

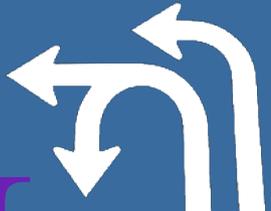
وَتِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا
بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

And this is the paradise you have been made to
inherit because of your deeds which you used to
do.

Al Qu'ran [43:72]

making

ChANGe



happen

By Syed Haider

iTHINK

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks to assert the centrality of social activism as a necessary and important mode of activity by which changes in society and our own selves is engendered. It begins by laying a religious foundation for social activism drawing on the Qu'ran and Ahadith to posit that theologically, social activism is an Islamic obligation that is part of faith. By locating the significance of social activism in religion, the author suggests one can abstract a spiritual solace for when one may experience moments of despair as a result of drawbacks.

The paper then moves more firmly into a practical and non-metaphysical realm, looking to analyse the more concrete mechanics of social change. It asks questions like: how do changes happen? Who are the agents in making change happen? What are the sites from where social changes begin? What tools are available to orchestrate social change? In the final section of the paper the author takes stock of the previous section and suggests how Muslims may/may not appropriate the information therein presented for a Muslim context. The conclusion then identifies certain important steps to build an agenda for action.

INTRODUCTION

I remember watching a documentary about the history and aesthetics of the Alhambra in present day Spain. The presenter stood and spoke to the camera about the arches and the general set-up of this remarkable building as pulling the eye upwards so as to instil in those who visit it the loftiness of God and the remembrance of the transcendent reality. She then posed a problem and said that in spite of this the Alhambra, being a building nonetheless, could not escape the materiality and sturdiness a solid structure involves. Yet, she said, one way was imagined to circumvent this problem and that was through the use of water. As she knelt down the camera followed her and focussed eventually on the water before her, into which she dipped her hand sending a gentle ripple through the reflection of that solid structure (see photo below).



I remember that documentary as I write this since one of the motives behind my work is to disrupt the seeming solidity of our social structures here in the West and much of the Westernising world. Outside of an Islamic metaphysics, everything is open to be deconstructed and to take what is helpful and disregard what is not – in a secular world after all, nothing is sacrosanct. Hence, this paper aims to inspire a conviction of changeability amongst its readers by transmitting a certain habit of perception, an important feature of which is the illusory solidity of the outside world. Of course for some, who are familiar with my writing, the word inspire may draw a chuckle since it traverses unreservedly the phlegmatic waters of theory so often as opposed to the pastures of a more emotive and gung ho style! Yet be that as it may, theory like our elders should not be mocked. A detached, unflinchingly detailed and analytical approach bears such fruit at times that it not only elucidates the path we wish to tread, but imbibes in us a confidence and authority over the possibilities of the future. Having said that, theory is rarely pristine and therefore is better imagined as a methodological practice rather than an already available guidebook. The theory presented in this paper therefore is up for refutation, rectification and a host of other manipulations, but the animating spirit behind it ought to remain the same and that is of analysing how we go about making positive, effective, and meaningful changes in society.

ISLAM AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

‘...every truth passes through three stages.
First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed.
Third, it is accepted as self-evident’.

Schopenhauer

Any one interested in *Da’wah* (missionary work) must be interested in social change. Indeed in many ways the two are interchangeable. *Da’wah* understood linguistically, simply means to call which, on entering Islamic parlance has come to mean calling to *Allah* and, by extension, Islam as a way of life. In so far as *Da’wah* is a verbal noun, it connotes action and, in so far as it is a call to Islam, it links Islam with actions. Understood in these terms *Da’wah* and social action, which is action that is socially transformative and, in the parlance of social active-*ism*, ethical¹, are linkable. Though this seems an arbitrary link (albeit one that is appreciable) I will attempt to illustrate that this is more than a simple attempt to find religious sanction for a “new” idea or sociology.

If one takes the compendium of the Prophet’s (saw) ahadith one notices a tripartite split between records of his sayings, his actions, and his tacit approvals². What is noteworthy is that of these three types of ahadith it is the ones recording his actions that are greater in number³. Actions then become an immensely important factor in Islam. Unlike some extreme spiritualists who maintain a division between action and belief, mainstream Islam places a great emphasis on human activity. In fact, so significant is “action” as a category that it sometimes influences the way faith is spoken about in Islam⁴. Many scholars – past and present - have written about the relationship between *imaan* and actions concluding that the former obligates the latter. What is more, one way to understand faith is as action. A famous hadith recorded in Bukhari reports that Abu Huraira narrated, ‘Allah’s apostle (saw) was asked, “What is the best deed?” to which He (saw) replied, “Belief in Allah and his apostle”’. Belief therefore is equated with action, for the questioner asked about action and was first told about belief. This makes more sense if we understand that in Islam the heart, (the organ identified closely with faith) is imagined as an “active” organ. This is taken from another hadith in which the prophet (saw) says that the heart is an

¹ I recognise that this is a problematic qualifier, but I am following the majority of studies on social change/activism/innovation which are guided implicitly by a belief that the subject of their study are actions that provide services to better the human condition. See Nick Wilkie et al, *Social Silicon Valleys*, (The Young Foundation: London, 2006). This tacit “spirit” will be looked at in the third section of this paper.

² Sometimes the Prophet (saw) remained silent on issues, which is taken as an approval regarding those issues, or when a narrator relates the such and such was carried out during the prophet’s life it is understood as part of his tacit approval. The rationale behind this is that if something was haram or otherwise displeasing the prophet was duty bound to make corrections etc. I am grateful to Owais Namazi for his clarification on this issue.

³ In *Usul-ul-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). However, it is the Prophet’s sayings which are given greater preference.

⁴ The separation of these terms – belief, faith, action, *iman* – here is merely presented as such for heuristic reasons. Lexically, let alone from the *Sharee’ah* viewpoint, *iman* is not synonymous with *tasdiq* (belief or faith). It is closer to the word *iqrar*, which embodies *tasdiq* as well as action (*inqiyad*) in the form of compliance and submissiveness. *Iman* therefore always and already encompasses both belief and action. In Islam, then, both have to exist at their minimal levels in the heart and upon the limbs for *iman* to exist. I separate these categories here only to draw attention to actions (and latterly, social actions) as a category in no way separated from, but as intimately related to the category of “faith” which has come to be seen (wrongly) as synonymous with *iman*. I am indebted to brother Farid for his clarity on this issue.

organ in the body which, if sound the body is sound, and if it is unsound then the body is unsound. It is from this premise that faith is understood as an “action” of the heart, comprising one third of *eeman*⁵. Actions therefore form an integral category of an Islamic praxis.

