

The Minority Within The Minority

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Do your earliest memories contain ones such as a raid taking place in your house? I remember it well.

The raid was triggered by something that I did at the age of five. The authorities were looking for illegal objects that my father could have hidden such as alcoholic drinks, banned books, or illegal music.

In an interview with the public broadcaster who asked me: "Tell us how much your father loves the supreme leader." I had answered, "I don't think that he does like the supreme leader very much because he changes the channel every time the leader comes on the television."

How about being in a single gender elementary school, where children would line up every morning in lines of 40 -50 per class? Then they would all sing the National anthem and were asked to shout on top of their lungs "death to USA, death to Israel, and death to England" for each three times. I wasn't even old enough to know what or where these places were, but I knew that I had wanted them dead. I remember I was sent to the principal's office a few times because another kid ratted on me that I wasn't shouting these chants loud enough and was messing the words up.

In a girl's school a person had the job of controlling the children and preventing rowdiness. Perhaps it would sound strange to you that this could include checking to make sure that the head-scarfs were tight enough, or nails were clipped, or girls were not wearing any nail polish. You could even get into trouble if you were wearing colourful socks, singing any songs under your breath since music was banned and especially females were banned from singing. In a boy's school, they would also check the personal hygiene and that you weren't wearing fun colored shirts, short sleeved shirts, or weren't hiding anything such as the American flag or the union Jack in your back pack as a sign of rebellion. Certain "western" haircuts could also get you in trouble.

Did you ever live in a place where children had no rights to speak of? Where physical abuse of the girls and boys was sanctioned by the belief system of the majority. If you live in a place with Sharia law, then you would see that not only all children suffer from sanctioned abuse, but the girls would suffer twice as much. Mothers believed they had to prepare their girls for an early marriage and a life of submission. Their own personal experience didn't provide them any expertise to be teaching anything of value to their girls or boys.

Were you ever stopped by the authorities at gun point because you were running home from school to watch your favorite show, and how dare you do that when you are a girl? Your head scarf might fall back to expose a bit of your hair and that might distract a man that could be watching.

Were you ever stopped by the authorities at a gun point because you had too much gel in your hair and that you were listening to a not-approved music too loudly in your car? The only logical reason for this would be to attract girls? And how dare you want the other gender to take notice of you? God doesn't approve of this kind of behaviour.

Do the stories above feel familiar?

If your answer is no, and what a twisted society and what a stupid way of living, then you were probably born and raised in a free society.

If your answer is yes and then some, then you probably have experienced a Muslim majority society or North Korea.

All the experiences mentioned above, were either my own memories or my own observations of cousins and friends that I grew up with in my country of birth. I believe that speaking of actual events of childhood should exempt me from being called an Islamophobe. Nevertheless to comfort those among the readers that are hyper sensitive towards the rights of minorities and believe that I should keep my memories to myself, I declare that not all Muslims agree with the situation described above, and not all Muslim majority societies are similar to the one described above.

In addition, not all Muslims see a real problem with divulging the memories I had described above. The Muslim majority country that I came from has a population of approximately 80,000,000 people. If 1 % of this population is involuntarily forced to declare themselves as Muslims, then that is 800,000 people who lack freedom of religion or freedom from religion

I am an atheist [apostate](#) living in secular Canada. My family was one of the lucky ones that could pay the fees, and do the paper work patiently and move to Canada as immigrants. I feel so lucky that my mother sacrificed everything including a comfortable retirement near her family to move her children to a free society. There is also a tremendous sadness and guilt about leaving behind so many people like me that still have to live in my previous country.

When we moved here to Canada, we moved to a neighborhood that had many people from my country which was great at first. We didn't speak English, we didn't know what we needed and what forms we had to fill out; thankfully, the community helped us settle down and get our paperwork in order.

However, it soon became obvious that everything I had escaped was only what I had thought I had escaped. For example, within this community there was a huge rate of arranged marriages. I noticed that many people would travel back to the old country, get married, and then come back to Canada with their new families. I knew a fellow who had such a hard time meeting girls here. He was going to school and working the rest of the time; hence, there wasn't much time left to meet people. He went back and got married to his cousin, an act that is sanctioned by Islam. I spoke with this man many years later, and he confided in me that he wasn't happy in his marriage, but breaking it off and getting a divorce was out of question due to extreme family pressures. He said that he had wished that he had put up with the loneliness

back when we had met, and that he still feels lonely anyways.

