

Grano Series – Europe and its Discontents

The 3rd annual speakers series, held in Toronto at Grano Restaurant, explores the future of Europe the implications of a fast changing European Community for North America.

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The owl and the ostrich

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*The following is an edited version of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's talk at the inaugural event of the 2006-2007 Grano Speakers Series. An outspoken critic of fundamentalist Islam and its treatment of women, Hirsi Ali fled to the Netherlands from her native Somalia in 1992. She served as a member of parliament there for three years until May 2006, when she resigned her seat over allegations about the status of her citizenship. In 2004 she wrote the screenplay for the documentary *Submission*, directed by Theo Van Gogh, who was murdered that year by an Islamic extremist. Hirsi Ali's latest book is *The Caged Virgin An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*. She is a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.*

In Africa we sometimes used animals to say things on sensitive issues to avoid discussing the messenger instead of the message. So I shall use the ostrich and the owl to sketch the two most important positions on the issue of immigration and pluralism in Europe.

The view of things, as the ostrich sees them, in Europe today is bright. He sees an open market of 450,000,000 people with an amazing potential. He sees a thriving economy and the free movement of people, goods, money and services. Immigration, to the ostrich, can only be viewed as an opportunity for an aging native population. Borders are better open than closed. Islam is a faith like Christianity and Muslims shall adapt their religion to life in Europe.

According to the ostrich, very soon there shall be a European Islam, signs of which are already visible in the young women in tight jeans, high heels, black sleeveless tight tops and matching head scarves, all designed by Prada. This Prada Islam will replace the old rural one and function as a vaccine against the Wahhabi Islam of the Saudis.

The overrepresentation of migrants in the wrong statistics, such as unemployment, unfinished education and crime, is to the ostrich no more than a temporary affair. It's a period that all people from underprivileged backgrounds go through. This unpleasant fact in the history of immigrants shall be short, as long as there is economic growth.

According to the ostrich, the wealthy natives should stop whining about the backwardness of immigrants and concentrate on the benefits. The ostrich points to the nurses, nannies, construction workers, grocers, bag carriers, cleaners, factory workers and a host of other jobs natives won't do but are necessary to keep the economy going.

The ostrich is not worried about the flow of migrants transforming the culture and society of Europe in any negative way. The societies migrants come from will grow, mature, become rich and the flow will dwindle. The ostrich sees only one thing as a setback the xenophobia of native Europeans. If only the inherently racist white society was to overcome its fear of what is alien, it would notice how migrants have improved the cuisine, the music, the arts and the economy of Europe. The mantra of the ostrich is borrowed from Monty Python "Always look on the bright side of life."

Then we have the owl. The owl is a night bird and gets, more often than the ostrich, a glimpse of the dark side of things. He sees all that the ostrich does not see or, rather, he sees all that the ostrich sees. Europe is healthy and wealthy but the old owl worries that Europe may not be so wise.

The shadow side of the free movement of people, for instance, is the trade in women and children for the ruthless sex industry. As well, weapons of all sorts go unnoticed from hand to hand, from country to country, unnoticed by the various member states. Some of these weapons could be biological, chemical or worse.

The old owl sees how poor migrants are exploited by cruel employers who hire and fire them at will with little or no pay, again unnoticed or ignored by labour unions. The owl can't help but notice that even after the recent amnesty, Spain has an estimated one million illegal immigrants. The United Kingdom roughly half a million. France, 200,000 to 400,000, if you trust the French. I think there are more. Germany, about one million. The Netherlands, 125,000 to 225,000 and so on.

The owl perceives the scale of the problem in Europe as being vast and the results for illegal immigrants detrimental. "Look," says the owl, "these are

human beings who are often being abused, extorted and have no legal recourse." The owl acknowledges unreservedly the need for migrants in Europe, the aging populations and the decreasing population growth, but also sees that selection of migrants is not always based on who is useful for the economy.

