



Multicultural Societies

By the time a person matures and is ready to face the world, close to two decades would have passed during which he or she is formed and shaped. One's formation actually starts from the moment of birth, with name, gender, religion, culture, and social and economic status. Practically speaking, a person's whole identity is placed into a context that will strongly shape his/her future outlook. Of course, the list also includes belief systems, convictions, and values.

To name two experiences at opposite ends of a spectrum: A person born in rural Afghanistan during the past three decades would most probably believe that a woman's place is strictly at home, with the main role of raising children. Mixing with other members of society or working in a public place would be unacceptable. On the other hand, a person born in Helsinki would most likely consider it normal for women to work outside the home. This person would also most probably believe that women and men are equal partners. Now, who is to say that either culture is wrong to believe what it believes? By what authority can anyone judge a certain culture?

Devastating wars between countries and deadly civil wars break out as a result of cultural differences – certainly not only because of issues of women's equality. A look around our part of the world, in particular, makes one wonder whether these cultural and other ideological differences are reconcilable at all. Perhaps extra effort by world political and religious leaders would succeed in bringing about an agreed-upon world order and in bridging differences, at least to the point of avoiding a military conflict. Could it be that the answer is as simple (or as naïve) as "Let each society be?" The problem with this solution, however, is the fact that we live in a global village and depend on each other. A lesson can be obtained from former prime minister Enver Hoxha who isolated Albania for four decades because of a policy that ended miserably and resulted in making his country the poorest, least developed country in Europe. Another problem with the "Let each society be" solution is human greed and lust which often results in one country usurping the natural resources of another, no matter how peaceful that other country is.

As a child, I frequently heard a statement that shaped me. "How can a society function when half of it is crippled?" Ideology aside, it seems impossible today for an average nuclear family to survive on the salary of only one member of the family. As life's economic challenges increase, there is a genuine need for more than one person to earn bread. But when we see some people choosing to abide by traditional cultural beliefs, as grating as that can be on our cultural sensibilities, respect is called for. The best scenario we can hope for is a tolerant, even welcoming multicultural society where social security for all is guaranteed.

Long live Palestine!

Sani Meo
Publisher



The Hare. Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 100 cm, 2019, by Laila Shawa.

This painting is focused on the Turkoman dress that is particular to a district of Gaza called Shuja'iyya. During the Crusades, many tribesmen of the Turkoman tribes were part of Saladin's armies, and many of them settled in Gaza in the twelfth century. They brought with them their customs, their trade (which is carpet-weaving: kilims), and their traditional dress, which survived in Gaza until very recently.