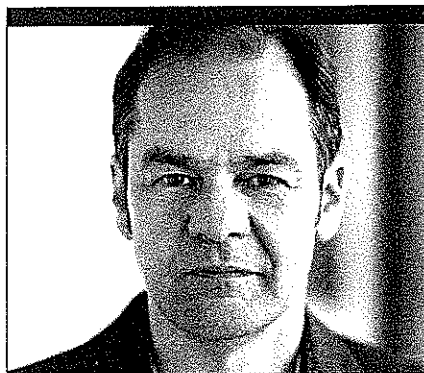


Liberty, equality and intolerance The classical liberal credo of freedom of opinion and liberties has not prevented Europe's public spheres and lifeworlds from becoming hotbeds of cultural struggle; nor has it led to intracultural solidarity within them. Only a minority recognize non-European cultures and religions, particularly Islam, as part of contemporary European culture. What can be done to combat this? *By Kai Hafez*



One of the key problems facing liberal democracies in Europe today is that Islamophobic attitudes – which may be considered a specific form of racism – are extremely common in bourgeois society. The generally inclusive character of the political system and the basically positive attitude of majorities and minorities towards the political system have not, unfortunately, brought about the kind of social peace we might have hoped for. Beneath the patina of loyalty to the system and the apparent stability of political systems, conflicts smoulder between Europe's Muslims and non-Muslims. If the majority do not believe that a

minority is loyal to the constitution and are convinced that this minority is completely unwilling to integrate socially and adapt culturally, and if this minority generally feel discriminated against, then we are living in an unstable and fear-ridden society.

In present-day Europe, constructs of the 'enemy' are booming and extend far into bourgeois society. Though only a minority are open about their racism, the greater part of the majority society believe that Islam is more violent than Christianity and/or incompatible with Western values and Western culture. Everyday discrimination is not inevitable but it is certainly a widespread reaction. Islamophobic violence is relatively rare but it is a problem that exists throughout Europe, despite the fact that there is as yet little public recognition of this fact.

The turning point for images of Islam was not the attacks of 11 September 2001 but the Iranian revolution of 1978/1979. Here the latent Islamophobia inherent in Europe's cultural legacy was reanimated through the politicization of a fundamentalist movement. The attacks of 2001 did little to alter the substance of the image of Islam, but they were of crucial importance

to the approach taken towards Islam within Western society. They massively bolstered the notion of Islam as the 'enemy' among right-wing populist parties, increased discrimination and led to violence towards Muslims. There are certain differences in the perception of Islam in specific European countries. A fundamental Islamophobia is widespread in Central Europe, while it is present in a somewhat attenuated form in Western Europe.

Public constructions of Islam in Europe show clear signs of collective perceptual extremism: they are highly selective, sloganeering, disparaging and marked by a radical mentality. To describe these negative images of Islam as 'racist' is justified in that what we see today is a racism 'without races', whose key differentiating criterion is not so much physical characteristics as affiliation to a particular culture or religion. So far, most Europeans and the major media have managed not to relapse into genetic racism. Cultural racism, meanwhile, is not even regarded as racism and is generally trivialized.

It is only this restructuring of concepts of the enemy that has made it possible for a majority of contemporary Europeans to claim that they are not racist, to openly denounce anti-Semitism while at the same time cul-

tivating negative prejudices towards Islam and Muslims. Through this interplay, Islamophobia has become a kind of politically correct, respectable form of prejudice, whose reach extends far into bourgeois circles. Far from representing an extreme and radical element, this is a component of European popular culture.

It is true that the Islamophobia of the majority is not necessarily intentional, and it does not necessarily find expression in everyday discrimination or Islamophobic violence. But there is more than enough evidence to suggest that far-right Islamophobic perpetrators of violence regard such prejudices as the driving force behind their actions. In this sense, bourgeois society has an at least indirect responsibility for Islamophobic attacks of the kind we have seen all over Europe, with murderous attacks in Germany and Norway. Given that popular images of Islam are a powerful source of xenophobia, the deeds of individuals are everyone's responsibility.

Academic scholarship can have no interest in making knee-jerk criticisms of the majority for their 'racism' and of minorities for a 'refusal to integrate'. The imperative is to produce a nuanced assessment of the attitudes and behaviours of Muslims and non-Muslims. Islamophobia is clearly more common than any fundamental aversion to Western culture and the Christian religion among Europe's Muslims. This sense that there is an asymmetry of cultural perception is quite explainable. It is congruent with the power gap that exists between the two groups in Europe. Similar resentment is of-

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ten felt towards autochthonous religious minorities in the Islamic world. The existence of cultural hegemony in modern immigrant societies is an unresolved problem across the world. Despite its liberal-democratic political framework, Europe is no exception here.

