



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8-9, 2024

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE THEMED
“EMBRACING DIVERSITY: TACKLING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN 2024”

Baku, Azerbaijan



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Baku International Multiculturalism Center is a legal entity, being a non-commercial organization it ensures the preservation of tolerance, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity in accordance with the ideology of Azerbaijanism, as well as represents Azerbaijan as the centre of multiculturalism in the world, explores and promotes existing multicultural models. In its activities, the Centre is guided by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan, international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party, decrees and orders of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, resolutions and orders of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan.



The Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) is a think tank, which provides strategic insights and policy recommendations on international affairs, thus making decision-makers, as well as experts in the field better equipped in analyzing outstanding issues. Our mission is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of global and regional processes and expand activities aimed at raising the international community's awareness of Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities, particularly the Armenia-Azerbaijan post-conflict period and regional security. The main aim is to understand post-conflict experiences and Azerbaijan's plan to support full regional economic integration as well as the reconstruction and restoration process in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region.



The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) offers an annual platform where a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives engage on global agendas (primarily and including the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs). The annual G20 Summits are a critical time and place where priority global issues are considered. The G20 process has evolved since it was established in 2008, with various platforms (ministerial meetings, engagement groups) that allow different sectors and communities to present ideas and recommendations to global leaders. Our goal is to contribute meaningful insight and recommendations that respond to and help shape the G20 and thus global policy agendas. The G20 Interfaith Forum builds on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting their rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. These include interfaith and intercultural organizations, religious leaders, scholars, development and humanitarian entities, and business and civil society actors.



The Baku Initiative Group, an international non-governmental organization, is dedicated to fostering international partnerships in the fields of decolonization and human rights. The Baku Initiative Group mainly conducts its activities in accordance with international norms and principles, focusing on fighting colonialism and neo-colonialism while also protecting and promoting human rights, which are essential in the decolonization. The Baku Initiative Group firmly and continuously supports the struggles for freedom and independence of those living under colonial and neocolonial rule, committing to solidarity and practical assistance. Simultaneously, our organization contributes to women empowerment, human rights, environmental, and cultural issues.



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Azerbaijan remains steadfast in its commitment to combating Islamophobia on the modern front. Last year, the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre and the Center of Analysis of International Relations, in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum, convened a conference titled “Islamophobia as a Specific Form of Racism and Discrimination: New Global and Transnational Challenges” in Baku, Azerbaijan. The aim of the conference was to contribute to the ongoing efforts to combat Islamophobia in all its forms and manifestations.

Throughout the conference, participants engaged in discussions on various aspects of combating Islamophobia, including the importance of adopting an intersectional approach, addressing conspiracy theories about Muslims, examining historical and contemporary perspectives on Islamophobia, fostering joint cooperation in combating Islamophobia, and exploring the role of international organizations. Additionally, discussions centered on promoting religious diversity and interfaith respect to build harmonious societies.

As an integral part of the Islamic civilization, Azerbaijan remains deeply concerned about violations and abuses of freedom of religion or belief worldwide, including instances of intolerance and hate speech. Therefore, the second Islamophobia Conference, co-organized by the Baku International Multiculturalism Center, the Center of Analysis of International Relations, and the Baku Initiative Group, in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum, served as a platform for serious discussions, research presentations, and open dialogues to address the multifaceted problem of Islamophobia.

On the occasion of the International Day to Combat

Islamophobia

**International scientific conference themed
“Embracing diversity. Tackling Islamophobia in
2024”**

March 8–9, 2024

Baku, Azerbaijan

CONCEPT NOTE

Islamophobia, a multifaceted challenge, calls for collective attention, empathy, and dedication to nurturing a world that values diversity, inclusion, and mutual respect. The current year has witnessed a surge in anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiments globally, often manifesting in traditional and social media platforms, as well as through discriminatory practices and surveillance by authorities. Concerns surrounding Islam and Muslim practices have permeated public discourse in Europe and North America, yet scholarly attention to the global and transnational dimensions of Islamophobia remains insufficient, often treating them as isolated, localized phenomena.

However, Islamophobia transcends borders, proliferating through far-right ideologies and fascism in various forms. Instances such as Quran desecration in Sweden and Denmark, depictions of the Prophet Muhammad in France, and violent attacks on women wearing hijabs underscore the pervasive nature of this phenomenon. Despite lacking monitoring mechanisms for anti-Muslim hate crimes in some regions, Muslims remain the primary targets of online platforms fostering hatred. Such animosity is unequivocally reprehensible and has no place in our societies, prompting Azerbaijan to establish an annual tradition of hosting international Islamophobia conferences to combat and monitor anti-Muslim sentiments.

As we convened for this conference, we acknowledged the imperative to dismantle prejudices hindering the full integration of Muslims into society. This gathering served as a platform for public engagement on this pressing issue, transcending mere intellectual discourse to formulate actionable strategies for

a more tolerant and inclusive future. Over the next few days, we delved into the historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors underpinning Islamophobia, examining the impact of discriminatory policies, media biases, and societal misconceptions.

Our objective was to raise awareness and develop concrete solutions that address the root causes of Islamophobia and foster global solidarity.

The second Baku conference convened professionals, academics, and government officials to explore the global, historical, theological, and political dimensions driving Islamophobia. Participants were engaged in insightful discussions, posed critical questions, and examined the intellectual origins of prejudice against Muslims and Islam.

Our aim was clear: to cultivate an environment where people of all faiths coexist harmoniously, where diversity is celebrated, and where principles of justice and equality prevail. We approached these discussions with open-mindedness, understanding, and empathy.

Each panel comprised 6-7 speakers and a moderator, with presentations lasting 8-10 minutes followed by a Q&A session. The outcomes of the conference and its publications were envisioned to serve as advisory resources and roadmaps for nation-states grappling with the complex challenges posed by Islamophobia.



JOINT COMMUNIQUE

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE THEMED “EMBRACING DIVERSITY: TACKLING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN 2024”

**March 8–9, 2024
Baku, Azerbaijan**

The Center of Analysis of International Relations and the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum and Baku Initiative Group held the conference titled “Embracing Diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024” on 8–9 March 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Starting in 2023, this is a second conference which was organized in Azerbaijan with the aim to contribute to combating Islamophobia in all its forms and manifestations.

The conferences included the address by H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Yousef M. Al-Dobeay, Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Prof. Cole Durham, President of the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum.

As President Ilham Aliyev underlined “We are witnessing the portrayal of Islam as a potential threat, with doubt, discrimination and open hatred against the Muslims becoming increasingly widespread with each passing day. As stated in the UN resolution on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, rise in instances of discrimination, intolerance and violence directed against religious communities are the source of concern”.

In this regard, the conference participants, recalling the resolution 12408 (2022) adopted by the UN General Assembly proclaiming 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, emphasized that Islamophobia had emerged and developed as a new form of racism that includes, among others, discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion in all areas of life. Among the participants of the two days debate were many officials, spiritual leaders, experts and academicians – Mr. Hikmet Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Head of the Department of Foreign Policy Affairs of the Presidential Administration, H.V. Sheikh Ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Board, Mr. Khalid Fathalrahman Omer Mohamed, Director of the Center for Civilizational Dialogue at ICESCO, Dr. Dodik Ariyanto, Head of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory, and many other dignitaries, scholars and media representatives – total 130 delegates from 31 countries.

The participants of the conference discussed matters of intersectional approach in the fight against Islamophobia and coordinated efforts to promote tolerance, peace and respect for human rights and religious diversity, problems emanating from the theory on “the clash of civilizations”, narratives on conspiracies, digital Islamophobia and discrimination in higher education.

The participants acknowledged that Islamophobia and Orientalism, in all of its complexity, have deep root in the history of European colonialism and emphasized that discrimination policies still continued in Western Europe, particularly, in France.

The discussants condemned the desecration and destruction of Islamic heritage in the context of Islamophobia. The participants condemned the attacks on cultural and religious monuments, including against the statue of Khurshidbanu Natavan, Azerbaijani poetess, which was installed in the city of Evian-les-Bains in France and removed after the act of vandalism while the French authorities took no action against the perpetrators.

The participants also underlined the gender related problems within the context of Islamophobia, entrenched prejudices against Muslim women, including in the higher education institutions and called for women’s inclusion in peace and security agenda and promoting women’s agency and relevant social programs.

The participants called on stopping to disseminate the prejudices and biases on Islam and Muslims through mainstream and social media, which are leading to undermining the foundations of inclusive societies. This phenomenon became especially worrisome in Europe and North America in the context of geopolitical tensions and conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The conference reiterated the primary responsibility of international organizations and national governments to expand the existing legal instruments and policy measures which are not enough to counter stereotypes on Islam and Muslims.

The participants agreed to further enhance cooperation and collaboration in the area of combating Islamophobia in two main directions – at the political level and through public advocacy; and at media and academic level through launching programs and projects to tackle discriminatory narratives.

The participants have also visited the city of Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan and witnessed the cultural destruction during the years of the Armenian occupation.



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FOREWORD

The concept of "Islamophobia" in the socio-political circulation of the world today is essentially a dangerous phenomenon based on false ideas, radical religious, racial, and ethnic stereotypes, artificial threats, and most importantly, hostility and intolerance towards Muslims and the Islamic world as a whole for the sake of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. Islamophobia, as a form of xenophobia, is a serious threat that hinders the establishment and development of the interreligious and intercultural dialogue process. It is not a secret that the interests of power centers and transnational companies are hidden behind modern Islamophobia, which is hiding under the veil of "religious conflict" and which is gradually reaching the scale of a social pandemic, and which pits peoples and religions against each other. One of the dangerous points is that the fear of Islam, and religious intolerance towards Muslims has been injected into the thinking of some Western societies as a standard phobia, "Muslim fear".

It is known that today in several countries of the world, serious steps have been taken at the legislative level to prevent manifestations of Islamophobia, religious hatred, and intolerance, and the work of religious education among the population has been expanded. However, despite the positive trends, in a number of countries that present themselves as "democratic states" and "heralds of freedom of conscience", the burning of mosques, persecution of Muslims, insulting of their religious feelings, and burning of holy books are still taking place in front of the eyes of authorities. All this once again shows that racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and discrimination are practiced at the level of state policy in several countries. For example, in countries such as France and Sweden, Islamophobia, which has become total, is not limited only to crimes and provocations on religious grounds, it seriously affects the lifestyle of the Muslim population in the country and limits their rights and freedoms on purpose. They face artificial obstacles and social injustice in terms of employment, worship, hijab, and wages, and are persecuted by neo-Nazi and pseudo-religious groups.

In November 2020, at the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Nigeria, the manifestations of global Islamophobia were widely discussed and assessed as a serious threat to global peace, security, and cooperation. In that meeting, March 15 was declared the day of the fight against Islamophobia for the first time. The resolution adopted in this regard stated that cases of terrorism and extremism on religious grounds should not be associated with people's different religious views, ethnicity, and cultural identity. Two years later -

in 2022, the General Assembly of the United Nations–supported the initiative of the OIC and adopted March 15 as the International Day of Combating Islamophobia.

Distinguished by its unique ethno cultural diversity, carrying the mission of a bridge between the Western and Eastern worlds, and at the same time, despite being a secular country, the majority of its population being a carrier of the Islamic faith, Azerbaijan has historically been recognized as a clear example of a center of tolerance, multiculturalism traditions, and interreligious coexistence. These traditions are currently protected and strengthened at the level of state policy. The traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism, the inadmissibility of xenophobia and religious intolerance, which were improved and raised to the level of national ideology at the initiative of the national leader Heydar Aliyev, have further strengthened their legal basis and operating principles with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Today, the traditions of inter-religious coexistence in the country are getting stronger thanks to the policy of President Ilham Aliyev. It is no coincidence that now the Republic of Azerbaijan is one of the countries leading the fight against all manifestations of Islamophobia.

An International scientific conference themed “Embracing diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024” was held in Baku on March 8 and 9, 2024 on the occasion of the anniversary of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on "International Day of Combating Islamophobia". Leading religious figures, theologians, scientists and experts from different countries of the world took part in the conference organized in partnership with the Baku International Center for Multiculturalism, the Center for the Analysis of International Relations, G20 Interreligious Dialogue Forum and the Baku Initiative Group.

Over 130 representatives from 32 countries, including scientists, international organization experts, religious figures, and non-governmental organizations, participated in the conference. During the conference, participants discussed matters of intersectional approach in the fight against Islamophobia, conspiracy theories about Muslims, historical and contemporary perspectives on Islamophobia, joint cooperation in the fight against Islamophobia and the role of international organizations, building harmonious societies by promoting religious diversity and interfaith respect. It was not merely a gathering of minds, but a collective endeavor to understand the roots of Islamophobia, dissect its manifestations, and formulate strategies that pave the way towards a more tolerant and inclusive future. Hence, the second Islamophobia conference provided a platform for rigorous discussions, research presentations, and open dialogues surrounding the multifaceted issue of Islamophobia. Each panel consisted of 5-6 speakers and a moderator for 15 minutes and followed by Q&A.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has addressed the participants of the international conference held in Baku on the topic of "Preserving Diversity: Combating Islamophobia in 2024." The text of the address was read by Hikmet Hajiyev, the Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan – Head of the Department of Foreign Policy Affairs of the Presidential Administration. The address drew attention to the increasing cases of Islamophobia in the world and the fact that Azerbaijan has also faced this negative trend. *“Among the dire consequences of*

Armenia's 30-year long occupation of our lands was a deliberate destruction and annihilation of our cultural heritage of universal value, including the monuments associated with the Islamic faith. While initial estimates suggested that 65 mosques had been razed to the ground during the occupation, unfortunately, that number is steadily increasing as numerous new examples of Armenian vandalism against Islamic heritage continue to emerge."

To organize an effective fight against it, there is a serious need to develop a rapid action plan and formulate its principles. This highlights the importance of the unanimous activity of state and government bodies, religious community leaders, theological scientists, political scientists, and media subjects based on the ideas and initiatives presented at the conference.

In this publication, speeches and materials from the International scientific conference themed "Embracing diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024" are presented.



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ADDRESS

by

H.E. Mr. Ilham ALIYEV,
President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

To the participants of the international conference themed “Embracing diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024”

Dear Conference participants,

I welcome you to the international conference themed “Embracing diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024” held in Baku. The timing of this event, on the eve of the holy month of Ramadan for the Islamic world and the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, holds significant symbolism.

Regrettably, Islamophobia trends across the world are on the rise. We are witnessing the portrayal of Islam as a potential threat, with doubt, discrimination and open hatred against the Muslims becoming increasingly widespread with each passing day. As stated in the UN resolution on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, rise in instances of discrimination, intolerance and violence directed against religious communities are the source of concern.

It is deplorable that today, Islamophobia has become integrated into the state policies of numerous Western countries that consider themselves democratic. These countries account for 80 percent of all the manifestations of Islamophobia that occurred around the world in the last year. In some European countries where Islamophobia has skyrocketed and been promoted as an official ideology, such insulting actions as the burning of our holy book of Quran and publishing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad, are presented as the freedom of speech.

France, along its traditional neocolonialism policy, is pursuing a policy of open pressure and discrimination, staging various Islamophobic campaigns. Legislative acts and political decisions that exclusively target Muslims, limiting their rights and freedoms, are often disguised as secularism. In this country, mosques, Muslim community centers and cemeteries are desecrated in one way or another, and Muslim citizens endure oppression.

Instead of combatting these manifestations that insult the feelings of the Muslims and holding the perpetrators accountable, the governments of those countries are inflaming the Islamophobic sentiments, encouraging the persecution of Muslims and aiming to keep these subjects high on the agenda. Unfortunately, certain Western institutions that also portray themselves as democratic are engaging in anti-Islamic activities. Today, the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have become platforms that promote Islamophobia and pursue policies based on this ideology.

The present negative trend is also evident in the operations of some global media entities. They deliberately target Islamic faith and Islamic culture, distort the true essence of Islam, trying to equate it with terrorism and smear it. We strongly condemn these trends that increasingly aim to tarnish our religion. Looking at a world map, we can see that Muslims are the ones that suffer from terrorism the most.

Azerbaijan is also a country that suffers from Islamophobia. Among the dire consequences of Armenia's 30-year long occupation of our lands was a deliberate destruction and annihilation of our cultural heritage of universal value, including the monuments associated with the Islamic faith. While initial estimates suggested that 65 mosques had been razed to the ground during the occupation, unfortunately, that number is steadily increasing as numerous new examples of Armenian vandalism against Islamic heritage continue to emerge.

Furthermore, discoveries have been made regarding the hundreds of Muslim cemeteries razed to the ground, with the deliberate alteration and falsification of the designation of Muslim places of worship, mosques, and tombs. In most cases, these sites were used as barns for animals considered haram in our religion. Such offensive actions insult not only our feelings but also those of the Muslims of the world. In the meantime, destruction of Azerbaijan's Islamic historical and cultural heritage in Armenia is regrettable. Azerbaijan has raised this matter with UNESCO, calling for a technical mission to be sent to that country for assessing the conditions of our cultural and religious sites subjected to destruction in Armenia for years. Unfortunately, to this day, UNESCO is yet to respond to our request.

We take pride in Azerbaijan being a multinational and multiconfessional country. Representatives of all religions and ethnic groups live here in peace as one family. Religious equality and inclusivity, safeguarded in our country as an asset, embody the way of life for the Azerbaijani people, serving as a source of strength.

Stemming from that, it is only natural that respect for multicultural values constitutes one of priority directions of our state policies. On the global scale as well, our country is doing its utmost to encourage and promote peace, peaceful coexistence, and humanism values. Azerbaijan supports harmonic relations among diverse cultures, and spearheads numerous global initiatives focused on intercivilizational and intercultural dialogue to foster mutual understanding. A vivid testimony to that is the long-standing tradition of hosting the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku in May.

In the XXI century there must be no place for Islamophobia, xenophobia or racism. Associating terrorism and extremism with any civilization or ethnic group is an

erroneous approach. Using religion for political motives only serves to divide and incite confrontation in the societies. Such manifestations also deprive the humankind from the ideals of humanism and universal values, ultimately resulting in intercivilizational conflicts.

Today's event showcases Azerbaijan's determination to combat Islamophobia as one of the challenges of the modern era. I am confident that this conference will make a contribution to concerted efforts in combatting Islamophobia, and generating fresh initiatives aimed at promoting the culture of tolerance and peace founded on respect for religious and faith diversity.

I extend my best wishes to you and wish conference success.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Speech

COMBATING XENOPHOBIA IN ALL ITS FORMS AND MANIFESTATIONS AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR ENSURING GLOBAL PEACE AND STABILITY

H. V. Sheikh Ul-Islam Allahshukur PASHAZADE

The Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Board, Azerbaijan



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*Your Excellencies,
Distinguished participants, dear guests!
Assalamu aleykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu*

I greet you and pray to Almighty Allah for the success and blessing of our event. It is a tradition of Azerbaijan to host international conferences on Islamophobia. The actionable efforts of the Azerbaijani State, which is known for its deep respect for the progressive, religious, and spiritual values of the Islamic world, as well as the environment of the inter-religious understanding, and sincere fraternity, are raising our global reputation and strengthen our international positions.

Standing on their ancient traditions of statehood, the people of Azerbaijan, have preserved their identity and originality to this day, thanks to their adherence to national and spiritual values. Our experience of multicultural coexistence amongst environment of inter-religious and inter-faith harmony is appreciated as a model worldwide.

Azerbaijan, which rallied all its citizens regardless of their language, or religious and national identity around the idea of national and spiritual unity, has turned today to a state, capable to present the ideas of multiculturalism and Islamic solidarity to the entire world. The Head of our State, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, who pays tribute to the universal significance of Islamic values and makes practical efforts to promote and protect the

peaceful essence of our sacred religion worldwide, has made great contributions to the cause of global interreligious dialogue and inter-civilizational cooperation and he made wise steps such as the declaration of the Year of Multiculturalism, followed by the Year of Islamic Solidarity, and launch of the Baku Process, which was initiated by his decision.

The mosques and sanctuaries, the places of worship of different religions throughout the country, including the territories liberated from occupation, have been restored and beautifully rebuilt respectfully for the religious and spiritual heritage released from captivity. This is manifestation of special care and multicultural vision of the State.

Our religion, Islam, is a religion of peace, understanding and tranquility. Abusing our religion, based on the Human Values at its core, for provocations and discreditation is unacceptable. The Azerbaijani state raises its voice against any disrespect for Islamic shrines, symbols and personalities happened in any part of the world. We strongly protest the Hate Speech that leads to national and religious conflicts. We actively confront those who abuse Islamic values for political purposes and deliberately distort religious values.

I remember 2004 when the UN held a conference on «Confronting Islamophobia». Although anti-Islamic manifestations in Western countries are being opposed at the state level, the xenophobia has not yet been prevented. In spite the European Union and different international organizations have repeatedly condemned this issue, this inhuman and racist movement is going on and continues to grow and expand. Today, cases of xenophobia and Islamophobia are observed in more European countries, including Sweden, Denmark, France and the Netherlands.

As a result of the policies pursued by the West since Medieval till modern times yet pro-fascist movements are being created to stop the growth of Muslim migration to this continent. Muslims are reportedly discriminated against in the European labour market, housing and education. In France, actions against followers of the Islamic religion are going on and the religious freedom is under serious threat in that country. Caricatures of the Prophet of Islam, burning of the Holy Quran, cases of public insults and acts of aggression against mosques are the reality of the self-proclaimed “democratic” Europe in the 21st century. The misguided policies of those who declare Islam as the enemy have accelerated the migration of Muslims to Western countries in the last 30 years, and this is an obvious consequence of Western military interventions in the Middle East and Africa. These armed interventions that exactly are forcing people to leave their homes, while extremist organizations in Europe are oppressing the migrants who actually were forced to migrate. Thus, the causes of Muslim migration and Islamophobia are the bitter consequences of the policies from the same source.

Distinguished participants!

Our President Mr. Ilham Aliyev coherently raises his voice from the highest podiums of the international world as the staunchest opponent of Islamophobia in the international level. He has confirmed his respect for religious and moral values by his actions and

efforts. In his speech delivered at the Non-Aligned Movement event in Baku, he defined the justification of cases of Islamophobia under the name of freedom of expression as completely irresponsible and unacceptable.

Based on the above, the State of Azerbaijan, the integral part of the Islamic world, the historical bridge between East and West, and the crossroad of civilizations, contributes to the prevent Islamophobia as one of the forms of xenophobia.

Along with Islamophobia, our country is constantly raising its voice against Christianophobia and anti-Semitism, protesting against hate speech and strongly condemning cases of discrimination on religious grounds in all reputable international forums. As a religious center, we actively advocate this position in all international forums and platforms of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

The salvation of human life, which is the greatest value created by the Almighty, is possible through the supremacy of law, morality, and justice. Unfortunately, the implementation of challenges that threaten humanity and the deepening of crises are a consequence of the non-compliance with international legal norms, violation of human rights, double standards and failure to implement decisions.

From this point of view, I consider the establishment of the International Day to combat Islamophobia as a worthy and important act. I highly appreciate the Baku International Multiculturalism Center for paying special attention to this issue. The world community must say NO! to national, racial, and religious intolerance and accept this position as a way of life. Xenophobic thoughts and actions such as Islamophobia, which bring human civilization to the brink of collision, must be rejected and prohibited. As the Holy Qur'an says:

«Let there be a group among you who call 'others' to goodness, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil" (Ali -Imran , 104).

Dear participants!

We are on the eve of Ramadan, the king of eleven months. On the occasion of this upcoming Holy Month, I express my greetings to all Muslims in the world and wish them all blessings. I pray to Almighty Allah for peace and stability in our homelands and entire World. May the highest values instilled by Ramadan awake noble feelings of humanity, and may all wars cease on Earth, and bloodshed of innocent people be stopped! May Almighty Allah bless Azerbaijan and may peace prevail in the world forever!



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Speech

ADDRESSING ISLAMOPHOBIA THROUGH DIALOGUE: A PERSPECTIVE

Dodik ARIYANTO

Head of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory, Indonesia



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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim **Excellencies,** **Distinguished Speakers and Participants,**

I feel very honored today, having the opportunity to speak about Islamophobia in front of you all, under the thematic session "*Calling for global dialogue to promote tolerance, peace and respect for human rights and religious diversity*",

From the theme we are discussing now, there are 2 (two) key elements which worth underlining: 1) *dialogue*; 2) promotion of tolerance, peace, and respect for human rights and religious diversity; and since this session is part of the commemorative event to observe *the International Day to Combat Islamophobia*, let us elaborate the two elements, then try to find their connection with the phenomenon.

Before I come to that point,

Everyone should have agreed that Islamophobia is becoming a global phenomenon. It continues to spread at an alarming speed, together with other forms of xenophobia. In certain countries, hatred and intolerance are even considered as legal actions protected by law. Such worrisome situation has been confirmed by reports and statistics.

In this context, the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution 76/254 designating 15 March as international day to Combat Islamophobia is truly

a groundbreaking, which was reinforced even stronger by the UN-Human Rights Council's adoption of Resolution 78/214 approximately one and half year after. I would say, these UN resolutions, together with the famous UN Resolutions 16/18, are really crucial steps needed to combat incitement to hatred, discrimination, and violence being done based on one's religion. The OIC gives much credit to the United Nations as well as all countries and parties who had dedicated commendable efforts towards the adoption of the said-UN resolutions.

What is the essential of those UN resolutions? There are many, and I can mention here two of them: first, the resolutions mean global acknowledgement that 'Islamophobia exists', among global challenges need to be tackled; second, they bring about implicit definition about Islamophobia, defining it as a form of hatred and intolerance.

Which is very important because, so far, there is no single, a consensual definition about 'Islamophobia'. Different parties have different understandings, and equivalents about the terminology.

How to address such a situation?

Here we come to the connections between *dialogue* and Islamophobia.

Finding a comprehensive solution to Islamophobia rely on collective work and active contributions from all stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil societies, religious leaders, and communities.

There are many different major causes of Islamophobia, such as the rising popularity of Far-Rights, the issue of refugee and immigration, *wave of terrorism and extremism*, and so on and so forth. Meaning, there is no single remedy for Islamophobia. Each needs a unique approach.

Here we are just trying to offer a perspective, that combating Islamophobia need to be taken at many different fronts, one of them is through Dialogue.

Why Dialogue?

Because dialogue bridges the fear and lack of understanding that divide people of different religions, cultures, and civilizations— The continuous growing trend of hatred and intolerance in the world today, has sent an urgent message that dialogue must play a bigger role to cope with the constant challenges. This means that interfaith, intercultural, and inter-civilizational dialogue need to be intensified, and expanded in terms of their participation and action.

What kind of Dialogue?

The Interfaith and intercultural Dialogue should focus on specific target, which is to promote tolerance, peace, and respect on human rights and diversity — a noble quest which is guaranteed by the international law, under the notion '*Freedom of Religion and*

Belief – according to which, every person has a right to worship as he, or she, pleases, and no one has the right to make a mockery on that particular matter.

To close this statement, I wish to offer 3 points of Recommendation:

Stakeholders need to organize interfaith and intercultural dialogue, focusing on the promotion of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, respect for human rights and diversity. Dialogue is peaceful by nature, for it is less controversial, so it usually works.

2. Continue organizing events to observe the International Day to Combat Islamophobia—it will serve, as a constant reminder that Islamophobia is a form of hatred and intolerance, therefore need to be fought, to be combatted, together with any other forms of xenophobia.

3. Built on the UN Resolutions 16/18 and Resolutions 78/214 to promote tolerance and diversity across the world. The said UN resolutions are not just legal documents, but they also provide with prescription on how to deal with hatred, intolerance, stigmatization, and incitement to violence based on one's religion. The resolution 16/18 is even more sophisticated, as it has already a follow-up mechanism, in the form of Istanbul Process.

Thank you.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8-9, 2024

STATEMENT

by

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Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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***Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,
Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh,***

**His Excellency Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Excellencies Ministers and Ambassadors,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor for me to participate, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to this important event and to thank the Government of Azerbaijan for its kind invitation.

Following the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution 76/254 designating 15 March as international day to Combat Islamophobia, – countries, international and regional organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders have been urged to organize various events aimed at increasing awareness at all levels about curbing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, and to observe the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has taken exemplary steps with regard to the said-resolution, by organizing since last year, international high-level events to observe the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. As we are all witnessing here today, the materialization of such Resolution is given even more significance, through the organization of this conference titled “Embracing Diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024”, marking the second Anniversary of the International Day to Combat

Islamophobia. Such commendable initiative, indeed, reflects the strong commitment of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the efforts of combatting Islamophobia.

I wish to express the OIC General Secretariat's profound appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for organizing such important events, which are crucial, for they serve as a constant reminder that Islamophobia and other forms of xenophobia are unacceptable; that hatred and intolerance could always manifest into disastrous violence, especially when they are committed on the ground of faith or religion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OIC has undertaken various constructive efforts and initiatives to firmly address the phenomenon of Islamophobia, whether at the level of the OIC General Secretariat, Member States, partner countries and international and regional organizations. The OIC Islamophobia Observatory has also been at the forefront in monitoring this phenomenon, its various trends, and the challenges associated with it, especially for Muslim communities and minorities in non-OIC Member States.

The efforts exerted by the OIC and its Member States culminated in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The OIC considers this designation by the UN a milestone achievement and a global acknowledgment to the fact that incitement to hatred and intolerance on religious grounds can create conditions that pose a threat to global peace, security and stability.

The OIC reaffirms its steadfast commitment to continuing its efforts to combat the alarming escalation of Islamophobia at the international level, its constant keenness to raise this issue, and the importance of finding the necessary solutions in the framework of existing consultations with a number of non-OIC Member States and international and regional organizations.

The OIC looks forward to the outcomes of this international conference, expressing the hope that all stakeholders would be able to contribute towards consolidating global awareness of the threat of hatred and fanaticism against Muslims, while encouraging the international community to take concrete measures to combat the phenomenon.

I believe that such expectation is relevant, considering the alarming level at which Islamophobia has been growing for the past few years. These days, provocative actions continue to take place, eminent figures and symbols of religion insulted, religious texts and Holy Scriptures desecrated, places of worship attacked, and individuals targeted only because of their faith or religion. Concrete global actions are, therefore, needed to combat the menace of incitement to hatred, discrimination and violence based on one's religion.

