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Necessity for Justice and Identity Politics

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Guest Column by Kazi Anwarul Masud

Perhaps the leaders of the world may wish to look back to the events of a century back that caused the world millions of lives and untold misery of the First World War (Oxford University International History Professor Margaret Macmillan-Rhyme of History).

Introspection into the causes of the First Great War could reveal whether it was caused by the overweening ambitions of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his ministers for a greater Germany with a global reach that could challenge the naval supremacy of Great Britain or in the sheer and seemingly unstoppable momentum of militarism? Or the War would never have happened but for a random event of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand heir-presumptive of Austro-Hungarian throne?

Has the world changed so much since the absolute predominance of the United States in global affairs has been now replaced by multilateralism with a growing China and a restless Russia under Vladimir Putin? Despite Robert Kagan and Niall Ferguson's dream of an unchallenged American might and unflinching belief in American Exceptionalism (no less believed by President Barak Obama) Fareed Zakaria's Rise of the Rest cannot be dismissed out of hand. Margaret Macmillan wished "if we can see past our blinders and take note of the telling parallels between then and now, the ways in which our world resembles that of a hundred years ago, history does give us valuable warnings".

Of the many destabilizing factors the world now has to face the despicable brutalities of the Islamic State, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and their cohorts. Macmillan finds it disturbing that while all of the world's major religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have produced their share of terrorists prepared to commit murder and mayhem in their name "the young offspring of Muslim parents from Pakistan and Bangladesh, even those born or raised in the United Kingdom and North America, going off to make common

cause with Syrian rebels, the Taliban in Afghanistan, or one of the branches of al Qaeda in North Africa or Yemen, despite sharing almost nothing—culturally or ethnically—with those whose cause they have taken up”.

Albeit there can be no defense for the terrorism and despicable brutalities perpetrated by the terrorists, the international community should remain conscious of the risks of identity politics by marginalized segment of societies on ground of religion. Alarming reports continue to pour in of violence threatening to become structural in Western societies where many people have started to look at Muslims, living for generations in their adopted countries, with suspicion. When loyalty to the country is questioned then the emergence of identity politics becomes inevitable.

Javier Solana, former Spanish Foreign Minister, Secretary General of NATO, and European Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy has recently observed that (Europe's Jihadi Generation-January 27 2015) the story of exclusion has been repeated millions of times in the countries of Western Europe, with immigrants and their families ending up poor and excluded. In the worst-case scenario, they are recruited by extremist groups that seem to offer what they are missing: a sense of belonging, identity, and purpose. After a lifetime of marginalization, participation in a larger cause can seem worth the lies, self-destruction, and even death that inclusion demands.

Europe needs to take a good look at itself. It must recognize that second- and third-generation immigrants are susceptible to the blandishments of terrorist organizations because European citizenship has not translated into social and economic inclusion. Chicago University Professor late Iris Marion Young's description of the adherents of identity politics is to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context in order to assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations with the goal of greater self-determination.

Others have added that what makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition had previously been denied. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.

Apart from the differentiation cited by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, to name a few, Islamophobia and Eurobia appear to have attracted the imagination of Europeans, mainly the French as among European nations France has the largest number of Muslim population accusing “among a generation of Muslims born in Europe, significant number have nothing but contempt and disdain for their native lands and have allegiance only to the Muslim ummah and the lands of their parents”. He strongly criticized the Arab European League for rejecting any idea of assimilation or integration into European society and the AEL founder Abu Jahjah for terming assimilation as “cultural rape”. Such obnoxious comment challenging the loyalty of a citizen who had never seen the land of his/her parents or ancestors should held in utter contempt.

In the same vein John Rex (National Identity in the Democratic Multi-Cultural State) suggests that national ideology established by the majority community may face corrosiveness by immigration of people from countries that have different culture and religion. He adds that many such migrants are likely to have a dual loyalty to their nations of origin and the nations amongst whom they settle. It is even more obviously true of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who migrate to Britain and, either directly or via Britain, to the United States. Members of the various sub-communities amongst these South Asian migrants may then feel that they belong to transnational communities spread across the world from Fiji to California.