Even though my mother and my father had made so many sacrifices to bring their children to Canada so that we could have a better life, they still didn't want to lose their culture. They wanted to keep their traditions and quickly learned that they didn't have to worry about losing their culture. 18 years later they still don't speak English, but they know that their culture is respected and that they don't need to learn this language. They call any criticism of their situation as bigotry and aren't hesitant to call me a bigot either.

When I started to break the tradition, I was told that I was becoming westernized. The sad look in my parent's eyes and sad tone in their voice told me of their disapproval. I decided that it was time for me to change my own life. I moved in with my boyfriend, and all I had to deal with was my parents' shaking their head and not calling me for a while. My parents may have been angry with me but I knew that I didn't have to worry about honor killing, or vengeance for a god because my family was not a religious one. I feel the most compassion for those that try to break free of their cultural and religious traditions. I would like to raise the reader's awareness to that group which seems to suffer the most.

Part 2:

My being an atheist in a Muslim majority society was not a unique case. There was a group of us in my school and I had heard of many in the other schools. Even though the penalty was death, as teenagers we had decided that death was better than living in fear and having no freedom. We would meet in cafes and discuss our ideas, but had no access to any atheist literature that may have existed on this subject. Many families such as mine moved to other countries to make a better life for their children, and interestingly the majority of them were highly educated.

I suspect and believe that the listed population of Muslims in any Muslim majority country is very inaccurate. When one is born in a Muslim society, one's parents have to declare the individual's religion and the sect that that person belongs to at birth. A Muslim child is brain washed at every level of life. Should this person lose his/her belief, or even want to belong to a different religion or different sect of Islam, the individual is then labelled as an apostate. This crime carries a death sentence and which has been carried out quietly for centuries.

Thanks to the internet, this phenomena is now better known by people in the west. I believe that there are millions of apostates living amongst Muslims that are simply too afraid to voice their opinions. As long as there are millions of unbelievers or what I call casual Muslims (those that do the rituals for comfort, but don't believe in the book), then I agree that one should not say that all Muslims agree with killing of apostates, stoning women and men to death for adultery, under age marriage, polygamy, inequality of men and women etc..

The most important right that one loses in a country that does not enjoy a secular constitution is freedom of religion, freedom from religion, and freedom of speech. One should not fear loss of life, if one does not want to subscribe to the belief of the majority any longer. This is

precisely what is happening every day in many of the Muslim majority countries, especially those in which some form of Sharia is the basis of their constitution. In addition to closed mindedness of Sharia, most Muslim governments have a large list of banned books which can occasionally contain previously well-researched and well-written works by authors within the said country.

My very first liberating moment as a Canadian was when I filled out my very first mandatory census form, and I could select 'None' for religion. The most important thing for me in this new society is to protect the freedoms that I am now enjoying at all cost, and I fear I see signs of degradation of these freedoms in Canada more frequently. I have divided the problem in two major points: 1. the problem that exists over there, and 2. the problem that brews over here.

If we agree that the best way of conducting Canadian society is having a democracy, then we have to agree that we have come to this conclusion by understanding democratic values and finding them the most ethical way of governance. If we love our democracy and believe that it is worthy of protecting, then we have to agree that places that don't have a democratic constitution are by our definition unethical. The problems over there stems from governments that are based on unethical constitutions. It is ridiculous to believe that every individual who is born in a non-democratic place agrees with the governing body of their country (over there). An Islamic constitution is almost always unethical. It disregards human rights such as women's rights and often has death sentences for crimes such as apostasy and homosexuality.

In a Muslim majority government with some form of Sharia law in its constitution, the people in power and their pawns are the ones who are extremists by our western standards. These governments do not value human rights of their population. I demand that people that are lucky to have been born in free and democratic countries and value their freedom, should show compassion towards those that happen to have been born in countries where their human rights are not respected. In other words, humanity has to come to an agreement that what is unethical here by today's standards is unethical everywhere and is worth knowing about and doing something about.

Now, let's briefly talk about the problem over here. As an immigrant to Canada, I have come to know of three common intents for immigration to this country. First are those from other secular democracies that move to Canada for an adventure. Maybe they have fallen in love with a Canadian or want a change of scenery and end up living in Canada. These people are most likely from countries that already enjoy freedom and have a robust constitution, but find that they want to live here, and thus participate in a democratic system by becoming citizens.

