



A confusion of minds: Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

31/01/2014 | Maximilian Gottschlich

Please see also the contradiction to this article by Reuven Firestone:

A Confusion of Minds? An Objection

The victories that Islamists have been unable to achieve militarily or through terror are now to be achieved on the battlefield of public opinion in Western societies. The manipulation of the climate of public opinion is one of the central tasks of the asymmetric warfare taken on by radical Islamists against Israel.

The concept of "Islamophobia" is thereby of particular importance. It is associated with a strategic approach that can be deployed at various levels of psychological warfare. Invented in the 1970s by Imams, Islamophobia was supposed to be a conceptual counterpart to the concept of anti-Semitism. As there are anti-Semitism and Judeophobia, now there should also be an "Islamophobia" – that is, an irrational attitude of aversion to Muslims and Islam. If Jews can understand themselves as victims of anti-Semitism and thereby also legitimize their political actions, the same idea shall now also apply to Muslims and Islam. The concept of "Islamophobia" is supposed to express a new victim myth that tends to give Muslims a new identity: Externally – directed towards the West – "Islamophobia" is an ideological battle cry as part of the global jihad and the associated psychological warfare; internally – directed towards Islamic societies and Muslim populations in the West – it is used as part of a psychological strategy that uses a new narrative to portray Muslims and Islam as victims.

No balanced terminology

Meanwhile, the equating of anti-Semitism and "Islamophobia" has led to a kind of pseudo-moral canonization of the two terms. The intellectual as well as moral short circuit that this creates, claims that those who are against anti-Semitism must consequently also be against "Islamophobia." Both – it is argued – are racism. One can only credibly be against anti-Semitism if one also takes a firm stand against "Islamophobia." No one wants to be called Islamophobic because it also insinuates that one is a racist and thus morally incredible. Thus, any form of criticism of the anti-Jewish statements of the Koran, any form of criticism of Islam, any form of criticism of Islamist terrorism and its ideology of hatred, is nipped in the bud. But since there is no binding definition of the term "Islamophobia," it can be used arbitrarily as a propaganda weapon. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are two terms that have almost nothing in common because they cannot be related to a common context of meaning or even to a common moral ground, which prohibits any linkage between them. Judeophobia, the irrational aversion to everything Jewish, has existed for as long as Jews have existed in history. The term 'anti-Semitism' was coined towards the end of the 19th century in order to give a quasi-scientific aura to a predominantly religiously motivated hostility towards Jews in Germany and thus prevent the emancipation of the Jews. Since the 1940s, the concept of anti-Semitism has been linked with pathological events which draw on complex collective - psychological and social causes. Since then, anti-Semitism has been understood as a 'social disease,' a malignant ulcer on the body of civilization (Ernst Simmel). Or, as the German writer Ralph Giordano puts it: "Anti-Semitism is an intellectual-historic aberration, a perverse attitude in the history of ideas." After two thousand years of persecution of Jews, this

aberration lead to the genocide of the European Jews. Hanna Arendt said correctly: "Anti-Semitism is exactly what it expresses, a deadly danger for Jews and nothing else."

A fictitious status of victimization

Never in their history or in the present have Muslims experienced anything comparable that would justify the term Islamophobia. "Islamophobia" is designed to establish a fictional victim status which the followers of the Islamic faith do not deserve because they are not victims: No one has ever perceived it as a religious duty and propagated it accordingly to eliminate Muslims from the earth, as it constantly happens to the Jews. Although there are currents on the political Right that are hostile to Islam, there are no pogroms against people of the Muslim faith – neither in Israel nor in any European country, even in those with a high proportion of Muslims.

However, the fact that the level of Anti-Semitism in Europe has never been as high as it is today is reasonable cause for concern. The increasing number of attacks on life and limb of Western European Jews is only the tip of the iceberg of a profound ideology of hatred which is now spreading across Europe again – seventy years after the Shoah. And this anti-Jewish obsession feeds not only on the guilt reversal right-wing political anti-Semitism that ascribes to the Jews themselves the blame for their persecution, but on an explosive mixture of left-wing anti-Zionism and Islamic anti-Judaism. The common enemy is the Jewish state – Israel is the most hated collective Jew. The pretext which this melange of anti-Jewish obsession uses is the Middle East conflict. But the occasions are interchangeable because anti-Semitism does not need reasons – it is itself the reason that searches out the facts on which it can ignite.

The catchword "Islamophobia" does not denote any situation to justify the term– rather, it is calculated to produce a propaganda-effective context of delusion. And it seems to increasingly succeed – as we observe the growing willingness in the West to equate "Islamophobia" and anti-Semitism. The confusion of minds causes trouble in editorial offices of the Western media just as much as in universities and elite circles of Jewish-Muslim discussion groups. With the battle cry "Islamophobia" Islamic anti-Semitism immunizes itself against any criticism of its ideology of hatred against Jews and the Jewish state. Thus, a person is "Islamophobic" if, with all due respect for Islam and the faith of Muslims, he/she refers to the religious roots and the religious tradition of the Islamic aversion to Jews – for instance in the context of the apocalyptic final battle between Muslims and Jews described in the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Mohamed), which states:

In the last hour, Muslims will fight the Jews ... and the Muslims will be victorious until even a stone or a tree will say: Come here, Muslim, behind me is hiding a Jew, kill him!

The primary function of the Islamophobia allegation is, on the one hand, to create the myth of a victimization of Islam; and on the other, the term "Islamophobia" serves to rationalize the religiously disguised obsession with the extermination of the Jews and the struggle against the unbelieving West. Both, the victim myth and the rationalization operate with the old anti-Semitic mechanism of the reversal of victim and offender. Hatred of the Jews is nourished by Islam's own usurped victim role and legitimized as religious duty and political necessity. This achieves a leveling of the moral gap between perpetrators and victims, between those who sow hatred and those who oppose the Islamist ideology of hatred. The term "Islamophobia" is a feint with which the preachers of hate justify themselves and their followers and build themselves up as victims.

Maximilian Gottschlich is Professor of Journalism and Communication-Sciences at the University of Vienna, contribution in the "Illustrierte Neue Welt" (*Illustrated New World*), 3/ 2013. Adapted from the Austrian magazine Dialog-Du Siach 93 - October 2013.

Translation: Fritz Voll with editing by Astrid Foster