

## EDITORIAL

### *Fascism Triumphant?*

How do you address hate? How do you have a rational conversation with hate? In coming to the Netherlands to teach, as the professor of Islam and Citizenship at the University of Tilburg, I expected that I would have to struggle with this dilemma. But nothing could have prepared me for the level of hate, bigotry, and prejudice that apparently has become acceptable to a sizeable minority in this country.

Shortly after arriving in the Netherlands, I read an article entitled “Fascism Triumphant” which discussed the performance of Geert Wilders’ party in the recent Dutch elections. It was clear from the article that Wilders and his party peddle in the age-old commodities of hate and fear. On June 15, Wilders delivered a speech in Copenhagen entitled “The Gates of Vienna” and I must say that I feel a confounding sense of shock at the level of racial and religious bigotry and hate that now threaten not just citizenship in the Netherlands and Europe, but the very foundations of humanism, humanitarianism, and human rights—progress which humanity achieved at an extremely high cost of human suffering, bloodshed, persecution, and oppression.

Wilders’ ideas are so embedded in bigotry, prejudice, and racism to the point that one feels there is no point in trying to refute him with facts. People who are capable of so much hate need a psychologist much more than they need an education. They will willfully ignore and distort facts to perpetuate a fantastical worldview to the point that engaging them in rational discourse only legitimates their irrationalities. The ethical thing is to condemn and shame racists and bigots, but what to do when the world goes mad and people elect, legitimate, and even worse, empower them?

In many ways, everything about Wilders is eerily familiar. Wilders has a very polarized worldview—in his mind the West stands for all that is good and beautiful, and stands in stark opposition to Islam, which just happens to be associated with everything that is bad and hateful. In his Copenhagen speech he rants against moral relativism, socialists, and Islam. According to Wilders, Moral relativists, socialists, and Muslims (including Muslims

in the West) are in alliance against the forces of moral clarity and goodness. Wilder believes Islam is not a religion; it is an evil ideology and while there are moderate Muslims (whatever he imagines a true moderate Muslim to be), there is no moderate Islam. Because he is such a firm believer in human rights and personal freedoms, he wants to make the persecution of Muslims in Europe legal, and because he is a firm believer in freedom of speech, he wants to ban the Quran.

Wilders and his ideas will find plenty of company in recent history. I am sure the Grand Inquisitors of Spain, Tomas de Torquemada and Francisco Jimenez, shared his view of Islam and Muslims. Raising the banner of “Unity of Faith” and riding on a wave of fear and hate mongering, they expelled Jews and Muslims from Andalusia, tortured and killed a great deal of people, and also gave Muslims and Jews a choice: be exactly like us or leave! As to banning the Quran and the rest of it, again, there is a wonderful precedent for that in European history—after all, in 1500 thousands of copies of the Quran were burned in the Rambla square of Granada and a short while before that, the famous mosque of the Albaicin was converted into the Church of San Salvador.

Now, of course, Wilders and the people who voted for him are not intolerant—they are perfectly willing to tolerate moderate and assimilated Muslims. But so as not to sink in moral relativism, they want to declare the Quran evil, Muhammad the Prophet of Islam evil, and of course, Islam itself evil. Does it really take any intelligence to see that the logical conclusion is that any person who wishes to remain Muslim would have to be evil? Perhaps Wilders’ vision of truly moderate Muslims are people like Ayaan Hirshi Ali, Irshad Manji, Wafa Sultan—all who maintain a faint pretense of being Muslim only to condemn Islam as evil! What I believe is truly evil is that Islam-bashing has become a lucrative industry that guarantees the basher cash, fame, and a sure ticket to becoming celebrated as the brave voice of conscience by prejudiced circles in the West. And this is morally condemnable.

Is it truly possible that people who support the likes of Wilders do not realize that they are marching down the same path of every other fanatic who used fear and hate to demonize millions of people? Do they not realize that this is exactly the state of mind and moral fuzziness that resulted in the genocide in Bosnia and the Serbian rape camps? Do they not see the unmistakable parallels between their attitudes and logic and the dynamics that led up to the Rwandan genocide, Bosnian genocide, or Armenian genocide? One would have thought that by this day and age, it would have become clear that it is wrong to make sweeping generalizations based on the stereotyping of others. My Muslim mother taught me this as a child, and she also taught me not to hate. Do we really need to be reminded of

what prejudice and stereotypes have done to native cultures around the world? The bigotry of a Wilders does not differ much from the bigotry that allowed Dutch colonialism to massacre thousands of Africans and to create the genesis of the Apartheid regime that claimed untold victims in South Africa.

And ultimately, I know for sure that of all the people in the world, there is one man who would be in full agreement with Wilders' spirit, method, and dichotomous outlook: Osama Bin Laden.

Wilders uses all the right buzz words: freedom, liberty, humanism, human rights—all of which he then claims is the province of the West in its confrontation with Islam. Predictably, he pretends that ideologies of Nazism, Fascism, Marxism, and Socialism, and every other “ism” including nationalism, are not Western products as well. He would love to pretend that Karl Marx was a Muslim and that the Jewish Kibbutz, which are at the foundations of Israel, was not a thoroughly socialist experience. But the recasting of the facts is not the issue. The issue is the shameless way that hate mongers exploit symbols of hard earned human achievements. People like Wilders do not represent the spirit and tradition of humanism, liberty, tolerance, and human rights; they are a corruption of this legacy. Wilders represents the authentic West only to the extent that the Ku Klux Klan in the USA can be said to represent the Declaration of Independence and American Constitution. They, too, believe that the best way to deal with problems of urbanization and decay and to protect American values is through the mass repatriation of millions of people. They would send all blacks to Africa, Asians to Asia, and Jews to Israel.

