

Denial: A Characteristic of the Islamic Mind

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Early in 2006, I discovered a relatively new Arabic web site: [www. kwtanweer.com](http://www.kwtanweer.com)

It originates in Kuwait, and its goal, as its name *Tanweer* (Enlightenment) implies, is to provide a forum for the discussion of such topics as *Religion & Modernity*, *Civil Society*, *Democracy*, *Human Rights*, and *Women's place and role in society*.

The subjects discussed in this forum are intriguing, as most of them would be considered *avant-garde* by an average Muslim. What catches my attention in my frequent perusal of the articles on this site are the readers' comments. They tend to be very negative, and annoyed by any suggestion of changes in the status quo!

I would like to share with you an article with this title: *Inkar* (Denial). The author dealt with the topic of denial as a characteristic of the Islamic Mind. Years ago, I read books that dealt with the Arab Mind, but to my knowledge I have not noticed any book dealing with this larger topic such as the Islamic Mind. Even though, I would regard V. S. Naipaul's books, *An Islamic Journey*, and *Beyond Belief*, as attempts to fathom and describe this mind.

The writer goes by the name of *Ahmad al-Baghdadi*; I presume that he is a Kuwaiti, but of an Iraqi background. He began with these lines:

*Dr. Kamel al-Najjar, a respected author now living securely in the West, wrote an article published on the Internet dealing with the **Crisis of the Islamic Mind**. What he meant was the mind of Muslims and not of Islam, as a faith.*

This crisis manifests itself as a serious illness besetting Muslims nowadays, namely their persistent denial of their lack of progress in the fields of scientific and human endeavors. At the same time, they keep on claiming that they are God's best people; thus, justifying their mistakes or ignoring them in a rather shockingly naïve manner.

Everyone is aware of this lack of progress. The solution for this chronic illness requires an acknowledgement of this denial, in the same way as Dr. al-Najjar requires alcoholics, or drug addicts seeking healing, to acknowledge their condition, and confess publicly their desire for a cure. It is only after such a confession takes place that the treatment for the cure of an addict begins. On the other hand, as long as an alcoholic or a drug addict refuses to acknowledge the seriousness and reality of his condition, he is bound to continue in his substance abuse. People around him notice the results of his addiction, in spite of the fact that he persists in his denial.

Today, the Arabs' failures are noticeable everywhere: in education, in economics, in politics, in culture, in administration, in technology, in manufacturing, and in human relations. If it were not for the mercy of God and the existence of the West, the Arabs would have perished, as their life expectancy would not have exceeded thirty years. [They should thank] the West that provides them with the necessities of life: such as food, medicines, technology, as well as university training for those fortunate Arabs [who manage to enter Western universities.]

And regardless of this evident lack of progress, we find Arabs taking a stand against intellectual pursuits, civil liberties, and science. They neither control the present, nor the future; all they possess is a past that ceased to exist around five hundred years ago. In other words, they glory in a culture that is no more!

Just as a car does not move without fuel, so is the condition of human civilizations; their fuel is liberty and democracy. Arabs refuse both. But they insist on claiming that they love freedom, intellectual life, and culture; while they keep on playing a broken record that proclaims the West's indebtedness to the Islamic civilization. This is the apex of delusion!

Today, Arabs are in need of a quick medicine that would end their addiction to a dead past, and allow them to start a new life. This will not happen, as Dr. al-Najjar pointed out, unless they are ready to confess publicly their backwardness. This is the first step. The next step is the search for a cure. The prescription is ready and available from the American doctor: freedom and democracy.

That gifted Arab essayist Adonis once wrote: "A society that places at the top of the pyramid of its national concerns a policy of an oppressive security, and makes it the custodian for the conduct of politics, is in the process of self-destruction. There is no such thing as security without a security that guarantees freedom and democracy. Any Arab regime that arrests a citizen on account of his thoughts or opinions is arresting not merely one citizen, but an entire country. And a government that sends a citizen to prison for his thoughts is actually incarcerating itself."

The Arabs today are living in the prison of their past, and the key to the gate of that prison is lost. What's needed is the destruction of the gate itself, so that they may get out and experience freedom. Therefore we must destroy the shackles of that imaginary history that causes us to indulge in claiming a spurious greatness. We need to learn the lessons of history. Sometimes, however, we deny these lessons in the name of religion; other times in the name of Arab nationalism. Such denials lead to the death of any attempt for progress. So as long as Arabs cling to their concept of history with all its deceptions without attempting to separate truth from falsehood, facts from fiction, they will continue in their present state for ever.

These words of *al-Baghdadi* are strong medicine. They must express the exasperation of several Arab and Muslim intellectuals who are fed up with the status quo. The Internet

allows them to utter such words which are regarded as extreme by the very people who need them the most.

Unfortunately the counter-denials pour into the web site. I was very disappointed by one response from a person who lives in Kuwait, the home of the *Enlightenment* site. I hesitate to share it with you. This is what he wrote, not only condemning the author of "*Denial*," but all, yes all the contributors to *Tanweer*. Unfortunately, there are many like him who prefer to live within the prison of the past, because they are unwilling to acknowledge their addiction to a mythical view of Islamic history.

Mr. *Badr* (full-moon, as his Arabic name means,) shot back at the article with these shocking words:

Half of those contributing to this web site should be sent to prison, and the other half, should be confined to mental hospitals.

What a pity that a civilization that persists in denial, and prefers darkness to light!