

IF WE LET THINGS CONTINUE THE WAY THEY ARE GOING, WE WILL BE TRAPPED BETWEEN RADICAL ISLAMISM AND THE EXTREME RIGHT WING

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From time to time we would like to be able to write about something other than radical Islamism. Unfortunately, as the days go by, each day seems more and more like the day that preceded it, and every week there is a new batch of bad news. Over the past few weeks, we have already had to deal with the appalling controversy surrounding statements made by Pope Benedict XVI (who primarily spoke about the disastrous intellectual level of the imams and other leaders considered to be the self-proclaimed “guides” of Muslim communities), followed by the grotesque affair concerning that British police officer of Pakistani origin who refused to perform guard duty outside the Israeli Embassy in London. A position that Britain’s police establishment seemed to consider completely understandable.

Over the last few days, we have heard about four new incidents. **In Lyon, a schoolgirl was stoned for not fasting during Ramadan.** In Paris, the decision to suspend 43 baggage handlers due to security reasons has reignited the controversy over clandestine prayer rooms in airports. **Also in France, it was discovered on 20th October that two gynaecologists had been violently assaulted for having examined pregnant women.** In London, tensions were stirred by statements made by Jack Straw (and backed by Tony Blair) regarding the **Muslim veil.** Three revealing “incidents.” Sometimes the reactions of others to the sad state of affairs can also be revealing. **In Lyon, Mr Azzedine Gaci, president of the Regional Council for the Muslim Religion is upset by what happened. According to Gaci, the Koran should be a required subject in schools (sic!) so that “students can learn that women who are not feeling well are exempted from observing Ramadan.”** This comment may be analysed in two ways. First of all, we feel that the need to know when a female minor has had her menstrual period is a violation of her private life. Next, **if we have interpreted Gaci’s words correctly, we could infer from them that it would basically be lawful to stone a woman who does not observe Ramadan if her choice is not justified by health reasons...**

With regard to the affair concerning the baggage handlers, **an anti-racism association and several labour unions have called it a “Muslim witch hunt.”** The problem is, however, not hard to comprehend: **if we are looking for radical Islamists, we are likelier to find them in the Muslim community than hobnobbing with Jehovah’s Witnesses.**

In London, finally, **Mr Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, has warned that riots could be triggered by attacks launched against the *Niqab*, the full veil that conceals everything except the eyes of the woman who wears it.** In other words, let’s accept anything for the sake of public order.

When all is said and done, only two encouraging elements will be found amongst these reactions: the uncompromising position of the French professional association of gynaecologists, which has maintained that it is unacceptable to set up the role of hospitals in accordance with the patients' religious beliefs, and of many Muslims, both male and female, who have admitted on various web forums (including www.bladi.net) that they have been scandalised by the obscurantism demonstrated by those husbands who thought it would be a good idea to avenge their honour (?) by beating up a few doctors. **A reaction, articulated in passing, that proves that a large number of Muslims do not share the stupid, backward vision of Islam that some individuals would like to see triumph.**

We cannot forget **Nicolas Sarkozy**, who very calmly stated that his role was to avoid tragedies. He rightly understood that defending our values, defending the secular state and democracy have become key challenges.

If a man feels insulted because his wife has been examined by a male doctor, it is a sad situation for the husband because he has no place in Europe. If a man believes that his woman or his sister ought to wear the *Niqab* (or, for that matter, the *Burka*), he has no place in Europe. If young people feel that they are being "good Muslims" by stoning a young girl who decides to eat something during Ramadan, they have no place in Europe. Elsewhere in the world, there are plenty of appealing places, such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, where these throwbacks to another age are free to live their version of Islam to the fullest.

And if politicians and the media refuse to state it loudly and clearly, if the situation continues to deteriorate, the day will come when we, as democratic secularists (including a large number of Muslims), will find ourselves trapped between radical Islamism and the extreme right wing.