy of the early Muslims especially Muslim leaders.

He makes it clear that they embraced Islam not for the sake of Islam itself but for plunder and personal gains. Khalid, Amr, Mu’awiya all of them amass a huge fortune from the conquests. It also shows that their embracement of Islam is not the result of their love for the new religion; rather it is a means for an end. They capture vast lands and enslave new peoples and live on the newly conquered lands as a rentier class and to exploit the economic potential of the rich new lands. Here Elray follows Goldziher who believes that “Many non-Arabs joined the Muslim cause for material advantages” (Warraq, 1995, p. 206). Mu’awiya, Shurahbil and Abu Sufiyan embrace Islam not out of love but because they “had no choice” (Elray, 2002, p. 26). Mu’awiya lives for years unfaithful to the cause: “For years, in the face of Omar’s trust, I lived uncomfortably with the guilt of my doubts of faith. But this guilt weighed more heavily on me, not less, after his death” (p. 249). One day, he goes for prayer feeling “doubtful that praying would solve this immediate problem” (p. 65). Many others have “embraced Islam rather than suffer the consequences of opposing it” (p. 28). Mu’awiya and Khalid accuse each other of embracing Islam for personal gains: “Your present condition,” Mu’awiya says to Khalid, “is fitting punishment for a lifetime of barbarous acts and deception. You even used the Cause solely to further your own ends”. Khalid replies: “And you didn’t?” (p. 235). Al-Moghira, the new governor of Kufa, Iraq, rejects Omar’s instructions and follows his whim in distributing money: “That money comes to me and I will distribute it as I please...Of course, I’ll need to determine what my share is to be” (p. 239). This leaves “no doubt that his share would be substantial” (p. 239). Other types of corruption of Muslim Caliphs take place during Othman’s reign. His “rule was punctuated by favoritism, corruption, and nepotism as many of his relations were appointed to important offices within the government” (p. 253). Othman is accused of spending “lavishly on his cronies and his personal acquisitions” (p. 258). It becomes clear that *Khalifah* is an effort to distort the image of early Muslims who are revered by Muslims all over the world as models in an attempt to make Muslims averse to their religion and *Sahaba*.

Though they claim to fight for the Cause, not all Muslim fighters have joined the war/jihad for the sake of Islam. Some fight for money and spoils. Al-Muthanna fights for gold and silver. His rapacity for money has been acknowledged



by Omar himself who says: “Al-Muthanna cannot remain our leader in Al-Iraq permanently. His primary motivation is plunder, not the Cause” (p. 174). Al-Muthanna informs Khalid that he has “ties to the leader of the BeniTemim” and assures him that he “could convince him to commit his tribe to our cause, at a not unreasonable cost” (p. 38). The BeniTemim have agreed to join Muslims if they are “given the proper incentives” (p. 38). The conversation between Khalid and his amirs, Al-Muthanna and Farouk, shows that their venture is more for the sake of money and worldly gains. They want to reach Iraq because it is rich. Al-Muthanna explains: “There are two outlying strongholds in the south, Khaffan and Al-Hafir, widely separated and more or less independent of each other. Take either one of these and you have access to the cities of Al-Iraq, and that’s where the real wealth lies” (p. 98). And when the Sword of Allah asks him, what kind of wealth could be found there, he replies, “Gold, silver, rubies, food...beautiful women. All in substantial quantities” (p. 98). Amr and Mu’awiya are not different. They are looking for personal gains too. When they decide to conquer Damascus, they think of its riches and wealth. The conversation between the two makes their intentions clear: “Ah, but Damascus, a magnificent city indeed, breathtakingly beautiful and rich beyond imagining. Surely we must conquer her” (p. 118). Khalid in Iraq is leading a rich life. His mansion is described as having

*rich trappings...A rectangular opening, the length of two men and half that in width, cut into the ceiling of the atrium, hovered directly above a shallow pool of like size and shape. Under the water lay a magnificent mosaic of the surrounding countryside. Across from the pool, an exquisite carpet of obvious Persian origin with intricate red and black designs graced a windowless wall. Two marble statues of partially clad women, their hair and garments overlaid with silver, flanked the entryway to the remainder of the villa. (pp. 220-21)*

He gives his friend, Farouk, a gift of one thousand gold pieces. At the end, Khalid is out to trial due to amassing money from war: “He has amassed a small fortune from the spoils of his victories, more than he should rightfully have” (p. 211).

Muslim leaders’ gluttony and love for money lead to a competition between them. In other words, the misdistribution of money among Bedouin and Qurayshi Muslims can be

considered as one of the reasons of the civil war in Islam. There is no just distribution of the taxes levied from new regions. The Bedouins “receive a pension from the tax assessed by Omar on the landowners. But the Bedouin feel they get too little, and that the Quraysh receive too much, solely because they were born in Mecca or Medina” (p. 238). The Bedouins in Iraq are unhappy with their lot though they are the ones who conquered Iraq and constitute the majority of the Muslim army there. They want the new land “as their prize of war, but Omar refused to apportion the land” (p. 238). This unfair distribution of money, land and other spoils has ignited the fire of jealousy that the Bedouins have for Quraysh. Booty became the bone of contention between the major leaders. So divisive it became that a war started between Muslims themselves.

### MUSLIMS: BARBARISM AND SAVAGERY

*Khalifah* presents Muslims as barbaric, savage, uncivilized and cruel. They are bloodthirsty and sadistic. They over enjoy torturing others. They are portrayed as opposite to the civilized white man. They kill for the sake of killing. Khalid, the Sword of Allah, is barbaric, vicious and savage. He has “no regard for the sanctity of life” (p. 58). He is a commander who does not respect the laws of war. After the defeat of BeniYerbu, Khalid does not only kill the prisoners, but also makes “an example of them” (p. 30). He never bothers himself with trials and his “justice has always meant death, whether it’s deserved or not” (p. 26). Imagining the death scene that is about to occur for BeniYerbu, Shurahbil says: “The blood will flow like camel piss today” (p. 32). Shurahbil is able to imagine the scene because he has seen the same thing happens many times in the past. Khalid does not follow the Islamic laws when conducting trials or passing sentences and always delivers “justice in his own special way” (p. 32). This means that Khalid follows his whims when he holds trials. So, his sentences are always harsh and unfair as they are based on unfair self-made laws. The massacre of Beni Yerbuprisoners in which almost half of the tribe are executed in one day is just one example. When Mutemmam accuses him of being a “Liar!” and a “Murderer,” (p. 41) Khalid kicks him swiftly in his crotch and bends over and fishes his left hand into Mutemmam’s “mouth to grasp the errant tongue while producing a knife in his right hand” (p. 41). He is ready to cut off his tongue.

