

Islamophobia?

The German Discussion about Islamophobia

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Abstract: *Islamophobia is a term which is relatively new in the world of social science; it is a neologism. Kofi Annan has warned about it but there is not a clear, undoubted concept to it yet – and it is questionable if there ever will be, especially if one looks into the German controversy about the term. The German discussion is not unique though, and it must fall into the pattern of, wider, European discussion about the Islamic minority. Prominent figures of Islamic hatred in Europe are for instance Oriana Fallaci and Brigitte Bardot. Against them, there stands a more liberal community that does not want to follow the language of violence and hatred. Two different standpoints are the main poles of discussion. One group wants to use Islamophobia as a concept, the other group opposes the term. In between, there is the scientific concept of Islamophobia that is threatened to be pulverized before it is even fully conceptualized. In the middle position there are also intellectuals known as Islamic reformers who argue that Islamophobia should be replaced by the term Islam-critique.*

Key words: *Anti-Semitism, Islam, Islamcritique, Islamophobia, Minorities in Germany.*

Introduction

Islamophobia is a term which is relatively new in the world of social science; it is a neologism. Kofi Annan has warned about it but there is not a clear, undoubted concept to it yet – and it is questionable if there ever will be, especially if one looks into the German controversy about the term. The German discussion is not unique though, and it must fall into the pattern of, wider, European discussion about the Islamic minority. Prominent figures of Islamic hatred in Europe are for instance Oriana Fallaci and Brigitte Bardot. Against them, there stands a more liberal community that does not want to follow the language of violence and hatred. Two different standpoints are the main poles of discussion. One group wants to use Islamophobia as a concept, the other group opposes the term. In between, there is the scientific concept of Islamophobia that is threatened to be pulverized before it is even fully conceptualized. In the middle position there are also intellectuals known as Islamic reformers who argue that Islamophobia should be replaced by the term Islam-critique.²

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² This group, in this article identified as islamic reformers, has to be differed from those Islamic intellectuals that try to reform islam from within, like Tariq Ramadan. The term is used in this article to name a group of (Islamic)

The term “islamophobia” was originally used by Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss-based Muslim philosopher, known for his connection with the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood due to his family history, as Nina zu Fürstenberg explains (cf Fürstenberg 2008). As a phenomenon, Islam hatred is not new. During the conflict between the Serbs and the Bosnians, Milosevic often referred to the battle of Amsfeld (1389), after which Serbia was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. In this way, he legitimated violence against the Muslim community. The long history and enduring importance of the phenomenon is widely recognised.

In his speech at Cairo University (Egypt) on 4th June 2009, Barack Obama stated: “We meet at a time of tension between the United States and Muslims around the world – tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of co-existence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars,” and his remark was very much to the point. In history, we can find examples such as Prince Eugen from Savoyen, known for his achievements in the second battle against the Ottoman Empire at the gates of Vienna (15th July – 12th September 1683); also the crusades could be mentioned, as well as numerous other incidents and groups.

As Nico Landman (2005: 560) explains, at the beginning of the 21st century the Islamic diaspora in Western Europe deals with the question of how Islam can be interpreted and passed on to the young generation while living in secular societies. At the same time, he argues, the countries of Western Europe face the challenge of integrating Islam into their religious infrastructure, while being confronted with social tensions, since some parts of their populations react with hatred against the more and more visible Islam in their countries. “In German analyses the term Tanya (the hiding of true intentions) is often used in order to express that Muslims might fit superficially into the norms of the German society, but that this adaptation is more to be understood as tactic and not as principle” (Landman 2005: 587). Landman further explains: “Also where the permanent presence of immigrants from Islamic countries is a fact not questioned, their cultural background and especially their religion are seen as alien elements that are hindering them to function as citizens of western European states. This popular thinking finds its reason in the overwhelming negative picture of Islam in the west-European general public that associates the religion with fanaticism and intolerance towards dissenters.” (Landman 2005: 569) Norman Daniels shows that this popular picture of Islamic societies is nothing new (Daniels 1989).

reformers, which have a liberal starting point and try to criticize Islam from an outer perspective. They have Islamic roots in their personal history, but have gone through the process of assimilation.

In the first place, this article tries to shed light on those groups that take part in the discussion. Who is who and who states what in this situation of social change? How do the different groups argue for or against the usage of the term?

