

Ziauddin Sardar

On Critical Muslim

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The quarterly 'Critical Muslim', which is published by the Muslim Institute, is of course an effort to provide the necessary space for the public intellectual debate which you deem so important.

Indeed.

But does it work?

The response has been tremendous, especially from the young people. They are looking for new ideas, new thoughts, etc. and at the same time they also have a lot to say. If you look at the separate issues, you'll always find contributions of three or four very clever young people. So wherever I've gone to promote critical Muslim I've always received a very good response from younger people. But of course, the older people – 45 and over – often feel threatened by it because they feel as if the carpet is being taken from under their feet.

With projects like Critical Muslim, there's always a bit of tension between the somewhat 'highbrow' critique they offer and 'reaching the masses' to affect the necessary change. How do you deal with that tension?

However complicated things might be, I believe that eventually they can all be explained in a simple manner. If you look at Critical Muslim, the magazine deals with complex issues but the articles are actually written in a very accessible way. You don't need very specialized knowledge to be able to follow the reasoning of the analysis. We also bring in a lot of humor and self-mocking, for example with our ironic lists of 'God pleasing gadgets' or 'towering fatwa's'. That's part of the exercise because you shouldn't take yourself too seriously. Otherwise you're not open to criticism anymore. Part of the art of criticism is that you should not just be able to criticize others but also be able to take criticism yourself and let it change and transform you. I have learned a tremendous amount myself from young scholars who have a different view on the world.

Still, the different editions of Critical Muslims are quite 'heavy'. 250 pages every time with articles of about 5000 words, that's not for a broad public.

Of course, it needs to be substantial as well. There has already been enough trivial, mundane and preachy stuff. We need to go beyond that. And then we hope that the ideas will eventually trickle down.

But don't you eventually also want to get sold in the same stores that sell all the preachy stuff?

Well, I don't know whether it's sold there, but when we organize events, people you wouldn't immediately expect – like conservative Salafi's – also turn up and engage in the discussion. And

obviously they often have relevant arguments as well. They can teach us and we can teach them. The important issue is that the debate and discussion continues.

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Critical Muslims and transmodern tradition](#)**