

Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 9

Editor-in Chief

Oliver Scharbrodt

Editors

Samim Akgönül

Ahmet Alibašić

Jørgen S. Nielsen

Egdūnas Račius



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Preface IX

The Editors XV

List of Technical Terms XVI

Islamophobia, Muslimophobia: From Words to Acts 1

Samim Akgönül

Country Surveys

Albania 19

Olsi Jazexhi

Armenia 36

Sevak Karamyan and Gevorg Avetikyan

Austria 46

Kerem Öktem and Güler Alkan

Azerbaijan 69

Altay Goyushov

Belarus 86

Daša Štabčanka

Belgium 98

Jean-François Husson

Bosnia and Herzegovina 121

Muhamed Jusić

Bulgaria 142

Aziz Nazmi Shakir

Croatia 164

Dino Mujadžević

- Cyprus** 178
Ali Dayioğlu and Mete Hatay
- Czech Republic** 196
Štěpán Macháček
- Denmark** 206
Brian Arly Jacobsen
- Estonia** 219
Ringo Ringvee
- Finland** 232
Teemu Pauha
- France** 248
Anne-Laure Zwilling
- Georgia** 272
Thomas Liles and Bayram Balci
- Germany** 293
Mathias Rohe
- Greece** 312
Konstantinos Tsitselikis and Alexandros Sakellariou
- Hungary** 328
Eszteella Csiszar
- Ireland** 345
James Carr
- Italy** 362
Maria Bombardieri
- Kosovo** 393
Jeton Mehmeti

- Latvia** 404
Simona Gurbo
- Lithuania** 411
Egdūnas Račius
- Luxembourg** 423
Elsa Pirenne
- Macedonia** 442
Muhamed Ali
- Moldova** 456
Aurelia Felea
- Montenegro** 471
Sabina Pačariz
- The Netherlands** 485
Martijn de Koning
- Norway** 503
Sindre Bangstad and Olav Elgvin
- Poland** 520
Agata S. Nalborczyk
- Portugal** 536
José Mapril, Pedro Soares and Laura Almodovar
- Romania** 551
Irina Vainovski-Mihai
- Russia** 569
Elmira Akhmetova
- Serbia** 588
Ivan Ejub Kostić

Slovakia 599

Michal Cenker

Slovenia 616

Christian Moe

Spain 628

Jordi Moreras

Sweden 645

Göran Larsson and Simon Sorgenfrei

Switzerland 659

Mallory Schneuwly Purdie and Andreas Tunger-Zanetti

Turkey 679

Ahmet Erdi Öztürk

Ukraine 696

Mykhaylo Yakubovych

United Kingdom 711

Alison Scott-Baumann

Islamophobia, Muslimophobia: From Words to Acts

Samim Akgönül*

Introduction

During an interview, the French iconoclast novelist, Michel Houellebecq declared to *The Guardian*: “Am I Islamophobic? Probably yes.”¹ Indeed, the interview was made on the occasion of the publication of his controversial novel *Soumission* (*Submission*) published in French in 2015, and translated into English in the same year,² having been published now in more than 20 languages. The novel’s plot is simple. In 2022, there is street violence between extreme-right “nativists” and Muslim youths. The second round of the presidential election sees the racist Marine Le Pen facing a “moderate Muslim” Muhammed Ben Abbes from the Muslim Fraternity Party. Thanks to a “republican block”, Ben Abbes wins and restores order but at the same time, Islamic family law comes into force, polygamy is encouraged, women are veiled and the troublesome unemployment rate finally drops after women are removed from the workplace and sent back home. By the end of the novel, progressively, many “French” people, especially “leftists” become one by one Muslim, by conviction or by opportunism.

