

“Why Do our Young Adults Become Apostates?”

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By Jacob Thomas

On 8 July, 2008, I noticed an article on the *Tanweer* website that had a very revealing title: "*Limadha Yulhidu al-Shabab?*" A literal translation would read: "*Why do al-Shabab Become Apostates?*" '*Shabab*' is the plural of '*Shab*,' and refers to young adults.

The writer is a lady intellectual and a regular columnist for the Kuwaiti online *Al-Jarida*, an Arabic term for "Newspaper." The topic is not usually discussed in the Arab media, as it happens to be a very sensitive one. Furthermore, it is overshadowed by the almost continuous reporting about the Islamists, or radical Muslims, some of whom have regressed into *Irhabis*. Is it really possible that some Muslim young adults are turning against their faith, and adopting what amounts to be an atheistic worldview?

Let me first quote from this article, and follow it by my analysis and comments.

"As we follow the discussions that are going on among young adults over the Internet, we notice an elevated tone in the call for '*Ilhad*' or apostasy in the Arab homeland, including Kuwait. What is rather strange among these young adults is that for them '*Ilhad*,' is not simply a personal conviction; rather it is a point of view that has assumed an independent existence. It claims that it can lift the nation from ignorance, backwardness, and retrogression in all areas of life. What's extremely puzzling about this phenomenon is that during the height of the spread of Communist and Socialist ideologies in the Arab world in the 20th century, no one ever called for an outright denial of the 'Creator.' Those movements restricted themselves to fighting all religions, regarding them as the "*Opium of the People*". The spread and the extremist nature of this new wave of unbelief, requires our study and research, as it has several ramifications.

"After the rise of the Soviet Union as a great power in the early years of the last century, several Arab organizations adopted the Communist and Socialist ideologies, as a solution that would guarantee equality, justice, and freedom. Those movements did not surface as a reaction to Islam *per se*, or to certain Islamic groups. They arose as an alternative for the capitalist ideology, and as a reaction to Western colonialism that had impacted most Arab lands. So it was not unusual for Arab Socialists to participate in religious ceremonies, such as attending the Friday prayers at the mosques. One could hardly find in the Arab Socialist discourse, any arguments about the existence of the Creator, or a call to apostasy and unbelief.

"At present however, in spite of the disintegration of the Socialist and Communist systems, and the rise of the Islamist tide; we witness the appearance of an extremism of an opposite kind, as a natural reaction to the ideology and practices of political Islam.

These young adults (*shabab*) having grown up in societies that experienced neither foreign occupation, nor colonialism, find their countries in a worse shape than in colonial times.

"As these young adults attempt to change the present order, they clash with the Islamists, who now play the role of the Church during the Middle Ages. For example, they encounter a person who, because he wears the '*amama*' (a Muslim cleric's headgear,) claims infallibility, and seeks to impose his own views on others; arrogates to himself the right to declare these young adults as '*Kuffar*,'" and seeks to drag them before the courts.

"These radical Islamists preach hatred, murder, and suicide, in the name of Allah. As a reaction, the '*shabab*' having also become the targets of the Islamists' deep-seated hatred, tend to apostatize. In fact, it is the Islamists who, by their words and deeds, bear the responsibility for pushing the "*shabab*" into unbelief. Would they ever realize the enormity of their crime?"

Analysis

The author of the article charges the Islamists with the crime of pushing some young adults into apostasy. This genre of unbelief constitutes a new phenomenon in the Arab world, and requires the serious attention of moderate or liberal Muslims such as the writer herself.

Comments

One can understand the distress of the columnist in observing the rise of '*Ithad*' among the '*shabab*,' throughout the Arab world, including her own country, Kuwait. I wonder though, whether she has considered that some Arab young men reject Islam, and become "unbelievers" not so much on account of the words and actions of Islamists, but for other weighty reasons. For example, back on 31 May, 2006, I posted an article on this website with this title [Muslims Questioning Islam](#). It dealt with a young man from Damascus, Syria, who described his journey from faith to unbelief. Throughout the entire narrative, there was no indication that he had acted in reaction to an Islamist ideology. After much reading and reflection, he came to the conclusion to leave Islam. Here are excerpts from his testimony:

"Since I belonged to a religious family I became very religious, committed to Islamic teachings, and very faithful in performing all the duties of my faith. I was a very strong believer in Islam. I defended it emotionally, and with zeal. However, I had to contend with doubts and questions without finding answers to them.

"All the religious authorities kept telling me: everything in the Qur'an is true, and everything that did not agree with it was wrong and false. As for your doubts and suspicions, they proceed from Satan. If you keep on dealing with these doubts, don't forget to seek refuge in Allah and implore Him to defend you from the evils of the devils.

"I believed, and I grew up. The intensity of my clinging to Islam led me to read ... Islamic books, ancient and modern, ultra conservative as well as those open to new ideas. The more I read ... the more my doubts increased. My mind became filled with questions that had no answers.

"I could not eradicate my doubts. In fact they remained embedded in some dark corners of my mind waiting for an appropriate moment to reappear with strength and to confront me anew.

"Once, while I was still a religious Muslim, a satanic idea came to me. I decided to assume the role of an atheist and confront a group of religious men with my arguments. Actually, my real aim was to strengthen my ability to engage in apologetics, and to discover areas of weakness in the position of the atheists through such encounter.

"So, I went to the College where the Shari'ah is taught as it was close to the Law School where I was studying. I chose a bunch of bearded men and sat among them. I began to engage them in a religious discussion, setting forth my own arguments for unbelief. I allowed my tongue to wax eloquent with all kinds of proofs for my position. I was surprised to find them unable to deal with my arguments!

"For the first time, I began to read Islam as a critic ... This led me to finally arrive at my position of no religion, and of forsaking Islam. It is very difficult to summarize the multitude of my readings and reflections in a few lines. That would require several pages. Some samples of my critique of religion can be found in articles I write for a network of irreligious Arabs (www.ladeeni.net)

"I am convinced that the Internet has a tremendous value as it serves anyone who has an idea to defend. It has opened for us a limitless space ... to express our views. In fact, if it were not for the Internet, we would not have been aware of the existence of the irreligious or non-religious current within Arab and Islamic societies. Perhaps the day is coming when I would be able to speak openly and boldly using my real name, and say: "Yes, I am an irreligious person, and these are my reasons."

I quoted from my 31 May, 2006, article not to disagree with the findings of the author of ***"Why do our Young Adults Become Apostates?"*** but to correct the notion that those who leave the Islamic faith do so only in reaction to the Islamist discourse and violent actions. The story of the Damascus ***"Shab"*** who confessed his ***"ladeen"*** (irreligion) shows that in today's globalized world, with the Internet facilitating exchanges of ideas, it is inevitable that some Muslims will forsake their faith and become either apostates, or embrace another religious faith. And regardless of the motives for such radical events taking place within the Household of Islam, this new phenomenon will grow during this new century. For the challenges facing Islam are so powerful and complex, that to continue repeating the warn-out mantra that Islam is the solution for mankind's problems,

has been proven utterly bankrupt. I won't be surprised if more defections will take place among the '*shabab*' of the Arab world.