

# Scots Wha Hae Wi' Wallace Bled, Or, The “Islamic Tartan” Farce

by Hugh Fitzgerald



During the week of September 5-12, sales of what has been called the “Islamic Tartan” in Scotland suddenly soared. And this surge in sales, which lasted all of two weeks before sinking back just as quickly, received a preposterous amount of attention online. It’s a feelgood story about Islam, so naturally the media are eager to dwell on it.

Let’s clear up a few things. The “Islamic tartan” is nothing new; it has been around, to general indifference, for seven years. Then, on September 5, a blogger, one Laura Morlock, described the tartan and showed an example at her website, and for mysterious reasons, Morlock’s message “went viral,” and the rest is – at least for two weeks – history.

The Arab News has the story [here](#):

*The tartan was designed in 2012 by a Scottish Muslim academic, and Arab News columnist, Dr. Azeem Ibrahim, to celebrate the histories of Scotland and Islam, and highlight and promote the dual heritage of the two communities in an attempt “to overcome religious intolerance and cultural discrimination.”*

In 2012, Azeem Ibrahim was commissioned by the largest manufacturer of hand-crafted tartans in Scotland, D. C. Dalgliesh, to create an “Islamic tartan.” It was a marketing decision, not some high-minded attempt “to overcome religious intolerance and cultural discrimination.” Some green-eye-shaded employees at Dalgleish recognized an unserved niche in the market, and thought the company could fill it; as it turned out, it took seven years for the “Islamic tartan” to finally increase its sales beyond the “few” that are normally sold weekly of each of Dalgleish’s tartans.

*“The sale of most tartans is a steady trickle, generally, and we normally expect a few orders a week,” said Nick Fiddes, managing director of D.C. Dalgleish and CLAN.com, which describes itself as the world’s only hand-crafted tartan mill. “The volume went up by four to six times, perhaps. It was very noticeable and we had no idea why at first. It was quite mysterious.”*

If there are a “few orders a week” – a “steady trickle” – for most Dalgleish-milled tartans, and that presumably would include the “Islamic tartan” over the past seven years, it’s not hard to calculate the likely number of requests for “Islamic tartans” during this new “surge.” If ordinarily “a few orders” come in each week for most tartans, that would mean 3 to 4; then, if the volume “went up by four to six times,” as Mr. Fiddes claims, during the week of September 5 to September 12 that would mean that 25 orders came in for

“Islamic tartan” kilts, ties, hijabs, and throws. All this excitement, all these “Islamic tartan” stories on the Internet, over what, if we do a little research, turns out to be a matter of 25 orders – in other words, much ado about nothing.

*“Scotland has officially created a tartan to honor its Muslim citizens,” she [the blogger Laura Morlock] wrote. Despite coming 12 years after the launch of the fabric, the post was retweeted 13,000 times and liked by more than 50,000 people.*

Laura Morlock’s remark is incorrect. Scotland did not “officially create a tartan to honor its Muslims citizens.” The tartan was designed by Ibrahim, the cloth then milled and sold by the firm of Dalgleish. It was not “created” by Scotland, but registered by Dalgleish as the “Scottish Islamic” tartan on the Scottish Register of Tartans. There is a difference.

*Morlock said the response to her post suggested that drawing attention to the tartan must have resonated at a time when Muslim communities in the West, and particularly the US, are feeling more isolated.*

This is special pleading for Muslims, whom we are supposed to see as victims, deliberately made to feel apart, “isolated,” from the mainstream. But the reason Muslims are not integrating well in the West is that they have shown that they do not desire to do so. They are told in the Qur’an to regard non-Muslims as “the most vile of created beings,” while Muslims are “the best of peoples,” and they are further commanded not to take Christians and Jews as friends, “for they are friends only with each other.” It is Muslims who stay aloof from non-Muslims, not the reverse. Of course there are Muslim attempts to ingratiate themselves with non-Muslims; this is not to be confused with a genuine desire to integrate into the larger society. Non-Muslims have gone out of their

way to make Muslims feel welcome, letting them settle in their countries, lavishing every sort of governmental largesse on them, including free or highly subsidized housing, free education, free medical care, unemployment benefits (even without prior employment), and family allowances.

*“I think people responded differently to learning about this because it hits a nerve at a time when hate crimes (particularly those against religious communities) are on the rise, and the news is full of federally mandated nationalistic cruelty around the globe,” she wrote in her blog.*

Morlock clearly means to suggest that these “hate crimes” are committed against Muslims, but if she took the trouble to look around the world, she would discover that Christians are the most persecuted believers worldwide, and their persecutors are in almost all cases Muslims. It’s hard to know what Morlock means by “federally mandated nationalistic cruelty around the globe,” but I presume this is an allusion mainly to the beyond-the-pale Muslim-banning islamophobic Trump Administration.

*The description of the “Islamic tartan” by the blogger Laura Morlock led to a rise in orders that upon inspection is not nearly as impressive as we have been led to believe.*

***Fiddes [who directs the tartan manufacturer Dalgleish] said the tartan is part of a Scottish-Islamic venture that aims to bring the two communities closer together.***

What could it be that is keeping the Muslim and the Scottish communities from being close together? Why is it that all the other, non-Muslim, groups of immigrants in Scotland – Chinese, Vietnamese, Poles, Hindus, Sikhs – have had no trouble integrating into Scottish society by the second generation? Isn’t the problem with the Muslims, whose holy book tells them

not to become friends of non-Muslims, and to regard them as the “most vile of creatures”?

How exactly does an “Islamic” tartan manage to “bring the two communities closer together”? And what significance does it have other than being a clever marketing idea to increase sales of tartans among Muslims living in Scotland?

*“This is one thing I love about tartans,” he [Fiddes] said. “It is saying that Muslims are a part of Scotland too, due to cultural significance.”*

Fiddes would not, of course, have owned up to the real significance of the Islamic tartan – the filling of a niche to increase profits at Dalgleish – but instead prefers to proffer a more exalted reason: “saying that Muslims are a part of Scotland too, due to cultural significance.” I’m not sure what “due to cultural significance” means – how have Muslims contributed to Scottish culture? – but it sounds appropriately high-minded.

*“The Islamic tartan was essentially the Scottish-Muslim identity being weaved together in the same way that the tartan is weaved together through its strands,” said Ibrahim [who designed the tartan], who is director at the Center for Global Policy in Washington.*

This remark makes no sense. The Islamic tartan is just a cloth, for god’s sake. It identifies the wearer as the member of a particular clan. It has no metaphysical meaning. It does not create, nor does it reflect, something Ibrahim chooses to call the “Scottish-Muslim identity.”

*Muslims have been coming to Scotland since the late 18th century, when sailors from India, Pakistan, Yemen and Malaysia began to arrive in Glasgow on merchant ships. The Muslim population grew substantially after World War II, and*

*a 2001 census indicated that 42,550 Muslims lived in Scotland at that time. Today the figure is estimated to be about 75,000.*

Thus we have the usual backdating of a Muslim presence, and a certain amount of calendrical confusion. The handful of Muslim lascars on British ships becomes an unknown number of “sailors” arriving from the late 18th century on, from India, Pakistan (which did not exist until 1947), Yemen, and Malaysia (which did not exist until 1963). The main point that is being made is that the Muslim presence in Scotland goes back to the late 18th century; it was undoubtedly larger than you Infidels think, whatever that number might be; we must all recognize that “Muslims have always been part of Scotland’s history” – and so the pseudo-history of Islam in Scotland is born.

Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled know that sometimes a tartan is just a tartan. This is one of those times.

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