Khalid's cruelty is vividly seen in his dealing with the two harp playing songstresses who are accused of ridiculing the Prophet in their songs. The scene is very horrifying. The hands of the first songstress

*were secured, far apart, to a fallen palm trunk. Her feet were bound likewise to another. On Khalid's signal, two of his men descended upon her, the first forcing her mouth open as the second loosened her front teeth, one by one, with a fist sized rock. Two broke off from misplaced blows. Khalid's man pulled the remaining teeth out by hand, using a thin piece of camel leather to maintain his grip. He grunted out the count. 'One, two, three, four.'* (pp. 33-4)

Then Khalid orders the guard to cut off the songstress's two hands. The second songstress is subjected to the same fate too.

Khalid's savagery is further seen when Toleiha is captured. When captured, Toleihais dismembered and cut into pieces: "Khalid personally decapitated Toleiha in front of his whole tribe and then, with an ax, quartered the man's head, as you would cut up an orange. Khalid ordered the pieces be taken to the four corners of the oasis and cast into the desert"(p. 68). In another scene, Khalid kills the Bedouin guide who led Khalid's army from Iraq to Al-Alamein: "Khalid drew his dagger and plunged it into the masked man's heart, removed it, and plunged it in again. A crimson patch, the size of a hand, then quickly growing to become the size of a head, stained the guide's white robe" (p. 135). What is remarkable about him is not killing itself but the way he kills.

Khalid is treacherous. He does not hesitate to kill even those who may have helped him. In this respect, he is a treacherous and does not keep him promises. During the conquest of Damascus, he orders Farouk to appoint some men to kill Mu'awiya, his vehement foe, but when the assassination fails, Khalid orders Farouk to execute the appointed men: "Tonight cut off one of their hands each, they are obviously of no use to these persons. . . . No, better yet, execute them on the pretext that we had learned of their plot to assassinate one of our leaders. Be sure to announce that after they've been disposed of"(p. 199). All these scenes show how Khalid feels delighted when he kills. Khalid is bloodthirsty and quick to kill and is overjoyed to see blood and heads cut.

Mu'awiya also is depicted as a heartless man. During the plague, Mu'awiya orders all the quarters invaded by the plague to be burned. Khalid has lost his position and now living in a very miserable condition. Thirty of his children have been lost to the plague. He is impoverished; wearing unclean garments and looks weak as if "he hadn't eaten in a week" (p. 234). Khalid the great has become insignificant. He is a "haggard warrior, the once great leader, now but a pathetic wretch" (p. 235). He appeals to Mu'awiya for help but Mu'awiya rejects his petitions and orders his soldiers to demolish his last possession, home. When his men burn Khalid's home, Mu'awiya orders them not to let him leave his home. He wants to burn him alive. Mu'awiya says: "One must purge one's consciousness in order to survive the unpleasantries of life" (p. 35). Further, Mu'awiya's torture of the cart driver who attempted to assassinate him shows his vicious heart. The prisoner was taken to a desolate area replete with ants. He is "staked down at a spot where several mounds lay clustered together. The assailant was stripped and his wrists and ankles secured to pegs which had been driven deep into the soil. He lay splayed face up under the scorching sun, directly on and surrounded by the nests of the voracious insects" (p. 204). When he refuses to respond or confess his crime, the guards drive long slivers of wood under the prisoner's finger nails.

Omar, the second Caliph, is portrayed as harsh and brutal. He is always seen with his cat-o-nine-tails in hand. His penetrating gaze causes men and women alike to divert their eyes from him. Omar is always roaming the town searching for somebody worthy of punishment. He roams the streets of Medina looking for transgressors behaving improperly so that he can slash them with his whip. Omar is portrayed as lacking humanity and very harsh even for war prisoners. When Mutemmam, a war prisoner, arrives with Mu'awiya he is surprised why Khalid has sent him to Medina and did order his death on the journey. The reader is surprised to see Omar, Mu'awiya and their officers urinate on Mutemmam. Describing the horrible scene, Elray writes that one of Mu'awiya's officer

*produced a sizable penis from beneath his robe and proceeded to urinate on Mutemmam's head.*

*Not to be outdone, the rest of us, all who could, also urinated on the prisoner. The streams hissed upon hitting the skin of his face. Mutemmam flinched as the foul smelling liquid*

*ran into his eyes and mouth. He awoke sputtering, still half dazed. (pp. 76-7)*

Beside his cruelty, Omar is also depicted as treacherous. When Jerusalem was conquered, Omar travelled there to sign a treaty between Muslims and Christians. After signing the treaty with Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Omar whispers to Amr "After he has served his purpose, relieve this blasphemer of his tongue, then send him back to Constantinople" (p. 210).

Another character who is depicted as barbaric and ferocious is Al-Hasan, the son of Ali ibnAbiTaleb. After the assassination of Ali ibnAbiTaleb, Al-Hasan has IbnMuljam brought to the central square of Al-Kufa and orders "the assassin impaled lengthwise with a lance and roasted, with the little bit of life which then remained in him, over a blazing fire" (p. 301). All these scenes provide the reader with an image of Muslims which is negative. They are savage, brutal and vicious. They over enjoy torturing others. They are devils putting prisoners to death. They practice mutilation. They are bloodthirsty slayers of people. They do not only kill but enjoy dismembering their victims. They seem to enjoy blood scenes.

### MUSLIMS: SEX AND SEXUALITY

Sex has been an important feature of Orientalist writings and scholarship. There is, as Edward Said (1978) says a clear "association...between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex" (p. 190). Explaining the orientalist's quest for sexual experiences outside Europe, Said Adds, "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest" (p. 190). Said directs his criticism at orientalist authors who in travel books, diaries or novels described their sexual experiences in the East. These writers, according to Said, often couple the Orient with sexuality. Speaking about Gustave Flaubert, a French writer and one of the early Orientalists, Ali Behdad (1994) writes: "like his precursors, he associated the Orient with sex and followed their exploitative habit of searching for the exotic referents of Oriental eroticism, and indulged as much as he could in their endless pleasures" (Behdad, p. 68). Oriental female is often depicted nude or partially-clothed. She is presented as exotic, an object of sexual pleasure. Arab men are portrayed as over-sexed, violent sheikhs or desert potentates. Elray is not an exception. Like

many other Orientalist writers, he presents a negative image of early Muslims.