Of course an importance of action is still not the same as *social* actions, understood as endeavours geared to alter society and social structures. This is captured well in a statement made by Martin Luther King Jr. when he suggests that social activism is not ‘flinging a coin to a beggar’⁶. Instead, it is the kind of action that sees the need to restructure the edifices that produce beggars. From an Islamic perspective such a spirit of activism should not feel the least bit alien since, I argue, this type of notion is at the very heart of Islam. One only needs to read the *seerah* of the Prophet (saw) to understand that Islam came to transform society; one needs to merely turn to the earliest revelations wherein Allah the Most High is condemning female infanticide to believe that Islam has a social dimension which is undeniable. But is the job of social transformation for everyone or is it for a few? Is it an obligation – *fard kifa’ya*, to use technical terminology – which is lifted from everyone *if* some are performing it? While I want to state at the outset that I am not a religious scholar and therefore unable to provide definitive answers to such questions, it is my opinion that social activism (if conceived broadly enough) is an obligation on all. This is premised on two key notions. Firstly, if *Da’wah* is accepted as encompassing social activism then I follow the understanding that one should be involved in *Da’wah* even if they know only one *ayah*⁷. Here, for the purposes of my argument, I interpret “one *ayah*” as metaphorical to imply that one ought to be involved in *Da’wah* in even the simplest/smallest capacity.

What is more, from a rational standpoint social change is more likely if greater numbers actively support and partake (to the extent they can of course) in activism so as to move against the status quo. Like the provision for fighting⁸ which exempts only those who are injured or otherwise unable, it seems rationally inconsistent to limit social change to a few individuals, especially when what is needed in social change is the participation of many people. Of course this is not to say that all need to be involved to the same degree nor that there will not always be a small band that will rally the majority. What is being suggested here is that when calls are made the majority ought to respond in whatever way they can – either donating a one off amount to an Islamic school or becoming a patron of the school, or becoming a governor for the school: to take a simple example.

Such an example may lead one to wonder whether what is being said here isn’t a little obvious as well as being presented in an overly complicated way. A cursory look at Muslim TV channels will show the number of programmes dedicated to appeals; a survey of Islamic societies will highlight the numerous activities being undertaken; even mosques now are getting into the spirit of it and engaging the “community” with events etc. If all this is being done, and it can all be rationalised as constituting social activism what is all the fuss about?

I would address any such rebuttals in three ways. Firstly, though social activism is a broad enough concept that it can accommodate a host of present activities, it is important for all those involved in these disparate activities as being conscious of their participation *in* social activism. Though it may seem a moot point to some, a consciousness of being involved in social activism would help

⁵ *Eeman* (faith) is: action of the heart; testification of the tongue; and actions of the limbs.

⁶ Cited in, David Bornstein, *How to change the world*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p1

⁷ I am paraphrasing something the prophet (saw) said in his final sermon.

⁸ I’m thinking of verse 95 in *surah Al-Nisa*

the different individuals imagine themselves as part of a greater whole. Such an approach would build an affinity between groups and enliven the metaphor of the jigsaw⁹ while at the same time giving them a unitary purpose and identity: participants in social change. Secondly, and quite simply, if it was a case that present activities were so numerous and so well saturated by individuals all conscious of social activism as part of faith, there would not exist the dearth of man power organisations feel. My experience has shown that almost all organisations need volunteers and that efforts are being limited by a factor of low participation. Related to this is also the fact that were we conscious of our participation in something greater than the parts there would be more strategic thinking and collaborating. Thirdly, our condition as an Ummah is, in my mind, reflective of the shortcomings in our own selves. This shortcoming is multifaceted with a (significant) part no doubt down to practices contrary to our aqeedah. That notwithstanding, our condition is also partly down to our lack of social activity, which, because we fail to see as integral to our Islam, we neglect. Allah The Almighty says in 10:99,

'If only there had been a community that believed and profited by its belief as did the folk of Jonah.'

And in 8:53,

'That is because Allah never changeth the grace he hath bestowed on any people till they first change that which is in their hearts...'

Having suggested that faith necessitates actions and that these can be broadened and imagined as social actions, we can read these ayahs with such a lens and posit that the profit the people of Jonah (as) made was concrete and this worldly as well as any transcendental type. The grace that Allah hath bestowed on a people is conditioned on faith and if faith is both a belief in the spiritualist sense and "active" in the way that I am suggesting it is, than a lack in either aspect can be the cause of the withdrawal of Allah's grace.

Before I move on to explaining why it is necessary to locate social activism in a religious context let me push this conception of emaan home. In chapter seven verses 156 and 157 Allah speaks of those who qualify for His immense mercy and presents eight qualities of such people:

1. Those who ward off evil
2. Pay the poor due
3. Those who believe in the revelations
4. Those who follow the Messenger
5. Believe in the Messenger
6. Honour the Messenger
7. Help the Messenger
8. Follow the light (Qu'ran) that is sent down to the messenger

In such an important list (concerning the qualities necessary for those who wish to qualify for Allah's grace) it seems odd that there should be a quality that only those who were contemporaneous to Muhammed (saw) could accomplish, namely: helping the Messenger. Though that may

⁹ See, Syed Haider, The Intellectual Challenge of Da'wah and the Framework and Jigsaw as Metaphor, www.islam21c.com/research

appear the case, I want to suggest one imagines it as constituting anyone (regardless of time and place) who conveys the message (Islam) with which the Prophet (saw) was sent, encourages in others (through observing it themselves) the Prophet's (saw) practices (the sunnah) and, by extension, continues to act in the spirit of what the Prophet (saw) did. This last is an important extrapolation to ensure that social actions of all hues can be Islamic acts if imagined as such. For instance, the Prophet (saw) was known to visit the elderly, so if today one volunteers some of their time at a mental health hospital we can say that though it is not visiting the elderly, it is in keeping with the spirit of what the Prophet (saw) was doing.

I have tried to layout a case for brining closer the notion of social activism with our understanding of Islam as a totalising force¹⁰. In doing so, I have suggested that what is needed is more than simply a tolerance of, an appreciation for, or an encouragement towards social activism – what is needed is a significant re-imagining of what social activism is and how it is positioned viz. ee-man and Islam. Thus far then I have looked at social activism as an important feature of Islam and as something important for practicing brothers and sisters. In the final part of this first section, I want to change the focus a little and emphasise the importance of Islam *in* social activism.

The nature of social activism is that it is difficult. A world that is perfect and content does not require or produce spaces for social change. 'There is constant improvement', said the Victorian historian Lord Macauley, 'precisely because there is constant discontent'¹¹. Yet changes in their nature are immaterial before they come into being; they exist as ideas, desires, aspirations, and follow from a kind of obstinate conviction that things could be better. By contrast, what is identified as needing change is normally material, concrete, established, and in many cases, institutionalised. Thus social actions are actions that work against the grain and are – as a result – hotly resisted. What this means is that drawbacks, struggles, and disappointments are an intimate part of the experience of social activism: "burn out" is not just an abstract reality in this sphere of activity but a very real danger.

