

AMIT ROY

KILLING FIELDS OF KARACHI

THERE is no more chilling book on the market than *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* by the French author and philosopher, Bernard Henri Levy, which has just been published in London (Duckworth, £20).

Levy travelled to Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Bosnia, the United States and Britain to conduct exhaustive research into the murder of the 38-year-old Wall Street Journal reporter, Daniel Pearl. In a way, Levy provides the answer.

Pearl, who was based in Mumbai for his paper, had gone to Karachi in January last year when he was kidnapped. A video of his throat being cut was released.

Later, his dismembered body was recovered from a grave.

A British man, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, 29, has been sentenced to death for the kidnap and murder of Pearl. With him, three others who have been given life sentences, have lodged



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This is a salutary tale of ruined lives. On one side, we have the widow Mariane Pearl, who has given birth to the baby boy his father never saw. On the other, we have Sheikh's parents, Saeed and Qaussia, and his brother and sister, Awais and Hajira, who are all naturally trying to save him from the gallows.

Levy's book, which reads like a fast paced thriller but is about real people, seeks to untangle how the trajectories of Sheikh's and Pearl's lives crossed with tragic consequences.

Let us be frank about things. There are many young Muslims, like Sheikh, in Britain and elsewhere who feel passionately about the oppression of their co-religionists all over the world. Sheikh's story is unusual in that he was not an uneducated jihadi ready for exploitation by militant mullahs. As a child, he was polite, polished and later he was arrogant enough to know he had a first rate brain.

He was born in London and educated at Forest School, a public school in Wanstead, and won a place at the London School of Economics with A

WHO KILLED PEARL?: The journalist's murder was plotted by Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh (Inset)

life in Pakistan.

There are those who argue that Sheikh is an innocent who was once a useful tool employed by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, Levy disagrees and insists that Sheikh is a fully paid up member of the ISI.

"He depended on the ISI and the ISI depended on him," says Levy.

Although Levy acknowledges that Sheikh was not the one who actually cut Pearl's throat and decapitated his head and then chopped his body into 10 pieces, "I don't accept he was a scapegoat," the author points out. "He

was without doubt the mastermind of the plot, the architect of the kidnapping. He was the man who set the trap into which Daniel Pearl fell."

Levy poses one of the most troubling questions in his book: "Is terrorism the bastard child of a demonic couple: Islam and Europe?"

This question will have more resonance in France than in Britain but what ought to be clear to Bush and Blair is that the West cannot bomb Afghanistan and Iraq with impunity without creating a new generation of Omar Sheikhs.



WARIS WHO? TV TOP DOCTOR RETURNS

AS THE BBC prepares to bring back *Dr Who* in "the most eagerly awaited comeback in television history", let us not forget Waris Hussein, to my mind the doyen of TV directors.

At an important stage in his career, Waris climbed into his Tardis and disappeared to the New World but he was all of 23 when he directed the first four *Dr Who* pilot programmes in 1963.

The science fiction series and its theme music are now part of legend. A particular favourite for viewers were the Daleks, machines which wanted to "exterminate" their enemies in their bid for control of the galaxy. The programme's hero, *Dr Who* (first played by William Hartnell), was a "Time Lord". He travelled between the past and the future in his space machine, the Tardis, which resembled a London

policebox from the outside.

Since viewers have now indicated that this is the one programme above all they want revived, the BBC is commissioning a new *Dr Who* series.

Waris, meanwhile, has climbed back into his Tardis and rematerialised before me.

He remembers that back in 1963, he was about the only director of Asian origin on the BBC staff. He was taken on not because of any notion of having a token ethnic around the place but "more because I had read English at Queen's College, Cambridge".

The Waris-directed four pilots for *Dr Who*, set in the past around 100,000BC and called *An Unearthly Child*, were broadcast — and the audience was hooked.

Waris quickly came back to direct

another seven episodes, collectively called *The Roof of the World*.

Initially, the consensus was that the story line was far too weird to find acceptance from ordinary viewers.

"No director wanted to touch the thing," recalls Waris. "People were cynical about it. I was the most junior director there, so I had no choice. At that time, it was just a job."

Waris went on to direct some of the biggest dramas on television — a black and white version of *A Passage to India* — "of which I am very proud", he says.

David Lean borrowed the video, was obviously inspired by it and went on to make his own feature film.

Waris also directed *Edward and Mrs Simpson* and *The Glittering Prizes*, the first Asian to be given responsibility for big prestige projects. He later headed

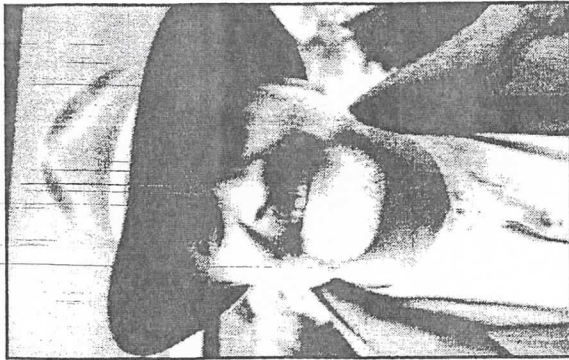
for America and was promptly forgotten in Britain. In 1998, he directed *Sixth Happiness*, based on Firdaus Kanga's autobiographical novel about a disabled Parsee.

He is just about to collaborate with his sister, Shama Habibullah, on an Australian-financed film, *The Inheritance*, which will be shot in Mumbai. Their late mother, Atia Hosain, published two novels, *Phoenix Flies* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, lamenting the partition of India.

Today, his name is practically unknown to British Asians who look baffled: "Waris who?"

The response from Waris is: "It would be nice if you stop them from forgetting me."

My dear chap, it would be an honour.



DOCTOR ON CALL: Waris Hussein