

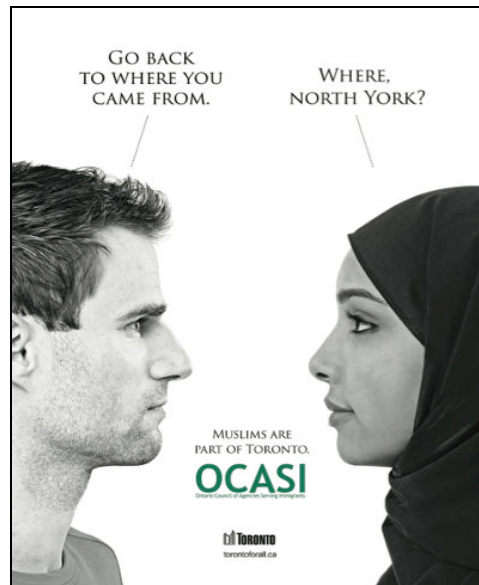
**TORONTO STAR**

## Anti-racist ad sparks controversy

### Comments

June 20, 2016

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### Ad campaign gets in your face, June 20

The poster aimed at countering Islamophobia has offended the large majority of Canadians who are tolerant, inclusive and exemplary of a multicultural Canada. Painting the picture of a “white” prejudiced Canada is not the way to alleviate cultural/religious frictions and misunderstandings.

By and large, we are not a racist society: we are the envy of the world when it comes to inclusivity. The poster is confrontational, paints with a broad brush the notion of a largely bigoted “white” society in Toronto, a city that many consider the most multicultural in the world.

Yes there are rotten apples out there but they are a very small minority and shrinking. The poster however has the effect of “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” We have come a long way in accepting one another in this diverse city. We can certainly improve on it using a much more positive approach, one that fosters exchanges of interests, understanding of differences and highlights of commonalities.

**Fidenzio Salvatori, Toronto**

This poster says it all for migrants and immigrants: for the recent migrants from the Middle East and Africa trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea for a better life in Western Europe; for the “boat people” from Vietnam in the 1980s; for the Asians who were kicked out of Uganda by Idi Amin in the early 1970s; for the Irish who risked their lives during the potato famine of 1845 to cross the Atlantic to North America; and for mankind, who from time immemorial has crisscrossed continents seeking greener pastures. The statement, “Go back to where you came from,” sounds very pathetic and ignorant and shows a complete lack of feeling for fellow human beings.

**Max and Helena Desouza, Toronto**

The new “Toronto For All” anti-discrimination ad campaign is powerful. It reminds us that Toronto’s motto may be “Diversity Our Strength,” but we live in a city challenged by Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism. This is a reality that our Muslim friends and neighbours – especially Muslim women who wear the niqab or hijab – know all too well. Like the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), we are committed to building a Toronto that is inclusive, safe and welcoming for all. It is our hope that this campaign will spark needed dialogue and action towards change.

**Heather McGregor, CEO, YWCA Toronto**

I am white. When I saw the print ad my gut reaction was negative – why are we using stereotypes to fight stereotypes? This is not a “nice” or “comfortable” campaign – and now after hearing the reactions to this ad I see the absolute necessity for triggering emotions and debate. There are many hard facts that show Islamophobia is on the rise and we need an active community response that rallies around all diversity for our neighbours, our children and for the sake of peace. Congratulations OCASI on sparking the conversation.

**Kim Jenkinson, executive director, HMC Connections**

Anti-discrimination campaign makes people uncomfortable — as it should, Opinion June 21 Amira Elghawaby’s mean-spirited defence – I suffered and now it’s your turn to suffer with this flawed ad – is very disappointing logically and emotionally.

Often discrimination occurs because the hater lacks the imagination to identify with the hurt felt by the target of hate. Thus her rationale for the insensitive ad needing to discriminate against whites in order to stop racism shows that she hasn’t learned how hate isn’t instinctive but is taught by society to perpetuate itself. Surely her justifying more

discrimination with the ads targeting a power group just adds to the problem and is not a solution that will break the vicious cycle of hatred.

How hard would it have been to specifically identify the target of hate – the girl wearing the head covering – but to generalize the identity of the hater? Couldn't a silhouette of the hater with a huge question mark superimposed on it have served to symbolize the general, anonymous, systemic discrimination that antiracists claim is inherent in society?

By singling out a young white man, a young white woman, etc., the antiracists have perpetuated hate on to this group.

Society doesn't need victims insisting on payback for discrimination, but rather transcendence of hate like Nelson Mandela who by their words and actions make sure that discrimination doesn't happen again to each and every one of us. A good antiracist ad should demonstrate that hate against any one of us is hate against all of us.

### **Tony D'Andrea, Toronto**

Some interesting opinions were expressed in your June 21 paper. Amira Elghawaby states we need an ad campaign to explain that a woman wearing a headscarf is not necessarily an ISIS supporter and a letter writer is incensed that a columnist's reference to a few Christian homophobic sermons is offensively implying something about all Christians. Maybe we need a neutral term to refer to Christian people like Pat Robertson who wanted all gays and Islamists to kill each other and the Muslim ISIS supporter who shot all those people in Orlando. In this world there are DRIB(S) and TRIBS. Pat Robertson is a Disgusting Religiously Inspired Bigot and we can include the "S" for the shooter who was a Bigoted Slayer.

World leaders and newspapers turned the word ISIS into Daesh to take away something from a loaded word and we can take out which religion is associated with an act to lessen people painting everyone with the same religious type brush.

