

## [“Why Do our Young Adults Become Apostates?”](#) [“Limadha Yulhidu al-Shabab?” Part 2](#)

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By Jacob Thomas

On Monday, 28 July, I contributed an article to FFI website under the title of [“Why Do our Young Adults Become Apostates?”](#) It was based on an op-ed article that had first appeared in the Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al Jarida*, dated 8 July, 2008. The author, who was a lady intellectual, manifested a great concern for some young adults in her country, who are turning away from Islam, and adopting a thoroughly secular and atheistic worldview.

One week later, having received several comments, she revisited the topic. Here are excerpts from Part II of *“Limadha Yulhidu al-Shabab?”* followed by my analysis and comments.

"Last week, when I wrote about this subject, I did not expect to receive the types of responses I did. It seems that I had failed to clearly explain my point of view. The majority of the respondents discussed this very sensitive topic without signs of narrow-mindedness. That was a very good beginning. How I wish that their positive outlook would "infect" a minority of respondents who failed to understand my words, and expressed themselves in a very improper manner!

"Some of my readers attributed the ease of communications throughout the world, the speed and variety of the available information, as factors which contributed to the "enlightenment" of the *“shabab.”* These young adults have become aware of a multitude of facts, theories, and philosophies that have caused them to alter their convictions. I agree completely with their explanation.

"For example, in a book used in Islamic education, it was claimed that epilepsy was a symptom of being possessed by a *jinni*. Now a diligent student has simply to consult medical and scientific sources to learn that this tragic illness has biological causes; and has nothing to do with either *jinn* or *ins*. \* The contradiction between a "religious" piece of information and one obtained from a scientific source, plants serious doubts in the minds of our *“shabab.”* Nowadays, they are quite able to find out the truth about all kinds of topics.

"Furthermore, it is important to note that the *Ilhad* of an Arab young person is quite different from the type we find in the West, where the choice of unbelief is an individual decision, and is quite often, a matter of secondary importance. It neither constitutes a new lifestyle, nor does it become a *“solution.”* But when we follow the Arabic writings and discussions about the subject of unbelief, we discover that *Ilhad* is being offered as a *“solution” (al-Hal)* for the nation's problems and as *“salvation”* from backwardness and corruption.

"It is evident that this wave of unbelief is a reaction to the Islamists' attempt to control all aspects of life, and not a result of serious study and reflection on the deep issues of life. In other words, the *shabab's* choice of *Ilhad* is an emotional reaction to the Islamists' *fatwas*. Furthermore, this unbelief may morph into a new religion. This phenomenon may be observed among many Western philosophers and spiritual leaders who have substituted for God, such concepts as *ethics* or *beauty*, or some other "*thing*" like *energy* or *life*; or what is known in the Western world as the "*New Age Religions*."

"Some of those who read my article of 8 July claimed that there was a difference between the *Ilhad* of the young adults in the Gulf countries, and the rest of the Arab world. They attributed the unbelief of Arabs living outside the Gulf region to poverty, and to the dictatorship of the ruling regimes. But with respect to *Ilhad*, I don't believe that material poverty has a different impact on young adults than spiritual or moral poverty. In all cases, apostasy is a revolt and a vendetta against traditionalism, and a thirst for freedom of thought and expression.

"A few respondents claimed that to merely discuss the subject of *Ilhad* was a sign of weak moral fiber. I would counsel such people to engage in a bit of critical thinking and self-examination. Why should degenerate persons bother to think about such deep topics and venture on the road of *Ilhad*? Why don't they enjoy the pleasures of life, "*pray and fast*," and keep up the appearances of true "*believers*?" There are plenty of people who parade their religiosity, without openly joining the ranks of the "*Mulhideen*."\*\*

"Some of those who took issue with my article bragged about the great accomplishments of the Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages; and insisted that Islam is standing firm, and continues to spread throughout the world. They refused to believe that there were any young adults who had renounced Islam, in favor of *Ilhad*...

"In the final analysis, what is required is an exercise in tolerance, and some critical thinking, coupled with a willingness to listen to the other side. This is the only way to arrive at solid convictions, founded on logical bases, and not based on emotional or traditional apologetics."

### **Analysis**

The author of these articles showed rare courage in her discussion of the phenomenon of unbelief, or *Ilhad*, in the Arab world. She explained it as an emotional reaction of some young adults, or *shabab*, to the suffocating hegemony of the Islamists on many areas of life in the Arab world.