Parties of the Discussion

The advocates of the first view, the “Islamophobes”, state that *we* as a majority have to focus mainly on Islamism, which means focusing on the problem of an existing politicized extremist interpretation of Islam. They see all Moslems as a threat, and do not differentiate between the different standpoints within the cultural minority. They are the protagonists of a combat against the Muslim community in Germany. Adelgunde Mertensacker, the head of the radical Christian party *Christliche Mitte* (Christian Middle) and the President of *Internationale Widerstandsbewegung Anti-Islam* (International Resistance Movement Anti-Islam), is one member of the group, as well as Stefan Herre, the initiator of the popular Internet blog *Political Incorrect* (labelled as PI in the following text), Ralph Giordano, a Holocaust survivor who has enjoyed the position of a moral authority in Germany, Alice Schwarzer, a well-known feminist who dominated the discussion about women rights in Germany in the past, Udo Ulfkotte, a former editorial journalist of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) (cf. Ulfkotte 2008; 2007), Henryk M. Broder (Broder 2007), Gisèle Littmann,³ political scientist Matthias Küntzel (see below) and Hans-Peter Raddatz (cf. Raddatz 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2007b). And last but not least, there are the Internet blogs *Akte Islam* (Dossier Islam) and *Die grüne Pest* (The Green Plague). The group itself represents a rather popular opinion. They all claim, when arguing against the use of the term *Islamophobia*, that there is also a developing phenomenon called Muslim anti-Semitism. They see the developing social situation as follows: there exists a hostile minority that tries to oppose critical voices by stating that they are the expression of a hostile majority. Therefore, Islamophobia should be seen as a term that functions to tone down critical comments, and that gets used by agents of Islam.

The advocates of the second view plead to monitor Muslim anti-Semitism together with Islamophobia, which, as a term, contains the stirring up of prejudices and fear of Muslims, supports a negative definition of Muslims *in general* by blaming them for negative social developments, as well as having a *bad* religion and plotting against the western majority. To them, Islamophobia can be seen as an offshoot of the science of prejudices, together with Muslim anti-Semitism.

³ Her webpage <www.dhimmi.org> creates a scenario of „Eurabia“. Compare also Shooman 2009.

In this context, anti-Semitism functions as a paradigm. The scholars who are in favour of this comparison state that there is enough evidence for the existence of structurally similar phenomena in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. They have accepted the term Islamophobia and have used it as descriptive tool, though Islamophobia as a term is not yet fully conceptualized. It is however, as this group states, structurally identical and as such it is the creation of the former. While in anti-Semitism, the Talmud is used as a proof of evil, in Islamophobia it is the Quran. The literary texts are analysed in order to find problematic passages and these are then understood as the real intentions or the real picture of Muslims. The aim of this group of researchers is to show that the minority portrayed as evil can possibly do nothing to prove that this is not the case. Their picture is not based on their actual behaviour but on preconceptions that are no longer questioned.

This group's most prominent figure is Wolfgang Benz, a well-known and respected scientist at the Center of Research on anti-Semitism⁴. Other advocates of the movement are Iman Attia, Siegfried Jäger and Juliane Wetzel. Looking outside of Germany, also Etienne Balibar can be added to the list. They are not part of the political arena; however, they are scholars that present their findings to the wider German society. Therefore, they have some political impact.

The third group that takes part in this discussion is made up by those that aim to criticize a certain interpretation of Islam by referring to civil rights. They combat the term Islamophobia as a misleading descriptive tool. Meanwhile, they also criticize the first view as racist and xenophobic. The most prominent figure in this group is recently Seyran Ateş, a woman who fights mainly for the civil rights of women and girls and criticizes certain interpretations of Quran and Hadiths. Also the scientists Bassam Tibi and Kenan Malik are a part of this group. They refuse to be put in the same box as the Islamophobes. However, they claim to be *dissidents* within the minority. Differing from those such as the Swiss-based Islamic philosopher Tariq Ramadan, who finds the starting point of the renewal of Islam in Quran, they find their starting point in liberal values and human rights. They argue that the minorities need to integrate, adopt western values and privatize religion.

The Discussion

The discussion between the respective camps is led mostly on an emotional basis. Scandals are provoked and the political conflicts are quite heated. Battles are waged about the construction of mosques, about women's civil rights and the political emancipation of the

⁴ See their website <<http://www2.tu-berlin.de/~zfa/>>.

Muslim minority, as well as about the situation in Israel and the Palestine. It seems confusing. The discourse however lacks a scientific interest to understand the changes taking part in the society; the discussion is dominated by promoters of social change and those that oppose this change.

“Instead, the discourse is dominated by the fear of domination by foreign influences and other societies, obscure ideas like *Eurabia*, the assumed conspiracy of Muslims to rule the world, or the *sneaking islamification*, a conspiracy that promotes the view that Muslims will take power because of their birth rate” (Königseder 2009: 21). One then encounters quotes such as “It is a worldwide offensive. The money comes from Saudi-Arabia, the ideology comes from Iran.” (Schwarzer 2006)

Those kinds of disqualifying statements do not lead to a change of view, but rather become another brick in the pile of resentment and prejudice. Firstly, it is important to mention that Iran has an ideology totally different to countries with a Sunni majority. In Iran, the Shia branch of Islam has majority. The two groups do not work together, but are enemies. In Afghanistan, for instance, Iranian diplomats were killed by Taliban (CNN 1998; Salam Iran 1998; Jehl 1998). Astonishingly enough, people that utter statements like that are still presented in the media as *experts*. It is despite the fact that there are enough experts around, such as the scientists at ZMO (Zentrum Moderner Orient) and numerous other universities.

