



"Confusion of spirits" - a sequel.

31.03.2014 | Maximilian Gottschlich

This article is a reply to the article by Reuven Firestone:

A Confusion of Minds? An Objection

I.

Mr. R. Firestone's response to my article in www.JCRelations.net of February 1, 2014, vividly illustrates the extent of the present confusion regarding the concept of Islamophobia. I had expected an academic discourse on this subject, instead received only crude polemics in response .

From psychology we know the phenomenon of the "blind spot": Realities that do not comply with one's own interests and normative expectations of how reality should ideally be, are shielded from perception. The Western apologists for the concept of Islamophobia suffer from such perceptual disturbances. They systematically shield the fact that the anti-Semitic extermination rage of the Islamists and the Islamist terror against Israel and the West -- as the jihadists themselves never grow tired to emphasize -- have their ideological roots in Islam itself and not in the unresolved Palestinian conflict nor in the controversial Israeli settlement policy. Islamophobia Conferences and Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogues are usually organized for the price of repression and denial of this crucial link between the terrorist war of Islamists and its ideological and religious or pseudo-religious roots. This is contributing more to the concealment of the problem rather than to its solution. One result of such concealment strategy is the equation of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

II.

This equation, as I argued in my first article, is historically, politically and morally wrong and therefore misleading. Islamophobia has just as little to do with anti-Semitism as anti-Semitism could be reduced to xenophobia -- even if seen, superficially and purely externally -- as phenomena similar to social rejection or exclusion.

Whoever equates anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, has not the slightest idea about the nature of anti-Semitism .

To put it bluntly, anti-Semitism is violence against Jews in word and deed, it is -- as Hannah Arendt said -- "a mortal danger to Jews and nothing else." Anti-Semitism is an irrational obsession of Jew-hatred. The long, painful history of anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews shows that anti-Semitism does not need empirical reasons. Rather, anti-Semitism is itself the reason that looks for the facts, with which to operate. No remotely comparable experiences in the history and social pathology of anti-Semitism can legitimately be used by the propagandists of the 'Islamophobia' concept to make comparisons. To put it in a nutshell: For anti-Semitism and hatred of Jews there are no rational reasons, for the fear and concern about the power ambitions of an Islamism hostile to the West and prepared to use violence, however, there are a lot. It is the strategic purpose of the comparison between the "Islamophobia" concept and anti-Semitism and the growing Islamophobia hysteria among Western intellectuals is to distract from this fact.

III.

In this context it was not my intention, as Firestone insinuates in his polemic, to speak to the long history and religious origins of Christian hostility to Islam, and it was certainly not my intention to speak about the Middle Ages, which is Firestone's specialty -- that is not the issue. Rather, it was my intention to point out the communication-strategic importance of the catchword "Islamophobia" here and today in the process of the formation of public opinion. I tried to make it clear that in the permanent struggle for the 'sovereignty of interpretation' of the events in the Middle East, the term "Islamophobia" has become a key strategic concept. Its general meaning is that one first inadmissibly equates Islamophobia with racism, so that one can with this "Islamophobia bludgeon" disavow and denounce as racism any criticism of Islam, any criticism of Islamic hatred of the Jews and Islamist terror. However, with this kind of racially-charged accusation of Islamophobia, so my critical note, moreover a twofold purpose is achieved: one is, to provide a counterweight to the Jewish narrative of victimization. The concept of Islamophobia serves the Muslim victim myth -- in the Arab world dominant anyway -- and, on the other hand, it serves the rationalization of massive and spreading anti-Jewish and anti-Western obsessions in Islam.

Rationalization is, simply put, a psychological process, by which one's own feelings, behaviors and actions are subsequently given a rational meaning. Therein lies the psychological and propaganda effect of the Islamophobia concept in the Islamic world. The Islamophobia concept operates with the most common form of rationalization: the mechanism of perpetrator-victim reversal: The religiously and politically motivated and fueled hatred of the Jews thus finds its political justification -- and its religious as well -- as pseudo-moral sanctioning and rationalization.

To repeat it again: The term "Islamophobia" is a propaganda ploy that serves the godfathers of hatred and their followers to talk themselves up as victims and divert attention from their own crimes. Firestone and all those who will not get tired of fuelling Islamophobia hysteria in universities and media make themselves -- knowingly or unknowingly -- compliant agents in this propagandistic concept.

IV.

How do critical Muslim voices comment on Islamophobia hysteria in the West? Abdur Rahan Muhammed, a former member of the "International Institute for Islamic Thought," says: "This abominable term [Islamophobia] is nothing more than a cliché, which was invented in the bowels of Muslim think tanks to prevent any further discussion and to silence critics."
(<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4214multiculturalism-responsibility>)

And the journalist, author and president of *The Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow*, Raheel Raza, takes the strange circumstance of an Islamophobia Conference in April 2014, for the 5th time held at the University of California, Berkeley, as an opportunity to engage critically with the Western Islamophobia fixation:

"Let us take a moment to look at Islamophobia. According to a 1997 report by the UK's Runnymede Trust, the term has existed since the 1980s and was first used in print in 1991. Runnymede defined Islamophobia as the "dread or hatred of Islam - and, therefore, as the fear or dislike of all Muslims, "adding that" [w]ithin Britain it means that Muslims are frequently excluded from the economic, social and public life of the nation ... and are frequently victims of discrimination and harassment." Are a majority of Muslims really excluded from the economic, social and public life in the United States and Canada? There are no statistics to verify such a statement. To the contrary, most North American Muslims live with full freedom as part of their social networks, unless they ghettoize themselves by choice -- as many do. Many Muslims in the West use "Islamophobia" as a penalty card against free speech, whenever there is criticism of Muslims. This

knee-jerk and reactionary response stifles dialogue, debate and discussion -- all signs of a healthy thriving democracy -- as increasingly seems to be the primary objective. North America is a region where freedom of expression is a cherished value. That includes the freedom to criticize the followers of a faith if they are indulging in violence, intolerance and radicalization."