Islam in this light provides not only a wonderful rallying call to the masses to open their eyes or a marker of common identity; it provides a very valuable transcendental buffer against those moments when one's spirits are low owing to the obstacles one encounters. Of course this is premised entirely on faith and thus raises the importance of the need for those involved in social activism as keeping up practices that boost their *emaan*. This can involve anything from reading the Qu'ran to surrounding oneself with brothers and sisters who remind one another of verses like the following:

Lo! Allah wrongeth not even the weight of an ant [atom]; and if there be a good deed, He will double it and give (the doer) from His presence an immense reward.
[4:40]

In his word for word translation of the meaning of the Qu'ran, Mohar Ali writes that Allah keeps a record of the smallest of deeds and does not diminish it event by the weight of an atom. A good deed, no mater what its worldly result, is honoured by Allah through multiplying its merit. What this highlights then is that the merit of something should not be solely tied to its "success" (in this worldly terms). Rather, the emphasis for a Muslim social activist is as it was for the Prophet (saw):

¹⁰ By this I mean the understanding that Islam should touch all aspects of our lives.

¹¹ Cited in, Nick Wilkie *et al*, *Silicon Social Valleys*, (The Young Foundation: London, 2006), p9

“He whom Allah leaveth to go astray, thou (O Muhammed) wilt not find a way for them” [4: 143].

In fact such was the reassurance Allah gave to all the Prophets for they were not assigned the job of change but rather of conveying a message and working *towards* change. This “towards” carries an important detail of aqeedah which is that we must all “tie our camels first” and then put our trust in Allah as the REAL cause of change. Such a conviction lessens the overpowering presence of efficacy as a marker of success.

I am conscious that taken to another extreme such a point seems to advocate an ethos of being socially active for the sake of it, or even ends up sanctioning a type of fatalism! Neither in my eyes are logical outcomes. To be socially active, as I claimed earlier, is part of practicing Islam so one engages in it regardless of outcome. At the same time one follows the prophets as social activists *par excellence* and none show fatalism; indeed the story of Jonah (as) is entirely instructive in this regard. What is more, the Qu’ran itself provides us an answer to such a sophistic conundrum. In chapter six verse 65, Allah the Most High reassures those who ward off evil that they are not accountable for the evil of others, but in His wisdom He also adds that ‘[a] reminder (must be given them [those involved in evil]) that haply they (too) may ward off (evil).’ So while we may not be accountable for the evil of others, or even ensuring that changes come¹², we may be accountable for failing to act.

Linking Islam to social activism in my mind is essential. Such an outlook will provide greater impetus to the need to bring about social changes; it will broaden the conception of social activism and link everyone into a greater whole; this in turn will bring to the fore the need for greater collaboration and strategising. It will also recharge our connection with the greater reality and the metaphysics of Islam, while making available the metaphysical/spiritual reality as a solacing reminder along the arduous path of social activism.

In the next section I will move away from the metaphysical to the more concrete realities involved in the mechanics of change.

¹² This of course may not apply to an Islamic state and so the finer details of enjoining the good and forbidding evil is something that is important that needs to be factored into a more careful deliberation on this issue. The general gist, however, is sufficient for my purposes here.

THINKING ABOUT CHANGE

‘This is not the way things are supposed to be;
they might be this way right not,
but they are not supposed to be,
and they will not always be.’

Angela Davis

One of the paradoxes that immediately faces anyone interested in studying the dynamics of social change is that while it is something that is constantly occurring, little has been written on how it occurs. Part of the reason for this is because it is a complex process involving several different factors that interact to different degrees and in changing proportions over time. Taken another way, social change is merely a way of describing innumerable changes all of which have their own particular dynamics, hence, the wisdom holds, the study can only ever be of the individual phenomenon and not of the conglomerate term “social change”. A third approach involves identifying and describing historical changes, with a view to building a picture of how different the past was and how we “arrived” at the present. What is missing from all such accounts is a detailed look at how futures are imagined and how they are “reached”. It is this ambition that is the concern of this paper. In this chapter I explore how social changes begin; the different agents involved; the different sites from which they can occur; and lastly, the different apparatuses (newspapers, public lectures, websites, protests) available to initiate, sustain, and achieve social change. Though in doing this I will be drawing on different historical and contemporary examples, it is my conviction that we can speak about social change without reducing the topic to a catalogue of different and internally “unique” phenomenon. I maintain that all social changes share certain features that can be abstracted from particular examples to build a general methodology of change.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In order to begin to change things it is first important to think of “things” as changeable. Silly as this may sound it is important for two reasons. Firstly, a critique borne of grousing is a critique that is satiated by the mere act of critiquing. In such a case, the critique does not present any possible solutions because the situation that is critiqued is seen as so intractable that it is, at least in the imagination, rendered unchangeable. Secondly, in order for change to occur other people need to be brought on board, and in order for this to occur everyone must view the potential obstacles as surmountable, and the situation being confronted as malleable.

What this highlights is that change must first begin in consciousness. Consciousness is also the site wherein motivation is produced and inspirations stirred. Often, a desire to be involved in or to begin some kind of social activity or movement centres on discontent. Anger or unease about current realities is a beginning point for motivating people to want to change their circumstances. At other times it is a realisation that things could be better. These two approaches can be employed individually or together, for instance, if one wishes to rally support for the abolition of Guantanamo Bay, highlighting what it represents may rouse anger or unease about it in others; if a local service is not available, highlighting its absence can rally support to ensure its availability; equally, anger about the representation of Muslims in the media may lead some to realise that there are a number of “gaps” which need “filling”, from Muslim writers to various

types of Muslim media. Either way, it is consciousness where the journey toward change begins, and it begins by imagining a world that is transformable.

We must, then, foster a critical imagination both in ourselves and in others. It is important to rise above the present status quo and to “imagine” an alternative reality. I find Professor Angela Davis’ statement made in a lecture delivered at UC Davis in 2006 particularly instructive in this context:

And so...that legal form of segregation has been disestablished. And it wasn’t dis-established because presidents, or legislators, or judges one day had epiphanies about the injustices and immoralities of racial segregation, it was disestablished because ordinary people became collectively aware of themselves as potential agents of social change; as holding within their collective hand the power to create a new world. And segregation was disestablished because ordinary people learned how to adopt a critical stance in the way they perceived their relationship to reality.¹³

Professor Davis highlights that the imagination is an important feature of social change. She also points to the collective nature of social change, something I will come back to in the next part of this chapter. For now, I want to emphasise the importance of taking the critical impulse seriously.