The latest incident

A striking incident happened also at the end of 2008. Though being rather a short footnote within the entire discussion, the episode is noteworthy. Wolfgang Benz, professor at Technical University of Berlin, was invited to a conference that dealt with concepts of the enemy.⁵ For this, Professor Benz has come under heavy criticism. Already the title “Enemy image Muslim – enemy image Jew” referred to hostile attitude towards both Muslims and Jews. The debate that was sparked off represented the latest culmination point of a very emotional controversy.

Before the conference started, Matthias Küntzel stated that the comparison of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism means *trivializing* Holocaust. He did this in the Wall Street Journal (Küntzel 2008). For critics like him, there is no such thing like a racist attitude towards Muslims after Sept. 11. Instead, according to them, the (not yet precisely developed) concept of Islamophobia is misused as a tool against critics of Islam and/or Quran. In this perception,

⁵ See the conference website <http://zfa.kgw.tu-berlin.de/feindbild_konferenz.htm>.

Islamophobia is nothing more than a muzzle used to silence critics, and a misleading description utilized by Muslim extremists who wanted to dominate the debate. The critics argue that there is a pressing need for research on the hostile minority of Islamic anti-Semites that aim to destroy Israel. This, according to them, cannot be done simultaneously; that is, to keep the concept of Islamophobia and at the same time to do research on people with resentments against Jews justified by politicized and extremist Islamic views.⁶

The critics of such comparison argue that to contrast one thing with another means to put them on the very same level. They argue that the concept under scrutiny, Islamophobia, is simply a term for the (political) battle and the ideas of Muslim extremists. This argument is not new when it comes to the attempt to find generic terms for structurally similar phenomena. Similar traits can be found in the development of the concept of totalitarianism and its modern offshoot – extremism (cf. Jesse 1999; Backes 2005).⁷

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

How seriously should we take the concern that monitoring Islamophobia means letting research on Islamism suffer?

In a newspaper interview (cf. Burchard 2008), Wolfgang Benz justified comparisons between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and argued against his critics who would claim that those who see Muslims as a possible group of victims of an anti-Islamic bias were also enemies of Israel and worked for the cause of Islamic extremists.⁸ Benz made it clear that he compared structures of prejudices and was interested in the mechanisms and effects of prejudices. Not using anti-Semitism as a reference would have been a mistake, since there has been extensive research on anti-Semitism. “The speculation that looking at the development of different

⁶ “Is the occupation with Islamic anti-Semitism islamophobic?” was for instance the question raised at a conference held in December 2008 in Berlin, organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, cf. Policy Politische Akademie No. 27: „Islamischer Antisemitismus“ und „Islamophobie“ (2008).

⁷ See also the interview with professor Wolfgang Benz, which is included at the end of this article.

⁸ But the Center argued this way also on other occasion: „The Institute has always applied the categories and findings emerging from research on anti-Semitism to the analysis of other prejudices. This is in keeping with the intentions of the founding director Herbert A. Strauss. In the 1980s, he, too, applied the results of his research – as well as his personal experience as a survivor of persecution under National Socialism – to discussions regarding German policies toward refugees. It was not his intention, nor is it ours, to equate various contexts. Rather, the aim is to conduct an analytical transfer: Research on anti-Semitism and prejudice is a specialization in the study of the dynamics and functions of the concept of the ‘Other as enemy’ in various spheres.” Cf. Benz (not dated).

societies and noting structural analogies would be a withdrawal of empathy from the issue of the Jews and Israel – that is a misunderstanding, if not worse” (Benz 2009: 18).

How is Islamophobia defined by those who advocate comparative studies? How is it criticized? How can we accommodate the remarks of the critics? Let us focus once on the main points of the research outcomes.

Professor Benz has already made it clear that he is not interested in the process of the theoretical development of the term; he mainly focuses on the phenomenon itself. He does not aim to put forward a theoretical finding; he wants to make it clear that there are structures in both phenomena that are identical. Islamophobia is in this way related to anti-Semitism. He mainly compares early anti-Semitic literature with expressions of Islamophobia (be it spoken, written, or expressed in behaviour, such as taking part at demonstrations against the construction of mosques in Germany – which in recent years happened in Cologne, Duisburg and Berlin).⁹

Islamophobia is mainly described as racism without a race.¹⁰ The term encompasses the cultivation of hatred against *the Other*, the result being stigmatization of an allegedly *homogenous* or *monolithic* group. This homogenous block will be then looked upon with fear, since it is argued that it poses a threat to the social majority, which is backed by *proven incidents* of wrongdoing. Based on popular resentments, Islamophobia works with well-spread fear, using it to establish a new concept of the enemy.¹¹

“The creation of an enemy as someone who is attributed with all the negativities of life is a powerful instrument, because of the enemy now functioning as a scapegoat, the stabilization of social boundaries and the strengthening of one’s own position by simultaneously downgrading the other. The mobilization of disgust or anger is, strangely enough, bound to the term ‘moral’. On the one hand, this construction is a function of distancing oneself from the group that is portrayed as *not moral*; on the other hand, it is a resource for understanding one’s own group as morally good.” (Bötticher 2008: 1007)

In one of my earlier articles, I outlined a possible way of developing a useful definition of Islamophobia, by using the phenomenon of anti-Semitism as a paradigm (Bötticher 2008: 1007). A generally accepted definition of anti-Semitism within the German discourse was chosen and

⁹ An interview with professor Benz took place on 3rd June 2009 in Berlin.