In conclusion, the OIC is firmly committed to continue and redouble efforts to raise awareness of the necessity to combat Islamophobia and to promote interfaith dialogue, understanding, tolerance, coexistence, and mutual respect.

I thank you.



Research Notes

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE WEST

Afzal KHAN

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It's a pleasure to be here with you today to mark the UN's International Day To Combat Islamophobia. It's incredible to have leadership on tackling Islamophobia at the UN level, and I'd like to pay tribute to the incredible work done by the OIC – the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation – who have been leading this.

Islamophobia is an insidious kind of racism prevalent across the globe – including in the West. Across the world, Islamophobia looks like:

- Uyghur Muslims in concentration camps in China
- 51 worshipers being killed at Islamic centres in New Zealand
- and the ongoing persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

This isn't an exhaustive list, but just a few chilling examples. In Britain, Islamophobia looks very different – but remains sinister. In the UK, most victims of religious hate crime are Muslim, and Islamophobic hate crime has increased by 335% in the last 6 months.

A recent report also found that 35% of British mosques experience a religiously-motivated attack at least once a year. This is often racist graffiti, arson, or pigs heads being thrown onto mosque grounds.

Islamophobia is not just hate crime, it filters through every aspect of a Muslim's life.

In the UK, Muslims:

- are most likely to live in poverty;

- have to submit 80% more job applications to get a positive response from an employer than a white British person;
- and are even charged more for their car insurance if their name is Mohammed than if their name is John.

Most Muslims have experienced religion-based discrimination in their everyday life, and it's not surprising considering conspiracy theories about Muslims are well-established.

Polling on the opinion of Britons on Muslims and Islam has found that:

- 18% believe Muslim immigration is part of a bigger plan to make Muslims a majority of the population;
- 32% believe there are areas in the UK where Sharia dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter;
- And even 31% of young children believe that Muslims are taking over England.

From my own experience, when I was standing in elections for the European Parliament in 2014, my opponent, the then leader of the fascist British National Party, sent a leaflet to every house in the North West of England trying to deter them from voting for me because I am Muslim.

Even when I was first elected as an MP in the British Parliament in 2017, I had to swear an oath to the Queen. I swore my oath in English, as I had to, and then I had the option of swearing my oath in another language too.

I chose to do so in Urdu, my native tongue and the language spoken by thousands of my constituents. Even Queen Victoria spoke Urdu.

After taking my oath in Urdu, I was subject to a barrage of hate online for daring to speak another language in Parliament, and for boldly expressing my Muslimness.

It is this Islamophobia that makes it harder for Muslims to live as equal members of British society.

But if we want to tackle Islamophobia, first we must define it.

And it's this issue of a definition which I think is such an important task to get right, and where we Muslims in Britain are facing increased hostility.

In 2018, I was part of a cross-party group of MPs who sought to develop a working definition of Islamophobia as the basis from which we could then support work to tackle it.

Following extensive consultation with academics, legal experts, civil society and faith communities, we defined Islamophobia as being:

“rooted in racism and a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”

This definition very clearly demonstrates that it is wrong to abuse or discriminate against someone because of their Muslimness or what you perceive to be their Muslimness – be that their name, their skin colour or the way they dress.

This definition has been widely accepted across British society – from councils, trade unions, academics, community groups and even political parties – except the Conservative UK Government.

Those who know UK politics will I'm sure be familiar with the deep-rooted Islamophobia within the Conservative Party – our governing party for 14 years – which holds the Government back from adopting this definition of Islamophobia.

But if you look at the Conservative Party, the views of its leadership, its elected officials and its members, it is hardly surprising they are avoiding a definition of Islamophobia, as any definition would find the Conservative Party guilty.

Just a fortnight ago, over five days, five Conservative MPs were implicated in Islamophobia.

The former Deputy Chair of the Party said the Mayor of London – a Muslim – was controlled by Islamists.

The former Home Secretary said the entire country was controlled by Islamists.

The former Immigration Minister said that our streets are dominated by Islamist extremists, when referring to peaceful pro-Palestine protestors.

Another former Minister said there are Muslim “no go areas” in London and Birmingham.

And our former prime minister claimed that a “radical Islamic party” could win a by-election we had in Rochdale, just because 36% of the constituency is Muslim.

It is no surprise then that the Conservative Party has refused to define or tackle Islamophobia, as it would first need to tackle the endemic Islamophobia from within its ranks.

Unfortunately, in Britain, the Conservatives being in power for the last 14 years has shown that Islamophobia is acceptable, and even promoted – especially in politics.

Tackling Islamophobia starts with our leadership, but it is Britain's leadership that is propagating Islamophobia in the first place.

We have seen leadership at the global level – from the OIC at the UN to everyone here attending this very conference.

It is clear there is the determination amongst countries committed to anti-racism, like Azerbaijan, to take action against the disturbing rise in Islamophobia, but it is clear that we need decisive action from the Western world too.

In the Labour Party, I have served as the Vice Chair of the Race Equality Taskforce, working to address the problems of racism from within our own ranks to ensure we are able to take bold action on racism if we are to come into government.

So I hope we are able to gather like this again next year, and I am able to speak about the brilliant work the Labour Party is doing in Britain to create a fairer society, and one that is better for Muslims.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES FOR COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Islamophobia is a form of religious stigma manifested in words and acts of anti-Muslim hostility, prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed towards markers of religious and cultural identity such as Muslims' most-venerated figures, sacred objects, mosques, and personal attire. Islamophobia is the present appellation of a fact that has existed historically. As a chronic, escalating phenomenon, Islamophobia raises growing concerns regarding peace and security around the world. Islamophobic discourse and actions have multiplied their snowball effects in various regions where Muslims are in the minority. Monitoring and countering this phenomenon demand focused surveys and integrated perspectives for research, public policy, and international cooperation. This paper aims to contribute to the consultative discussions on countering Islamophobia based on IRCICA's experiences in the international cultural field.

Starting from the first century of Islam, Muslims were known and identified by their faith and culture by other peoples with which they traded or coexisted under Muslim and non-Muslim rules. The history of inter-religious and inter-civilizational relations includes both peaceful and troubled experiences. Communities' images of each other carry vestiges of diverse perspectives from this history. Following the advent of Islam, the first translations of the Holy Qur'an made in Europe and some of those printed from the 16th century onwards aimed to invalidate the Qur'an and some bore the title "Refutation".¹ On the other hand, works of science and philosophy written by Muslim scholars were translated and taught in European universities under the Islamic Kingdom in Spain (711-1492) where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived in a harmonious,

¹ *World Bibliography of the Holy Qur'an. Printed Translations, 1515–2015*, IRCICA, 2023.

development-oriented coexistence. In the meantime, the Crusades, launched by the Christian Church in the 11th century to reconquer Jerusalem from Muslim rule and maintain political control over the Middle East, entrenched anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim opinions in European minds for two centuries by targeting Muslims as the enemies of Christians. Later, during the period of European colonialism in the 15th–20th centuries, peoples of the countries concerned in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, some of them Muslim, were portrayed in the West as underdeveloped and culturally inferior, which served to justify the practices of domination, occupation, and economic exploitation. The gap widened further due to the rapid scientific and technological advancement of the West after the Industrial Revolution and persistence of West-centered perspectives in the humanities and social sciences until well into the 20th century. After the foundation of nation states and formation of a peace and justice-oriented world community, issues regarding political affiliation and economic development generally preceded matters of faith and culture in international forums for many decades. The latter made a historical come-back in the later part of the century, when increased international migration began to transform societies' demographic compositions at unprecedented rates. The distributions of Western populations according to faith and cultural identity criteria had generally remained stable for centuries, until steady inflows of immigrants from various continents gradually turned them into multi-religious societies. States' importing of foreign labor, regular inflows of foreigners, and their relatively high rates of natural growth created concern and resentment in the receiving societies. With time, the issue grew to become a matter of systematic, politicized discourse. Stigmatization and marginalization of minorities is not a new phenomenon; different ethnic or religious groups have been subjected to various types of exclusion and discrimination in America, Asia, Europe and elsewhere. Islamophobia presents a distinct case due to its nature, persistence and tendency to spread, as well as its impact and implications in public administration, laws, employment, education, and other sectors of life.

The search for solutions to this problem through international consultation and cooperation has engaged inter-governmental and inter-religious organizations, the former within the framework of safeguarding peace and universal human rights, the latter for promoting inter-faith understanding on theological grounds. Both approaches aim to eliminate ignorance, extremism, bigotry, religious and cultural biases and other obstacles to peace and global harmony. These concerns deepened further after the publication of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis in 1993, its expanded editions after the wars of the 1990s, and the ensuing literature. Islamophobia became a widely used term after the publication of the report titled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" by the British NGO Runnymede Trust in 1997.² Since then, world developments have unfortunately helped the rising course of Islamophobia. The idea of dialogue between religions and civilizations drew greater emphasis in response to the clash thesis, warning against the danger that it might normalize the concept of inter-civilizational conflict in the public mind. The idea of inter-religious dialogue itself was carried to inter-

² Runnymede, "Islamophobia: Still A Challenge For Us All, A 20th-Anniversary Report", 2017, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/islamophobia-still-a-challenge-for-us-all> (accessed on 27.5.2024)

governmental platforms. The UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was established in 2005. The OIC included it in its Ten-Year Action Plan the same year. The OIC and the UNAOC have emphasized the link between inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and the promotion of tolerance and inclusion in various societies. IRCICA, the OIC's cultural centre, undertook long-term activity programs aiming to highlight and create global awareness of the positive interactions among different civilizations. On the subject of the history of relations between Islam and Europe, IRCICA cooperated with the History Education Division of the Council of Europe during 2006–2011 for two consecutive projects titled "The Image of the Other in History Teaching" and "A History of Interactions Within and Around the Mediterranean and with Other Cultures". Furthermore, the Centre conducts conference series on the history of cultural contacts between Islam and the civilizations of Russia, China, Korea, and various regions of Africa. It also organized two conferences specifically on Islamophobia and published their proceedings.³ The OIC and IRCICA are actively taking part in the Global Forums of the UNAOC and also participated in the World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue led by the Government of Azerbaijan in the 2010s. In this context, IRCICA co-organized sessions on possible ways of countering extremism and Islamophobia, where international and country experts discussed the historical and contemporary as well as theoretical and practical aspects of these phenomena, presented case studies and recommended measures to counter them. It was pointed out that the role of historical bias in the rise of Islamophobia has not been clearly explicated in empirical research partly due to the difficulty of assessing it by any quantitative indicator, but that nevertheless, clues to the role of anti-Islamic prejudice in instigating anti-Muslim discourse are contained in the discourse itself; in this regard, some experts drew attention to the frequent exploitation of stereotypes about Islam by extremist politicians to justify their anti-Muslim arguments.

In this overall theoretical setting, focused analyses are needed on the diverse trends and manifestations of Islamophobia in different countries. Evidently, in light of the foregoing, it appears that anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim prejudice need to be tackled separately but in coordinated manner. The multiplicity of necessary focuses on different aspects of the problem resulted in the proliferation of studies and publications. From IRCICA's perspective, the huge task of monitoring the numerous publications has been facilitated by the collections of studies and periodical reports of the OIC's Islamophobia Observatory. The 14th periodic report for 2020–2022⁴ presents country surveys and field studies on Islamophobic acts and practices under separate chapters. Additionally, we are following the reports published in the OIC Member States and by international organizations on the subject. It is observed that Muslims' increased visibility in Western societies has made them the target of extremism which threatens to persist if not

³ International Symposium on "Islamophobia in Europe: Past and Present", IRCICA and Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul, 13–14 January 2017; Expert Group Meeting on: "The Role of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory in Bolstering the Muslim World's Efforts to Address the Issue of Islamophobia Around the World", organized by the OIC General Secretariat and IRCICA with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Istanbul, 4–5 April 2017.

⁴ [https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2022/14th Annual Report on Islamophobia March 2022_r2.pdf](https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2022/14th%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Islamophobia%20March%202022_r2.pdf) (accessed on 27.5.2024)

stopped, due to Islam becoming the second largest and fastest growing religion in Europe. The Muslim population in Europe is estimated to be over 50 million⁵ and is becoming more integrated within Western societies.⁶ Furthermore, in recent years, the refugee inflows have been much larger compared to the averages of recent decades, though this rate of inflow declined after the restrictions imposed by the European Union and its Member States. As a matter of fact, Muslims' share in European population is likely to increase even with no new migration.⁷ The OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers based its resolutions on countering Islamophobia on the findings of the Observatory, defining Islamophobia as a form of racism spread around the world and appealing to Member States to cooperate on opposing it. The resolutions also state that Islamophobia is a multidimensional human rights violation and that elimination of this and all other forms of discrimination and intolerance requires concerted efforts on the part of international community as a whole.⁸ According to the OIC's Islamophobia Observatory, the major factors that led to the further spread of Islamophobia during the period covered by its above-mentioned report were the agendas of the extreme right, the immigrants and refugee crises, attacks by extremist and terrorist groups, as well as hate speech adopted by various media channels. After examining government policies and Islamophobic incidents around the world, the report concluded that Islamophobia would likely continue, particularly given its rise over the preceding five years. The report found that Europe ranked first in the frequency of incidents, followed by Asia and then North America. It indicated that France and Britain witnessed the highest rates of Islamophobic acts, which was reflected in government policies increasingly geared towards far-right views. It also observed that false stories, such as Muslims congregating in prayer places having contributed to epidemics, resulted in many attacks against Muslim groups. The records of multiple and varied derogatory narratives show that Islamophobic ideology builds negative representations of a targeted existential identity to construct a theory for its exclusion. This is also proven by the shift that has occurred over time in the identity markers targeted, from immigrants' local origins to markers of religious affiliation, generally

⁵ Anadolu Ajansı: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/-muslims-to-make-up-30-of-russia-s-population-by-2034-/1409181> (March 5, 2019); Tehran Times quoting Pew Research Centre: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/487219/Rise-of-Islam-in-Europe-and-its-consequences#:~:text=TEHRAN%20%2D%20According%20to%20the%20Pew,second%20largest%20religion%20in%20Europe> (July 24, 2023) (accessed on 27.5.2024)

⁶ The Economist: https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/02/14/the-30m-muslims-living-in-europe-and-america-are-gradually-becoming-integrated?ppccampaignID=&ppcadID=&ppcgclid=&utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&utm_campaign=a.22brand_pmax&utm_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiArfaubHApEiwAeoB7qEkakrmkN3KOxUkJ4gFhrAJrwyJ9lxZMIsL7ASRhmcZq_f8WWYTChoCH_0QAvD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds (accessed on 27.5.2024)

⁷ Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/> (accessed on 27.5.2024)

⁸ Resolutions were taken by the 49th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC Member States (Nouakchott, Mauritania, 16-17 March 2023) under the titles "Combating Islamophobia and Eliminating Hatred and Prejudice Against Islam", "Combating Defamation of Religions", "Condemnation of Desecration of the Holy Quran" (<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=9793&refID=4271>)

in all countries where Islamophobia is prevalent. Multifarious variables are at play in shaping country situations and governments' attitudes regarding Islamophobia, from past colonial relationships with immigrants' countries of origin to the nature and length of experience in receiving immigrants or refugees. Various surveys have suggested that Muslims being seen as a "major threat" does not depend on their number but on public mindset and habits and the latter's reflections on public policy. Some experts have expressed the conviction that new generations of immigrant communities will succeed better in combatting Islamophobia due to deeper acquaintance with the workings of the countries' public sphere, more skillful with media tools, and thus, able to develop more effective networks and strategies of action. Additionally, some positive developments, also recorded by the OIC Islamophobia Observatory, include the growth of global efforts to promote harmony and tolerance between different cultures, the measures adopted to support Muslim groups at the level of the United Nations and the European Union, and the efforts exerted against far-right groups in the USA, Brazil, Canada, Spain, Britain, Germany, and Australia.⁹ These trends have more or less continued after the period reviewed by the Observatory but the year 2023 additionally saw an increase of offensive acts aiming to denigrate copies of the Qur'an by burning them in public places. As a final observation based on the surveys, the central issue has moved beyond that of immigration and refugees, which dominated the political dynamics in Europe in earlier years,¹⁰ to public sentiment targeting Muslim identity, which brings the issue somehow closer to the theoretical constructs of the "clash of civilizations".

Clearly, the contextual analyses of country situations and types of Islamophobic practices would help to strengthen the efforts deployed by international organizations and their Member States. The OIC is active in the UN context to encourage international cooperation for combatting Islamophobia. On 15 March 2024, corresponding to the second anniversary of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the UN General Assembly endorsed a follow-up resolution on "Measures to Combat Islamophobia" which was spearheaded by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and supported by the OIC Member States, adopted with 115 votes in favor, 44 abstentions and none against. IRCICA, for its part, will continue to contribute to these efforts by organizing international awareness-raising and knowledge-building activities and diffuse information and references on Islamic civilization and Muslim cultures to help to eliminate biases and misconceptions between peoples of different faiths. Our Centre emphasizes in all relevant platforms that Islamophobia is not a threat to Muslims but to all of humanity, which genuine international cooperation can help to solve.

⁹ https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2022/14th_Annual_Report_on_Islamophobia_March_2022_r2.pdf (accessed on 27.5.2024), p. 7

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3




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Research Notes

RESHAPING THE NARRATIVE: MUSLIM AMERICAN EXPERIENCES AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF MULTICULTURALISM IN COMBATting ISLAMOPHOBIA

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Introduction

In the United States, the fabric of society is woven from strands of diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural threads, among them the Muslim American community. The experience of Muslim Americans is a unique tapestry within this fabric, reflecting both vibrant contributions to society and the dark stains of Islamophobia. This paper examines how the narrative of Muslim Americans has been shaped, the challenges and promises of multiculturalism in addressing Islamophobia, and the approaches that could reshape this narrative to foster a more inclusive society.

Understanding Islamophobia

Islamophobia is characterized by an irrational fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents. It manifests in various forms, from overt acts of discrimination to subtle biases that influence policy, media representation, and interpersonal interactions. The term itself gained traction in the late 20th century, but the sentiment extends far back into American history, with roots entangled in colonial encounters and orientalist stereotypes.

Muslim Biases in America

The impact on Muslim Americans has been profound, especially since the September 11 attacks, which intensified scrutiny and suspicion towards the community. The resultant policies, such as heightened airport security protocols and surveillance programs targeting Muslims, have institutionalized Islamophobia. In everyday life, this has translated into harassment, vandalism of mosques, and even violent attacks. The following highlights key areas of prejudice affected Muslim Americans:

1. Public Perception of Muslims:

- A Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2017 found that 50% of Americans believed that at least “some” Muslims in the U.S. were anti-American, including 11% who thought “most” or “almost all” Muslims were anti-American.
- The same survey highlighted that 75% of respondents believed there was “a lot” of discrimination against Muslims in the U.S.

2. Hate Crimes and Discrimination:

- According to the FBI’s 2020 Hate Crime Statistics, 13.3% of religiously motivated hate crimes were against Muslims, despite Muslims making up less than 2% of the U.S. population.
- CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) reported a significant rise in discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S. over the past few years. In their 2021 report, they documented over 6,000 complaints of anti-Muslim bias.

3. Employment and Workplace Discrimination:

- A study published in the American Journal of Sociology in 2020 demonstrated that Muslim candidates were about 32% less likely to receive a job callback compared to Christian candidates with identical resumes.

4. Impact on Mental Health:

- Research indicates that experiences of discrimination and bias can have detrimental impacts on mental health among Muslim Americans, including increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

5. Political Climate and Policies:

- The political climate, especially during and after the 2016 presidential election, has been linked to an increase in Islamophobic rhetoric and policies, which many believe has contributed to a rise in bias and discrimination against Muslims.

The Muslim American Experience

Muslim Americans are not a monolith; they represent an array of nationalities, ethnicities, languages, and sects. Despite this diversity, they share common challenges rooted in their Islamic faith amid a predominantly non-Muslim society. These challenges include reconciling religious practices with American cultural norms, confronting the

stereotypes that depict Muslims as “the other,” and dealing with the economic and social repercussions of systemic discrimination.

Multiculturalism and Its Complexities

Multiculturalism in America aims to acknowledge and celebrate the cultural diversity of its citizens while ensuring equal opportunities for all. It holds promises for empowering minority communities and enriching societal values. However, multiculturalism also faces criticisms for potentially fostering segregation rather than integration and for diluting a cohesive national identity.

In combatting Islamophobia, multicultural policies must navigate these complexities. They must promote intercultural understanding without reducing cultures to simplistic or exotic caricatures. Moreover, they must ensure that celebrating diversity does not come at the expense of addressing underlying social inequities.

Strategies for Combatting Islamophobia through Multiculturalism

To reshape the narrative around Muslim American experiences, several strategies that embrace multiculturalism can be employed.

Education and Awareness

Education plays a critical role in dismantling misconceptions about Islam. An inclusive curriculum that integrates Islamic history and acknowledges Muslim contributions can help build a foundation of understanding. Public awareness campaigns can further demystify Islamic practices and beliefs, fostering a climate where differences are seen as educational opportunities rather than threats.

Media Representation

The media wields significant power in shaping public perceptions. By challenging stereotypes and ensuring fair representation of Muslim voices in news coverage, film, television, and online platforms, we can begin to normalize the presence of Muslims in American narratives. Empowering Muslim voices in media production also means supporting Muslim journalists, writers, directors, and artists who can provide authentic representations from within the community.

Political Engagement and Policy Reform

Active political participation by Muslim Americans is crucial in advocating for policies that protect against discrimination. This includes lobbying for fair immigration practices, equal employment opportunities, and protection against hate crimes. Engaging with political processes also allows for greater visibility and influence in shaping legislation that affects all Americans.

Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue

Encouraging dialogue between different faiths and cultures promotes understanding and empathy. Programs that bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds to

share experiences can break down barriers and challenge preconceptions. Such dialogue must be ongoing and rooted in mutual respect to be effective.

Community Alliances

Forming alliances with other minority groups can amplify efforts against bigotry. These partnerships can highlight shared struggles against discrimination while also celebrating each group's unique cultural heritage. Solidarity across communities strengthens the voice against systemic injustices that affect multiple marginalized populations.

Case Studies and Success Stories

There are numerous success stories where Muslim Americans have reshaped their narrative through advocacy, cultural contributions, or policy change. Muslim grassroots movements on local levels have worked tirelessly to address issues of discrimination and promote a positive image of Muslims.

Cultural contributions by Muslim Americans are extensive and varied. From Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad to comedian Hasan Minhaj, public figures have brought Muslim experiences into mainstream consciousness. In academia, scientists like Ahmed Zewail, a Nobel laureate in Chemistry, have underscored the community's intellectual contributions. Almost in every field and walk of life, Muslim Americans are making significant contributions.

Policy changes at local and national levels also reflect effective advocacy work. For instance, New York City's addition of two major Muslim holidays to the public school calendar recognizes the importance of inclusivity in policy decisions.

Challenges in Reshaping the Narrative

Despite these successes, significant challenges remain. Resistance to change is often rooted in deep-seated prejudices that are not easily overcome. Within the Muslim community itself, sectarian differences and debates over assimilation versus preservation of cultural identity can complicate collective efforts against Islamophobia.

Moving Forward – Strategies for Future Success

For future success in combatting Islamophobia through multiculturalism, several strategies can be emphasized:

Comprehensive Educational Reforms

Beyond curricular changes, educational institutions can implement training for teachers on cultural competency and create environments where students from all backgrounds feel valued.

Media Literacy Campaigns

Promoting critical media literacy among the public can empower individuals to discern biased narratives and seek out more accurate information about Muslims.

Inclusive Policy Making

Advocacy for policies that involve Muslim Americans in the decision-making process ensures that their needs are considered and met.

Empowerment through Technology

The rise of social media and digital platforms offers new avenues for sharing stories and countering negative narratives about Muslims.

Conclusion

Reshaping the narrative surrounding Muslim Americans is an imperative step towards combatting Islamophobia. Through a multifaceted approach that embraces multiculturalism's complexities, we can foster a society where diversity is not only tolerated but celebrated. Education reform, fair media representation, political participation, interfaith dialogue, community alliances, and open-minded policy change are essential tools in this endeavor. As we continue to confront Islamophobia with determination and compassion, we pave the way for a more inclusive future where every individual's story is part of America's grand narrative.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8–9, 2024

Speech

MULTI-LAYERED STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING INTERNALIZED ISLAMOPHOBIA

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Dear participants,

In my speech, I will draw your attention to the possible risks of internalized Islamophobia among Muslim youth and suggest some remedies to minimize these risks. Regrettably, Islamophobia continues to be a prevalent issue today with significant consequences, as highlighted in previous presentations.

The reality of Islamophobia has crystallized in Western societies due to historical prejudices against Islam, combined with various systemic and financial factors. This has led to daily acts of violence resulting in deaths, occasionally accompanied by traumatic feelings or directed programs following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Widespread misinformation in society, negative representations in the media, political discourse, and historical prejudices are significant factors contributing to Islamophobia.

When tackling Islamophobia, there is an inevitable need for multi-layered evaluations. Dealing with this issue requires collaboration among individuals from different disciplines and perspectives. Collaboration among academics, activists, policymakers, and community leaders is essential. Without this collaboration and careful handling, we can easily fall into the trap described by Tariq Ramadan as the “Islamization of social problems,” which can lead us to adopt a victim mentality.

It is an undeniable fact that Islamophobia has significant consequences for both non-Muslims and Muslims living in the West. This irrational, or better to say, “unjustifiable fear, hatred, or bias against Islam or Muslims” creates a collective sense of guilt among Muslim groups. Islamophobic propaganda implants stereotypical clichés into the subconscious, such as “not only those who resort to violence, but all Muslims are guilty;

Islam is not a religion but an ideology; Muslims are not like us; they collectively hate us." These clichés not only weaken resistance against unjust policies imposed on Muslim minorities or Muslim countries but also lead to the internalization of such Islamophobic ideas among a significant portion of the new generation of Muslims born and educated in the West.

Various studies conducted in the last five years draw our attention to the adoption of Islamophobic prejudices and stereotypes among Muslim youth in America. This phenomenon is called "internalized Islamophobia." Muslim youths may internalize Islamophobic stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously, due to their desire to be accepted by the society they live in or their fear of being judged and socially excluded.

I am sure you are familiar with the research conducted by the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) in the United States. Yaqeen Institute's research revealed that the stereotypical thoughts produced by the dominant society about any ethnic group tend to be internalized and accepted by individuals at a subconscious level. According to this study, one in three children did not want to tell others that they were Muslim, one in two did not know if they could be both Muslim and American, and one in six sometimes acted as if they were not Muslim. This survey interestingly parallels the well-known doll test conducted approximately 80 years ago by psychologists Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark. ISPU's research also revealed that 30% of participating Muslims agreed with the judgment that their Muslim community is "more prone to negative behavior than others." This rate was 13% among Jews and 12% among Catholics. Normalizing or legitimizing discrimination against oneself or other Muslims can be a typical sign of internalized Islamophobia. Additionally, the tendency to silence or deny rather than speak out against Islamophobia can also be another expression of internalized Islamophobia.

Based on these findings, some academics, activists, and observers argue that one of the primary goals of the "Islamophobia industry" is to question or undermine Muslims' faith in Islam. According to them, certain individuals, groups, or organizations actively promote fear, doubt, and negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims with the aim of weakening faith and creating doubt among Muslims.

Therefore, recognizing internalized Islamophobia and providing support for young Muslims to develop confidence and self-esteem, and encouraging them to proudly express their own identities, becomes a crucial issue. In this way, young Muslims can overcome internalized Islamophobia and fully realize their potential.

I would like to underline some measures that can be taken in combating internalized Islamophobia as brief recommendations:

- It's crucial for young individuals to understand their own religious beliefs, norms, traditions, and the influential figures within those traditions. In this regard, I would like to emphasize the significance of prioritizing character education programs, especially in Western countries where Muslims are in the minority, as a means to combat internalized Islamophobia. We should

increase the number of inclusive and inviting moral centers, which highlight the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and ethical dimensions of Islam. These centers will facilitate healthy interactions among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The programs should focus on teaching young people the fundamental values of Islam, its rich traditions, contributions to global knowledge, significant centers of learning, and the esteemed scholars who have shaped its history. By participating in these programs, young individuals can regain confidence, enhance self-awareness, foster tolerance, and cultivate positive relationships within their communities.

- It is essential for Muslims to develop media instruments, films, animations, PC games, and social media tools through which they can better express themselves. Muslims should strive to produce their own role models and not allow them to be discredited.
- Considering the real strengths and capabilities of Muslims, and drawing inspiration from the “contact theory” found in social psychology, which suggests that interactions between different groups can help foster better relationships and lessen prejudices, it’s clear that we need to provide more avenues for Muslims to engage positively with society at large. This approach serves as an effective strategy in our efforts to combat Islamophobia.
- As concluding remarks, I should say that when addressing a complex issue like Islamophobia in the Western world, it’s important to use a multi-faceted approach involving various institutions and structures, alongside mental analysis. While scholars study the theoretical and psychological aspects through academic research, other groups should focus on managing media representation and public image. Establishing a strong defense mechanism and pursuing justice through legal means is crucial. Building a strong identity and forming alliances with the broader community, especially those with reasonable views, is important, as well as prioritizing the education of younger generations.

Thank you for listening.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

IS THE CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS BECOMING A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY? THE PLACE OF ISLAM IN A NEW MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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Manifestations of Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hatred

Over the past two decades, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred have emerged in the West and beyond in two distinct forms. Firstly, there is a racialized form of Islamophobia, primarily found in far-right circles, where Muslims are viewed as an opposing ethnic group. This type of hatred often manifests as racism against Muslims, perceiving them through a lens of ethnic and cultural alienation.

Secondly, there is an ideological form of Islamophobia, rooted mainly in left-wing circles. This variant rejects Islam as an alternative worldview and belief system. It extends a broader hostility towards traditional religions, focusing intensely on Islam in recent years. This ideological hostility is still relatively unknown but is gaining traction, representing a significant threat to the pluralistic acceptance of diverse religious beliefs.

The Idea of a Clash of Civilizations

The Clash of Civilizations theory (Huntington, 1996), initially popular in right-wing circles, has now permeated wider societal discourse. This theory posits that distinct civilizations, particularly Islam and the West, are inherently in conflict. Today, the concept has evolved into a broader cultural war, reflecting clashes between values and ways of life within every country.

