

Is it a Phobia if They Really Are Trying to Shut You Up?

A striking feature of the unsolicited submissions recently received by *Humanist Perspectives* is the large proportion pertaining to Islam, immigration, and multiculturalism. I interpret this as a reflection of how rapidly Canada as we have known it is changing and the concerns this raises among citizens, including some of our readers. I have read articles in which people in areas of Western countries undergoing rapid change describe themselves as feeling like strangers in their own land.

It's probably safe to say that, as a group, no one has presented a greater challenge of integration than Muslims. Is there indeed a "clash of civilizations"? I would say yes, and it's not just from the violent jihadis. Many peaceful Muslims are pushing on the same side of the door as the jihadis, by seeking to transform our institutions and laws and using those very institutions and laws to do so. And one of the weapons in their arsenal is the word "Islamophobia." In the words of Abdur-Rahman Muhammad, a former member of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) who has renounced the group, "This loathsome term is nothing more than a thought-terminating cliché conceived in the bowels of Muslim think tanks for the purpose of beating down critics."

While the origins of the term are a bit murky, in the more recent past it has been used to deliberately obfuscate the distinction between criticizing Islam and promoting hatred or violence against Muslims. The first should be an uncontested free speech right, while the second is reprehensible and illegal. But both are unacceptable under Islamic law. Part of the "Islamophobia" narrative is that words will lead to violence, hence the big

push to address "online hate." And you can take to the bank that there will be attempts to widen the definition of what constitutes hate speech.

Criticism of Islam is already harshly punished in Muslim countries. The horrific experience of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman who spent most of a decade in prison for allegedly having insulted the prophet of Islam, which she denies, and who eventually found refuge in Canada, is a case in point. The pictures of rabid mobs demanding her blood are bloodcurdling. But the Islamist agenda also requires the enforcement of Islamic blasphemy laws in Western countries – the ones that now supposedly enjoy freedom of speech.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an alliance of the 56 Muslim-majority countries in the United Nations plus the Palestinian Authority, are promoting the silencing of criticism of Islam in Western countries through UN Resolution 16/18, a sharia blasphemy law-promoting resolution masquerading as one against religious discrimination and incitement. Based on the treatment of religious minorities in the countries behind Resolution 16/18 (ask Asia Bibi), it should be clear to anyone that the only religious discrimination of concern involves Islam. It should be clear, but we're talking about the UN after all.

Consider some of the countries who sit on the UN Human Rights Council. There have never been fewer than 13 OIC countries among its 47 members. This year the OIC controls 15 seats and next year it will probably be 16: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Paki-

stan, Qatar, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, and Togo. Somalia, along with two other likely members of next year's slate, Eritrea and Sudan, are among the world's bottom ten in Freedom House's annual Freedom in the World report.

While the OIC holds regular summits and meetings on Islamophobia (at its first summit, in Saudi Arabia in 2006, it announced a zero tolerance for it), neither the OIC nor its members in the UN Human Rights Council seem all that concerned about what happens to religious minorities in their own countries. And it isn't pretty. The World Watch List 2019 that the Christian organization Open Doors released in February says that 4,305 Christians were killed simply because of their Christian faith in 2018. Muslim converts to Christianity in countries governed by sharia law face the most severe persecution. According to the Independent Review of FCO [Foreign Commonwealth Office, UK] Support for Persecuted Christians published earlier this year, "In some regions, the level and nature of persecution is arguably coming close to meeting the international definition of genocide, according to that adopted by the UN."

Not surprisingly, the OIC considers the accurate reporting of human rights abuses in Islamic countries to be Islamophobic. When the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) in 2014 raised for consideration the practices of female genital mutilation, honour killings, stoning for adultery and forced marriage of little girls, it was told that these practices were permissible under sharia and therefore the Human Rights Council could not address them because to do so would be to judge or evaluate a religion. The IHEU had not specifically mentioned Islam or sharia.

Fortunately for the OIC but unfortunately for you and me, when it comes to so-called "Islamophobia," there is no shortage of politicians in Western countries eager to virtue signal their determination to eliminate this scourge or at least appease those who demand its elimination. Motion M-103 (Systemic racism and religious discrimination), essentially the implementation of Resolution 16/18 in Canada, was passed by Parliament in March, 2017, with the support of all Liberal and NDP members. Although almost all Conser-

vative members voted against it (objecting to the singling out of one religion with the term Islamophobia), the Conservative party has revealed its appeasement tendencies. Conservative leader Andrew Scheer removed his party's Michael Cooper from the House of Commons Justice Committee in June because Cooper committed the unpardonable sin of reading a sentence from Christchurch killer Brenton Tarrant's manifesto, in which Tarrant declared his sympathy to China, in an angry response to a Muslim witness having linked "conservative commentators" to "mass murderers." The Conservatives also disallowed academic, author, and long-time Conservative party supporter Salim Mansur, who identifies as a Muslim but has criticized Islamism, multiculturalism and Canada's immigration policies, as a candidate, presumably because of concerns that he might be considered Islamophobic. Mansur will now be running as a candidate for Maxime Bernier's one-year-old People's Party of Canada.