Raheel Raza also provides for the "Islamophobia mania" especially of American academics the following thought-provoking statement:

"How did this Islamophobia theory become mainstream and so popular? In North America there is already an existing sense of guilt – "white liberal guilt." It is a guilt that Christians have already built into their faith, and that other North Americans have been made aware of from their treatment of Natives; Canadians have guilt about residential schools and wartime internment of the Japanese, and the Europeans have guilt about having mistreated people in their colonies, as well as the complicity that many of their grandparents had with the Nazis in rounding up and sending Jews and others to their deaths during the German Third Reich. The Islamists readily and eagerly build on this guilt, when they play the "victimhood" card and join with some academics, who did buy into the concept to build an highly profitable industry of the supposedly aggrieved, called "Islamophobia."

The strategy of the Islamists is clear, as Raheel Raza describes it correctly:

"Islamists have been successful in building the Islamophobia industry: It diverts attention from activities they would probably prefer not be noticed, such as promoting sharia law in the West, stealth jihad and a push to implement a global Islamic Caliphate, among many others. Any non-Muslim who questions the Islamist's intentions to promote the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood is immediately slapped with an Islamophobia *fatwa* [religious opinion], thus rendering most well-behaved and civil Westerners, silenced and apologetic. This is not only racist but, for the most part, a form of emotional extortion, intended to extract special concessions from well-meaning but gullible people in the West. Islamophobia is, therefore, a convenient pseudo-cause, around which to whip up young followers: They are informed, whether true or not, that they have much to be aggrieved about and the only solution is, to close down free speech, demonize all who might have an opinion that differs from theirs or who ask "inconvenient" questions, and to start creating an authoritarian political movement, in which they might feel themselves to be a meaningful participant. But in the long run it can only numb the minds and hearts of young Muslims growing up in the West, and destroy all spirit of inquiry and independent thinking -- as increasingly seems to be another of its objectives." (<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4193/islamophobia-agenda>)

Those who ignore these contexts -- because they feel uncomfortable with them or they contradict the normative expectations about reality, 'as it ideally should be' -- become complicit in this fateful development and play into the hands of those, who hate nothing more than the West, the Jewish State of Israel and the democratic value system, to which both are committed.

From someone like R. Firestone one should expect a minimum of real political understanding, even though he is scientifically connected to the Middle Ages. And one should expect a minimum of intellectual honesty in content and form of the argumentation. This condition is missing throughout in Firestone's polemic. He argues not factual, but rather "ad personam" by insinuating that my justified criticism of the propagandistic use of the term "Islamophobia" is itself Islamophobic. In this way he tries to disavow my criticism. This is disgraceful and dishonest, complicates a dispute on an academic level and ultimately disqualifies Mr. Firestone also for any inter-religious dialogue.

V.

Finally, a word about the outrage over my article "Confusion of minds" that happened behind the

scenes and widespread on an embarrassing low level from one part of the Board of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ): Does the future of the Jewish-Christian, Jewish-Muslim dialogue or triologue depend on being silent on the crimes of radical Islamism and the propaganda strategies of their justification? Does the future of such inter-religious dialogues depend on the fact that the demonization of Jews, Zionism and the Jewish State, already fuelled in school text books throughout the entire Arabic world, continues to be ignored? Does the future of these conversational relations depend on the decision not to reveal the ideological and religious roots of an Islamic war of terror against Israel and the West, and that one not hold those commissioned to teach religious doctrine and practice within and outside the Arab world responsible? If all this would be condition, then, of course, the moral and political price of such appeasement would be too high, and it would be better to refrain from "Dialogues" of this kind ...

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Recently published by the author:

- *Medizin und Mitgefühl. Die heilsame Kraft empathischer Kommunikation. ("Medicine and Compassion. The healing power of emphatic communication")* Wien-Köln-Weimar 2007 (Böhlau)
- *Versöhnung. Spiritualität zwischen Thora und Kreuz. Spurensuche eines Grenzgängers. ("Reconciliation. Spirituality between Thora and Cross. The Search of a Cross-boarder Commuter")* Wien-Köln-Weimar 2008 (Böhlau)
- *Die große Abneigung. Wie antisemitisch ist Österreich. Kritische Befunde zu einer sozialen Krankheit. ("The Big Aversion. How anti-semitic is Austria. Critical results concerning a social disease")* Wien 2012 (Czernin)

<http://publizistik.univie.ac.at>

<http://www.forumgottschlich.blogspot.co.at>

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