The narrative projects Muslims as erotic and sexual maniacs whose sexual appetite is almost bestial. They are conceptualized as sexual beings who are closer to the animal kingdom. The Muslims are bound to their wives/harem through an animal-like appetite for sex. They have no feelings of tenderness, love or compassion. They practice adultery though forbidden by Islam. The novel is replete with erotic and gratuitous sex scenes and the word erection is repeated so many times. Khalid, the foremost general of Islam, is depicted as a hypersexual man with "lustful thoughts meandering through [his] mind" (p. 29). Shurahbil's party is attacked on the road to Al-Buzakha by BeniYerbu with Malik's leadership. But Shurahbil was able to defeat them and fifty of their leaders and certain suspect individuals were taken as captives. Among the captives are sheikh Malik ibnNuweira, his beautiful wife Leila, and his brother Mutemmam. Since Malik and his wife became captives, "Khalid hasn't taken his eyes off her during the whole journey" to Al-Bitah (p. 23). And to get the beautiful lady, Khalid makes a plan to get rid of Malik. He kills him in a make-believe battle between prisoners and their guards. After the murder of Malik, "Khalid counted the hours until he could rightfully lay claim to the woman of his enemy, her name escaping him at the moment, but her beauty etched into his soul" (p. 29). Khalid, depicted as having a voracious sexual appetite, marries her the same day her husband was murdered. Describing her condition after the death of her husband, Elray writes: "Leila wept as she bent over a lifeless Malik. She looked up upon hearing her captor's terse voice. Her dark hair framed tear-filled almond eyes, eyes as exquisite as Khalid had ever seen. The wind had blown Leila's robe up to expose one of her legs and when the Sword of Allah saw it, he groaned like a camel in heat, but feigned that his utterance was in sympathy for the dead" (pp. 40-41). Khalid here is seen as someone without emotions and feelings. He does not care about the psychological condition of a woman who has just lost her husband.

Another example that shows Khalid's addiction to sex is seen when Majaa and his daughter Oleiyah are held captives. Majaa is one of Museilam's men. He has a beautiful daughter. After the defeat of Mueilam's army, the father and the daughter are taken by Khalid's forces. The moment Khalid meets Oleiyah, he decides



to take her. Her father pleads to him to leave her as she is the only one left for him in this life but Khalid rejects his pleas. Unable to save his daughter, Majaa goes to her and asks her to go to Khalid. So Oleiyah goes to Khalid. As she approaches, Khalid removes the cloth to expose his erection. She undresses and takes out a knife she has under the robe and kills herself. Later we are told that her father committed suicide also.

Mu'awiya, the founder and the first Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, is depicted as a sexual maniac also. When Mu'awiya meets Leila, Malik's and then Khalid's wife, Mu'awiya feels "an erection coming on" (p. 23). Next time when Mu'awiya sees Khalid with Leila in the tent, he says:

*Khalid turned his attention to Leila. The expression on her face was neutral – not sad, nor happy; more inquiring than anything else. The combination of her brazen complexion, dark elongated eyes, and raven black hair against a flowing white robe accentuated her exquisite beauty. I sensed, by his tone of voice, that Khalid was becoming aroused... as was I. I felt the stirrings of lust beneath my robe. I wanted what Khalid coveted. (pp. 45-6)*

Mu'awiya, Omar's protégé and mentor, could not hide his sexual desire for Koreiba, Omar's wife, though Omar is his mentor, protector and supporter. When he meets her, he describes her:

*She had a stately posture and was a very...handsome woman, would be the best way to describe her. She had enormous breasts which were readily evident even under her loose fitting robe. I was alarmed to realize that I had developed an erection from looking at her. I quickly diverted my thoughts to Khalid, so as to purge my mind of any impurity. It was a sin to covet another's wife, especially that of a friend and such an important figure as Omar. (pp. 66-7).*

Feeling a sexual attraction to the wife of one's friend or close relative is considered immoral degeneracy in Muslim culture. It shows Mu'awiya's vice. Further, Mu'awiya is depicted as a man without jealousy. For example, he knows that Meisun, his wife, has had an affair with Khalid, his most vehement foe, and keeps silence. He does not even ask her why.

Another scene which depicts Arabs' vulgar indulgence with sex occurs in the open between Al-Ashtar and Sajah. The men of the

BeniHanifa are seen dancing in a circle around fire at night. As the excitement heightens,

*Al-Ashtar brought Sajah into the center of the circle where she began to disrobe. Al-Ashtar did likewise. She dropped her garment onto the sand and laid on it with the Bedouin sheikh following on top of her. They began to copulate to the rhythmic sounds of the ceremony. While the act continued, the tempo of the chanting and dancing quickened until it reached a frantic pace. Sajah began to experience orgasm after orgasm, her body writhing, her legs raised and shaking. The BeniHanifa cheered as their leader delivered the final few thrusts and then fell limp on the prophetess. (pp. 89-90)*

In this scene Arabs are reduced to animals. Having sex in front of others is not a human behavior. It is an abnormal sexual behavior. The narrator adds that Sajah, who claims to be a prophetess, has been able to attract men through sex. She uses sex as a force to attract followers. "Sexual rituals," the narrator says, "in which she often figured centrally, were commonplace and on many occasions Sajah would pleasure herself with several men and women simultaneously. The prophetess was never concerned with the consequences of her depraved escapades; being barren meant complete freedom in this regard" (p. 46). Muslims and Arabs are depicted as sexaholic, sex-addicted men, licentious and philanderers.

Amr, a brave general of Islam who defeated the Byzantines in Egypt, is seen as a sex-addict and homosexual. One night he assembles the commanders in his tent near Bosra and informs them of the numerous delicacies awaiting outside the tent: "Cattle, sheep, goats, goat cheese, gourds, oranges, sweet bread, dates, pomegranates, and...women; young, beautiful, perfumed Hebrew and Syrian women, for later in the evening. Greek boys too, if that was your inclination – not men yet – captured from the enemy after the last skirmish" (p. 142). In addition to their inclination for women, Muslims are seen as homosexuals also. Offering boys to his commanders in this way implies that such lustful carnal acts between men were common among Muslims. However, homosexuality is one of the greatest sins in Islamic jurisprudence whose punishment includes death penalty.

