

I Like bin Laden

A true story by: Suad Bushnaq

Waiting for the bus on a chilly February evening after a long day's work in Mont Royal, the only thought on my mind was to be home, warm and dry. It seemed like ages for that bus to come, and I was so drained that even talking to myself was not an option at this point.

Then he came.

A shabby, middle-aged man, exuding intriguing whiffs of alcohol and grease. He started talking to me, complaining about the barking dog behind us, and I agreed that it was ruthless of its owner to leave it alone for so long. The man, whom I'll call Ben, started sharing his ideas regarding child raising. Although he made some sense, his reactions did not: He would get really loud, and snapped at a teenager who politely asked about the time.

Seeing that, I decided it would be best not to delve into more talk with Ben, for fear of provoking him and getting a scolding myself. I maintained a neutral smile, occasionally nodding mildly, after all, a woman has the right to choose when to turn friendly [or lack thereof] small talk into a conversation. I was, however, listening to what Ben was saying, privately admiring how smart his sister-in-law was in giving her son two choices of snack: apple or carrots.

Sensing my lack of interest, feeling alienated, or for a different reason altogether, Ben decided to befriend this hijab-wearing Muslim woman. He came closer to me, tilted his head, and gave me the 'I-understand-you-and-where-you-come-from-really-well' look. Winking knowingly at me, he said in a soft, friendly voice as if to reveal a long kept secret:

"You know.....[pause]... I like Bin Laden."

Shocked like someone who just got electrocuted by a blow-dryer dropped into a bathtub full of water, I flinched and started to subtly move away, hoping I was walking slowly enough for him not to notice, and fast enough to move as far away as possible. By the time I was saved by the bus, my head had transformed into what felt like a beehive during rush hour.

"What on God's earth is he thinking?!" I thought to myself, "What makes Ben laden with such thoughts?"

If he likes Bin Laden, then there are three things that disturb me. First, I don't want to be anywhere in the vicinity of Ben, anyone with Ben's ideas, or Bin Laden himself for all that matter. Second, because I am a visible Muslim, is that a pick up line to befriend me? I mean, I appreciate the gesture, but did he assume I would say, "Get out! I like him too! OMG I'm glad you support terrorism. Do you have Facebook?!" And third, which was the most disturbing thought bubbling in my head and which still worries me till this very day: Since when did the extent to which we stereotype and label an entire nation, based on the wrongdoings of a fanatic minority, go this far and soak this deep into people's minds?

As funny of a story this incident makes, and as much of an interesting conversation opener it could function, it is alarming. Telling it to my Haitian-Quebecois colleague, he told me how he was approached by a white man who blurted out, "I think O.J. Simpson is innocent, yo!" To which he replied, "But I think he's guilty!"

Similar incidents happen, and the media is not helping demystify misconceptions. In fact, I believe it is because of the media that we label and stereotype. My colleague continued to say, "If a black man kills someone, the news headlines would read: BLACK MAN MURDERS WOMAN." So true and so often to happen for it not to be considered intentional brainwashing, for when was the last time you read the headline 'WHITE MAN SLAUGHTERS WOMAN' ?

When a man not belonging to a visible minority opens fire in public, or rapes and kills women, mental disability is given as a justification for the motive. The number of women murdered by their intimate partners in North America is never mentioned although it surpasses those committed elsewhere, yet when an Arab/Muslim commits a similar crime, it is translated by the media into an honor crime or an act of terrorism that is painted all over the newsrooms in the name of that person's religion or race, without investigating his motive or mental state. For God's sake we don't end up remembering the victimizer's name but rather his colour or creed!

Insinuating similar ideas is just as bad. In 2009, thousands of Montrealers of all religions peacefully marched in solidarity against the Israeli attacks on Gaza. CTV's anchor announcing the news headlines that night shamelessly related the demonstration to a fire at the other end of town, by announcing with typical news-anchor excitement, "Any relation between the two?!"

Listening to the entirety of the news, both stories were covered as two isolated incidents. So tell me, why would she arouse people's sense of racism by uttering a mannerless comment that serves nothing but ignite racial profiling?

The fact that I am a practicing Muslim who follows the true message of the Koran does not mean that I support terrorism. I have had it with people associating me and 1.2 billion Muslims with the wrongdoings of a fanatic minority. I do not belong to them: I follow what I've been taught since my early childhood: a religion of peace, submission, and mercy upon all creatures where even plants and ants have rights upon me.

I have nothing against any religion or lack thereof, as long as people respect one another. When I condemn attacks on innocent Palestinians, I also condemn the attacks on the Twin Towers. I refuse to tolerate acts of terrorism no matter by whom they are committed, and with this I speak on behalf of the majority of Muslims.

I also condemn stereotyping, racial profiling, and intolerance, and will keep on fighting against until the day I die, so help me God.