Understanding this impulse opens up a host of possibilities regarding the type of work that needs to occur in activities or movements working for social change. Imaginative mediums like photographs, plays, poems, novels, art, and documentaries become more than mere entertainment, they can be utilised to enliven the imaginations of others and transmit habits of perception important in critically positioning oneself to reality. What Muslims so often dismiss may actually be an important primer in making change happen. Our dismissal of these modes of knowledge production and transmission shows how lightly we take the importance of nurturing a critical imagination.

Of course it is not enough to merely maintain a critical imagination, or to “imagine” an alternative reality without also imagining *how* we may actualise it. In order to do this we must be ready to present an alternative to the present status quo, and so the significance of ideas becomes crucial to social change. If consciousness is seen as the starting point on the journey to social change, then ideas are the next stop. It is with this as our next point of discussion that we move into exploring who is involved in social change.

RESTLESS PEOPLE

When dealing with the question of who “does” social change, Bornstein is clear that it is individuals. ‘Social change’, he says, ‘frequently begins with a *single* entrepreneurial author: *one* obsessive individual who sees a problem and envisions a new solution’ (my emphasis)¹⁴. He is also dismissive of the role of ideas seeing them as currency for the realm of theory where one tends to study more how ideas ‘move people than how people move ideas’¹⁵. Quoting Victor Hugo’s famous adage: “There is one thing stronger than all the armies of the world, and that is an idea whose time has come”, he undercuts its profundity by saying that the ‘problem with

¹³ Angela Davis, How does change happen? www.khayal.sinfo/multimedia

¹⁴ David Bornstein, How to change the world, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p3

¹⁵ Ibid, p93

this statement is that it gives *too much* to ideas' (my emphasis)¹⁶. As inspirational and forceful as Bornstein's arguments are, his emphasis on the notion of an entirely autonomous individual is a little too simple. Though he recognises that such a premise focused entirely on the boldness and spirit of individuals does not lend itself to strategising, his suggested approach is to build a 'framework of social and economic supports to multiply the number and effectiveness of the worlds social entrepreneurs'¹⁷.

I find even this suggestion however too simplistic since it rests on a notion of entrepreneurs as always and already present, who need to merely be linked together and supported. Though the impulse is in itself one that I support, I do not see this as a good enough premise from which to begin imagining how social changes *actually* happen. In order to do a more thorough job I fall back on – pace Bornstein – the mental gymnastics involved in the realm of theory, and, moreover, to ideas as the base.

In my approach I maintain individuals as the necessary agents for the actualisation of change, but also hold true the centrality of ideas as catalysts that drive the actions of individual agents. Furthermore, I add a third and necessary feature for actualising social change and that is the *collectivity*. The collectivity is a term I use to describe the network of relations between a number of individuals and groups who all, to varying degrees, are involved in shaping the path toward social change. Sometimes parts of this network are obvious and those involved in the network are conscious of one another and at times even collaborate to initiate actions contributive to changes. At other times the relations are more vague and incidental. Nonetheless, the collectivity is an important feature to understand social change as something that is not the story of charismatic individuals alone. It may be the case that charismatic individuals – inspired by an idea – enthuse others and thus activate networks. But it is probably just as true to say that charismatic leaders are inspired by ideas borne in other contexts known through a network of relations, which he or she then develops and enthuses others with, thus enlivening a further network of relations.

Complicated though this may sound it is necessary. Only by understanding social change in this tripartite way can we identify the three types of "agents" involved. *Individuals; ideas* (of viable alternatives to what is opposed); *the collectivity* (that informs or shapes the first two). Bornstein himself in fact provides a good example of this. Drawing on the work of Thomas J. Moore he relates how Mary Lasker, 'a relatively unknown American woman'¹⁸ changed American attitude towards blood pressure, which in the 1970's was rarely considered a health risk. The story begins in 1966 when a researcher called Edward Freis discovered that a drug he was testing 'offered significant protection against moderate or severe hypertension'¹⁹. He published his findings in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* but had to wait four years and complete a second phase of research before he saw any recognition in the public sphere, and even then it was, as Bornstein puts it, afforded only one sentence on Walter Cronkite's television news programme. This small almost insignificant recognition however made an impact on Mary Lasker who viewed the programme.

Though Lasker wasn't a doctor she was, according to Dr Jonas Salk inventor of the first safe vac-

¹⁶ Ibid, p93

¹⁷ Ibid, p3

¹⁸ Ibid, p96

¹⁹ Ibid, p96-97

cine for polio, a 'matchmaker between science and society'²⁰. In his book *Who Lives Longer and Why*, Moore describes her as a 'wealthy, stylish, energetic woman' who today is credited with having been the 'driving force' behind the National Institutes of Health and, 'for five decades, the leading proponent for increased government funding for biomedical research in the United States'²¹.

Lasker, then, is clearly crucial in driving the changes that would see America's attitude toward blood pressure transform within a few years. However, to concentrate on her alone, as Bornstein would have us do, would halt prematurely the analyses of social changes and present a skewed methodology. Instead, by locating each of the triadic "agents" delineated above we can begin to appreciate a more accurate and nuanced picture. Freis provided an idea which was transmitted by a network of relations (*the collectivity*) – which may include amongst others the researchers at Cronkite's news programme – to eventually reach Lasker, who picked up on it and moved to do something about it by activating another collectivity. Hence neither an idea nor the extraordinary motivation of the individual is enough; a collectivity is also crucial. It is also true that ideas that materialise are never pure in their origins. Several different agents shape an idea before it eventually becomes what the world sees actualised. Again, crucial though he or she may be, the individual entrepreneur would have to be cast as an ingredient in social change. What this reveals is important. Together with a critical imagination one needs to promote the notion of *collective intervention*. What this means is that everyone becomes potentially involved in social changes. We not only need committed and strong-minded entrepreneurs, we need artists, academics, managers, filmmakers, and volunteers. Some will pioneer ideas, some will pick up ideas and move them forward, and others will assist in transmitting and refining the idea and its practical implementation further. All in all, people will begin to "see" themselves as potential agents of change.

Mary Lasker's story also highlights another really important detail. While ideas are the raw materials of social change, they do need popularisers in order to make a fuller impact. This is especially true in the Muslim case where the type of social change we often have in mind is one of changing Muslims' self-perception as well their perception in society. Take for example the theoretical significance of narrative and narrativity for self-perception²², or even well thought out answers to present predicaments/"attacks" by Muslim think tanks; both need a *middle people* who can absorb the ideas and convey them to different strata of the Muslim population. I will address the importance of Islamic Societies and Universities as invaluable sites for precisely this purpose in the next section, but before that I want to draw on a historic case to drive home the importance of these *middle people*.

