

Another day in the life of a burka-bashing white oppressor



MARGARET WENTE

My week started well enough. I stopped by the local newsstand and had a long chat with the Muslim guy who runs the place. I asked him what he thought of the alleged terrorist plot in Southern Ontario. At first, he said he was worried about a backlash. Then he said that, in his opinion, most Canadians are reasonable people and won't blame all Muslims for the actions of a few. He told me that complete strangers often offer assistance to his hijab-wearing wife when she goes grocery shopping with the baby. Then he told me how angry he is at the young men who were arrested. "The people they hurt most is the Muslim community!" Then we shook hands. "I normally don't shake hands with women," he said, "but we are friends."

It went downhill from there. By noon, I had been exposed as a racist hater. Maybe you heard it on the news.

That morning, I had been invited to speak at a symposium at the University of Toronto. The subject was the impact that the arrests

of 17 people on terrorism charges might have on multiculturalism in Canada. The other speakers included three academics and two moderate Muslims.

Campus events such as this are iffy propositions, especially when the subject is the Middle East, U.S. politics or Islam. The audience invariably includes people whose sole purpose in life seems to be to grab the mike and launch into denunciations of Western imperialism. Every time this happens, I vow to skip the next one. But then time passes, and I forget.

I got up and said I didn't think the alleged plot had much to do with multiculturalism at all. Muslim extremism in Canada can't be explained by something we did

wrong (although we should do some things to minimize it). It's part of a global phenomenon from which we're not immune. I said our immigrant experience has been overwhelmingly positive (unlike Europe's), and that was unlikely to change. I said I thought the values of most Muslim and non-Muslim Canadians are aligned, and pointed out that there'd been virtually no backlash. Having said that (I said), it would be a good idea for us to robustly assert that some values are better than others. I added that it isn't racist to believe that burkas don't belong in Canada.

The other speakers agreed that Islamic extremism — not multiculturalism — is the real issue. The most aggressive was the Muslim

Canadian Congress's Tarek Fatah, who warned that too many imams are dripping Wahhabist poison into young men's ears.

Then came question time. One man attacked the panel for not uttering a word about Caledonia, where First Nations people have joined the global struggle against white oppression. (Big applause.) A gorgeous young student insisted there really is a backlash. Her evidence was that she felt people were looking at her because she was a Muslim. (Big applause.) She was outraged by my remarks about the burka, which, she insisted, women freely choose to wear. She herself was dressed in a sleeveless tank top with spaghetti straps and, in dress and skin tone, resembled a

third of the young women in Toronto.

But the best was yet to come, in the person of Rinaldo Walcott, who holds a Canada Research Chair in Social Justice and Cultural Studies. With his tight T-shirt and long black dreads, he made for an impressive sight. He denounced the entire proceedings as a racist exercise in colonialist discourse that objectified the "other" (or something like that), and he denounced me in particular as a monger of hate speech. Then he stalked dramatically from the room. (Big applause.) So much for free and open debate on campus.

After the session, several people came up to talk to me. "That's what it's like these days," said a woman who identified herself as a U of T professor. "You can't dissent. It's not tolerated." There was a note of desperation in her voice.

Not for the first time, I thanked the Mother Goddess that I'd passed on a career in academe, where the children of the middle class now flock to pursue degrees in social justice and cultural studies. There, they spend their parents' hard-earned money to learn that Western civilization is the root of all evil, and that the real oppressors of burka-clad women are people like me. Later on, I left a message for Prof. Walcott asking whether we could discuss what he had said. But he never called back.

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Air Canada does give a damn



MONTIE BREWER

I was more than a little dismayed to pick up my Saturday Globe and Mail and read Jeffrey Simpson's column (Air Canada Doesn't Give A Damn — June 10). Coming as it did without warning, and containing a level of vitriol rarely exhibited by the normally reflective Mr. Simpson, my first response was shock.

Upon further consideration, however, I had to admit that while I disagree with many of Mr. Simpson's assertions, some criticisms of our company are fair. We are not perfect and things sometimes go wrong. I'll be the first to admit that.

Let me also take this opportunity to apologize personally to all our customers who have experienced problems when flying with Air Canada. No one, least of all our company, wins when a customer goes away dissatisfied.

We carry 30 million people a year safely to their destinations. Along the way, we strive to provide professional, courteous service. Sometimes, we exceed that goal and our people reach out to customers in ways that are truly inspiring. But sometimes we let our customers and ourselves down. I don't think anyone at Air Canada would deny that.

