

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 15

Full of Admiration for the British

I came to Britain in 1961, full of admiration for the British. In the early days I used to fear that the superiority and attractions of the West would prove too much for a simple-minded people and that we sell our faith for a share in the obvious advantages of Western civilization. Thirty years on I no longer have this fear.

Early in the 20th century Muhammad Abduh, a distinguished religious leader and scholar at Al-Azhar, the centre of Muslim learning in Cairo, wrote after a visit to Europe: 'In Europe I saw Islam but not Muslims; in Egypt I see many Muslims but no Islam'.

Even today the standard of public service, rule of law, democracy, freedom to dissent and equality in Britain far exceed anything that is found in a Muslim country, where dictatorship, brutish coercion, bribery, nepotism and deceit are usual. Yet familiarity with the West increasingly reveals to us – through the many stories in the media about child abuse, rape of the elderly, routine sexual greed and exploitation – the rottenness that lies at the core of this civilization, contact with which makes us embrace our faith with greater certitude and welcome British converts.

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