



AMR News

AMR FORUM: 'Horrid' History

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AMR News

AMR News is published every three months (God Willing). The articles published in AN do not necessarily reflect the views of AMR as a body. Contributions from Members of the Association and others are welcome and should be sent to The Editor, by October 15th 2005.

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Dr. Tabarra opened AMR's Forum on 4th February with a presentation showing that although the History Curriculum itself provided the tools required to deliver inclusivity, objectivity, critical thought and the coverage of a wide range of topics offering perspectives other than the Establishment one, the reality was that this was not being followed by many schools - whether state or independent and children were being failed. In addition, topics which were provided within the curriculum and



Dr. Tabarra opening the Forum

would include and enthuse children of diverse background, such as *"The History of Medicine Through Time"* or *"The Mughals,"* both of which vividly show-cased Muslim contributions to world civilisation, were little known about by teachers and schools and so much of the History actually taught in schools was Eurocentric. Not only that but it was taught with little attention given to the oppression experiences by colonised or enslaved peoples. Also, there was little evidence of the history being taught in schools relating to, and giving contexts for the crises of today. The aim of the AMR Forum was to analyse the source problem and identify what could be done to address the issues arising.

At the end of the meeting the following were agreed as action points: 1. The History curriculum is not an issue but the disseminating of information, good practice, teacher awareness and training, resources, parental involvement are. 2. That AMR should send representatives to the QCA Diversity Seminar being held in March. 3. The role of parents is very important. They must engage with teachers and with PTAs to encourage improved History teaching. 4. Specialist resources for schools needed. 5. Increase the options available at KS2, 3 and increase awareness of the possibilities that already exist for units which are inclusive. 5. Raise awareness of the need to improve standards of History teaching and opportunities for inclusive History at Primary level. 6. Teacher training and support especially where non-specialists are teaching History. 7. Opportunities for History across Curriculum subjects. 8. To invite the speakers back again to perhaps address specialists e.g. teachers.

See The Feature p3/

AMR INPUT TO BRITISH MUSEUM MIDDLE EAST EXHIBITION

Arising from his work with the National Maritime Museum's Islamic Calendars Exhibition last March, AMR's Dr Usama Hasan was invited to take part in a Consultation held at the British Museum on 23rd February regarding a major forthcoming exhibition on the Middle East.

Some of the key messages that the Museum wishes to deliver with its Middle East Season 2006 are:

- What it means to be Middle Eastern.
- The interaction and impact the peoples and cultures of the Middle East.
- Reflect issues of

Directory Entry

AMR will appear in a Directory being produced by the British Council which will provide contacts for overseas journalists interested in UK Muslim issues.

The Association of Muslim Social Scientists is one of the organisations contributing to the the editorial team established to produce the Directory.

AMR will be represented in the Youth specialism section with Mohammed Dhalech of the AGC listed as the nominated Spokesperson on behalf of AMR.

identity and politics and the rich artistic heritage of the region.

- Develop a richer public understanding of the Middle East now.

As Dr. Usama was not available for the Consultation, AMR was ably represented by Shiban Akbar who contributed from her previous experience in advising on an Islamic Exhibiton. The day included the opportunity to meet with and discuss the forthcoming exhibition with Curator, Venetia Porter.

Emma Clarke who liaised with AMR and was at the National Maritime Museum and is

now Head of Audience Development and Communities in the British Museum's Learning and Information Department.

Shiban's comment after the Consultation, "A nice bunch of people with lot of goodwill for Muslim culture. I seemed to contribute more than I thought I would and it was appreciated." Shiban introduced colleagues to the work of Sachiko Murata, author of *Tao of Islam*. Murata went to every old Arabic text known to mankind in writing her work. Venetia Porter seems to be interested now in contacting this renowned scholar.

AGC DISCUSS RE-UNION PLAN

At the AMR Governing Council (AGC) meeting held on 4th February, Mohammed Dhalech's proposal that young participants in the Re-union take responsibility for managing the 2006 Re-union was accepted.

Mohammed explained that at a late night meeting held with the older teenagers, a great interest in being more involved in organising future events was expressed. The youngsters elected Nur Elahi and Saira Qureshi to lead the organising group and Mohammed

said this initiative and interest shown by the young people, many of whom had been attending events from a very young age, should be used as an opportunity to invest in the future.

In order to build the capacity of the youngsters to take on greater responsibility, Mohammed proposed an Easter Bank Holiday retreat to give the 10-12 young people involved the orienting and facilitating support they needed to be equipped to take on the responsibility of organising for the next Re-union. (*See Diary*).