In his book, *Darwin's Worms*, Adam Phillips suggests that whether we know it or not, today we all speak versions of Darwin's language using his ideas as metaphors and imagery²³. Such an observation ought to make one wonder how it is that something as removed from everyday life as *Origin of Species*, Darwin's seminal work, and a text so phlegmatic in its style caught the public imagination. Of course, the history of Darwinism is not a simple one of immediate acceptance; there was considerable resistance to his theory from both ecclesiastical and scientific circles. Nonetheless, evolution by natural selection has become the new orthodoxy as Phillips notes and

²⁰ Quoted in, *ibid*, p97.

²¹ *Ibid*, p97.

²² See, Syed Haider, *The Place of Narrative*, www.islam21c.com.

²³ Adam Phillips, *Darwin's Worms*, (Faber and Faber: London, 1999).

so, with its history and its academic register in mind, we ought to ponder over how an idea borne and developed by someone stationed in the higher echelons of society transpired downwards. This question becomes even more pertinent when we find out that Darwin himself was a reluctant public speaker.

To answer this one must look for the collectivity through which the idea of evolution by natural selection was promulgated. By approaching the issue in this way we begin to piece together the different individuals involved in taking the idea from Darwin to the lay population. Social change in such a case then becomes not merely a matter of chance or individual idiosyncrasies but about networks and, as stated earlier, *collective intervention*.

Together with Thomas Henry Huxley – “Darwin’s bulldog” – there were a number of other individuals who were galvanised by Darwinism. This collectivity made great strides to move the idea of evolution by natural selection from the margins to the mainstream. One network within this collectivity was of a group of people who called themselves the Agnostics. This sector of society was largely of lower middle-class, borne of the industrial boom, struggling against an older Church bound aristocracy, and thus firmly committed to gradual social change. Though Darwin relied on the mechanistic and law bound outlook induced by Newtonian science, he introduced a vision of flux into nature which together with redundancy in godhead meant that things were not only not divinely ordained, they were not permanent either. This is undoubtedly making out more of evolutionary theory than Darwin lay down in the pages of *Origins*, but it is also testament to the incredible malleability of his theory and, as Beer notes, the freedom it afforded to ‘diverse dispositions of its all-encompassing form’²⁴.

Charles Albert Watts, son of a prominent English Secularist, together with William Stewart Ross led a vivacious campaign of inundating the reading public with material on agnosticism and evolution so that the two began to be seen as complimentary and connected. This did much to present evolution as an entirely separate way of understanding the world and its history, yet together with agnosticism, it was a complex epistemological proposition requiring a familiarity with scientific and philosophical concepts and this is where the likes of Watts and Ross stepped in. They ‘did not claim to be original thinkers; they were only gifted popularizers, able to give simple, clear and vivid accounts of complex scientific and philosophic theories. Furthermore,’ Bernard Lightman states ‘they were synthesizers of the first magnitude. They desired to demonstrate that modern science could present an integrated and rational world view, encompassing every realm of thought’²⁵.

Another aspect of this collectivity is highlighted by Martin Rudwick’s investigation into the visual representation of the deep (pre-historic) past in the early nineteenth century. His findings suggest that a prefigured depiction of prehistoric landscape helped give the theory of evolution a ‘picturability’²⁶ necessary in its popular conceivability. What this intimates is that Darwinism’s ability to establish itself as a new paradigm was influenced and assisted by an imaginative assimilation of its principals and assumptions as much as by its factual and scientific basis. This

²⁴ Beer, Gillian, *Darwin’s Plots*, (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), p16.

²⁵ Bernard Lightman, “Late-Victorian Popularizers” in, *History, Evolution, and Humanity*, ed by James R. Moore, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p292.

²⁶ Martin Rudwick, “Encounters with Adam, or at least the hyenas: Nineteenth-Century visual representations of the deep past” in, *History, Evolution, and Humanity*, ed by James R. Moore, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p232.

leads me to identify another key network within the collectivity that helped make Darwinism a socially transformative idea.

Realist novels, which became popular in the nineteenth century, were in keeping with a more modern scientific understanding of things. Their use of third person narration was infused with a detachment different to the narrations available only a century earlier. The voice in a novel like *Tom Jones* for example is a deeply personalised one and 'at its most solemn is not that of a scientist but of a moralist.'²⁷ Realism aspired to depicting things as they were, it was the equivalent in literary terms to what the term "science" was in the scientific world – a mode of investigation that looked to dissect and reveal the inner workings of phenomena without recourse to anything beyond its pale. So unlike the metaphysical novel where chance is happily employed as a plot resolving source implying a grander providential plan, the realist novel struggles with chance more as a disparity in results (be it beneficial) than a purposeful mechanism.

In fact, in a realist novel such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the detached observing narrator, akin to his non-fictional counterpart the scientist, draws the spirit of science to the very pages of the novel. 'The authority of science and its extension from natural phenomena to human was both a condition of Darwin's enterprise, and its consequence' while his patient and plodding style, as seen in the extreme detail of the *Origins*, fostered the illusion 'that the power of science, and hence its authority, lay in its self-denying surrender to observed fact'²⁸. This authoritative significance within the act of observing – which is the 'power [that] opens up the fact and subdues it into knowledge'²⁹ – was the primary source of material for a nineteenth century realist narrative, such that even when it appears to draw attention to discrepancies and tensions within that illusion, it does so by the introduction of unreliable observations and observers. All in all then, novels and novelists like Eliot and Hardy, both supporters of evolutionary theory, helped normalise the new world view that lay in Darwinism.

Hence, it is only in the coming together of Darwin, his idea, and the collectivity that we can begin to chart more clearly *how* a social change occurs. What is also done away with in this approach is the need to quantify or specify the significance of each triadic component: it is together and not alone that social changes occur.

Having established then "who does social change" my next concern is to identify some of the sites from where social changes happen. Once I have explored that aspect I will move to look at the different "tools" involved in making change happen.

SITES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

When I speak about sites for social change what I am not thinking about is someone's basement where an idea was first thought up and then expanded from. Nor am I talking in abstract terms about the sites wherein changes occur like schools/colleges/universities (Education), or hospitals/local hospices (Health). Instead what I mean by sites is spaces that, because of certain features, lend themselves to being transformed into bases from which to begin socially innovative action/movements.

The features that make a space potentially transformable in this way include things like a place

²⁷ Levine, George, *Darwin and the Novelists*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p23.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp14-15.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p15.

that naturally brings a number of people together; is historically identified with social changes; is imbued with a spirit of ideational exploration; is involved in providing services; is located in “communities”. Religious sites like Mosques and Churches are a good example of this, however, the space I want to concentrate on in this section is the University. There are several reasons for this including the historically central role Universities have played in social change, though perhaps most because they are currently under used. Part of this is because we have not theorised thoroughly enough the place of the University in social change.

