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Kenan Malik. From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and its Aftermath. New York: Melville House, 2010

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Kenan Malik. *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and its Aftermath*. New York: Melville House, 2010.

In January 1989, angry Muslims paraded through Bradford in northern England and burned a copy of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses* (ix). Nearly twenty years later, in September 2008, the publishing house Gibson Square was fire-bombed by another group of angry Muslims on the eve of the publication of *The Jewel of Medina*, a work of fiction by American journalist Sherry Jones centered on the prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha (192). These events, despite their similarities in tone, mark the beginning and end of Kenan Malik's *From Fatwa to Jihad* and symbolize for him, the transition of British society with respect to the "end" of racism, the birth of multicultural politics, the growth of radical Islam, and the slippery slope of self-censorship. Interspersed with personal experiences from living in Britain throughout these sea-changes, Malik objects to the racism that dominated British life for immigrants and their children in the 1960s and 1970s and demonstrates an equal, if not greater, abhorrence for today's politics of over-accommodation, which, Malik believes, not only veil more deeply held prejudices but also provide the space (and an excuse) for acts of terrorism. In his focus on second-generation South Asian immigrant youths in Britain and the social, psychological, and political influences they face, Malik offers a view of the post-Rushdie affair, post-9/11, post-7/7 world that is grim but not irredeemably lost to a clash of civilizations.

Fatwa to Jihad begins, as would be expected, with an introduction to the controversy surrounding Rushdie's book. Yet Malik's work does not begin immediately with Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against Rushdie but instead introduces the Rushdie controversy as it originated: in India, with the objections of novelist, journalist, and then-editorial advisor to Penguin Books, Kushwant Singh. Rather than opening with the alarmism of Khomeini's *fatwa*, Malik thus initiates his account more subtly, beginning with the first protests against the book on the South Asian continent. For Malik, protests against *The Satanic Verses* were never over matters of theology; instead, they were over matters of politics. In India, the ban on *The Satanic Verses* was a precaution taken by Rajiv Gandhi's government in anticipation of upcoming parliamentary elections. From there, the controversy spread to the UK though the Jamaat-e-Islami network and encouraged by the Saudi government. There, too, political alliances played a crucial role; "conflict between the Jamaatis, Barelwis and Deobandis was a feature of British Islam," Malik notes and "helped fuel the Rushdie controversy" (4). Led by the Deobandis, the first major street protest to the book took place in Bolton (UK) on December 1 and was followed by the protest and book-burning in Bradford (4). In response to these Deobandi-led protests, the Islamic Democratic Alliance in Pakistan, "of which Jamaat-e-Islami was an influential part," promoted demonstrations against the book following the party's defeat to Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (5). Whether this protest was a reaction to the book or a more malicious plan to destabilize the country is open for debate.

Thus, in the earliest stages of the controversy surrounding Rushdie's work, Iran played a minor role. The country's intervention in the matter and the declaration of a *fatwa* against Rushdie, however, not only elevated the protests against his book but

fundamentally changed the rules of the game. This decisive change forms the crux of Malik's argument and marks the point of origin in the transition from book-burnings to train bombings that frames his account. As with the other protests, Khomeini's declaration against the book and against Rushdie as its author, as Malik clarifies, is not detached from the context of either national or regional politics. It was not only an expression of Khomeini's new supremacy in Iran but also an attempt to declare Iran's supremacy within the Islamic world vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. Beyond these regional developments, the *fatwa* over-stepped national borders to assert Iran's legitimacy internationally. Though the *fatwa* emerged from the context of local politics, it demonstrated the ayatollah's new desire to exterminate not only anti-Islamic activity within Iran but also to prevent such activities outside Iran.

From the history of controversy, in chapter two, Malik turns to the political climate of the UK in the 1970s, which marks the true beginning point for his narrative. He then moves from youth organizations and the fight against racism, to the promotion of identity politics in the 80s and 90s, and lastly to the emergence of anti-offensive-speech legislation and reduced civil liberties in the wake of 9/11. This narrative builds progressively throughout the book, artfully incorporating personal accounts and information gleaned from interviews with community organizers, mosque leaders, and youth activists. Though Malik at times attempts to trace wider circles around his arguments, his work is at its best when dealing with specific events, organizations, and individuals.

The story of Bradford, Brixton and youth activist organizations in chapter two becomes a much broader history in chapter three. In "The Rage of Islam," Malik refutes two commonly-held but inaccurate assumptions about violence in Islam today. The first fallacy he contests is the idea that Islam is inherently violent; the second is that Islamic violence today is a reaction to the ill-treatment of the Islamic world by the "West." Both of these mainstream arguments are false, Malik contends and more importantly, are representative of dangerous over-generalizations regarding Islam's place in the world. To dispel these faulty assumptions, Malik turns to the rise of Islamist identities through multiculturalism and identity politics in the UK. To illustrate this point, Malik delves into the alienation of suburban, second-generation immigrant youth and the emergence of Islam as the only channel for the social and political expression of their voices. Malik's experience as a journalist and his familiarity with the political topography of the UK are both a boon to this chapter.

