

After Orlando (USA) homophobic massacre: Time to address homophobia among some Muslims

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Given the current Islamophobic climate it is wise for Muslims to make their position of peace and tolerance clear, even though it may not be fair.

How much can change in a week and yet stay the same.

It started on June 3rd with sadness upon learning of the death of Muhammad Ali. Thanks to the foresight of the Champ, who planned his funeral as a wonderful teaching moment on Islam, Muslims, coexistence, and justice, the week was one of the proudest moments for millions of Muslims around world. Islam and its markers, such as “Allah Akbar” and “Assalamu Alaykum” had been taken back from fanatics.

Then, just over a week later, tragedy strikes — again. Muslims are mourning the 49 innocent dead, dozens injured and countless others traumatized by the horrific attack on LGBTQI community in Orlando.

Muslims are also lamenting how the newly galvanized positive image came crashing down with the bullets sprayed by a crazed homophobe. Guilt by association does not know nuance.

To apologize or to condemn became the question. No community or group of people are asked to apologize for the actions of the fringe from among them, whether self-identified or through association. There is no broad expectation if you’re white or Christian to say sorry for the terrible acts of a few who happen to share your race, ethnicity or faith.

As Muslim basketball legend Kareem Abdul Jabbar summed up, “When the Ku Klux Klan burns a cross in a black family’s yard, Christians aren’t required to explain how these aren’t really Christian acts.” Atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and even animal rights and environmental activists are not expected to apologize for and distance themselves from terrorists among their ranks, and rightfully so.

The double standard is not lost on many who ask why only Muslims should be held collectively responsible for the actions of a criminal fringe.

Yet on the question of condemnation, it’s a bit more complicated. In the wake of the San Bernardino attack, U.S. President Obama, while noting that “Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbours,” also stressed that Muslim leaders must “unequivocally reject the hateful ideology that groups like ISIL (Daesh) and Al Qaeda promote.”

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Muslim organizations and individuals have done just that. Yet the community needs to say and do much more. Not because we have conclusive proof that Orlando

shooter Omar Mateen was driven by his religious belief (in fact, it appears he was not very religious like many of his ilk), but because there is a perception that he was. Given the current Islamophobic climate and the intensification of rhetoric from extremists it is wise for Muslims to make their position clear, even though it may not be fair.

Moreover, Muslim leaders must be more proactive in undermining some of the classical texts glorifying violence. The ethical and peaceful vision of the Quran must be harnessed to confront some of the existing Islamic narratives fuelling cognitive radicalization. Imams must deconstruct and contextualize the violent rhetoric found in juristic works and attributed to the Prophet and adopted uncritically by far too many.

Having grown up in the community and worked publicly as a Muslim activist for more than three decades during my student days and then as a lawyer, there is a culture of righteous violence and otherization that is rampant. Indeed, I was once of this mindset. The victimhood mindset combined with the moral certitude that comes with theological backing for violence in furthering “Islamic” sanctities is a fuse ready to be lit at any moment.

As noted on his Facebook profile by internationally recognized Islamic scholar Prof. Ebrahim Moosa of the University of Notre Dame: “It is a type of religious mindset that wants quick redemption by committing acts of horror that are proclaimed by ISIS as jihad and killing the enemy. This mindset, while peculiar to Muslim terror groups, also has a certain validation within mainstream Muslim theology where zeal (ghayra) to take moral offence at violation of Muslim sanctities is glorified. And often the violence perpetuated to avenge the moral offence is viewed as valid.”

The mostly Saudi and Iranian-funded Islamic world view preached around the globe has had profound and lasting effect on Islam as it is practiced today. This must be undone. The Wahhabi and Iranian influence is evident from the prevalence of aggressive *takfir* (excommunication), tolerated anti-Semitism, promoted homophobia and *kuffarophobia* (fear of unbelievers) and institutionalized gender inequality that is far more common than most of us are ready to admit.

Not to say there is a connection, but many may be surprised to learn that less than three months ago, at a mosque just 30-minutes away from Orlando, a foreign Imam was reportedly invited to address homosexuality. His previously recorded talk on the subject argued that death was the punishment — out of compassion and belief in the afterlife.

“We have to have that compassion for people. With homosexuals, it’s the same,” he said. “Out of compassion, let’s get rid of them now.” In all fairness, he did say that this law would not apply in the U.S., but subtlety is not the forte of zealots.

Islamic scholars and leaders can no longer afford to remain silent.

“Today we stand with them (LGBTQI) shoulder to shoulder,” said Nihad Awad of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) at a press conference in Washington, D.C. on Sunday. “The liberation of the American Muslim community is profoundly linked to the liberation of other minorities — blacks, Latinos, gays, Jews, and every other community. We cannot fight injustice against some groups and not against others. Homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia — we cannot dismantle one without the other.”

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P.S.

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<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2016/06/14/time-to-address-homophobia-among-some-muslims.html>

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