



How Silly Can You Get? A Fitna Lesson

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I plunge myself full-force into the theater; and I might as well have tied a boulder to my neck, in doing so, and hanged myself. I dash off a comedy about life in a harem; as a Spanish author, I feel I have the capacity to takeoff Mohammed without causing trouble, till the moment some envoy... I don't even know where from, complains that my lines are offensive to the Ottoman Empire, Persia, part of some peninsula in India, all of Egypt, the kingdoms of Barca, Tripoli, Tunisia, Algiers and Morocco: and voila! My comedy is flambéed to please some Muslim princes who I don't even think know how to read it, and who go around beating us across the backs while calling us "Christian Dogs!" -

Thus spoke Beaumarchais in the Marriage of Figaro. Three centuries later we do not need envoys, we provide them ourselves.

Here are a few reactions to the internet movie Fitna, by westerners.

The piece was available March 27th, around seven in the evening Netherlands time. By ten at night, the prime minister of the country had already appeared on television condemning the film and declaring it deplorable. He complimented Muslims for their fair reaction. He did so in Dutch, and English. Newspaper Trouw even topped that by having its next-day editorial published in Arabic. March 29th the Internet provider had to remove the film overwhelmed by threats.

Apparently the Dutch representative did not go far enough in apologizing to the world for the freedom of expression, and the acting president of the European Union (27 countries) called the movie an *incen-*

tive to hate. It so happens that this is a criminal offense in Dutch Law. It was not clear at the time whether or not the EU was filing a suit against Wilders. The newspaper De Telegraaf took the next step; it published a form for lodging a legal complaint against the author. Apparently the Attorney General had provided the wording since, they said, it would help the administrative process should many people choose to go to court over the film.

The secretary general of the UN firmly considered – all these considerations are firm and the speakers appear strenuously outraged - the film harmed the beliefs of Muslims and was anti-Islamic.

Compared to this, the response of Muslim lands was mild. Iran called the images violent and the content blasphemous. Indonesia thought it was misleading and racist. Jordan attacked the author for being Zionist and extremist. The Muslim Brotherhood said it was not an appeal to dialogue but rather to war. Morocco was particularly sweet and called it an example of human stupidity.

The process seems clear, we have become Islamic radicals.

We have reached the point where we are more popish than the pope. Well, not quite since the Pope baptized a former Italian Muslim during the Easter vigil.

Press agencies took advantage of *fitna*, the ordeal we are evidently experiencing in what was formerly called the West, to speak of Wilders

as an ultra right-wing politician. That's reasonable, considering he has called for a ban on a specific book, the Koran. He also advocates a smaller welfare state, lower taxes and more control on immigration, shame on him!

Now, can we be more patronizing of the Muslims? Can we treat them more like children? I doubt it.

Will this appease the radicals among them or empower them to act?

Considering we stole their message they might be angrier than yesterday. Imagine their concern: *You know what, I was just going to talk about that crazy Dutch film and, you wouldn't believe this, their prime minister took my line! What a (expletive)!*

Some might think they're making friends. Maybe they're just giving reasons for us to believe we are so weak that the smallest action could make us disappear.

Perhaps I missed it, but I heard no official voices referring to the freedom of speech. Well, a few voices were raised *before* the movie was out, floating the thought that it might be forbidden, and that, well you know, you better be careful. Remember Hirsi Ali, when all her neighbours managed to make her move. She was a danger to their community, or so said the judge. Afterwards, we even got her to leave the country.

By the way, what did she have to say?

Writing in De Volkskrant she reminded the prime minister that he should have been more nonchalant before the movie was released. She suggested he could have just said:

We cannot react on a film that has not yet been made, and till then any official position by the cabinet will not be made public.

She added:

In the Netherlands, the executive governs, and the parliament controls. Regarding Member of Parliament, Wilders, the Government behaved as if it were the controller. It tried actively (...) to keep his mouth shut. The fact that the opposition did not act against this grave attempt of censorship is more worrisome than any film over Islam.

Who offends Islam more: the representative that makes the painful but relevant questions over a religious belief or a government that utters hypocritical words of respect?

As a contrast she reminds us of the comments made by Ahmed Aboutaleb, a Muslim who happens to be a

vice-minister in that same government:

Muslims must think about the fear that accompanies their belief. The majority remains silent and that is not good. We chose the Netherlands, precisely because of the freedom here. This must be said. I miss the voice that parts company with extremism.

She concludes:

Let us hope that the entire government can now stand behind the elegant position of Vice-minister Ahmed Aboutaleb.

That'd be just fine, but I would settle for less. Could we just let the radical discourse to the radicals and not steal it from them? How is that for a start?

Immediately an envoy... coming from the West complains that my verses offend...

- Oh, hello, fellow westerner, I understood thee not, I thought you would have said the word to part company with extremism, says the Muslim.