

## Review Essay

### What's the Trouble with Human Rights?

Books discussed:

Irshad Manji.

*The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith.*

New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005.

Irshad Manji.

*Allah, Liberty and Love: The Courage to Reconcile Faith and Freedom.*

New York: Free Press, 2011.

Karima Bennoune

*Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim*

*Fundamentalism*

New York: W. W. Norton, 2013.

By Howard A. Doughty

Two important cases regarding the constitutional right to same-sex marriage are being brought to the United States Supreme Court for decision in 2013. Whether the court will choose to hear them, and what decisions may be made are not known at the time of writing. I do not think, however, that the ultimate outcome is in much doubt. Despite plaintive cries from religious fundamentalists and other cultural conservatives, I am confident that same-sex marriage will become the law of the land ... though maybe not quite yet. Enthusiasts of such legislation as the *Defense of Marriage Act* and traditional arguments that marriage be limited to a union of one man and one woman are adamant in their opposition, but public opinion polls show that as many as four out of five young Americans favour reform. Time will tell which side prevails and time certainly seems to be on the side of those who favour a more inclusive definition of marriage.

The winds of change are blowing, but the deep currents are strong and hard to turn. Immediate predictions about both moral and legal judgements on the matter of same-sex marriage will, therefore, turn on whether you prefer an atmospheric or an oceanic metaphor. That is, whether you believe that recent changes of opinion will be strong enough to prevail over well entrenched beliefs. Despite reluctance in some cultural and religious quarters, however, the future of gay and lesbian, as well as bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people looks much like the future of women and African-Americans looked a century or so ago, at least in the United States of America.

The same cannot be said about those parts of the world in which the dominant religion is Islam. There is, of course, no monolithic Muslim culture. The religion itself is, like its sibling Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity, internally divided. A great schism between Sunni and Shi'ite factions and all manner of other sectarian distinctions ensures that no one

speaks with uncontested authority for Islam (though many claim the authority to do so). Nonetheless, there is a perceptible difference—overlaps and innumerable exceptions notwithstanding—between what may conveniently be called Western Civilization on the one hand and Islam on the other. While there may be a robust debate among Christian leadership and laity alike, for example, an apparent agreement among Muslims on the matter seems relatively stable and, in many places, open discussion of the issue is almost unthinkable.

To help its readers understand how the issues of sexual orientation and same-sex marriage play out globally, my local newspaper recently published a map of the world. On it, three features were graphically displayed for each country. They were:

- persecution of homosexuals (official sanctions from none to the death penalty);
- legal recognition of same-sex unions (from none to full marriage equality);
- civil protection (from none to civil and criminal laws against discrimination).

The results revealed few surprises. The countries where gays and lesbians are subject to the least persecution, enjoy full recognition and receive the most legal protection are: Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Sweden. They are closely followed by Australia, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, those countries in which gays and lesbians suffer the most official persecution with the least recognition and protection are Iran, Mauritania, (northern) Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, (southern) Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Close behind are Brunei, Ghana, Guyana, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda.

It requires no great expertise in comparative geography, culture and religion to detect a pattern here. Inclusive societies are mainly Western and exclusive societies are mainly Muslim. The United States, incidentally, stands uneasily in the middle, but American gay rights advocates are optimistic that their situation will improve—sooner rather than later.

This essay deals with three books that have challenged people of Muslim faith to address questions not merely of the human rights of homosexuals and of women, but of the tendency among some Islamic societies to infringe on what the United Nations and others regard as *universal* human rights.

