

Opinion

Invitation to Asra Nomani an insult to Toledo's mainstream Muslims

By Dr. Abdul-Majeed Azad

I find it offensive that some folks in high places at UT are stealthily conniving to cause pain to the mainstream Muslim community in Toledo and its suburbs. I am referring to the invitation extended to Asra Nomani by the so-called 'Diversity' team.

Organizers at diversity should have done some homework before they were blinded by the blitz of Nomani's association with the Wall Street Journal and her trying to become the self-appointed mouthpiece of Muslims in the U.S. and Islam-berating champion at talk shows.

Nomani shot to fame by making unqualified comments against Islam in the days following the unfortunate events of Sept. 11 only to placate the frenzied audience of Fox News. Arrogance is dangerous. But arrogance laced with ignorance is even worse. Asra Nomani's book, *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*,

is filled with the combination of these two, as is her personality.

Her "storied" insistence to sit in the front row to listen to the Friday sermon and stand shoulder to shoulder with men in the mosque to pray is akin to the insistence of the Arab Bedouins to pray three times instead of the prescribed five times and not to pay the mandatory tithe commanded in Quran. Her misguided search for "her place" in Islam shows how shallow her knowledge about Islam and its edict is.

Her book is an account of self-grandiose, at best. It is also an account of the length a rebellious and ignorant person would go to malign anything and everything, including his or her faith, for mere 15 seconds' fame. Nomani's 15 seconds might extend to 15 years; they are nevertheless of infamy and ignominy.

People professing to be Muslim have been going to Mecca for pilgrimage for the past 1,500 years. Alas, instead of wondering if her arduous journey to Mecca was worthwhile, she chose to use this blessed opportunity to blaspheme Islamic traditions upon her return. So, it is no surprise at all that her ridicule of Islam in this book

became lilting music to those who hardly know anything about Mecca, let alone about Islam.

In today's media-controlled environment, her confrontational approach and statements toward the veil, conservative dress code and the position of women — at home, workplace and in the mosque — prescribed by the Word of God (Al-Quran) might be very appealing to the jaundiced-eyed onlookers of Islam — including some liberal Muslims in this town.

Nomani along with Irshad Manji is as controversial a figure among mainstream Muslims as are Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh among level-headed Americans. Give a microphone and a camera on the roll, neither of these camps would ever let go of an opportunity to show the acute symptoms of mouth diarrhea.

If openness in discussions and freedom of opinions was the yardstick that propelled the diversity team at UT to invite this controversial personality, one fails to understand why it didn't stand with Crystal Dixon when she was fired by the administration for speaking out her views. By the way, those responsible for hiring and firing at UT should rest assured that I'm writing this on a weekend at home

and sent it to the editor via my non-UT e-mail account.

Nomani does not represent mainstream Muslims. At times such as these, people unfamiliar or less familiar with Islam and its tenets should hear from well-learned and well-qualified Islamists in the country. Instead of bringing Nomani alone to present her own skewed perception of Islam, it would have served well had the organizers also invited a well-known Islamic scholar from within the Toledo community to present the correct view.

Diversity at an educational campus can be highlighted and strengthened by bringing speakers who are known ambassadors of fostering better understanding about religion and traditions and not those who deepen the divide lines, fortify the picket fences, and contort the truth.

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