In their manifesto for social innovation, The Young Foundation pays little attention to the University as a significant site for social change. What is more, they subsume the University within the narrower focus of academia. While academia is an arena wherein new ideas are borne and debated, academia itself is not my focus. Instead, my interest in the University is more to do with the fact that it is a site wherein there is a strong concentration of young individuals, as well as being a place where individuals engage with ideas. This can be as part of their course or then with extra-curricular activities. All in all, students are trained to be able to deal with difficult ideas and concepts and as such are the ideal candidates to transmit ideas borne in the “higher” echelons of society or in specialised areas and, through joining or beginning social activism, can translate those ideas into concrete realities. What this requires is to first shape the thinking of students at Universities.

Historically, Universities have been a hub of social activism. This was particularly true in the 1960's/70's when they were often the heart of countercultural activities. During the 60's in America, the Students for a Democratic Society's (SDS) manifesto implored the student body to 'consciously build a base (from the college campus) for their assault on the loci of power'³⁰. Such a call was far from novel during this time. In the intellectual sphere thinkers like Foucault and Derrida were challenging the very foundations of knowledge and “epistemic power”, and as such were not only academics or intellectuals but also, according to Arthur Marwick author of a detailed study of the sixties, cult figures. Their radical approaches to knowledge and academia transpired on the streets in the form of radicalised students, empowered by the new ideas and calling for the dismantling of power structures as different as American imperialism (Vietnam) and laws against abortion. Leiken recounts a wonderful circulatory relationship between students and teachers when he himself was teaching at Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

“Politicised” teachers often “politicised” students who in turn “politicised” other teachers [Leiken counts himself amongst this group] who then joined other teachers in preparing educational programs to “politicise” *other* students.³¹

The University therefore became a ‘base for organising forces’ just as Ludwig Marcuse had urged in an address he made to ‘4,000 enthusiastic students’³² in 1965. The space of the University became so charged precisely because it had an energetic middle people who not only took ideas but also transformed them into practicable actions. When Parisian students ‘took to the streets [in May 1968] to join factory workers in a massive demonstration that brought down the De Gaulle government’³³ behind it lay a complex mixture of charismatic individuals, a network of

³⁰ Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, 1962, <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>

³¹ Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), p27.

³² Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p293.

³³ John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992), p344.

ideas and a collectivity. The University therefore did not just remain an institution of cultural transmission but became the matrix for social activism.

In America it was students who were members of SDS that fuelled much of the protest that took place on the Berkeley campus. As Diggins explains, 'many of its early members had been active in campus politics in Michigan, Oberlin, Swarthmore, and elsewhere. Some had taken part in civil rights demonstrations in the south; others had protested at the House of Un-American Activities Committee; a few had walked the picket lines in support of Detroit's auto workers.'³⁴ Al Haber, SDS's founder, urged the students in one of his speeches to 'forsake the pessimism and cynicism born of the atomic age and commit themselves to a politics of clear thinking and *direct action* (my emphasis)³⁵, an idea expressed by Marcuse and adopted from Marx's recently discovered 1844 manuscripts. From it Marcuse showed how 'human praxis can free man from all ontological and historical determinants by re-conceiving him as reflexively self-creative and capable of rising to consciousness through action'³⁶. Foucault also echoed this in his analysis of "revolt" where he saw the 'impulse by which a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people says, "I will no longer obey"...is [an escape] from history, and its long chain of reason'³⁷. The University in this case not only brought together students and intellectuals but was imagined as the nexus from which ideas moved outwards. It was the very fabric of the University that lent itself to this as well as committing students and professors to an ethos of using knowledge in a transformative way.

In looking at the University in this way we begin to see the triadic "agents" in practice and locatable in real time and space. One may wish to look at the Mosque or Church or even a Community centre in these terms and thus appreciate that certain established places lend themselves to initiating social changes. Even where a site does not immediately strike one as such, it may be transformed if some of the features stated at the outset are brought out or established there.

In light of this highly charged history, today's campuses and their lukewarm atmospheres indicate a space that is underused. Islamic Societies specifically need to learn and draw inspiration from such histories. They need to transform their own thinking and then begin a process of affecting the consciousness of others. When this is done they need to enliven all sorts of collectivities so as to channel their student bodies into voluntary organisations through which ideas may be spread and more individuals affected. Those smitten by the love of social activism as presented to them through the University experience may then become pioneering entrepreneurs and go on to begin their own little endeavours. This patchwork approach could then grow to become a formidable collectivity to be drawn on and activated at given moments³⁸.

In the final section of this chapter I move to look at the different tools available to orchestrate social changes. Following that I move to take stock of all the details explored in this chapter and try to view them within a Muslim context. The final chapter will then move firmly away from the metaphysical emphasis of the first chapter and the historical and theoretical focus of this chap-

³⁴ Ibid, p227.

³⁵ Ibid, p227.

³⁶ Ibid, p271.

³⁷ 'Useless to revolt?' in, *Power: Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. by James D. Fabion, trans. by Robert Hurley, vol. 2, (New York: New Press, 2006), p449.

³⁸ For instance, when the recent Shari'ah fiasco occurred, a collectivity such as imagined above could have transmitted a strong response so as to shape the discourse. More dramatically still, when new laws targeting the Muslim population become proposed such a collectivity would become invaluable in presenting blocs of resistance.

ter and the next to one that is pragmatic and practical.

TOOLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In the discussion so far then we have already spoken about certain tools that are important when considering social change. These have included things like novels and lectures as well as paintings (as in the case of depictions of the prehistoric past in the early 19th century). Each tool has its own merit – some are instructive while others are explorative. Social activism requires those involved to pay attention to utilising all sorts of tools to effectuate changes in perception and understanding about the different socio-political ills in the world. Islamic societies and other such bodies seem to be forever locked into using old formats like lectures which not only limits the type of audience they can draw, but also the effectiveness of whatever message they may wish to send out.

A good example of a campaign that is using different tools in raising awareness and calling for justice is the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB). The ICJB describes itself as a 'coalition of people's organizations, non-profit groups and individuals who have joined forces to campaign for justice for the survivors of the Union Carbide Disaster in Bhopal.'³⁹ In 1984, the American company Union Carbide's plant in Bhopal, India, began leaking 27 tons of the deadly gas *methyl isocyanate*. 'None of the six safety systems designed to contain such a leak were operational,' declares ICJB's website, 'allowing the gas to spread throughout the city of Bhopal. Half a million people were exposed to the gas and 20,000 have died to date as a result of their exposure. More than 120,000 people still suffer from ailments caused by the accident and the subsequent pollution at the plant site. These ailments include blindness, extreme difficulty in breathing, and gynecological disorders. The site has never been properly cleaned up and it continues to poison the residents of Bhopal.'⁴⁰ The campaign is on running and aims to gain justice for the people affected and for prosecutions to be brought against those involved. This campaign has utilised the power of the Internet with websites and internationally established media contacts. They run a student campaign for any students who want to raise awareness about what happened and how justice is being thwarted. They provide ideas for events and help link activists together. They are working to link different organisations working against big corporations and the immunity their money and power affords them, by establishing global days of action. One of the most innovative ideas they championed (albeit one that was a little precarious) was called,

JHADOO MARO DOW KO! (Whack Dow With A Broom!)