It should be very obvious that the KKK is a corruption of American values in the same way that Wilders is a corruption of Western values. Scholars can debate whether secular humanism is founded on religious values; they can debate whether human rights are a Western invention that is universally valid and to what extent; and they can debate whether there is such a thing as Judeo-Christian values and to what extent the Islamic civilization made critical contributions to the development of these values. Scholars can debate all of that but Wilders and his cohorts can only exploit these debates, which they do understand and do not wish to understand. They are predators who twist serious intellectual issues into two commodities that sell well: hate and fear.

In his speech, Wilders boasted that his party won Rotterdam. What a shame that the city that everyone associates with the humanist Erasmus is now marred by such a profoundly contrary legacy. What a shame that the Netherlands, the country that earned distinction in history for being the center of religious tolerance and for being the refuge for persecuted religious groups and dissidents, is now tarred by this ugly legacy.

The important point, however, and something that the Wilders of the world are incapable of understanding, is that all cultures, societies, and religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have produced both the beautiful and the ugly. After all, it is the same people who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries put to death someone who stole a loaf of bread, and who built the Iron Maiden, the Rack and other horrific methods of torture, who are the ones who now realize that such cruel and barbaric laws are not consistent with their theology or values. The same societies that once embraced fascism and colonialism are the ones that now embrace democracy and human rights. It all depends on the ethical stand that people choose to take and what legacy they wish to build on.

The crucial issue for humanity, and not just the West, is how often people have to repeat the patterns of history before they learn something. How much ugliness before people learn beauty?

It was not too long ago that the Wilders-type of ideas resulted in the Inquisition, and the arrogance of the Inquisition was part of the culture that propelled the legacy of the Conquistadors and eventually led to full-fledged colonialism. This, in turn, played a critical role in creating the horrors of the slave trade and numerous genocides committed in the name of civilization in America, Asia and Africa against native cultures. And the bigotry and racism that fueled slavery and colonialism produced the extreme nationalism of Nazism and Fascism, which resulted in the horrors of World War II. Finally, hoping that history had taught us something, the world adopted the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. But now it seems that we might be forced to wonder how many people have learned nothing at all, and wish to relive these horrors all over again?

The real irony is that Wilders closes his Copenhagen speech by promoting himself as a defender of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And in the typical fashion of a pseudo-intellectual predator, he garbles his oratory with affirmations of the right to freedom of speech, which he takes basically to mean the freedom to malign Islam and Muslims, and the need for Europe to adopt the American model of rights. Now, this is interesting because under American law, free speech does not include the right to cry fire in a crowded theater—in other words, people do not have the freedom to exploit peoples' fears, and incitement to violence is not protected speech. And this is the real problem because the likes of Wilders do little but incitement. For instance, he cannot be bothered by the fact that the UNIVERSAL Declaration was drafted not by Westerners but by an American woman and an Arab Lebanese man (and to a lesser extent, a Chinese man), and it was not adopted by the Security Council but by the General Assembly of the UN. It was affirmed as an inspirational docu-

ment (this is why it is called a Resolution) by all nations of the world except Saudi Arabia, which abstained from voting. The Universal Declaration, which it is obvious Wilders has not read, condemns religious discrimination and bigotry and forbids hate speech that demeans any religion or the followers of any religious faith.

What is so disingenuous and disheartening about Wilders is that his speech and his party call for nothing more than thinly concealed racism. His central theme, as well as his rants about a so-called Eurabia, is that Muslims are different; they are incapable of assimilating because they are loyal to Sharia and not to the domestic laws of their country of citizenship; and they will be tolerated if they drop any pretense to a Muslim identity. In the USA, the arguments about an alien culture and the inability of people to assimilate were at the heart of the Chinese Exclusion Laws and the Japanese Internment cases. Even worse, if people would read the pontifications of pseudo-intellectual predators and even the claims of some prominent scholars in Europe in the 1930s about Jews, gypsies and others, they would find the identical kind of hateful discourse. It was alleged that Jews could not assimilate because they are loyal to Halakha law and because they insist on their own distinctive culture. We all know what this kind of extreme and puritanical nationalism led to: the Holocaust. If people support Wilders and his party, this evil legacy will repeat itself. The victims this time will just be a different group of Semitic people.

Khaled Abou El Fadl

**Dr Khaled Abou El Fadl** is the Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law, where he teaches international human rights, Islamic jurisprudence, national security law, law and terrorism, Islam and human rights, political asylum and political crimes and legal systems. He was awarded the University of Oslo Human Rights Award, the Leo and Lisl Eitinger Prize in 2007, and was named a Carnegie Scholar in Islamic Law in 2005. He was appointed by President George W. Bush as the only Muslim on the Commission for International Religious Freedom, and also previously served on the Board of Directors of Human Rights Watch. Dr Abou El Fadl has written 14 books (five forthcoming) and over 50 articles on Islamic law and Islam. His books have been translated into numerous languages including Arabic, Persian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Ethiopian, Russian, and Japanese. In 2007, his book, *The Great Theft* was named as one of the year's Top 100 Books by Canada's *Globe and Mail*. His book, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books*, is a landmark in contemporary Islamic literature.