The perceived conflict often simplifies the relationship as one between Islam and Christianity, harking back to historical antagonisms. This narrative fuels a divisive

view that Islam and Western values are fundamentally incompatible, fostering an environment of suspicion and hostility.

Irrelevance of the theory and the Risk of a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Despite its widespread acceptance, the Clash of Civilizations theory is fundamentally flawed. The real issues facing Western societies—such as economic decline, value crises, and family disintegration—are unrelated to Islam. However, societies in crisis often seek a scapegoat, and Islam has become the convenient target.

Western countries are inherently diverse, encompassing a mix of cultures, ethnicities, and religions. The oversimplification of conflicts as a clash of civilizations confuses identities, politics, cultures, and religions, which are interconnected yet distinct.

Believing in the Clash of Civilizations can transform it into a self-fulfilling prophecy. When enough people start seeing others as enemies based on this theory, actual enmity may develop, leading to real conflicts that validate the original false premise.

Discrimination against Muslims in the West

Discrimination against Muslims in the West is both real and concrete. Beyond far-right populist circles, so-called progressive left-wing groups also exhibit Islamophobic tendencies. For instance, highly educated Muslims in Switzerland are approximately four times more likely to be unemployed than their non-Muslim counterparts with the same level of education (Lindemann & Stolz, 2018). Surprisingly, discrimination against Muslims is more pronounced in highly skilled jobs, contrasting with lower-skilled positions where it is much lower. The study does not explain this trend, but it sheds light on the complexity of discrimination against Muslims, challenging simplistic attributions of Islamophobia to any specific political spectrum. Indeed, many professional environments where highly qualified Muslims face discrimination in hiring seem ideologically closer to the left than the right.

In academia, particularly in Switzerland and France, Muslims engaged in Islamic studies face discrimination. They are often perceived as non-neutral and biased, expected to adopt a skeptical and critical stance towards their faith. This expectation starkly contrasts with the treatment of other religious scholars, such as Protestant pastors, who can freely hold academic positions without renouncing their beliefs.

Islamophobia from the New Progressive Left

A lesser-known form of Islamophobia emanates from the progressive left, which attempts to impose its views and values both in the West and globally. Traditional Islamic values on human nature and gender roles often clash with the ideological agendas promoted by these political movements. Consequently, Islam is sometimes expected to conform to these “new” values to be tolerated in certain Western contexts.

Academic and public discourse frequently advocate for a fundamental reform of Islam, presupposing that its current dominant form is problematic. This

trend undermines the principle of freedom of belief and represents a new form of Islamophobia that challenges the authenticity and integrity of Islamic teachings.

The Decline of Western Hegemony and the Rise of a Multi-Polar World

The decline of Western hegemony and the emergence of a multi-polar world should deter any single value system from claiming universality. Instead, we must acknowledge the existence of diverse cultural systems, each with its own merits and contributions to global society.

Alternative societies with specific cultural systems should not be coerced into adopting ideological frameworks imposed by Western powers under the guise of “universal values.” Respecting this diversity is crucial for fostering genuine global harmony.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Islam should not be compelled to conform to external ideological agendas, whether from the right or the left. Defined in Arabic as a *deen* (Auda, 2013), Islam presents its own value system and worldview, which need not be circumscribed or limited by foreign ideologies. However, common values and objectives exist between Islam and other religions and ideologies, and partnerships and unions are encouraged as long as mutual respect is maintained.

Recognizing Islam as a universal religion, not confined to specific cultures or ethnicities, is essential. Post-colonial influences have unconsciously linked Islam to ethnic identities. For many Europeans, Islam represents the religion of the “others”. However, Islam embodies a universal dimension that seek humans globally, without any principle of restriction to specific countries, cultures or ethnic groups. Such as Christianity, Islam is followed by people coming from any cultural and ethnic background. Nevertheless, this reality continues to be ignored by many who sees Islam as non-Western religion. To tackle the narrative of a so-called Clash of Civilization that tends to oppose Islam and the West, it is necessary to bring this awareness that Islam does not have to be restricted to a specific ethnic or cultural identity.

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Research Notes

FROM BREIVIK TO TRUMP AND BEYOND: HOW DIGITAL ISLAMOPHOBIA IS A GLOBAL THREAT TO FREEDOM

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Abstract:

Islamophobia has increasingly become both a global and a digital phenomenon. Digital Islamophobia has its roots in the nineteenth-century circulation of Orientalist imagery, which also expanded as technology changed. With every technological innovation came a new manner of circulating Orientalist imagery, but the rise of the internet has produced a more frightening reality. Internet Islamophobia merged image with action, and the results have already been deadly. What's perhaps even more concerning is that internet Islamophobia is deployed not only by fringe characters but also now by major international politicians (such as Donald Trump). Current research indicates the clear danger of this phenomenon, one that we must pay close attention to and work towards defeating, for the sake not only of Muslims around the world but also for the establishment and preservation of global democracy.

Keywords: Islamophobia, racism, technology, globalization, democracy

Introduction

Islamophobia, the fear and hatred of Muslims and Islam, is a dangerous and worldwide phenomenon. Like all forms of racism and bigotry, Islamophobia menaces the wellbeing of a community and its members out of the prejudices of others. As technological advances continue to connect people across geographies and create likeminded communities across the world, Islamophobia too has increasingly become a global and digital phenomenon. Recognizing this reality should draw our concern, as it could translate into more violence against Muslims around the world with Islamophobia playing an even more pernicious role in our global politics.

Two warnings

The study of the global character of Islamophobia comes with at least two cautions, however. First, we must be careful not to focus on every example of Islamophobia as evidence of some sort of global hatred or worldwide conspiracy against Muslims. Such an approach is intellectually lazy, and it also threatens to miss or at least discount local conditions that facilitate the rise of Islamophobia in a specific region. Muslims communities in India, in Egypt, and in England all operate under fundamentally different circumstances. Even if state or civil society actors engage in forms of Islamophobia against Muslim communities, what remains intellectually and ethically important is to recognize that these are different communities and circumstances. We should be careful with how we draw connections between different manifestations of Islamophobia and not universalize the condition of the Muslim as the victim.

A simplistic view of Muslims only as victims also runs the risk of failing to give Muslims agency over their own affairs while assuming that global forces of Islamophobia are always at the ready to organize against Muslims. Many Muslims communities and civil society organizations around the world engage in work to minimize or defeat Islamophobia. Moreover, seeing Muslims as agent-less victims of global forces will not allow us to understand the deep connections between Muslim rights and the rights of non-Muslim migrants around the world, or how the climate emergency is also exacerbating Islamophobia along with other conflicts around the world, or how Islamophobia and anti-Black racism and antisemitism are all related phenomenon propping up a larger social order of inequality. In short, seeing Muslims only as agentless victims prevents us from making the necessary connections to others who are also struggling, thereby sustaining the very forces of oppression that we should otherwise be working together to defeat.

The second warning is very straightforward. Technology today is neither a tool uniquely tailored for liberation, nor an instrument crafted solely for domination. We have witnessed how technology has helped organize mass protests, such as the Egyptian uprisings in 2011. We have also seen how technology has been used to identify protestors and quash calls for freedom around the world, such as in the USA, UK, India, Iran, or Russia, among others. As technology continues to advance, and as more of the world is connected to global technological networks, we must understand the value-neutral role that technology itself plays. What matters less is the technology itself. What matters more is who owns the technology and how it is used.

Precursors to contemporary digital Islamophobia

Digital Islamophobia can be defined as the broad dissemination through technological means of images, sentiments, and ideas of and about Muslims and Islam that are used to reinforce the cultural authority, or positional superiority to use Edward Said's phrase, of whoever is producing the image, sentiment, or idea. A precursor to today's digital Islamophobia, which is highly dependent on the image, is the European tradition of Orientalist painting.

Muslim women figure prominently in Orientalist painting, and these women were often depicted in ways that emphasized their differences from European women at the time. Muslim women “were often depicted as innocents, trapped against their will in some far-off place, their nakedness more to be pitied than censured,” as Linda Nochlin observes. “They also display an ingratiating tendency to cover their eyes rather than their seductive bodies,” Nochlin notes.

Changes in technology expanded the way that these images circulated. Photography introduced broader audiences to very similar imagery, and the industrial reproduction of images allowed them to be not only more disposable but also to be easily affixed to a text. Malek Alloula’s masterful examination of the colonial postcard, *The Colonial Harem*, illustrates this change and examines the phenomenon.

With every change of technology, then, we find a revamped and reinvigorated version of Orientalism. One of the earliest blockbuster films, for example, was *The Sheikh* (1921), made famous by Rudolph Valentino playing the role of Sheikh Ahmed Ben Hassan. A popular television show during the early days of color TV was *I Dream of Jeanie* (1965–1970). Both of these examples also relied on stereotypical images of the Muslim world to bring their representations.

The Internet age

While the internet’s origins date to the latter part of the twentieth century, what we commonly label as “the internet age” is usually understood to be the twenty-first century. A decentralized, globally networked, relatively accessible, and moderately inexpensive technology allowed, for the first time, people from across borders and continents to communicate with each other and even establish like-minded communities across vast distances.

Internet Islamophobia was not far behind the birth of the internet. Internet Islamophobia also seemed to offer something different from previous manifestations of visual Islamophobia, whether in painting, photography, or film. Internet Islamophobia merged image with action.

When Anders Behring Breivik dressed up as a policeman and systematically murdered 77 mostly young people in Norway in 2011, he did so out of explicitly and extremely right-wing political motivations. Breivik was hoping his killing spree would draw attention to a 1,518-page manifesto he had both written and compiled, extolling the virtues of Europe and what he saw as the Muslim menace at Europe’s doorstep. The manifesto is titled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* (“2083” because that is the year Europe’s civil war will finally end, with the Muslims deported out of Europe and all the cultural Marxists and multiculturalists executed).

Breivik’s manuscript is often misunderstood as a hasty cut-and-paste job mixing outright plagiarism with random, egocentric musings. This is a mistake. As I wrote in 2012,

Breivik never calls his text a manifesto, instead using the term ‘compendium’... [H]e clearly envisions the document as a present and future collaborative effort. Sections

are left in draft form, to be completed by others later. He also appears to have carried out his 'operation' essentially as a form of marketing for the work. He sent the document to 1,003 people ninety minutes before the attack and concludes his text by telling the reader that 'the responsibility falls upon you now as I will, for obvious reasons, not be able to develop it any further. Any and all individuals with the appropriate skills are encouraged to contribute to a second edition of this compendium by improving and expanding it where needed.' He closes by thanking his 'brothers and sisters in England, France, Germany, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Spain, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, the US etc.' for their assistance.

The list is significant. Breivik may be a loner, but he's not alone. Transcribing the anti-Muslim blogosphere into his text is his way of showing he is part of a movement. He is tapping into the talents of today's right-wing populists who 'are adept at using new technology to amplify their message, recruit, and organize,' as a recent study by European think tank Demos pointed out. 2083 gets its compositional energy from the phenomenon of crowd-sourcing. This is not a brainless cut-and-paste job. It's a wiki for right-wing terrorism.

Breivik's idea was then to harness the organizational potential of the new digital landscape of the internet to grow a worldwide network of Islamophobic violence. He has, unfortunately, succeeded.

On 15 March 2019, Brenton Tarrant walked into two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand and began shooting. He killed 51 Muslim worshippers that day. Similar to Breivik, Tarrant also wrote a manifesto, although his, at 74 pages, is considerably shorter than Breivik's. Tarrant's manifesto, titled *The Great Replacement*, bears the same name as the 2011 Islamophobic book by Renaud Camus, which prompted the so-called "Great Replacement Theory." In this twisted worldview, global elites are conspiring to replace white Christians with black and brown Muslims in Europe. Tarrant's manifesto is replete with Islamophobia, ecofascism, and demographobia.

In case you were wondering, this quote, from the manifesto, explains all three movements in one brief paragraph: "[T]he environment is being destroyed by over population, [and] we Europeans are one of the groups that are not over populating the world. The invaders are the ones over populating the world. Kill the invaders, kill the overpopulation and by doing so save the environment."

Tarrant's manifesto explicitly names his inspirations, including the American white supremacist Dylann Roof, who killed nine Black worshippers in the Charleston Church Shooting in 2015, and Donald Trump, whom he admires "as a symbol of white identity." Tarrant, however, shares his greatest respect for Breivik.

(Incidentally, an interesting aspect of Tarrant's evil is his incorporation of low-tech means to achieve his ends. "Incite conflict," he writes to his supporters in his manifesto. "Place posters near public parks calling for sharia law, then in the next week place posters over such posters calling for the expulsion of all immigrants, repeat in every area of public life until the crisis arises.")

From the Margins to the center

We ignore at our own peril the ways that Islamophobia in the internet age has united marginal figures from across the world into murderous action. These actors can and have done great damage, and the potential for more and greater violence exists to this day. Yet, the greater danger may be the way that digital Islamophobia has moved from the margins to the center of our political discourse. Perhaps the most well-known example of a politician seeking to enhance his status among right-wing voters by deploying Islamophobic rhetoric on social media is the American businessman-turned-politician Donald Trump.

Trump was particularly known for his use of the social media platform Twitter, and by the time Twitter eventually suspended Trump from its platform after the attack on the US Capitol in January 2021, Trump had accumulated a total of 88.7 million followers. It was during the lead-up to and shortly after his election in 2016, however, that Trump was probably at his most Islamophobic on this particular platform.

The following are but a few examples of Trump's Islamophobic tweets from that moment:

- "Syrian Muslims escorted into U.S. through Mexico. Now arriving to Oklahoma and Kansas! Congress?" (12 Oct. 2015)
- "Credible Source on 9-11 Muslim Celebrations: FBI" (7 December 2015)
- "In Britain, more Muslims join ISIS than join the British army." (10 December 2015)
- "The United Kingdom is trying hard to disguise their massive Muslim problem. Everybody is wise to what is happening, very sad! Be honest." (12 December 2015)
- "Incompetent Hillary, despite the horrible attack in Brussels today, wants borders to be weak and open-and let the Muslims flow in. No way!" (22 March 2016)

The difference between a fringe figure like Anders Breivik emailing 1,003 people an Islamophobia tract and Donald Trump tweeting Islamophobic statements to his millions of followers, after which the message will be further spread by social media and legacy media organizations, is not hard to fathom. The mainstreaming of Islamophobia through digital means results in greater threats of violence by like-minded individuals around the world.

This is not conjecture. In recent years, research has identified the link between Trump, his Islamophobic tweets, and hate crimes against Muslims. One study, from Müller and Schwarz, found that a strong correlation exists between high-follower Twitter accounts (such as the president of the United States) tweeting hate speech and racist remarks, and later violence and hatred in public (and even in private) settings. Digital Islamophobia, in other words, continues its move from speech into action.

Müller and Schwarz found this correlation to be especially true in places that have high densities of Twitter and social media users. They also found that violent and hateful

acts decreased during internet outages. Major internet and Facebook failures “fully undo the correlation between social media and hate crime.”

Online Islamophobia is, moreover, part of “a language game aimed at Islam and Muslims in every way of life,” according to Khan, et al., and social media interactions facilitate the rapid spread of racist messages, thereby growing new and established communities of followers.

Müller and Schwarz also had at least one other major finding. Donald Trump was more likely to tweet anti-Muslim messages when he was playing golf.

Where do we go from here?

If digital Islamophobia is a growing problem around the world, what should we do about it?

The first answer is clear. We should not let Donald Trump play golf.

In all seriousness, however, this is not a problem that lends itself to easy solutions. Greater regulation of social media platforms is an obvious place to turn, but regulation must not limit people’s rights to free expressions, either. And there will always be a dark corner of the internet that will exist beyond the reach of even the most aggressive regulation.

Civil society solutions that attempt to change behavior will likely be more durable than outright regulation. Among those solutions are seeking greater representation of Muslims, from a wide variety of opinions and tendencies, on legacy and social media platforms. Muslims still are too often talked about rather than heard from.

Digital Islamophobia shows the harms of social media, but there are profound possibilities of a global public sphere within the concept of social media today. One obstacle to creating a viable global public sphere is that social media itself is not a public utility, though it is often used as one. All the successful social media companies remain in the hands of private enterprise. More than anything, this fact illustrates the need for a real space with meaningful communication between peoples and across borders that is not run for profit. We need to imagine new platforms for, of, and by the people globally. That would be a true social media revolution.

Finally, we should understand that nothing is inevitable about Islamophobia. There are many eras in human history when a thriving coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims was the rule and not the exception. Islamophobia today, then, is a symptom of other political problems and becomes an opportunity for political opportunism. The more our politics improve globally and offer equal rights and opportunities for all, the less likelihood global Islamophobia will continue to exist.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND TURKOPHOBIA IN DIGITAL MEDIA AS AN IDEOLOGICAL TOOL AGAINST AZERBAIJAN

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The meaning of the phrase "Digital Islamophobia" is more evident in today's realities. Since the mid-2000s, social platforms have become a place where everyone uses and creates content. According to statistics, in 2025, the number of social media platform users will reach up to 4.41 billion people.

As users who add to those statistics, we can say that the number of hours we spend on these platforms is increasing year by year. This creates very fruitful conditions for the use of every shared piece of information as an ideological tool.

One click is enough to create an information matrix

Azerbaijan has fully restored its territorial integrity and sovereignty in the last 4 years. The fact that the absolute majority of the population belongs to the Islamic religion, while the ethnic majority is made up of Turks, makes it possible to use both the ideological tools of Islamophobia and Turkophobia against Azerbaijan. As a result, we are constantly on the receiving end of such attacks. But...

How and when did this start?

Azerbaijan regained its independence in the early 90s. At the same time, we were facing aggression from Armenia. This was not only about the territory but also the state and its people. Unfortunately, instead of hearing the truth about this war, the world heard theses formed by Armenia while we were under an information blockade.

The most effective narrative against Azerbaijan was the alleged Christian-Muslim conflict in Karabakh. In 2017, I had the opportunity to interview the Catholicos of all Armenians, Garegin II. At that time, 20% of our lands were under occupation, and along with the meetings between the leaders of the countries, religious leaders also met. During the interview, he mentioned that the meeting of religious leaders served to create a constructive environment for the meeting of political leaders. However, throughout the entire negotiation process and especially in the 44-day war of 2020, we saw quite the opposite:

Clerics were actively trying to create serious consolidation against Muslims in their public speeches, using hateful rhetoric

It is a pity that during the 44-day Patriotic War, the global media resources also seemed to forget the imperatives of objectivity and impartiality. Even though Azerbaijan was not in the same position in terms of an information blockade as it had been in the early 90s, the influential tools were identical. But this time, on a much greater scale thanks to the use of modern digital technology.

During this period, President Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by dozens of media resources, with some journalists asking questions that were expressly used in order to create a particular view of our country.

For example,

- A SKY NEWS representative accused Azerbaijan of setting fire to the church in Shusha
- Representatives of other media structures voiced even more absurd statements: claiming that the country allegedly brought and used mercenaries from the Middle East – Syria, Iraq and other countries. It is no secret that the establishment of this relationship resulted from the identification of the image of a Muslim with the image of a terrorist in the public opinion.

It is not only the media and social platforms that are responsible for such antagonism – foreign special services are fighting ideologically against Azerbaijan mainly in 3 directions: one of them is to achieve religious and ethnic discrimination.

Additionally, The roots of Turkophobia go even deeper. It is appropriate sufficient to say only that in Armenia the word 'Turkish' is used as an insult by most Armenians. For example, when they want to express that a person is cruel, hostile, bad, or incomprehensible, they say "turk ches?" (Azerbaijani: Are you Turkish?), and when they mean a messy and unclean house, "ن یوہ نوت ی کروت سی کرت" (Azerbaijani: they use the expression 'Turkish house').

Where are we now?

We are living in a time of rapid change. As the global political landscape has changed, and new technological tools become easier to access, security threats have metastasized in the last decade. This is even truer with the unlimited, unregulated mass use of digital platforms for hate speech, division, and destruction. Surely the time has come for us to use the power of these tools for good? Now, more than ever in history, there are opportunities to build a real environment of peace and cooperation.

So, what are we waiting for?





Research Notes

THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA; CAN EDUCATION HELP OVERCOME THE PROBLEM?

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze the cultural roots that have produced the discourse of Islamophobia, depicting Islam as a barbaric religion and Muslims as enemies of civilization, and promoting propaganda against it and its universal principles, and the peacefulness of its peoples who have been historically subjected to invasion, hatred, and colonization, especially in modern times after Europe dominated the world.

The paper raises questions about the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the Western context, and about the hate speech resulting from it, and what are the cultural roots of this phenomenon that produce hate speech towards Muslims? How can this situation be overcome for the sake of coexistence, peace, and humanity? And what is the role of education in this?

To achieve its goal, this paper relies on analyzing a sample of intellectual texts that reflect Western domination over Islamic civilization, contrary to history and reality. To understand the background of the anti-Islam imagination that led to the emergence of Islamophobia, and its transformation into hate speech, in various means of communication and interaction.

One of the most important conclusions that this paper aspires to is to open the door to cultural, religious, and intellectual Western revision towards Islam, to openness to it, and to overcome the complex of the Crusades in order to build a scientific and realistic understanding of Islam as it is, and of Muslims as they are and not as they are imagined. It also aims to open the door to civilizational cooperation and coexistence instead of conflict, especially as we are in a world where the fate of all humanity is interconnected with each other.

Key Words: Islamophobia, Hate, Conflict, Coexistence, Education

Introduction

In the modern era, marked by technological and communication advancements, global interconnectedness is pervasive, making isolation increasingly difficult. However, certain phenomena, including Islamophobia, hinder peaceful coexistence and effective communication among nations. Islamophobia, defined as irrational fear and discrimination against Islam and its followers, is a significant barrier to global harmony. This prejudice has deep roots in historical, cultural, and socio-political factors, necessitating collective efforts from intellectuals and leaders to combat it.

1. The Cultural Roots of Islamophobia:

1.1. The Historical Context:

Historical interactions between the West and the Muslim world have often been contentious, contributing to negative perceptions of Islam. Events like the Crusades, Western colonialism, and the aftermath of 9/11 have reinforced these views. The Crusades, driven by religious zeal and territorial ambitions, left a lasting legacy of animosity towards Islam in Western culture. Colonialism further depicted Islam as inferior, justifying Western dominance and exploitation of Muslim-majority regions. The events of 9/11 intensified global Islamophobia, associating Islam with terrorism and leading to widespread discrimination and hate crimes.

To counter Islamophobia, it is crucial to address its cultural roots through education and collaborative efforts, promoting intercultural understanding and respect. This approach aims to transition humanity from exclusion and conflict to inclusion and coexistence.

1.2. The Orientalist Discourse

Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, is the Western portrayal of the "Orient" as exotic, irrational, and inferior. It depicts Islam as a monolithic and static civilization marked by despotism, fanaticism, and anti-modernism, reinforcing stereotypes of Muslims as backward and uncivilized.

1.2.1. Orientalism: Justifying the Distorted Muslim Image

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said connects Orientalism to Western colonial expansion. He identifies three aspects of Orientalism: an academic discipline focused on the Orient, a mode of thought creating a sharp divide between "the Orient" and "the Occident," and a discourse of power used to control and restructure the Orient. Orientalism played a crucial role in shaping Western stereotypes about Islam, presenting distorted images of Islam to fit Christian perspectives rather than reflecting Islamic self-representation. This portrayal of Muslims as reactionary, barbaric, and oppressive fueled negative stereotypes that permeated Western thought and media.

This Orientalist vision influenced Western public opinion and policy, perpetuating distorted images of Islam and Muslims. It justified European colonialism under the

guise of liberating and developing the Muslim world. Although some Orientalists offered more objective views, the majority continued medieval stereotypes, reinforcing the perceived racial superiority of Europeans over Muslims.

1.2.2. Orientalist Stereotype Making

Orientalist scholarship, literature, and art have historically constructed Muslims as the “Other,” often assuming European cultural and civilizational superiority. This stereotyping is evident in the works of various Western travelers and scholars.

John Lewis Bouchart, who traveled under the alias Sheikh Ibrahim bin Abdullah, depicted Arabs negatively in his book *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahhabis*, describing them as thieves. Edward William Lane’s *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* presented Egyptians as frivolous and immoral, reinforcing negative stereotypes. Charles Doughty in *Travels in Arabia Deserta* described Arabs as backward and Islam as violent.

Ernest Renan, in his lecture “Islam and Science,” characterized Islam as inherently narrow-minded and anti-scientific, promoting the idea of European superiority. Renan’s views influenced French and broader Western thinking, depicting Islam as irrational and incapable of producing science and philosophy.

Bernard Carra de Vaux and Bernard Lewis further propagated these stereotypes. De Vaux advocated for exploiting divisions within the Muslim world to weaken it. Lewis, a leading Orientalist, emphasized the clash of civilizations and portrayed Islam as a threat to Western values, influencing Western foreign and domestic policies, particularly post-9/11.

Orientalists often used selective sources, such as Crusader accounts and travelers’ impressions, instead of primary Islamic texts like the Quran. They exaggerated negative aspects of Islam and ignored its positive contributions, leading to widespread Islamophobia and distorted perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

Accordingly, Orientalist studies have played a significant role in shaping negative Western perceptions of Islam, perpetuating stereotypes that continue to influence contemporary views and policies.

1.2.3 The Crises of Orientalism

Orientalism has faced several crises that have contributed to Islamophobia and negative sentiments towards Eastern cultures:

1. **Dichotomy and Division:** Orientalism divides the world into “Western superiority” and “Eastern inferiority,” hindering cultural convergence and reinforcing a “we vs. them” mentality.
2. **Ideological Influence:** Orientalism is heavily influenced by various ideologies, including secularism, atheism, capitalism, and communism. This ideological bias undermines scientific objectivity and promotes distorted perceptions of Islam.

3. **Generalization and Reductionism:** Orientalism often treats the Islam and Muslims as a monolithic entity, ignoring cultural and social differences among Muslim societies. This leads to broad generalizations and superficial analyses.
4. **Neglect of Contemporary Changes:** Orientalist studies frequently overlook recent developments in the Islamic world, relying on outdated views from the seventh century and ignoring the impacts of colonialism and imperialism.
5. **Incorporation of Myths:** Orientalist works often include myths and distortions, lacking scientific rigor. This results in a misrepresentation of Islamic truths and perpetuates false information about Islam and its civilization.
6. **Speaking for the East:** Orientalists often speak on behalf of Eastern cultures, lacking impartiality and objectivity. They present information from a superior standpoint, shaping Western perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims without accurate representation.

These crises have led to a biased and inaccurate understanding of Islam in Western consciousness, fueling Islamophobia and hindering genuine intercultural dialogue.

2. Education as a Tool for Overcoming Islamophobia

Education is a powerful tool for combating Islamophobia by fostering knowledge, critical thinking, and empathy among students. The following dimensions illustrate how education can address and overcome Islamophobia:

2.1. Promoting Critical Thinking Skills:

Questioning and Evidence: Encouraging students to ask questions and seek evidence promotes a deeper understanding of the Muslim world and challenges biased narratives about Islam.

Diverse Perspectives: Exposing students to various interpretations of Islam helps them critically evaluate different viewpoints, fostering a nuanced understanding of Islamic history, theology, and socio-political issues.

Source Evaluation: Teaching students to assess the reliability and credibility of information sources is crucial in discerning fact from fiction, particularly in the context of misinformation.

Self-Reflection: Encouraging students to reflect on their own biases and assumptions helps them identify and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam.

Open Dialogue: Providing platforms for respectful discussions and debates about controversial issues related to Islam promotes intellectual curiosity, tolerance for diverse perspectives, and effective communication skills.

Through these approaches, education can cultivate empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive attitude towards Islam and Muslims.

2.2. Exchange Educational Programs

Exchange programs are pivotal in combating Islamophobia and fostering intercultural understanding by allowing participants to immerse themselves in different cultures and build meaningful connections. These programs achieve this in several ways:

1. **Cultural Immersion:** Participants live and study in foreign countries, including Muslim-majority areas, gaining firsthand insights into diverse Muslim traditions, customs, and lifestyles. This challenges stereotypes and fosters empathy.
2. **Personal Connections:** Forming friendships and meaningful relationships with individuals from Muslim backgrounds humanizes their experiences and perspectives, breaking down barriers and dispelling misconceptions.
3. **Academic Engagement:** Attending classes or conducting research at host institutions enables intellectual exchange and collaboration with scholars and students from Muslim-majority countries, enriching participants' understanding of Islam.
4. **Cultural Activities:** Participation in cultural activities, language classes, and excursions allows participants to appreciate Islamic art, literature, cuisine, and traditions, deepening their appreciation for Islamic culture.
5. **Open Dialogue:** Encouraging respectful discussions about Islam and Islamophobia with peers from diverse backgrounds fosters understanding and empathy while challenging stereotypes and prejudices.

2.3. Fostering Empathy and Understanding

Education fosters empathy by encouraging students to understand others' perspectives and experiences. By incorporating diverse voices and narratives, educators can humanize Muslims and counteract stereotypes:

1. **Diverse Voices in Curriculum:** Incorporating diverse voices and narratives from different cultural, geographical, and historical contexts into the curriculum helps students gain a holistic understanding of Islam and Muslim communities.
2. **Muslim Creative Expressions:** Studying literature, art, and other forms of Muslim creative expression provides insights into the lived experiences of Muslims and the richness of Islamic culture. This exposure helps students develop empathy and appreciate Muslim identity and experiences.

3. **Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** Structured discussions, collaborative projects, and intercultural events with peers from diverse backgrounds, including Muslims, foster appreciation and respect for different perspectives and experiences, promoting empathy and shared humanity.

4. **Self-Reflection:** Encouraging students to reflect critically on their own beliefs, biases, and assumptions about Islam and Muslims fosters empathy by making them aware of the impact of stereotypes and prejudice. This self-awareness motivates students to challenge Islamophobia in themselves and others.

