

THE FASHIONABLE MUSLIM

WRITTEN BY

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Name: Dallas Gopi

Date: 20th April 2010

Abstract.

The Fashionable Muslim is a story about pragmatism, but not obviously so. It's also a story about how too much is choice as opposed to too little choice can be a major cause of scepticism.

(Note by author).

It is my intention that the following exegesis shows how I have attempted to incorporate my argument(s) as the main storyline for my novel *The Fashionable Muslim* and how rapidly changing urban multiculturalism will eventually affect a historically bi-cultural society like Auckland city. I won't however be attempting to draw conclusions between my evidence-based exegesis and my novel within this document because I believe that the purpose of this document is demonstrate how multiculturalism is happening and going to continue to happen whether people like it or not. I would hope that this evidence-based document speaks for itself and the accompanying fictional novel creates a similar conclusion through its narrative and story structure.

You can't fight it Marsha, it's bigger than both of us.

It seems highly likely that when Phillip K Dick was writing Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?¹ the dystopic post-apocalyptic Los Angeles year 2019 was a relatively faithful reproduction of what Los Angeles was envisioned by many of that era to look like. It was seventy years away and The United States of America was on the verge of sending men into space.² All number of comic book superheroes lined the shelves of newstands promising readers exiting futuristic crime-busting tales while programs such as Lost in Space³ and Star Trek⁴ hit America's television screens.

The future was going to an exciting place and before the end of the century it was commonly believed that people would be travelling to work in flying saucers instead of cars and buses. Now with only fourteen years to go it seems unlikely that the City of Angels will become the dystopic city that Dick's novel portrays. Neither is it likely to evolve into the heavily Asian styled homogenised remix of New York, Hong Kong and Tokyo's Ginza district that is plainly evident in Ridley Scott's Blade-Runner⁵, the film adaptation of Dick's novel.

In actuality, The Los Angeles of the future probably won't be much different to the Los Angeles that currently exists bar a few more buildings and some more freeways. With less than two-decades to go it seems more that L.A. will likely be a heterotopic city – neither dystopic urban sprawl⁶ or the utopic garden of eden but more something in-between. Giant television screens advertising geisha girls and infomercials promising a better life in the colonies as they do in Blade Runner will not be on the side of every building and the street level won't be crammed with sushi bars and shady-looking shopkeepers who offer bio-genetic operations in back rooms of their seedy

businesses. The Sci-fi city is certainly exciting to read about and exciting to watch but I'm sure if given the choice most of us would not want to live in such a corrupt and polluted environment amongst the yellowskins⁷ speaking cityspeak.⁸

I will attempt to argue that the basis for the mise-en-scene for the dystopic city we admire in books such as Do androids dream of electric sheep, Neuromancer and films like Blade Runner and The Fifth Element,⁹ finds its impetus from the deeply rooted scepticism and xenophobia of the western world populous. I will attempt to show how the west is fearful of an eventual takeover by Asian nations and that novelists and film-makers have drawn upon this fear of difference, either wittingly or unwittingly, and amplified it considerably in order to create a fictional environment that fits and often complements the protagonists struggle to escape to a safer and cleaner, less populated environment.

Respected Italian economist Loretta Napoleoni author of Rogue Economics: Capitalism's New Reality¹⁰ suggests that the world's economy is undergoing a major redistribution of monetary power that will create a very different world over the next several decades. Napoleoni calls this financial swing 'a rewriting of the social contract'¹¹ and suggests that it is already taking place in the larger Western cities. She projects that the current financial powerbrokers, Europe and the United States, will eventually forfeit control to an invisible axis of new world order that stretches from Beijing to Cape Town, incorporating the Middle East and much of Africa¹². Napoleoni even suggests that the gold dinar¹³ will be the new standard for international currency exchange and will replace the US dollar as the benchmark for trade. With the dinar as the new standard international importers and exporters will save many hundreds of billions of dollars per year hedging against currency losses in global trade, thus making the holders of the dinar the real power brokers.¹⁴