### **Comments**

I cannot but admire this Kuwaiti lady whose picture appears with her op-ed articles, thus informing the public that she refuses to cover her hair, in defiance of the radicals' disapproval of her stand. Many of her observations are quite accurate regarding the root

cause for the spread of *Ilhad* among the *shabab* of Kuwait, and other parts of the Arab world.

Perhaps the limitations placed on an op-ed article did not allow her to point to a period in the history of Islamic civilization, when there was more freedom of thought and expression than at present. For example, after the upheavals that surrounded the rise of the Abbasid caliphate (750 A.D.), as things began to settle down, Baghdad became the center of the cultural life of the Arab-Muslim Empire during the 9th century. There was a great deal of freedom for the airing of various theological and philosophical views. Both Muslim and Christian scholars participated in this movement. The impact of Greek culture was great, but unfortunately only a small group of intellectuals felt it; the masses in Baghdad, and throughout the vast empire, did not participate in such intellectual activities.

There were, for example, the rationalists known as *Ikhwan al-Safa*, who claimed that there was no conflict between Islam and Greek philosophy. Religion, *per se*, was meant for the weak, while philosophy was for the learned! They championed the belief that man was perfectible through wisdom. They were tolerant with those who did not share their views. They taught that all religions were helpful!

Unfortunately for Islam, a great change occurred during the 11th and 12th centuries. The era of freedom of expression came to an end thanks to the personality and writings of *Al-Ghazzali* (died in 1111 A.D.) This great thinker became a powerful and reactionary force in the history of Islamic thought. His impact on the Arab-Muslim mind and culture was to freeze them in a mold that led to cultural stagnation.

In his book, *"Ihya' 'Uloom al-Deen" (The Revival of Religious Knowledge)*, he defined every utterance a Muslim makes and every step he must take in order to guarantee the orthodoxy of his faith. As one Egyptian scholar put it, ***"Everything was spelled out for the Muslim: how to eat, sleep, travel, fellowship with one's wife and child, etc. No room was left for any spontaneity in the Muslim's life."*** *Al-Ghazzali* was responsible for ***"closing the door of Ijtihad. \*\*\*"*** It has remained closed for almost one millennium.

Perhaps this new age of globalism, and the rising use of the Internet within the Arab world, will affect the Arab-Muslim masses, and enable them to set aside their rigid traditionalism and legalism. Only time will tell.

Personally, I'm not very hopeful regarding the realization of a genuine change in the world of Islam. While I greatly appreciated the two articles of the Kuwaiti lady, yet her conclusion was fuzzy. Frankly I didn't get what she meant by ***"what is required is an exercise in tolerance, and some critical thinking, coupled with a willingness to listen to the other side. This is the only way to arrive at solid convictions, founded on logical bases, and not based on emotional or traditional apologetics."***

Did she mean that a true dialogue between the *Islamists* and those who adopted *Ilhad* is possible? Has she forgotten the ancient tradition that was initiated by *Abu Bakr*, the first

Caliph, who waged wars against all those Arab tribes that went back on Islam, and forced them to re-embrace it? In Arab history, that period is known as **Huroob al-Radda**\*\*\*\* From that time on, no Muslim has ever been allowed to disown his faith, and embrace another religion, or no religion. What is there to discuss between an **Islamist** and a **Mulhid**? For once a Muslim sees the fallacy of his worldview, he renounces it for good. And a growing number of these **shabab** are joining the ranks of the **Mulhideen!**

\*In the Arab-Islamic popular culture, humans are referred to as "**ins**," an abbreviation of "**insan**," i.e. a human being; in contrast with the **jinn**.

\*\* **Mulhideen**, plural of **Mulhid**, someone who rejects belief in God.

\*\*\***Ijtihad**, the Arabic term for theologizing, and offering legal opinions that must be based on the Qur'an, and the authentic Hadiths.

\*\*\*\***Huroob al-Radda**, Several Arab tribes, after hearing about the death of **Muhammad** in 632 A.D., decided that they no longer owed allegiance to him, or to his movement. However, they were forced by **Abu Bakr** to return to Islam. A Muslim who goes back on Islam is called a **Murtad**, an **Apostate**. It may be that the author of the two articles wanted to minimize the enormity of the sin of apostasy of the **shabab**, by not calling them **Murtaddeen**, (Apostates), but **Mulhideen**, (Unbelievers)