The second group are people who feel lucky that a country such as Canada has opened its doors to them. These people sacrifice so much to move their families to this country, and become invaluable citizens in the long term. One has to appreciate the cost of such a move, and the uncertainty of uprooting their families and moving them to a new and mostly

unknown culture. The majority in this group take such risks in hopes of a better life and future for their children. This group tends to work hard, encourage their children to get an education, and little by little make a better life for themselves. As for their cultural preservation, they perhaps want to speak their own language at home, teach it to their children. They will of course try to pass on their religion, and whatever traditional thing they find valuable in the culture they left behind. This group is usually not opposed to integration. They want their children to go to the public schools, they are open to inter-racial marriage, perhaps with a little disapproval at first.

The last group of immigrants are those that come to this country with no intention of integrating. They think that western societies are bad and unethical. This group doesn't agree with democracy, doesn't respect secular human rights as being legitimate, and is very religious. These people also want a better life for their children, but think that their culture is the best. They cannot understand why the better life doesn't exist in the country that they left behind, and they try to put much of the blame on western values. The common defense used is to blame imperialism of the west, or the western foreign policies ... for the poor quality of life in the place that they left behind.

I find that Canadians stick to the clichés that have been defining them as being Canadians and don't challenge anything that might make them seem 'not nice'. People readily say that this is a culture of inclusiveness and tolerance. These ideas are broad and dangerous for our democracy. What are Canadians truly inclusive of? What if the core values of an ideology promoted destruction of freedom of speech, gay rights, or women's rights? Are we so inclusive that we turn a blind eye to the cultures and ideologies that have consistently produced governments such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria ... The same ideologies that are also responsible for producing Hamas, Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda, the Muslim brotherhood ... Does the Canadian inclusiveness mean that we allow minorities to believe that it is a great idea to kill apostates for as long as they are minorities? Do we not see a fundamental danger in having such divisions in our society?

Almost every group of immigrants wants to and does pass down some of its culture to its next generation in Canada. This is a beautiful thing for the most part. It produces bi-lingual or multi-lingual individuals. It produces a mixture of traditions, which is a wonderful thing. Why not celebrate the Chinese New Year or the Iranian New Year? Why not go to the East Indian festivals? Why not enjoy the ethnic food and music?

All this is great, if all the individuals that participate in the Canadian democracy would educate themselves on Canadian values, and accept secular democracy as the most ethical way of governance. If it is allowed that a group of people, no matter how small of a minority to believe that this style of democracy is not worth defending, or is ungodly, or for whatever reason is flawed, that will result in a serious corruption in democracy. If individuals think of themselves as Pakistani first, Iranian first, Indian first, or any other identity first and Canadian second, this results in groups of individuals that go to election polls with an

alternate goal than that of improving this democracy. It is even a greater threat when an individual thinks of themselves as Muslim or Christian or part of whatever other religion first.

Within every cultural group in Canada, whether it is an immigrant culture or a localized cult, there are those that wish to leave it. In case of many Muslim immigrants from many different countries the individuals that want to leave their community fear for their lives, or lives of those they love. Although apostasy laws are not carried out in Canada, we often hear of honor killings.

As atheists/humanists in Canada, I encourage us to place our compassion and focus our efforts on the minority within the minority groups who want to leave religion. Every Muslim extremist attack in the world makes Muslim minorities feel threatened in Canada, and this is wrong. However, there are many individuals within those minorities that feel afraid because of Islam practiced here in Canada.

In our secular Canadian society we go to great lengths to protect the rights of people to worship whatever imaginary god they would like and go to great lengths to respect their culture. **However, we consistently fail to protect those that want to leave a god and cultural tradition behind.** The minority immigrant groups come together and comfort one another in times of hardship, but there is no such relief for the individuals within the minorities who wish to leave their culture and religion.

We as atheists need to realize that we need to form an environment for new immigrant atheists to belong to and feel protected. If such an atheist community could exist, then people that leave atrocities of religion can become an effective force in fighting religious and cultural extremism. In order to defeat injustice, we have to be able to help those new Canadians within Canada.

Signed,

Metamorphosis

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