The novel gives the reader a glimpse of the condition of woman in conquered lands. Her condition is indeed deplorable. She seems to be at the entire mercy of her master. The master has the right to do anything: he can take her as a

wife, a concubine, a courtesan or a slave. Women are kept solely for the master's carnal gratification and are sold when he feels tired of her. Many suffer untold shame and dishonor at the hands of cruel and barbaric Muslims. They are used as sexual instruments. Their psychological condition is overlooked. They kill themselves to save their honor.

### MUSLIMS: DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Muslims are depicted as drug addicts. They smoke hashish, chew Khat<sup>1</sup> and drink Khat tea. Al-Muthanna, an Amir in Khalid's army, is described as someone addicted to hashish and Khat. He "broke the corner from a flat, amber-colored brick of hashish which lay on the ground by his side. He sniffed the freshly broken surface... The sheikh crumbled the chunk of hashish into the bowl of the pipe, placed the lit end of the ember on top of it, and puffed on the stem until smoke billowed from his mouth. He filled his lungs and released the breath slowly" (p. 6). In addition to hashish, Al-Muthanna is addicted to Khat. He offers Mu'awiya and others to have some: "Sit. I will have food brought for us, but in the meantime have some Khat tea to invigorate yourselves after your long journey" (p. 7). Another one who is addicted to Khat is Amr. Many times we see him chewing Khat. In one place the narrator says: Amr "produced a small leather pouch into which he inserted his fingers. The faint odor of Khat made its way to my nostrils" (p. 251). In another place, Amr removes two Khat leaves from his pouch and, while inserting one into his mouth, he hands one to Mu'awiya. Mu'awiya chews "on the stimulating herb and swallowed its bitter juice" (p. 267).

Though wine and liquor are forbidden in Islam, Elray portrays Muslims as drunkards and alcoholics. Al-Ashtar and Farouk, two of the valiant Amirs under Khalid's commandment, are seen drinking: Al-Ashtar reaches for a nearby jug and pours a red liquid into a cup. He gives Farouk who drinks a little and then spit on the floor. When Farouk says that it is forbidden, Al-Ashtar replied. "It is forbidden!" 'If you don't want it, give me the cup.' Al-Ashtar reached for the vessel. 'It's not a matter of wanting it, it's... forbidden. Farouk hesitated.

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<sup>1</sup>Khat or Qatis a flowering plant native to the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It contains the alkaloid cathinone, a stimulant, which is said to cause excitement, loss of appetite, and euphoria. In 1980, The World Health Organization classified it as a drug.

'Maybe just a little is permissible.' He drew the cup close to his chest" (p. 228). Here Muslims are shown ignoring the teachings of Islam. They know that wine is not allowed in Islamic Sharia, however, they continue drinking.

People in Mecca, the center of Islam, drink nabidh, an alcoholic drink made from fermented grapes or raisins. When Mu'awiya and Omar are in Mecca, they sit in a public eating place and near them "two female servants prepared nabidh, a mild fermented beverage made from raisins. Legal nabidh was just two days old, anything stronger was forbidden" (p. 173). Drinking wine which is forbidden means that these people do not respect their religion. They are not following the teaching of Islam. They are hypocrites, that is they claim to be Muslims and at the same time neglect or violate Islamic teachings and instructions.

### MUSLIMS: POLITICAL INTRIGUE

*Khalifah* is full of complicated conspiracies and stratagems dominate the story. Mu'awiya and Khalid conspire against each other. In the same way, Ali and Mu'awiya plot against each other. Ali conspires against Othman. Omar supports Mu'awiya against Khalid. Al-Ashtar plots against Omar and Othman. There are unpredictable alliances, hidden agents, and invisible networks. There are assassinations, murders and manslaughter. It seems that conspiracies have haunted Muslims.

Khalid ibn Al-Welid, the greatest general of Muslim army and a companion of Prophet Muhammad, is commonly known as The Sword of Allah. He is well-known for his strategic military plans and skills in leading the Muslim armies in the wars of apostasy and the conquest of Iraq and the Levant, during the reigns of the Abu Bakr and Omar between 632 until 636. He is one of the few military commanders in history who have not been defeated in a battle throughout their lives.

The first time we meet Khalid in the novel is at Buzakha during the wars of apostasy. After the death of the Prophet, most Arab tribes except the people of Mecca and Taif and tribes adjacent to Mecca and Medina rebelled against the authority of Abu Bakr, the new Caliph of Muslims. There were different reasons for this rebellion: some of them recanted Islam altogether, and some remained Muslims but refused to pay *Zakat*, and some others followed the false prophets such Museilama, Toleiha and Sajah. However, Khalid's relationship with



Omar and Mu'awiya is very bad. His hatred for Omar goes back to pre-Islamic period and he abhors Mu'awiya because Mu'awiya is Omar's protégé. Further, though Mu'awiya is sixteen years younger, Khalid sees him as a real rival in the competition for military ranks and positions. Moreover, Khalid feels jealous of Mu'awiya because Omar favors the later. The conflict between the two starts after the death of Abu Bakr. Khalid is the supreme command of Muslim Forces. Undeclared and admired by all, he is at the peak of his glory. However, something unexpected happens. Omar dismisses him from his position as the supreme command of Muslim Forces. Omar sends the letter of dismissal with Mu'awiya but Khalid does not accept the instructions of Omar and burns the letter he receives from Mu'awiya.

Khalid in an attempt to prove his superiority over Mu'awiya, asks him to take Mutammem back with him to Medina and when Mu'awiya refuses, Khalid threatens him: "You will take him back...unless you wish Omar to receive the bittersweet news of your heroic martyrdom in the battle to restore the Faith!" (p. 43). Khalid can murder him very easily but he abstains because of Omar. When Mu'awiya rejects his orders for the second time, he threatens him again but this time to expose his father's treason and complicity to bring about the downfall of Mecca: "I brought Mecca to its knees for the Prophet and defeated the Quraysh, but I had help. Your father colluded with Muhammad to deliver up the city in return for protection of his family and his wealth. That is why Mecca fell so quickly. Your father betrayed your own people. Take the prisoner back or I will make this information about Abu Sufyan known when I return to the west" (p. 44). Abu Sufyan is a leader and merchant from the Quraysh tribe. He is highly respected by people of Mecca and it will be a great catastrophe for him if he is branded a traitor.

When Khalid is informed that Mu'awiya has become Amr's second, he feels discontent. He believes that Mu'awiya does not deserve this position and that there are "far better choices for that position than him" (p. 131). Khalid believes that Mu'awiya is too inexperienced and naïve and therefore should not hold such a serious position like this one. Further, Khalid knows very well that Omar—"the Left Handed One" as he calls him—favors Mu'awiya and this is what he fears.