The owl sees that Islam is not Christianity and that not all Muslims understand or want to share in any European future based on European values of freedom, tolerance and an attitude of live and let live. The owl cannot ignore the success of the Islamist totalitarian movement financed from Saudi Arabia and other petroleum nations in the Middle East, parts of Asia and parts of Africa.

The owl sadly looks on as poor kids are taught to view themselves as victims and the society in which they live as the enemy. He can't help but notice that Muslim migrants are receptive to the seduction of Islamism. Even worse, there are now natives converting to this brand of totalitarianism.

He can't help but notice that most of the people who migrate to Europe are from Muslim countries; the shrinking populations of Europe do not only represent an economic problem, but a more serious problem of a clash of values.

The owl can't ignore the growth of the extreme right-wing movements and parties. He fears that the debate on pluralism in Europe will be hijacked by two uncompromising extremes whites' power fascism and Islam fascism.

The owl thinks that the ostrich is right; we should always look on the bright side of life but be careful not to get delusional, perhaps because, unlike the ostrich, the owl has no neck to bury in the sand.

Foretelling the future can be fun for astrologists, prophets and crystal-ball gazers. For academics, it is not. If you get it right, you will be damned like Samuel Huntington. If you get it wrong, you will be called a certified idiot. So instead of predictions, we draw rough sketches of a best-case and a worse-case scenario.

In a worse-case scenario, the warnings of the owl will not be heeded. The optimism of the ostrich will be abandoned. The monopoly of force that is now exclusive to states will be challenged by armed subgroups. European societies will be divided along ethnic and religious lines that are hostile to each other. An already deteriorating education system will not succeed in grooming the youth to believe in a shared past, let alone a shared future.

The educating of kids will be left in the hands of their particular ethnic or religious community.

The European states will find themselves limiting civil liberties. Europeans will come to accept the de facto implementation of Sharia law in certain neighborhoods and even cities. The exploitation of the weak, women and children will be commonplace. Those who can afford to emigrate will do so. This emigration will compound an ongoing brain drain but also an outflow of money and expertise.

On a global level, Europe will be overtaken in economic growth by China. Russia shall not shy away from teaching all Europe a lesson. Besides, Turkey may fall into the hands of the Islamofascistic nationalists vying for power today and decide to become unpredictable. European societies may catch themselves begging the U.S. for help or reverting back to the short-lived, precarious alliances of 19th-century politics. Instead of an ever-growing union, future generations may witness an ever disintegrating one.

In a best-case scenario, Europeans will heed the caution of the owl without losing the liveliness of the ostrich. This wise and optimistic approach will be translated into a three-dimensional, comprehensive immigration assimilation policy designed on an EU level. First, controlled or planned immigration. Second, an intervention, sometimes proactive, in countries that generate large-scale exoduses. And third, an active assimilation policy. Member nations that do not meet this or frustrate this policy will be penalized legally and financially.

Coming to the first dimension, we will see, in a best-case scenario, a reform of current migration policy. The unplanned ad hoc migration and alien policies designed by member states will be abandoned and replaced with a planned one. This will require European immigration and naturalization services compared to that of the U.S. on a federal level.

Right now, Europe has 25 immigration and naturalization services, each with its own visa, short-term and long-term regulations, and each with its own naturalization procedures. Each member state assumes border control it no longer has or can't afford. The system is contradictory, open to abuse and difficult to control for law enforcement officials.

In a best-case scenario the EU will introduce quotas such as those in the United States, based on the selection of migrants and who is beneficial to the economy and who is not. The current system in most European countries is designed to attract the highest number of people with truly

heartbreaking stories, not the highest number of people who are willing and able to adapt to the European society. This will be changed.

The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention will be adapted to an age that is entirely different from the age in which it was created and adopted and recognize the intense difficulties it has brought numerous Western nations, which struggle with the assimilation of millions of refugees and their descendants.