Considering Islamism in a global context draws Malik's discussion away from the particular predicament of UK Muslims, but his discussion of Islamism as a reaction to political frustration and ideological homelessness demonstrates his desire to refute the fatalistic "clash of civilizations" theory that dominates mainstream conversations about Islam in America and Europe. Malik's attempt to place British Islamism within a larger frame becomes difficult, and the categories of "youth," or "second-generation immigrant" become muddled in the more general discussion of Islamism as a post-Cold War ideology. Though Malik's disaffected youth thesis may be narrow, if not trite, it is nonetheless useful in reframing the issue of Islamic violence in familiar terms and turning the specter of Islamic violence haunting Europe into a human and manageable threat.

One trait of this work that should be noted—and chapter three is no exception—is the author's constant effort to dismantle the typical binary between the "West" and

“Islam.” Malik accomplishes this task not by creating new terms of engagement—for he frequently employs these terms as a matter of convenience—but rather by focusing on particular actors and organizations at each stage of his argument and by pinpointing ongoing disputes between Islamic nations outside and Islamic organizations within the UK. Chapter three in particular highlights differences between immigrant groups, political parties, and strands of radicalism to illustrate the dangers of assuming certain radicals speak for the entire Muslim community. The representation of Muslim opinions is a tendentious issue, and owing to its importance, also appears more expressly in chapter four, wherein Malik further explicates the dangers of taking certain individuals’ opinions as representative of “Islam.”

Chapter four thus moves from the so-called “rage of Islam” to reactions to it in Britain. Malik here refers to the terms “Islamophobia” and “Islamophilia” to ground his discussion and moves between them as a way to show the dangers of both extremes. The Islamophilic “liberals” who stand up against offense are, in Malik’s opinion, almost as dangerous as the “Islamophobic” radicals who promulgate the rhetoric of “Islamageddon” (136–140). In what appears to be a vicious cycle, radical figures give credibility to claims of “Islamophobia,” which in turn becomes justification for retaliatory violence. Refuting claims of “Islamophobia,” Malik suggests that if anything, in the UK, Islam receives special treatment, which, he believes, is equally damaging because such treatment only masks still existing, deeply held prejudices (132, 139).

Finally in chapter five, “God’s Word and Human Freedom,” Malik returns to the areas of offense and free speech and delves into what he argues is the true outcome of the Rushdie Affair: a slow dismantling of personal freedoms. Here, Malik examines blasphemy as the historical predecessor to “offensive speech” and criticizes this category as a new version of the sacred in secular society. Malik expertly negotiates this delicate issue, drawing upon his own observations and those of others authors, like Monica Ali, who have faced the rage of the anti-offense brigade. To emphasize his point further, Malik also considers examples from the past and in particular draws parallels between Rushdie and Thomas Paine. By drawing these two figures together, Malik argues for greater protections of free speech and individual rights to expression.

Building upon the arguments of chapter five, chapter six, “Monsters and Myths,” expands Malik’s argument for the preservation of free speech. Here, he moves away from the Rushdie Affair and the Danish cartoons controversy to deal more specifically with the effects of those controversies and the problematic practice of self-censorship. Using *The Jewel of Medina* as an example, Malik observes the changed attitudes of publishers and academics, who now withhold material from publication for fear of causing offense. Rather than curbing the fires of Islamism as intended, self-censorship lends justification to those fires, Malik argues. He does not promote purposeless offense but rather warns that voluntarily surrendering the right to free expression pre-empts any attempt to provide space for a plurality of opinions. As he concludes in the penultimate section of the book, “Once the Enlightenment becomes a weapon in the clash of civilizations...and a measure as much of tribal attachment as of progressive politics...then...the pursuit of the Enlightenment becomes a source of de-Enlightenment” (207). Angels preserve tradition, but devils rock the boat; like Rushdie, here too, Malik sides with the devils.

What *Fatwa to Jihad* misses in the way of scholarly apparatus it more than makes up for in its honest approach and focus on the particulars at every stage. In his criticism

of multicultural politics and liberal reactions, Malik remains firm in his commitment to free speech and expression. He eschews the liberals' willingness to accept one eccentric's cry of offense as representative of the entire Muslim community and condemns publishers and scholars for backpedalling from the possibility of offense. The questions he asks are large, and the answers do not fit neatly into boxes of political correctness, but what Malik argues in *Fatwa to Jihad* needs to be said, and he writes in a way that leaves the door open for further consideration.

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