Khalid believes that Omar is jealous of him. When Farouk asks why Omar would dismiss him from his position after all the victories Khalid has brought to Islam, Khalid replies:

*Because he's jealous...He wants to lead our people to glory himself, but he can't. Abu Bakr keeps him so busy with administrative matters that Omar is rarely able to even leave Medina, let alone put his life at risk leading men into battle. And that vexes him to no end, so he takes it out on me. We were always in competition; neither of us could stand to lose. Now I am winning and he is not, therefore he tries to diminish my reputation. (p. 131)*

In spite of his intelligence and acumen, Khalid's destruction comes immediately after the death of Abu Bakr. The conflict between Omar and Khalid culminates when Khalid receives a letter in blood from Omar in which he accuses him of different crimes including "being a murderer, ...an adulterer, ...and of having 'no conscience whatsoever, nor compassion for any life on the face of the earth'" (p. 153).

The allurements of power unites Khalid and Ali. Ali, who feels marginalized by Abu Bakr and Omar, becomes more interested in the workings of the newly-born empire than he has been in the past. When Omar succeeded Abu Bakr, he "questioned Omar's succession as Khalifah and took offense that he was not consulted in that decision" (p. 156). Ali believes that it is his right to be the new Caliph for two reasons: first he is a blood cousin to Prophet Muhammad and second, he is his son-in-law. He wants to keep the regime in the house of Hashim which is now losing its influence. Othman warns Mu'awiya that Ali "harbors ill feelings towards you because of your father. I am telling you this because I have been informed that he has met with Khalid, another one who has reason to be disgruntled now that Omar is Khalifah. They both see you as a threat" (p. 156). When Mu'awiya is informed of this he is struck by the news. His "mind raced with thoughts of calamity" and decides that he "would no more trust him than I would set myself on fire" (p. 156). This news of Ali, sparks the old dormant conflict between the house of Omia and the house of Hashim. Hence, Mu'awiya starts to prepare himself to deal with the new events and mistrust and suspicion begin to dominate their actions. The conflict between Ali and Khalid on one side and Mu'awiya on the other grows rapidly during the reign of Omar because Ali

“appears disaffected by his meager role in the affairs of state” (p. 183). These events culminate in the first civil war in Islam, a split which is still in work today.

Khalid is a great worrier and has his own followers. He has to be feared. He can amass an army for himself and fight back Omar. For this reason, Omar, after dismissing Khalid from his position, resolves to keep him under scrutiny and sends him to an unknown locale where he cannot amass his followers. Omar fears that giving Khalid a chance to return to Iraq “would result in an excess of uncontrolled power outside of Arabia” (p. 174). Omar does trust Khalid and therefore he intends to keep him in check: “I shall recall the Sword of Allah to Medina where he can be watched more closely, until I can find a suitable place for him. Fear naught of Khalid, I will keep him in check” (p. 212). However, Omar knows that keeping such a great man in check would not be something easy: “Experience told me that keeping Khalid in check wouldn’t be easy. Even from Medina he could direct his minions to interfere with me if he so desired” (p. 212).

At the end, the conspiracy is entirely woven around Khalid and he is accused of amassing money from spoils. In the latter part of the year 17 AH, Khalid learned that he would be put on trial for embezzlement, on the orders of the Caliph. The trial was a decidedly unpopular event. Khalid had always proved himself to be a leader beyond comparison, despite his flaws. The caliph relieves him from his position. And Mu’awiya succeeds in removing the hardest obstacle from his way.

Khalid, on the other hand, harbors ill feelings towards Mu’awiya. He attempts two times to have Mu’awiya killed. During their conquest of Damascus, Khalid gives his commands to his Amirs Farouk and Al-Ashtar to have Mu’awiya “eliminated” (p. 199). After the conquest of the city, Khalid is astonished to see Mu’awiya alive. He summons Farouk to ask him how Mu’awiya has escaped death and Farouk explains: “I just received the report. It seems that all arrows either missed their target or were deflected by random occurrences. Remember, these attempts could not be overt – many times the shots were made from the waist, without the benefit of a true aim” (p. 199). The mission fails and his enemy still alive. The second attempt to have Mu’awiya killed takes place in Sidon. One afternoon while Mu’awiya was sitting on a low stone wall with his wife Meisun, watching the

fishing boats return from the day’s catch, one man fires an arrow in their direction. The guards caught the attacker, and next day during interrogation, the attacker says that he was sent by Al-Ashtar—one of Khalid’s amirs.

Throughout the novel Khalid is depicted as a wicked man who is ready “to succumb to his own weaknesses than be bettered by another” (p. 183). He does not like anyone to better him. He is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of power. However, Mu’awiya believes that Khalid’s “own lust for power may be working against him” (p. 183). Khalid, the nonpareil general of Islam who conquered the most powerful empires of the time—Persian Empire and Byzantine, is the one most attacked by the author. He is savage, a man without humanity who kills and dismembers prisoners and has no respect for war laws. He is depicted as more of an animal than of a human. He succumbs to his carnal desires and whims always looking for women. Further, Khalid does not hesitate to use any means to achieve his goals and remove the obstacles on his way: he may kill even a Muslim companion. Elray has been able to present Khalid to the readers as arrogant, opportunist, savage and a cruel commander with no humanity; a commander who is pursuing power by any means.

Mu’awiya bin Abu Sufyan is, as mentioned above, the founder and first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty. He was born in Mecca in 602 CE. Mu’awiya and prophet Muhammad share the same great-great grandfather, ‘AbdManaf bin Qusay, who has four sons: Hashim, Muttalib, Abd Shams and Nofal. Hashim was the great grandfather of Muhammad. Umayyah, the son of Abd Shams, was the great grandfather of Muawiyah. BaniOmia has feud with both Khalid’s clan and the house of Hashim. The family looks to be between the hammer and the anvil. Therefore, Mu’awiya wonders: “Between Khalid’s clan and the House of Hashim it’s a wonder that any of our family is still alive” (p. 13). Summarizing the long history of conflict and feud between his family and prophet Muhammad, Mu’awiya says:

*A blood feud existed for ages between my family and that of the Prophet Muhammad, the House of Hashim, even though we’re all cousins. My father attempted to have Muhammad killed some ten years ago. The attempt failed. The Prophet eventually returned the gesture, which was also unsuccessful. Three years later, after Mecca fell to Muhammad, our families*

*reconciled. To bind the pact, my sister was given to the Prophet as wife, and the following year I was selected to be his scribe. (p. 8)*

However, this conflict particularly the one between Khalid and Mu'awiya continues after both of them embrace Islam though covertly. Both of them see the other as a rival and an enemy and each of them is waiting for his chance to get rid of the other. At Al-Bitah Mu'awiya is alone in Khalid's army and so feels vulnerable. Speaking to Shurahbil, he says: "My foremost concern right now is leaving here alive. Between the rebel tribes, bandits, and Khalid's presence, I feel ill at ease in these parts. If I can survive the next fortnight I will finally have an opportunity to make something of myself. Such an opportunity may never come again" (pp. 24-5). Though Khalid wants him dead, he cannot do it himself because he will be the first suspect.