Houellebecq, accused of being paranoid, explains that Islamphobia means the fear of Islam and not the hatred of it:

Is he Islamophobic? “Yes, probably. One can be afraid,” he replies. I ask him again: “you’re probably Islamophobic?” “Probably, yes, but the word phobia means fear rather than hatred”, he says. What is he afraid of? “That

* Samim Akgönül is an historian and political scientist. He teaches at the University of Strasbourg at the International Relations Institute and the Department of Turkish Studies, and conducts his research at the Research Centre DRES of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). His latest publication is *La Turquie nouvelle: du rêve d'Europe au cauchemar du Proche Orient* (Paris: Lignes de Repères, 2017).

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/06/michel-houellebecq-submission-am-i-islamophobic-probably-yes>, accessed 22 June 2017.
- 2 The original French edition was published by *Flammarion* on 7 January 2015, the same day of the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, that was about to publish a new issue with a cover mocking the Islamophobic attitude of Houellebecq: “The predictions of the sorcerer Houellebecq: in 2015, I lose my teeth. In 2022, I observe Ramadan”. The English version, translated by Lorin Stein, was published by William Heinemann in 2015.

it all goes wrong in the West; you could say that it's already going wrong." Does he mean terrorism? He nods. Some might say that's a tiny percentage of people, I begin ... "Yes, but maybe a very few people can have a strong effect. It's often the most resolute minorities that make history".³

When observing the areas in which the term Islamophobia is used (well-integrated now into the vocabulary of the academic world and of international organisations), one can see three different fields, interconnected but independent, and three different meanings according to the actor(s) using the term.⁴

Islamophobia may refer to:

- Political and/or media discourse against Islam (criticism and sometimes hate speech and traditional racism against an ethnic or racial group based on the idea of superiority of another ethnic or racial group)⁵
- Discrimination and actual physical attacks against those perceived as Muslims (irrational fear of Muslims, i.e. Muslimophobia and/or traditional racism and/or cultural fundamentalism and/or social class oppression)
- Mocking religious taboos and social values of Islam (blasphemy).

Islamophobia is used

- In Europe and by international organisations such as the Council of Europe⁶ to denote both hate speech towards Muslims and attacks against individuals or institutions in Europe
- By Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim majority countries to qualify all discrimination (private and public) and official measures perceived as targeting Muslims, whether or not this is actually the case

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/06/michel-houellebecq-submission-am-i-islamophobic-probably-yes>, accessed 22 June 2017.

4 Thijl Sunier calls it a "semantic impasse": Sunier, Thijl, "What is Islamophobia", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2016), p. 141.

5 For the interaction between traditional racist discourse and Islamophobic discourses, see Meer, Nasar, and Tariq Modood "Racialisation of Muslims", in Sayyid Salman and Vakil Abdoolkarim (eds.), *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (London: Hurst, 2011), pp. 69–84.

6 See, for example, "Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, online hate speech increased in 2014", http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/full-news/-/asset_publisher/VN6cYYbQB4QE/content/anti-semitism-islamophobia-online-hate-speech-increased-in-2014, accessed 17 June 2017.

- By some Muslim majority countries to denote all criticism of Islam as a system of values and all light comments and all types of mockery towards any aspect of Islam.

Based on concrete examples, this article investigates these very different categories in order to understand the reason for this semantic shift, from attacks on Muslims (that can be qualified as Muslimophobia), to criticism of Islam. However, in order to be able to analyse attitudes against Islam and Muslims that are qualified as “Islamophobia”, one must first discuss the concept of “Muslims”.

Muslim “Minorities” as a Target?