Napoleoni's reasoning behind such a dramatic shift in financial power appears to be born from her analysis of rapidly changing ideology amongst the governments and the populous of (what were) third world countries. She uses the 1997 Asian financial crisis as an example. In response to crash the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mohammed Mahathir refused help from the International Monetary Fund in favour of a bail out by other Muslim nations. The IMF were shocked. Mahathir, upon receiving an award from the Islamic Financial Company LARIBA told his audience that he wanted his people to enjoy their fair share of the economic pie rather than the interest gather coffers of the IMF¹⁵. Mahathir was talking about Sharia law where it is illegal for one to charge interest on loans but instead to seeks revenues in the form of rent, royalties, a share of profits or commodity trading. A mortgage for example is viewed as a 'rent to buy' arrangement where if eventually sold for a profit then the lender may require a share of those profits. Mahathir may have also been wary of accepting an IMF bailout because of what happened when Russia accepted rescue packages from IMF during the 1990s. The Oligarchs got rich and the people remained poor while the IMF collected interest on those loans¹⁶.

Mahathir's response to the Asian financial crisis may have given Islamist financiers the proof and courage required to mount a succesful alternative to western usury based lending. If the dramatic increase in the living standards of middle-class families in China, the Islamic nations and India are also taken into account then it is extremely likely that alternative methods of banking that better suit this growing populous means the days of the West calling the shots on how the East will live are severely numbered. A recent article in the Australian media suggests that Islamic businesses that adhere to the religious proscriptions in business 'have a market potential of US five trillion dollars and the industry is continuing to expand globally.'¹⁷ Islamic

financiers are becoming more able to provide the required non-usury service for Muslim customers that completely fits the requirements of Sharia law. A Canadian financial institution recently introduced Canada's, and possibly the western world's, first halal-approved credit card. The iFreedom Plus Mastercard is a prepaid credit card and therefore it is interest free. It is expected that the card will also be available to US Muslims by the end of the year.¹⁸ The move by financial institutions to cater for customers with specific beliefs that are non-western, i.e. non-christian, suggests an understanding that the Muslim community is part of a growing population that are destined to integrate with the West whether the West likes it or not.

If historic reaction to foreign ownership or foreign control of specific markets is anything to go by then news of a Muslim controlled financial institution that looks as though it could reasonably be a major player in future world finance will be greeted with suspicion and scepticism. One only need look at public reaction to the attempted buyout of the largest dairy farm in New Zealand to have it confirmed that xenophobia is alive and well in this country. A farmer whose 81-hectare property neighbours the farm for sale said that the potential for the Chinese to be involved in the New Zealand dairy industry was 'very worrying.' The unnamed farmer said '[he is] not prejudiced or anything like that but I don't really trust the Chinese. I've certainly got my doubts about them and I think they can't be trusted to a certain degree.'¹⁹

An interesting example of the purported fear of foreign ownership may have been best outlined in the 2006 sale of Jaguar and Land Rover, two of Britain's premiere motoring brands, to the Indian corporation Tata industries for what was suggested to be a two billion dollar sale.²⁰ The flagship brand of British motoring with its long history of serving the country during wartime and upheaval was to be purchased by a person from the colonies. Up until 1948 Indians were the servants of the British and now the

British will be working for them. I'm sure the irony of the deal would not be lost on Ratan Tata, the 72 year old chairman of the Tata group of companies.

The threat of change certainly has the ability to create a sense of fear amongst the incumbant populous. In 2007 an application by the Muslim community to broadcast the call to prayer from the minarets of their newly completed mosque in central Oxford was met with outrage by the local community.²¹ In the more right-wing newspaper The Sun comments included concern that children would be woken up from their afternoon naps and that the Muslim minority had no right to ram their message down the throats of those who weren't interested.²² A recent petition by Swiss citizens opposed to the construction of a six metre high minaret on the roof of a Muslim community centre in northern Switzerland collected 115,000 signatures.²³ The debate appears to have engulfed the entire nation and as a result the Swiss government passed a law that prohibited the construction of minarets throughout Switzerland. 57.5% of Swiss voted in favour of opposing the construction of minarets. It appears that the fear of an eventual Muslim takeover of Europe is the impetus behind such opposition.²⁴

