

Public Narrative

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I remember the evening/ of 9/11. The day/ our world/ turned upside down. Some segments of society/ even celebrated the event. They were ignorant/ of what/ it was going to bring upon us. Afghanistan/ was attacked. My community/, on the border of Pakistan/ and Afghanistan/, couldn't avoid the influence. There were/ two strong sentiments. Religion/ and tribalism. And it pushed us /(as a society)/ to be part of a war/ that wasn't ours.

We were polarized into two major extremes: religion/ vs liberalism. The middle ground of coexistence/ that kept us together/ for so long/ was no more. Intolerance/ became the order of the day. This even affected/ deep rooted friendships/ and family ties. We were not ready/ to listen to each other. For both sides/, the only solution/ was war.

In 2008, my family's situation/ got even more intense. My younger brother/ had joined the war. The family/ fell into a constant tension. My parents/ forgot to smile. I remember/ how my siblings/ and I/ would constantly look for excuses/ to make them smile again.

Meanwhile/, after my masters/, I joined an NGO/ and started my professional journey. This posed/another challenge. NGOs/ were considered to be/ the helping hand of western agenda/ and their employees/, western agents. I was judged constantly. I was compared to my brother/ from both sides of the conflict.

In 2011/, after three long years of uncertainty/, my brother was shot dead/ in Afghanistan. But the judgments/ and comparison didn't stop. Being both a practicing Muslim/ and a liberal thinker, I was a misfit/ to both schools of thought.

Since 2001, we have lost/more than sixty thousand innocent lives/ in Pakistan. 60,000 lives lost/ to this war of opinions. The peak/ was even more horrific/ when a school was attacked/ and 140+ innocent children were murdered/ in cold blood. It was the darkest incident/ of Pakistan's history. But it also brought/ the divided segments of the society/ to a single platform/ which I call /the middle ground. For the first time/, the message was sent/ that terrorists have no place/ in any society. They have no religion, they have no race. And they must be dealt with/ with an iron fist.

Today/, from Brussels's attack/ to Ankara's explosions/, from Paris massacre/ to Lahore's blast; we faced the same enemy. We felt/ the same pain. We suffered alike. Yet the notion of selective humanity/ prevailed. The global community/ responded differently/ to each attack.

Again I realized/, this polarization of thoughts/ is a global phenomenon. And it is growing.

The division between the religious extreme/ and the liberal majority/ can't be overcome by closing borders. It cannot be overcome/ by passing sweeping laws/ or by shrinking freedoms. It must be discussed/ and understood. We have to collectively strive/ for that middle ground. A ground/ of coexistence.

I believe/ with this positive approach/ we can reshape the world/ into a place where diversity/ will be seen/ as something to be cherished; where a difference of opinions/ will not provoke violence. It will provide a base/ for meaningful dialogues instead. A place where the masses/ will not be divided by class/, color/, religion/ or ethnicity/, but united/ by humanity. Together/ we are the solution. Otherwise/, the terrorists will keep on/ exploiting our differences/ and we will keep on/ losing our loved ones.

If their negativity/ could unite them/ across the globe, then why don't we give/ our positivity/ a chance?