Differences of opinion concerning sexual orientation and women's equality, of course, are not merely matters of debate within the niceties of legal systems. Attitudes toward women and GLBT people are not only expressed in social mores concerning education, occupation, dress codes and norms of proper public behaviour. They are also expressed in the brutal repression of those who deviate from the moral expectations of a community. So, for instance, while systemic violence against women is a serious problem in almost all cultures, socially sanctioned outrages including family-based "honour killings" are especially heinous. In my own country, a small number of murders of this sort (and additional emotional and physical abuse, often within families) has been widely reported and widely condemned by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In addition to the obvious humiliation and pain experienced by the victims, these practices are

also important because they have provoked a backlash including intense anti-immigration and, specifically, anti-Muslim sentiments within the larger society, with some Canadians calling for a ban on immigrants who refuse to live according to minimal standards of freedom and equality. At the very least, there is plainly a difficult problem in cultural development and inter-cultural relations and any prospective solutions require innovative political, social and educational policies and programs to facilitate a thriving civil society.

Globally, GLBT rights and the rights of all women are controversial topics in themselves, but they also lie within the framework of *universal* human rights. Today, exclusive of the extremes of military, diplomatic and political interventions in countries from Mali to Pakistan and apart from the ongoing tensions that regularly erupt into violent episodes in some places and sustain ongoing civil wars in others, it is plain that incendiary cultural disagreements—no doubt encouraged by economic and geopolitical interests, but also troubling on their own—represent one of the most obvious places in which genuinely innovative and transformative thinking and action are required. Apart from the prospect of calamitous ecological degradation, catastrophic medical epidemics, natural disasters such as earthquakes and occasional encounters with asteroids, issues of human conflict stand out among the greatest threats to our species. And among these disagreements, at least since the implosion of the Soviet Union and the putative end of the Cold War, deep-seated religious disputes seem paramount.

The authors of the books under review take strong positions. They have been cheered as courageous defenders of human rights and inspirations to young, inquisitive and tentatively dissenting Muslims the world over. They have also been vilified by some influential members of their own communities for undermining the faith and corrupting the youth. As a secular Western male with no religious attachments of any kind, and with no personal connections to North Africa, the Near or Middle East, or any other place of significant Islamic settlement, I make no claim to speak with or even for Manji, Bennoune or any of their admirers. As a witness to the troubled world they inhabit, however, I hope to make a few pertinent points

## I

Claiming the right to free speech is probably not enough to merit standing in any particular debate. At least a passing familiarity not only with the cultural perspectives and practices at issue, but also with the generic topic of human rights seems required.

I offer the following: at the college where I work, I am regularly assigned to teach courses in Cultural Anthropology and Political Philosophy. So, over the years, I've learned a little about some important contemporary controversies and the several ways in which our leading public officials, intellectuals and advocates describe, analyze and offer advice about how to resolve them. By way of full disclosure, I have also been active in support of a number of political and cultural organizations which have been supportive of human rights and critical of the oppression of women and others. So, it should be obvious that I am a presumptive advocate of the views that Manji and Bennoune express. That, however, should not disqualify me from discussing their books, especially since I wish mainly to put the dispute in a larger deliberative context and not merely argue in support of their main thesis.

## II

One central discussion concerns ethics, morals and religious beliefs. These are terms that frequently overlap, but are not necessarily synonymous. They tend, however, to address common issues. What, if anything, is right and wrong? Are there rational criteria according to which transcendental and not merely situational rectitude can be said to exist? By what standard can we measure good and evil? Can we make such judgements without simply indulging in our own moral conceits? Finally, to bring the matter down to an important practical question: What, if anything, are we obliged to do when we observe violations of the moral principles that we have chosen or been persuaded to uphold?

My anthropology tells me to live and let live. It directs me toward the words of the venerable Roman poet, Publius Terentius Afer (ca. 190–159 BC): “*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*” (I am human. I consider nothing human to be alien to me). According to this dictum, all human practices—cannibalism, human sacrifice, rape, incest, bestiality, self-mutilation, theft, gluttony, blasphemy, spitting on the sidewalk and driving the wrong way on a one-way street—should be judged (if they should be judged at all) by taking into account the cultural standards of the people who perform them.