This glorious idea was devised in 2002 by the women survivors of Bhopal's bastis [slums], caused major embarrassment to Dow executives around the globe. CEO Michael Parker was jhadoo'd at a prestigious luncheon. Dow's European CEO fled from the broom of Champa Devi⁴¹.

The campaign has also activated a network of writers who have both factually and imaginatively

³⁹ www.bhopal.net/index1.html

⁴⁰ www.bhopal.org/whathappened.html

⁴¹ www.bhopal.net/campaigns.html

presented the tragedy of 1984. Dominique Lapiere and Javier Moro co-authored the book, *Five past midnight in Bhopal*, cataloguing in detail the night of the disaster as well as indicting Union Carbide through factual analysis of its failures. Treating the event and its aftermath imaginatively, Indra Sinha wrote *Animal's People* from the perspective of a boy who walks on all fours because the chemical leaks from the factory left his bones twisted 'like a hairpin'. The energy, imagination, and belief in collective intervention profuse this campaign and is one that is exemplary of being alert to employing creatively the different tools available for promulgating a message.

Tools such as literature, documentary, plays, photographs are all underused in social activism and need to be seen as normatively interconnected with making changes happen. In view of this I want to explore theoretically the significance of literature to pin down why such mediums as novels, short stories, even plays offer a significant and effective way of affecting people and thus inspiring them or affecting their behaviour.

It is an agreed phenomena, as Joan Rockwell writes in her essay, *A Theory of Literature and Society*, that 'no society exists without some form of "literature"', although, as she herself concedes, one must 'extend the term to include every type of fictional narrative such as legends, folk-tales, and ballads'⁴². This way she covers traveling communities like those of Gypsies, who, while not having what may strictly be termed literature have nonetheless 'a number of legends and exemplary tales in which traditional beliefs of their origins are preserved'⁴³. Leaving aside the problems of definition, Rockwell draws attention to a hidden assumption that we all naturally make. Since literature exists within societies we tend to think that it is produced second to societies. However, this near universal phenomena is generated by the equal truth that no human society exists – however primitive – without language. While true that all animals show signs of communication, this does not extend as it has done for nearly every (if not all) human languages which have shown an acute ability to grasp what is not present or – even more than that – engage purely on the level of the imagination. Human Beings then have this distinct difference with other animals though it would be inane to suggest that the very faculty of speech was endowed by society. So, one may claim that society is based upon the ability for individuals to communicate, that the coming together of people was because they *could* communicate. Similarly, it is not too tenuous to suggest that literature may be seen as more primary to society than previously imagined. Literature, as imaginative tales, is as basic to human beings as is their ability to speak a human language. If imagined as such one begins to accord literature a greater significance since society it would seem could not exist without literature.

Born then from the very nature of human languages, literature is essentially a product of the imagination. It produces for people histories about themselves, narratives about events far away, it relates for society its collective beliefs about why things may be as they are. From the very first instance then, literature, because of its very nature, delves into areas that are fundamental to individuals' (and by extension, society's) sense of who or what they are. 'It is this didactic power of literature', write Rockwell, 'which in my opinion is the most interesting aspect and certainly the one which has attracted the most attention both from authority and from those who wish to upset authority.'⁴⁴ Literature, understood this way presents itself as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas for promoting social change.

⁴² Joan Rockwell, 'A Theory of Literature and Society', in, *Sociological Review Monograph 25*, ed. by Jane Routh and Janet Wolff, (Wood Mitchel & Co.: Straffordshire, 1977), p33.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p35.

Those involved in da'wah/social activism need to survey the different apparatuses available to them to orchestrate change. When this is done, not only are new audiences attracted but new individuals are also brought on board and their skills and energy utilized. With this new collectivities are enlivened and, to quote Robert Kennedy from that age of activism, the 60's, 'each time a man [sic] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he [sic] sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.'⁴⁵

In the next chapter I will assess the details explored in this chapter within a Muslim context.

⁴⁵ The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches, ed. by Brian McArthur, (Penguin: London, 1999), p370.

TAKING STOCK: THE MUSLIM CONTEXT

If we do not articulate the structural pre-determinates of the violence then how are our interventions going to be successful?
How are we going to ensure that all the people we are hoping to incorporate into our remedy are actually included if we do not have every dimension in which they are vulnerable included in our articulation of the problem.

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw

Just like Kimberle Crenshaw, who advocates an intersectional⁴⁶ approach in critical theory and practice, I believe it is important to detail all the coordinates of social change if we are to undertake actions that are successful in mobilising people for different social changes. Without this our efforts will rarely benefit from the fruits of experience and a detached analysis. In this spirit, then, I move to take stock of all the details and possibilities laid down in chapter two and assess what the Muslim population can learn from this in their da'wah in Britain.

Since social activism begins with changes in the consciousness of individuals it is firstly important to undertake activities that emphasise this in one way or another. This can be done through imaginative means as much as through instruction. For instance if one wishes to speak about reform one may promote certain personalities who have shown remarkable changes in themselves. Malcolm X would be a good example of this. One could hold an event in which certain sections of his autobiography are read out, together with clips from a documentary or film on him, followed by a short contextualisation of the history with an emphasis on the broader theme of personal reform. At this point one could emphasise how personal reform lead Malcolm X towards societal reform since one without the other is ineffective. All the while, certain key words like "consciousness", "collective", "social activism" could be dispersed through out so as to help internalise the ideas these words carry in the context of social change.

Another example of activities to raise consciousness of the need for action may involve a photographic exhibition on the theme of poverty, with each photograph being coupled with key words like "justice", "forgotten realities" etc. Following this, as viewers leave the exhibition, you could have some material about how they can engage in changing these circumstances. Building on this, organisers could have a few video cameras set up at the exit/s so that as people are leaving the exhibition, they can record (no longer than 30/60 seconds) their thoughts afterwards. This idea could easily be appropriated for a less sombre theme like Muslims in Britain,

⁴⁶ Intersectionality seeks to examine the ways in which different markers of identity interact and whose aggregation produce different experiences of discrimination in society. Intersectionality holds that the normative approaches to oppression take each category in exclusivity, paying little attention to how all of these together produce varied experiences of inequality. Thus race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, their complex totalities interrelate and affect individuals differently in a system of oppression. See also, Knudsen, Susanne, "Intersectionality – A Theoretical Inspiration in the Analysis of Minority Cultures and Identities in Textbooks", www.caen.iufm.fr/colloque_iartem/pdf/knudsen.pdf

where, through photography, an exhibition explores Muslims living in Britain. Each photograph could carry small quotes relating Muslim experience in words, with key words again being highlighted/emphasised.