¹⁰ The concept has been mainly developed by Etienne Balibar and Stuart Hall.

¹¹ See the full explanation at Benz (not dated).

tested against the phenomenon of Islamophobia, using quotes from PI-News.net.¹² It was shown that in the Islamophobic circle of this blog, there was religiously motivated hatred against Muslims, consisting in the arguments that *they believed in the wrong God*. It was also shown that the Islamic community in Germany had been stigmatized by stating that they all would be criminals, which is a racist view. Statements such as “All Muslims are milking the German Cow” can be identified as socio-political Islamophobia. However, the most interesting result was found in connection with Holocaust. Instead of denying Holocaust, Islamophobes argue that they (and all *Westerners*) will be the victims of an approaching Holocaust, to be committed by Muslims (Bötticher 2008: 1014f). Therefore, a clear hint is given that the Palingenesis-Thesis of Roger Griffin might be not completely wrong, and it could be the case that with the help of this thesis, a new point of resemblance between the different Ideologies has been found, although Griffin has linked the phenomenon of *a new morning* solely with extreme Nationalism. In any case, the conclusion of research on the given material was: “anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are to be marked out by their extreme attitude. Although they have different enemy conceptions underlaid, they function in the same pattern and represent a threat to the liberal Act of Settlement of the State. They both stand against the “ubi bene ibi patria” and do not want an open society. The Moslem is here an absolute Enemy, just like the Jew is in anti-Semitism.” (Bötticher 2008: 1015).

Critical Voices to the Concept

Seyran Ateş who held a speech during the “Political Academy”, organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in December 2008, noted that Islamophobia as a term is used by Muslim advocates in their course of discussions with liberal Muslims. She argued that the term has enough room for interpretation, so that it would be an invitation for misuse. She made a distinction between legitimate *Islamcritique* and illegitimate *Islamophobia*. She stated that: “‘Islamophobia’, understood as negative Picture of Muslims by highlighting the unequal status, discriminates Muslims because of factual, believed or attributed group membership. Because of this, and because of the fact of its instrumentalisation, the term [Islamophobia] is not useful in the discourse about Muslims in Germany.” (Ateş 2008)

¹² It was the definition of anti-Semitism from Armin Pfahl-Traughber. He differentiates seven different kinds of anti-Semitism: The religious anti-Semitism, the social anti-Semitism, the political anti-Semitism, the cultural anti-Semitism, the racist anti-Semitism, new anti-Semitism (denial of Holocaust) and Anti-Zionist anti-Semitism. (Cf. Pfahl-Traughber 2002: 11ff.)

She differentiated between *Islamcritique* and *Islamophobia*. Between these two groups whose only similarity is the general fact of critical attitude, there are many differences. She is, I think, quite close to the truth. Both show a clearly different motivation. While the former aims at helping the process of integration, the latter aims for segregation. While the former has ceased criticising certain interpretation of Quran and Hadiths and does not refer to Muslims as a monolithic block, the latter uses Quran and Hadiths to show that *all* Muslims have no morals,¹³ understanding their immigration and settlement in Germany as a form of occupation. These points, distinguishing between the two streams of thought, can become an interesting subject of future social scientific research in Germany.

Still, the co-existence of the two streams of thought comes at an interesting time, since both sides are uncomfortable with the construction of new mosques and the ensuing emancipation of Muslims in Germany. This also gives us interesting background for a definition of the phenomenon. While the Muslim communities that construct mosques are stating that they are tired of going into some backyard buildings to pray and that they want representative buildings for their community (as there has been only one representative building for the Islamic community in Hamburg so far), the (two) critical streams of thought see their actions as somewhat dubious.¹⁴ The former stream confronts the part of the minority that is rather conservative with a growing self-confidence, by formulating special issues to be discussed (e.g. liberalization). The latter stream of thought fights against the construction of mosques because they feel the minority will have the upper hand: “All liberal and left-wing people have to understand what we, the dissidents and critics of Islam, are doing now. We are trying to stimulate a discussion inside Islam, so that a debate can take place to reform it, and for this purpose, we need support of the majority.” (Ates in Kreuz 2007)

However, it can be stated that the supporters of the use of the term *Islamophobia*, especially members of the scientific community, do not fight against the process of discussion within the minority and affiliates or, as she said, *dissidents*. The scientific community welcomes the process of integration and exchanges of arguments. Doing so clearly shows that there is nothing such as a monolithic bloc.

