

Shut down the sheiks who incite violence by Muslims

JANET ALBRECHTSEN THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM June 18, 2016

*First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a socialist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out —
because I was not a Jew.*

Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.

Martin Niemoller, 1892-1984

Protestant pastor who, for being an outspoken critic of Hitler, spent the final seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps

That history often repeats itself imperfectly shouldn't discourage us from learning from the past. Martin Niemoller's lesson about political apathy, first delivered in Europe's postwar years, has ramifications in the 21st century.

Islamist terrorists, under different names, from al-Qa'ida to Hezbollah to Islamic State and others, came for the Jews first. Then they came for the Americans on 9/11, then the British people on buses and walking along London streets.

Then other Islamist terrorists, using different names but infused with a similar religious ideology, came for prepubescent Nigerian schoolgirls. Others came to murder Yazidi boys and men; they came for the Yazidi girls too, selling and raping them.

They came for the gays in Syria and Iraq, tossing them off rooftops. They gunned down iconoclastic French cartoonists in Paris, young Parisians in a nightclub too, others in a restaurant, a cafe. French policemen were slaughtered on the street. Men advocating the same Islamist terrorist cause came for customers in a Sydney cafe, a Sydney police worker.

Then, on Sunday at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, they came for the gays, murdering 49 people. They will come for others, too. Every Western country is on high alert to prevent further murder at the hands of Islamic terrorists. It's not that we are saying nothing. We say plenty each time Islamic terrorists strike. But too few say what's needed. And that leads to the challenge raised by Niemoller: does silence equal complicity when it allows evil to continue?

Three fundamental failures rooted in politics, law and culture have led the West to a dangerous inflexion point in relation to the way we use words in the terrorism space. Politically, we fail to discuss the critical issue of the relationship between Islam and terrorism. Legally, we have laws that fail to prosecute those who incite murderous violence. Culturally, we have created a system of competitive victimhood, where people vie for victimhood status, become infantilised by a bevy of laws and concomitant social diktats about what can and cannot be said.

There is a direct relationship between each of these societal failures. The explosion of feelings-based claims, legal or otherwise, distracts us from confronting those who incite others to violence and, most critically, it fuels a modern veneration of victimhood that stifles critical debates about the values and future of Western liberal democracies.

US President Barack Obama has come to symbolise the political failure. Time and again, he has shied away from even mentioning the root cause of modern terrorism: radical Islamic ideology. This week, Obama confected outrage over this analysis of his presidency. He built a straw man that he could easily tear down. "Not once has an adviser of mine said, 'Man, if we really use that phrase (radical Islam) we're going to turn this thing around'," he said as he criticised the term as just a talking point.

Except that Obama hasn't managed to talk about this talking point. Not once this week has he engaged on the great challenge facing the West: the relationship between Islam and terrorism. If the leader of the free world cannot speak honestly about this, who can?

Refreshingly, in July last year British Prime Minister David Cameron said: "It's dangerous to deny the link with Islam because when you do that you neuter the important voices challenging the religious basis which terrorists use for their own warped purposes."

Alas, one good speech is not a conversation. In Australia, Malcolm Turnbull begrudgingly manages to mention “radical Islamists” and there the real conversation stops before it’s even started.

The departure of Sheik Farrokh Sekaleshfar from Australia on Tuesday night raises questions for us to consider. Sekaleshfar came as a guest of the Imam Husain Islamic Centre in Sydney’s Earlwood. Sekaleshfar has previously said having the death penalty for homosexuals in Islamic societies “is nothing to be embarrassed about”.

He outlined those views in Orlando just weeks before gays were slaughtered in the Pulse nightclub. He told the ABC, “I am a follower of the Islamic faith” and, according to Islamic faith, gays can be put to death in certain circumstances.

According to the sheik, death is appropriate, indeed compassionate, to end the life of sinning homosexuals if they have sex in public. “You will sin less ... we’ve saved you,” Sekaleshfar said.

The sheik has left Australia. He has been rightly condemned. The Turnbull government is reviewing visa processes. And now? Silence and a hope maybe that the sheik’s rapid exit from Australia will let sleeping dogs lie.

Yet uncomfortable and important questions remain not just unanswered but unasked. Do the members of the Imam Husain Islamic Centre, as followers of the Islamic faith, also accept the sheik’s views about death sometimes being an appropriate punishment for gays? What about members of the Islamic faith beyond this Islamic centre in Earlwood? Do they agree with Islam’s violent attitude towards homosexuals?

On Thursday evening at Kirribilli, the Prime Minister hosted senior Islamic leaders, including Sheik Shady Alsuleiman, president of the Australian National Imams Council, who has condemned gays for “spreading diseases” and delivering “evil outcomes to our society”. Among the guests was Hafez Kassem, president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, who has said gays should be treated with medication; and Supreme Islamic Shia Council head Kamal Mousselmani, who defended Sekaleshfar’s right to believe that gays should be put to death. Just imagine the outrage from the Left if a Catholic leader had said such things.

How many Australians Muslims represented by these Islamic leaders support these homophobic and violent views? Cultural relativism doesn’t cut it here. As Ayaan Hirsi Ali wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* this week, Muslim homophobia is institutionalised by Islamic law and homosexuality is criminalised in 40 out of 57 Muslim-majority countries.

Iran hangs men for being gay. Islamic State throws homosexuals off tall buildings. “Homophobia comes in many forms,” writes Hirsi Ali. “But none is more dangerous in our time than the Islamic version.”

If you advocate death for a group of people, you are inciting violence. That ought to be a crime. Even ardent defenders of free speech shouldn’t tolerate words that incite violence. Yet NSW, where so many terrorist attacks have happened and many more have been planned, has become an unfortunate template for the wretched legal and political failures to prevent those who knowingly and deliberately incite others to cause physical harm to people.

Section 20D of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act, enacted in 1989, prohibits those who incite violence towards others on the basis of race. There has not been a single prosecution, let alone a conviction. Not even when the spiritual leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ismail al-Wahwah, called for “jihad against the Jews”, when he called Jews a “cancerous tumour” that had to be “uprooted” and destroyed. His violent words were uploaded to YouTube, accessible to every young man with murder on his mind and hatred in his heart.

There have been empty political words and undelivered promises from NSW Attorney-General Gabrielle Upton about keeping the state safe: the state’s Liberal government has done nothing so far to ensure this law is enforceable and enforced.

Meanwhile, laws at the federal level haul young students into court for using words that simply hurt the feelings of a woman who worked at the Queensland University of Technology.

We have not just lost all sense of proportion. We have lost sight of principle. Inciting violence should limit our right to speak freely. Hurting someone’s feelings should not. Our failure on both fronts is dangerous. Laws that protect hurt feelings have created a wider, informal but no less powerful muzzle on us, preventing us from having necessary conversations about Islam. The same strictures infantilise Muslims as too irrational or too vulnerable to discuss their own faith.

Islamophobia epithets are routinely thrown around to enforce what has become a deadly silence. If a few Australian Muslims won't critique their religion, just as Christianity and Judaism have been challenged from within over hundreds of years, then, as Orlando shows, an internal problem for Islam becomes our problem. Islam's homophobia, divined from scripture and most recently enunciated by Sekaleshfar, struck at young gay men and women dancing in the nightclub in Orlando. Who's next? And when will someone finally speak up about what is at stake for Islam and the West?

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