Not to be outdone, Ontario is on the verge of declaring January 29, the date in 2017 that Alexandre Bissonnette gunned down six people in a Quebec City mosque, as a Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia. No such date of remembrance was sought or given for the victims of terror attacks in St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Ottawa or Toronto. The narrative is that Bissonnette was driven to take action by online hate. The reality based on his confession to police is that he was driven by fear of Muslims resulting from the terror attacks on Canadian soil and in Europe, and he took action on the day that Prime Minister Trudeau responded to US President Trump's "Muslim ban" with a #WelcometoCanada tweet. Bissonnette feared that all these refugees would come to Canada and kill him and his family.

Bissonnette had mental health issues and his response was not rational, but his actions arose as a response to Islamic terrorism, not online hate speech.

If we want to "stand on guard" for free speech in Canada, we should keep a close eye on the Islamophobia narrative – and how our very own human rights tribunals deal with issues of "hate speech."•

– Madeline Weld

Letters

Are Canadian Muslims safe from the influence of Islamic State operators? It is alleged that around 200 Canadians have gone abroad to fight with this murderous organization, and now “those chickens are coming home to roost.” An IS operative with blood on his hands has been identified as living in Toronto.

It is important to understand that IS is a cult; Muslims all over the world have condemned its barbarous ideology. IS preys on emotionally unstable young men and women, citing historic religious grievances. It is alleged that the core of this cult are disgruntled Sunni soldiers of Saddam Hussein’s army, and they exploit the Shia/Sunni chasm in Muslim-majority countries.

This cult operates by poisoning the minds of its followers. The recent reports of a knife attack in Paris and the bombing of churches in Indonesia by returning IS members are worrisome for law-abiding, peace-loving Muslim communities. The followers of IS cannot be trusted; their thoughts are governed by a cult hierarchy.

IS has committed crimes against humanity; it deserves no second chance. Its members have blood on their hands, and they need to face the law of the land.

– Asad U. Khan, *FRCPC (ret’d)*

Ancaster, Ontario

Founding president, Islamic Education Foundation of Manitoba

Past chair of Muslims against Terrorism, Manitoba chapter

There seems to be something missing from the optimistic editorial on conscience, justice and the law in the summer 2019 edition of *Humanist Perspectives*.

If, as suggested, humans have a conscience which provides a quality of intrinsic goodness, then how is it that throughout history there have been wars and injustice? Where is conscience when genocide occurs?

Yes, there may be a few heroic individuals who risk their lives to uphold their sense of fairness, but how is it that entire societies can promote torture, slavery, killing and starvation of millions of other humans?

The answer is surely that humans are not only social animals but are also pack animals with an instinctive need to divide the world into us (our pack) and them (everyone else). Throughout evolution, the pack was made up from related individuals but in modern times it is generated by social ties such as language, religion and even sport associations. People

will make incredible sacrifices for the sake of their pack while inflicting suffering on others, particularly those who may be considered to be in a rival pack.. Unfair laws serve to justify such behaviour.

Problems which face humanity are now global in scale so we need to progress to a world where we are all us and there are no more them.

– Rodney Blackwell, *Langley, British Columbia*

Thanks to Rodney Blackwell for his thoughtful comments.

Yes, it is difficult to think of such a thing as intrinsic human goodness in a world so fraught with violence and brutality. But it is also difficult to imagine a world with so much individual love, kindness and generosity somehow emerging from the association of beings who are merely self-interested. We are beings of conscience but, sadly, we are also fearful, often ignorant and prone to prejudice, particularly concerning those who seem different – those who (to use the letter-writer’s term) come from another “pack.” The story of civilization is largely about how these human inclinations – compassion on one hand and fear and loathing on the other – fight for supremacy.

The idea of intrinsic goodness is central to a humanistic view of life. If such goodness were only an illusion, then the only hope for a decent caring society would be something like the fear of God – where being good is tied to the idea of retribution. But for non-believers, hope lies in this idea that basic human goodness will prevail and that, someday, if not overcoming the travails that continue to besiege the world, we might at least do a better job of dealing with them. This hope is strengthened by the many acts of unsolicited kindness we witness, every day – a mother’s sacrifice for her child, a young person’s help to an aging one, the courtesy and thoughtfulness that characterise most interactions with our fellow humans.

There are, of course, sociopaths who lack the goodness gene (or something). I have known some of them. We all have. The Americans elected such a man as President, striking a terrible blow against the idea of human decency. But such people are exceptions, and even Trump, too, shall pass. There are not so many of such people, though one of the great weaknesses of democracy, perhaps the greatest, is that elections seem to select for them.

– Gary Bauslaugh, Editor *HP* issue #209