

Young Muslim adults have recently come under greater scrutiny for their involvement in criminal activities ranging from petty crime to domestic terrorism. Whereas crime among the youth is worrisome, it is for the most part written off as no more than the pains of growing up. Except in the case of Muslim youth, where it takes on ominous proportions if only because the Muslim community's public image is so entangled with the war on terror. The city of Minneapolis, for instance, set aside a special development grant meant, not just to reduce crime in Somali neighborhoods, as was announced, but also, some say, to prevent Somali youth from getting involved in domestic terrorism. After all, some of these same youth are known to have slipped out of the country to engage in acts of piracy on the east coast of Africa, or to help al-Shabab, a paramilitary youth group, topple Somalia's transitional government. Then there are the recent arrests in Sydney, Australia of Somali youth conspiring to storm an army base and kill soldiers indiscriminately. And this is not just about recent immigrants from third world countries. Reza Taheri-azar, a philosophy and psychology major at the University of North Carolina, and a long time resident of the United States, struck nine people with his sport utility vehicle at a pedestrian crossing because he wanted to 'avenge the deaths or murders of Muslims around the world'. Which begs the question: what drives these young Muslims, some with promising careers in the making, to fight other people's wars in foreign lands, or worse still, bring home such wars only to be fought against friends and neighbors? Is it because they belong to a small disgruntled group of social misfits who took the wrong sermons at the local mosque to heart, or is it because they are, in fact, part of an inexorable demographic shift worldwide that is turning society inside out.

Jurgen Habermas, the German sociologist, would argue that the problem Minneapolis is experiencing is part of a broader change taking place worldwide in the relationship between citizenship and national identity. In Europe for instance, two countervailing forces are seriously subverting the national identity of its citizens. On the one hand, the establishment of the European Union has so scrambled the national identities of long standing nation states that their citizens now complain of being turned into one bland demographic blob. On the other hand, the influx of non Europeans from Turkey and North Africa, brings them face to face with communities desperate to live next door, but not to become part of that very blob! Europe thought it had dealt with these issues way back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when monarchies in places like Spain, Portugal and Sweden gave way, firstly to territorial states, and then to nation states. These nation states, first formed in Europe and then transplanted elsewhere, were to have sublimated culture, language and religion to a new collective identity based on a common citizenship within a specific territory. The nation state was to have been a new collective consciousness, not of people of the same descent, as in an ethnic enclave, but of legally

recognized citizens who politically integrate and collectively organize to pursue their *individual* civil rights. But globalization seems to be unhinging this artificially synthesized identity that many would argue, has served the modern world more humanely and efficiently than any ethnic or sectarian identity. In the United States this unhinging manifests itself among young adult Muslims in an odd way that reflects their peculiar circumstances.

Recent surveys undertaken on behalf of national Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), as well as one authored recently by Fait Muedini (Muslim World (Hartford, Conn.) 99 no1 39-59 Jan. 2009) show that Muslim youth suffer an identity crisis that puts their faith and their nationality at odds with each other. They complain, for instance, that the media so distorts the image of Islam that all attempts to say otherwise are dismissed as faith based babble or a threat to homeland security. Their parents complain as well, when they in turn listen to their own children speak passionately in defense of US foreign policy or against societal inequities rampant in parts of the Muslim world. This backlash from both sides underscores the tight spots in which Muslim American youth find themselves; but it also puts some responsibility for such behavior on, of all things, the lofty ideals of both communities.

As Muslims they are taught that in fighting oppression they serve not just the oppressed, but the oppressor as well, because oppression ultimately cuts both ways. They are also taught to think of their communities like the human body: if one part suffers injury, the rest moans in sympathy. As Americans they see themselves as good cops in a dangerous neighborhood which the world is today. And they see American foreign power, not as colonialism in disguise, but as a humanitarian mission to take law and order, democracy, and human rights to those without it. These teachings act in tandem to inspire them. . . to hold both their communities to a higher standard! As Muslim Americans driven by their consciences to speak truth to power, they take their government to task, for example, for its foreign policy imbalances, and the Muslim world for perpetuating antiquated prejudices. Needless to say, many of their fellow citizens, and believers, find such talk unsettling. And so, they withdraw from public life, preferring instead, to pray at home, or hold religious services in basements rather than in the local mosques; and they've come to learn that some opinions about America are best kept from friends and neighbors. They have also discovered much to their dismay that to air the core values of their respective communities is to attract the kind of attention from those very communities that casts doubts on their loyalties.

And yet having a hybridized identity is about as American as it gets. Some consider being American and at the same time Italian, Jewish, or Hispanic a badge of honor to be proudly displayed at annual ethnic parades. But there are exceptions, as the Japanese discovered during their internment, and as young Muslim adults now discover. They learn that the mere display of their Islamic identity in school or their American identity at the local mosque unnerves those around them. For young adult Muslims both their communities, too often, look at common issues in ways that polarize rather than synthesize. They lament the fact that they cannot convince both communities that the war in Iraq, for instance, is as much about promoting human rights as it is about protecting America's energy interests; or that an attack on Iran would be met with approval not just in Israel but in Saudi Arabia as well; or that Islam is claimed to be an integral part of terror, not just by counter terrorists but by terrorists as well.