The “most resolute minorities” that Houellebecq refers to in his interview, is the Muslim one. Therefore, as public opinion in Western countries where Islamophobic resentment exists, the French novelist uses a postulate that can be easily deconstructed: There is *in fact* a “Muslim minority” and the latter is “resolute” to make “history”. In a sense, this point of view is correct. The problem of defining Muslims in Europe, however, stems from two issues:

- Firstly, even though some European countries have a long history of Muslim presence, Muslims in Europe are still “minority groups”, not only numerically speaking (which is irrelevant) but mainly in the sense of lack of domination.⁷ Those are and have been described mainly by the *majorities*. Legally speaking, among Muslims in Europe, some groups can be defined as “minorities”, some not. Especially in Eastern European countries, there are some “Muslim minorities” legally recognised as such, like in Greece or Bulgaria. Most of them are legacies of the Ottoman system. The Tatar minority of Finland is also recognised as a minority, and operates under the Finnish Islamic Congregation. Sociologically speaking, there are several groups. For example, the social status and ethno-linguistic background of

7 The term “domination” is used here on purpose, and refers to the symbolic dimension of domination conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu, especially in his *Les héritiers, les étudiants et la culture* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964), written with Jean Claude Passeron, and *La reproduction: Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964), also written with Jean Claude Passeron. In these two works, Bourdieu explains the principal reason for the lack of “domination” as a weakness in economic, cultural or social capital.

Muslims in France or in the UK are quite different. In addition, the internal division of “Muslims” is hidden by their perception by the majority as exclusively Muslim.

- Secondly, concepts such as identity, ethnicity, religion, culture and nationality are ambiguous and dependent on relational issues. In addition, these are dynamic concepts vertically (in time) and horizontally (in different contexts). Particularly, when it comes to describing minority groups, it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe them wholly adequately, because the very wish to do so relates to the asymmetrical power relationship between majority and minority.

In short, it is empirically relevant for scholars to recognise that the way we describe Muslim minority groups in Europe does not necessarily correspond with how these groups think about and understand themselves. Nor do they necessarily think about themselves as “Muslim”, but might have other and intertwining categories to describe themselves.⁸ When majorities define (and thereby identify) “Muslims” in Europe, and the very same majorities differentiate themselves from these Muslims, this expresses a categorisation of a “group”, which can be distinguished from other groups by virtue of its “Muslimness”. However, not all Muslims are Muslim, religiously speaking. Here, the category of Muslim means “belonging” and has nothing to do with belief or Islamic behaviour. According to the three “Bs” (belief, behaviour, belonging), the qualification of “Muslim” may refer to individuals who are: Muslim spiritually speaking; individuals who behave (practise in everyday life) according to Muslim rules; and individuals who belong to the social group of “Muslims” because of their origins. These three concepts may overlap. In many circumstances, however, they might be separated, with Muslims who: do not behave “like a Muslim” or who do not practise the religion; people that behave socially as Muslims without believing in the religion; or people who see themselves as Muslims or who are perceived as such but who do not believe, do not practise, nor follow the rules of Islam in their social lives, or who do not express claims related to their “Muslimness”.⁹

On the other hand, some, but not all, of the members of the minority groups of “Muslims” fit into the scholarly definition of what it means to be a “Muslim”,

8 On the difficulties of defining “Muslims” as a social group, see the contribution by Jeldoft, Nadia, “On Defining Muslims”, in Jørgen S. Nielsen, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Brigitte Maréchal and Christian Moe (eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol. 1 (2009), pp. 9–14.

9 For the theory of three “Bs”, see Akgönül, Samim, *The Minority Concept in the Turkish Context: Practices and Perceptions in Turkey, Greece and France* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

and belong to a group which one can define as “Muslim”. Some “Muslims” might not think about themselves as distinctly “Muslim” but rather in ethnic, national or cultural terms or, for example, in a mixture of ethnic and religious terms, while others wholly self-identify as “Muslims” and actively articulate a Muslim identity, as separate from their ethnic and national identities.

Another central issue is defining Muslims in binary categories of “practising/observing Muslims” vs. “cultural/nominal Muslims”, because this can also vary significantly depending on the specific context. The categories themselves are ambivalent because they are often used as opposites, and as such, are used politically to distinguish between “good” (“non-practising and therefore secular and integrated/assimilated”) and “bad” (“practising therefore fundamentalist”) Muslims.