Not every image of the enemy is unjustified. Some enemies are real. Certain sections of Europe's Muslim population do in fact exhibit high levels of criminality, educational shortcomings and signs of economic deprivation. None of these problems should be dismissed even if we are critical of the concept of 'integration'. From the perspective of the liberal-democratic theory of politics and society, we must make a sharp division between minimal political, economic and cultural requirements of immigrants and the freedom to be different within a pluralist society, a freedom both intended and generated by the system.

But the problems currently faced by many immigrants do touch on the foundations of social solidarity, such that policies of integration and recognition must be fused together. We must remember that all the empirical studies show that the integration problems of Muslims in Europe have very little to do with the religion of Islam. Statistically, it is quite clear that it is not religious affiliation and not even the degree of religiosity that is decisive but rather immigrants' social background, which is in turn often linked with their regional origins. The sociodemographic structure of Turkish immigration to Germany, for example, is quite different from Arab and Iranian immigration. Arab immigration to France, on the

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other hand, is quite different from that to Germany. Iranians and many Arabs in Germany exhibit very high levels of integration. Even within socially deprived strata, often of Turkish origin, there are many different aspects to integration.

Despite the problems that exist, there is absolutely no cause for social alarmism or excessive fears of 'parallel societies'. Furthermore, Muslims as a whole not only exhibit a high degree of trust in the political and social system of the European states, but extremist political views are no more common than in the rest of society. There is absolutely no reason for culturalization or Islamophobia.

A large number of publications have appeared dealing with tolerance and recognition from a theoretical perspective. But the views expressed in this literature are rarely connected with the theory of liberal democracy. This weakness of liberal thought has been criticized by other theoretical schools. In the United States, much of this criticism has come from communitarianism, which ultimately includes 'multicultural nationalism'. It seems implausible that we might create a society based on positive tolerance in which multicultural ideals of community prevail on the basis of liberal theory's demands for negative toleration.

If we look at racism, regardless of the ideological and power-political guidelines set

by the political system, a large number of causal complexes lie hidden deep within the societal structures of modernity. The dearth of intercultural contact, global educational deficiencies, social deprivation and the exclusion of immigrants will not be resolved solely through a liberal theory of politics. The question we must face is how the meta-values of tolerance and recognition can be cemented without regressing to traditional group ideologies and artificial forms of Islamization, which provide the raw material for modern ethno-religious constructs of the enemy. Modern recognition within the multicultural society entails acceptance of the other as well as rejection of ways of thinking and behaving that are incompatible with human rights and the liberal principle of democracy. This form of recognition is open to conflict and dialogue-intensive. So far, the discourse of recognition and tolerance has largely remained an annex to constitutional debates. For the most part, however, the problems we are faced with in liberal democracy and the battle against Islamophobia cannot be solved by the legal and political system alone:

Habitual-cultural defensive responses

Value deficiencies: there is a pronounced connection between Islamophobia and authoritarian, dogmatic values, particularly in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom. Values of religious freedom are certainly widespread, but in Europe – in clear contrast to

the United States – they have not been fused with the values of an immigrant society and seemed to be limited to the Christian, and perhaps Jewish, religion.

Social deprivation: Islamophobia is partly dependent on socioeconomic factors. It is to some extent 'determined by the economy' in much the same way as the anti-Semitism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it would be reductive to regard Islamophobia as a consequence of poverty, because what matters is relative deprivation. Any trends towards middle-class decline reinforce habitual-cultural defensive responses among members of this group. Cultural distinction and the cultural rejection of 'others' are a key characteristic of this new middle class. Furthermore, we should not overlook the fact that socioeconomic crises tend to reinforce rather than trigger Islamophobia, which has also existed during periods of economic boom.

Lack of intercultural contact: while Muslims are often accused of failing to integrate socially, many non-Muslim citizens of Europe do nothing to cultivate contact with Muslims and consciously keep their distance, which is a significant factor in maintaining stereotypes and prejudices. Regardless of their growing numbers and immediate presence in local spaces, Muslims often remain the 'absent other'.

Eurocentric education: education is generally believed to diminish racism. With regard to Islamophobia, there is evidence of a positive influence of a high level of formal education, though even among educated people Islamophobia remains much stronger

than anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. European democracy seems stable yet European societies exhibit a high degree of xenophobia and Islamophobia. This is partly bound up with the failures of the political system and legal system. In their key spheres of activity, namely the legislative, executive and judicial branches, they have made major progress towards achieving legal equality for Islam. But there are major deficiencies in their ideological development and this influences how societies' core, shared values are defined. Other manifestations of Islamophobia, however, show that the political system is not solely and perhaps not even chiefly responsible for Islamophobia. In addition to the responsibility of each individual, several functional systems of society that might help resolve the problem of racism exhibit major deficiencies. In general, the less subsystems have to perform state and constitutional functions, the greater their shortcomings.