CHANGING 'HORRID' HISTORY

One of the clear findings of the Tackling Extremism Working Groups as reported by *The Muslim News* was the strong sense of alienation and disenchantment felt by Muslim youth arising from grievances over the way in which British foreign policy has been conducted in the last one hundred years. This fact, combined with critical comment by a range of commentators from Professor Simon Schama of the LSE, to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) Ken Boston, on the woeful failings in the teaching of History at secondary (and, subsequently, we learned, primary level in British schools) led to the Association of Muslim Researcher's (AMR) Horrid History Forum held on 4th February in Central London.

Among the participants were two members of the QCA, including its Diversity Consultant, Lina Akbar. The QCA are currently engaged in reviewing much of the secondary school curriculum including history at key stage 3 and A level and were the only public body to be represented at the meeting despite numerous invitations sent to the relevant Chairs of the government working parties, leading MPs and Lords, leaders of representative Muslim organisations and educational bodies. Acknowledgements and messages of support and interest were received from only a handful of those invited, but included Baroness Uddin, Dr. Humayun Ansari of London University and Dr. Stuart Foster of the Institute of Education History/Citizenship department who said, "...I do think the issue you are addressing is a very important one and one that should be openly discussed. Thus I support your efforts..."

Ex-AMR Vice-President Dr. Mohammad Tabarra, a consultant engineer and parent of two children, had initiated the proposal within AMR to look at the teaching of History saying, ..."It seems to us that one practical Government step that will help reduce the alienation felt by Muslim youth is the proper study of the recent history of the British Empire and its colonial policies. "British secondary school children spend too much time on Henry VIII, the Tudors, as well as the Second World War and Nazism, the American History, The Opium War in China, etc. There is far less syllabus coverage of the role of Britain in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine and Jordan, Iran, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern and the African countries." A situation Schama had biting summarised as "Henry and Hitler, with nothing in between." (Quoted from BBC Online). He demonstrated by referring to the current crises over Iran and Palestine, how much of the History taught in schools was irrelevant to an understanding of current affairs and their background.

Tariq Wilkinson, drama and history teacher at the Muslim faith school, Brondesbury College for Boys, then delivered an excellent presentation entitled "History as a Tool for Negotiating a British Muslim Identity". He began by dismissing the myth that Muslim children were only interested in Islamic religious history and he demonstrated how it was possible to use the existing History curriculum as a framework to deliver lessons to students which included, enthused and provided a historical context to the current problems of the world and international relations. Through careful and considered selection of topics from the syllabus and using his awareness of the needs of his students, he showed how it was possible to

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March 2006*

Mental Health of Immigrants in England Pt 2 of 2 **by Dr. Hashim Reza**

What is *Jinn*? The popular understanding is that it is a paranormal creature which is mostly invisible but can appear in different forms, lives in deserted places and graveyards, has supernatural capabilities and sometimes behaves mischievously or even malevolently. Curiously, the *Jinn* are not generally blamed for causing any physical health problems.

This popular understanding is usually assumed to be based on description of *Jinn* in the *Qur'an*. This however is not true. The *Qur'an* does indeed mention *Jinn* in several places. Invariably, each time the *Jinn* are mentioned, human beings ('*Ins*' or '*Insan*') are also mentioned in the same verse. In this way, the *Qur'an* constantly compares and contrasts these two creations of Allah. Their common attributes, duties and destiny are listed below. The only differences being that the *Jinn* have been created from fire and have some special attributes.

Created from fire
[Qur'an, 15:27, 55:15]
Groups & nations [ibid. 41:25, 72:11]
Believers & non-believers [ibid. 11:119,

51:56, 72: 14]
Rewarded & punished [ibid. 72: 15-16]
Whisper into hearts [ibid. 114:5-6]
Exceptional attributes [ibid. 34:12-14]

These *Qur'anic* descriptions do not explain popular beliefs regarding the *Jinn*. In particular, there is no explanation for their implication in causing mental illnesses. There is no basis in the *Qur'an* to justify the kinds of powers that are attributed to the *Jinn* in causing mental illness. If the *Jinn's* "whispering into hearts" could be interpreted as a possible cause of mental illness, humans are noted to be capable of this in the same verse. The *Jinn* are no more likely to cause mental health problems than they are likely to cause heart disease or diabetes.

However, *Jinn's* role in mental health can be understood if one reviews anthropological research. There are examples of supernatural explanations for mental health problems in all communities of the world - including those who have had interactions with Muslims as well as

those who never came in contact with Muslim beliefs and practices. Research work on beliefs about mental health in Quebec Inuits is a good example in this regard. This body of research provides the basis for a secular explanation of the phenomenon of the *Jinn* and popular beliefs of mental illnesses.