A spokesman for President Nicolas Sarkozy's centre-right union for a Popular Majority said the Swiss debate reflected widespread alarm in Europe over radical Islam, while in Germany, a senior MP from Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrat Party said the fear of growing Islamisation 'must be taken seriously'.²⁵ Conservative Christian groups even went so far as to author a video with professional graphics and an authoritative voiceover to warn their audience of the impending Muslim invasion. The video claims the Muslim communities in Europe have a fertility rate more than four times higher than those of non-Muslims which will eventually result in the Muslim population doubling to 104 million in twenty years. It is also suggested that the number of children born to every Muslim family averages 8.1 compared with 1.8 for non-

Muslims. The video warns that in the Netherlands half of the newborn infants are Muslim and that France will be an Islamic republic in a mere 39 years.²⁶ Since being posted on You Tube on March 30th 2009 the video has been viewed 11,731,631 times. It has however been shown to be completely inaccurate in its statistical assumptions but nonetheless it has obviously proved extremely popular.

The instances of xenophobia I have outlined may well be a result of a fear of being converted to Islam or to be ‘Asianafied, [sic]’²⁷ against ones will. It could also be due to one’s inability or desire not to incorporate a new set of rules or customs into one’s daily routine. The fear of having to accommodate or learn something new can often cause scepticism amongst those who either feel threatened by change or are fanatical about any suggestion that cultural difference should be incorporated into their conservative and stringent mechanism of belief. Such a dogmatic approach to multicultural integration may well be clouding the ability of the xenophobic populous because it is arguable that multicultural integration is already well underway. However, those opposed to immigration may be inadvertently accommodating and encouraging multiculturalism without actually realising that they are doing it – whether this is through the purchase of fake designer labels or bootleg DVD films, or even the food they eat. China currently controls a majority of the worlds counterfeiting industry and the products that are found coming out of China are in some cases almost indistinguishable from the real thing. Whether it’s at the weekend market stall, on internet or while on holiday in Bali, counterfeit goods are purchased by westerners because it saves them money. The cheap price paid for the Rolex watch or the Prada clutch purse still allows for a healthy profit to be made by the manufacturers who are more often than not Mafia controlled.

The Chinese and South East Asian Mafia-controlled human trafficking business is

also part of this subversive industry. Delivery to the west is often risky and many don't make it due to the cramped and unhygienic conditions of the voyage. If they do make it they are almost always forced to work as sex slaves or in sweatshops in order to pay off their debt with the traffickers. Those that are so opposed to immigration may well find that their frozen fish and potatoes are processed and farmed by immigrants and they have unwittingly helped line the pockets of the Mafia just by doing their grocery shopping. They also may be shocked to discover that their daughters' new purse that cost a fraction of what the real thing cost would be the end product of a multi-billion dollar industry that has boosted what was a once a downtrodden and poor third-world country. Loretta Napoleoni says that the most dangerous breeding ground for rogue economics is the global economy. She tells us that almost every product we consume has a hidden, dark history, from slave labour to piracy, from fakes to fraud, from theft to money laundering.²⁸

Even the most patriotic of the patriotic, the French, appear not to be immune from the rapidly advancing tide of multiculturalism. In 2009 the French Prime Minister Nicholas Sarkozy launched a national debate on immigration known as the 'great debate on national identity'. The debate created a hostile stream of anti-immigrant rhetoric and was subsequently quietly shelved by the Elysee Palace. It was claimed during the debate that immigration threatened to destroy French identity and the French way of life. Sarkozy was quoted during the debate as saying 'that he considered himself to be completely French, as French as my own bread.' But it seems that Sarkozy's vehement patriotism appears to have caused him some embarrassment. The 2010 winner of the best baguette de tradition (traditional baguette) was won by an immigrant from Senegal. Djibril Badian moved to France when he was six years old and he beat 162 rivals for the coveted prize and in addition to pocketing 4000 Euros he will also supply bread to

the Sarkozy official residence for 12 months.