Our employees have gone through a lot in recent years — a hostile takeover fight, a major merger, a severe downturn brought on by SARS and a financial restructuring. There is no doubt their morale has suffered along the way, and so I have made it my goal to rebuild that morale through dialogue, real change in the way we work together and meaningful financial incentives, such as our profit-sharing plan, which paid out \$43.5-million to Air Canada employees in 2005.

Mr. Simpson's criticisms of our employees, however, are unfounded and downright insulting. Our employees work hard every day toward better serving our customers. One important measure of this commitment is Air Canada's on-time-performance rating, which in the first quarter of 2006 was ranked No. 2 in North America, second only to Hawaiian Airlines, which operates in a somewhat more hospitable climate.

Moreover, monthly customer surveys demonstrate that we are making progress: Customer satisfaction levels have improved steadily over the past three years in all areas, including baggage handling.

Still, we are a company in transition in an industry that is itself in the throes of profound change. We are changing to adapt to the new industry realities and many of those changes are welcomed by our customers. We have lowered fares and are giving customers the option to choose the level of service they want to receive — and pay for. We have invested heavily in new technology to make travel simpler, such as the ability, both on-line and on handheld mobile devices, to check in before arriving at the airport. We are embarking on the entire refurbishment of our fleet to provide customers with new amenities, such as individual seat-back entertainment systems. We also are investing billions in new aircraft that will provide greater comfort and open new routes.

One thing that remains unchanged, however, is our dedication to serving Canadians. Contrary to Mr. Simpson's assertions, we have grown our services 6 per cent domestically, and both the Atlantic and Western regions have benefited. We have recently added new long-haul services to communities such as London, Ont.; Abbotsford, B.C.; Yellowknife; Sydney, N.S. and Fort McMurray, Alta., and with the arrival of more aircraft, we will introduce more long-haul, point-to-point service to smaller communities where market demand exists.

Through the dedication and focus of our employees, we are carrying more passengers to more places and doing so with better — and still improving — on-time performance and customer satisfaction. We are ever mindful that the Canadian travelling public has other options when they go to the airport.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Simpson has not been able to experience the improvements we have accomplished. We are still focused on winning him over as a loyal customer and show him that we at Air Canada do give a damn.

Montie Brewer is the president and chief executive officer of Air Canada.



ANTHONY JENKINS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

A debasement of Islam

Canadian Muslims must stand up to fundamentalists, says human-rights specialist **EMRAN QURESHI**

— an attempt to "return" to a purer, un sullied and, for the most part, imaginary past. There is nothing wrong with returning to tradition. But these interpreters put forth a fundamentally radical and intolerant understanding of Salafi Islam (one that incidentally also views Shia theology and Sufi mysticism as "innovations" and thus a heresy). Radical here is not a synonym for bad or wicked, but meaning a radical break from tradition.

That coupled with a 20th-century politicized understanding of Islam that has at its core an Occidental world view — a hatred directed at a stereotyped view of the West, the idea that Western values and traditions are alien, inimical and antithetical to Islam. This was an ideological construction on the part of Islamist intellectuals such as Abul Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb. (The irony is that these leading interpreters of Islam leavened their understanding with illiberal Western ideas borrowed liberally.)

Salafi utopianism and a politicized understanding of Islam mas-

querade as Islam. Both, however, repudiate humane and ethical precepts within the Islamic tradition. The message becomes more dangerous for young Muslims living in the West who are taught a distorted version of Islam that loathes the very society they live in. *Jihadis* take this stilted understanding and posit an apocalyptic conflict between Islam and the West: one in which the West is besieging Muslim lands and peoples. In this world view, they are simply defending the Muslim *ummah* (community) against a rapacious West. Here, the Internet helps constitute a globalized *jihadi* subculture.

This is a watershed moment in Canadian history, with a very heavy burden that has befallen Canadian Muslims, especially the very young and very visible. Islam has a long and peaceful presence in North America dating back to the African slave trade, and the Muslim presence in Canada dates back to the late 19th century. Now it has come under challenge.

My parents, who happen to be

practising Muslims, love their adopted Canadian homeland. When we were growing up, they were Trudeau-era Liberals who were liberal in outlook and temperament. Decades earlier, my mother worked for the Department of National Defence, and she still looks on her public service with pride. We made no distinction between numerous non-Muslim and Muslim friends and acquaintances. No false "Islamic" division between Islam and the West. Rearing a young family, we had no access to halal food because it wasn't available, but kosher products were, and for that we were profoundly grateful. In short, our identity was plural: Canadian and Western, Islamic, South Asian and with a profound respect for all humanity.