The second dimension of that policy, that optimistic policy, is an intervention plan directed at Europe's neighbouring states or failed states that create conditions under which people have to migrate in large numbers. This interventionist plan will consist of aid, trade, diplomatic pressure and military intervention, if necessary. That's taboo in Europe at the moment.

Right now the EU selects the countries it wants to aid based on lists provided by the World Bank or the United Nations. The criteria for aid are based on such vague notions as the 100 poorest countries or countries with good governance or some other goody-goody sounding reason. If one takes heed of the precautions of the owl, one cannot help but think that Europe must start with its immediate neighbors when it comes to improving other societies.

In a best-case scenario, countries will qualify for interference - some call it aid - based on the number of migrants they produce. To strengthen the argument for this type of interference, the EU will respect the rules of proper free trade. This means that subsidies on agricultural products in the EU will be stopped in order to allow products from third world countries to be sold fairly on European markets.

Aid given to these nation states will consist of trying to decrease those factors that push out migrants. This does not mean that there would no longer be reasons for migrants to leave their home countries, but the political, economic and humanitarian reasons for large numbers of people to risk their lives in the sea and in the hands of smugglers in order to travel to the EU will not be nearly as pressing as they are now.

Finally, in a best-case scenario, the EU will implement an assimilation program guided by the lessons learned from the failed policies of member states that attempted to integrate non-Western migrants based on a theory of multiculturalism. It will acknowledge that the basic tenets of Islam are a major obstacle to integration. In practice, Muslims will continue to enjoy religious freedom within the EU, as long as exercising

that precious right does not infringe upon the freedoms of others, including daughters and wives.

The argument of the French is that the freedom of conscience and thus, faith, is best guaranteed by a neutral state. Much as I admire the American way of doing things, the French model seems to me to be the best in dealing with the problem of assimilation. It's geared best towards the folly of all religions that indoctrinate helpless children with the superstitions their parents subscribe to.

In a best-case scenario, there will be no schools indoctrinating poor kids with a hostile view of life. Outside school, parents may favour their religion. When a child is old enough to make one's own decisions, he or she will choose whatever faith or secular mind he or she wants to adhere to. Most important of all, he or she will have learned in school not to impose but to respect the freedoms of the other.

This means a clear departure of the old policies that were based on multiculturalism. While the prevention of ghettos is key in helping the integration of migrants, the best instrument for a reasonably quick and effective integration of migrants is education.

In a best-case scenario, the EU policy makers will invest in girls and women, protect them from violence, punish those who try to limit their freedoms and encourage them on and on to finish school, earn their own living and get complete control over their bodies and sexuality.

In a best case scenario, the EU policy makers, hopefully with the consent of the labour unions, will reform the welfare state; the regulations pertaining to the hiring and firing of employees will be made more flexible, making it easier for migrants to enter the labour market. We need, for the sake of integration, structural reforms that inform, that reward hard work and discourage idleness; reforms that punish discrimination in the labour market, reforms that ensure a climate of legal order and stability where wives do not have to be afraid of their husbands, where daughters do not have to be afraid of their fathers or their brothers, where girls can go to school without fear of being harassed by male members of their community, reforms that prevent genital mutilation and reforms that can ban radical preachers who preach violence and encourage their followers to engage in acts of violence.

In short, we need reforms that end the misguided policies that have brought Europe into its current predicament.

The combined vision of the ostrich and the owl is indeed possible in Europe but requires a great deal of willpower, leadership and, above all, the recognition that tolerating oppressive cultures and encouraging more mass migration from Islamic countries often hurts precisely the people we seek to help abused women in Islamic countries, young jobless men, and Europeans who live in working-class neighborhoods who wonder how it all could have gone so wrong.

A misguided vision brought Europe to its current predicament; an idealistic vision, convinced of the inherent superiority of enlightened values over the values of oppressive cultures, a vision steeped in individual rights, the rule of law and the equality of men and women, can help guide Europe out of it. It is possible. Europe is not yet lost and members of its immigrant communities can indeed integrate into a European society.

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