Among academics and others, this attitude is called “cultural relativism.” It doesn’t eliminate the possibility of judgement, but only insists upon caution and due regard for the people being judged. I call it “soft” relativism, because there is a more radical version which claims that there is no such thing as “morality” at all. This may describe absolute pure “scientific objectivity,” but it also betokens nihilism. Most anthropologists stop short of saying that “anything goes”; but, as conscientious outsiders, “etic” observers in the language of Marvin Harris (1980), they have made it difficult for themselves to come to moral conclusion about what insiders or “emic” participants think and do. They remind themselves that anthropologists were often complicit in Western imperialism which did irredeemable damage to indigenous cultures around the globe.

## III

At the same time, my philosophy tells me that there are some things that people do or have been known to do which are intolerable, evil or even sinful (if you wish to think that your particular moral beliefs have a religious dimension, possibly including divine ordinance and potential punishment). These acts can be set out according to any number of moral codes. Some codes impose obligations, such as helping others. Some impose restrictions, such as refraining from perjury, “bearing false witness.” Some affirm liberties and insist these should not be infringed, such as freedom of speech. Some assert a collective responsibility to provide others with health care, education and so on. With regard to the problems encountered on the basis of gender and GLBT status, however, few seem to offer a more germane and comprehensive foundation for individual rights than the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), to which additions have been made over the past six-and-a-half-decades. The document and subsequent affirmations of an even larger range of rights and liberties emphasize the individual

or the person and freedom from oppression, all on the basis of a belief that human rights cannot be selectively apportioned according to conviction or circumstance. They are either universal *rights*, or they are particular privileges to be allocated and withdrawn at will.

The logical progression from the primal statement of human rights to the application of the concept to GLBT people has, of course, not been easy. In 2006 the International Committee of Jurists, the International Service for Human Rights and a number of independent experts met in Indonesia and generated twenty-nine principles for submission to the United Nations. They were presented to the UN in 2007 and, although the argument that the the UN's own emphasis on universal human rights based on the integrity and dignity of the person provides a firm base upon which to build these rights, the opposition has succeeded in preventing the matter from being adopted in international treaty and thus have only symbolic force for the ninety-four countries that have signed on to day, and are not a binding part of international human rights law.

While it is clear that Women's Rights and, eventually, GLBT rights have growing support, the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church as well as Muslim countries makes the kind of optimism that is justified in the USA inapplicable world-wide. Nonetheless, the logic of the expansion of human rights is sound, though logical consistency is not, in itself, a factor that is likely to change minds soon.

However slow and halting progress may be at the United Nations, two things should be kept in mind. First, the issue has only been raised in the past few years. Second, even if consensus and substantive action is absent, the increased publicity and the gradual growth in international opinion matters.

The *Declaration of Universal Human Rights* implicitly and explicitly claims that moralities grounded in traditional cultures and great religions alike cannot successfully challenge claims to personal dignity and equity which are *universal*. To some, these principles are akin to Platonic absolutes and therefore exempt from criticism by particularistic and historically contingent sets of beliefs. Thus, although various Abrahamic religions, for example, deem certain practices to be an "abomination," these religions lack the legitimate authority to impose their values on any other society and, even within the limits of their communities, universal protections against such antediluvian punishments as dismemberment and death by stoning. There is, it seems, an implied hierarchy of rights in which protection against extreme humiliation, cruelty and sustained inequality supersede the assertion that such actions and patterns of behaviour have traditional roots and divine sanction. For those of us who decline to invoke supernatural entities to justify our political claims, it is enough that any affirmation of a universal human right to dignity and equity must, by definition, overrule particularistic claims to withdraw those rights by virtue of a simple application of the Rule of Logical Types (in this case affirming that if human rights are universal, all specific human rights must be universal as well; see Russell, 1908). So, I am confident that, with the assistance of my old friend Time, global societies will recognize the cognitive dissonance (the psychological discomfort that arises when attempting to hold contradictory ideas simultaneously; see Festinger, 1957) of granting universal rights to some while denying them to others and resolve their logical problem. (I choose, of course, to believe that dissonance reduction will be achieved by extending rights to everyone and not depriving them to all.)