Such events centred around changing peoples psychical landscapes by positioning them differently to different topics need to be seen as primers. Together with these activities occurring intermittently throughout the year other more activist events and programs need to be initiated. For instance, greater efforts to network with individuals working in different fields of social activism would help form collectivities. As well as this, organisations and individuals could do more to share ideas and good practices, building perhaps a database of good replicable/scalable ideas.

Though Muslims can use almost any tools, Muslim activists must remain cautious not to compromise Islamic precepts in order to achieve what seems a "good" end. It is in this sense that the greatest caution and imagination is needed since what is generally considered ethical – integral in defining social activism – may not be consistent with Islam. Where this is the case, Islam as a system of ethics must be accorded priority since it is the premise from which I am arguing that Muslims ought to be involved in social activism. Compromising this makes the "Muslim" in Muslim-social-activist redundant. Also, it is only by remaining true to Islamic precepts that we can truly change the view of Muslims, and this, for me, is the base line of all activities for Muslims currently.

It is important that Muslims challenge images of Muslims in the media, not by observing the complete opposite of that image – the "British" Muslim; the passive/non-opinionated Muslim; the feminist/leftist Muslim; the pro-liberal-democracy-capitalism Muslim; the moderate Muslim – but by being true to Islam even when one finds its positions difficult to defend or rationalise. That is the real challenge. Of course, we do not advocate violence and should be the first to condemn criminal acts like 9/11 and 7/7, but to do this does not mean walking on eggshells thereafter and forever! To assume the opposite of those images that are reeled off on television screens locks us forever into the hyper-reality of which those images (to which we are reacting) are part. Instead, we must re-imagine a reality outside of the narrative and typologies presented in popular culture.

Social activism I believe is one of the best ways to do this. To engage creatively and imaginatively with Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of social acts – food runs, volunteering at Mental health hospitals, setting up youth activities, providing tuition to students etc – will challenge the perception of those with whom Muslim social activists will come into contact with. Even if individuals carry on believing what the media feeds them, the least that will have to happen is people will have to add a proviso that some Muslims are not like that. Enjoining the good and forbidding evil often sounds inquisitorial and harsh when in truth simply undertaking good actions while maintaining Islamic boundaries is part of this Islamic practice. Social activism will open up positive spaces for interaction with all sorts of people whom one would not otherwise have encountered. This goes for non-practicing Muslims too, since they need good examples of active Muslims to break their perception of practicing Muslims as humourless and isolationist.

This perception is not broken by endless lectures, a mode of information transmission that is unhealthily over used! A use of different tools then is something that all those involved in da'wah must consider. Viewing social activism within the Muslim context highlights how valuable such activities may be in changing the Muslims' self-perception and their perception in the wider society. Also, it highlights that at this stage of the journey, the main task for Muslim social activists is

to engage and alter the image of Islam in Britain. Social activism therefore is not only a means of helping others but may in fact be the means by which Allah's grace is bestowed on us, and thus is a means of helping ourselves find both the drive and the mechanism to make change happen.

BUILDING AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

Innovation is often given complex definitions.
We prefer the simple one: 'new ideas that work'.

The Young Foundation

The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas
and throw away the bad ones.

Linus Pauling

Throughout this paper I have argued that social change is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving a particular frame of mind; different "agents"; certain sites that lend themselves to becoming a base for social change; and different tools to orchestrate change. I have traversed theoretical as well as historical ground. All the while, the animating conviction behind the paper has been a firm belief that social change cannot be left up to chance and serendipity, and needs instead a more systematic approach. Here I lay out some key steps that need to happen in order to make small ripples turn into bigger currents.

🏠 Finance: Though the general narrative about social activism presents it as altruistic and idealistic, the reality is that all forms of social activism require money. While things may begin on a voluntary basis, very soon organisations and movements will find their growth and potential is capped because of low finances. More work must be done to create a pool of income to support individuals and groups engaging in social work. This can happen in different ways. Middle groups may be set up who rely on donors and perhaps even zakat. These middle groups then channel that money to individuals, programs and organisations working for social change. Another approach may involve certain individuals researching and educating people presently involved in social activism about the different ways in which to secure funding from government and corporations. A third still may involve building a database of social activities currently happening with the aim of interested parties donating money or becoming patrons for organisations through it. Of course this should be done at the same time as promoting the old nineteenth century notion of philanthropy. The database could then also hold annual/bi-annual conferences where they help network philanthropists with organisations and activists. Financial concerns should also lead social activists to build a more detailed and strategic plan of how they will utilise the potential money so as to maximise on the one hand their chances of securing donations and, on the other hand, making the most of the money.

🏠 All lectures must make social actions an integral part of their message. This will sometimes involve simply inspiring people to want to become agents of change, and at other times may involve promulgating practical steps that listeners ought to take in order to make strides for change.

🏠 We must do more to transmit habits of perception whether that is notions of resistance to present political and cultural dominance, the malleability of society, or the importance of tawheed as an organising principal in our lives. This must be done through repetition and can

happen through the process of constructing messages.

🕌 Muslim social activists need to construct their messages, phrasing them well and thinking long and hard about how what they are saying underpins their own endeavours, and how it will help change perceptions of/and realities.

🕌 Social activists must be bolder in diversifying the means they use to put across their messages. Islamic Societies, youth groups, community activities, larger Muslim events (Islam Expo etc) and the like must be more clear about what message they wish to convey and how they are going to do this. They must also see each activity/event as part of a fabric that reinforces and pushes forward their message.

🕌 Social activists should identify collectivities which they can access and activate.

🕌 Organisation like Islamic Societies (Isocs), London Isoc (LI), Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), University of London Union Isoc (ULU Isoc), Food4Thought, Luton Muslims, iThink, Muslim Research and Development Foundation (MRDF), Islamic Foundation, Islamic Shari'ah Council for UK & Eire and other Islamic organisations, Islamic Schools/Colleges, and even Mosques should all contemplate and word a mission statement of HOW their activities contribute toward social change and make this available on their websites.

🕌 Muslim parents and schools must promote volunteering among their children/pupils. Where possible, this should be made an integral part of the schoolwork and assisted through linking voluntary organisations and young people (through schools, youth programs, Mosques etc.).

🕌 Muslim media should assist by lowering their charges or making free adverts that advertise social activist events/social activists advertising for volunteers etc.

🕌 More research must be done to explore imaginatively, theoretically, and historically how social change happens and how it can be helped. Alongside greater conceptual clarity we need more case studies and better analysis of factors that assist and inhibit the process of social change.