From now on newspapers should primarily use the word DRIB when reporting on things like a homophobic sermon by a Christian, Muslim or any other type of preacher. The fundamentalist term for having a conservative, literal interpretation of the bible includes accepting things that are hurtful and things that are beneficial to modern society from a book. So it does not work. DRIB only rejects all that is hurtful and it has an antonym. Fortunately, in Canada the TRIBS (Tolerant Religiously Inspired Beautiful Souls) greatly outnumber the DRIB(S).

### **Russell Pangborn, Keswick**

This is where I'm from, Opinion June 20

Can you imagine our concerns if a publicly funded ad campaign served to alienate young Muslim men in their intellectually formative years? Some people might think this unwise.

Yet Shree Paradkar writes in her article such an alienating message is acceptable in addressing younger white men, all because somehow the “regular white Joe and Jane” will suddenly realize how lucky they are.

Instead, perhaps we might have an ad campaign to remind the young white male (such as the one pictured in the ad) that his heritage also includes the fight against slavery, the vast expansion of voting and human rights, the fight against Nazism, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Then just invite him to “Keep Up The Good Work” of his ancestors: Pride in good works will always be more effective than the shame and guilt that this campaign implies and Paradkar encourages.

### **Nelson Lister, Oshawa**

In assessing this new GTA ad campaign, the Star’s deputy digital editor, Shree Paradkar, suggests it should “depict more races.”

“In reality, if you fed that poster to a program that cycled through various racial or ethno-religious backgrounds for both people, and came up with, say, an Asian on the left and a black person, or a Hindu on the left and a Muslim, the ‘Go back to where you’ve come from’ sentiment would still be accurate.”

I find the aspersion cast against Asians and Hindus deplorable. She has disparaged both groups. But as a Hindu, I am appalled that her assumed bigotry in the minds of Hindus against Muslims in GTA is so pervasive that a computer program would routinely come up with this stereotype.

Ms Paradkar (a recent immigrant) needs to produce her evidence, otherwise she must apologize to the Hindu community for this affront and vilification. Veda Nath Mohabir, Toronto

Only a spoilt, self-entitling brat could have conceived such a silly, unreasoning and inflammatory propaganda poster. In all but gesture the woman is giving the middle-finger to everybody looking at the ad. Does the producer of the poster really think the model young woman pictured can be emblematic of Muslims to non-Muslims? Or that the young white man pictured, none too clean-shaven (he’s been too busy perhaps thinking hate-thoughts to care about what anybody thinks of him), can be emblematic of the anxieties of non-Muslims?

What the young woman hasn’t likely thought, and probably can’t imagine, is that she has every opportunity of self-expression here already, with none of the omnipresent risks her religion dictates in the countries where its influence rules.

She can be as rude and defiant as she likes, and get all the attention she wants as a result of it. She's only making things harder for new arrivals, who, unlike her, don't have a chip on the shoulder.

**R. Heard, Toronto**

As a Muslim who was born and raised in Toronto, the OCASI ad campaign sends me a different message. It reminds me that I didn't come from anywhere else, there's nowhere for me to "go back" to. My parents helped me create my own identity by fusing their old traditions with new ones (they make the best campfire biriyani!). It's up to me to take the next step and represent myself in the larger Canadian community.

Organizations like Canadian Muslim Vote and Uzma Jalaluddin's column in the Star help me add my voice to the diverse perspectives that define Canada. "Back home" to me is right here.

**Nizam Hussain, Stouffville**

This ad campaign dredged up a long-buried memory going back to 1942. As a 12-year-old kid from Western Canada, I arrived in Toronto in 1940, and by 1942 had acquired my own bicycle, resided on Brunswick Ave., and decided to explore places I had never seen. That found me on a Sunday way out in the Beaches area. Pedaling past a group of young guys on a street corner I was hailed with "Hey Jew-boy – go back to Palestine." I kept on pedaling but shouted back, "I come from Winnipeg!" Some attitudes are still in need of change.

**Morley S. Wolfe, Brampton**

I doubt very much that the ad campaign attempting to convert people who have an aversion to Muslims and the niqab will bring about the desired results. Ads like these are more polarizing and serve to entrench animosity toward the groups we are trying to placate. The article itself states the obvious as both Ms Elghawaby and councillor Joe Cressy say that the ad is intended to "force" people's opinions and attitudes. Of course if we used that word to express our desire to see Muslims assimilate into our Canadian way of life we would be ostracized in the media.

**Ross Quantz, Mississauga**

Yesterday my two neighbors and I convened on my lawn, as we often do, for impromptu chat in summer evening. I have known both of them for 12 years and we have an excellent relationship. But when the conversation went, "I have nothing against anyone but ..." I knew something was up. Then it went into 15 minutes of unimagined hate speech against Muslims – how we let them come in but they are causing problems; they dress funny and pray all the time; and accepting Syrian refugees was a mistake and it is costing Canada enormous amount.

However the most outlandish pronouncement was that "Muslims are taking over the world." During this interaction I was completely silent and they had forgotten who I was. Should I have defended myself and made use of this teachable moment?

For the sake of harmony and friendship, I kept silent. Would Canada become like America after a Trump presidency? Very likely. All the ingredients are here. But we are very fortunate that our government has changed and there is some initiative to restore traditional Canadian harmony.

**Shah Nawaz Husain, Brampton**

*“Go back where you came from,” he blears,  
Looking hard at the head scarf she wears.*

*“I’m headed right there,”*

*She replies with a stare,*

*“And we both pay the same subway fares.”*

**Robert Holland, Toronto**