#### IV

The issue at stake in Manji's book is nothing less than the state of Islam in the modern world. It strives to diagnose, treat and afford a prognosis for a religion that, she believes, is in considerable difficulty and distress. Deeply embedded in her discussion is the nature and fate of concepts such as human rights, and whether ideologies, religions or other overarching statements of doctrine or faith can or should distinguish among such rights while attempting to retain the concept as a meaningful element of political thought.

I was drawn to *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* in 2008, after it had been published and had already received an enormous reception in the world press. At the time, I often saw Irshad Manji being interviewed on television and in the printed press. I was impressed. She seemed a courageous, articulate and appealing advocate for many things in which I believed—her Islamic faith excepted. Then, I didn't so much forget about her as place her comfortably among the dozens of other writers, artists and activists who are stashed in a gallery of people whom I regard as praiseworthy, but to whom I do not pay constant attention.

Irshad Manji did not rest comfortably in that virtual menagerie of integrity and excellence. She wasn't allowed to because of all the real events taking place in the world and many of the crucially stupid ideas being used as "lenses" through which to see and interpret those events. I am speaking, of course, of the twin hazards of Western Islamophobia and Muslim Jihadism.

There are numbers of sources of these bad ideas. Some of them are involved in the planning and execution of hideous deeds. Some participants are called "terrorists," though no doubt they would prefer an honourific such as "freedom fighter" or maybe "holy warrior." Others are called "counter-terrorists," though some would prefer to label them "imperialists" or "infidels." In any case, they are the most visible contestants in what Samuel P. Huntington (1993) famously called the "clash of civilizations," which may be the most unhelpful idea of all. In both cases, there is a sort of contemporary Manicheism, which separates the world between representatives of cosmic forces of good and evil and leaves no room for mutual understanding and compromise, let alone cooperation. Moral absolutes dominate and opponents are remorselessly, irredeemably allocated to the category of evil by those purporting to be good.

Huntington, of course, didn't create what seems to be the main political predicament since the collapse of the USSR, now almost a quarter-century ago. His way of describing it, however, not only turned attention away from the guilty parties and the seemingly intransigent issues, but also mischaracterized the conflict itself. Although sensitive to the need for diverse cultures to "learn to coexist," his article's (and later his book's) effect was to give permission to lesser, narrower minds to conceive not only of Islam, but also of the "others" as incompatible and possibly innately hostile cohabitants of the planet. Meanwhile, the deeper bases of conflict, not least competition for petroleum resources and geopolitical advantage, were given far less attention. Religious fury, after all, is a good deal easier to promote than self-consciously imperial adventures.

As a result, we have not only been exposed to the *jihadist* rhetoric of the "great Satan," but also to equally damaging descriptions of Islam, often accompanied by hate-filled epithets by

otherwise intelligent people in the West. Huntington, whether he meant to do so or not, became the intellectual symbol of a toxic vision of Islamic-Western relations that is so bizarre that, as the physicist Wolfgang Pauli famously said of a particularly inept contribution to his discipline: *Das ist nicht nur nicht richtig, es ist nicht einmal falsch!* “Not only is it not right, it's not even wrong!” That is to say, it is an idea that doesn't even rise to the level of coherence at which contrary evidence could be presented against it. It is misguided from the beginning. It resembles the North American anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s. It is the rhetorical tail that wags the imperial dog.

## VII

When I finally read Irshad Manji's *The Trouble with Islam Today*, I was plainly in need of a cold dose of reality. I was not disappointed but was rather delighted for a number of reasons. There were several obvious points of agreement. She urged a liberal reinterpretation of the *Qur'an* that would soften some of the restrictive prohibitions and harsh punishments that she believed were impositions of contemporary tyrannical regimes—both sacred and secular—rather than the authentic teachings of her religion. She pressed for an enlivening of the practice of *ijtihad* which, she explained, is within the venerable tradition of lively, critical and independent thinking in Islam, and which should lead to a personal and liberating interpretation of Islamic texts and doctrines. And, she spoke in support of greater openness to other cultures, and especially to the legitimate claim of the Jews to a homeland. For a mirthful moment, I almost imagined her dancing the minuet with Pope John XXIII ... I doubt if many others would have smiled or would now smile warmly at the image.