Our communities have had superstitious explanations about all health problems at different stages of history. These popular views have changed as knowledge of diseases, their treatment and especially their prevention has become widely understood. Thus, public has accepted causes of illnesses as explained by science while ignoring the popular explanations they had learnt from their forefathers. Attitudes and beliefs towards infectious diseases can be a prime example from the past century. Changing views regarding diet, exercise and smoking is another good example from our own times. As public comes to understand the scientific explanation, they accept and utilise

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Horrid History, from p3/
 deliver lessons on subjects as apparently exclusively British as The Middle Ages or Elizabeth I in a way that drew parallels with Muslim historical experiences and so became of added interest for his students. For instance, Tariq drew parallels between the Middle Ages in Britain and Al Andalus in Spain and Elizabeth I and the first interaction between the British and the Mughals in India. He also showed that the curriculum also allowed the good History teacher to contextualise current debates related to international politics in the school History lesson. For instance he related the topic of the run-up to World War I to highlight the machinations in the Middle East which led to British involvement in the undermining of the Ottoman Caliphate and the creation of the problems which underlie present-day resentments over Palestine. Tariq Wilkinson's presentation was also excellent for highlighting the important role the school and particularly good inclusive teaching approaches, not just in the subject of History, could contribute to a child's development of a positive identity and how negative experiences would do the opposite leading to the development of future "Yardies", "Yobs" or "Terrorists".

These presentations were followed by discussions and contributions
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from the QCA representatives and from a Youth and Equality Consultant. The former welcomed this initiative and debate around the teaching of History and said that there were problems which need to be addressed and the QCA for its part more than welcomed input. One of the most important points debated was the extent to which AMR's initiative would undermine the need for a 'shared history' for the whole nation. Wouldn't histories meeting the needs of the multi-cultural classroom undermine this and be of no relevance to children in the shires where there were few BME children? Mohammed Dhalech, Equality and Youth Consultant and member of AMR countered from his personal experience of living in Cumbria. Demographics and Employment exigencies were forc-

ing young Cumbrians to leave their isolated homes for work in the inner cities and BME professionals were being drawn into work in hospitals and the service sector in the shires - there was a greater need than ever for the teaching of History to better meet the need to promote understanding and inclusion across the nation. Three teenage boys also shared their experiences of being taught History in Grammar and Independent schools.

Michele Messaoudi, a HMI OFSTED Inspector with particular interest in the teaching of History was unable to present due to ill-health but she had provided some observations which were shared with the Forum participants.

Amongst her many important points gleaned from the experience of inspecting state as well as independent schools, including Muslim schools, were the observations that some of the best practice in the teaching of History came from state schools with committed specialist staff who were dedicated to and had an awareness of inclusion. Some of the worst History teaching was in the primary sector which was partly due to lack of specialist teachers but also due to ignorance of best practice in the teaching of World History which offered a myriad of opportunities to inspire children from the youngest age to love his-

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**AN
 INCLUSIVE HISTORY**

- 1. Impact of Imperialism on the Black and Muslim worlds*
- 2. Anti-colonial and anti-slavery movements*
- 3. Contributions of and interactions with the Muslim world over history*
- 4. The Neo-colonialism - the 'New World Order'*
- 5. Palestine*
- 6. The subversion of principle in Western foreign policy approaches to the Muslim world: Kashmir, Iran, Palestine and Bosnia.*

Horrid History cont from p5/

tory and appreciate the cultural contributions made by different communities to this society. Modern European History was important and should not be disregarded - especially the history of Fascism and the rise of Hitler, but this should be taught not as a museum piece but as a phenomenon re-appearing today with the rise of the fascist right in Britain and Europe. Michele also provided examples for additional units such as the History of Ideas or the History of Technologies which would help bring the contribution of Muslim and other cultures to world civilisation. She also mentioned the very practical point that in this age of examination success, it was only when BME inclusive topics were examinable topics that secondary schools would take them more seriously and allocate proper resources to them. It was also important she said to view History not in isolation but as a subject whose objectives could be attained by cross-curricular referencing to Citizenship, PSHE, English Literature and RE.

by Sarah Sheriff

Membership Review Mooted

Membership of AMR has regularly figured as a main agenda item in several recent Governing Council meetings. Views of wider AMR family are needed on this matter in order to reach some decisions.

Two key issues necessitated repeated discussions of membership. Firstly, our numbers have been dwindling slowly over the recent years. All attempts to attract newer members or increase attendance at Forum meetings have not proven successful. The Reunions have been exception to this in remaining very popular and frequently over-subscribed.

Secondly, there is speculation that Charities Commission is likely to forbid treatment of non-members any differently from members of charitable societies and groups like AMR. This was expected to be announced in their review of current rules which has been overdue for some time. If this turns to be the case, we would like to know whether this could have further impact on our activities as well as our rev-

enues.