Mu'awiya is an ambitious man. He has grand aspirations for leadership and political stature. He expresses his ambition openly: "I'm interested in a governorship of some conquered territory, no more than that. To be a leader of men and to make my father proud of me. That's what I want" (p. 25). To achieve his ambition, Mu'awiya has established few important political alliances, the most important of these alliances is with Omar. Abu Sufyan and Omar were friends prior to the fall of Mecca, and Omar was indebted to Abu Sufyan for sheltering him during a blood feud with Khalid's clan. For this reason, Omar, to return the favor, is now preparing Mu'awiya for the leadership in the future. Mu'awiya is Omar's protégé and to prepare him for the future, Omar orders Amr to train Mu'awiya and Amr has promised Omar to make him a leader among men. In a few years, Mu'awiya rises to second in command in the army of Amr. After the conquest of Damascus and the death of his brother Yazid, who was the governor of Damascus, Omar appoints him the governor of Damascus. His desire for leadership and political power is seen after appointing him as the governor of Damascus. He says: "A governorship! This is what I'd been waiting for. At last, it was mine for the asking, and of a rich land with a famed capital. I was tingling all over, my mind reeled, I felt like jumping up and down like a child" (p. 211). This comment shows how power allures everyone. It also shows that his participation in the Muslim army is not for the sake of Islam itself but a means to an end. Though an ambitious and man of

thought, Mu'awiya does not trust anyone: "There were not many people I trusted. Omar was one, and perhaps Amr – him I had to, there was no choice if I expected to advance" (p. 120). Mu'awiya's struggle since embracing Islam has given its fruit. He is the governor of one of the richest towns in the Middles East.

Besides Khalid, Mu'awiya's other rival is Ali ibn AbiTaleb. After the assassination of Othman, Mu'awiya's cousin, Ali declares himself the Caliph of Muslims. He does not put to trial the murderers of Othman and this made Mu'awiya angry. When Ali Becomes the caliph, Mu'awiya asks him to find the killers of Othman but Ali delays the matter. The conflict between the two culminates into a civil war—the first civil war in Islam. After the battle of Siffin, Mu'awiya decides to get rid of Ali and so starts his plan. He hires IbnMuljam to execute the mission. Mu'awiya is depicted as one who will never give up. He is ready to wage a war against anyone who stands between him and his dreams. He conspires, plots and colludes.

Another Amir who indulges in political intrigue and conspiracies is Malik ibn Al-Harith Al-Ashtar, who is well-known for his courage, eloquence and cruelty, and is considered one of the heroic commanders in Islam army. He is one of Khalid's close Amirs beside Farouk. Elray depicts Al-Ashtar as an egocentric and cunning man. He is very loyal to both Khalid and Ali. He starts his game of instigating a rebellion against Omar after dismissing Khalid from his position. Speaking to Farouk, he says: "Omar has gone too far...Something must be done – this cannot go unanswered" (p. 227). He feels sympathy for Khalid: "it incenses me to think that after all the victories Khalid has bestowed upon us, this is the thanks he receives. And by our association with him you and I are now outcast too!" (p. 227). Though he feels angry due to Khalid's dismissal, he has such a feeling only because the destruction of Khalid means his destruction also. However, much of his abhorrence for Omar is self-centered. He does not like Omar because he is unable to achieve his personal goals under Omar Caliphate. This is clear when he says to Farouk: "We deserve better than a house of mud...I for one will not sit idly by and see my future disappear like camel piss into the desert sand" (p. 227). This declaration of the Al-Ashtar marks the beginning of rebellion, civil conflict and assassinations in Islam. He intends to "establish alliances, talk to the army, garner



popular support, and whatever else it takes to protect my interests” (p. 227). ‘My interests’ shows that Al-Ashtar is a self-centered man who is ready to go to the extreme to protect those interests. Further, he is very careful and patient. He knows that a rebellion, if it fails, means death for him and he also knows that at this moment the fruit of rebellion is not ripe yet. So he decides to wait for the right time and from this moment he starts his game.

Al-Ashtar is very loyal to Ali. However, this loyalty is not the outcome of a true love for Ali himself. Al-Ashtar knows that in this rebellion he needs someone from Quraysh so that he is accepted by Muslims in Mecca and Medina. Al-Ashtar knows that if they choose a non-Arab as a leader, Arab Muslims will not accept. This shows that non-Arab Muslims are regarded as inferior or second class citizens. They are subjected “to a series of fiscal, social, political, military, and other disabilities” (Lewis, 1990, p. 37). Arabs’ superiority will not allow them to accept non-Arab to lead them. And, therefore, his eyes fall upon Ali ibnAbiTalib. He uses him as an instrument; he says: “But one person who could be instrumental to us in this is Ali ibnAbiTalib” (p. 228). He chooses Ali to achieve his goals for several reasons: first, the hidden conflict between Ali and Omar; second, the blood relation between Ali and prophet Muhammad and third, Ali is from Quraysh. Further, Ali is “not content with the state of affairs in Medina” and “Power. He has none ” (p. 228). And finally, Ali lacks leadership and this is what Al-Ashtar wants so that he can ‘manipulate’.

Al-Ashtar’s seditious activities in Kufa increase rapidly. The corruption of the Qurayshi governors of Kufa is of great aid to him to start instigating people in Kufa against Caliphs in Medina. Sa’d, the first governor, is well-known for his extravagance. His Palace was the only building built of stone. The Palace’s “trappings were luxurious transplants from the old Persian capital of Iraq, Al-Medain”(p. 238). The hall is full of “lifesized replicas of cats, rams, and foxes, rendered in solid gold, which surrounded a flowing landscape of leopard skins...A colorful tapestry, depicting birds in a garden—a portrayal one would never see in Medina—hung on the wall opposite” (p. 238). Further, Omar’s appointment of Al- Moghiraibn Shoba as governor of Al-Kufa is ill-advised. Al- Moghira is “an opportunistic, morally corrupt individual

and it was through him that Al-Ashtar was determined to further polarize the Bedouin and Quraysh and work himself into a position of power” (p. 237).