Many of her Muslim co-religionists were certainly unimpressed. Invoking the mercy of Allah, they displayed a sort of cultural denial about dogma, cruelty and particularly the repression of women. They quarreled, for example, with the advocacy of feminism, insisting in one instance, that claims about the inequality of women under Islam were bogus since Allah had, in fact, “given women the ability to give birth, but denied this to men” (Ahmed, 2005). Inequality, it seemed, was the will of God and, in fact, women got the better of the deal.

As for what seemed to an outsider to be something akin to the Protestant denial of the *Magisterium*, the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, the retort from many Muslim sources amounted to little more than the logical fallacy appeal to authority (Woods and Walton, 1974). Although Manji relied on what she held to be the Islamist tradition of free thought, she was told that this privilege “is only for the scholars of the *Sunnah*, wherein they apply independent reasoning of the *Sharee'ah* for current circumstances, so it is not for every ignorant person to undertake” (Manhaj, 2005). In the process, much was made of Manji's Canadian upbringing, her North American residency and her lack of a suitable background in Islamic scholarship. She was regularly described in rather severe terms as a person unfit to offer an opinion on such matters as Muslim thought and practices. In other words, “Shut up”.

Finally, she was accused of being a traitor, a pawn of the Zionists and a witting or unwitting tool of American aggression. Her appeal for mutual understanding and conciliation between Arabs

and Jews was held out as an adequate reason to call for her death. With the enduring difficulties concerning an Israeli-Palestinian settlement seemingly as irresolvable as at any time since the creation of Israel in 1948, it is hard to hold out any hope for a peaceful resolution; it is therefore all the more important never to retire nor to subject to the colossal condescension of subsequent generations, the words of Prince Feisal to Felix Frankfurter at the post-World War I peace Conference where certain nefarious forces set the world on a path toward the foundations of the present deadlock. Emir Faisal of Iraq wrote to Felix Frankfurter, the Zionist leader and future US Supreme Court Justice:

... We feel that the Arabs and Jews are cousins in having suffered similar oppressions at the hands of powers stronger than themselves, and by a happy coincidence have been able to take the first step towards the attainment of their national ideals together.

The Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with the deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement. Our deputation here in Paris is fully acquainted with the proposals submitted yesterday by the Zionist Organisation to the Peace Conference, and we regard them as moderate and proper. We will do our best, in so far as we are concerned, to help them through: we will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home.

With the chiefs of your movement ... we have had and continue to have the closest relations. ... We are working together for a reformed and revived Near East, and our two movements complete one another. The Jewish movement is national and not imperialist. Our movement is national and not imperialist, and there is room in Syria for us both. Indeed I think that neither can be a real success without the other.

Today, while it is possible to be supportive of Palestinian rights without being anti-Semitic, it is also possible to be supportive of the State of Israel without condoning the occupation of the West Bank. Both sides could benefit from a careful analysis of the path taken toward the current impasse and the necessary cessation of mutual hostility so that those culpable for the current situation on *all* sides are held to account.

Quite apart from any traditional doctrinal or contemporary political questions, however, it is also important to understand the nature of Manji's first internationally successful book. While it is apparent that she had specific complaints and sought appropriate remedies for what she regarded as her faith in peril, it is also obvious that this was a deeply personal *cri de coeur*.

