

Chapter 6

Nauman Faizi, “Why saying ‘only some Muslims are violent’ is no better than saying ‘all Muslims are violent’”

Introduction

This is a discussion guide for Nauman Faizi’s chapter in Julia Snyder and Daniel H. Weiss (eds.) (2021). *Scripture and Violence*. London: Routledge.

Summary of Chapter

Nauman Faizi addresses a prevalent way of talking about “scripture and violence” in modern societies. He notes that well-intentioned people often remark that *most* Muslims are peaceful, and that only *some* Muslims resort to violence. In response, he argues that it is possible to talk about “only some Muslims” and still speak as if there is some violent essence in Islam or the Qur’an. As an example, he discusses an 1871 tract about Muslims in British imperial India, where W. W. Hunter argues that Indian Muslims are not *generally* violent or rebellious, except for “Wahhabi fanatics” – and the latter largely because of commitment to the Qur’an. By implying that scripturally committed Muslims tend toward violence, Hunter makes an essentialist claim about “some Muslims.” According to Faizi, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan fell into the same trap when arguing against Hunter’s tract in the same historical context. Sir Syed argued that the Qur’an does not encourage rebellion or violence *unless one externally imposes violent readings onto the text* – thus suggesting that scripturally committed Muslims will necessarily be peaceful, another essentialist claim about “some Muslims.”

Understanding the Argument

As you read Faizi’s chapter, answer the following questions. These questions are designed to help you understand his argument.

1. In his case study from British India, Faizi argues that “Hunter’s descriptions of scripturally committed Muslims are essentializing, stereotyped, patronizing, and colonial” (p. 81). What does W. W. Hunter say about “scripturally committed Muslims” that Faizi considers “essentializing” and “stereotyped”?
2. What does Sir Syed Ahmed Khan say about “scripturally committed Muslims” that Faizi considers problematic? In what way?
3. With regard to the present day, Faizi writes, “Hollywood celebrities, competent journalists, and academics regularly state that the vast majority of Muslims in

the world are peaceful and non-violent people, and that it is only *some* Muslims, in *some* circumstances or contexts, who resort to violence” (p. 77). According to Faizi, what is problematic about this type of statement?

4. At the end of the essay, Faizi offers suggestions for what to do when you hear someone say that “only some Muslims are violent.” What does he recommend?

Digging Deeper

After discussing questions 1-4 above, take time to reflect on the following issues:

5. Which of the following best describes your reaction to the statement “Not all Christians are violent”?
 - a. “That sounds about right.”
 - b. “Wait a minute... Why would someone say that? Why would it occur to anyone to associate *Christians* with violence?”
 - c. “I disagree. All Christians are violent!”

Share your response with people in your group, and discuss why each of you responds as you do. (Ideally, your group will include people from different religious backgrounds.) Then repeat the same exercise with other statements, such as, “Not all Americans are violent,” “Not all Muslims are violent,” etc.

6. To think further about the effects that statements about “only some” or “not all” can create, imagine you are watching a talk show, and hear someone make the following remarks. How do you think the talk show host should respond?
 - a. “Only some cats rip out their owners’ eyes with their claws. Most have been tamed.”
 - b. “Only men who have been in the military beat their wives.”
 - c. “Not all women are stupid.”
 - d. “Not all American tourists are rude.”