Al-Ashtar is the first one to plan assassination in Islam. He starts searching for coordinators who will help him save his interests. He, along with Farouk, plans the assassination of Omar. They choose a Bedouin called Mutemmam, who knows Medina very well and despises Omar as he “has suffered directly at the hand of the Khalifah and therefore is highly compelled to do a thorough job and maintain secrecy” (p. 240). When they reveal their plan to Al-Moghira, the second governor of Kufa who is appointed by Omar himself, though a look of hesitation appears on his face, he does not object and accepts the plan. Al-Ashtar continues his plans after the murder of Omar. When Othman became the Caliph after the death of Omar, he replaces Al-Moghira as governor of Kufa and averts certain rebellion. However, the seeds of dissent have been already firmly sown in Kufa which remains the locus of this discontent. “Over the years,” writes Elray, “Al-Ashtar, ever vigilant, watched and waited in Iraq for another opportunity to undermine the Quraysh to his own benefit. In the summer of the year 35 AH, his opportunity arrived” (p. 253). Othman was seventy years old when he assumed the Caliphate. His appointment to the post proved ill-fated not only for himself but for the empire as well. The dissatisfaction of Ali and his followers with the election of Othman fragmented the Muslims and re-ignited the rivalry between the house of Omia and the house of Hashim. Al-Ashtar has already started his job of inciting the citizens of Kufa against Othman. He “openly became the standard bearer for the renegades” (p. 253). Al-Ashtar incited the citizens of Al-Kufa to turn out Othman’s second appointed governor. In Dhul Hijja, 18 AH, after several accelerating incidents in Medina, the insurgents acting on orders from Al-Ashtar, stormed the Caliph’s residence and savagely murdered him. So the reign of Othman ibnAffan came to an end. To summarize, Al-Ashtar is the one who planned the assassination of Omar, the one who planned the assassination of Othman. He tried two times to kill Mu’awiya. He is the leader of insurgents in Kufa.

Al-Ashtar is portrayed as a demon. His main role is the creation of chaos, which he instinctively seeks. He is the epitome of evil itself. He is a serious danger to Muslims and Islam. He has extreme vices. He is the source of

all evildoings throughout the novel. And above all he seems to be enjoying what he does. He has a disturbing propensity to harm others. He is malevolent, full of bad intentions and goals.

Omar, the second Caliph in Islam, is, like any other leader, cautious of conspiracies and intrigues. He has his ears and eyes everywhere. Mu'awiya leaves his cousin Ibrahim with AL-Muthanna as Omar's eyes and ears: "Omar needs someone to serve as his eyes and ears here" (p. 11). Omar uses Mu'awiya to spy on Khalid. "You must promise to keep me informed of any rumors you hear regarding Khalid," (p. 71) Omar says to Mu'awiya. Omar explains, "Khalid is wary of me, and I must be wary of him. He expects that I will use my power to make him pay for the past" (p. 71). This is the relationship between the would-be Caliph and the first general in Muslim army. It is a relationship of suspicion and mistrust.

Omar feels that Khalid and Ali are hatching some plan. Their meetings in Media trouble him. So he decides to separate them: "His meeting with Khalid troubles me even more so. I'll see to it that those two are separated by as much distance as possible" (p. 159). Further, Omar and Othman feel that Khalid is standing in their way: "All the more reason to send Khalid somewhere where he can't be a thorn in our sides" (p. 160).

The last character indulging with politics and shaping the history of Islam is Ali ibn Abi Talib. Ali becomes much more interested in the workings of the realm than he has been in the before. He has the strongest claim to the succession as he is a blood relative of Muhammad and the father of his two grandsons. So he questions Omar, "Omar, you know I have the utmost respect for you, but tell me, how was it determined that you should succeed Abu Bakr as Khalifah?" (p. 146). He also takes offense that he is not consulted in that decision. He believes that it is his God-given right to rule just because the prophet is a blood relation to him. He also harbors ill feeling towards Mu'awiya. He feels that the house of Hashim is losing its influence. His obsession with power culminates in a civil war between Muslims. The war between Ali and Mu'awiya is the first civil war in Islam. More than 70,000 Muslims were killed. Actually, the most destructive and bloody rivalry is between Ali and Mu'awiya. The war that started between them more than 1400 years ago still continues till today between Sunni and Shia Muslims. All these political intrigues,

conspiracies and assassinations, desires for political power and personal gains among the first generation of Muslims show the lack of success of the Islamic teachings of love, peace and devotion for the Cause. Though Khalid, Mu'awiya, Ali, and Al-Ashtar are great and unmatched warriors, they show little respect for Islam teachings. Despite Islamic doctrines that explicitly forbid assassinations, deception, plotting, plunders; all these are committed without any remorse. These men are represented as using Islam for personal ends.

### BEDOUIN

The first image we have of Arabs in the novel is "a black-skinned Bedouin" with "untrusting eyes" (p. 2). His name is "the Black One." Overlooking the name and stressing the color of the Bedouin is significant here. When Mu'awiya and his companion arrives the camp, the stench of manure permeates the camp and is sickening. Describing the stench of the camp, Elray writes:

*The last vestiges of daylight faded, cooling the air rapidly and producing a mild breeze that did little to stifle the sickening stench of manure that permeated the camp. The great herds of camels and goats – with which the Beni Bekr traveled – snorted, brayed, and bleated as nighttime fell. The foul odor of fresh dung, and that being dried by fire to be used later as fuel, burnt my throat and nostrils. (p. 3)*

In the camp they see also an old man massaging a camel to stimulate urine flow and another younger man cleansing a newborn in the camel's stream. They are washing the birthing blood off the child under the hissing torrent of camel's urine. To show Arabs' primitivism the author introduces an appalling scene of infanticide in which an Arab is burying his daughter. These scenes show the cruelty of life in the desert. In the first few pages the author has been able to send the reader to a completely new and exotic world—a world where people "live like animals" (p. 4). The Bedouin are described in a very degrading terms. They always smell of urine. Ibn Muljam is "thin and smelled of urine. An unkempt overgrowth of brown and red facial hair gave him the appearance of an animal" (p. 292). Four Bedouins sit next to Shurahbil and Mu'awiya and their "scent of urine wafted our way" (p. 25). They are very cruel and "love to see blood flow" (p. 26). The Bedouins are poor people living in the desert far from the riches of the cities: "We are, however, a poor people out here in the desert, so far from the rich cities of the

west” (p. 10). They use urine as medicine as “It kills parasites. You’d use it if it was all you had” (p. 4). Mu’awiya’s father and Othman refuse to give their blessings to him because he marries a Bedouin girl. “The Bedouin are animals,” Othman says, “they live only for the present, without compassion, without regard for property” (p. 156). Arab Bedouins are discriminated against and looked down upon. Arabs living in towns see themselves as the only civilized race. They alone possess enlightenment in a world inhabited by barbarians and infidels.