Our western cities are becoming more culturally homogenised by the day. We are beginning to enjoy having the choices that come with multiculturalism and we are less likely to condone racism amongst our peers. It's no longer acceptable for people to criticise Asian drivers and then pick up Chinese or Thai for dinner on the way home. The tourist who visits New York and returns home to tell what an amazing city it is can no longer oppose their country taking in a boat load of Afghan refugees.

We are living in a state of flux that requires an ability to learn in order to be able to guarantee day-to-day functioning. As I have outlined this is due to a dramatic shift in the wealth of the citizens of countries considered by many only a few decades ago to be poor and third world. Although it is suggested that India has around one million millionaires, Forbes magazine puts the actual total of people who have at least one million dollars in financial assets at 123,000.²⁹ This takes into account a 22.7% jump since 2007. China's millionaire population grew 20.3% to 415,000 and Russia's millionaires now number 136,000, a 14.4% jump from the previous year (2007). America still has the largest amount of millionaires at around 3 million but the population of the elite group grew by only 3.7%. The title of the Forbes article is 'A Millionaire Boom In The East' and it appears to be exactly what is happening. It is safe to say that along with wealth come options and it appears that one of the options taken by the wealthy is education. Students whose middle class parents can now afford to send them to study are swamping universities in India with applications. It's become a cutthroat competition reports the New York Times³⁰. Kapil Sibal, the government minister overseeing education says India may not be able to cope with future demand for tertiary education. India's premiere science institution, the Indian Institutes of Technology, I.I.T. allowed 320,000 students to take the entrance exam for its available

8000 vacancies.³¹ Around twenty million students are enrolled in higher education in India and it appears that the numbers are similar for China where students are also struggling to be accepted into universities.

An obvious solution to the problem of not getting into a university in one's own country is to apply to attend a university in another country. New Zealand and Australia have seen enrolments from foreign students, especially those from India and Saudi Arabia rise significantly during the past several years. In 2008 India had just over 6000 students studying in New Zealand and Saudi Arabia sent just 4000. China's student population declined to around 22,000 from 56,000 in 2003, while South Korea remained relative stable at around 18,000. The total international student population in 2008 was just under 90,000 and it added an extra 2.3 billion dollars to the New Zealand economy and created 32,000 jobs.³² An obvious consequence of moving to another country to study is the possibility of making that country one's home. Should that happen then the likelihood of other family members travelling to either live or visit brings money and cultural diversity into that country. Should the students return to the homeland then multiculturalism will continue on with a new batch of students and immigrants but it must be realised that the idea the world is accessible by a specific group of people for whom for it was until recently not accessible will have resounding consequences. Access to a world outside their own country has told them that it is not necessary to remain in one place for the rest of one's life. Living in a different country amongst a foreign culture where a different language is spoken is not difficult. The barriers that once defined East and West have been broken down as the world has become more accessible.

A generational shift in how we live our lives may have something to do with this negation of fear of immersing oneself in a different country's culture. Those born from

1945 to 1958 – the infamous baby-boomer generation tended to stay in one job for the 45 years of their working careers. For their children, Generation X, it is not uncommon to have an average of ten different jobs during that time as well as numerous holidays abroad. Unlike their parents Gen X wait longer to have children, possibly due to the high amount of broken homes they were brought up in or were witness to. In the eyes of the baby boomers, Generation Y takes the anti-authority attitude, the scepticism and the indifference about their careers of Gen X to a new level. Generation Y appear to be directionless and cynical and without allegiance to any axiom of worth. But these are the students that are travelling abroad to undertake their university degrees in foreign countries. Generally they are street smart and intuitive and set out to enjoy as much of their adopted country as possible. They are aware that education is what is going to get them ahead in life, not an allegiance to a company that they know will offer them no security should trouble loom on the financial horizon.

