

Their Jihad... Not My Jihad! A Muslim Canadian Woman Speaks Out

Raheel Raza

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Distressed by the challenges facing Muslims living in North America, author Raheel Raza has engaged her own jihad in her adopted homeland.

In Their Jihad...Not My Jihad!, Raza, who was born in Pakistan and now lives in Mississauga, examines how Muslims, their religion and their culture integrate into North American society. A progressive Muslim feminist, Raza is particularly sympathetic to immigrant Muslim women who are bewildered and often disadvantaged as they try to transition from their old way of life into the new.

Their Jihad...Not My Jihad! explores spiritual, gender and political jihad. Raza writes:

"Since September 11, 2001, I've been invited to many churches, schools and community centers to speak about Islam to non-Muslims. People curiously ask if I'm trying to convert others or get converted myself! I tell them it's neither: What I do is essentially "damage control."

With time, I thought this fleeting interest in Islam and Muslims would fade, like a passing fad. Much to my surprise, it hasn't and today, I still find myself doing the rounds, teaching Islam 101!

One of the most satisfying aspects of these sessions is the Q & A's; this is when real issues surface and the spectre of an unknown fear is put to rest. I usually start off by telling my listeners that no question is too controversial and no issue too contentious for me. Questions have ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous: "How many wives does your husband have?" to "What is the history of the turban in Islam?"

However, there is one serious question that is posed every time, in various formats: "Is violence a part of your faith and does it say, somewhere in your scripture, that suicide is an honourable act to be rewarded by God? Is killing non-Muslims a form of jihad?"

It concerns me that while I spend valuable time and energy informing non-Muslims about the true interpretation of jihad (moral, intellectual and spiritual striving) and that violence and suicide are forbidden in Islam, there are many people in positions of authority within the Muslim world who simultaneously promote and condone violence. These are Islamists who believe their jihad is physical violence against civilians seen to be their enemy; to blow themselves up for political aims and to rid the earth of non-Muslims.

Obviously, their jihad and my jihad are not the same. I believe the jihad preached and practised by the Messenger of Islam, Mohammad is not the one being propagated by people who support the path of violence against civilians, or who encourage the destruction of lives through suicide bombings."

In Their Jihad...Not My Jihad!, Raza offers insight, opinions and solutions to restoring dignity and respect to Muslims living in the West, while reminding them that they need to take back their faith from Islamic extremists.

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