The question is how such transnational communities should be conceptualized. The first thing to note is that the basic unit to which an individual feels attached is an extended family seeking to improve its economic estate. The second thing to note, however, is that faced with competition abroad these families may also feel that, amongst other competing families the markers of religion, language and shared customs may serve to indicate that some of the other competing extended families are also their potential allies in taking collective action in countries of settlement. While this may not mean a tight structured organization of the migrant community on ethnic lines, it does mean that individuals are conscious of ethnic boundaries.

The response to immigration by established societies to the presence of these minorities might take one of three forms. It may involve attempts to assimilate the minorities on equal terms as citizens; it may seek to subordinate them to a dominant ethnic group as second class citizens or, it may recognize cultural diversity in the private communal sphere while maintaining a shared public political culture.

The refusal by European nations among the developed economies to recognize cultural diversity or multiculturalism by Angela Merkel, Berlusconi, and Giscard D'Estaing among other politicians strengthens resistance from the minority ethnic groups. The inevitable result of attempted subordination by the majority community has brought about chaos in the global society already afflicted with a real possibility of survival if the projections of climate change scientists were to be proven right notwithstanding the dissention on the question of historical responsibility of carbon emission.

It is time, as Javier Solana points out, to accept that religion is not only a belief system; it is also an institution, a language, and even a kind of market actor, competing for supporters.

Radical terrorist groups attempt to consolidate their distorted version of "true" Islam as the only institution, imposing their language to win the entire Muslim market. Indeed, it was the failed transitions in Syria, Libya, and Yemen after the Arab Spring revolts that fuelled the Islamic State's emergence. Millions of young people, disillusioned by decades of social paralysis, unemployment, and brutal dictatorships, had dared to expect better. One simply cannot wish away more one billion Muslims through force. George Bush and Tony Blair tried and failed.

In their book Cutting the Fuse by Robert Pape and James K. Feldman found increased suicide attacks from 2004 and 2009 compared to a

total of 350 during the period of 1980 through 2003. Increased suicide attacks has been attributed to anti-Americanism, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, and in particular, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan where most of the attacks have taken place. Besides, contrary to popular notion that the attackers come from poor and uneducated background they were opposed to foreign occupation and in the case of Iraq they perceived American presence as assisting subordination of the Sunnis by the Shias.

Though decades might have passed since the "arrival" of the first generation of immigrants the native Europeans may still be considering the socio-economic costs of immigration. In the case of Britain, for example, the Office of Budget Responsibility feels that immigration "does tend to produce a more beneficial picture" for the Government's finances. The Budget Office advised that Britain would need more migrants to finance the rising cost of pensions, social care and National Health Service. Without immigration national debt will soar to 175 % of the GDP in the next fifty years.

In the case of the US recent studies demonstrate that the higher earnings of legalized workers yield more tax revenue, more consumer buying power, and more jobs. American Immigration Council positively views immigration. Recent studies suggest that the economic value of a new legalization program would be substantial, amounting to tens of billions of dollars in added income, billions of dollars in additional tax revenue, and hundreds of thousands of new jobs for native-born and immigrant workers alike. In short, a new legalization program for unauthorized immigrants would benefit everyone by growing the economy and expanding the labor market.

But critics are there to contest the benefits of immigration. In a vicious commentary against "immigrationists" The Guardian(May 17 2009) review of Christopher Caldwell's Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West—observed that Caldwell cut to shreds the conventional wisdom of the "immigrationist" ideology - the view that mass immigration is inevitable and in any case a necessary injection of youth into our ageing continent. He demolished the economic and welfare- state arguments for mass immigration and pointed out that in most countries there was no desperate need for extra workers in the 1950s - in Britain's case, Ireland still provided a reserve army of labor".

But Professor Bruce B. Lawrence of Duke University found Caldwell's diatribe as a full-throttle polemic meant to raise alarms, stoke fears, and tame a danger at once unseen and misunderstood yet pernicious and widespread. The danger is Islam, the villains are Muslim immigrants, the terrain is the West, and the outcome is certain defeat for European culture by the tide of Muslim immigration. One hopes that the Muslims, and in particular Muslim Diaspora in the West, would not have to tread "the path of progressive alienation" and become a second class citizen in the country of their birth.

The international community must realize and act in the belief that religion is a private matter for the individual and those trying to bring about an age of darkness have to be confronted and destroyed.

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