The problems of Islamophobia and discrimination are highly pronounced in the media – the mass media and the Internet – and in the private economy. The overall state of play in the academy and schools is somewhat better. Not all fields, however, have been adequately researched. Nonetheless, the major problems of Islamophobia today do not lie in the field of political control, but in the fields of values, knowledge and communication within modern society.

The political system of liberal democracy has two key characteristics: the liberal constitutional state and democratic sovereignty. The highest principle of the constitutional

state is equal treatment. Secularism means the equality of the individual before the law. Other aspects of secularism such as the separation of religion and politics or the 'privatization' of religion, which amounts to the withdrawal of religion from the public into the private sphere, are secondary. The relationship between liberal law and democracy is conflictual, since in reality democracy embodies the principle of hegemony.

Therefore democratic majorities intervene in much of Central and Northern Europe. What we see in these states is a belated adaptation to the requirements of immigration. It is also apparent that the European Union has strengthened cultural pluralism. Islamic organizations are given a hearing in Brussels, and the antidiscrimination laws that have now been introduced in Europe have to a large extent been at the instigation of European policymakers.

Overall, European national governments and policies formulated in Brussels are clearly playing an increasing role as immigrants' guardians, protecting them against discrimination in society. This is evident, for example, in the many statements by heads of state over the last few years and decades promoting the idea of Islam as part of Europe, as well as in state-run conferences on Islam and state advisory committees.

Leading European politicians still make statements critical of Islam as representatives of their parties or the official opposition, but ministers, heads of government and above all representative heads of state tend to deploy an inclusive rhetoric. At least on the level of symbolic politics, this is consonant with

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the requirements of the multicultural liberal constitutional state. Taking power at the state level thus has a 'civilizing' effect. State policies of tolerance in Europe continue to make their presence felt.

Whilst policies of recognition have made progress, the field of internal security has faced new challenges, above all since the attacks of 11 September 2001. Combating terrorism through dragnet policing and searching of non-suspects in their homes and mosques is not just a danger to the liberties of Muslims, but to the liberal order itself. European governments sometimes cross the line between legitimate defensive measures and institutional discrimination. Vital distinctions such as that between violent and nonviolent Islamic fundamentalists are ignored.

Collective characteristics as a criterion for prosecution

In much the same way as in the United States, collective characteristics such as actual or alleged affiliation to Islam become criteria of prosecution (ethnic profiling), which is an infringement of human rights and allowed by European courts only if there are very strong grounds for suspicion. On the whole, from the perspective of the liberal theory of democracy, state policies on Islam are ambivalent. Executive policies will re-

main susceptible to discrimination against Muslims as long as there is no comprehensive multicultural consensus among the political class at the level of political parties and ideologies. The legislative sphere in particular, however, finds itself exposed to increasing pressure from right-wing populist parties and an Islamophobia that extends deep into the heart of bourgeois society.

State and society encounter and intersect one another in the political culture, made up of political attitudes, values and norms, which are often more important than institutional systems. Unless the values of liberal democracy are lived by the people, no political system is capable of maintaining a corresponding order. Values exist on a number of different levels, from religious, metaphysical convictions through individual lifestyles to the norms of social and political coexistence, but only the latter are included in the liberal theory of democracy. Liberal orders aspire to facilitate diversity in the field of religious conviction and lifestyle, but in return they demand an integrative consensus on basic political values. And Muslims in Germany do in fact exhibit high levels of trust in the state.

So is the sphere of political values problem-free? It may be a shortcoming of classical liberal theory that multicultural recognition occurs only indirectly – via a general tolerance for different lifestyles within the framework of constitutions and laws. Paradoxically, a sense of community is generated through the recognition of difference, and here difference is understood essentially as a basic attitude rather than as an obligation

to establish a dialogue between minorities and majorities.

So in liberal systems community values do not come about by dealing with others, but through – shared – loyalty towards a third party, namely the constitution. It is no great surprise, then, that a high level of trust in the system among minorities and majorities in Europe goes hand-in-hand with mutual distrust. This represents a major gulf in values, and there is a risk of rupture between the inclinations of European political systems and European societies. To recall the slogan coined in the French Revolution: the majority of citizens have internalized the goals of 'liberty and equality', but 'fraternity', in the sense of a feeling of multicultural solidarity and togetherness, is not widespread. What Rosemarie Sackmann has said about the Netherlands probably applies to much of Europe: "politics has focused on the integration of immigrants while neglecting the integration of the indigenous population".

