



## Europe's forgotten heritage

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Comment

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IT was less than six months ago, in October 2010, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel affirmed that attempts to build a multicultural society in the country has "failed, utterly failed". Insisting that immigrants should "learn to speak German", she wanted them to do more to integrate.

Notably the comments came at the height of anti-immigrant sentiments and an election in Germany. A survey then reportedly showed that more than 30 per cent believed that the country was "overrun by foreigners" — mainly Muslims.

Earlier in September, Merkel praised Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and awarded him the M100 Media Prize 2010 in Potsdam. Apparently this is for his "bravery" in the drawing of the most controversial of 12 caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, first published in a Danish newspaper in 2005, which many considered offensive.

Last week, Danish People's Party MP Jesper Langballe alleged that Denmark has fostered a special culture of feeling offended. "A lot of people in Denmark — first of all Muslims, but also many left-wing people — see feeling offended as an art," he reportedly said.



*Young women of the German Muslim community take part in a demonstration against a ban of headscarves in Germany's public service in 2004. Merkel has affirmed that the attempts to build a multicultural society in the country has 'failed, utterly failed'*

Langballe was in support of the Danish Free Press Society president early last year when he wrote about Muslim fathers in a national paper. "The truth is that they kill them (their children in so-called honour killings) — and, in addition, don't pay notice to uncles' rape of their daughters." If this is his understanding of "an art", then Danish Prime Minister has a description for it: "stupid and generalising". Langballe was convicted of libel and paid a fine of 5,000 Danish Kroner (RM2,778) at the end of last year. Aping Merkel, he was quoted as saying: "Anyone who is unwilling to put the values of the host country above their own should leave, many come by choice." Merkel, however, was more emphatic when imploring immigrants to adopt German culture and values stating: "We feel tied to Christian values. Those who don't accept them don't have a place here." Such use of language and intonation sounded familiar at one time in several parts of Europe, stage-managed by German leader Adolf Hitler. According to the Jewish Virtual Library website, Hitler studied "the demagogic techniques of the popular Christian-social Mayor, Karl Lueger, and picked up the stereotyped, obsessive anti-Semitism with its brutal, violent sexual connotations and concern with the 'purity of blood' that remained with him to the end of his career.

"From crackpot racial theorists like the defrocked monk, Lanz von Liebenfels, and the Austrian Pan-German leader, Georg von Schoenerer, the young Hitler learned to discern in the 'Eternal Jew' the symbol and cause of all chaos, corruption and destruction in culture, politics and the economy."

The website alleges that the concentration camps, Nuremberg Race Laws against the Jews, the persecution of churches and political dissidents were forgotten by many Germans in the euphoria of Hitler's territorial expansion and bloodless victories. Today the euphoria is perhaps more of economic dominance and of soft power. Have many forgotten the tragic European history as it unfolds yet again? This time it is directed at another Semitic-Abrahamic target. Or is this an endorsement of the purported new "art" now taking centre stage in European democracy?

Maybe Europe needs to be reminded of euphoria in its history that has long been forgotten, seemingly by design. Those were the days of Andalusia, from the Arabic Al-Andalus, for at least 500 years. In Cordoba alone, a million people lived in Europe's largest city, the cultural centre of the time, as narrated in lively exhibits in Calahorra Tower across the bridge from the majestic architectural Mezquita de Cordoba.

There we are reminded of the meaning of life in Andalusia where there is no separation between East and West, nor between Muslims, Jews and Christians. "It was here that the true Renaissance began, where it blossomed and grew", came yet another reminder. It is, after all, an evocation of those golden centuries whereby "(wo)man became human" and how (s)he can remain so.

This is the heritage of Europe that has fallen into oblivion together with the illuminating message of multiculturalism par excellence that is more relevant today than ever before.

The leaders of Europe are poised to be multicultural beacons in their struggle to relive their own heritage of such a monumental proportion. Rather than succumb to the shallowness of the so-called special culture of feeling offended as an art form that only Hitler and his modern compatriots will come to appreciate in a "stupid and generalising" way.

They must first overcome their selective amnesia regarding their own history.

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