¹³ Interestingly enough, Sabine Schiffer writes: „Referring to anti-Semitism, it has by now – and also because of the work of the Center for Research on anti-Semitism – come to the point where the rejection-mechanisms of the dominant society against the minority are investigated instead of being correlated with the minority – the Jews. Discussions like this took place in 19th century, when there were continuous attempts to back up anti-Semitism by presenting parts of Thora and Halacha.” (Schiffer 2009: 38)

¹⁴ For Seyran Ateş’s speech see Welt Online 2008.

On another occasion, Ateş does not fully differentiate between the minority within the country and areas where a conservative-interpreted Islam is a major cultural stream (Ateş 2007). This interferes with the take on the development of *Islamophobia* as a majority-minority problem. The argument that slavery, cruel treatment or sexual abuse are wrong acts is clearly the kind of argument that one does not hesitate to back up. The existence of countries where human rights are ignored is a sad fact of this world. And of course, people like Mr. Mutahir use a discourse that is unacceptable and intolerable. However, it does not allow us to fully project those experiences on the Muslim German minority. It would be especially wrong to use this as a proof of failing moral standards of *German Muslims*. The problem of Ateş's description lies in the assumption that there was something like *an* Islamic culture. She presents all kinds of cases (that are really sad, in fact) from all kinds of societies in order to show that Islam poses a threat to civil rights. Albania, Bosnia, Libya, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Emirates and the Philippines are all home to particular cultures, with their own histories, languages and societies. It clearly follows that there are very different understandings and definitions of Islam (e.g. Bosnia and Saudi Arabia). And it seems impossible to transfer such experiences (even though they show that there is a lot of cruelty in this world) to the case of the minority-majority discourse in Germany.

Ateş's suggestion to differentiate between *Islamcritique* and *Islamophobia* should be noted in the scholarly discussion on how to establish meaningful critical categories in the case of Islamophobia.

The socialist scholar Udo Wolter has also made his critical voice heard in this discourse (Wolter 2009). He criticized the fact that the term *racism* is replaced by *Islamophobia*. He claimed that the comparison with anti-Semitism is used in order to give Islamophobia another colour, distinguishing it from *ordinary* racism. While taking a look at the published article "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – A Comparison of Basic Conceptions" (Bötticher 2008: 1007), he notes that the discoveries made by the present author were consequently described as aspects of Islamophobia, instead of showing that these phenomena are clearly "well-known racist resentments".

This is partly right. Islamophobia is a type of racist resentment or xenophobia. It finds its uniqueness in a structure that we find in the anti-Semitism of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Another note can be added: Racism and anti-Semitism are different because ordinary racism is a more biologically grounded form of hatred – it is the hatred against certain bodily features, for instance the colour of the skin, that is combined with certain negative ideas about the character

of the persons having those features. Xenophobia is a fearful hatred against another culture; its existence is not explained by biological features, though it can easily be combined with racism. Anti-Semitism is, in its later forms, clearly an example of a combination of xenophobia and racism. Islamophobia is therefore not to be understood as ordinary racism. There is the added hostility against a foreign culture. It is not argued that Muslims are of the same race; in fact, most Islamophobes reject racism as cruel and unjust – they focus more on cultural membership. Therefore, Islamophobia needs to be understood as a subtype of xenophobia.

Wolter's greatest concern, that the *equalization* of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is a threatening process in the rationalization of anti-Semitism, also needs to be commented upon. Comparison is not equalization. Learning about certain structures of resentment always includes also an attempt to rationalize the development of hatred and rejection. The process of rationalization does not necessarily mean a wholly disinterested look at dead bodies that have been the results of numerous acts by spiteful fanatics; rationalizing means constructing models and theories and providing for a further understanding of hatred, which may help us to prevent further killings, as well as to understand the big question "What happened?" in front of the mass of dead bodies that have been killed by such political groups.

Wolter states: "While the resentments against Muslims are mostly based on sweeping generalizations about things that *really* exist (such as Islamic terrorist attacks or Islam-based oppression of women and homophobia), modern anti-Semitism, as I said, is based on fictitious accusations of a world conspiracy and disintegration, functioning, therefore, even without any Jews present, e.g. in countries where there are almost none" (Wolter 2009: 17).

Here, Wolter does not differentiate between political extremists and Muslims in general. We need to focus on research into possible threats posed by Islamists, which means political extremists of whatever kind. This is a security issue that is not new. And there is a good response to the threat of terror of all kinds in Germany. There is a special police force that has been set up after the Olympic Games in Munich, we have *Verfassungsschutz* – an intelligence service that works in defence of the constitution – as well as the BND (Federal Intelligence Service). Furthermore, there is a body of scientific research into the mental dispositions of fanatics (Hole 2004).¹⁵

Stating that Islamophobia has not already integrated the idea of a world conspiracy is simply wrong, as an earlier article of mine points out (Bötticher 2008).

¹⁵ There is a broader initiative in the research on extremism in a biographical perspective at FTE (Forschungsstelle Terrorismus, Extremismus – Joint Research Center on Terrorism and Extremism) going on, just to mention two interesting events on the scientific scene.