As an Arab immigrant girl, originally from Uganda, she grew up in cosmopolitan Canada, but was raised by parents with strict conservative views. As a lesbian, she encountered double difficulties. As she grew into her religious scepticism, she rebelled more and more systematically. She was irritated by the rising extremism, especially from Saudi Arabia. She was aggravated by the "Arab monopoly" on Islam which, like the Roman Catholic church in its long-time insistence on a Latin *Bible*, required that the *Qur'an* be read only in Arabic. Finally, she resisted what she saw as pervasive anti-Semitism in the Islamic culture (Cline, 2013).



Prior to the attention garnered by the publication of *The Trouble with Islam Today*, Manji had been a legislative aide and speech-writer for the leader of the mildly socialist New Democratic Party in Canada. She became an editorial writer for the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, a feature writer for the *Globe and Mail*, and a frequent guest on public affairs television. In 2002, she was appointed writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, which is where she wrote her innovative book.

Subsequently, she has been a visiting fellow at Yale University and is currently a senior fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy in Belgium while also heading the Moral Courage Project at the Wagner School of Government at New York University.

Irshad Manji's media profile, her increasing academic credibility, her work through the social media and in the Emmy-nominated American PBS documentary film *Faith Without Fear* have combined to propel her into an international leadership position among disaffected or, at least, questioning and sometimes sceptical Muslim youth and Muslim women. In this context, she produced her second major book.

## VII

In *Allah, Liberty and Love*, Manji presses the case for personal growth. She has moved beyond her own biography and seeks to give inspiration to others who, through fear of offending their families, friends and larger communities or because they fear the consequences such offences might bring, choose to remain silent, though internally conflicted. In a persistent effort to remain true to her convictions (and her conviction that those convictions reflect the *real* Islam), she does her best to reply to those who resolutely deny that she has the skill or even the right to interpret the *Qur'an* by citing, Surah and Verse, how it is that Allah is considerably more inclusive, gentle and encouraging than her adversaries have made him out to be.

Irshad Manji's new contribution has not been uniformly welcomed, as may be expected; but, curiously, it is not the hard-line Islamic fundamentalists who offer the most concerning critiques. Theirs are predictable and unconvincing except to those who are already convinced beyond redemption (in a manner of speaking). Rather, the sharpest criticism is the opinion that Manji may lack the *gravitas* to drive home her points and turn ideas into action. We get a hint when Rayyan Al-Shawaf (2011) begins his assessment thus: "The irrepressible Irshad Manji, Islam's *enfant terrible*, is at it again."

Omar Sultan Haque (2012) continues in a patronizing manner:

Manji's God resembles an extremely affectionate and powerful high school guidance counselor: a loving person who looks over you and wants you to be your freest and most socially responsible self. This God gave humans powerful minds that they should cultivate. This God wants humans to use reason and empathy to reinterpret traditions in light of modern knowledge and ethical necessities.

...Muslims can think for themselves, and overcome a fearful, passive, conformist religiosity. In its first centuries, over a hundred schools of Islamic interpretation flourished. Muslims can reclaim their right to use reason to dissent conscientiously from prevailing religious opinion, connect with God in a deeper manner through personalized faith, and avoid stagnation and backwardness by redefining and reinvigorating themselves and their communities based on modern needs.

Of course, it is Manji's incredible lightness of criticism that makes her attractive to many young people who need encouragement to become questioners, to join together with other (presumably) liberal Muslims and to "humanize" their faith. What her earnest critics seem to miss is that her ease of communication, stripped of abstract philosophical, political and economic analysis is precisely what allows her to turn her thoughts into other people's actions. Treatises in comparative theology and polysyllabic neo-Marxist diatribes, on the other hand, won't do the trick. Celebrity, tied to deeply personal experience, will.

Moreover, anyone thinking that Manji has debilitated her own radicalism or compromised her essential positions need only pay attention to her strongly worded and consistently firm opposition to traditions of violence against women and what can only be called the barbarism of "honour killing." These allegedly cultural customs need have nothing to do with Islam *per se*, but Manji is relentless in her argument that it is an abomination (so to speak) for anyone to tolerate such practices, to claim religious justification for so doing and to invoke the principle of freedom of religion to deflect criticism.

