

Eric G. Loo and Mustafa K. Anuar, *Journalism in Good Faith: Issues and Practices in Religion Reporting*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2010. 222 pp. ISBN 978-967-3036-68-7.

In this book, Eric G. Loo and Mustafa K. Anuar, in their own words, aim to show that while reactive media texts and visceral imageries make for accessible reading, they effectively divide communities during times of tension (6). The period of tension the authors refer to in this book is the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. The scenes of the burning Twin Towers and their ultimate collapse have remained scorched in the minds of millions of people in the US and around the world. The loss of more than three thousand lives in New York, Washington and in rural Pennsylvania where the third hijacked plane, United Flight 93 crashed, have remained as a testimony to many Americans of the hatred of their way of life by a small group of militant hijackers of Muslim background. The painful memories of 9/11 were revisited in the US, in September 2010, in circumstances unparalleled in the recent history of the country.

The sombre way that 9/11 used to be remembered in the US in the past was broken this time. Instead of calls for better understanding of Islam and Muslims, one could hear the loud distinct voices of hatred against Islam and Muslims. For the first time, demonstrations were held in Manhattan, both opposing and supporting the setting up of an Islamic Centre, eight blocks away from the place where once the World Trade Centre stood. Tensions arose as Reverend Terry Jones, the leader of a small Evangelical church in Gainesville, Florida, threatened to observe September 11 as “Quran Burning Day.” Muslims all over the world were outraged at this suggestion. For the first time, there were demonstrations in small town America against the setting up of mosques. Alarmed at the possible backlash by Muslims, General Petraeus, Commander of the NATO and American forces in Afghanistan, warned that if Jones went ahead with his plans, it could threaten the lives of American soldiers in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

According to Eric and Mustafa, “journalists can play a constructive role in helping to restore and maintain constructive dialogue by tempering their reactive reporting with a more contextual treatment and more educated assessment of issues that affect members of different faiths” (6). However, the behaviour of sections of the American media covering the issues surrounding the construction of the Islamic Centre and Reverend Terry Jones remain questionable, and therefore, disappointing. Sections of politicians in America, like elsewhere in the world, thrive in controversies. It seems that both

Democratic and Republican party politicians used the media to achieve their narrow political goals. Take for example the case of a female Republican Congressional candidate from a North Carolina constituency. On a popular CNN news show, the candidate kept calling Muslims as threats to the US, as they were terrorists. When asked why she was saying such things, she confidently responded by stating that her constituency felt that way and she was simply representing their views. The well-known CNN anchor never asked her whether it was not the responsibility of a leader to correct the views of the constituency if they were wrong. But to be fair to the CNN anchor, he did say that he had never met such a bigoted politician in his professional life.

It was in November 2009, that *The New York Times*, in a front-page news item, reported the decision to construct the Islamic Centre in lower Manhattan. No one has ever explained why it took so much time to come to the fore and become so much controversial. Instead of explaining the reasons, most of the media in America were busy reporting the construction of a “mosque” on ground-zero, which simply was not true. It took the BBC and CNN sometime to correct this. The Islamic Centre is eight blocks from the ground zero, and it plans to have a library and a prayer room. It needs to be pointed out that the World Trade Centre had a prayer room for the Muslims and the Pentagon’s multi-faith prayer room is used by Muslims. No one ever objected to this.

Reverend Terry Jones, the leader of Dove World Outreach Centre in Gainesville, Florida, a small congregation of about forty people, suddenly became the focus of the world – thanks to a great extent to the intense media attention! His every move, nearly every word was broadcast giving him a celebrity status. Majority of the American media seemed to be more interested in his right of free speech than pointing out that his planned act would add a crack in the fault line separating the US and Islam. But at the end of the day as Tad Stahnke, Director of Policy and Programmes at Human Rights First, pointed out, most of America’s leaders got this one right. Tad Stahnke rightly points out that major political, religious, and other leaders, including President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, General David Petraeus, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Florida Governor Charlie Crist, and many others presented a clear message and a unified front against the Qur’an burning. And so, finally, the idea was abandoned. The Mayor of Gainesville, Florida, declared September 11 as the “Interfaith Solidarity Day.”

As early as 1998, Paul Marshall commented that the apparent growth in religious influences is likely due to the fact that analysts are only now noticing what was always there. Given the contemporary complex international situation, the journalists, more than ever, cannot afford to miss out on religious influences on societies. Journalists are instrumental agents in initiating social change through facilitating and engaging in productive cross-cultural and inter-faith

dialogue within the community (8). In order to help journalists, and ordinary citizens to widen their understandings of world's religions, Eric and Mustafa provide similarities (58-60) and differences (60-69) between Islam and Christianity. The authors also provide interviews with Japanese, Indonesian and Malaysian journalists about their difficulties in reporting on religion.

Books such as the one under review should have an index for convenience. However, Eric and Mustafa did not include an index in this edition of their book. It is hoped an index would be added in the second edition of the book.

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Works Cited

Marshall, Paul. "Religion and Global Affairs: Disregarding Religion." *S AIS Review* 18.2 (1998): 13-18.