We also have to put emphasis on the problems of Muslim anti-Semitism, homophobia and women's rights. Yet, there is no evidence as to why it should be implied that those problems are *especially* Islamic. German men that are not Muslims beat up their women as well, just as in any other part of the world within any culture – which does not actually make the problem any smaller. Cruel treatment of women is a problem of patriarchal societies, not merely one of Islam. Homophobia is the expression of another minority-majority relationship; it is the rejection of homosexuals, explained by homophobes in a number of ways. It is not specific to Islam; in fact, we can find rejection of homosexuality in Catholicism and also in other contexts, where such hatred is based rather on biological arguments. Insinuating that all Muslim women wearing a scarf are discriminated against is a remark that does not need to be commented on any further, and there are already serious publications on the problem of Islamic anti-Semitism available (Wetzel, Benz 2007). We can cite here a very unambiguous statement by Barack Obama, addressing the hijab discussion: “Likewise, it is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear. We cannot disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretence of liberalism.”¹⁶

Also, Wolter does not differentiate clearly enough between Islamic scholars and politicians.¹⁷ There is no similarity between people such as Mutahir (who has stirred up anti-Semitic feelings and plays a questionable role in defining an Islamic identity against “the Other” – an approach that can also be seen on the Iranian side, since they try to reach common ground with Sunni communities by using Israel as common enemy) and Mark Terkessidis (who stated that there is an identifiable transfer of anti-Semitic stereotypes to Muslims). We should acknowledge that they do not share the same views.

Research into Islamophobia that uses anti-Semitism as one of its instruments can get an applause from quarters it would not side with, yet it can be easily shown that the two are based on different assumptions. While, for instance, the Center for Research on anti-Semitism clearly points out that both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have identical structure, when we have a look at anti-Semitism well before 1930s, we can see that the promoters of a clash of civilizations

¹⁶ Barack Obama “A New Beginning” speech at Cairo University (Egypt) on 4th June 2009.

¹⁷ „Werner Schiffauer stated some time ago that anti-Semitism is replaced by massive anti-Islamism; Von Barun/Mathes even argues, just like Mark Terkessidis, that anti-Semitic stereotypes have been transferred to Muslims. Sadly enough, the Center for Research on anti-Semitism from TU Berlin participates in backing up these claims. This claim is getting picked up by Islamic politicians like OIC – General Secretary Ihsanoglu, who stated that ‘Islamophobia’ comes near to the level of anti-Semitism in the 1930s (Wolter 2009: 17).

on the Islamic side present the situation as if there was a huge threat to Muslims in Germany, just like there was in the 1930s for the Jews. This is clearly not to be taken seriously and, in fact, promoters of the scientific comparison state that it is not.¹⁸

Conclusion

The usage of the term Islamophobia cannot hold up without some kind of valid conceptualization. Therefore, the Center for Research on anti-Semitism needs to be criticized for their decreasing interest in working out concepts. Contrary to the claims made by Prof. Dr. Benz, it can be clearly shown that discussions about scientific terms are in fact discussions about their contents. If we focus on the arguments of the opponents of public discussion, we easily get to talk about contents.

There are clearly a number of points to discuss. We need to talk about a theoretical conception that differentiates sufficiently between those groups that wish to live together with Muslims and accept them as part of the German society, and those that do not. We also need to state clearly that wherever criticism is used in order to merely bash Islam and the cultures that have been formed by it, we have encountered an instance of Islamophobia. We need to put an emphasis on the instruments and techniques used, in order to show that *a particular group has particular qualities*. The use of parts of Quran without any knowledge of the context, or with the clear intention to define Muslim groups as evil has to be taken into account in further research. We must discuss how racism and Islamophobia fit together, and how we can answer the question whether Islamophobia is just another form of racism. Doing so will facilitate progress in the theory of enemy images.

We can already draw some conclusions that may help answer some of the questions raised above. First of all, we are able to differentiate between Islamophobes and Islam-critics. Islam-critics, as presented in this article, are people who have Islamic roots; however, they have been fully integrated in the German society and articulate the claim that others may follow their example. In general, Islam-critique is a plea for integration, expressed by anyone wishing for different cultures to live peacefully together.

We need to be critical though, as this group presents texts structurally not very different from those of the Islamophobes; they pile up evil acts committed by real or imagined members of Islamic communities and define them as Islamic. This group is hiding behind western liberal values in order to voice unreasonable demands, such as asking women to remove their hijab.

¹⁸ See the interview with Wolfgang Benz above.

Telling people what clothes to wear is illiberal, however. Naturally, we also need to mention that the interpretation of Islam, according to which women have to wear hijab, is not liberal either. One needs to strike a reasonable compromise between these two positions.

We need to acknowledge that the intentions of this group are commendable – they attempt to find ways of reaching a cultural compromise in order to establish peace. However, it seems clear that these intentions do not get sufficient support by actions such as formulating the demand to prohibit the hijab, since this only feeds the Islamic picture of a freedom-promising Germany that is in fact fascist – which it clearly is not. However, the very intention to solve the problems of living together is a criterion which can be used to differentiate between these groups.

