Pop Culture in the Name of Islam

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
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I FEEL very uncomfortable about the pop culture which is growing around some so-called Nasheed artists. Of course I use the term ‘Nasheed artists' very lightly. Islamic ‘boy bands' and Muslim ‘popsters' would probably be more appropriate.

Eminent scholars throughout history have often opined that music is haram, and I don't recall reading anything about the Sahaba whooping it up to the sound of music. Don't get me wrong. I'm all for people letting off steam, but in a dignified manner and one which is appropriate to their surroundings.

The reason I am expressing concern is that just a few days ago at a venue in Central London, sisters went wild in the aisles as some form of pop-mania swept through the concert venue. And I'm not just talking about silly, little girls who don't know any better; I am talking about sisters in their 20's, 30's and 40's, who squealed, shouted, swayed and danced. Even the security guys who looked more like pipe cleaners than bulldozers were left looking dazed and confused as they tried to stop hijabi sisters from standing on their chairs.

Of course the stage groupies did not help at all as they waved and encouraged the largely female Muslim crowd to "get up and sing along." (They're called ‘Fluffers' in lap-dancing circles!)

The source of all this adulation was British-born Sami Yusuf, who is so proud of his claret-colored passport that he wants us all to wave the Union Jacks. I'm amazed he didn't encourage his fans to sing "Land of Hope and Glory." Brother Sami asked his audience to cheer if they were proud to be British ,and when they responded loudly, he said he couldn't hear them and asked them to cheer again.

How can anyone be proud to be British? Britain is the third most hated country in the world. The Union Jack is drenched in the blood of our brothers and sisters across Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Our history is steeped in the blood of colonialism, rooted in slavery, brutality, torture, and oppression. And we haven't had a decent game of soccer since we lifted the World Cup in 1966.

Apparently Sami also said one of the selling points of Brand UK was having Muslims in the Metropolitan Police Force! Astafur'Allah! Dude, these are the same cops who have a shoot-to-kill policy and would have gunned down a Muslim last year if they could tell the difference between a Bangladeshi and a Brazilian. This is the same police force that has raided more than 3000 Muslim homes in Britain since 9/11. What sort of life is there on Planet Sami, I wonder? If he is so proud to be British, why is he living in the great Middle Eastern democracy of Egypt?

Apparently the sort of hysteria Sami helped encourage is also in America, and if it is happening on both sides of the Atlantic, then it must be creeping around the globe and poisoning the masses. Islamic boy bands like 786 and Mecca 2 Medina are also the subject of the sort of female adulation you expect to see on American Pop Idol or the X-Factor. Surely Islamic events should be promoting restrained and more sedate behavior.

Do we blame the out-of-control sisters? Or do we blame the organizers for allowing this sort of excessive behavior which demeans Islam? Or do we blame the artists themselves?

Abu Ali and Abu Abdul Malik, struggling for their Deen, would certainly not try to whip up this sort of hysteria. Neither would the anonymous heroic Nasheed artists who sing for freedom; check out Idhrib Ya Asad Fallujah, and you will know exactly what I mean.

Fallujah is now synonymous with the sort of heroic resistance that elevated the Palestinians of Jenin to the ranks of the resistance written about in the Paris Communeand the Siege of Leningrad. The US military has banned the playing of any Nasheeds about Fallujah because of the power and the passion it evokes.

If those Nasheeds had sisters running in the streets whooping and dancing, however, the Nasheeds may be encouraged because of haram activity surrounding them.

Quite frankly, I really don't know how anyone in the Ummah can really let go and scream and shout with joy at pleasure domes when there is so much brutality and suffering going on in the world today. The rivers of blood flow freely from the veins of our brothers and sisters from across the Muslim world.

Screaming and shouting the names of musical heroes drown out the screams coming from the dungeons of Uzbekistan

where brothers and sisters are boiled alive in vats of water. How many will jump up and down and wave their arms in the air, shouting wildly for justice for our kin in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, and Iraq?

There are many more killing fields as well across the Asian and Arab world. Will you climb on theater chairs and express your rage over Guantanamo Bay and other gulags where our brothers and sisters are being tortured, raped, sodomized, beaten, and burned? Or will you just switch off this concerned sister and switch on to the likes of Sami Yusuf because he can sell you a pipe dream with his soothing words and melodic voice?

Oh, Muslims, wake up! The Ummah is not bleeding; it is hemorrhaging. Listen not to what is haram. Listen to the pain of your global family.

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