2.4. Joint Research Projects and Visiting Professor Programs

1. Joint Research Projects

Collaborative research projects involving scholars from diverse backgrounds are essential for enhancing understanding of Islam and Muslim communities. By working together on topics such as Islamic history, theology, culture, and contemporary issues, scholars can:

- **Exchange Knowledge:** Share perspectives and insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of Islam.
- **Challenge Misconceptions:** Address and dispel stereotypes through informed research.
- **Promote Cross-Cultural Dialogue:** Foster empathy and mutual respect by learning from each other's experiences and methodologies.
- **Combat Islamophobia:** Encourage a nuanced and inclusive understanding of Muslim societies.

2. Visiting Professor Programs

Hosting visiting professors who specialize in Islamic studies allows institutions to:

- **Provide Diverse Perspectives:** Enrich students' educational experiences by exposing them to various viewpoints and resources.
- **Enhance Curricula:** Develop academic programs that promote intercultural understanding and tolerance.
- **Engage in Public Outreach:** Through lectures, seminars, and public events, visiting professors can educate broader audiences, including community members, policymakers, and media professionals. This public engagement helps challenge stereotypes and promotes empathy.

3. Building Academic Bridges

Joint research projects and visiting professor programs help build lasting connections between academic institutions, fostering:

- **Long-Term Partnerships:** Strengthen international networks through shared research goals and hosting visiting scholars.
- **Intercultural Exchange:** Promote dialogue and collaboration across cultural and religious boundaries, contributing to the collective effort to combat Islamophobia.

These initiatives play a crucial role in promoting a more accurate and empathetic understanding of Islam, countering stereotypes, and fostering intercultural cooperation.

3. Conclusion

In this historical, ideological, and intellectual context, it's undeniable that Orientalism plays a significant role in the genesis of Islamophobia. It has fostered offensive stereotypes against Islam and Muslims, perpetuating these associating Islam with violence, terrorism, and resistance to modernity. Additionally, it has propagated notions of an Islamic threat to the West, contributing to various forms and manifestations of Islamophobia prevalent in Western societies.

In a globalized world, efforts to control or distort Islam's image hinder mutual understanding. Wisdom dictates the necessity for the West to foster coexistence among religions, cultures, and civilizations.

Moreover, wisdom entails moving beyond historical attitudes that are no longer relevant or realistic, and instead, developing an understanding of Islam based on factual knowledge rather than imagination. It requires embracing our contemporary reality, recognizing that the world has become interconnected, and acknowledging our shared destiny as one global community. In this regard, education holds immense potential in combatting Islamophobia by promoting critical thinking, empathy, intercultural understanding, and active citizenship. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to challenge stereotypes, engage in dialogue, and advocate for social justice, education lays the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious coexistence. However, achieving this vision requires a concerted effort from educators, scholars and policymakers.

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Research Notes

THE DUTY OF CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION OF MUSLIMS IN THE EU AND KEY ISSUES IN ADDRESSING ISLAMOPHOBIA

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Abstract:

Muslims are an integral part of European societies. This means that they have rights but also duties, the correlativity of rights and duties also requires a certain reciprocity. Rights and duties are often seen as two sides of the same coin. If an individual has a right, then there is usually a corresponding duty on others to respect and uphold that right. For example, if you have a right of freedom of religion, then others have a duty to respect other religions or faiths and vice versa. While rights grant individuals certain freedoms and protections, duties ensure that these rights are respected and upheld in a manner that promotes a just and harmonious society. For the most part, the existence of one presupposes the existence of the other. In conclusion, rights (being a Muslim) and duties (to be a bridge to dialogue and for the benefit of European societies) are interdependent concepts that help to define the relationships between individuals and society.

One of the duties that Muslims have is to renew the Islamic discourse and to show unwavering commitment to the advancement of equality, freedom, human rights, gender justice and protection of human dignity for all by fostering “Fiqh al-Muwatanah”, the citizenship jurisprudence. This renewal means looking into the origins of Islamic sources with *ijtihad*; and developing “*tajdid*-related formulas and guidelines” leading to “forging the objectives of inter-civilizational harmony and their cooperation for the common good and participate and contribute in European societies.

Keywords: European Muslims, Rights and duties, Renewal of Islamic discourse, islamophobia , religious extremism, Far -right , Azerbaijan , European parliament.

Introduction

First of all I want to emphasize the fact that Azerbaijan became in the last few years, a reference for many countries and Muslims in the world about tolerance and dialogue among different religions and civilizations.

The vision of the current president of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilhem Aliyev who has taken the policy of dialogue very seriously, made a very clear statement last year in his opening speech and letter to the participants of the international conference on Islamophobia in Baku, when he said: “ *Islam is a religion of peace, mercy, tolerance and justice and terrorism has no religion. The use of religion for political purposes only serves to create differences and clashes within societies.* The fact of that this second edition of celebration of the 15 March on the UN day against islamophobia is now bearing fruit and the results are interesting.

Today, Azerbaijan is taking a leading role in tolerance and became a model in how a multicultural , multireligious and philosophies of life can live together and safeguard the mutual understanding and respect in our superdiverse societies.

That is also what we need as a model example from the Islamic world. The 25 million Muslims in EU are not all migrants or refugees. Many are fully-fledged citizens who have both rights and duties. We know too well, when the terrorist attacks occurred in Europe, many Muslims have unconditionally condemned these attacks which has nothing to do with Islam as religion.

But the excess left behind by these attacks was immense in terms of image building about Muslims and how people in Europe viewed Islam. The spread of Salafism ideology among many young people caused also isolation, alienation and resulted in religious exclusionism (*Lubbers, 2001*). Polarization and extremism interacted, so that one encouraged the other and the advance of the far right movement has taken place. Addressing islamophobia / Muslim hatred was a part of EU- project in order to tackle hate speech and discrimination.

Pitfalls of democracy

A rightward shift in European policy could also cause problems and more discrimination for minorities – specifically for Muslims – in EU in the future. For example, the cross-pollination between the far right and the European institutions on migration reached a new peak when former Frontex chairman Fabrice Leggeri announced that he will be on the list for the European elections of the French far-right Rassemblement National.¹

The findings of a 2017 FRA survey on EU Minorities and Discrimination ,show that 27% of Muslims had experienced incidents of hate-motivated harassment, while this percentage is higher (31%) among Muslim women wearing the headscarf in public.²

¹ Aerts Alexander, De Europese doorbraak van uiterst rechts “ The European breakthrough of the far right” , (Antwerpen: Apache online Magazine, April 16, 2024). <https://apache.be/2024/04/16/europese-doorbraak-van-uiterst-rechts>

² Report European Commission, Raising awareness of and countering Islamophobia, or anti-

Muslim hatred is recognized on a European level and this a step in the right direction to tackle islamophobia. The European Commission has appointed a coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred. The coordinator will work with Member States, European institutions, civil society and academia to strengthen policy responses in the field of anti-Muslim hatred in the EU.³

The prevalence of Islamophobia in Europe rise over the last decades, with a particular spike in the last few years, are reasons for serious concern. Islamophobia is a severe violation of human rights and dignity that not only affects people who are Muslim, or perceived as such, it also creates divisions in national communities, undermining social cohesion and the peaceful living together. Commission President Von der Leyen – In her 2020 State of the European Union address – underlined that progress on fighting racism and hate is fragile . She announced that the Commission will propose ‘to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech, whether because of race, religion, gender or sexuality.’⁴

Diversity Not selective Pluralities⁵

European society sees itself as a democratic, secular constitutional state; a state in which rights and duties go together. A society with a large of diversity cannot end in a selective pluralism, because this would undermine the core values of the EU .

Diversity was first applied to pillarization in the early 19th century. This value was indispensable in addressing the relationship between Catholics and Protestants and the relationship between liberals and Catholics.⁶

Today, it is expected to apply this principle also to Muslims; who are living in the same society and have the rights and duties. This tolerance and safeguarding the fundamental rights to all citizens ; is an anthesis of racism and xenophobia, and must be applied as a logical evolution of a constitutional state.

This logical evolution to do the same with other cultures requires the implementation of rule of law; Reciprocity means while rights grant individuals certain freedoms and protections, duties ensure that these rights are respected and upheld in a manner that promotes a just and harmonious society. By no means has Europe ever been devoid of pluralism or diversity, for it is precisely on the premise of the latter that the very idea of Europe has taken shape⁷.

Muslim racism, in Europe. Report | Doc. 15616. 2022 – Fourth part-session. <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/30259/html>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/774811/en>

⁴ European Commission , a more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime, communication from the commission to the European parliament and the council, COM,777 final (Brussels, European commission, 2021). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0777>

⁵ Parvati Nair , Cultural and Religious Diversity in Europe: The Challenges of Pluralism, (Barcelona: IEMed, European institute of the Mediterranean, 2014).

⁶ Zemni Sami, Assymetrisch universalisme en morele suprématie, Paper UG,1997.

⁷ <https://www.iemed.org/publication/cultural-and-religious-diversity-in-europe-the-challenges-of-pluralism/>

It is true that the mechanisms and presuppositions of both discourses; Both far-right parties and Islamic extremist groups show similarities, and a degree of stigmatization is reflected in every appointment and their views. Both colour their discourse based on a structural asymmetry that they discern between us (Europeans) and them (Muslims). The “we” only emphasizes the differences that distinguish them from the “them” to confirm its superiority.⁸

However, dealing with right-wing extremism poses many legal challenges for prevention and prosecution, given the fine line between political populism and extreme right ideology, free and hate speech, activism versus subversion, and sympathy versus participation.⁹ Nevertheless, the very existence of these two groups must be seen as symbolic, for, when bracketed together as they inevitably are (the one would not exist without the other), they reflect the fact of pluralism in Europe and the challenges that fetter such pluralism in the contemporary global context that has emerged after the terrorist attacks carried out by religious extremists ; such as Al Qaida & IS in Europe (2001 – 2017). This attacks are also used as a breeding ground for Islamophobia.

For the ninth consecutive year, IS (Islamic State) remained the deadliest terrorist group globally recording both the highest number of attacks and deaths from terrorism. The group carried out attacks in 20 countries in 2023, down from 30 countries in 2020. Terrorism increased in 2023 by 22 per cent to 8,352 deaths, and this has surely its impact also in the increasing hate crimes against Muslims in EU on those who are not making a distinction between the Islam as belief and religion and the extremist groups who are killing in name of God.¹⁰

Duties as Muslim citizens in Europe

I want to emphasize that in the last years we have more and more to deal with European Muslims rather than Muslims in Europe and this due to two reasons. Each year there are thousands of converts to the Islam and also we have a third and four generation Muslims who are born and grown up in Europe who identify themselves with European identities.¹¹

This way that they express their sense of belonging means a lot. It can foster this group and make their religion as part of their EU identity. We also see a semantic shift in many terms; such as “migrant” became synonymous with Muslims born in

⁸ Zemni Sami, p.2

⁹ Laytouss Brahim, Rise of the Extreme Right: Background and Similarities between Right-wing and Religious (Islamic) Extremism in Europe, (Brussels, Brussels International Center, 2021).

¹⁰ Annual Report ,Global Terrorism Index (GTI), (Sydney: The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), p4
<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>

¹¹ According to the New York times , 25,000 Americans convert to Islam every year(2001). In France 4000, in UK 5000 and in Germany 4000 and in Belgium approximately a 1400 according to numbers of the Grand mosque in Brussels (2019).
<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/22/us/nation-challenged-american-muslims-islam-attracts-converts-thousand-drawn-before.html>

Europe. By extension “the Muslim” all the way, while we know very well, not all migrants are Muslims, and certainly not all Muslims are Arabs, Turkish or Moroccan, but also European.

There is a huge difference between a European Muslim and a migrant Muslim. It is also important as European Muslims to contribute in the social, economic¹² and political process of Europe and how to advance the interest of all? This is also crucial for how Muslims can tackle Islamophobia, Muslim hatred and stereotyping and advance the normalization of Muslims in Europe.

When we look in a broader look, we also see that there is part of Muslims, which behavior is not according to the rules of Islam and they give a very negative image; the same as extremists do. The extremist groups consider voting and democracy as a form of shirk (polytheism and a sin).

Extremists act in the name of Islam, also inspire sharp discussion in Europe: how should European states view the increasingly active role of these Muslims in the public space? Does it signal integration or separation?¹³ These minority and extremist will never be the representatives of the Islam, neither the Muslims. Muslims cannot live isolated from others. We must also combat ideological extremism by helping raise awareness among youth and guiding them according to the Islamic values of peace and dialogue. These values teach comprehension of the other, preservation of the other's dignity and rights, and observation of the national laws in which one resides.¹⁴

The principle of cooperation and participation is clearly mentioned and confirmed in the Quran: “And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression” (Quran, 5: 2). Da’wah in Europe means inviting others to do good. This also has been seen as a great reward in the Islam. There is no compulsion in religion (Quran,). To participate in society and protect their neighbors are fundamental in Islam. The prophet said: “By Allah, his faith is incomplete – and repeated this three times – He was asked: “O!, Messenger of Allah! Who is he? He said: “one whose neighbor is not immune against his mischief”.¹⁵ In another Hadith, the prophet said also: “Indeed, Allah loves gentleness in all matters”¹⁶ The prophet (pbuh) as teacher and the leader of all humanity, was a caller to Allah and who encourages good deeds, he said “one who guides to something good has a reward similar to that of its doer” (Muslim)¹⁷.

¹² A Canadian study stipulated that the Halal contribution to the food economy in Europe is now more than 69,3 Billion euro, (for e.g. Belgium its halal market is about 2 Billion euro, see the Flemish report: Maak kennis met de moslimconsument at <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/25353>

¹³ Nielsen, Jørgen S. Muslim Political Participation in Europe, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Al-Issa, Mohammed bin Abdulkarim, The Charter of Makkah, (Makkah: Muslim World League, by the conference convened between 27-29 May, 2019).

¹⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah, in Sahih Al-Bukhari.

¹⁶ Narrated by ‘Aaishah in Sahih Al-Bukhari.

¹⁷ Narrated by Abi Masud al Ansari in Sahih Muslim.

Islam urges high manners, the virtue of “As- samaha” which means “ easiness with others” easy-going in his relationship and to have mercy on others, encourage gentleness, especially Muslims in Europe who helps determining the image of Muslims and to have mercy on others.

Renewal of Islamic discourse (Tajdid & Islah)

Muslim leaders in Europe must develop a new Islamic discourse by emphasizing human values and harmonious coexistence. These values teach comprehension of the other, preservation of the other’s dignity, rights and observation of the European and national laws in which one resides. This Islamic renewal or “civilizational renewal is an integral part of Islamic thought” that European Muslims needs in order to live and to be compatible with their European context.

This renewal means looking into the origins, history, and interpretation of the holt texts (classical and contemporary) and their relationship with ijihad; and this will help in developing “tajdid-related formulas and guidelines” leading to “forging the objectives of inter-civilizational harmony and their cooperation for the common good”.¹⁸

This renewal of Islamic discourse must have the purpose to install the jurisprudence of citizenship “ Fiqh al-Muwatanah ” with rights , but also duties , such as: fostering dialogue, active participation and to contribute in the society, promote noble moral values, to cooperate in fighting crimes, environmental and security challenges according to concepts shared by Islam and humanity, promoting centrism, moderation especially among women and youth.

Muslims have the religious and moral duty to create inclusive societies and to contribute in the societies they live.

This call for a renewal of Islamic discourse is a “broad and comprehensive approach. These elements of renewal include: **reciprocating** with what is better (cf. Q. 41:34); recognition and advocacy of pluralism in the cultural, political, and socio-legal components of Islamic civilization (Q. 5:48; 49:13); developing beneficial cooperation (Ta’awun) and exchange with other communities and civilizations; enhancing and further developing the jurisprudence of minorities (Fiqh al-Aqaliyyat) for minority Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries, based on (Q. 2:233) ; unwavering commitment to the advancement of equality, freedom, human rights, gender justice, and protection of the human dignity of women; and a resolute stand and commitment to the elimination of sectarian conflicts.¹⁹

When we examine the primary texts of Islam (Quran and Sunnah) we will notice that the principles of human values , justice, cooperation , living together are clearly confirmed by many qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions. To uphold and protect this principles of tolerance and human rights ; who are also EU values must be emphasized

¹⁸ Kamali, Mohammed Hashim, *Tajdid, Islah, and Civilizational Renewal in Islam* Mohammed Hashim Kamali (Washington & London: IIIT with IAIS, Malaysia, 2018.) p 53.

¹⁹ Kamali,p146-147.

in the Islamic discourse in Europe. On this way Muslims can go further in action-oriented steps to putting these principles into practice and to contribute to fulfill their duties, which ought to be followed by every citizen.

Even if the duty of citizenship (as participation of Muslims) is important. In the last few years, we have noticed that only 11 MEP's had a Muslim backgrounds. Although it is supposed to in proportion to their numbers (25 million) they should have at least 35 seats of the current 705 seats in the European Parliament. Muslims are underrepresented due to weak participation and involvement but also exclusion. This exclusion has led to dangerous levels of political apathy, fear and even anger amongst young Muslims. Some still see the EU Parliament as one of the most monocultural places on a very multicultural continent.²⁰

When we look since the first EU elections took place in 1979, and now the EP elections scheduled to be held on 6 to 9 June, in 2024, it will be the 10th Parliamentary election. There is shift to the Right, in many countries in the EU elections . Today there are nine countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia) where far right and hate against Islam and Muslims is still growing gradually and poses problems which promotes Islamophobia .²¹ These populists and far right parties are gaining votes by using fear and disinformation by caricaturing Muslims and portray them as a threat.

Conclusion

As a matter of fairness and reciprocity, Muslims has also a big responsibility on three major levels: as individual citizens but also as Muslim institutions and as Muslim communities as a whole to fulfill their duties and obligations “ so they have first of all to renew their Islamic discourse to an inclusive and more comprehensive one; remembering them to contribute to the societies their resides and to consider this as a duty of citizenship;

They have to know that one cannot exist without the other in many circumstances. One is said to have the right to be free from interference of another, which means that the latter has the duty not to interfere with the right of other.

It will be unfair and arbitrary if, one may do such and such without being deprived by others, if one does not have duty to honor and preserve the rights of others. Duties arise from this mutual agreement to ensure a functioning and just society.

²⁰ Kassam Salim, Euroviews. **Muslims feel excluded from EU politics. May's EU elections won't change that | View** (Brussels, Euronews, 2019).

²¹ [Anti-Muslim hatred database](https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/case-law?country%20), (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023), the database complements FRA's survey research and builds on related work of others, including the EU Coordinator for combating anti-Muslim hatred, UN bodies, the Council of Europe, and the online hate crime reporting system from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). [https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/case-law?country%](https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/case-law?country%20)



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

RISE OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES IN EUROPE AND THE THREAT OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

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I'd like to start by appreciating the Baku International Multiculturalism Center and AIR Center for organizing the 2nd edition of the Islamophobia conference. It is indeed a great service to the Muslims across the World and in particular Europe. Azerbaijan is an example of inter-faith harmony and the world should look up to it an example to shape their societies in such a way that people of various faith and ethnicities can live together peacefully. The attitude of the Azerbaijani state towards the principles of tolerance is openly demonstrated both in the attitude towards representatives of various religions, restoration of religious and historical monuments, the organization of the international conferences on these questions and in the essence of the national legal system. Azerbaijan has set a goal to achieve implementation of the motto "From the tolerant country to a tolerant world" and I think this conference will play an important role in achieving that goal.

Islamophobia has emerged as a new form of racism, with an added gender aspect, as girls and women are targeted due to their dress and the notion that they are oppressed. Islamophobia is also finding purchase in the political sphere, including discriminatory travel bans and visa restrictions, and discourse among far-right groups for electoral gains.

In recent years, Western Europe has witnessed a notable surge in support for far-right political movements. These parties, often espousing nationalist ideologies, have capitalized on economic uncertainties, migration challenges, and a sense of cultural anxiety to gain traction among the electorate. As they ascend to positions of power,

their rhetoric and policies have increasingly targeted minority communities, with Muslims often finding themselves at the forefront of discriminatory practices.

The rise of Islamophobia in Western Europe is deeply intertwined with the anti-immigrant sentiments propagated by these far-right parties. In their pursuit of a homogeneous national identity, these groups often scapegoat Muslims as the supposed "other," fostering an environment where discriminatory policies and practices gain public support. This has manifested in the form of restrictive immigration policies, surveillance measures targeting Muslim communities, and a surge in hate crimes against individuals perceived as Muslims.

Furthermore, these far-right parties exploit social and cultural anxieties to advance an exclusionary narrative that seeks to undermine the principles of diversity and inclusivity that are foundational to Western democracies. The rhetoric often revolves around misconceptions and stereotypes, portraying Muslims as a threat to national security, cultural cohesion, and societal values.

The propagation of Islamophobia by European far-right politicians is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon driven by a combination of political, social, and economic factors. Understanding the motivations behind their rhetoric requires an examination of several key elements:

Identity Politics

Far-right politicians often capitalize on identity politics to appeal to a sense of national identity and cultural homogeneity. They frame Islam as a perceived threat to these ideals, fostering a narrative that positions Muslims as outsiders who challenge the traditional fabric of European societies.

Populism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Islamophobia frequently intersects with anti-immigrant sentiment. Far-right leaders exploit public concerns about immigration, portraying Muslims as a cultural and economic threat. By scapegoating Islam, they divert attention from broader socioeconomic issues and present simplistic solutions, often involving stricter immigration controls.

Economic Anxieties

Economic uncertainties and disparities can fuel resentment and fear, providing fertile ground for far-right politicians to propagate Islamophobic narratives. By blaming Muslims for job losses or economic challenges, they offer a convenient scapegoat to channel public frustration.

Security Concerns

Far-right leaders often exploit fears related to national security. They portray Islam as an ideological adversary, linking it with terrorism and violence. This fearmongering allows them to advocate for more stringent security measures and justify policies targeting Muslim communities.

Media Influence

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions. Far-right politicians use media platforms to amplify Islamophobic messages, contributing to the reinforcement of stereotypes and misconceptions. Media sensationalism can further exacerbate existing prejudices.

Electoral Strategy

Far-right parties frequently use Islamophobia as a tool for electoral gains. By tapping into public anxieties and leveraging anti-Muslim sentiment, they seek to consolidate their voter base and attract those who feel disenchanting with mainstream politics.

Cultural Anxiety

Far-right politicians often exploit cultural anxieties about changes in societal norms and values. They depict Islam as incompatible with European culture, fostering a perception that Muslim communities threaten the established way of life.

Global Events and Migration Crisis

Periods of heightened global tensions or migration crises can intensify Islamophobic sentiments. Far-right leaders use these situations to amplify fears about cultural dilution and national security, framing Muslims as a supposed threat within this broader context. For instance, pro-Palestinian protestors in Europe have been branded as anti-Semitic by far-right groups in Europe and these groups have used this as an excuse to advance their Islamophobic agenda.

Some governments across Europe have also adopted legislation that discriminates against Muslims. Claims of countering extremism have been used to justify the closure of mosques in France and Austria, and to ban the construction of new minarets in Switzerland. In Denmark, children born into immigrant or Muslim neighborhoods, labeled ghettos by the Danish government, must be separated 35 hours each week from their families to learn Danish values. The governments of Austria and France have identified Islamist Separatism and political Islam as national security concerns without clearly defining those terms or requiring a relation to the use or advocacy of violence.

Islamophobic language by high-ranking politicians, mostly from the far right, normalises a dehumanising and racist language when it comes to the portrayal of Muslims. This reduces the threshold of what is considered utterable and overall acceptable in public discourse, and legitimises discrimination of Muslims as citizens and as human beings.

We can look many examples of rising hate against Muslims in Europe:

Following the game between the French and Moroccan national teams two years ago, armed and hooded far-right groups violently attacked Moroccan supporters in the streets of several French cities such as Lyon, and Nice. One young teenager of Moroccan origin was even killed by a car driver waving the French flag.

In Netherlands, up until recently, Geert Wilders was in the driving seat of discussions to bring together a coalition government, paving the way for him to become the Netherlands' first far-right prime minister. It's not just his party. The third biggest party, VVD, and the fourth party, NSC are more towards the right side of the political spectrum as well. A former judge and MP of the Greek right-wing ruling party Nea Dimocratia insinuated that phone tapping of Muslim MP's should be allowed.

In Slovenia, a prominent member of the centrist-right SDS (part of the European People's Party, accused the governing social democratic party of "Islamisation and Shariatisation and massive import of the Arabs" into Slovenia.

In February 2022, the official page of the government of Republic of Slovenia published a tweet stating, "Ukrainian refugees are coming from the environment, which is in cultural, religious and historical sense something completely different as the environment, from which the refugees from Afghanistan are coming."

In France Islamophobia is tied into political figures. French Leaders has consistently called for targeting "radical" Islam, and pushing for a "French" version of Islam. Marine Le Penn, a far-right politician, is known for her extreme Islamophobic statements. She was a contender for the French presidency, showing that these ideas are integral to mainstream French society.

Political rhetoric has created an environment where Islamophobic sentiments are on the rise, and individualized attacks occur. Since 2020, Islamophobic attacks in France increased by 53%.

Generally, and it is true for across Europe, the incidents of Islamophobia are under reported because the Muslim immigrants feel that the systems has been structured in a way in which their grievances would fall on deaf ears. So, whatever statistics we might have heard regarding the reported Islamophobic incidents are only a fraction of the real ones.

The institutionalized Islamophobia in France has created a normalization of hatred against Muslims. This not only demonizes Muslims, but increases violence against them. When faith is intertwined with French colorblind racism, the systems of oppression continue on and on, cycling for years. To address the problem, France must first acknowledge their deep institutionalized issues.

France has pursued a series of controversial bans and restrictions on items of customarily Islamic dress in recent years, which have frequently drawn the ire of Muslim countries and international agencies.

Last year lawmakers backed a ban on wearing the hijab and other "conspicuous religious symbols" in sports competitions. The amendment was proposed by the right-wing Les Républicains party, which argued the hijab could risk the safety of athletes wearing it while playing sports.

It is crucial for the international community to recognize the danger posed by the rise of far-right movements and their impact on the Muslim population in Western Europe. The discrimination faced by Muslims extends beyond mere rhetoric; it translates into policies that curtail their rights, limit their opportunities, and perpetuate a cycle of marginalization.

As we deliberate on strategies to combat Islamophobia, it is essential to address the root causes that contribute to the rise of far-right ideologies. Promoting education, fostering intercultural dialogue, and challenging misinformation are pivotal steps in countering the divisive narratives that fuel discrimination. Moreover, fostering alliances between communities, religious leaders, and policymakers can create a united front against intolerance.



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Research Notes

UNDERSTANDING WHY ISLAMOPHOBIA NEVER SLEEPS: DISSECTING EUROPEAN PATHWAYS

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Fear and the makings of Islamophobia

The expansion through immigration of Muslim communities in Europe whose diverse ethnic backgrounds encompass Turkish, Maghrebi, sub-Saharan African, Iranian, Arab, Pakistani, Indian, and many others has been accompanied by a rise in anti-Muslim attitudes among established European citizens. A clash-of-civilizations perspective would draw attention to nearly 1,400 years of rivalry between western Christianity and Islam, so the phenomenon of anti-Muslim sentiments is far older than the concept of Islamophobia, or fear of Islam as a religion and of its adherents.

Fear is a pervasive term used to describe an individual's perceived insecurity, threat, and angst. It can also denote a person's wariness, suspicion, and skepticism about events that may soon occur and affect and alter one's standing. In other words, fear can be applied in many different ways and contexts. When parts of a nation sense fear, the significance and relevance affect international relations. The sources of fear differ, predictably, from nation to nation and state to state.

Contemporary use of the term Islamophobia is often associated with its introduction into political use in England by the Runnymede Trust. Set up in 1968 to advise the British government on race relations, the Trust established a Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia in 1997 to investigate discrimination against this group. Its seminal report titled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Trust 1997), served as both a consultative document for the government and catalyst for social consciousness. The Runnymede report described Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam' (Runnymede Trust 1997, p. 1).

Eight stigmatizing characterizations of Islam comprising Islamophobia were listed: Islam as: (1) monolithic and static; (2) as separate and 'other', not sharing the values of other cultures; (3) as irrational, primitive and inferior to the West; (4) as aggressive, violent and implicated in a clash of civilizations; (5) as an ideology used to promote political and military interests; (6) as intolerant towards western critiques; (7) as deserving of the discriminatory practices towards and exclusion of Muslims; and (8) as making anti-Muslim hostility natural and normal (Runnymede Trust 1997, p. 4).

Initially religious and cultural attributes were identified but a racial component was not. Usage of Islamophobia highlighted the spread of hostile public attitudes towards Muslims. But this changed in the twenty-first century when race and racialization were added to attributes of Islamophobia. It was as if these latter terms would, once and for all, damn the phenomenon. Instead, however, race and racialization entered the Islamophobia vernacular by encouraging virtue signalers to cast further disgust with assumed Islamophobes. A corollary was also added: those accused of racism at times took pride in being described as racists.

It is never a bad idea to turn to the classics for creativeness as well as wisdom. Thucydides' status is particularly important to historians since he was forefather of the study of not just conflict but fear. Indeed his detailed analysis of the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BC) has been described as "a meditation upon fear – its varieties, ubiquity, potency, and even rational necessity." His focus on the part played by fear in politics highlighted how the spread of fear can pose a grave danger to democracy itself – a key topic today when debating the subject of democratic backsliding and democratic erosion. Its complex nature offered insights into the different types of fear extending from sudden panic to more distant suspicion.

Thucydides employs five different terms – more accurately, word groups – to refer to fear. *Phobos* and *deos* are general notions reflecting words evoking primal fear. *Eksplēsis* spells panic. And two other nouns, *orrodia*, and *hypopsia*, have fallen out of use today. It is the latter that can be revived today to offer greater explanatory power suggesting looking beneath the surface of things, or just plain suspicion of migrants.

The Greek historian's investigation of the causes and effects of fear, and the terminology he developed to interpret it, was semantically trailblazing. It also displayed a prescient awareness of how the emergent system of Athenian democracy collided with human passions and could be destroyed by them.

Today many politicians and much of the public believe that the growing presence of visible symbols of Islam – mosques, minarets, headscarves, burqas, niqabs – offer a threat of the Islamification of Europe. Fear is seen elsewhere as well, such as saying prayers on street corners of large towns or setting up makeshift garage mosques in empty buildings.