*Allah, Liberty and Love* has been called "aspirational," for it works as a kind of "consciousness-raising" device and seeks to inspire people to aspire to a fuller and better way of life. As such, it is not unlike many of the early works of Western feminism and then GLBT activists beginning about four or five decades ago. The main goal of Manji's more recent book is to normalize critical thinking. She wants to persuade people that it is not required of us to defer to what is, that open discussion is not merely permissible, but is actually a precondition for authentic living and that, through what Gloria Steinem (1983, 1993) once called a "revolution from within," we can work wonders by combining self-esteem and social engagement. Through self-esteem, self-development and sharing with like-minded others, we can now use the pervasive social media to permit hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of small voices to be heard and to hear one another—each making tentative gestures toward openness and solidarity.

And there, of course, is the rub, for any attempt to compare the aspirations of middle-class American women fretting about their occupational ambitions with the fate of women regarded and treated as actual chattel in conditions of poverty and despair is apt to reinforce the accusation of cultural imperialism from a variety of perspectives and, in the process, to trivialize both. Nonetheless, the comparison is not wholly inapt.

Manji wants to make a difference with people, who will then make differences of their own. What she lacks, so her first-world bourgeois revolutionary critics insist, is a coherent political and economic analysis that will allow the development of an effective strategy for social transformation. Changing people's minds about conditions in their immediate personal settings,

they say, is well and good; but, it does not count for much when facing overarching power structures and lethal institutions. So, the accusation is made that Manji's liberalism is dedicated to the recognition of individual dignity, mutual respect, fairness and harm reduction, all of which matter as conditions of interpersonal relations, but none of which, in themselves, speak to or for the profound political and economic revolution that is needed to fulfill those aspirations. Any number of protesters can therefore show up in a public square and can, occasionally, even precipitate the overthrow of ossified authoritarian dictatorships. The hard work, however, comes after. In the wake of "Arab Spring," for instance, attempts to build better (apparently meaning secular, democratic and ultimately Westernized) nations on the rubble of the old have not worked out especially well. Tyranny is resilient and the patronizing investment of Western modernizers is peculiarly weak—not only against traditionalists, but also against the constituencies that liberal outsiders want somehow to help, but fail to understand.

That said and acknowledged, it is unfair to be excessively critical of Irshad Manji, whose aim is to inspire individual emancipation as a method to build a movement that will ultimately bring progressive change to the Muslim world. The process is long. The results are unknowable. And the fiction that the "lifestyle" of liberal democratic capitalist modernity is either possible or desirable in countries which have not developed organically in that direction is simply inappropriate. What's more, self-identified leftist critics should be very cautious before scorning her or, which is the same thing, damning her with the very faintest of praise.

As for the timidity of supporters of human rights who are so infused with a kind of debilitating political correctness, another kind of tension occurs and sometimes has Manji alienated from some of her natural allies. Ghaffar Hussain (2012). put it well when he reminded us that:

Irshad is ... very critical of moral and cultural relativism, which is something many western liberals incline towards when dealing with Muslim issues. Refusing to judge or criticize aspects of other cultures may appear to be the sensitive and enlightened approach to dealing with difference, but the net effect is often the empowerment of more reactionary elements. In fact, certain western liberals are often seen making strategic alliances with reactionary Muslim elements, whilst shunning Muslim liberals ...

He concludes:

Reading this book can leave one feeling elated because it illustrates what freedom combined with courage can really achieve. It can also leave one feeling a little sad because you realize how right the author is and yet you know how few there are like her.

So, let us pass from the focus on one "gutsy" woman and her quest to promote reasoned dissent and the reinterpretation of religious texts and traditions in order to reconcile her religion with her hopes for feminist and lesbian rights and freedoms. It is time, as Irshad Manji said in an interview with Barbara Hoffert (2011), to move beyond the kind of "interfaith dialog [that too often] degenerates into an exchange of platitudes ... Now that young Arabs are rising up and bin Laden has gone down, a new chapter is upon us, all of us." How will that chapter unfold?

