

THE PHENOMENON OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE MODERN EUROPEAN CULTURES

Basem Al Atom

Dr. , Jordan, basematom2000@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of my research is to examine Islamophobia in the western cultures, to analyze it and to minimize the fear of Islam which may cause clashes between civilizations.

The growth of Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism, has been dramatic throughout Europe and North America in recent years. There have been increased attacks on Muslims, on their mosques and community centers, and a series of laws targeting Muslims have been passed especially after 9/11 .

Theories espousing a 'clash of civilizations' have become more widespread, and Muslims have become synonymous in the eyes of some politicians and the press with 'extremists' and 'terrorists'. Now, Muslims are expected to apologize for any act of terrorism or wrong doing carried out by other Muslims, regardless of how unrepresentative of Muslims such actions are.

Arabs in TV and movies are portrayed as either bombers, in reference to Arab men being portrayed as terrorist or as wealthy oilmen and Arab women being portrayed as sex objects.

This kind of phobia does not just cause psychological harm (culture, insult) but also helps feed into actions that are physically harmful by dehumanizing a group first before attacking it.

These representations, which have been historically and predominantly negative, often have adverse repercussions for Arab Europeans and Muslims in daily interactions and in current events.

In order to minimize such phenomenon we as intellectuals suggest :

- The creation of institutions on reducing the impact of Islamophobia that approach diversity and promote an understanding of both the cultures, the East and the West.
- Encouraging the West to visit / encounter the Arab World and learn more about their culture.
- Academicians should work on the removal of this fear.

Keywords: Islamophobia, extremists, civilizations, racism

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia defined as an unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs...'

The Runnymede Trust identifies eight components, characterizing Islam as:

- static, and unresponsive to change;
- having differing values from other cultures and religions;
- being inferior to Western societies;
- barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist, violent, aggressive, threatening, supporting terrorism, and clashing with Western civilization;

- an ideology used for political or military advantage;
- irrationally criticizing Western values;
- warranting discriminatory practices that exclude Muslims from mainstream society; and
- believing anti-Muslim hostility is natural and norm.

Islamophobia can be discussed in the arena of politics, culture and economic power in relation to a particular agenda, which relies on an 'ideological worldview'.

This phobic picture of faith can be given to all religions and faiths—today Islam, tomorrow Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. Religio-phobic policy potentially can be a political force for clash of civilizations, marginalization of 'other' civilizations and domination of a mono-centric culture and civilization overwhelming others.

2. ACTS POST 9/11

The aftermath of the September 11 attacks in which 15 of the 19 hijackers were of Saudi Arabian origin and all were of Muslim faith, Arabs and Muslims complained of increased scrutiny and racial profiling at airports.

In a poll conducted by the Boston Globe, 71 percent of Blacks and 57 percent of Whites believed that "Arabs and Arab-Americans should undergo special, more intensive security checks before boarding airplanes.

3. MEDIA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

The problem with the media is that it was, and still is, not ready to handle this issue. Many western publications have a historically orientalist approach full of stereotypes. They depict Muslims with clothes and beards reminiscent of bloody images. When one looks at the way Prophet Mohammed was depicted in western plays in the past, the way the Ottomans were portrayed in magazine cartoons, or how Muslims are still depicted on some church walls, one can see the historical perception and how the stereotypes about Muslims were perpetuated in the arts and media.

The problem with the media today is a structural one. Papers publish what sells and what will pull the audience in, like everything else. They first cover physical conflicts and only then political conflicts. In dealing with Muslims, the media focuses on extremism. Extremism is indeed important and dangerous and it exists in many different religions, but its presence in the Muslim world is scarce, perhaps one percent. The problem is that, in its coverage of the Muslims, the western media always focuses on extremist events.

Arabs in TV and movies are portrayed as either **bombers, belly dancers, or billionaires** in reference to Arab men being portrayed as terrorist or as wealthy oilmen and Arab women being portrayed as sex objects. Cartoons have been insulting to Arab and Muslims and how the people who live in the US and interact with its community are the most affected by these stereotypes because they will be treated differently at many points.

4. SECURITY AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

We might ask 'what is happening in Europe?' Has the politics of Europe been taken hostage by politicians who have forgotten the results of the Holocaust in Europe and who are trying to gain political power through hate speeches against minorities? In this case, the power of fear is an important factor. These politicians are spreading fear in their society about Muslims, pointing to them as the source of almost every social and economic problem. Politicians and states are trying to present Muslim communities as a security issue. The meaning of security has changed over time. It is no longer limited to the protection of the state and its national boundaries or to a military threat. Now the term goes beyond these limits, instead being related to several different issues such as immigration, ethnic/religious revival, identity claims and even supranational entities.

Islamophobia is above all a civil rights issue as well as a religious one. It consists of a specific hostility towards Islam and Muslims. The fact that Muslims are visible in society, with their prayers, practices of morality, lifestyles or clothes, is unacceptable for some. This is where the real test for a meaningful acceptance and tolerance begins. Many examples explicitly reveal: efforts to ban Halal slaughter, placing fines on the wearing of the burka,

the provocative speeches of some politicians such as Geert Wilders, the cartoon crisis, pressures on NGOs, the minaret ban in Switzerland, foster care agencies which are sometimes used as a tool for assimilation, the 15 Euro tax for animal sacrifices in Belgium, as well as discriminatory acts in some schools and companies. The Council of Europe and the OSCE have documented these issues. So have NGOs such as EMISCO (the European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion), chaired by the former UN special rapporteur on racism, which have published extensive reports.

Suggestions:

Moral Efforts:

- Thoughts corrupt language, language can also corrupt thoughts.
- A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should know better.
George Orwell

Recommendations

- The creations of institutions/centers on reducing the impact of such phobia that approach diversity of cultures and religions and promote an understanding of both the cultures, the East and the West.
- Encouraging the Wests to visit/ encounter the Arab world and learn more about their culture
- Academicians in colleges and institutes should work on the removal of the Islamophobic discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

Theories espousing a 'clash of civilizations' have become more widespread, and Muslims have become synonymous in the eyes of some politicians and the press with 'extremists' and 'terrorists'.

Now, Muslims are expected to apologize for any act of terrorism or wrong doing carried out by other Muslims, regardless of how unrepresentative of Muslims such actions are.

The final removal of Islamophobic discourse requires a reorientation of the power relationship between Arab Muslim nations and Europe, one which respects the right of the Arab and Muslim people.

If there's less or no political and economic hegemony planned or exerted by the western countries over the Middle East then a hatred Muslim act would begin to disappear.