When it comes to describing Muslims, it is important not to make matters of practice the only standard description because it is possible to self-identify strongly as a “Muslim” while not observing the fast or participating in any Islamic rituals. Although many Muslims can be adequately described as either “practising” or “cultural”, this does not mean that matters of practice necessarily involve self-identification as a Muslim. Two concrete examples at two different levels can be used to illustrate this cognitive dissonance, both among “Muslims” and among those who identify people as “Muslims”. Alevis, for example, practising scrupulous *sema* ceremonies, often describe themselves as “Muslims”, but are not seen as such by others because of the visibility attached to “Muslimness”.¹⁰ On the other hand, many Muslims practising only the festive aspects of Islam, following the sociological behaviour of a given minority, without necessarily the spiritual aspects, *are* perceived as “Muslims”.

Self-identification as “Muslim” can correlate with other issues rather than just religious practice. It can express attitudes towards the majority, as well as other ethnic and national groups, and it can be related to gaining minority rights as a “group”. Likewise, we cannot presume that a Muslim identity is equally important in all situations. A “practising Muslim” or “cultural Muslim” is not confined to being *just that* at all times. Depending on context, it can be relevant for a cultural Muslim to accentuate his or her religious identity, while a practising Muslim might choose to tone down his or her religious identity, or *vice versa*.

Above all, “Muslims” possess other identity markers as well, such as mothers, fathers, students, professionals, Turks, Tatars and Lebanese, or Lithuanian,

10 Tözün, Issa, and Emil Atbaş, “Alevi Communities in Europe: Construction of Identity and Integration”, in Issa Tözün (ed.), *Alevis in Europe: Voices of Migration, Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 121–144.

British and so on. These are not necessarily detached from one another, that is to say, self-understood separately from being “Muslims”, but might very well be understood as intrinsic elements in what it means to be “Muslim”.

On the other hand, to be a Muslim can be the equivalent of being a Turk or an Arab. In the halal business, some products are only ethnic products or everyday life objects. In France, for example, one can buy halal salt, which is basically salt from Turkey. In Western Europe, in particular – where some third and fourth generation immigrants with a Muslim background articulate a sense of a global Islam and belonging to the Muslim *umma* – it is important to constantly evaluate and check the reality of categories that we use to describe these groups.

In addition to these points, the concept of “Muslim” covers a very large and diverse range of groups, which have very different histories, populations, and political systems, and thereby also very different ways of being described or not being described as “Muslim”. In some countries, such as Denmark and France, it is illegal to register people according to their religion, while in other countries it is voluntary for people to register as “Muslims” for the national census.

All this does not mean that Muslim groups are vague and indefinable, and can only be grasped theoretically. However, one needs to demarcate very carefully what one means, when describing Muslims:

1. Definitions of any group imply categorisations *per se*, which is problematic when studying heterogeneous (minority) groups, including problems concerning insider/outsider perspectives (categorisation vs. self-identification)
2. There are problems with equating “practice” and Muslim identity.
3. One needs to consider the complex empirical situation(s) with regard to different European nation-states
4. Majorities conduct many studies on minority groups. This problem of representation can be reduced (but never eliminated) when the majorities and academics a) include the minority perspectives (i.e. self-understandings) when describing them and b) reflect critically upon the fact that majority scholars are involved in creating the minorities and representations of them with whatever that involves (politically, ethically etc.).

Therefore, if Islamophobia targets “Muslims”, which is true, the very same Islamophobia is a fear of the visibility of Muslims, but attacks the invisible.

Islamophobia as an Arrow

The first understanding of Islamophobia is discursive at both the political and media levels: Islam as a set of values/taboo and/or Muslims, seen as a monolithic group, are allegedly threatening the social cohesion or the “Western way of life”. According to Edward Said, Islamophobia in the 1980s was a *trend* within Orientalism in a more general anti-Semitic Western tradition.¹¹ From this point of view, Islamophobia articulates the *need* of Western European societies to construct enemies, of whom distorted images are created.

