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MULTICULTURALISMS
Western, Muslim and Future

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf

e are accustomed to thinking of the West as open to and tolerant of difference, and the Muslim world as being homogenous and violently opposed to cooperation with others. What we forget is the not-so-distant history of the West as the site of profound xenophobia and the Muslim world as the home of diversity and multiculturalism.

It is only in the past half-century that the West has evolved away from two paradigms that led to extreme violence against people considered the "other":

1. *The racist paradigm*, euphemistically phrased as the "White Man's Burden," that led to a Western triumphalism that aggressively proselytized the rest of the world into adopting Western culture and religion. The British, for example, sought to create a race of 'brown Englishmen' in India. The French Francophiled their North- and West- African colonies (Algeria, Morocco and Senegal) while the Spanish completely displaced Central and South American native cultures with their own Hispanic culture and Catholic religion. It was this attitude that fueled the discriminatory "White Australia" immigration policy until the mid-20th century and sanctioned other policies that permitted the horrible treatment of Australian aborigines. It also explains the American genocide of the Native American Indians and slavery of the black race, behavior neither countenanced by any religion nor by the American Declaration of Independence.

2. *The nation-state paradigm*, which aggressively sought to homogenize human identities within a geographic boundary. When race was not different, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities were oppressed and treated as outsiders, alien to the dominant culture. Where once wars were conducted by a warrior class or by soldiers, wars between nation-states drew whole populations into participating in national wars, broadening the conflict to include non-combatants. Pogroms against Jews in East Europe, the treatment of the Irish Catholics by the Protestants, and the ejection of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula are examples of what happens when societies shift from a multicultural social contract to a monocultural one.

These two paradigms ineluctably ushered a 'Clash of Civilizations' that reached its most explosive apogee in the two World Wars of the 20th century and with the Nazi regime, which sought to establish a purified white Aryan race and gave us the holocaust. Monoculturalism weakened the European powers and almost destroyed the human race.

The multiculturalist paradigm now on the rise in Europe and the West was the operational paradigm that ruled the Muslim world for thirteen centuries, flowing from the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad as understood and implemented by his immediate successors.

How the Muslim World Lost Its Multiculturalism

Until the 20th century, the Muslim world operated under a multicultural paradigm, understood as flowing from Islamic theology, law and historical precedent. Until the First World War, Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman caliphate since 1453, was almost half Greek, with many cities and regions of modern Turkey populated by Greek majorities. Smyrna, the modern Izmir, for example, was two-thirds Greek until 1922. 400,000 Greeks lived in Alexandria, Egypt until the mid-1950s. Today it has less than 3% of this figure. Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and Persians, reflecting the full variety of Jewish, Christian and Muslim interpretations: Shia and Sunni with all the varieties of legal schools of interpretation, lived and worked in intimate proximity with each other, as did Hindus and Muslims in South Asia. Today the head Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church is still based in Istanbul.

Starting with WW1, the Muslim world, under the colonial influence of the West and legitimately enamored by the ideas that catalyzed Western prosperity, uncritically adopted these two pernicious paradigms. The result was the rise of

triumphalist nation-state identities around ethnicity and religion. Monoculturalist societies began to emerge around hardening ethnic and religious identification. Arab nationalism was one, fueled by the British in the late-19th century as a means of breaking up the Ottoman Empire. Traditional Islamic systems of rule came to an end, systems that had hitherto ruled over multicultural groups of peoples, including the Islamic nation, the ummah, based upon workable concepts of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society not defined by geography.

Geographically homogeneous ethnic nations were born, seeding ethnic conflicts that continue to this day. Turkey now had no place for Greeks, who left in large numbers. Armenians and Kurds suffered atrocities Islamic law forbids. Pakistan and Israel were examples of geographies carved to accommodate religious nationalisms that philosophically had no space for Hindus and Gentiles as equals, violations of the very religious ethical principles of Islam and Judaism. And when Arab nationalism failed to progress society, Islamic nationalism readily filled the vacuum, a concept completely alien to the traditional notions of Islamic thought, theology or legal and historical precedent.

An Islamic version of the White Man's Burden evolved in the 20th century: a "Muslim's burden" that sought both to defend the "House of Islam" from what was perceived as militant secularism and militant Jewish nationalism. It also sought to aggressively proselytize non-Muslims towards Islam, just as in the past European religious groups tried to convert Muslims to Christianity, or at the very least neutralize or secularize them. One unfortunate result of this was that the historical embrace and protection by Muslims of the varieties of Christian churches in their midst, Christian communities whose histories trace back continuously to the time of Jesus Christ, have withered, and non-Muslim communities increasingly feel under attack by an Islamic militancy that was never allowed such prominence in the fourteen centuries since the rise of Islam in Arabia.