In addition, security fears attenuated by terrorist attacks carried out by extremists in the name of Islam often suggest to Europeans that an unbridgeable civilizational divide exists between their 'western' and an alien 'Islamic' world. The Muslim migrant is thus constructed as the carrier of antagonistic values: 'The immigrant is no longer just a classical outsider but also the terrorist within' (Sivanandan 2009, pp. viii-ix).

Muslim women are in particular the targets of Islamophobic behavior. If we even set aside headscarves and clothing that are often frowned upon by other 'locals', anxiety and health are compounded by going out in the street to shop or looking after children. A book by Oxford doctoral student Tania Saeed has examined other aspects of stress endured by Muslim women (*Islamophobia and securitization: religion, ethnicity and the female voice*, 2016).

Islamophobia is more complicated than this imaginary assumes. It draws from a historical anti-Muslimism and anti-Islamism and fuses them with recently-added racist ideologies of the twentieth-first century to construct a distressing concept.

Lessons learned from anti-Semitism

Along with anti-Semitism, Islamophobia has become a pervasive phenomenon in European societies. It bundles religious, ethnic and cultural prejudices together, just as anti-Semitism (which involves more than anti-Judaism) does. An arguably scholastic interpretation is that because mainstream Islam professes the inseparability of religious life from politics and identity, any sentiment or action targeting a Muslim must necessarily be anti-Islamic, even if the 'infidel' responsible for it has no awareness of this nuanced logic.

By contrast, the study of anti-Semitism has a long history, it has spanned many different countries and it implicates multiple academic fields. Historians, psychologists and cultural theorists, for example, have shed light on why the Holocaust happened. Some of the mechanisms that trigger antipathy towards Jews underlie today's hostility towards Muslims. The pioneering historian of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg, probed beyond the anti-Semitic perpetrators to identify the part played, inadvertently or not, by bystanders. Among these he included helpers and givers; gainers; and onlookers and observers, or what we might call witnesses.

Hilberg also wrote of messengers who reported the annihilation taking place. Their influence on events, though minimal when compared to perpetrators, could be positive or negative – or cloaked in ambiguity. Messengers overseeing acts of genocide were, for many, complicit in crimes against humanity. A unique example from World War II and its German death camps illustrated the position of the bystander: 'Polish peasants gestured to Jews on their way to Treblinka that their throats would be cut. And that is where they left it, between a warning and a taunt' (Hilberg 1993, p. 216). In a strident variation of Hilberg's triad, another Holocaust historian asserted: 'The Holocaust is a warning. It adds three commandments to the ten of the Jewish-Catholic tradition: Thou shalt not be a perpetrator; Thou shalt not be a passive victim; and Thou most certainly shalt not be a bystander' (Bauer 2001, p. 67).

This typology has limited applicability to research on Europe's Islamophobic backlash. While its victims are readily identifiable, its perpetrators are not. One British study noted that those who commit anti-Muslim hate crimes can range from lone wolves to members of loosely affiliated violent extremist nationalist milieux (Lambert and Githens Mazer 2010, p. 89). They can thus include racist skinheads as well as the

hundreds of thousands who backed the British National Front and English Defense League. Today on the eve of the 2024 European Parliament elections, dozens of far-right parties in many European states await a stronger reaction to immigration and further regress in democratic backsliding. Islamophobia is part of the reckoning.

Exacerbating Islamophobia and undoing it

The mix of religion, race, ethnicity and culture all constitute variables explaining Islamophobia, but how significant each is in explaining variation in it is impossible to measure, as survey findings we have reported indicate. Racialization as a category fusing these variables can serve as an explanatory device for the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim attitudes. It allows this group to be classified as not just 'Other' but 'inherently dangerous and inferior' (Bleich 2006, p. 17). Racialization, race and differential racism have all become more endemic to Islamophobic stigmatizing of Muslims today than was the case in the past.

The character of debates about national identity, migration and multiculturalism focuses, accordingly, on primordial, civilizational and racial differences more than on civic identity which had dominated public discourse when the Soviet Union fell apart.. At the same time, to classify Islamophobes as racists makes for bad politics, if honest scholarship. It credits perpetrators with a chiliastic but repugnant, vision and exacerbates their shallow stereotypes of Muslims as racially different into deep and rigid structures. The Manichean world view of Islamophobes versus virtue signalers is an exaggeration and it should not be reproduced by any sector of society.

Public opinion is infrequently used as an explanatory variable for policy outcomes. Policy-making is generally self-driven and in the hands of political elites. It is based on different factors: citizens' levels of political knowledge, their political interest, and their political sophistication, all of which can be controlled by the ruling class – so long as public opinion does not become desperate in unfavorable conditions and exerts power of its own. Important, too, though it is rarely approached this way, is measuring the level of intensity of opinion about an issue. High-intensity opinion typically leads to political movements in support of or against a particular policy.

Two political scientists developed a thermostatic model that measured policy responsiveness to public opinion (Mark Franklin and Christopher Wlezien, 'The Responsive Public: Issue Saliency, Policy Change, and Preferences for European Unification', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 9, 1997, pp. 347–63). They found that opinion had a stronger effect on policy than generally assumed. For example, public preferences have been reflected in European legislative behavior such as legislation in the form of regulations and directives across multiple policy spheres. While there might not be a 'point landing' leading to congruence of policy with antecedent opinion, the general policy direction is impacted.

Public opinion on valence issues, such as immigration, offers predictive power of what future policy may emerge. To be sure, the causal direction does not always lead from public preferences to a consequent policy. Policy decisions may represent

'anticipatory responses' to public opinion by strategic actors like a parliament or the European Commission. 'Policy entrepreneurship' can tap the state of public opinion and often have its way (Andrew Moravcsik, *Centralization or fragmentation? Europe facing the challenges of deepening, diversity, and democracy*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1998).

When it relates to the status of Muslim minorities in Europe such logic is straightforward: it can unmake the public–elite divide and offers an enhanced role for public opinion in the making of immigration and integration policy. Frequently it can empower such minorities.

An initiative of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, part of a non-partisan, independent Migration Policy Institute based in Washington, came up with four radical recommendations to overhaul the migration process. (Bertelsmann-Stiftung, Migration Policy Institute (eds.), *Migration, Public Opinion and Politics: The Transatlantic Council on Migration*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann-Stiftung, 2009, p. 26).

1. Governments must demonstrate to their publics that they are in control of both the composition and scale of immigration'.
2. Politicians must acknowledge and address the public's concerns about immigration, such as border control, public security and potential crowding in the labor market. Ignoring these concerns – or worse, suggesting they are evidence of prejudice – will only alienate voters. One way of doing this is the following: 'Politicians should appeal to values and emotion, not just recite statistics . . . Public opinion is based on (and influenced by) values more than by statistics; therefore addressing a contentious policy issue by "defending facts" can backfire'.
3. Policymakers can cull lessons learned from polls to create more effective narratives and address their constituents' desire for greater control over their lives. The most effective response is to acknowledge people's fear of change, instead of trying to "counter" that fear with facts and statistics'.
4. Publics want governments to create more stable, predictable and usually smaller flows of legal migrants; to dramatically reduce illegal entry; to prevent unscrupulous employers from undermining wages and work standards; and to ensure that immigrants learn the local language, obey the law, pay taxes and respect a country's civic culture and institutions'.

Let us for a moment imagine, then, that such far-reaching recommendations had been implemented in the 1970s. It became plausible then to undo the sequence of events that led from a dramatic increase in immigration numbers and a disregard for public opinion ushered in by unreformed elites to a rapid increase in anti-immigration attitudes. These were eventually converted principally into anti-Muslim sentiments. One counterfactual – that political elites were different then and pursued liberal pragmatic,

perhaps overly-generous immigration policies – could have made an enormous difference.

What exactly is a counterfactual? Paraphrasing political scientist Richard Ned Lebow (*Forbidden fruit: counterfactuals and international relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 'The simplest way to undo the chain of events that has produced Islamophobia would be to introduce a miracle counterfactual, whereby human nature is altered so that prejudice is absent from people's psychological make-up' (Taras, *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe*, p. 204). Such a long long-shot counterfactual may even amount to the confines of social science fiction. In the case of liberal EU migration policy, 'Would less idealistic and moralistic, and more realistic and populist, EU norms on immigration and integration at an earlier stage in the event sequences have pre-empted the emergence of an ethnoreligious cleavage?' (Taras, p. 197).

The ensuing debates over integration, assimilation and multiculturalism would have been banal – an outcome preferable to replacing highly-charged polemics with open-ended dialogue. The evolution of parallel societies, economic and social marginalization, and the rage of the banlieue would have been less intractable challenges because state capacity for absorbing immigrants would have been closely matched to immigrant numbers.

Would controversies over mosques, minarets, headscarves and burqas not have erupted had this counterfactual been recognized? Many theory-driven explanations highlighting the structural causes of Islamophobia would cite the 1,300 years of supposedly insoluble conflict between Islam and the West to repudiate this imagined outcome. In contrast to long-shot counterfactuals, close-call counterparts would, by contrast, point to a branching point at which political leaders could choose to 'paint a picture of how society and national identity should look in the longer term, and explain how immigration fits into that construct'.

Replacing EU political leaders, not the people, is disingenuous and unrealistic. Dialogue in a deliberative democracy conducted in a liberal spirit would most likely have had a better chance to reduce prejudice in society and establish a normative consensus in Europe in which Muslim communities constituted a full-fledged partnership.

There is a more tangible and even fundamental role today that Islam, in Europe but especially in the Global South, should be encouraged to perform. Over centuries European colonizers' mission has been to recognize, demonize and colonize the international system. Such 'liberal agendas' typically induce intolerance.

It becomes realistic in a changing international system that Muslim agency becomes involved in the forging of a new multipolar order. There is a role to be played by Muslim political leaders to assist with building multilateralism. The logic can take us further and seeks to engage Muslim leaders in creating a multi-centered global order. Its objective would be to put an end to the persistent unipolar international system that emerged when the USSR fell apart in 1991.

Ending liberal hegemony, discarding economic neoliberalism, and recognizing that Islam has a major part to play in an emergent multipolar system handily defeats the defensive-minded task of keeping Muslims protected from Islamophobia. As we know, however, Islamophobia never sleeps.

References and notes:

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
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Research Notes

THE PRESUMPTION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN FRANCE ON THE EXAMPLES OF URBAN, IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION POLICIES

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Abstract:

In light of the political declarations and actions of the French government over the last 50 years, some people are raising to designate France as an Islamophobic country. To address this problem, the author proposes to speak of a presumption of Islamophobia.

After briefly recalling the origins of Muslim populations, the author analyzes the three public policies in France over the same period. These are urban policies, asylum and immigration policy and integration or reintegration. In particular, it highlights mediocre successes and especially failures in each of them, which have led to the many persistent problems in the daily life of Muslims in France and the inability of the public authorities to remedy them despite numerous laws, experimental measures and others of the type of "positive discrimination".

The observation of the objective failure of the policies described and their consequences may explain the current situation and the inability of the authorities to develop a balanced policy towards part of its populations of Muslim origin. Finally, this inability is also reflected in the failure of attempts to build an "Islam of France" as opposed to an "Islam in France". The latest announcements and restrictive measures by the French government can only reinforce this analysis. It is obvious that far-reaching legislative reforms are necessary, particularly those of the 1905 Law to fill the current legal vacuum and above all to align the desire of the public authorities to have control over various Muslim religious bodies. This also concerns the financing of religions and free Muslim schools.

On the other hand, considerable efforts must be made for the integration and reintegration of part of the Muslim population, in addition to the socialization of children and the learning of the French language. We also understand that in the years to come the percentage of Muslim populations will increase and the so-called "Muslim" vote will appear in French political life.

Key words: Muslim populations, public authorities, Islamophobic country, political declarations,immigration

Introduction:

Positioning of the problem: Is France Islamophobic?

At the end of the 1st quarter of the 21st century, we ask ourselves whether France, a country of human rights (which declares itself to be so), is an Islamophobic country. It is true that a lot has happened in 50 years and some statements or actions of the French government could be interpreted in this way. To remain objective, I propose to talk about a presumption of Islamophobia (1) and to address the question from the angles of the three public policies carried out over the last 50 years (2). To do this, we must first recall the origins of the Muslim populations in France and their evolution.

Let's first make a brief **reminder of the (historical) facts** by answering this question. *What is the origin of Muslim populations in France and how they have evolved? What are the problems and challenges?*

To understand the origin of the Muslim populations in France, we must refer to the beginning of the nineteenth century, i.e. to the conquest of Algeria by the French empire and then of other countries of the Maghreb and black Africa. **The origin of Muslim populations is linked to France's colonial past and is therefore colonial (1).**

The arrival of the Muslim populations happened in waves. However, it **had become more pronounced in the twentieth century**, paradoxically after the former colonies gained independence (2). **Algerians represent almost the majority of the immigrant population of France**, as well as the Muslim population. Another paradox, because **Algeria's independence was born of the failure of the integration of Algerians**, the inability of the French authorities to guarantee them equal rights (3)!

Today, even in the absence of statistics carefully kept by INSEE, **the number of Muslims in France can be estimated to be at least 1/10 of the total population**, or **nearly 7 million** people. However, **the more likely figure could be close to 10 million people** (4)

It's a fact: Muslims make up nearly 10% of the population in France, are much more present among immigrants (44%) and descendants of two immigrant parents (48%). Sourced: INSEE 30 March 2023.

We can see that many of the (social) problems are linked to Muslim populations in France: discrimination, racism, crime, (re)integration, immigration, religion, the status of women, etc. All of these problems are challenges for public authorities (5)

Let us now analyse these problems in the light of the three types of public policies carried out over the last 50 years. We will analyse the so-called urban policies, asylum and immigration and integration (reintegration).

Discussion

Analysis of urban, immigration and integration policies over the last 50 years (1974-1924)

Let us first analyse the so-called urban policy

Definition. Urban policy – the set of policies carried out at the level of a territorial unit (most often a municipality or agglomeration) to guarantee the security, social cohesion and harmonious development of the unit in question.

The appearance of these policies coincided with the end of the 30 glorious years (1945-1975) when unemployment, the notion of a “ghetto” and related problems affecting the very often immigrant and Muslim populations (socio-economic) gradually appeared.

The first ministry of the city dates back to 1992. Then came the SRU Law of 13 December 2000 and the many successive laws.

The episodes of the riots of 2004 (from October 27 to November 13) and 2023 (from June 27 to July 15) clearly demonstrate the limits and failures of urban policy. The main causes of this failure in my opinion are: the absence of a continuous and coherent policy, the lack of resources or the decisions taken by the authorities (e.g. the abolition of the “community police” by N. Sarkozy in 2003 (created in 1998 by L. Jospin), which then equated police officers with social workers, positions of educators in the city).

It should be remembered that in 2005, as in 2023, the event that gave rise to the riots is a news item. In 2005, 2 17-year-olds were electrocuted in a transformer in Clichy-sous-Bois as a result of a chase by police officers. In 2023, Nahel Marzouk died as a result of a fatal shooting by a police officer as a result of a refusal to comply.

However, **urban policy is closely linked to the other two**. It can also be said that **in order to prosper, it had to be carried out in addition to the other two policies**, which was unfortunately not the case.

Let us now take stock of the asylum and immigration policy in France over the same period

It can be seen that the majority of the immigrant population in France are Algerians (probably because of the Franco-Algerian Agreement). They are 48.2%. Are of Muslim origin: 32.4%, i.e. Algerians: 12.5%, Morocco: 11.9%, Tunisia: 4.7%, Turkey: 3.3%.

Since 1984, the French authorities have been trying to pursue a restrictive and selective policy, but they have not succeeded. The slogan of immigration chosen and not suffered will remain as such “ (speech by Dominique de Villepin of 08/06/2005).

The % of the population of immigrant origin ~ 10.3%, or about 7 million people. **The % of the immigrant population is around 2%, or about 1.4 million people.** The number of

foreigners in an irregular situation **can also be estimated to be at least 1/2 (= 0.89% – 1.19%), between 600–800 k people, or 700 thousand people.** Here again, **the majority of people staying illegally are of Muslim origin** (some of them ended up there following the refusal of family reunification).

The many obstacles that exist in the administrative procedures and the attitude of the local authorities (Prefectures) transform the journey of a foreigner in France from arrival on the soil to naturalization into an obstacle course. **Part of the administration of the Ministry of the Interior** (agents of the prefectures) **has openly racist ideas**, convinced that the “strangers are parasites”, or “radicals” and even potentially terrorists (amalgamation of Muslims).

Family reunification, which has been authorized since 1974 (Decree of 29/04/1976, J. Chirac), **has not solved anything, but on the contrary accentuated problems**, particularly those linked to the question of “polygamy”.

Similarly, **the asylum policy** (which remains a gateway to the country) **is generally a failure**, because it leads, as a result of the inability of the authorities to regulate the flows, to an increase in the number of undocumented foreigners, in an irregular situation.

The problems caused by the failure of asylum and immigration policies are not absorbed by those of republican integration. We even realize that **we need to carry out reintegration policies for certain populations of immigrant origin or even natives of France**, who are also substantially Muslim.

It is undisputed that asylum and immigration policies are linked to the two opposing visions of the consequences (E. Zemmour’s invasion by foreigners vs. The creolization of J-L. Mélenchon).

Let us consider the third policy, that of integration (reintegration of certain categories of the population)

For many years **there had been various structures that were intended to help immigrant populations to integrate.** The last one is called the **French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII)**, created in 2009. It has been provided that the fees collected when residence permits are issued will be used as funds for the actions of this agency. However, **the OFII’s record remains mediocre** in view of the persistent problems of integration of foreigners. **The organization suffers from a lack of resources and understaffing**, as do the prefectures.

Similarly, **there are many French populations**, partly of immigrant origin, **who need to be reintegrated.** There are **problems with mastery of the French language, higher unemployment rates, many economic and social problems**, as well as **crime.**

The **public authorities have tried many policies and experiments.** Among them are the Priority Education Zones (ZEP), 1981, Sensitive Urban Zones (ZUS), 1996, the appearance of the notion of “positive discrimination” at the end of the 1990s of an “anonymous CV”, the francization of surnames and first names, etc.

Here too **we will see the lack or irrational use of resources, problems in the education and socialization of children**, the elimination of jobs, etc. One can ask questions, for example, **about the short-sightedness of the public authorities in the need to ensure phonetic “recycling” of children from the age of two whose two parents** (especially the mother) **are not native French speakers** (Guy Chevalier’s thesis). Similarly, the so-called “global” method of learning to read seems unsuitable for his children.

This short-sightedness **can also be analyzed** as a **voluntary policy designed to encourage the departure of non-integrated populations from the national territory and their return to their countries of origin**. If this **hypothesis** is **confirmed**, then we can only note **that such a policy finally backfired on the same authorities years later**.

It can therefore be objectively concluded that *the public policies pursued by the French authorities have failed and their consequences*.

Thus, **as a result of the failure of the above-mentioned policies, many problems appeared in French society at the end of the twentieth century**. **Some of these problems** being linked to Muslim populations **have given rise to an amalgam against Muslims**, especially against the background of the several attacks.

The **public authorities have sometimes made sensational declarations** (N. Sarkozy on “karcher” or the “scum” on 19/6/2005 at the city of 4000 in La Courneuve), **sometimes have run behind the votes of far-right voters** or **have tried to create an Islam “of France” vs. Islam “in France”** CFCM, 2003 / N. Sarkozy, Fondation de l’Islam de France 5/12/2006 / D. de Villepin, Forif, 2022 / E. Macron) **by means of ultimatums** (ultimatum to the CFCM to adopt a “charter of republican values” of 19/11/2020, E. Macron).

However, this **charter presents several problems:**

- Stipulation that Islam is a religion and not a policy
- Creation of a national council of imams with accreditations to preach
- Notion of “Islamic separatism” (Law No. 2021-1109 of 24 August 2021)

It is also obvious that a reform of the 1905 Law on the separation of Church and State (and the Church School) **is necessary**, insofar as **the public authorities want to control the religious practice and religious teaching of Muslim populations** (closure of free Muslim schools, end to the secondment of imams from abroad to France, without their training in France).

Similarly, it is not clear how the authorities saw the “public” funding of religious organizations (associations, mosques) and “free” Muslim schools, to counter any so-called “opaque” funding from abroad, when the state of the law and the current law prohibit it (this same public funding). All this gives **problems with secularism in schools** (wearing the Abaya lately), that of the so-called detached imams (expulsion of Imam Youssein) and tensions with the Muslim authorities (CFCM / the ultimatum of E. Macron).

The **latest statement by the new French Minister of National Education** on the **bill allowing the exclusion and schooling of Muslim children who have become “radicalized”** is part of this logic. The attempt by the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes to close the Muslim bookshop “Le Message” in Nice as well.

I will leave it to each of you to draw conclusions and answer the question I asked at the beginning of my presentation in the light of my analysis.

For my part, **I remain convinced that the key to solving the problems remains the socialization of children from an early age, which must go hand in hand with the learning of French, which would not be possible without the questioning by the French authorities of the policies carried out for 50 years, the complete reform of the 1905 law and the rethinking of all the public policies cited above. The populations concerned should also become more politically active, structure themselves into interest and/or pressure groups to defend their rights effectively.**

Thank you.

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Maps and Infographics:

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The distribution of the Muslim population by department

Number of foreigners residing in France, since 1945

Immigrant population in France

Urban Free Zones (ZFU)

Towards a Reform of Islam in France (Visactu)

Islamophobia in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack

Cartoons

Deportation of a young undocumented foreigner.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

FRANCE AND AUSTRALIA: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

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Abstract:

This paper presents a comparative analysis of Islamophobia in France and Australia, with a focus on the regulation of Muslim visibility. This paper explores how differing approaches to secularism and multiculturalism shape the experiences of Muslim minorities in these two nations. While France's *laïcité* emphasizes secularism and assimilation, Australia's multicultural policy promotes diversity and religious freedom. Drawing Cheikh-Husain research on Muslim Community Organizations (MCOs), this paper examines how Australian Muslims navigate Islamophobia, leveraging multicultural policies to assert their religious identity and reclaim public visibility as citizens. Through cross-cultural engagement and initiatives that challenges the notion of religiosity as a private issue, Australian Muslims reclaim and assert their belonging as Australian citizens. This analysis highlights the significance of national values and policies in shaping the dynamics of Islamophobia and minority responses in diverse socio-political contexts.

Key words: Islamophobia, France, Australia, comparative analysis, secularism, multiculturalism religious identity

Introduction

Islamophobia in Australia sounds like a walk in the park when compared to Islamophobia in France. The extent to which the French government attempts to regulate and control every aspect of French-Muslim's visibility, discourses, institutions and even Muslims' forging engagements is astonishing in a very negative way.

We often speak about Islamophobia without defining it. Islamophobia is not as simple as the expression of anti-Muslim hate. It takes different manifestations. In my presentation I am going to focus on one kind of Islamophobia that targets the visibility of Muslims. I am not going to be talking about political or discursive forms of Islamophobia. I will be focusing on the social aspect of Islamophobia that regulates the visibility of Muslims. In this presentation I argue that while both Australia and France problematise the visibility of Muslims, Muslims in Australia are far more capable of combating Islamophobia due to two foundational differences between the two countries: secularity and Multiculturalism.

Needless to say, that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist activities in the West created a climate of moral panic whereby the religious identity of Muslims in the West became at the forefront of political, media and public contestations leading to their hypervisibility as problematic social category both in France and in Australia.

The discursive framing of the so-called 'Muslim question', or more precisely how to govern the 'Muslim problem', has become the core focus of many Western nations, Australia included, despite being extremely obvious in France due to its overt attempts to govern Muslims' existence and expressions of religiosity. Underpinning all of this, is the assumption that Islam and Muslims in the West are fundamentally incompatible with Western values of secularity and democracy.

This assumption is intensified within hard-core secular nations which imply a strict separation between the secular and the sacred, as is the case with Laïcité in France. Nonetheless, religion is still perceived and approached mostly as being a private matter that belongs behind closed doors even in soft-core secular multicultural nations, such as Australia and Canada. Therefore, visible markers of Muslims' religiosity, such as women's head scarfs and men's beards, acts of praying in public, etc- stand out as 'odd' and threatening because they fall outside the secular norms of private religious practice and are therefore linked to forms of ideological extremism. In the public imagination, such Muslims' religious visibilities are often portrayed as being somehow un-Australian or un-French.

My research on Muslim Community Organisations' MCOs understating of and responses to Islamophobia has revealed that for these organisations, Islamophobia is the socio-political assumption that Australian Muslim are not and cannot be Australians leading to Australian Muslims being treated and viewed as un-Australians. Because of this perception, MCOs anti-Islamophobia activities focused on countering that perception by asserting Muslims' Australianness. More on how they do this will follow.

That's said, France and Australia's values and policies around secularity and multiculturalism leads to foundational differences in the manifestation of Islamophobia and Muslim's response to it.

Secularity

While France's laïcité emerged out of conflict and a desire to end religious interference and establish state sovereignty over religious institutions, Australia's

secularism developed through a peaceful integration of religious diversity. Australia's secularity was influenced by practical considerations, including the need to appease religious factions during the federation's formation, without explicitly aiming to separate church and state.

While France's *laïcité* aims to administer society (in public and political lives) without any religious influence, Australia's secularity is more about ensuring religious freedom and preventing governmental interference in religious matters. Section 116 of the Australian constitution explicitly limits the government powers to be religious and to impose religion. In fact, it prohibits the government from limiting the free exercise of religion. This is a major difference in the core foundation of the two nations which impacts Muslims' ways of expressing religiosity.

This is why France's *laïcité* allows the state to impose discriminatory policies to ban headscarfs and Islamic religious symbols and expressions to keep public spaces free from religious influences. In contrast, Australia's secularity is more inclusive and pragmatic, focusing on coexistence and tolerance rather than the active exclusion of religion from the public sphere.

Multiculturalism

Despite the lived reality of the French multicultural society, Officially, France does not recognize its ethnic, racial, or religious minorities. It does not collect data on ethnicities and religiosities which undermine the nations' ability to attend to minorities needs. The only recognised identity is a French republican. Therefore, France promotes assimilation into a unified French culture, with a strong emphasis on secularism and the adoption of French values and language.

To the contrary, multiculturalism is the formal policy in Australia. Australia's Multicultural policy not only recognises Australia's diversity, but also celebrates it. It celebrates the diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of its citizens emphasising the right of every Australian to maintain and celebrate their cultural heritage within the bounds of the Australian law. The government regularly collects data on diversity to make sure that everyone is included and not excluded. This policy gives Muslims the right to practice and share their religion and culture free from discrimination.

The Racial Discrimination Act in 1975 provided Australia's first anti- discrimination legislation. It protects people from unfair treatment or vilification on the basis of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. A section of this law prohibits employers, for example, from imposing work requirements that "impair recognition, enjoyment, or exercise on an equal footing" of a human right or fundamental freedom, such as banning the headscarf.

So, the stark difference in secularity and multiculturalism between Australian and France provides the ecosystem for Muslim minorities in these two nations to have a distinctive experience of Islamophobia as well as respond to it in empowered ways in Australian when compared to France.

Strategies of visibility

Focusing on Muslims' visibly as one fraction of Islamophobia, the argument has been that the hypervisibility of Muslims in the West is a manifestation of Islamophobia. Muslims are not too many and they are not in the West to conquer and impose Sharia law, but Western media and the far-right political narratives have intensified the visibility of Muslims beyond their actual numbers. For example, in 2015, Australia had five or six anti-Islam political parties running for elections deploying the solo agenda of anti-Islam despite the very low numbers of Muslims in Australia (at the time 2.6%).

Focusing on Muslims' visibly I argue that Australian Muslims uses Australia's multicultural policy not only to claim their rights and freedoms of religious expressions, but also to capitalise on their hypervisibility as Muslims. For example, Australian Muslims consider cross-cultural activities as opportunities not only to educate non-Muslims about Islam but most importantly to put their hypervisibility as Muslims in display to humanise and normalise Muslims' existence. They perceive cross-cultural engagements as critical platforms to regain control of their public images and to impose and improve their social positionings as Australian Muslims by amplifying their positive visibility. This is despite them knowing and speaking about cross-cultural activities as softly-imposed by the Australian government throughout the "War on Terror" era as part of the government's "soft-anti- terrorism" measures known otherwise as the "social cohesion" agenda to ensure Muslims' "integration". Some scholars call these social cohesion initiatives as manifestations of *soft* Islamophobia imposed on Muslims given the assumption that unintegrated Muslims are more prone to radicalism and extremism.

Another example is Muslims attempt to blur the sharp dichotomy between public sites of visibility assigned to citizens and private sites of invisibility assigned to Muslims- aka Mosques verse parks. Muslims in Australia deliberately turn their private spaces such as mosques and Islamic cultural centres into public spaces open to receive all and not only Muslims. An example is the annual National Mosque Open Day when several mosques across the nation simultaneously open their doors to the public offering Australians a first-hand opportunity to interact and have conversations with Muslims inside their houses of worship.

There are also instances when Muslims turn public sites into private Islamic spaces. For example, when Australian Muslims gather in a public space such as a park in the city of Melbourne to perform Eid prayers under the public gaze. This silent and visible performance of Muslims praying en mass in a public space is a highly audible and visible statement of Muslims' rights to exists and express pride in their religiosity. This is a deliberate and strategic decision to access public sites of visibility assigned to Australianness in their capacity as Muslims. By doing so, they aim to conflate the two, Australianness and Muslimness. They assert that: we are Australian citizens, and we are Muslims and that is our religious identity as citizens and there is no contradiction between the two. The aim is to amplify their religious identity and assert its compatibility with their national identity as Australians.

Conclusion

To this end, Australian Muslims use Australia's multicultural systems whereby religious freedoms are protected, to situate Muslims within secular and national visible sites of recognition and citizenship to enhance their public recognition as Australian citizens. This is particularly because they understand the problem of Islamophobia as the misrecognition of Muslims as Australian Citizens.

Australian Muslims use Muslims' hypervisibility as a social capital to outwardly project and amplify their religious identity within a multicultural system that not only protects but should also celebrate Muslims' existence.