On the contrary, Islamophobes can be depicted as promoters of an idea of general conflict that cannot be resolved. They do not intend to find a compromise that fits all the interests of the parties concerned; they just demand that Muslims be transferred back to their countries (while denying the fact that Germany is their home country). Their intention is segregation.

Therefore, intentions serve here as the main criterion for differentiation.

There needs to be further discussion about the question whether we can actually differentiate between these groups on the basis of their intentions. Are their intentions a criterion solid enough to be used in future research, or do we need to take into account the mechanism of piling up negativities and interpret them as Islamic?

How did other scholars act in similar situations? What if the actions are comparable, but the intentions are clearly different?

The first question leads us to the question whether we can accept a structure of argument that enumerates evil acts all around the world, or more precisely, mentions a somewhat problematic existence of something in all parts of the world, and transfers it to a nationally defined conflict between a majority and a minority. It is clear that the practice of piling up negative images can create a feeling of urgency, so that there is greater hope of answering certain needs formulated earlier. However, it is also clear that hastiness may provoke anger in the followers of Islam. The pattern of thought may seem spectacular; however, when applied to another case, it is easy to see why it would not work in the end. We would not look at teacher-student relationships in India, Bangladesh, Jerusalem, Barcelona and Hamburg in order to formulate an agenda of student needs at Humboldt University in Berlin – hoping that in this way, the society will understand the urgency of the demands made at Humboldt-University and follow with corresponding measures. This strategy only creates anger – both in the followers and the

accused. It does not lead to a process of integration of special needs. In order to formulate certain demands, we instead have to look at the particular area where the conflict occurs. We need to understand the boundaries of the conflict. Therefore, the students at Humboldt University should rather write down all the negative points concerning their university and formulate a list of demands.

The second problem is the problem of who is the audience of these addresses. As noted earlier, one cannot address *the* Muslim minority in Germany since it is not a monolithic group; in fact, for a number of years, they have been unable to establish an association that might speak for all the Muslim communities in Germany. A sufficiently formed argument should not merely name a problem defined by the boundaries of the conflict, but it should also name specific parts of the whole. It seems inappropriate to stress the need for changes without looking at who these changes refer to. It is a specific part of the group that we need to speak to, since this group is not monolithic.

The ways the demands are expressed in a dispute also have great impact on the ensuing debate, because it influences our listeners. The willingness to enter into a conflict, as Quackenbush explains while discussing conflicts between states, is still an important criterion for comparison.¹⁹ The willingness to enter into a conflict with the Muslim minority in Germany is limited in the case of Islamcritique, since this group does not favour the option of segregating Muslims, but rather opts for dialogue. Different goals can lead to different classifications.

The second question – how to work with groups whose intentions are different but which act in a similar manner – can be answered when looking at the definition of extremism. There, we find a whole variety of groups with different intentions acting in the same way – using violence in order to reach their objectives. In this case, the actions carried out become the main criteria for including different groups under the heading “extremist” or related terms, such as “terrorist”.²⁰ Within the concept of extremism, there is also the possibility of acknowledging the objectives of different groups and differentiating among them using these objectives (e.g. Islamism, extreme nationalism, Marxism-Leninism etc.).

¹⁹ „Opportunity is essentially the ‘possibility for militarized conflict between two states’, while willingness refers to the ‘desire by two states to engage in militarized conflict’. In order for states in a dyad to become involved in an international conflict, they must have both the opportunity and willingness to fight.” (Quackenbush 2006: 38)

²⁰ „Die eingesetzten Mittel sind es, nicht die verfolgten Ziele und auch nicht der politische Kontext einer Gruppe, anhand derer man festmachen kann, ob es sich um eine Terrorbewegung handelt oder nicht.“ [It is the criteria in question – rather than the political context or the objectives pursued – that help us define whether a movement is terrorist or not.] (Richardson 2007: 31)

Different goals can again lead to different classifications, such as *radical* or *extremist*. Here, it can be noted that clues for classification can be found by looking at the problem-solving models presented by the groups in question.

Both mechanisms and desires have a great impact; therefore, they should be taken into consideration.

The differences between Islam-critique and Islamophobia seem to be relevant, since they offer a varied picture of the opponents of an evolving Islamic culture within the German nation. The comparative method is a useful tool in social sciences; comparing different forms of hostility may lead to interesting outcomes, giving us clues as to the possible ways of dealing with violence towards minorities.

Appendix: Interview with Wolfgang Benz²¹

You took part in a conference with the title “Enemy Image Muslim, Enemy Image Jew”. Can you describe the reactions that had taken place before the conference started?

“Upon the announcement of the conference, a storm of outrage followed by people who thought that my attendance was totally unacceptable. However, it had been proven quickly that these people were no scholars. They were actors on the political scene, with a single-minded determination of objectives and sympathies. They broke out in a strident outcry and claimed, ‘this is not allowed; the Center of Research of anti-Semitism may not engage in studying modern forms of Islamic criticism or hatred of Islam; its sole duty is to do research into anti-Semitism’. They apparently had not understood that the Center is a university-based academic institute, and not an agency for or against Israel.”

