

Islamophobia: The Man Behind the Movie

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THIS is the face of the man who created the painful-to-watch video, Innocence of Muslims. Whilst the Prophet's face should not be shown, there is no reason to not reveal Nakoula Basseley Nakoula's image, much protected in the media in fear for his safety. (The actress was tricked into believing she was playing the daughter of a man named George in a film called Desert Warriors.) And on Thursday Sept. 27, Nakoula was arrested in Los Angeles.



The few minutes of video that have been seen online are merely a collection of scenes from a full-length film that has been shown once. One time only and seen by a grand total of 10 people. Millions, however, have seen the YouTube edit, protests have broken out in 30 countries, and more than 50 people have been killed. Had the Egyptian television anchor — now accused of being a “Salafist sheikh” by some in the media—not shown the months-old clip on his Al-Nas program, arguably much of the reaction would not have taken place. The cost of advertising and public relations for new films can sometimes run into the millions of dollars. Well-known Islamophobe darling of the neoconservative crowd Ayaan Hirsi Ali — co-creator of the Dutch anti-Muslim film Submission, which led to the violent death of director Theo van Gogh—added her fair share this week in her assessment of “Muslim Rage” and how it must be stopped front cover of Newsweek. In defence of free speech, Hirsi Ali has repeated Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Breivik’s reasoning that “he had no other choice but to use violence” because his opinions were “censored.” She herself believes that Islam must be defeated entirely; not just “radical” Islam, but “Islam, period,” because Muslims are “not interested in peace.”

All of this free advertising as a result of Nakoula’s video is going to only lead to more money being poured into coffers to produce more anti-Islamic films and videos.

A big-budget \$ 30 million film called Muhammad, produced by a Palestinian has long been in the works in Hollywood, and appears to be sympathetic to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Another anti-Muslim film, however, has already raised over \$ 2 million since Nakoula's video became viral. Ali Sina, an Iranian-Canadian ex-Muslim, intends to portray the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the leader of a cult – as long as he can secure \$ 8 million in further funding. With Islamophobia picking up steam, we should assume donations flooding his way soon meet his goal.

Nakoula, a twice imprisoned felon for drug-manufacturing and bank fraud, relied upon a director of pornographic films, named "Alan Roberts," for his project. Like Nakoula's use of "Sam Bacily," Roberts is the pseudonym for the more mainstream director, Robert Brownwell. The men stripped the film of its original dialogue to create the final video, vast amounts of dialogue dubbed over the actor's original words.

According to the office of the County of Los Angeles and Film LA, Inc., it was a Christian non-profit organization named Media for Christ that secured the original permit to shoot the film. The owner of Media for Christ is Joseph Nassaralla Abdelmasih, a Coptic Christian who also owns a small television channel named The Way TV. Steve Klein, the ex-Marine Christian-paramilitary Islamophobe who collaborated with Nakoula to make the controversial film, is one of the talk show hosts on Nasaralla's network.

The interconnection between a small but powerful Islamophobic force was thoroughly documented last year by the Center for American Progress in a well-worth reading report, Fear, Inc. Although the mainly neoconservative elements are highlighted there, it is clear how an increasingly influential radical Christian segment of society is gaining ground and joining forces with the moneyed established Islamophobes. This bodes ill for Muslims around the world.

A Pakistani minister offered a bounty upon Nakoula's death of \$100,000 in a "sacred duty" for revenge. Although the government disassociated itself from his offer, it is insufficient.

When arrested in Los Angeles, Nakoula was held without bond. Not for any of the contents of the inflammatory video: he was detained because he may have violated the terms of his parole. In reality, his only punishment is a possible violation for using the Internet whilst still on probation. Prison is unlikely however, as the violation is normally connected to the original conviction, in this case, check-cashing fraud. Perhaps the worst outcome for him has already occurred: he had to go in hiding and has had to put up his California house for sale. A trail of scores of deaths in his video's wake, this might be the extent of his suffering.

In the world we live in today anyone is free to make any video he or she wants no matter how hateful. It is thus inevitable that Islam is going to come under increasing attack. Nakoula's film is a tipping point, having opened a Pandora's box. No Muslim state will be able to change the laws of 'absolute free speech' in the United States, and therefore discussions amongst leading Islamic scholars must urgently take place to address an unstoppable deluge of blasphemy. If YouTube is blocked, Vimeo will pick up the slack; if Facebook is shutdown, Twitter takes over.

No one in the 21st century can remain oblivious to the flood of news, images and offenses. Given this reality, rationally addressing the problem is an imperative. The question must be asked, what can clerics do? This time, time is indeed of the essence.

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