Australia's multicultural policies allow Muslims to use public spaces to turn the very visibility of Muslims from a hyper-securitised construct to a platform for countering Islamophobia narratives.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Speech

FROM GLOBAL ISLAMOPHOBIA TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SPACES OF RESISTANCE IN FRANCE

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Hello everybody,

I am a French academic, and for example I've never been able to find a job in France. So, we can say that French academia is also one of the many criminalized spaces of resistance. And I will continue to speak in English as I always say: 'English saved my professional life'. First, I will talk about how Islamophobia is a spatialized process as I am a geographer. I will explain how Islamophobia projects a reality from the global scale to the local scale and therefore how global Islamophobia impacts the everyday lives of local Muslims, and here particularly of French Muslims. Then I will highlight the spaces of resistance against Islamophobia which undergo significant closures, repressions and other intimidations in France. And here, I'm going to talk about my contribution to the European Islamophobia Report which ranks France as the Champion country of Islamophobia in Europe (and in the West), to the point that the editors decided in 2020 to put the face of President Macron on the cover. So, I developed the concept of 'Spatialized Islamophobia' in my first book that basically shows that Islamophobia affects all spatial scales ranging from the globe to the body. And by analyzing Islamophobia at all these scales, I was able to highlight many findings such as maps presenting the distribution of anti-Muslim acts for the Parisian case (and also for the London case) and quotes from the testimonies of the main victims of Islamophobia living in Paris (and also London) that I collected a few years ago. So, we know that Islamophobia is a global phenomenon. The spread of this form of racism (which is more than open, normalized and even now legitimized) in the media and political discourses

is impressive and globalized in the sense that it is visible in many parts of the world (whether located in the West or not and in a Muslim-minority context or not). And if we focus only on the West (which represents the most discussed study area), we can see that the visibility of Muslimness is depicted as problematic. Many Islamophobic tropes have been manipulated to justify the way Islamophobia is legally embedded in law, notably in France with the 2004 hijab ban in public schools or the 2010 law banning the niqab in the streets, or the 2021 anti-Separatism law which seeks to reduce displays of the Islamic faith in public life. In France, I collected quantitative data (from community associations before they were shut down) that allowed me to observe that in France Islamophobic incidents are mainly discrimination in public institutions (while in the UK for example they are mostly verbal abuse on public transport). So, this focus on institutions clearly questions the French laïcité as well as the whole French Republican model and especially its values of Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité. Islamophobia is not only multi-scalar, it is also multi-dimensional. It affects all sectors. First, we can talk about the political and media sphere which is particularly affected by Islamophobia. And it was very intense during the 2022 presidential campaign with the participation of the new candidate Éric Zemmour who shared a very worrying anti Muslim program. Instead of having programs and laws protecting religious and ethnic minorities, we have in France almost constant promises of new Islamophobic laws. Education is also constantly affected especially with the Secularism Plan that targets the long skirts of young girls who wear the hijab outside of their high school. Their bodies and clothing are once again controlled and scrutinized (sometimes to the point of sexual harassment) in the name of secularism. Many other sectors are affected, and many other incidents could be mentioned here, such as police violence against Muslims; or anti-Muslim directives given to the police; or the scandalous and disproportionate expulsion of Imams; or the unfair imprisonment of Muslim activists; or the promotion of white supremacist crimes by highly influential figures; or even crimes committed against vulnerable and racialized Muslim people. All these examples are signals sent to French Muslims. These signals show them that their community as a whole is targeted. Their religious practices are monitored, as are their associations, their organization, their capacity to react, to protect themselves, to resist and to have a political voice. At the moment, everything shows that they are subject to a sort of exceptional regime. This exceptional regime has allowed, very often 2 without convincing reasons, the closure of local mosques, Muslim schools, publishing houses, NGOs denouncing Islamophobia... We are therefore observing a real criminalization of all spaces of resistance against Islamophobia in France. So, a legitimate question appears here: Are there still spaces against Islamophobia in France? It is true that as French Islamophobia is mainly institutional, any attempt to combat it is inevitably incriminated and even destroyed. But let's try to stay positive, because there are a few spaces where we can still meet and discuss Islamophobia. We can still see some initiatives although they are limited.

There are still some actions carried out by French Muslim associations, by politicians, journalists, academics, activists, etc. And there are also many international Human Rights NGOs trying to do something outside of France to protect the rights of French Muslims. All of this is obviously more than welcome. So yes, let's try to remain positive, even if we must also keep in mind that as long as our governments are not ready to

break with their neoliberal regime, all strategies aimed at reducing Islamophobia (and more broadly inequalities) will necessarily reproduce even more irregularities. In other words, we must be able to criticize the contradictions of our governments which claim to limit and reduce inequalities and racism that they themselves have paradoxically generated through economic deregulation and colorblindness. So, Islamophobia is a spatialized phenomenon, a pervasive phenomenon because it affects all spatial scales as well as all sectors, and that is why we have no other choice but to resist. We must all resist because oppression necessarily calls for resistance. Our resistance should be both localized and internationalized, as we are doing here today. And our resistance should also try to bring together all the global struggles against oppression. Because Islamophobia has the potential to go beyond Islam and Muslims and create new alliances with broader anti-racist groups that already know the structural dimension of racism. Islamophobia is an anti-racist issue, but it is also a feminist issue, an anti-colonialist issue, and so on. And the main goal here is to all unite against the normalization of such a racist culture.

Thank you!



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING DESECRATION OF CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

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I would like to start with expressing my gratitude to the organizers of the conference for inviting me to participate in this great event. I am honored to have received the invitation from the Baku International Multiculturalism Center (BIMC) and the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum.

The core of my argument is that at the present juncture in world history desecration of Islamic cultural and religious heritage is not just an act of Islamophobia. A decolonial view of Islamophobia connects these acts to present juncture of world history.

In order to effectively fight Islamophobia we need to have a vision of how it is connected to the colonial world civilization and how we should move forward to a new world civilization that eradicates all forms of racism including Islamophobia.

With thanks to ChatGTP I list the following types of desecration of Islamic cultural and religious heritage. We should keep in mind that desecration is not only about impacting physical structures but also about damaging the collective memory and identity of Islamic communities.

1. **Physical destruction:** Demolition or damaging of mosques, shrines, tombs, minarets, or any other religious structures.
2. **Vandalism:** Graffiti, defacement, destruction of monuments, inscriptions, or artworks.

3. **Theft and looting:** Stealing or illegally trafficking Islamic artifacts, manuscripts, or religious objects.
4. **Cultural appropriation:** Misappropriating of Islamic symbols, practices, or artifacts for commercial gain.
5. **Conversion or repurposing:** Converting mosques, madrasas, or other Islamic religious sites into secular spaces, such as bars, clubs, or non-religious institutions.
6. **Discriminatory legislation or policies:** Implementing laws or policies that restrict the practice of Islam or target Islamic cultural expressions that lead to the marginalization and erasure of Islamic heritage.
7. **Digital desecration:** Spreading misinformation, hate speech, or derogatory content about Islam or Islamic cultural practices through digital platforms.
8. **Neglect and lack of preservation:** Failing to maintain and preserve Islamic historical sites, artifacts, or cultural traditions leading to their gradual deterioration and loss over time.
9. **Forced conversions or cultural erasure:** Coercing individuals or communities to abandon Islamic practices, beliefs, or cultural traditions through force, persecution, or cultural assimilation leading to the erosion of Islamic heritage.
10. **Military actions and warfare:** Conflict zones often witness the destruction of Islamic heritage sites due to military operations, bombings, or intentional targeting by warring factions.

The 27 member states of the European Union have a Muslim population of 20 million on a total population of 450 million (4%). In 2017 the European Union on Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR) published its second survey on European Union minorities and discrimination. It defines the purpose of the survey as follows: *“Collecting robust and comparable data on discrimination experiences of persons with ethnic minority or immigrant background.”*¹

In complete concordance with the philosophy of liberalism that sees the individual as the cornerstone of society, the European Union sees discrimination as a problem of the individual. That is complete different from a decolonial understanding of Islamophobia. Decolonization used to refer to the process of political and economic independence of former colonies. In recent decades activists and academics added the cultural dimension of colonialism to decolonization. Decolonizing knowledge and power refers to the need to transform the centers of knowledge production (the universities) and confront the political power that maintains these centers.

Decolonizing The Mind is a specific theoretical framework in decolonial theory that is based on three key concepts:

1. The concept of the colonial world civilization.
2. The concept of racism, that includes Islamophobia.
3. The concept of mental slavery.

I define a civilization as a collection of societies with a common cultural base. The cultural base is the most distinctive feature of a civilization because it has a view of what kind of society that civilization wants to build, what kind of vision it has for the future of humankind, where it stands now and where it wants to go. It defines the identity of that civilization. On the basis of these views, it sets up the institutions for knowledge production and distribution and other institutions in the economic, political, social and cultural dimension.

I define colonialism as a collection of global systems of economic, political, social and cultural institutions that the Global North has created in order to rule the world in a colonial world civilization since 1492. The colonial world civilization is a global civilization that was established by Western colonialism. It was based on a specific form of knowledge production. In fact, Western civilization was based on two distinctive foundations of knowledge production.

In the first hundred and fifty years of European colonialism the colonial civilization was based on Christian theology. This period laid the foundations of the Spanish and Portuguese empire. Then followed the rise of a world economy that used enslaved Africans to work on the plantations and mines in Abya Yala (the term that indigenous people use for the Americas). The products like sugar, coffee, cacao, and tea were shipped to Europe that processed these products into consumer goods. It required the development a global infrastructure (railways, roads, harbors). This is all based on rising technology and science. Christian theology hindered this technological development, because they argued that science goes against Bible. Hence arose the need for the Enlightenment in Europe that began in 1650 with the rise of the European enslavement of Africans. Since then European civilization began to be based on the European Enlightenment and slavery.

I define racism as a global system of economic, social, political and cultural institutions that organize the relationship between human beings on the basis of superiority and inferiority. It is not primarily about individual feelings (prejudices, antagonistic feelings) or human interaction. It is not even about biological race. It is about superiority and inferiority that can be linked to race, religion or culture.

In DTM we distinguish between three forms of racism. These forms are linked to the notion of the authority of knowledge production. This is the collection of institutions in a society that is regarded as the source of valid knowledge.

Racist concepts in colonialism are link to the authority of knowledge production. There are three forms of racism:

- Theological racism: the concept of superiority/inferiority that is argued from theology and is linked to theologians as the authority of knowledge production.
- Biological racism: the concept of superiority/inferiority that is argued from philosophy and the natural sciences and is linked to philosophers and natural scientists as the authority of knowledge production.
- Cultural racism: the concept of superiority/inferiority that is argued from the social sciences and is linked to social scientists as the authority of knowledge production.

"We came here to serve God and the king, and also to get rich", writes Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1492–1584), who participated as a soldier in the invasion of Mexico under Hernán Cortés and wrote an account of the events. He was honest about the greed of the Spaniards, but even greed needs to be put in a framework: serving God and the king.

To understand the nature of the authority of knowledge production I refer to the story of the Irish archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656) who calculated the day God created the universe based on the genealogy from Adam and Eve to the birth of Christ. In the Bible individuals could live for several hundred years. He concluded that God created the universe (including life) on Sunday October 23, 4004 BCE at 6 PM. That was valid knowledge in that time.

Against this background we should look at the infamous debate of Valladolid in 1550 between two Christian theologians: Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494–1573) and Bartholomé de Las Casas (1484–1566). The king of Spain has asked them to give their answer to the question: *"Is it lawful for the King of Spain to wage war on the Indians, before preaching the faith to them, in order to subject them to his rule, so that afterward they may be more easily instructed in the faith?"*

The discussion centered on the superiority of Christianity and the inferiority of the religion of the people of Abya Yala in order to justify the colonial occupation of Abya Yala.

With the rise of the European enslavement of Africans and the rise of the European Enlightenment there comes a shift in the authority of knowledge production from theology to philosophy and the natural sciences. The Enlightenment philosophers criticize the Bible as a source of knowledge and thus break down the authority of the theologians. They open the door for another form of knowledge production based on reason. In the natural sciences biologists classify human beings as inferior and superior based on their biological traits. Philosophers and natural scientist are the proponents of racism.

Here are some quotes from key thinkers of the European Enlightenment on Africans. They are the intellectual giants of the Enlightenment.

Charles de Montesquieu (1689–1755): *“Those concerned are black from head to toe, and they have such flat noses that it is almost impossible to feel sorry for them.”*

Voltaire (1694–1778): *“Their round eyes, their flattened nose, their lips which are always large, their differently shaped ears, the wool of their head, that very measure of their intelligence, place prodigious differences between them and the other species of men.”*

David Hume (1711–1776): *“I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites.”*

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): *“The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous.”*

George Hegel (1770–1831): *“The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.”*

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): *“At some future period the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world. The break between man and his nearest allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as now between the negro or Australian and the gorilla.”*

It is interesting to see that before the rise of the European enslavement of Africans the image in Europe about Africans was not racist. There are many paintings in European museums that show Africans as dignified human beings. They are dressed like noblemen and treated with respect. Racism came out of slavery and not the other way around.

With the legal abolition of slavery and the colonization of South Asia, Eastern East and the rest of Africa came the rise of the social sciences: economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology etc.. A additional authority of knowledge production was established: the social sciences. They argued that all human beings are biologically equal, but not all cultures are equal.

The foundation of cultural racism is the theory of phases. Everything develops from a lower and simple phase to a higher and more complex phase, like Darwin’s concept of lower and higher life forms. The same goes for societies and cultures. There are societies with a lower development of culture. Western society represents the higher and most complex phase of human civilization and culture. These concepts are to be found in leading social theorist of the European Enlightenment: August Comte (1798–1857) founder of sociology and positivism, Karl Marx (1818–1863) and Marx Weber (1864–1920).

Here is how I position Islamophobia. Islamophobia is an expression of cultural racism and thus embedded in Western civilization: it is not about individual prejudices.

The concept of mental slavery entails the acknowledgement that superiority/inferiority requires the colonization of the mind, and specifically in knowledge production. Racism was introduced in Eurocentric knowledge production with six concepts:

1. Science arose in Western Europe with modernity (another name for colonialism after the demise of Christian theology) and rationalism (thinking with your head). Before modernity there was no science, no systematic production of valid knowledge about nature and society.
2. Eurocentric science is objective. There can be a bias, but biases can be corrected and thus maintain its objectivity.
3. Objective knowledge means that it is universal knowledge. The law of gravity goes for the whole universe. The laws of economics goes for the whole economic world.
4. Objective knowledge was developed in Europe. It did not exist outside of Europe.
5. The step to superiority is now small: Objective knowledge is superior to knowledge that is not based on the canon of Eurocentric epistemology. European science is superior to non-European science.
6. Superior knowledge came from white Europeans. Racism is embedded in science.

Currently I am looking with colleagues into how colonialism and racism have impacted the following disciplines:

1. Epistemology
2. World history
3. Economic theory
4. Social theory
5. Political theory
6. Cultural theory
7. Mathematics
8. Physics
9. Biology
10. Applied linguistics

In DTM we argue that our task is to reconstruct the discipline and by doing to produce new knowledge that eradicates racism and mental slavery.

There are three dimensions in the methodology of DTM:

1. The critique of Eurocentric knowledge production. DTM offers a fundamental critique of the basic concepts of the individual disciplines, including mathematics and natural sciences.

2. The development of an alternative system knowledge production. DTM looks into the knowledge that was produced in civilizations from the Global South (Chinese philosophy, Hinduism, Islam, Indigenous philosophies, etc) and looks for useful concepts that can be integrated in a trajectory to decolonize the disciplines and reconstruct new knowledge per discipline with the use of creativity and imagination.
3. The translation of this new knowledge into viable policies to build a new pluriversal world civilization. DTM tackles the problem of power. For example: how to reconstruct a new economic order? What are the practical implications of this reconstruction? What kind of economic institutions are needed and how will they be built? How do we organize to transcend from the colonial world civilization to a new world civilization?

The basis for eradicating Islamophobia and what comes with it, such as the desecration of cultural and religious heritage, is a policy for building a new world civilization. We are in the last phase of colonial world civilization that can end in a new world based on justice and peace or in a nuclear war that destroys civilization.

A new economic and political order is rising: BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization are the most important examples. BRICS is primarily about building a new economic order. It has elements of a new political order. Shanghai Cooperation Organization is about security cooperation.

We need to add a civilizational component to the international institutions: a pluriversal knowledge base for a new world civilization that draws on civilizations from the Global South. Intellectuals, activists, universities and governments can play a role in this process.

It is not an easy task, but as the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said: *“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”*

References and notes:

- ¹ EUAFR (2017): Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. Muslims – Selected findings. Publications Office of the European Union, p. 7.
- ¹ See Hira, S. (2023): Decolonizing The Mind. A Guide to Decolonial Theory and Practice. Amrit Publishers. The Hague, p. 168.
- ¹ Idem, paragraph 6.2.4 for an extensive discussion on this debate.
- ¹ Idem, paragraph 6.3 for these quotes.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8-9, 2024

Speech

DESTRUCTION AND DISTORTION OF AZERBAIJANI HERITAGE IN ARMENIA

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Today, we stand at a crossroads in our collective journey towards fostering a world where respect, tolerance, and understanding transcend the boundaries of race, religion, and ethnicity. Regrettably, the shadows of hatred and prejudice, particularly against Muslims, loom large over our aspirations. This is not a challenge that has emerged overnight but rather a deeply entrenched issue that has been exacerbated in recent decades. Among the earliest victims of such targeted Islamophobia are the Azerbaijanis from the territory of today's Armenia. Historical records and events bear witness whereby Armenia emerged as the pioneer in institutionalizing religious and ethnic intolerance against Moslems as a matter of state policy. Essentially, Armenia is the birthplace of systematic Islamophobia.

Armenia not only expelled and massacred Azerbaijanis but also methodically erased their rich cultural heritage.

So, let's have a closer look to the issue.

Introduction

Established as the Society of Azerbaijani Refugees in 1989 and renamed to Western Azerbaijan Community in 2022, our organization is dedicated to championing the right to return of Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia during the last century.

Who are Western Azerbaijanis?

Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia have always been called 'Western Azerbaijanis' by themselves and others as a matter of historical connotation. Use of 'Western

Azerbaijan' as the name of the Community derives from the basic human right of self-identification, and does not have any political or territorial connotation.

Background and History

Let's take a closer look at the tragic story of Western Azerbaijanis.

The Azerbaijani people have suffered greatly from armed conflicts, occupation, ethnic cleansing, forced relocation, and genocide over the past two centuries. Azerbaijanis constitutes over 80 percent of population in Khanate of Iravan, whose territory largely corresponds to that of nowadays Armenia. The complete expulsion of Azerbaijanis from what is now Armenia, where they once constituted the majority and lived as their ancestral land, was finalized in 1991.

As a result of ethnic cleansing, no single Azerbaijani lives in those lands. These acts were systematically carried out with state support, involving violence, genocidal acts, and other crimes against humanity. The expulsions were particularly violent in 1905–1906, 1918–1921, 1948–1953, and 1987–1991. The third deportation, ordered by Stalin, resulted in the deaths of many of the over one hundred thousand deportees due to bad living conditions and harsh climate conditions.

Last Deportation

The last deportation between 1987 and 1991 turned Armenia into a mono-ethnic country. Over 300,000 Azerbaijanis were forcibly displaced, with 216 brutally killed. Their homes were destroyed, property forcibly taken.

Damage to cultural heritage

The forced displacement of Azerbaijanis from Armenia shook the fabric of the community and caused immense damage to the intangible cultural heritage of Azerbaijanis, including our traditional music, dance, cuisine, and the art of ashig. It epitomizes the extent of cultural genocide we have endured. The destruction of monuments, such as that to Ashiq Alasgar, proves the systematic effort by the Government of Armenia to erase our identity and legacy.

Azerbaijani cultural heritage in Armenia is systematically eradicated. More than 300 mosques and 500 cemeteries were demolished, with the sole remaining Blue Mosque falsely presented as belonging to another country. Tapabashi quarter of Iravan, the last remaining piece Azerbaijani settlement architecture, is being demolished to erase last traces of Azerbaijanis in the city.

The intangible heritage, including the Ashiq art, carpets, and culinary traditions, suffered severely. The ethnic cleansing shattered Goycha Ashiq School, the cradle of Azerbaijani Ashiq art, recognized by UNESCO as intangible heritage of mankind.

Our appeals to international bodies like UNESCO for recognition and restoration of our obliterated cultural heritage have been met with inaction, further exacerbating our plight.

Formation of the Community

Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia were organized as the Society of Azerbaijani Refugees in 1989. This body continued its activities until August 1, 2022, when it was reformed as the Western Azerbaijan Community. The Community has an inclusive representation from all segments of Western Azerbaijanis, with most leadership being well-known intellectuals. The Community has very active women and youth branches testifying to broad support for the cause within expelled Azerbaijanis.

Hope for Return

On December 24, 2022, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's visit to the Western Azerbaijani Community, his address to the meeting with a group of Western Azerbaijani intellectuals instilled hope. On January 26, 2023, the Community adopted its Concept of Return, rejecting the injustices committed over the past two centuries and declaring their primary goal: to create conditions for the return of expelled Azerbaijanis and ensure their rights, based on international law.

Culture

The Community carries out events dedicated to revival and preservation of cultural values, customs and traditions of Western Azerbaijanis and enlightening on the prospects of peaceful, safe and dignified return. The inclusion of Ashiq art in the list of intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO at the initiative of First Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva played a crucial role in revival and resilience of Goycha Ashiq school, and works of its luminaries, including Ashiq Alasgar, as the universal cultural value. The Community interacts with UNESCO on issues relating to preservation of Azerbaijani cultural heritage in Armenia.

International Support

The Western Azerbaijan Community actively advances its mission aimed at galvanizing international support for its lawful mission. It has held numerous conferences and advocacy events. The Community sent appeals to international organizations and countries, and actively participates in the work of human rights bodies of the United Nations, OSCE and other pertinent organizations. In May 2024, the OIC Banjul Summit 57 member states adopted a decision to support the right of return for Western Azerbaijanis and condemned Armenia for the destruction of Muslim heritage in this country.

Call to Action

Western Azerbaijan Community seeks the peaceful, secure, and dignified return of Western Azerbaijanis to their ancestral lands, in line with international law principles. Helping our mission, supporting Azerbaijani refugees and advocating for their rights serve peace and justice.

Conclusion

The formation of a new state on the land where Azerbaijanis once constituted the absolute majority, through the expulsion of our people and the bringing in others, marks an unprecedented injustice in modern history. This unprecedented injustice created a sense of impunity among the ruling circles of Armenia and encouraged them to raise territorial claims, use force, conduct military occupation against the internationally-recognized territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, further large-scale ethnic cleansing, and other crimes against humanity.

The complicity of countries such as France, with its own anti-Muslim policies, and the misuse of international mechanisms by Armenia to mock the very essence of human rights and racial discrimination. The fact that Armenia can levy claims against Azerbaijan on the grounds of racial discrimination at the International Court of Justice, despite its own egregious record, is a mockery of the human rights values. It underscores the erosion of our international justice system. This should serve as a wake-up call for all progressive nations that champion peace and justice.

Therefore, the safe and dignified return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia is not merely a matter of rectifying a wrong against our community; it is imperative for confronting and eradicating of Islamophobia at its toots. In 2023, our community, the Western Azerbaijan Community, reached out to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan with a peaceful and dignified plea for our right to return to our ancestral lands. His lack of response and the misinterpretation of our intentions as a territorial claim only highlight the challenges we face in seeking justice under international law.

Therefore, we call upon the international community to stand with us in ensuring the safe and dignified return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia. It is time for Armenia to take concrete steps to enable our return, to restore and protect the Azerbaijani religious and cultural heritage.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8-9, 2024

Speech

THE IMPACT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA ON MUSLIM WOMEN AND GROSS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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**Distinguished Madam Moderator,
Dear Conference participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the conference participants for the interesting, effective and productive discussions they have had over the past two days to combat Islamophobia. As we know that, discrimination, in all its possible forms and manifestations, is one of the most common forms of human rights violations and abuses. It affects millions of people every day and is one of the most difficult to recognize.

Freedom of religion and religious tolerance are fundamental values in the world, but acts of discrimination based on religion have not yet disappeared. Religious intolerance is often linked to racism and xenophobia, especially Islamophobia.

Today, Islamophobia manifests itself in various aspects and results in gross violations of human rights and freedoms. The effects of Islamophobia on women were more serious and urgent action was needed to address such situations. I would like to draw attention to the restrictions imposed on the freedom of thought, conscience and religion of Muslim women. This includes restrictions on the dress of Muslim women and multiple forms of discrimination.

In defending the freedom of choice of Muslim women, international organizations must find solutions that would help protect their fundamental rights. The denial of the rights of Muslim women occurred in the context of the growing Islamophobia in Europe, particularly in France, a problem that disproportionately affected women, who were easily identified as Muslims.

Many European countries had laws prohibiting the wearing of religious dress, and Muslim women also faced indirect pressure from political discourse, social expectations and the media. This is a gross violation of the right to liberty.

Restrictions on religious clothing are often justified within the framework of the neutrality that applies to people of all faiths, but in reality, they are directed only against Muslim women and are part of a broader debate about that Islam is incompatible with Western values. Stigmatization and stereotyping of Muslim women denied them a voice, ignored their diversity and incited hatred that led to harassment and violence. This is evidenced by the increasing number of violent attacks on Muslim women wearing headscarves, as well as their experience of discrimination at work and in other areas of life. Such cases of discrimination violated the fundamental rights and freedoms of Muslim women, including the right to education.

For example, in 2004, France banned the wearing of religious symbols, including the hijab, in schools, and in 2010 it extended the ban on wearing headscarves in public places.

In a television interview, French Minister of Education Gabriel Attal announced his decision to ban the wearing of Abayas' dresses in schools. He said that "it is impossible to determine the religious affiliation of students at the entrance of the class only by their clothes". The representative of the French Government, Olivier Veran, also supported this view, calling the Abaya "not only a religious dress but also a political statement".

All this shows that Islamophobia is a French State policy.

Muslim women face violations of their fundamental rights and discrimination on the basis of both religion and gender. Numerous examples show that Muslim women bear the brunt of this intersectional nature of discrimination in their daily lives, also living in societies where gender discrimination remains a major problem.

However, for Muslim women, gender discrimination is often masked as an attempt to promote gender equality, arguing, for example, that women in burqas cannot be free. These arguments deny Muslim women the right to self-determination and rarely allow them to speak for themselves.

In modern Europe, we are now faced with a situation where prejudices based on religion or gender are considered illegal, but an exception is made for Muslim women. Politicians who do not consider it permissible to interfere in the choice of women's clothing often make judgements about the dress of a Muslim woman.

We are deeply concerned that the gender equality proclaimed in the EU is threatened by increasingly blatant discrimination based on religious beliefs. Some European countries must take a firm stand against any form of religious intolerance and gender inequality.

The stigmatization and exclusion of Muslim women will continue to reinforce social divisions, deepen exclusion and create additional tensions in Europe, which desperately needs greater social participation and the involvement of all sectors of society. A continent that prides itself on the rule of law cannot, above all, continue to witness an open violation of the fundamental rights of part of its population.

The ban on hijab spreads to other fields of life. Athletes representing France would be barred from wearing headscarves during the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris because of the French way of approaching secularism and religious symbols according to French Minister of Sport, Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, who highlighted the “representatives of our delegations, in our French teams, will not wear the headscarf”.

Implementation of such policies through institutions legitimizes Islamophobia across various public and private spheres and promotes negative attitudes and discrimination toward Muslims.

Despite the UN declaring the face veil ban as a violation of human rights in 2018 calling for France to review its ban on full-face coverings, and criticizing the latest decision on the 2024 Olympics as discrimination against women, the government continues to justify these restrictions in the name of secularism.

These facts also show the extent to which France has complied with its international obligations.

These measures have fueled a continuing debate about Islamophobia in France, as they appear to disproportionately target Muslims. Islamophobia reports highlight that, to distract society from national issues, Muslims in France often become subjects of political arguments as a threat to secularism. Demonizing Muslims prevents voicing the serious problems Muslim French citizens face in the country. This situation raises critical questions about the balance between protecting secularism as a way to separate church and state and respecting religious freedom, particularly in relation to the Muslim population.

Among many, the prohibition of the hijab in France deserves special attention from various points of view, as it denies Muslim women access to basic institutions such as education and work. Since the hijab is a visible Muslim dress only for women, discrimination against the hijab is considered a form of gender-based Islamophobia, meaning that women experience Islamophobia differently than men. The approach to this issue from the perspective of women’s rights and gender equality is therefore particularly important for understanding the place of Muslim women wearing the hijab in France relative to other women in the country.

In many Western societies, Muslim women are subjected to various forms of religious discrimination. Research shows that religion plays a more important role than race and ethnicity in employment. For example, an experiment in Germany that was conducted with three identical fictional resumes for job applications showed that a Muslim-named résumé and a picture of a hijab were the least suitable compared to those that with a Muslim name and a photo without a hijab, and compared to the CV character with a German name and image. While the French Muslim women also reported similar

experiences in the labor market, compared to other countries, France is a unique case as it does not allow hijab-wearing women to work at any rank in public institutions at all, and the private sector is reluctant to hire these women by taking shelter behind the secularist discourse of the French government. Such policy-driven discrimination leads to systematic disenfranchisement against Muslim women in the French labor market.

I would like to note with regret that such illegal acts, which lead to gross violations of human rights and freedoms, are being supported and reinforced at the State level in France. I believe that international organizations should not remain indifferent to these facts and should prevent such situations.

Dear Conference Participants,

Another issue to which I would like to draw your attention is the special protection of women in international humanitarian law. However, I would like to note with regret that Islamophobia is once again leading to discrimination and gross violations of the human rights of Muslim women under the IHL.

As we know that, in international armed conflicts, women are among those protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. In these circumstances, they shall benefit from all provisions which enshrine the basic principle of humane treatment, including respect for life and physical and moral integrity, in particular the prohibition of coercion, corporal punishment, torture, collective punishment, repression, robbery and hostage taking.

I would like to note with regret that, for some reason, these commitments have not been taken into account with regard to Muslim women, and that Muslim women suffer most from war crimes. I would like to inform you that thousands of Azerbaijani Muslim women have been killed and subjected to violence during the war crimes committed as a result of ethnic cleansing and the genocidal policy pursued by Armenia against Azerbaijan in recent decades.