The precedent established by the Caliph Umar b. Al-Khattab's in 638 CE, graciously honoring the Orthodox patriarch in Jerusalem, granting Christians protection, and inviting seventy Jewish families to immigrate to Jerusalem from Tiberius to re-establish a Jewish community in the City of David, is hardly on the radar screen of many young Muslims today. Gripped by their Islamic fervor, they are often taken aback when reminded of this important legal precedent that shaped interfaith relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, and of its Quranic basis in injunctions like "there shall be no compulsion in religion," and

"tell the infidels, 'to you your religion, to me mine.'" These principles are firm-
ly enshrined in Islamic law and historical precedent, which require Muslims to
honor and protect those who frequently remember God's names and hymn His
praises in "cloisters, synagogues, churches and mosques."

The Prophet's intention of creating an Islamic identity, or ummah, was to
replace the tribalism of the *jahiliyyah* period, which fueled constant conflict,
with a notion of identity based on human God-given values mandated by the
above-mentioned verses [and others] which urge humanity to live by the second
commandment of the Abrahamic faith traditions: *to love thy neighbor as thyself*, to
treat others as you would want yourself to be treated.

Addressing the Future

The larger question is: What is the basis of our human identity, as Europeans or
non-Europeans, as religious or not, as black, white, yellow or brown races? Can
we create layers of identity nested in a larger sense of identity, starting from the
individual all the way to a globalised human one? Our religious traditions teach
us that every human being is created in the Divine image—the Quran states that
God breathed a bit of His Spirit into the clay of Adam, thereby enlivening him.
Does this not mean then that we must see ourselves in the faces of others? And
that we are—and must live as—one consciousness?

Human conflict is fueled by fear, anger and misunderstanding. Western
nations that have openly embraced multiculturalism—Australia, Canada and
the US—are nations with an essentially *immigrant* identity. The European trajec-
tory towards multiculturalism is driven by Europe's economic need to import
labor from non-European societies, and is complicated by vestiges of its ex-colo-
nial relationships and military alliances: the UK with India, Pakistan and
Bangladesh; France with Algeria, Morocco and Senegal; Germany with Turkey.
Multiculturalism entered Europe by the back door, so to speak. The demise of
the welfare state, with its loss of economic benefits and social programs, com-
bined with the sense that the traditional nation-state identity is being diluted,
has given rise to high anxiety in many European populations, leading to dan-
gerous anti-Muslim sentiment. Let us hope that the evolution towards the
European Union model will usher in a multicultural paradigm that is inclusive
of the continents' Muslims.

Muslim nations too must recall their multicultural history. The treatment
by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries towards their guest workers in the last
thirty years is untenable under Islamic law. After decades of work and stay, and

contribution to the economic growth of their nations, guest workers—the vast majority of whom are Muslim—are generally not given the rights of citizenship that their co-religionists in Europe and America have won. This must change.

Will Kymlicka, speaking at the Multicultural Futures conference, suggested that immigrant groups in Canada need an "élite segment," defined as a group that can mediate and negotiate the group's status and issues in Canadian society. This suggestion needs to be globalised, for the whole world today stands in need of an 'élite segment' that will furnish powerful arguments for a Global Multiculturalism.

Limiting my comments to the Muslim communities, both the recent immigrant communities in the West as well as Muslim communities in their homes of national origin, I suggest the following:

1. Finding Muslim and non-Muslim spokespeople *who can mediate in both directions between immigrant Muslim groups and the larger society*: their work encompasses both mediating Muslim issues towards the larger society, as well as mediating the concerns and values of the larger society towards the immigrant Muslim society—as well as to the homeland Muslim society.

2. Developing Islamic arguments based on Islamic law, theology and historical precedent to support multicultural values and notions of social identity. Deploying Islamic arguments are the most effective way to correct this imbalance in the Muslim world, for then we do this in praise of God's name and furthering Divine justice.

3. Bridging Islamic values with Western values, by unpacking what they mean, line item by line item, to show where differences of semantics hide similarities of substance and content. From Church-State relations to differing understandings of representational democracy and good governance, such arguments can go a long way in helping us reconcile differing systems of personal and criminal law, and contribute towards healing the divide between the US and the Muslim world. Witness, for example, the recent flap over the EU's concern with admitting Turkey into the EU with its criminal laws on adultery, or the controversy in Canada over allowing Muslims to arbitrate personal law issues in Ontario under *Sharia* law.

4. Muslims need to be reminded that when Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century, it re-stated its principles and values in the cultural, social, legal and economic paradigms of pre-existing ancient societies with their legal codes: African, Egyptian, Roman Byzantine, Mesopotamian, Persian, South Asian, etc. Islamic history has ample precedent to demonstrate how the current challenge can be met, and in the process re-state its eternal principles and values in contemporary times so as to establish a Western Islamic identity [American, British, French, etc.] that can contribute to the evolution of a global Islamic identity. In the process, Muslims will re-discover their multicultural past and establish a strong basis for Islamic multiculturalism.

The Executive Director for the Association for Canada Studies, Jack Jedwab, observed that Generation M in Canada (ages 18-29) operates with the "they *are* us" paradigm instead of the "them *versus* us" paradigm which gives me great hope that the next generation of humanity really gets the Quranic teaching: "O humankind, We certainly created you from one male and one female, and fashioned you into tribes and nations so that you might get to know/celebrate each other. The noblest of you with God are the most devout/ethical of you."