

The Scars of Apartheid

by
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Apartheid. A word which when said out loud can send people of my parents' generation into unpleasant memories of inferiority to another race. My parents have spoken of commuting with non-whites and even shopping in non-white shopping centres. For an Australian this is difficult to imagine even though there always has been an element of racism in Australia's past, present and probable future.

It makes me think how South African migrants have assimilated into the Australian landscape. The word assimilate has never sat comfortably with me. Through my schooling years I and many other Australian children were taught about the white Australia policy and how it impacted on peoples of other ethnicities. Assimilation was a very nasty concept back then and not something I would ever champion for this vast brown land of ours.

But, we have grown up Australian, our identity, a juxtaposed mish-mash of religion and culture which influences our every day lives in big and small ways. How do Australian Muslims feel about each other? Is there an element of "racism". Does one nationality see another as inferior to itself?

I often wonder if all that has happened since 11 September 2001, has impacted on our community in a positive or negative way. Yes, we welcome new Muslims into our faith with open arms.....But do we? Do we help them in every way possible? Do we look up to them for the brave decision and commitment they have made or do we cast them aside as "not like us"?

I'd like to think that every South African migrant to Australia thinks like me. Growing up as "different" and not always fitting in at school and university, I developed a strong sense of self which I think I learnt from my religion. Islam is what defined me. Now as a parent I struggle with how I should raise my kids. Do we surround them with only Muslim friends? Is that the answer? Or are we alienating our children from a deeper understanding of the world and its complexities?

Some may argue that "my child needs to build his identity amongst his own people before being "let loose" amongst the masses." So what happens then? Does that same child grow up to be a man with a closed view to this world and the endless possibilities which await him? Should we not instil in our children a solid foundation built on the principals of our Deen and practice whatever we teach them in our home so as to be good examples. Is this a Utopian ideal? What happens when they reach university or enter the workforce? Will they have the skills necessary to carry them through life?

Speaking to many mothers, who are around the same age as me and who have children under 10, I find many confused as to what mix is the right one. Is Islamic School the answer? What issues await them at a secular school? What issues await them at an

Islamic school? This brings me to another issue. Is there an "Islamic School" in Australia which is run in the strict sense of the word Islamic. Or are they really secular schools with a secular curriculum who have just added Quraan and Islamic studies to their list of subjects?

What does being an Australian really require? I think this is the real question. And my answer is, to be a law abiding citizen of this country who will be happy to stand up and fight for its freedoms should the need arise. Does this in anyway take our Islamic identity away from us? My answer is NO.

My point is this, many migrants, recent or old, have formed communities here in Australia based on their last place of residence, even if that last place of residence doesn't define their heritage. The South African (Indian) Muslims have set up residence in Brisbane, predominantly the south side, and formed communities which are very close knit. Apartheid has left its scar on this community and it will take many years before it can be filtered out.

For those who disagree with the conclusions I draw. I ask you to ask yourself this- What would you do if your daughter or granddaughter wanted to marry someone who was not of South African background but was a Muslim? Truly answer this question in your heart and see if there is still an element of Apartheid left in you. If not, the second question you should ask- would I welcome friends of my children from other backgrounds, for example Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or Maori cultures into my home and treat them with the respect and courtesy you would hope other parents show to your children?

These issues are complex but need to be addressed. Let's begin a dialogue whereby we can open our hearts and minds to creating an Ummah which is ready to deal with what can be a nasty, cruel world at times but a world that has endless beauty and prosperity which can impact on the lives of many more Muslims to come.