The Azerbaijani women were killed and subjected to violence for the reason that they were Muslims and they were Turks. All these crimes are clear manifestations of Islamophobia and Turkophobia. As can be seen, the existence of Islamophobia is the cause of gross violations of human rights and freedoms, and each of us must join our efforts to prevent such cases.

Thank you for your attention!



Research Notes

UNVEILING THE COMPLEXITIES OF GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA: NAVIGATING MEDIA NARRATIVES, WOMEN'S AGENCY, AND SOCIETAL PARADIGMS

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Abstract:

This essay explores the pervasive issue of gendered Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim women, focusing on the role of media representation. Drawing on personal experiences as a professor studying the portrayal of Islam in the West, particularly in the media, this analysis incorporates extensive secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the trends, factors, and stereotypes associated with Islamophobia. The essay examines the challenges posed by media stereotypes and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslim women, highlighting how both Western and Latin American media outlets contribute to perpetuating negative narratives. It advocates for a multifaceted approach to combat gendered Islamophobia, emphasizing the importance of empowering Muslim women, reforming media practices, and fostering institutional cooperation. By addressing root causes and promoting inclusive representations, societies can work towards a more equitable and tolerant future.

Key words: Gendered Islamophobia, Muslim women, Media, Stereotypes, Discrimination, Women Agency.

Introduction

According to Ilyse Morgenstein Fuster (2021), both antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks are as high as they have been since the mid-twentieth century. Anti-Muslim hate crimes are at their highest points since 9/11/01 in North America; in Europe, Muslim advocacy groups document a similar spike in Islamophobic incidents, including anti-burqa laws, targeting of Muslims by police, and so-called commonplace incidents

of harassment; in Asia, we see the oppression and ethnic cleansing of ethnic Muslim groups like Uyghur and Rohingya as well as anti-Muslim legislation and pogroms; in Oceania, anti-Muslim attacks have increased startlingly in the last decade. Similarly, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, antisemitic attacks have increased steadily in recent years, with some organizations reporting they are at near-record highs.

During the January 6, 2021, riot, many white (Christian) nationalists storming Washington DC's Capitol were seen wearing explicitly antisemitic slogans and symbols. The European Commission similarly reports a rise in antisemitism online and "in real life" across the continent. We can expect a rise in hate crimes against both racialized religions as a direct result of the ongoing war against Palestinians in Gaza. This violence will exacerbate passionate sentiments fuelling both evils: antisemitism and Islamophobia. Unfortunately, many in the West have been misled into thinking that Hamas represents all Palestinians, and hence, they assimilate Hamas with extremist ideology and terrorism, which is always a source of the resentment and rejection that nurtures Islamophobia. (Kumar 2012, Kundnani, 2014).

Islamophobia, particularly concerning gender, remains a pervasive issue impacting the lives of Muslim women globally. The media plays a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes and fostering discrimination against this demographic. While Western countries like France and England have historically had contentious relationships with Islam and Muslim communities, media outlets in Latin America, despite lacking colonial ties with Muslim-majority regions, also contribute to the misrepresentation of Islam and its adherents. This essay explores the impact of gendered Islamophobia on Muslim women, the role of media in perpetuating stereotypes, and potential solutions to combat discrimination.

Impact of Gendered Islamophobia on Muslim Women

Gendered Islamophobia manifests in various forms, including social exclusion, institutional discrimination, and hate speech. Muslim women often face double discrimination due to their gender and religious identity. The portrayal of Islam as inherently oppressive towards women contributes to stigmatization and marginalization. The hijab, in particular, becomes a focal point for debates and media scrutiny, further exacerbating stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim women's agency and autonomy. The niqab and hijab bans curtail women's right of freedom of choice of what to wear. This is an ongoing debate in French society and others that have recently tried to pass similar bans, such as Belgium and the Catalonian community in Spain.

Besides, foreign policies in the West are also shaped by gendered Islamophobia. For example, the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the 20 years of occupation that followed were publicized as efforts to "save Afghan women." I often wonder: How can you liberate women by destroying their homes, their families, and their societies? We must question sexism in our societies in the West. Women do not need saving. Our politicians and decision-makers need to question our idea of liberation and freedom.

Gendered Islamophobia in the media also contributes to the negative perception of Islam and Muslims in the South. Here are some examples from scholarly research:

1. **Portrayal of Muslim Women:** Media outlets often depict Muslim women through a lens of gendered orientalism, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing Islamophobic attitudes. The wearing of the veil, a religious signifier for Muslim women, makes them easily identifiable and susceptible to gendered Islamophobia. Reducing all the discourse in the West to the hijab issue speaks more for us than it does for them, Muslim women. According to Perry (2014), this simplification exposes our ignorance in the West.

2. **Structural Bias and Stereotypes:** Studies highlight how media coverage contributes to structural bias, lack of understanding of Islam, and increased anti-Muslim sentiment (Camiña Bolaño, 2019). Stereotypes associating Muslims with terrorism, considering them a threat to society, and portraying women in headscarves as religious fanatics further fuel negative perceptions (Tama & Sulistyaningrum, 2023).

3. **Intersection of Racism and Islamophobia:** Research emphasizes that addressing racism and Islamophobia requires a nuanced gender analysis. The intersectionality of these biases leads to discrimination against Muslim women, underscoring the need for comprehensive approaches to combat gendered Islamophobia (Girdap, 2024).

Media Representation and Misrepresentation

The above examples illustrate how media narratives perpetuate gendered Islamophobia, shaping perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the South. I am very familiar with Latin American countries since I have been living there for almost 20 years. By portraying Muslim women in a stereotypical manner, reinforcing biases through structural frameworks, and promoting negative stereotypes, the media plays a significant role in fostering a climate of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims (Vidal Calvo, 2016).

Media outlets play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of Islam and Muslim women. Despite diverse cultural contexts, media narratives tend to reinforce negative stereotypes and portray Islam through a Eurocentric lens. Thus, media narratives from Western developed societies have a profound influence on shaping perceptions of Islam and Muslims globally, including in Southern Western countries like Latin America, where historical colonial ties with Muslim-majority regions are absent. Yet, media outlets replicate editorial lines that perpetuate Islamophobia. Sensationalist reporting and biased coverage contribute to the construction of a false image of Muslim women as oppressed and submissive, disregarding the diversity and agency within these communities.

By reading scientific articles such as “Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women: A Computational Text Analysis of US News Coverage” (Terman, 2017), we can conclude that US news media propagate the perception that Muslims are distinctly sexist. This, in turn, may shape public attitudes toward Muslims, as well as influence policies that involve Muslims at home and abroad.

It is high time to correct misrepresentations in the media, particularly in the press, which almost exclusively focuses on persecutions and ill-treatment of Muslim women by their communities but does not show hate crimes and anti-black racism against Muslim black women. A 2020 report in the US reveals that veiled black women are most likely to suffer hate crimes.

This misrepresentation is not only found in the media but also among academics. US academia exclusively talks about Muslim women's oppression and downplays Muslim women's agency. In Canada, the "Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act" is sustained by this stereotype about "oppressed women in Islam" or gendered Islamophobia. In fact, honor crimes, polygamy, and forced marriage were already illegal in Canada. Hence, there was no real need for a zero-tolerance act.

In conclusion, the role of media in shaping perceptions of gendered Islamophobia is a critical area that requires continued scholarly attention and societal awareness. Understanding how media narratives influence attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, especially concerning gender, is essential for combating prejudice and fostering inclusivity globally (Gonzalez Ortega, 2022). Here are some key insights and examples from scholarly work:

1. **Council of Europe Report:** The Council of Europe highlights how Islamophobia intersects with gender, leading to discrimination against Muslim women. It stresses the importance of an intersectional approach to address this issue effectively.
2. **Research on Media Portrayals:** Studies like the one on US news coverage reveal how media outlets contribute to perpetuating Islamophobia through gendered orientalism, shaping public perceptions and attitudes.
3. **Academic Articles:** Scholarly articles delve into the structural blueprint of gendered Islamophobia, shedding light on how institutional factors contribute to the production of biased narratives.
4. **Hidden Assault on Muslim Women:** Research explores how gender and Islamophobia intersect to create a context where violence against Muslim American women is perpetuated, highlighting the impact of these intertwined biases.

The Intersectional Analysis

An intersectional analysis is crucial for understanding the complexities of gendered Islamophobia, as it reveals how multiple forms of oppression intersect and interact to shape Muslim women's experiences. As Nadine Naber (2005) argues in "Muslim First, Arab Second: A Strategic Politics of Race and Gender," gendered Islamophobia cannot be divorced from broader systems of power and domination. Rather, it is deeply intertwined with racialization processes, colonial legacies, and contemporary geopolitics.

Gendered Islamophobia must be addressed through an intersectional lens, considering the multiple and intersecting identities of Muslim women. This approach acknowledges the diversity within Muslim communities and recognizes that Muslim women experience discrimination differently based on their race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other factors.

As Professor Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst argues, 'addressing Islamophobia means thinking about race and gender' (2022). This intersectionality was particularly evident among black communities in the early 20s in the US, amid revival movements such as the jazz era and the resurgence of black identity. Many within these communities interpreted Islam as a liberatory force, distinct from the white supremacist ideologies prevalent at the time. They saw Islam as a religion more aligned with their experiences, viewing it as more liberatory and meaningful to Africans than Christianity. This sentiment is echoed in Sylvia Chan-Malik's book 'Being Muslim,' which features a compelling image from 1923 depicting four veiled 'American Moslem' black women (2018).



FOUR AMERICAN MOSLEM LADIES
Right to left: Mrs. Thomas (Sister Khairat), Mrs. Watts (Sister Zeineb), Mrs. Robinsin (Sister Ahmadia), Mrs. Clark (Sister Ayesha)

Reflecting on the intersections between race and gender is paramount when addressing bias against Muslim communities, both in the West and in regions like Asia. In countries like Spain, historical connections with Morocco and its former colony in Western Sahara deeply influence perceptions of Islam. Presently, Moroccans constitute the largest Muslim community in Spain, shaping attitudes and expressions

regarding Muslims, particularly women. Persistent stereotypes depict Muslim women as submissive and subjected to ill-treatment by their religion.

Understanding these historical ties underscores the importance of addressing gendered Islamophobia effectively. Efforts should prioritize deconstructing societal imaginaries and fostering empathy and respect through education. Educational programs play a pivotal role in promoting intercultural understanding and challenging myths about Islam. Initiatives like educational workshops and media diversity guidelines can raise awareness and encourage critical thinking about media representations of Muslim women. Additionally, amplifying voices of Muslim women through social media campaigns and showcasing diverse role models like Asma Lmrabet, Rashida Tlaib, and Zaha Hadid can help counter negative stereotypes and reclaim their narratives.

By implementing these strategies, it is possible to combat negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims in the media effectively. Furthermore, promoting a different profile of Muslim women in cultural industries, such as the film industry, and ensuring wider distribution of voices from Muslim women writers can contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The Hijab: A Symbol of Identity and Misconceptions

The hijab is a symbol of identity for many Muslim women, representing their faith, cultural heritage, and personal choice. However, it is often subject to misconceptions and misinterpretations, particularly in Western societies. The hijab is frequently associated with oppression and subjugation, ignoring the agency and autonomy of Muslim women who choose to wear it (Camiña Bolaño, 2019). This simplification reduces the diverse experiences of Muslim women to a single narrative, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing gendered Islamophobia.

In reality, the hijab holds different meanings for different women, and its significance varies across cultural and social contexts (Ahmed, 2011). For some, it is a form of resistance against cultural assimilation and a way to assert their identity. For others, it is a personal expression of faith and spirituality. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the hijab is crucial for challenging stereotypes and promoting a more nuanced understanding of Muslim women's experiences.

Women's Resilience and Activism

Muslim women's resilience and activism are essential in challenging gendered Islamophobia. By amplifying their voices and narratives, they can reclaim agency and challenge stereotypes. Muslim women are not passive; they are vocal and active in resisting gendered Islamophobia, and their needs and preferences, including their choice of clothing and forms of solidarity, must be heard and respected.

Grassroots initiatives and community-led campaigns play a vital role in raising awareness and fostering solidarity among diverse communities. Engaging with

mainstream media platforms and advocating for accurate representation can facilitate positive change and challenge dominant narratives.

It is virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive review of all Muslim women's agency initiatives taking place around the world, including those in the West, where one might presume they enjoy a safer and more open-minded environment. However, to address another insidious stereotype in the West—that Muslim women are prevented from experiencing pleasure and sexuality, thereby reinforcing patriarchal notions of women's sole reproductive function—we can look to specific initiatives.

In the United States, the HEART Women & Girls organization gives talks about sex-positive attitudes in local Muslim communities, explaining how the Quran allows both men and women to enjoy and find pleasure through intimacy. Activist Sahar Pirzada emphasizes that Western literature often misleads doctors and other professionals, causing them to misunderstand and dismiss Muslim women's specific suffering by attributing it to "their culture and religion." Women of color from other racial and religious backgrounds also experience similar dismissals. Muslim nurses, for instance, express their discouragement when they perceive attitudes of mistrust from colleagues or patients, asking, "If I am not trusted in my profession as a nurse, how am I supposed to do my job?" These testimonies are widely shared through videos on YouTube and other social media platforms.

Sahar Pirzada highlights the importance of building communities of support through local mentors, not just among Muslim citizens but also with other community members. She asserts, "Knowledge is the key to test and correct assumptions that are misconceptions."

Conclusions

Gendered Islamophobia is a significant but often overlooked phenomenon rooted in societal perceptions and media portrayals. It associates Islam with terrorism, fanaticism, and misogyny, perpetuating negative stereotypes. The social construction of 'us versus them' by media leads to the exclusion and stigmatization of those who do not fit the dominant cultural model. This discrimination exacerbates existing social exclusion, particularly affecting Muslim women who face double stigmatization.

Efforts to combat gendered Islamophobia should focus on deconstructing societal imaginaries and promoting empathy and respect through education, especially targeting adolescents. The hijab, often used to homogenize Muslim women, is both a symbol of identity and subject to misconceptions, such as its association with oppression. Initiatives should empower Muslim women to reclaim their narratives and challenge stereotypes.

Education plays a crucial role in preventing gendered Islamophobia by fostering understanding and breaking stereotypes from an early age and fostering coexistence.

Gendered Islamophobia remains a significant challenge impacting the lives of Muslim women globally. Media representation plays a central role in perpetuating stereotypes and fostering discrimination against this demographic. While media

outlets in Western countries have historically contributed to misrepresentations of Islam, similar trends are observed in Latin America despite lacking colonial ties with Muslim-majority regions. Combating gendered Islamophobia requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including empowering Muslim women, reforming media practices, and promoting intercultural dialogue. By addressing root causes and advocating for inclusive representations, societies can work towards a more equitable and tolerant future.

On a more personal note, I would like to add that having lived in several Muslim countries and thanks to my constant traveling to many others, I have had the privilege of meeting many Muslim women from all types of social and ethnic backgrounds. I am morally obliged to say that under no circumstances should we underestimate or exoticize Muslim women. I much prefer to befriend them, build solidarity through empathy and mutual respect, and concentrate on fostering positive narratives about Muslim women and Islam in general.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
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Speech

CAUSES AND MEASUREMENT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This speech addresses the intricate and multifaceted issue of Islamophobia, focusing on its causes, types, and measurement from a psychological perspective. Islamophobia involves various negative sentiments and stigmas directed towards Islam and Muslims, often utilized to attract attention and assert social dominance. The speech explores the psychological, social, and cultural factors contributing to Islamophobia, such as emotional maladjustment, societal norms, stereotyping, and sociopolitical interests. Additionally, it distinguishes between external and internal Islamophobia, highlighting how both non-Muslims and Muslims can perpetuate prejudiced behaviors. The concept of the four 'theaters' of Islamophobia, which influences the presentation and perception of Islam and Muslims, is also examined. The IMOS (Islamophobia Scale) is introduced as a tool to measure the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of Islamophobia, with findings from a 2022 study in Indonesia illustrating its application. The speech concludes with recommendations for educational and dialogue-based interventions to foster understanding and inclusivity.

Keywords: Islamophobia, causes, measurement, scale, tool, internalized oppression, intervention

Islamophobia has gained significant attention in recent years, and today, I want to delve into the various negative sentiments and stigmas directed towards Islam and or Muslims. These sentiments often serve as a means for individuals to attract attention and assert social dominance. The psychological roots of this phenomenon are complex

and multifaceted, making it essential for us to understand the underlying causes to address and counteract it effectively.

Islamophobia arises from a combination of psychological, social, and cultural factors. Let us take a closer look at these categories to grasp how such negative sentiments are cultivated.

First, let us consider the psychological factors. One primary contributor to Islamophobia is prejudice and hatred. Have you ever noticed how unresolved emotional issues can make us project our frustrations onto others? This is emotional maladjustment at work. People tend to mirror the attitudes and norms prevalent in their society. If societal discourse is rife with negative portrayals of Islam, it is likely that individuals will adopt these views. How we process social information and develop our social identities also plays a significant role. During this development, biased information and stereotypes can be internalized. The need to belong to a particular group can lead to the exclusion of others. Think about how strongly identifying with an in-group can result in the vilification of out-groups to solidify in-group cohesion.

Let's move on to social-cognitive factors. These factors exacerbate Islamophobia through mechanisms such as stereotyping and in-group versus out-group thinking. Simplified and generalized beliefs about Muslims create distorted perceptions that ignore individual differences and context. Categorizing people into 'us' (the in-group) and 'them' (the out-group) leads to discrimination and prejudice during interactions. Beyond these realms, sociocultural factors also play a crucial role. The pressure to adhere to societal norms and values can perpetuate Islamophobic attitudes, especially if these norms are biased. Sociopolitical and economic interests often drive Islamophobic attitudes. Politicians and media outlets may exploit fear and prejudice to advance their agendas, further entrenching negative stereotypes.

Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective intervention or rehabilitation programs and fostering a more inclusive society. By addressing the psychological, social, and cultural roots of Islamophobia, we can begin to dismantle the prejudices that fuel this form of discrimination and work towards a more understanding and cohesive world.

Let us now explore the various types and manifestations of Islamophobia. Understanding these distinctions is essential for developing effective strategies to counteract and mitigate the negative impacts of Islamophobia on individuals and communities. Islamophobia can be broadly categorized into two types: external and internal.

External Islamophobia is directed by non-Muslims against Muslims. This form manifests in numerous ways, including discriminatory behaviors and acts that unfairly disadvantage Muslims in various aspects of life, such as employment, education, and public services. Hostile attitudes and behaviors based on preconceived negative stereotypes about Muslims and Islam are also prevalent.

Internal Islamophobia, called as '*internalized oppression*' or '*Islamophobia from within*', occurs when Muslims exhibit prejudiced behaviors towards other Muslims.

This phenomenon is often influenced by external factors such as Western media propaganda, colonial history, and secular ideologies. It manifests in several ways, including inter-communal racism, prejudice and discrimination within the Muslim community based on ethnic or sectarian differences, and sexism, which reflects and perpetuates broader societal sexism within the Muslim community. Internalized negative portrayals of traditional attire, religious rituals, and other aspects of Muslim identity are also common.

The presentation and perception of Islam and Muslims are heavily influenced by the 'theaters' or contexts in which these interactions occur. The visibility of Muslims, particularly through distinctive appearances like traditional attire, can provoke negative stereotypes and hostile attitudes. Have you ever seen someone in traditional Muslim attire and noticed the reactions they get? Visible Muslim identities are often unfairly labeled with terms such as "barbaric," "primitive," and "oppressed." Muslim women face unique challenges due to their visibility. Stereotypes often portray them as oppressed and victims of abuse, leading to a perception that they are resilient and can endure hostilities and negativity.

To effectively counter Islamophobia, it is essential to measure its prevalence and impact accurately. This can be done through indicators of cognition, emotion, and psychomotor actions. Measuring biased thoughts and beliefs about Muslims, assessing emotional responses such as fear and hatred, and observing actions ranging from social exclusion to physical violence against Muslims provide a comprehensive understanding of Islamophobia's depth and breadth. This knowledge is crucial for designing and implementing intervention or rehabilitation programs that aim to foster empathy, understanding, and inclusivity.

Further, let me share about the IMOS (Islamophobia Scale), a comprehensive instrument designed to measure various aspects of Islamophobia. The IMOS scale categorizes them into three main domains: cognition, emotion, and actions. It assesses prejudice, accusation, and stigmatization towards Muslims, gauges the intensity and prevalence of negative emotions, such as fear and hatred, and measures behaviors resulting from cognitive biases and emotional responses.

To illustrate the application and findings of the IMOS scale, I want to share my recent study conducted in Indonesia in 2022. The study revealed insightful data about the prevalence of Islamophobia among Muslims in Indonesia. It found that 92% of Muslims do not exhibit signs of Islamophobia, reflecting a generally inclusive and accepting attitude towards Islam and its symbols within the Indonesian Muslim community. However, 7.67% of Muslims display prejudice, fear, and rejection towards certain Islamic symbols, religious traditions, and Muslims with distinguished appearances. Although a minority, this segment is significant and indicates areas where intervention efforts can be focused.

These findings highlight that while Islamophobia is not widespread among the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, the presence of a small but notable minority exhibiting such attitudes suggests the need for targeted interventions. This data is invaluable for

policymakers, educators, and community leaders working to foster a more inclusive society.

Understanding and measuring Islamophobia is a critical step in addressing this pervasive issue. The IMOS scale provides a structured and detailed approach to quantify the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of Islamophobia. By applying such tools in diverse contexts, we can gain a clearer picture of where and how these negative attitudes manifest and develop effective strategies to combat them. The study in Indonesia serves as a testament to the importance of continued research and action. While the majority of Indonesian Muslims do not exhibit Islamophobic tendencies, the existence of a significant minority underscores the ongoing need for education, dialogue, and intervention.

In our efforts to promote social cohesion, it is essential to educate, implement educational programs that promote understanding and respect for diverse cultures and religions. We must foster open and respectful dialogue between different communities to break down stereotypes and build mutual understanding. Developing targeted interventions for those exhibiting Islamophobic attitudes, addressing their underlying fears and misconceptions is crucial. By addressing the roots of prejudice and fostering understanding, we can work towards a future where acceptance and respect prevail over fear and discrimination.

In conclusion, understanding and addressing Islamophobia requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. The insights provided in this speech underscore the importance of identifying and tackling the underlying causes of Islamophobia, including prejudice, societal norms, and sociopolitical interests. By distinguishing between external and internal manifestations of Islamophobia and recognizing the contexts in which these attitudes emerge, we can develop more targeted and effective intervention. The IMOS scale offers a valuable tool for measuring the prevalence and impact of Islamophobia, as demonstrated by the research findings from Indonesia. These findings reveal that while the majority of Muslims in Indonesia do not exhibit Islamophobic tendencies, a notable minority still harbors such attitudes, necessitating continued efforts in education and intervention. Our collective goal should be to promote empathy, understanding, and inclusivity through educational initiatives and open dialogue. By addressing the roots of prejudice and fostering mutual respect, we can work towards a future where acceptance and respect triumph over fear and discrimination. Together, we can build a more just and inclusive world, free from the scourge of Islamophobia.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to this vital cause.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

THE DYNAMICS OF ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT-COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS BASED ON THE ISSP MODULE RELIGION WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE UNITED STATES AND AUSTRIA

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Abstract:

According to the topic of the article, research was conducted on two factors. First, the author aims to provide a global overview of the emergence of Islamophobia. We know that the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) regularly conducts representative, broad population surveys on key topics in many countries around the world. The 2018 ISSP module "Religion" includes different dimensions of religiosity and allows comparison of views of Muslims in different countries.

Based on this, the author presented some cross-national figures to present his views on the global relevance of Islamophobia. Second, the author addresses a notable research gap by examining the role of religion in explaining prejudice as an advantage of this study.

He chose the United States and Austria as two notable cases to explore potential similarities and differences in the dynamics of anti-Muslim sentiment. The article also highlights a particularly notable research gap by focusing on the role of religion in explaining superstition.

Key words: Islamophobia, anti-Muslim sentiments, Cross-national studies, ethnic prejudice, religion

Introduction: Survey research on Anti-Muslim sentiment

Theoretical and empirical research on attitudes towards immigrants has been conducted over several decades, providing substantial evidence about the dynamics of prejudice¹. However, a contrasting picture emerges when examining the attitudes of the majority population towards Muslims. Cross-national studies are limited to the collection of individual indicators², and there are few surveys that enable a differentiated measurement of anti-Muslim sentiments³. Thus, while Islamophobia is an emerging concept in the research on ethnic prejudice⁴, its empirical elaboration is still in its infancy.

The aims of my contribution are twofold. First, I aim to provide a global overview of the emergence of Islamophobia. The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) regularly conducts representative, population-wide surveys on key topics in numerous countries around the world. The 2018 ISSP module "Religion" includes differentiated measurements of religiosity and allows for comparisons of views on Muslims across various countries.⁵ I will present some cross-national figures to offer insights into the global relevance of Islamophobia. Second, my contribution focuses on a notable research gap by examining the role of religion in explaining prejudice. The relationship between religiosity and Islamophobia remains unclear, and it is an open question whether different aspects of religiousness increase or reduce prejudice.⁶ I have chosen the United States and Austria as two notable cases to explore potential similarities and differences in the dynamics of anti-Muslim sentiment. Then my contribution focuses particularly on one notable research gap by focusing on the role of religion in explaining prejudice.

A global picture on Islamophobia

The first two figures illustrate attitudes towards Muslims in various world regions based on ISSP data from 2018. It is revealed that in Georgia and Russia, the majority of citizens hold positive views about Muslims. However, the picture becomes slightly more negative in the US, New Zealand, and the UK, where the majority of the population holds a neutral stance. In Europe, there are notable differences, but generally, attitudes towards Muslims are more critical than in Anglo-Saxon countries. Here, only about one quarter of the population expresses a positive view towards Muslims, while a higher proportion (up to 40%) holds rather critical views. Interestingly, even in Sweden and Finland, two countries where citizens are often more supportive of cultural diversity, a critical view towards Muslims is shared.

¹ e.g. for a recent review Ceobano & Escandell 2010

² See for instance Strabac & Listhaug 2008, Yendell & Friedrich 2012, Pickel & Yendell 2016

³ e.g. PEW, 2017 or Pollack et al., 2014 for an exception

⁴ e.g. Stolz, 2005; Helbling, 2012; Aschauer, 2017

⁵ The data is freely available to use, see here https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7570

⁶ e.g. Burch-Brown & Baker 2016

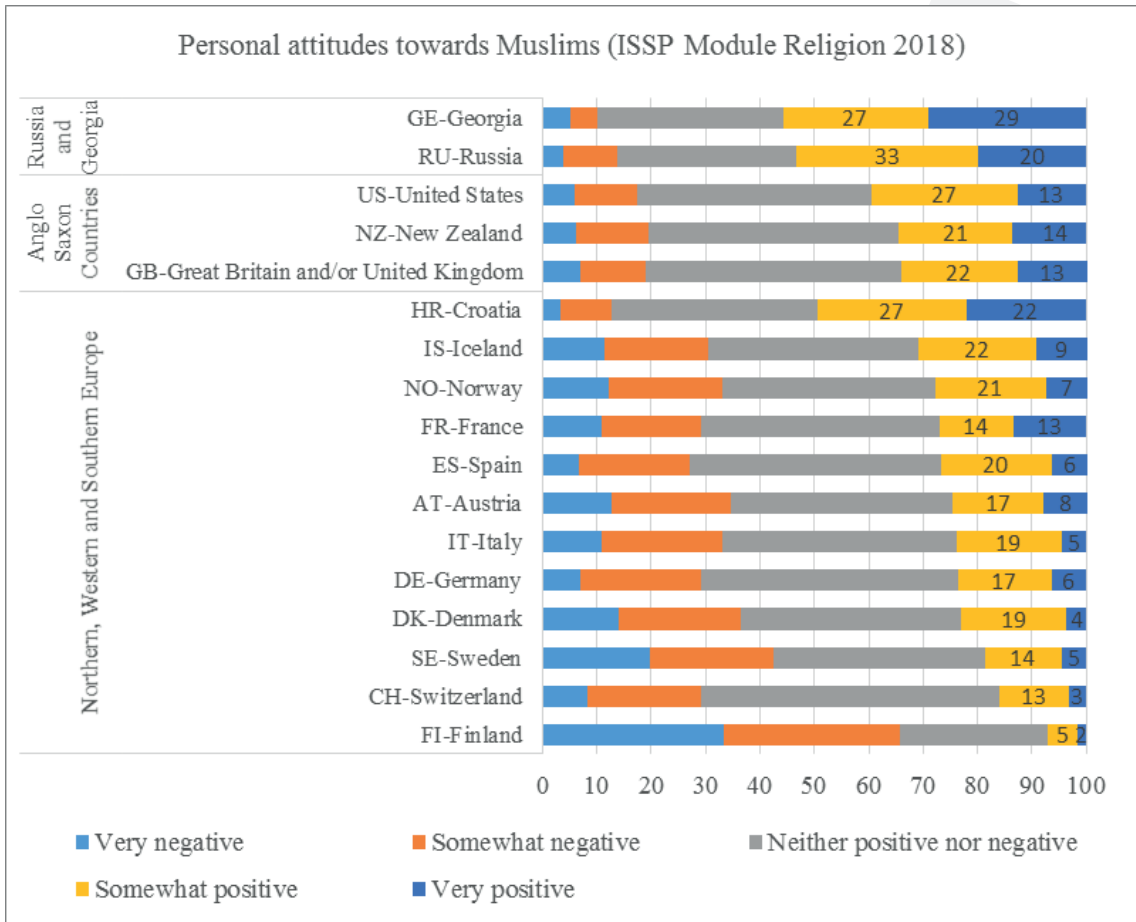


Figure 1: Attitudes towards Muslims in various world regions I
 Source: Own computations based on the ISSP module religion 2018

It is important to note that Islamophobia is not exclusively a Western issue; it is a global phenomenon. When analyzing attitudes in Asia, it becomes evident that only in countries with a higher proportion of Muslims (e.g., the Philippines and Thailand) are views towards Muslims more positive. Conversely, in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, attitudes are similar to those in Europe, if not worse. Turning to Eastern Europe, once again, only in Bulgaria and Slovenia do people frequently express more positive views. However, in all other countries, only about 10% of the population holds favorable opinions of Muslims, while particularly in Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary, the majority of the population is highly critical.