One place to locate the connection of the moral and strategic questions raised at the outset of this essay to the unfolding of the next chapter in relations between Muslim fundamentalism and accusations of Western imperialism is in the West African nation of Mali. One suitable entry into that link is the third book under consideration: Karima Bennoune's *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*.

Karima Bennoune is a distinguished professor of law at the University of California at Davis. She has taught at the University of Michigan and at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Her list of academic publications is notable. So are both her academic teaching and research awards and her practical achievements. She served as legal counsel to the Tribunal for Global Accountability for Violations of Women's Human Rights and, for four years, a London-based legal adviser at Amnesty International. She may lack the celebrity of Irshad Manji, but the lessons of her academic publications in various international law journals have been translated and retransmitted to a larger audience on *Slate*, in the *Nation* magazine, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Huffington Post* and *Al Jazeera*. She has also been a vital source of information and analysis for the UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against women and on protecting human rights while countering terrorism. She lectures extensively in some of the most prestigious venues and sits on the Board of the Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws. She is destined to come to even wider public attention. Research for her book *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* was done across northern Africa, the Near East and the Middle East. That kind of intimate association with the subjects of her book and the skill to bring even the most stumbling reader into their world almost ensures its sales.

Since the creation of the state of Israel, much of the world's attention has been focused on the Palestinian question and the several wars in which this conflict has been prominent. Since September 11, 2001, the focus has been shared with the American-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. More recently, attention has been paid to various Arab uprisings, notably in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Although it won media attention early in 2013 with the French military intervention, however, the situation in the land-locked African country of Mali has displayed the same limited staying power as front-page news. This is not the fault of Karima Bennoune (2013), who has played a large role in making events there available and intelligible to the rest of the world.

Unlike Irshad Manji's work and life, it is unlikely that Karima Bennoune will be called "sassy," but her work is no less emotive, principled and committed. In the end, it may have at least equally important and perhaps more enduring results.

Bennoune's account of the threat to human rights by Islamic extremists is based not only on her considerable prowess as a human rights advocate, but also on her extensive travels in north Africa, the Near and the Middle East. She has been interviewing Malians and others and has collected first-hand accounts of hideous assaults on alleged adulterers, unmarried women and others whose behaviour was said to bring shame upon them, their families and to be an affront to their faith. Her accounts of the destruction of ancient treasures and sites held to be holy by their Muslim rivals, especially the Sufis, are horrendous, as are the ruptures in the lives of other, largely Christian, minorities who had lived in peace and mutual respect with their Muslim neighbours for centuries.

There is no point reiterating the tales of brutality and verified reports of atrocities here. They are well enough known. Of importance, however, is the act of witnessing, without the prosthesis of theory and the muffle of interpretation. Acting as our own anthropologists, we need to decide how much of the behaviour of our species we can find acceptable and excusable. Acting as our own philosophers, we need to think much more profoundly than a casual comment about the nightly news.

The comparatively sterilized and anaesthetized ambience of the United States Supreme Court permits disinterested comment and a decent distance from the conflicts behind singular human rights cases. The personalized and deeply human stories of a young girl in conflict and her attempts to reach out to others so that they, too, can make existential choices are personally moving. It is, however, when the less artful victims of violence are presented by Karima Bennoune that the convergence between abstract talk of rights and liberties can be seen, too often with blood on the street. It is at the point when thought and reality conflate that we can answer questions of good and evil, redress and redemption and the limits of tolerance. Irshad Manji and Karima Bennoune are good guides on the path from which we can see beyond the specific struggles over particular rights and define what is human and what is alien to us.

#### **About the author:**

**Howard A. Doughty** teaches political economy at Seneca College in Toronto. He can be reached at [howard\\_doughty@post.com](mailto:howard_doughty@post.com).

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