There are political activists that have a very critical perspective of Islam and Muslims. These activists also hold conferences and publish books. What is their relationship with scientific research?

“I believe these people give no serious attention to science whatsoever. Those scholars who can be persuaded to join the activists’ campaigns and whose views are favourable are good scientists for them. Others are then described as no scientists at all, or bad scientists. These political activists do not have any interest in cognitive understanding, which is a feature of science. They have their political goals, they employ the rhetoric of combat, and they have a Manichean worldview – there are only foes and friends and nothing else in between. They are not interested in gaining knowledge, they merely want to achieve their political aims.”

²¹ Interview between Astrid Bötticher and Wolfgang Benz held at Technical University on 3rd June 2009.

There is Udo Ulfkotte, for instance, who used only parts of Dr. Michael Blume's lecture and made the scholar's results fit into his own perspective. Dr. Blume defended himself on his personal webpage and published the results there. Do you see yourself only as one scientist whose work has been abused?

“I have not yet realized anything like that. Maybe my results or what I publish cannot be used to fit in such simplistic worldviews.”

There are voices in the debate that challenge the existence of Islamophobia. What is your answer to that?

“The phenomenon of hostility towards Islam cannot be disputed; you really would have to close your eyes to do so. When you monitor the social debate or look at serious newspapers (as well as the more tabloid ones) and there you learn what happens with projects of construction of mosques – in Berlin, Cologne and elsewhere – you cannot say, with a clear conscience, that there is no such phenomenon as Islam-hatred. The phenomenon is not as widespread as in France, but it is on the rise. This was the reason we dealt with this social phenomenon in December 2008.”

Others criticize the term Islamophobia, but acknowledge that there is a wave of racially motivated attacks both in communication and writing. They plead for the term Islam-critique, also because they see Islamophobia as a discursive weapon used by promoters of Islam, in order to silence the critics that stand against a certain interpretation. What relationship do you have with the kind of critics who become a face of this movement, such as Seyran Ateş?

“I do not have any relationship with them, because I stand really apart from this ‘war of terms’, in fact I do not understand it. I use the term Islamophobia not in order to annoy anybody, though there is a certain number of people who become agitated when the term is used. With them you could speak solely about the definition of the term – it will be a three-hour discussion and you will never agree on its substance. I tried to make a point at the conference, saying that you may call it what you want – Islam-critique, Islamophobia or Islam-hatred. That is totally a peripheral issue. I can only roll my eyes when somebody says, ‘whoever uses the term Islamophobia is a denier of Holocaust’. I cannot take this anymore. I do not understand what that is for – just not to get to speak about the substance, that is for sure.”

Is there an attempt to distinguish between the two scenes? I mean on the one hand, there is the racist-ridden Islamophobic scene, and on the other hand, there are modernizers of religion. What kinds of criteria are imaginable when considering these two?

“That is not my field of interest. One must look deep into Islamic scholarship in order to find out about the debates within this area. For me as a scholar researching anti-Semitism – and that was my reason for attending the conference – it is interesting that there are similar mechanisms employed in order to exclude very different minorities. Yes, I do believe there are. There was the

historically older, religiously motivated hostility towards Jews that accused them by stating, ‘your religion is evil, bad and wrong and it has been proven with citations of Talmud’. Nowadays, I take notice every time people use citations from Koran to prove that every Muslim is a bad human being, because he is affiliated with an evil religion. Whoever does not accept the fact that different minorities get attacked using the very same mechanism, is not open to science and its evidence and merely wants to create a hostile image.”

In your latest publication “Islam Hatred and Its Contexts”, which mainly documents the conference that was attacked so viciously earlier, you use anti-Semitism as a paradigm. Interestingly enough, you make comparisons with figures such as Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Grattenauer, Johann Andreas Eisenmeyer, August Robling and Christian Frank. All these people lived in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries...

“The three are classical figures of anti-Semitism. I mentioned them in my opening speech at the conference, because using them as an example, you can demonstrate easily the extent of what happens when we read some books with prejudice, in this case Talmud, and exploit it in order to find citations that can be used against a minority. Using this approach, we can easily construct evidence that this particular minority is dangerous for us and that we had better be afraid. I have just tried to show that we – in this new literature about Islam – find the same structures; somebody picks into Quran to show, ‘Hey, here I’ve got a passage!’ However, he does not understand anything about Quran – he only picks into Quran with a needle to find those parts. The structure is the same, it functions just like the saying, ‘All Irish have red hair – I saw an Irish person once’. Somebody gathers such details and proudly shows his evidence around, explaining from this moment on that all Muslims are devils and we should be afraid of them. The motto is, ‘Danger for Europe because of Islam’. That is the reason why I used the classics of anti-Semitism to show the mechanism at work. It is a mechanism created to stigmatize minorities.”

Can you already sum up the findings of the comparative research?

“The research has already started and we will need about three more years to get definite conclusions. The conference was supposed to be the first step in the direction of articulating a social problem that needs to be focused on scientifically. That is our work now.”

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