What happens, somewhere, at some moment, is a fact. However, its transmission through the media and by individuals is only a reinterpretation. Therefore, the transmission is necessarily a reflection of different points of view, and merely a selection of some aspects of the fact, according to the agendas of the people transmitting it. Facts are tools to build an opinion; they do not have their own existence, they exist when they are transmitted. There is no history – it is an illusion – there is only historiography. Who tells what for which purpose?¹²

All social groups (including those based on nationality, religion, gender, generation, etc.) need an “other.” This othering is the single criterion of belonging. It has two types: the remote otherness, concerning a group too distant for us to be afraid of, involving a perception built on false stereotypes; and what can be called the “otherness of proximity”, concerning groups too close to “us” and therefore threatening. These groups are the reflection in the mirror;¹³ they are “constitutive enemies”.¹⁴

In this sense, Islamophobia, as a media-led and public opinion discourse, leads to the rise of populist anti-Islamic political movements in Europe, and

11 Said, Edward, “Orientalism Reconsidered”, in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley (eds.), *Literature, Politics, and Theory* (London: Methuen & Co, London, 1986), p. 220.

12 On the concept of reality and its transmission through “signs”, see Baudrillard, Jean, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays in Extreme Phenomena* (London: Verso, 1993), especially the chapter on “The Mirror of Terrorism”, pp. 75–80.

13 Akgönül, Samim, “From the ‘Constitutive Enmity’ to the ‘Otherness of Proximity’: Turkish and Greek Minorities in the Nation-making Process in Greece and Turkey”, paper presented at the conference *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Uses of the Past (1797–1896)*, King’s College London, 6–10 September 2006.

14 The concept of “constitutive enemy” is used by Bernard Lory to explain nation-building processes in the Balkans: Lory, Bernard, “Strates historiques des relations bulgaro-turques”, *CEMOTI*, no. 15 (1993), pp. 149–167.

is a kind of cultural fundamentalism and racism that is not the consequence of ignorance of the “other”. On the contrary, groups, especially national and religious groups, hate those they know too well. If not, we cannot explain genocides, civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts or irredentism. The discourse of PEDIGA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident)¹⁵ is certainly grotesque, but the political *doxa* of the French *Front National* (National Front) or the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Freedom Party) or the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria) cannot be reduced to “ignorance” or to “Orientalism”.

According to Carl Schmitt, political domination (and, one may add, class domination) needs an enemy.¹⁶ It must constantly create and cultivate dangers and threats in order to perpetuate the togetherness of the nation (or class), and the best enemy is an internal one that is close enough to provoke hatred and sufficiently blurred to generate fear.

The construction of an internal enemy is not an easy task. How to make people believe that others just like them, with whom they live, are actually different, and dangerously different? For this, we need a combination of “media” and “facts”. This process can be adapted to social media, perhaps even more fittingly, because social media follows what French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon termed, already in 1895, the “crowd psychology”: “The general characteristics of crowds are to be met with in parliamentary assemblies: intellectual simplicity, irritability, suggestibility, the exaggeration of the sentiments”.¹⁷ In social media, fed by traditional media, hatred grows exponentially.

There are three steps to construct an internal enemy. During the first phase, traditional media and social media specify and emphasise the identity of the criminal. According to the dominant identity, this bad “other” is systematically “Muslim” in today’s Western world. When a violent fact occurs, it has become a reflex to look at the “name” of the actor to determine if he or she is a “Muslim”.

15 <http://www.pegida.de/>, accessed 17 June 2017.

16 Schmitt clearly implies that sovereignty is possible by homogenising the community by appealing to a clear friend-enemy distinction, as well as through the suppression, elimination, or expulsion of internal enemies who do not endorse that distinction: Schmitt, Carl, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1932]), p. 46. On the conceptualisation process of Schmitt, see Balakrishnan, Gopal, *The Enemy: an Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 2002).