The worst that could possibly be done at this time is to make hoary generalizations about Islam (a religion, a culture, and civilization), and thereby accentuate alienation within the Muslim populace, an environment in which *jihadis*

thrive. Moreover, the average Canadian Muslim is not responsible for the actions of the radical few, and collective guilt is not the way forward.

That being said, there is a crisis within contemporary Muslim societies, and the reasons are complex. There is, however, one undeniable truth: Today, a tiny murderous minority teaches that it is permissible within Islam to murder, with religious sanction. That is a profound profaning and debasement of Islam.

Some Canadian Muslim leaders have responded by denial, alleging "root causes": Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East, or our troops in Afghanistan. They should, instead, reflect on the poison that is being disseminated, the ruined young lives, and the resultant prejudice engendered toward Muslims within the broader society.

Other Muslims argue that the real issue is Islamophobia and prejudicial attitudes and nothing more. This is a facile and borderline apologetic response.

Canadian Muslims have rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship. Canadian Muslim leaders should not continue to evade the seriousness of recent events and their responsibilities in cleaning up this mess, and Canadian Muslims who participate in and donate to Canadian Islamic charities and institutions should insist on moral and ethical accountability.

We owe nothing less to our country.

Emran Qureshi, a Canadian, is a fellow at the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.

The world according to Kim Campbell



LAWRENCE MARTIN

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Mikhail Gorbachev's startling offer to the United States to begin a three-stage process to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Most everybody, of course, thought it was propaganda. "Tell us another one, Gorb," But the Soviet leader proceeded to demonstrate that he was serious. For a while, he brought Ronald Reagan on board and, for a while, they lit up the galaxy with hope.

Today, you don't want to look. There is no greater terror out there than nuclear arsenals. But they are being stockpiled like beanstalks, and few seem to care. George W. Bush runs roughshod over the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But, yawn, we're so used to this Presi-

dent trashing the treaty system — he's junked or spurned nine international accords — that it isn't news any more.

Former prime minister Kim Campbell came to Ottawa this week to try to draw some attention to the issue. She is part of a group, the Middle Powers Initiative, headed by the intrepid former disarmament ambassador Doug Roche, that seeks a nuclear-free world. But nuclear weapons are viewed as a relic of the Cold War. Terrorism is the story. It swamps all headlines.

Ms. Campbell dropped in to see Prime Minister Stephen Harper. With a hundred other issues on his plate, he hasn't had time to look at her one. When he does, she shouldn't expect much. Mr. Harper is not about to go criticizing Mr. Bush — no matter how many treaties he trashes.

She is 59 now, but Ms. Campbell still has the soft, sparkling eyes of a kid. Our footnote PM is still not afraid to be frank, even with her conservative brethren in power north and south of the border. Sitting in a corner of a dimly lit Otta-

wa restaurant, she talked of the nuclear threat and of Mr. Bush and Mr. Harper in the context of the harsher conservatism of our times.

Though she credited Mr. Harper with a fine start, she believes his Conservatives, especially in terms of social policy, are to the right of the average Canadian. Being wonderfully experienced in the art of



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short governance, she issued a warning: They may not last long.

"It was very clear in the last campaign that the Conservative Party tried to put a more centrist or moderate philosophy in the window," said Ms. Campbell. "Now, whether they can continue to do that, I don't know. If they can't and the more socially Conservative members of the caucus are able to impose an agenda, I don't think they will be able to survive as a government. It will be very, very hard."

Having spent a few years in Los Angeles and Boston, Ms. Campbell now resides in Spain, where she heads up the Club of Madrid, a group of former leaders helping nascent democracies. The distance she keeps from Canada helps soften the scars of the 1993 election, her party's two-seat horror show. She no longer — or so she claims — dwells on it.

Being out of the country for so long has made her more appreciative of the values of multilateralism. She's a Conservative, but she kept using a term that is anathema to those on that side of the political spectrum — "soft power."

"One of the sad things about unilateralism," said Ms. Campbell, a former defence minister, "is that it has in many ways destroyed so much of America's soft power. Soft power is extremely important. It is goodwill that gets you listened to."

She supports the Canadian military effort in Afghanistan, but the chances of Canada and its allies winning there, she said, have been hamstrung by the Bush diversion in Iraq. That war took away the resources necessary to win in Afghanistan. The hard power as displayed in Iraq has made America weaker, she maintained, not stronger.

But it's not all grim out there, said our first and only female prime minister. The Bush Republicans — and we can only hope she is right on this — have learned that "being big and powerful is not enough." Even on the issue of nuclear weapons, she sees signs that the President might come to his senses. He and his team seem to be discovering, finally, "that they need the rest of the world."

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