After the Second World War, Europe created political and economic systems that served as role models all over the world – but the cultural development of its majority societies did not keep pace with these changes.

The notion propagated by liberals such as the English historian Timothy Garton Ash that we must tolerate Islamophobia because freedom of opinion means people must be allowed to express such views is legitimate. But the classical liberal credo of freedom of opinion and liberties has not prevented Europe's public spheres and lifeworlds from becoming hotbeds of cultural struggle; nor has it led to

intracultural solidarity within them. Only a minority recognize non-European cultures and religions, particularly Islam, as part of contemporary European culture.

The dangers that can arise from such a situation are apparent in the many parallels with the European anti-Semitism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rapidly advancing legal emancipation of Jews was not matched by respect for Judaism within society. When Judeophobia began to gain ground within political parties in Weimar Germany, increasing numbers of Jews began to realize that they were facing an existential threat. Like the anti-Semitism of the past, Islamophobia is currently spreading within the European party system. As in the past, some observers have already noted the looming rupture between the political system and society. They worry about the stability of political systems in Europe. But there is a difference between the present and the situation in Weimar, and it may be decisive. It is not the established parties that are becoming more Islamophobic. Instead new populist parties are forming on the extreme right wing, which are profiting from the tensions between system and society and offer citizens a pro-system political platform for political racism. Whether this will help stabilize the system of liberal democracy, however, is as yet unclear. Right-

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wing populism may be just the beginning of the gradual erosion of liberal democracy, the start of a transformation culminating in a populist radical democracy or authoritarian systems. There are anti-Islamophobic networks in Europe but they can scarcely be described as strong.

Since Islamophobia is a phenomenon present in many fields of bourgeois society, even in left-wing and intellectual circles, such networks often have great difficulty in mobilizing people. To the extent that racism is becoming embedded in the bourgeoisie, anti-fascism will have to find new approaches, while major social institutions such as trade unions also need to step up their efforts.

Culturalization of the discourse

Some, of course, might suggest that democracies at present are more stable than in the Weimar period and that Europe's Muslims therefore face no real danger. Meta-values such as 'freedom' seem more firmly anchored than ever; political systems appear more solid than in any other period in European history. So we would be well advised to be cautious about comparing historical anti-Semitism and modern day Islamophobia. Europe's societies have changed in all kinds of ways over the last century. One example is the growing influence of the media and the spread of public communication. Media facilitate the communication between state and society necessary in a democracy. The mass media in particular have increasingly

attained a position that makes communication seem like the third resource of political and social development alongside power and the economy. The stability of the political order and social model, but also their transformation, depend to a large extent on the institutions of mass communication. They stimulate the emergence of constructs of the other. Though the media's impact on society is contested, they can both advance multicultural recognition and reinforce racism.

Explicit verbal stereotypes about Islam appear to be diminishing in German and European media, but stereotypical perspectives are being reproduced through agenda setting, thematic foci and imagery. This entails reconfiguring the culturalization of Muslims and the Islamic world and the negative discourse about them to make them politically correct. The result is a seemingly paradoxical 'enlightened Islamophobia'. It is not justified criticisms of individual Muslim actors, practices, and so on that is problematic, but the stereotypical character of media coverage, which is rooted primarily in the management of topics and imagery. These suggest that there is a fundamental difference between the Islamic and Western worlds. Media and societal Islamophobia tend to go hand-in-hand. But the mainstream mass media has at least eliminated a great deal of verbal racism and the representation of Muslims is improving, though thematic constraints often preclude genuine participation. The contribution of the Internet to participatory forms of social and democratic development may be substantial. Racist discourses, however, appear to have

been strengthened on the Internet.

Power relations between majorities and minorities are reflected online, and may even be intensified in the absence of the traditional filter institutions of the media. To a great extent, the European Internet has become a sphere of Islamophobic 'hate speech', home to racists and Holocaust deniers. With respect to the topic of Islam, the Internet is not just a reflection of right-wing populist and right-wing extremist milieus. To take just one example, about 50 per cent of Internet weblogs are Islamophobic, which equates to a far larger number of people than those supporting right-wing populists. A substantial portion of the bourgeois middle of society, which may not vote for neo-populist parties, is evidently expressing Islamophobic views online.