### CONCLUSION

Elray’s novel has a significant setting. It is set in the early years of Islam during which Islam expanded so fast. Setting the novel at this period and during those wars has two reasons: first, Elray wants to tell the reader that the Muslim empire was built on plunder and pillage and that Muslims are a race of plunderers and pillagers and second, Islam spread by sword. Depicting Muslim Caliphs, leaders and commanders as violent and savage, Elray wants to present a negative picture of Islam and Muslims. He seems to be telling the reader ‘Look! These are the roots of Islam. Today’s violence is a continuation of that violent. And that Islam is violent since its inception and that Islamic notion of jihad whether in the past or now has for its ultimate goal the conquest of the entire world’. Further, setting the novel during the war of apostasy shows that one does not have the right to change one’s religion under Islam. A Muslim is not free and cannot convert to another religion.

Further, setting the novel in this period is very important because the events of these early years have a “significant and lasting consequences for the development of the Islamic community: crucially, they laid the basis of the division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, which was to grow in the next four centuries” (Kennedy, 2016, p. 8). Those who came in later ages looked back to the first caliphs’ reigns as examples of both good government and how things could go wrong. The Orthodox caliphs figure prominently in modern discussions about the caliphate. They are seen as models. Moreover, these victories have been a source of pride and strength for the coming generations. With these victories, certain attitudes and assumptions have been planted in the minds of Muslims which persist to this day. Elray’s novel is an attempt to destroy and distort these attitudes and

assumptions and to inculcate in the minds of readers that today’s violence has been planted centuries ago. So if we are looking for the source, we have to go back.

The novel represents the Muslim society as engaged with war and nothing else. From the beginning of the novel to the last page, we are either in battle fields, tents of commanders or caliphs. What about social life and many other things. In other words, the Muslim society is depicted as one busy with violent warfare and jihad and Muslims as a group of warmongers and extremists. By detailing all those wars whether against apostate people, Persians or Greeks, Elray suggests that the career of Muslims from the beginning is so thoroughly marked by blood and warfare. Muslims are taught that there was nothing better (or holier) than jihad and warfare,

The novel depicts Non-Muslims both living under Islam in Arabia, Persia, Iraq and Egypt as victims of Islam violent laws. They have an inferior status under Islamic law. They have to pay taxes. They are subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment. They are subject to violent punishment and torture. The novel shows what punishments are in store for transgressors. They are roasted, amputated, flopped, murdered, or urinated upon. The impossibility of religious coexistence in Muslim land is highlighted here.

The novel makes it clear that one of the fundamental reasons for the revolt in Kufa and other revolts has been to use Goldziher words “the increasing arrogance and racial presumption” of Arab Muslims. Islam unambiguously instills the equality of all believers. All Muslims are equal before Allah. But the novel shows that all Muslims are equal but some Muslims are more equal than others: another version of George Orwell’s “all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell, 2018, p. 75). Arabs despise Arab Bedouins who are referred to as “animals”; Arab Muslims also look down upon non-Arab Muslims and consider them as second class Muslims. Prophet Muhammad has tried to teach Arabs that from now on, Islam is the unifying principle and that blood relations and tribal affiliations have no place. The novel shows that Muslim have neglected all these teachings. Tribal rivalries continue between different fractions such as that between the house of Omia and the house of Hashim. Feuds and competitions linger not only among the masses but also among the Muslim



leaders. There is a power rivalry between Khalid and Mu'awiya, a competition between Ali and Mu'awiya, assassinations of two of the caliphs and so on.

The novel shows that Islam practiced persecution, discrimination, forced conversions, massacres of non-Muslims. This entirely false picture of Islam is built up by the author's imagination and has no connection to reality. The author has concentrated exclusively on the wars that followed the death of Prophet Muhammad in an attempt to propagate the stereotyped ideas of Islam as a hostile, intolerant, violent, anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, and anti-pagan religion. The novel claims that these ideas were established by the first generation and followed by generations throughout history.

Elray's allusion to the famine and the plague are very significant. The novel narrates that thousands of people die as a result of the famine and the plague. Mu'awiya himself orders his men to burn entire quarters of Damascus. Khalid loses his thirty children in the plague. Elray wants to convince the reader that the famine and the plague are a consequent to the destruction and pillage. It is the result of Muslim barbarity and savagery; it is the result of unrestricted killings and massacres.

Islam is depicted in the novel as the religion of violence, Jihad and pillage. Instead of being a religion of peace, Islam is a constant struggle against the enemy. Following another Orientalist idea, the novel presents Islam as an aggressive and threatening religion. Muslims are presented as self-centered, their selfish desires always override; they are vicious, lacking any real good side. They suffer a poverty of conscience. Each one is wishing the other great misfortune. Elray wants to destroy some of the well-known characteristics of Islam such as equality, co-existence, civilization, brotherhood and companionship. The novel provides the reader with false and shocking information about Islam.

Finally, the novel in an indirect way tells the reader that cities such as Damascus, Kufa and Egypt that were under the rule of either Persia or Byzantine have embraced Islam under the sword. In other words, Islam spread by the sword. The novel shows that the first contact or clash between the western world and Muslims did not start with the Crusades but more than four centuries before the Crusades. It was during the first century of Islam after Islam forces united the scattered tribes

of Arab Peninsula into a single community. They started their own Crusades against Christian lands—particularly the Byzantine Syria and Egypt, as well as North Africa, Jerusalem and Persian Iraq which had a significant Christian population. This transformation did not take place through preaching and the conversion of hearts and minds. It was carried out by the sword. Here the novel tries to vindicate the Crusades.

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