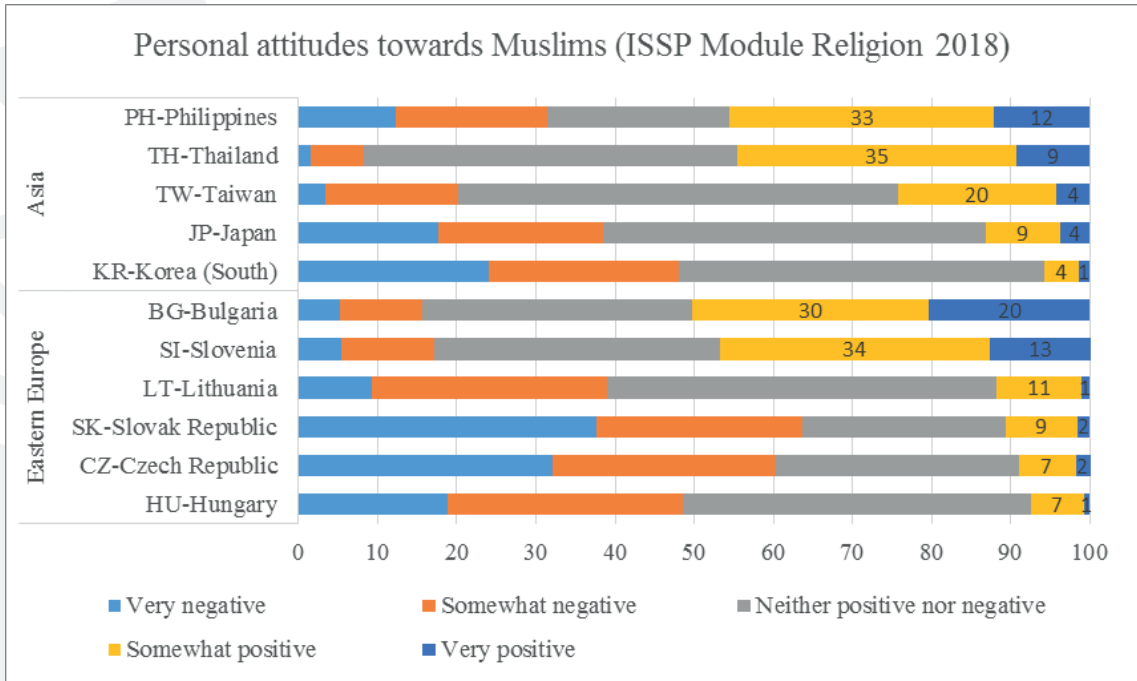


Figure 2: Attitudes towards Muslims in various world regions II
 Source: Own computations based on the ISSP module religion 2018

A closer view on dealing with cultural diversity in the United States and Austria

After presenting this global overview of anti-Muslim sentiment, I aim to focus on societal developments in the Western world, specifically examining the dynamics of Islamophobia in the United States and Austria. Both countries share similarities and differences. The perception of living in a state of multiple crises⁷ and experiencing a loss of economic and political power is widespread in the West, contributing to future pessimism. Political and institutional trust is diminishing, signaling a crisis of democracy.⁸ Additionally, the experience of living in an individualistic society exacerbates economic polarization and cultural divides, threatening solidarity and social cohesion in the Western world. Populist parties are thriving in many countries, as citizens who feel marginalized seek simplistic solutions to complex societal challenges amidst rapid processes of change. Islamophobia can be seen as a form of scapegoating, with immigrants in general and Muslims in particular being held responsible for societal decline.

Austria, situated in the heart of Europe, presents an intriguing case study due to the heightened manifestations of various Western societal trends such as the surge of right-wing populism and the challenges pertaining to integration and social cohesion, particularly when compared to other European nations. In Austria, right-wing populism has a long tradition because the Freedom Party (FPÖ) has long been present in the political landscape and has gained popularity among a broad spectrum of voters

⁷ Cotta & Isernia, 2020

⁸ Arpino & Obydenkova, 2020

over the past two decades. Anti-muslim sentiment and anti-refugee policies have always been on the top of the agenda of the FPÖ. But there is also another side of the coin. The rights of religious freedom are historically grounded in Austria. The early recognition of Islam in Austria due to the Islam act of 2012 created one of the oldest and most progressive relationships towards Islam in Western Europe. Current statistics in Austria clearly confirm that the country has to be considered as multifaceted immigration society.⁹ A recent study estimated that about 700.000 Muslims already live in Austria, which represents about 7% of the population¹⁰. Migration researchers¹¹ call for a differentiation in the consideration of Muslim life which is rarely done by the media or in public and political discourse. This is leading to a kind of vicious cycle. The more attention is given to the notion of Europe being 'foreignized' and the more negative attitudes towards Muslims are propagated by politics and the media, the more Islamophobia will increase in European countries.

When we review the public discourse on Muslims in the United States, September 11th serves as a key date in bringing Muslims on top of the political agenda. Commentators at diverse media channels began to reflect on Islam, distributed stereotypes about the Muslim community and fears of further terrorism attacks were growing among the non-Muslim population. There appears a standardization of anti-Muslim arguments at both sides of the Atlantic with regards of mosques as a breeding ground for terrorists, the spread of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam (especially via the internet) and issues concerning the oppression of women in the Muslim world.¹² During recent years, especially the refugee movements of 2015 and the terrorist attacks in European cities due to the recruitment of foreign fighters by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have led to a revival in anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. It was one of the first attempts of Donald Trump, after winning the presidential elections in 2016, to put a Muslim ban into practice, restricting immigration from seven countries with predominantly Muslim populations. This ban signalled a new era in which the place of Muslims in American society is increasingly challenged. Up to date the Muslim community represents a kind of mosaic of ethnic, religious and socio-structural diversity. A notable difference to Europe is given by their rather high position in US society. Muslims often have prestigious jobs which lead to a relatively high standard of living. Also with regard to education, more than half of them achieved a college or postgraduate degree compared to one quarter of the general population.¹³ Especially young Muslims and second generation immigrants tend to be quite proactive in civic engagement especially in the arena of religion and within specific Muslim organizations.¹⁴ Muslims growing up in the US seem to negotiate what it means to be both Muslim and American especially in a climate of rising anti-Muslim sentiment. The Pew-Study on religious beliefs and practices in the US could clearly confirm that religion plays a major role for rather large parts of the

⁹ e.g. already Fassmann & Münz, 1995

¹⁰ see Goujon et al., 2017

¹¹ e.g. Güngör et al. 2019

¹² Marzouki (2017)

¹³ see Moore, 2007, p. 122

¹⁴ see for instance Read, 2015

US-population although the proportion of non-believers (from 17% to 23% between 2007 and 2014) is on the rise especially among the millennials.¹⁵

The antecedents of anti-muslim sentiment with a special focus on religion

The following insights are based on a comparative study on the main drivers of Islamophobia in the United States and Austria. In a sequential regression design I added three levels of explanation. The first level refers to the socio-demographic and socio-structural characteristics of the respondents, education, the subjective estimation of status and dealing with household income. As a second explanatory level, three central indicators of disintegration dynamics (namely political disenchantment, pessimism about the future and perceptions of injustice) are used. Finally, at the third level the various religious factors come into play. Here I used the emphasis of the role of religion in society, religious practice, creating meaning through religion, susceptibility to spirituality and superstition as explanatory variables. The same operationalization was possible for the US and for Austria, which enables to directly compare the effects. Figure 3 highlights the main factors to explain Islamophobia in Austria. Women tend to have a more positive attitude towards Muslims as well as the youngest generation. People in their middle ages and people with higher age (older than 75) are rather critical. Also people in urban areas share more positive views of Muslims because they are more used to live in a multicultural society. These effects are all stable when adding further variables to the model. It is also interesting to note that socio-structural dynamics and subjective feelings of disintegration have hardly any influence in Austria, it is only the disenchantment with politics leading to a higher skepticism towards Muslims. But the religious beliefs and attitudes have a considerable effect in Austria and make a significant contribution to explaining the variance in the dependent variable. Here it can be seen that those individuals who generally want to strengthen the role of religion in society, experience religion as a source of meaning and are susceptible to spirituality and esotericism are more tolerant towards Muslims, while people who are susceptible to superstition are more likely to have critical attitudes towards Muslim migrants.

¹⁵ see Pew, 2015

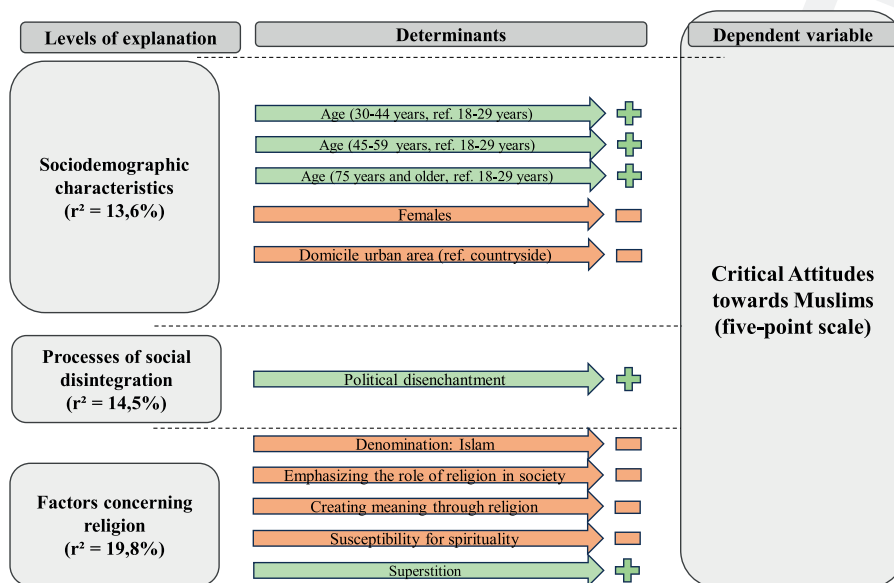


Figure 3: The antecedents of anti-muslim sentiment in Austria

Source: ISSP 2018 data, own computations

Concerning the US, we have to come to slightly different conclusions. No effect of gender can be observed, although the age effect is significantly stronger than in Austria. Here, an increase in Muslim resentment is already evident in middle adulthood. The urban-rural dynamic also appears to have a much stronger effect in the United States. While in Austria a more tolerant image of Muslims tends to be observed in large cities, in the USA even a residential location in medium-sized cities appears to have a weakening effect on the formation of prejudice. It is also interesting to note that socio-structural dynamics and subjective feelings of disintegration have hardly any influence in Austria, while in the USA at least higher education is a major driving force against anti-Muslim resentment. A key explanatory factor in both countries is disenchantment with institutions, In the US it is clearly seen that black people are more tolerant towards Muslims and it is also interesting to note that Protestants and atheists are more critical of Muslims. Interestingly, religious beliefs and attitudes do not play a role in explaining Islamophobia in the US-context. The lack of religiously based conflicts in US society might serve as one potential explanation, why the majority of the population in the USA is more tolerant towards Muslims.

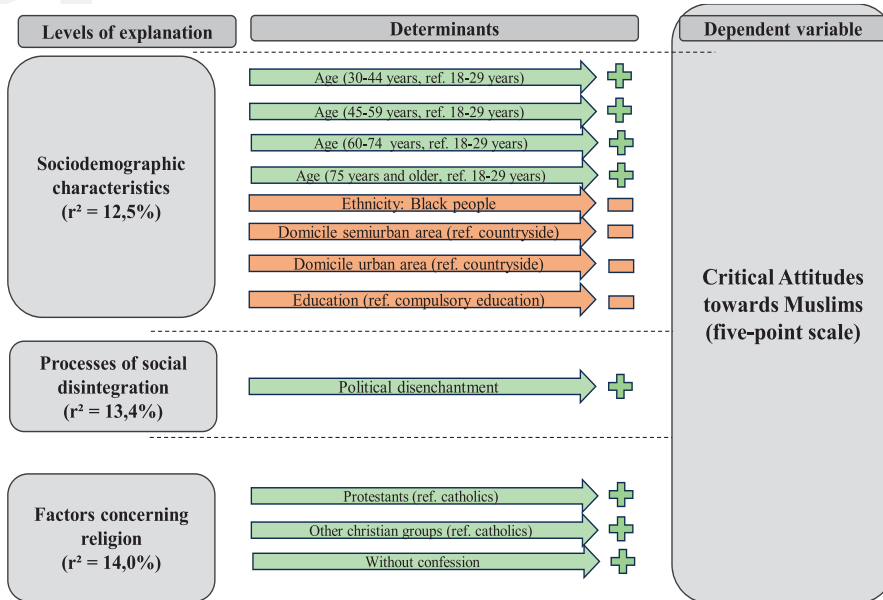


Figure 4: The antecedents of anti-muslim sentiment in the United States

Source: ISSP 2018 data, own computations

Concluding remarks

Especially in the West, societal cleavages are becoming more visible and appear to be deepening amidst the current polycrisis. In the US, educational disparities are compounded by an urban-rural dynamic that further fuels resentment towards Islam, reinforcing the thesis of a polarized American society. In Austria, different factors might play a crucial role. Beyond distribution conflicts (concerning more or fewer resources), identity conflicts (concerning more or less recognition) are increasingly significant, particularly in Europe.

On both sides of the Atlantic, it seems unlikely that these cleavages and elements of a conservative backlash will diminish in the near future. However, temporal comparisons indicate a trend towards greater acceptance of multiculturalism in many Western European countries. This suggests that cultural diversity is not merely an arena for conservative backlash and increased prejudice but remains a contested field in Western democracies. One glimmer of hope is that younger generations are more supportive of multiculturalism and may act as advocates against racism in the future.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Research Notes

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTICULTURALISM AND THE THEORY OF THE “CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS”¹

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Abstract:

The article is devoted to the comprehension of the concept of Islamophobia, conceivable in the practice of multiculturalism and the theory of the “clash of civilizations” by S. Huntington. The author analyzes the reasons for the emergence and spread of the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the context of modernity, the theory and practice of multiculturalism, the potential of the Islamic world in overcoming modern challenges and threats. In conclusion, the author concluded that it is necessary to recognize the right of each nation-bearer of its original culture to contribute to the global cause of building peace not only at the level of theory, but also in practice as such.

Key words: Islam, Islamophobia, clash of civilizations, multiculturalism, dialogue of cultures.

¹ The article is a revised version of the report delivered by the author at the international conference “Protecting Diversity: Fighting against Islamophobia in 2024” in the section “Multiculturalism, Islam and the Theory of the Clash of Civilizations: Reframing of Islamophobia” (March 8–10, 2024, Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan).

Introduction

The theme of Islamophobia in the context of the practice of multiculturalism and, more broadly, the European policy of tolerance, including critically, has been actively studied in recent years by a number of figures². In this context, it is worth discussing the theory of the “clash of civilizations”, which is once again gaining popularity in the media in the context of global conflicts – especially given that the very same “civilizational conflict” is often defined as a conflict of religions³.

Islamophobia may not be the best name for a whole spectrum of phenomena. In one way or another, we are talking about hostility towards Islam and Muslims – from rejection and discrimination to hatred and attacks. Of course, we are not talking about a phobia in the clinical sense of the word – and the name “Islamophobia” is unfortunate precisely because it is constructed by analogy with other “-phobias” from Western liberal discourse. It would be more accurate to say this: aggression towards Muslims is a product of fanatical racism and ignorant anti-religiosity. To be honest, it is difficult to find another short, capacious term. In modern scientific discourse, Islamophobia is sometimes defined as a form of ideology of hatred, which is characterized by the followings⁴:

1. Perception of Islam as a monolithic and static phenomenon;
2. The alienation of Islam as an “other” and separate segment;
3. Perception of Islam as inferior, insignificant in all respects;
4. Constructing Islam as a Hostile Community;
5. Perception of Islam as a manipulative tool;
6. Justifying racial discrimination against Muslims;
7. Unsubstantiated Invalidation of Muslim Criticism of the West;
8. Normalization of anti-Muslim discourse.

Indeed, the orientalist perception speaks of Islam as an inert and unchanging phenomenon, and Islamic communities, despite their real diversity, are considered a homogeneous whole. Islam has increasingly served to construct the “image of the enemy” after the terrorist attacks of 2001, and the discourse of producing the “other” in the person of Muslims has been and is combined with racist oppositions (the “real” British, Americans, French and “alien” Muslims; moreover, representatives of Islam among the titular nations are branded by renegades and traitors)⁵.

² Choudhury C. A. Ideology, identity, and law in the production of Islamophobia // Toğuşlu E., Leman J., Sezgin I. M. (ed. by) // *New Multicultural Identities in Europe Religion and Ethnicity Secular Societies*, 2014, Leuven University Press.

³ Huntington S. *Clash of Civilizations*. – M.: AST, 2003. – pages 24.

⁴ *The Fear Of Islam. An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*. Todd H. Green. 2015, Fortress Press. C. 10-19.

⁵ Silva D. M. D. The Othering of Muslims: Discourses of Radicalization in the “New York Times”, 1969–2014 // *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (MARCH 2017), pp. 138-161

The main thing, however, is how widely spread and often manifests itself in waves of aggression and hatred associated with so-called Islamophobia⁶. Last year, 2023, the International Day Against Islamophobia was celebrated for the first time (March 15)⁷. Its introduction is justified by alarming trends in the world, where Islamophobia has strengthened especially after 2001 and is combined with the raising of neo-Nazism and “white nationalism”. We can add that the unstable and conflictual state of many countries, which contributes to both forced migration and the aggravation of aggression towards “outsiders”, several years ago reached a level unprecedented since the Second World War (1939–1945). Let us remember that war and instability sometimes engulf those Islamic countries that, for various reasons, remain at a low level of socio-economic development, or those for which no serious long-term political solutions have been found by the world community (Sudan; Palestine).

Islamophobia, meanwhile, is broader than hatred of specific Muslims. The complexity of human identity itself, as well as the ignorance of popular perception (for example, every fifth American considered President Obama a Muslim and called this the reason for their hostility towards him⁸), lead to the intersection of such components as ethnicity, origin, and language with religious ones. And those countries from which flows of people go to the “Global North” are predominantly Islamic – but these Islamic countries are also quite diverse within themselves (especially such as Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq). All this means that the fight against phenomena united under the “umbrella” of Islamophobia is relevant for many, and perhaps mainly for non-Muslims⁹.

The idea of a “clash of civilizations,” and civilizational theory in general, has become a common methodological and even ideological tool in the arsenal of socio-political thought in post-perestroika Russia, where the obligatory Marxist paradigm has long dominated¹⁰. By that time in the West, the classics of civilizational theory began to be perceived as quite an outdated system, similar to classical Marxism – the classics of this trend, such as Spengler, Toynbee and Danilevsky, were criticized, in particular, for voluntarism in the qualification of individual civilizations¹¹. However, perhaps more important than the specifically academic and somewhat “partisan” debate about formations and civilizations is the status of the concept of “civilization” in society as a whole. Even where the civilizational approach as a theory is considered discredited, the notion of discrete ‘civilizations’ as fundamental and opposing communities has

⁶ Muslim Societies In Postnormal Times. Foresight for Trends, Emerging Issues and Scenarios. 2019, International Institute of Islamic thought. C. viii–xiv.

⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/anti-islamophobia-day>.

⁸ Hartman T. K., Newmark A. J. Motivated Reasoning, Political Sophistication, and Associations between President Obama and Islam // PS: Political Science and Politics. Vol. 45, No. 3 (July 2012), pp. 449–455.

⁹ UN Materials on the Impact of Islamophobia on Non-Muslims: www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Civil%20Society%20or%20Individuals/ProfAwan-4.pdf

¹⁰ Marlene L. Rethinking Empire in the Wake of Soviet Collapse: a new Eurasian ideology // Vestnik Evrazii, 2000. page 11.

¹¹ Roesel J. The Clash of Civilizations: A Critique // Strategic Studies, Vol. 18, No. 1, Special Issue: The Clash Of Civilizations (Autumn 1995), pp. 75–109.

become a doxa, a common belief that is unspoken, unarticulated, but alive among the people and serves as a framework for the widespread understanding of religions and cultures¹².

Discussions about civilizations often occur not in the Abstract; not in the format of justifying some division of them or reviewing their historical fate, but those far removed from academia, as well as the “leaders of public opinion” recall civilizations specifically in the context of the “clash of civilizations”, an idea most vividly presented by Samuel Huntington. His theory is scientifically interesting in itself, but what is fundamentally important for us is that the confrontational aspect of this idea has become an ideology embedded in propaganda and public thought¹³. It provides a tangible and intuitively understandable justification for a “natural order” of opposition, particularly between Christians and Muslims – or, in this eclectic understanding, between Europeans and people from the Middle East.

Understood in this aspect, the idea (namely, the idea that lives as a common opinion, and not as a conceptually theory that developed it) of the confrontation of civilizations and their ethos denies the unification of ethno–religious groups into a single, irreducible whole – the “flourishing complexity” of a society of different peoples. The practical response to the idea of an irreconcilable struggle between distinct civilizations and cultures was meant to be multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism and modernity

Multiculturalism as a policy, a policy of declared inclusivity and acceptance of refugees from the Middle East and other regions (mostly devastated, disunited by the host powers themselves), has become an increasingly vulnerable position in recent years, to put it bluntly: failed. The lack of a plan for the integration of refugees due to the deliberate refusal to thoughtfully build a new complex social community, coupled with a tendency to “throw money at the problem” and a narrowly liberal approach to addressing the issue as a whole – has rendered the form of multiculturalism we have witnessed in Europe over the past decade a misguided endeavor.

Numerous immigrant communities have failed to integrate into the fabric of European societies, and not because of their own, these refugees, inability to adapt, learn the local language, or comply with the laws of their host countries. A critical role has been played by the multiculturalist approach to the issue, according to which special planning and control of the social situation in the process of mass migrations were not required. This reflects the logic of European liberals: since people are fundamentally equal and possess inherent equal rights, it is sufficient to simply proclaim this equality and the corresponding rights. This is a tragic mistake, because human rights and the equality of nations require a well–thought–out approach to their implementation. The declarative nature of multiculturalism also leads to the fact that

¹² <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/11/1026>

¹³ Yilmaz, I.; Morison, N. Civilizational Populism: Definition, Literature, Theory, and Practice // Religions, 2022, 13, 1026.

the fight against its opponents is reduced to prohibitive rhetoric and obfuscation¹⁴. Censorship and a refusal to engage in discussion only strengthen the positions of nationalists. Furthermore, in such case, discontent with elites and politicians easily spreads to Muslims as such, since they are associated with their unfair “defenders” from among liberal politicians. Thus, liberal multiculturalism is not only powerless against Islamophobia, but also fuels it to some extent.

Tolerance, in and of itself, as a medical term, is an unpleasant concept for us from a moral and ethical perspective. It seems to merely mask the underlying hatred without fostering genuine dialogue and reconciliation.

Criticizing the identified shortcomings of this policy, we cannot rejoice at such a failure of multiculturalism. The consequence and continuation of this failure is the rise of racism and populism, which are already having social and electoral repercussions in several European countries. The abstinence of liberal ideologues of multiculturalism has the downside that the right notices the obvious and fair – Muslim migrants are clearly different from the “indigenous” population of European countries¹⁵. This observation demands entirely different conclusions, but the fact that it is fundamentally accurate enables Islamophobes to gain support in a crisis-ridden era, where stagnation or deterioration in living standards fosters confrontation.

How does the theory of civilizational communities relate to finding reconciliation between the differences of cultural formations and the real embodiment of universal human rights? The pragmatic answer to one such decision is the theory of “civic nationalism”, which asserts that any member, old or new, of a certain community should be a full representative of it, so to speak, “by passport, not by skin color”. However, it is important to note that this approach does not eliminate the fundamental “civilizational” contradictions of cultures, confrontationality, or even nationalism itself – whether in quotes or without¹⁶. As we see in the example of the United States, such a “melting pot” is not immune to Islamophobia; their “signature” religious and national tolerance initially extended first only to “white” people, then to representatives of different races, but, but, as we have seen over the past couple of decades, not to Muslims, who have become emblematic of the external “other”, a fearsome and unfamiliar enemy.

Perhaps examples of successful solutions to the issue of interethnic hostility should be sought specifically in the Islamic world¹⁷. We are aware of, though not sufficiently familiar with, examples of egalitarianism in Islamic history: in the tribal Arabia of the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in the original Caliphate, in various sultanates of Western Asia, and in the global Ottoman Empire. Moreover, it is interesting to consider these examples from the perspective of civilizational theory also. The Prophet

¹⁴ Chin R. *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History*, 2017, Princeton University Press. Pp. 237–286

¹⁵ Keating M., McCrone D. *The Crisis of Social Democracy in Europe*, 2015, Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 125–139

¹⁶ Springs J. A. *A Tale of Two Islamophobias // Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (2015), pp. 289–321

¹⁷ Shukiyanen L.R. *Islam and Human Rights in the Dialogue of Cultures and Religions*. – M.: Sadra, 2014. – pages 117–128.

Muhammad, as we understand, did not aim to establish a separate civilization, his and his companions' call was addressed to all people of the world. Nevertheless, the historical fact of the uniqueness of the community formed by the Islamic countries, for all their differences, cannot be denied. Islamic civilization, if we can speak of it as such, was formed accidentally, but not by chance, that is, not meaninglessly.

It seems that the broad universal call, most often religious in nature (note that most classifications of civilizations are based on religion), serves as a powerful impetus for uniting people. In an era of such unification, the natural hostility between people who are foreign to each other gives way to remarkable acceptance, familiarity, and mutual enrichment. The magnitude to which such openness corresponds is paralleled by the earthly greatness of historically formed empires–civilizations. Moreover, only that state or that association can become great, even in conventional historiographical and journalistic terms, which itself heeds to some kind of call, seeing its mission in organizing the world according to it. By itself, such an idea does not oblige to approve of hegemonism or conquest; rather, it is essential to disentangle the concept of violent dominance from that of a unifying movement to recognize that such unification often occurs independently of conquests and wars, which represent only the surface layer of historical processes.

Conclusion

The mission of a civilization nation consists in organizing the world – this was also noted in their intuitions by the classics of civilizational theory, like Toynbee¹⁸. Purged of its actual opposite expansionism, this idea can also make it possible to approach the construction of a multicultural society with greater constructiveness. After all, each ethnoreligious community refers not only to its mother civilization as a vast empire, and not only to the disparate communities marked by the principle of in-group and out-group, but also to its contribution to the global endeavor of world-building. The mistake of multiculturalism as a policy has been its declarative nature, which has stifled the unique approach each culture takes to the world. In this new era, where the civilizational impetus of each nation can and should be expressed in the joint construction of a unified world – such words should not be shunned – it is the responsibility of both governments and representatives of the various nations themselves to find ways to express this impetus that will at least not provoke frustration and misunderstanding among the masses¹⁹. For those who, like us, discuss the problem of Islamophobia in connection with the difference of cultures and civilizations, it is important to remain critical of themselves and avoid those fundamental mistakes that the first architects of a multicultural society made in this field in excessive confidence. Most likely, the

¹⁸ Faritov V.T., Borisova T.V. Arnold Toynbee as a philosopher and theologian: (post)metaphysical meanings of history // Bulletin of the Samara State Technical University. "Philosophy" series. 2023. Vol. 5. No. 2, pages 61–68.

¹⁹ Azam G. Social Harmony, Multiculturalism and Cultural Pluralism // Philosophy and Progress, 45 (1–2): 67–86 (2009). P. 71 ff.

multicultural society of the future will be built, just like the great civilizations of the past, “beyond our control”, not according to our project, but also not without our participation.

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ANNEX

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Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos (Spain) – The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (Video address)

Mr. Yousef M. Al-Dobeay (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) – Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

Prof. Cole Durham (The USA) – President of the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum

H. V. Sheikh Ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade (Azerbaijan) – The Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Board

Mr. Khalid Fathalrahman Omer Mohamed (Sudan) – Ambassador, Director of the Center for Civilizational Dialogue at ICESCO

Dr. Dodik Ariyanto – Head of The OIC Islamophobia Observatory

Mr. Ebrahim Rasool (South Africa) – Former Ambassador, Founder of World for All Foundation

Dr. Mohamed Bechari (UAE) – Secretary General of the World Muslim Communities Council

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- Mr. Afzal Khan (The UK)** – Vice chair of APPG British Muslim, Shadow Minister for Exports in Labour’s Business and Trade Team “Islamophobia in the West”
- Dr. Mahmut Erol Kılıç (Turkiye)** – Director General of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA)
- Dr. Waqaruzzaman Azmi (The UK)** – Chairman of Remembering Srebrenica UK and Chief Executive of Badger Health Group “Bosnian Genocide and Islamophobia”
- Mr. Oussama Ali Jammal (The USA)** – Secretary General of US Council of Muslim Organizations
- Assoc. Prof. Yashar Çolak (Turkiye)** – Vice-President of Türkiye Diyanet Foundation Islamic Research Center
- Mr. Elshad Iskandarov (Azerbaijan)** – Ambassador at Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan “Geopolitical Challenges to Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Confronting
- Dr. Baptiste Brodard (Switzerland)** – Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Aix-Marseille University
- Prof. Mr. Bülent Aras (Qatar)** – Professor of International Relations and Research Director at Center for International Policy Research Qatar
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- Dr. Fahid Ahmed Qurashi (The UK)** – Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Salford and Research Director at the Ayaan Institute

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- Mr. Nourredine Belhout (France)** – Director of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences of Paris
- Dr. James Charles Laurence Wolfreys (The UK)** – Senior Lecturer in French and European politics, King’s College London “Islamophobia and the Authoritarian Dynamic in Contemporary French Politics”
- Dr. Sara Cheikh Husain (Australia)** – Research Assistant at University of Melbourne
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- Mr. Aydin Safikhanli (Azerbaijan)** – Head of the Ombudsman Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Member of the IPHRC of the OIC “The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women and Gross Violation of Human Rights”
- Prof. Susana Mangana (Spain)** – Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, Doctoral Researcher at the Human Rights Institute, University of Deusto, Bilbao
- Prof. Zora Arfina (Indonesia)** – Forensic Psychologist and Associate Professor at University of Indonesia
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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON ISLAMOPHOBIA
BAKU, March 8–9, 2024

CONFERENCE PHOTO GALLERY











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