Even though they are from the East they actually see themselves as being Westerners. If renowned Palestinian-American literary theorist and political activist Edward Said were still alive he would no doubt condone the self-rebranding of citizens from the East. In his widely acclaimed book Orientalism³³ Said claims that the term ‘Orient’ is and has been wrongly used by the West as a blanket term to refer to the East. He argues that use of the word Orient suggests a predetermined idea of romanticism and at the same time suspicion. One Thousand and One Nights³⁴ and Agatha Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express³⁵ suggests a place of mysticism and intrigue while the imperialist political structure of the past Persian and Ottoman empires created a blanket suspicion of the entire region. Said argues that the vastly differing cultures that reside in that region warrant recognition of difference instead of being blanketed under a titular heading. His argument suggests that the misunderstanding of the West of what

happens in the East is because of an ignorance that finds its impetus in the ‘us and them’ syndrome. The complex and often tumultuous political structure of the East is a complete contrast to the mostly Christian Anglo-Saxon culture of the West. Said attempts to redirect a train of thought that has for centuries mis-labelled and misunderstood an entire region of the world, quite possibly at the expense of many lives.

9-11 may indeed be an example of where the misrepresentation and the misunderstanding of cultures can have catastrophic consequences. Conspiracy theories aside, it seems that America may have overestimated its ability to protect itself from those who intention it was to cause harm. Was it because the United States still viewed their foes in the East as soldiers who fought with ‘sticks and stones’ and thus completely unable to plan and execute an attack of such complexity? Since 9-11, and as suggested in my novel, *The Fashionable Muslim*, Muslims may be enjoying a newfound understanding and respect because the world has been unwittingly educated about Islam. It cannot be denied that initial reaction to Islam and Muslims was fear-based and was centred upon what Muslim fundamentalists were capable of, but I would argue however, that since 9-11 the initial suspicion and fear has been diluted into a global recognition that not all Muslims are terrorists.

I think Edward Said would agree that as tragic as it was, 9-11 will be looked upon by many in the future as a landmark point of history where the East and the West began to understand the complexities of each others existence with mutual respect. It may however be a little while away yet as a recent article titled ‘The date all US Muslims dread’ suggests that even 8 years later many American Muslims still struggle through the anniversary of the attacks.³⁶ Feelings for Muslims range from a sick feeling in the stomach to wearing a red white and blue flag pin. ‘There’s a kind of anxiety... [and] I force myself to go out.’ says Sarah Sayeed who came to the US from India when she

was eight years old. However, a recent poll attests to the possibility that suspicion of Muslims as terrorists may indeed be a foregone conclusion. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that 38% of Americans believe Islam is more likely than other faiths to encourage violence. This number is down from 45% two years earlier.³⁷

It must be concluded then from the examples that I have provided that our world is undergoing a massive and dramatic shift within its cultural and financial axioms. But we should remain optimistic. We are probably not going to descend into the dystopic city of the science fiction film and we are probably not going to be all forced to convert to a religion or a culture against our will. We are more likely to incorporate and grow with change and barely notice that we are doing so. Loretta Napoleoni suggests that the populations of India and China will soon begin to consume the goods produced by their own countries and they will no longer be reliant on the West as their main export market. This will spur a revival of smaller manufacturing companies in the West and in turn create a market force whereby local industry is the main beneficiary.³⁸ Western economies will once again blossom and the global market will enjoy a more founded and equal structure. Napoleoni calls herself an optimist and I think that she has good reason to be. The homogenisation of cultures is an exciting possibility and one that will create a more harmonious and better understood multicultural environment.

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- ¹² *ibid*: 267
- ¹³ *ibid*: *Economic Tribalism*, pp 250. The modern Islamic gold dinar, sometimes referred as Islamic dinar or Gold dinar, is a bullion gold coin made from 4.25 grams of 22-carat gold. It is a recent revival of the historical gold dinar which was the standard of currency exchange for 13 centuries until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. The US dollar has been the international standard for currency exchange since 1971.
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