Regardless of what people write online, virtual Islamophobia is not necessarily linked with violence, but it is almost always mentioned as a source of inspiration by perpetrators of Islamophobic violence. At the heart of European society, a phenomenon is gaining ground that used to be found only on the margins of society – the communitization of racists. These virtual communities cannot be compared either with the traditional conversation over a beer at the local pub or with neo-Nazi cadres, but we should not under-estimate their potential for mobilization at the centre of social life.

Under the sign of the debate on Orientalism, European academic scholarship has undergone numerous processes of revision over the last few decades. Though at present almost all the impetus for critical debate

on the position of Islam in Europe is to be found within Western scholarship, comes from Western academies or is published by Western publishers, it is far from clear that those disciplines not specifically concerned with Islam and the Islamic world have really overcome Eurocentric traditions.

Sensationalization of knowledge markets

As a whole, however, academic scholarship functions as a pioneering system for the grounded critique of Islamophobia. But serious problems arise at the interface between scholarship and the public sphere, in the field of public intellectualism. Over the last few decades, the European public sphere has generated many public figures who present themselves as 'experts on Islam' and have achieved enormous popularity as fundamentalist critics of Islam. As a rule, their impact remains limited to particular nations, though there are exceptions such as Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. But they are far more likely than academic scholars to become public opinion leaders.

Public intellectual culture in Europe is by no means well-equipped to deal with Islamophobia. It is in fact fundamentalist critics of Islam who set the tone for popular Islamophobia and are nurturing the rupture between political system and society. There is clear evidence of a process of deliberalization among formerly liberal and left-wing intellectual elites when it comes to the subject of Islam.

The causes of their success, however, are complex. The media evidently have a great need for seemingly independent expertise, but instead of being supported by the academic system this is 'staged' by the media themselves. The resonance achieved by these critics of Islam is generally fostered by their concurrent presence in a number of different media markets. Key here is the interplay between book production, publishing houses' public relations and the mass media's fixation on events, which make an 'event' out of Islamophobic critics of Islam themselves, attracting a vast audience.

So media opinion leaders on Islamophobia are generated by an external tendency towards sensationalization of knowledge markets and the internal problems of European intellectualism, with its occasional susceptibility to reactionary radicalism, something that has no means disappeared as a result of the Second World War or the 1968 students movements.

As far as the state school sector in Europe is concerned, the multicultural reconstruction of syllabuses and schoolbooks is well underway throughout much of Europe.

Yet Islam-related knowledge appears to find very little expression in the syllabuses for specific subjects. At times the entire process of diversification of teaching materials is restricted to special projects on 'global learning'. Syllabuses for the subject of history, for example, have often been purged of earlier stereotypes, but the growth in know-

ledge of relevance to Islam remains limited. It is above all with respect to the Middle Ages that attention is paid the Islamic world, while in the modern era selected insights into regional conflicts dominate (Middle East conflict, Gulf wars, terrorism, and so on).

In modern history in particular, there are major knowledge gaps. The image of Islam is extremely fragmentary and fixated on conflict, while a distinct and comparative perspective on the development of Middle Eastern societies over the last few centuries is almost entirely lacking. More attention is being paid to topics such as 'migration' with respect to politics, society and economics, but in some cases recent studies have highlighted persistent analytical clichés (such as the concept of the 'identity conflict'). Too little attention is paid to Islamophobia as a distinct theme. Overall, it is unclear to what extent schoolbook knowledge is capable of counteracting the distorted image of the Islamic world gleaned from the media. Few studies have examined the practice of teaching, which goes beyond syllabuses and schoolbooks, so it is impossible to evaluate it.

That the problems of contemporary Islamophobia are being fostered by an interplay between different subsystems of society is also evident with respect to the Christian churches. Key documents produced by the leadership of the Protestant church in Germany, for example, exhibit a profound need to emphasize boundaries with Islam. There is no sign here of an attempt to advance a global ecumene. Fundamental truth claims dominate. Even more significant from the point of view of liberal theory is the transfer-

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ral of this need to accentuate difference into everyday social practice. Common prayer among Christians and Muslims is prohibited, while Protestant social institutions are discouraged from employing Muslims. The attitude of the Catholic Church towards Islam is ambivalent and is informed both by the dialogical approach outlined by the Second Vatican Council as well as occasional polemics against Islam. Intermediary theological institutions of both churches, particularly the Christian academies responsible for adult education, seem significantly keener on interreligious dialogue. Here the distinction between the churches' fundamental theological functions and their role in promoting social dialogue is more evident. It is impossible to say with complete certainty to what extent the grassroots of the Church is involved in the Islamic-Christian dialogue. But it is highly doubtful that the churches are acting consistently as societal intermediaries with respect to Europe's Muslims.

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