At the AGC meeting held in April 2005, the idea of changing the membership status of AMR to that of donors was mooted. This would imply a change in the relationship between AMR and its members. As donors, signed-up members of organisation commit themselves to support the charitable causes of this organisation. When they participate in any of the activities or services that the organisation offers, they cannot expect differential treatment in charges or other issues determining access to such services.

In the more recent AGC meeting in February 2006, it has been suggested to develop a database of skills and expertise that AMR members have in fostering the organisation's objectives. Such an audit of skills can help determine what niche area AMR can best serve. The recent successful forum on "Horrid History" is a good example of how we can focus our resources.

Comments are suggestions are invited to formulate these proposals.

*By Dr. Hashim Reza
& Dr. Tippu Sheriff*

HAVE YOU RENEWED?

Please help us by renewing promptly

MEMBER ON ISLAM CHANNEL

On 21 November 2005 - Rabbi Tony Bayfield, Head of the Movement for Reform Judaism, appeared on the 'Islam Channel's Agenda programme - Europe's premier television channel devoted to Muslim affairs, with a regular viewing audience of 750,000.

Rabbi Bayfield, Rev. Marcus Braybrooke and AMR member, Roger Boase, all members of the 'Stern-

berg Centre Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue Group' (which recently produced a major platform statement entitled "*Welcome and unwelcome truths between Jews, Christians and Muslims*"), appeared on the magazine programme to launch a collection of essays entitled *Islam and Global Dialogue*, edited by Roger Boase, and to which the Chief Rabbi,

Sir Jonathan Sacks, has also contributed.

During the course of the programme, subjects under discussion included the government's anti-terror legislation, the riots in France and the earthquake in Pakistan.

Mental Health, cont. from p4

the interventions offered by science. Therefore, as public's understanding of causes of common physical health problems has come closer to scientific explanations, the *Jinn* are not blamed for causing it. Similarly, until public education on mental health problems is greatly improved, all kinds of superstitions will continue to rule public imagination.

It is very important that all of us consider it our duty to challenge these erroneous public beliefs. Such superstitions prevent us from seeking the correct help from the health services that are available. From time to time these superstitions have resulted in tragic consequences. At least three young Muslim women have been murdered in England and France since 1993 when faith healers tortured them violently in attempting to rid them of the *Jinn*.

LETTERS

Sir,
I have enjoyed the newsletters, thank you.
Mrs U. Malik.

INTER-FAITH APPOINTMENT

Dr Chris Hewer, long-time AMR member and former advisor to the Bishop of Birmingham, has announced that he has accepted an appointment as the St Ethelburga Fellow in Christian-Muslim Relations in London.

St Ethelburga's was a medieval church in the heart of the City of London that survived the Great Fire and the bombs of the Second World War. In 1993, a lorry bomb planted by the IRA exploded immediately outside it, causing extensive damage to City institutions and leaving only

parts of two walls of St Ethelburga's standing. Ten years later, it was rebuilt and reopened as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. Part of his work will be as a resource to the programmes of St. Ethelburga's that concern Christian-Muslim relations.

Most of his time will be spent in delivering courses on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, training others to do the same and writing new resources for such work. Dr. Chris is the author of the excellent book, *The Essence of Islam*.

NEW WEBSITE FOR AMR

AMR hopes to update and improve its website in the near future. At the AGC meeting held on 4th February it was agreed that the current website is in need of overhaul and it also needs to be relocated to a new host which will allow for easier updating.

Brother Tim Bowes, a Trustee of the Muslim Women's Helpline and a web-designer in his spare time has undertaken the task of coming up with proposals for the new look AMR website.

Details will be announced in due course.



Dates For Your Diary

Easter Bank Holiday Re-union Leadership event for AMR youth (by invitation, to be confirmed).

'Horrid' History - training event. To be confirmed

Friday 25-28 August 2006, AMR Re-union at the Wilderness Centre.

New Member

Heba Youssef, Sussex. *Critical Theory & Literature*



Tariq Wilkinson speaking at the 'Horrid' History Forum on 4th February

"Recommended Site-Seeing"

AMR's Turkish-Irish IT expert, Seref O'Holik, cherry-picks some of the most interesting websites he has recently visited:

🔗 History resource featuring a 1000 years of Muslim contribution to civilisation

<http://www.muslimheritage.com/>

🔗 The British Museum
www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

🔗 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority for teachers' resources

www.qca.org.uk

🔗 Tariq Wilkinson (Master Calligrapher)

www.tariqwilkinson.com

🔗 Muslim intellectual discourse in periodical format

www.islamicmagazine.com

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