

through intelligent and minimally-intrusive interventions that seek to align individual incentives with desired outcomes and with minimal effects on economic efficiency. This is the consensus among policy economists around the world. For that reason, the book serves as a useful corrective against some of the prejudices against economics held by both collectivists and conservatives.

However, the confusion that Heath displays in Part I, where he discusses so-called ‘right wing fallacies,’ serves to reinforce other prejudices. Heath forgets the very four principles that his introduction asks us to bear in mind. He tells us that capitalism is not natural or spontaneous and relies on government for the enforcement of

contracts, whereas markets and agreements arose quite naturally out of people’s interactions, and the law of contract arose later to encourage the smooth operation and expansion of these relations. He follows his argument that economists wrongly overestimate the importance of material incentives in theorising about behaviour with an argument that those incentives *are* incredibly important in determining economic and social outcomes, and then cannot propose a better, less materialistic, and more nuanced approach to understanding behaviour. He uses the ‘theory of the second best’ to argue against the general idea of competitive markets, completely missing the importance of competition for promoting efficiency and innovation. He dismisses the effects of incentives on government spending and service provision, when we know from experience that these are significant. He fails to grasp that lower international competitiveness leads to lower

living standards. And he accuses ‘the right’ of misunderstanding moral hazard but himself doesn’t examine or understand the arguments of conservatives (he doesn’t mention classical liberals).

Heath states his motivation for the book in the introduction, saying ‘... I share the unease which most people feel with the capitalist system,’ and explaining that he wants to find something better and that economics



is an important part of this search. It is certainly a noble aim to want to improve a system, and he is right to focus on economics. But he never explains what it is about capitalism that makes him uneasy. And it is no small irony that Heath ends up not only making

a number of mistakes in his economics but also promoting the economic freedom with which he is so ill at ease.

Is this book important? Some of the analysis is very good. Heath clearly understands the theory of comparative advantage and explains well that difficult, counter-intuitive idea. Other sections, such as those on cooperatives or the price system, are also impressive. But the book is patchy. The chains of reasoning aren’t as strong or consistent as you might expect from a philosopher. Heath’s lack of familiarity with basic economic concepts is a significant deficiency for which his wide reading and native intelligence cannot compensate. And at more than 300, pages the book is too long and carries too few diagrams.

Elementary economics will, I think, have the last say. Books are ‘experience goods,’ and sales tend either to benefit from indications of product quality—such as a famous author or careful production combined with a high price—or

from a low price that reduces the cost to the buyer of taking a ‘punt’ on something unknown. My training tells me that at \$35, a thick, wordy book on economics written by an obscure academic, printed on cheap paper and with an uninspiring cover, isn’t going to be a pop economics bestseller.

Reviewed by Jeremy Bray

*Once Were Radicals:
My Years as a Teenage
Islamofascist*

by Irfan Yusuf

Allen & Unwin

Sydney, 2009

\$26.99, 324pp

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The Muslim memoir has become a staple of publishing houses in recent years as the demand for authentic young Muslim voices grew within the West. In Australia, the young adult author Randa Abdel-Fattah is one such voice as is Melbourne academic Waleed Aly, although his book *People Like Us* is more analysis than personal memoir.

Perhaps the most influential book of this genre is *The Islamist* by Ed Husain, a Brit of South Asian descent. His account of close involvement with the radical group Hizb ut-Tahrir before disillusionment with their ideology of hate and anti-Western extremism earned global acclaim. Irfan Yusuf has attempted to follow in Husain’s path but in a more Australian fashion—with a light-hearted, laconic coming-of-age memoir.

Yusuf was born in Karachi in 1969 to a Pakistani father and an Indian mother. He attended a madrasa as a boy in Pakistan and lived in New Jersey for a while before returning to

Sydney. In his teens, Yusuf became energised to fly to Afghanistan and fight for global jihad. He developed his zeal in a Muslim youth camp, but he and his fellow teen Islamist activists were persuaded against such actions by a religious leader. His account re-iterates the difficulties young Muslims can have developing a coherent identity while raised between the liberal West and strict households that attempt to distance children from local cultural practices, which some parents view as morally corrupt.

Yusuf also fits the profile of those vulnerable to radicalisation in other ways, for it is the socially awkward who are most likely to turn to Islamist teachings for a sense of social connectedness, in much the same way that other disaffected adolescents may become punks or Goths. Yusuf writes of being bullied because of the colour of his skin while in primary school. He is also obese. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece, an Iranian blogger captured it beautifully when he describes the religious police as 'those young men least likely to ever attract the opposite sex but then find the government tells them they are special and give them guns to prove it.'

Much of the rest of the book is a fast-paced, polemical journey through Yusuf's childhood in Australia, trips to Pakistan, and his exploration of the various sects within Islam. Yusuf is deeply knowledgeable about these sects, but this also leads him to think that pious Muslims act according to the written word. This can lead Yusuf to disregard the modern symbolism of Islam and its associations with the underdog that have more to do with modernity than the Koran. For example, hijab wearing among

Muslim women in the West is based more in an expression of individual identity than the written word of the Koran.

Yusuf shows the power of television images and their effect on the psyche of young Muslims. The backdrop to his upbringing was television reporting of the Iranian revolution, war in the Balkans and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His account gives us insight into how Muslims can be raised in a more politicised environment than the average Australian teenager.

Yusuf's understanding of the various ethnic and sectarian tensions that fuel Islamic politics in Australia are second to none. From lucrative Halal licenses to misguided sheikhs, Yusuf shows how an Australian version of Middle Eastern-style politics is being played out in our backyard. As he writes:

'Australian Islam remains largely an ethno-religious relic; mosques are still run along ethnic and cultural lines of little relevance to most young Muslims; and women are still barred from many mosques.'

There are many amusing accounts of his family and their struggle to build a life in a foreign land, including Yusuf's difficulties with a strict Arab tutor and his mother's disapproval of the teacher. This stoush highlights the strains an Arabised Islam can inflict when it attempts to dominate the culturally diluted versions of Islamic practice beyond the Middle East. This is a key modern struggle, and some of Yusuf's analysis highlights its occurrence in Sydney's suburbs. On a more personal level, regular references to his mother's Indian accent become tedious and his prose can lack emotional warmth. There

is little sense of the complexity of the relationships that shaped his upbringing.

Yusuf will remain controversial and disliked by many, including some Muslims. He is a provocative blogger whose voice has adorned the op-ed pages from New Zealand through to Brunei. He is a fearless critic of the right wing conservative commentariat and their often misinformed views about ethnic groups and Muslims. His sensitivity to perceived anti-Muslim views has led to some public clashes. He famously told Mark Steyn at a CIS-event that he 'wished he [Steyn] would just drop dead.' Yusuf was threatened with defamation action by US Middle East expert Daniel Pipes after falsely suggesting in the *Canberra Times* Pipes had written that Muslims deserved to be the victims of the next holocaust. The newspaper and Yusuf were forced to issue a public apology.

But *Once Were Radicals* confirms Yusuf as an important Muslim Australian voice. In his first book, he has produced both a collation and extension of his previous ideas that are a worthy recipient of the Iremonger Award for 'works of political, social and cultural commentary with contemporary Australian relevance.'

He finishes by correctly suggesting that the strongest antidote to festering radicalism is making young Muslims feel they belong. The jihadists recruit alienated young men by telling them that Australians hate them and will never accept them. His book is a timely reminder that both citizens and policymakers must do their utmost to ensure the opposite.

Reviewed by Tanveer Ahmed