17 Le Bon, Gustave, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895), p. 2. For English translation see Le Bon, Gustave, *Psychology of Crowds* (London: Sparkling Books, 2009).

It does not matter where the event took place, or whether the criminal act was related to the perpetrator's religious identity. What matters is the fact that readers associate the crime with the assumed identity of the actor.

The second phase is the combination of the plural and the singular. While traditional and social media will continue to highlight the identity of individuals, in the same context, groups will be categorised as "bad". Thereby, the group is criminalised as a whole, and all individuals perceived as belonging to that particular group (based on physical appearance, accent, the use of a minority language, behaviour, geographical origin, etc.) become, by definition, the "same" as the other members of the group.

There is a third phase, whereby traditional and social media add to these two perceptions ("Muslim" in both singular and plural) again a singular perception. In this phase, the whole group is categorised in the body of a singularity: "Muslim is bad". At the end of this phase, as one maligned individual is equated to another, it does not matter if "we" punish one instead of another. The entire group is already placed on the margins of society, and barely considered part of humanity: a process Erik Erikson qualifies as "pseudospeciation".¹⁸

Muslimophobia as a Fact

When in 2010, the fast-food chain *Quick* decided to adapt its supply to the demand of its customers' sociological profile by advertising a new halal burger, an impressive controversy started in the French media.¹⁹ As Olivier Roy noticed, there is today a rising demand from "European Muslims" for a Western kind of fast-food to be made from halal meat, due to their generational and social class makeup.²⁰ It could be seen as a sign of "integration" because a halal-burger is nothing else than the combination of two *habitus*: adopting eating habits of a globalised capitalist economy whilst respecting a religious taboo. On the contrary though, many see halal food as a sign of a lack of integration in everyday

18 Wallerstein, Robert S., and Leo Goldberger (eds.), *Ideas and Identities: the Life and Work of Erik Erikson* (Bloomington: IUP, 1998), pp. 22–23.

19 Crumley, Bruce, "Halal Burgers? Another French brouhaha over Islam", *Time*, 24 February 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1967299,00.html>, accessed 17 June 2017.

20 Roy, Olivier, *Globalized Islam: the Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 264.

life. This very commercial decision by *Quick* has been criticised if not fought by denouncing it with the very French concept of *communautarisme*.²¹

During the summer of 2016, some small towns in Southern France banned the use of the “burkini”²² on beaches, because it was seen as a sign of the “Islamisation” of French society,²³ in spite of the decision the *Conseil d’État*, the highest administrative court in the country, declaring such a ban unconstitutional. While the ban provoked vehement criticism outside France, within the country almost all political leaders, across the political spectrum, supported the mayors who introduced it.²⁴ According to the then socialist Prime Minister Emmanuel Valls, the burkini is a political sign of religious proselytism that locks up women.²⁵ The far left leader Jean Luc Mélenchon also considered the burkini as a “political provocation” and a “militant show”.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, the far right leader Marine Le Pen described the burkini as a threat to the “soul of France”.²⁷ In a sense, the burkini ban was “a logical extension of France’s law against full-face coverings, particularly the kind worn by some Muslim women”.²⁸

France was the first European country to adopt a law prohibiting the complete covering of one’s face in public. Although the Law applies to scarves, masks and motorcycle helmets, many Muslims in France felt targeted, considering that fewer than 2,000 women (most of them converts) wore full-face veils at the time it went into effect. The question of the burkini was soon seen as a new demonstration of Islamophobia (or Muslimophobia), insofar as the

21 “*Communautarisme* a d’abord pour réalité (et peut-être pour unique réalité ?) d’être un discours qui annonce un scénario-catastrophe en affirmant l’urgence de réagir ou en déplorant qu’il soit déjà trop tard”: Dhume-Sonzogni, Fabrice, *La communautarisme. Enquête sur une chimère du nationalisme français* (Paris: Demopolis, 2016), p. 7.

22 The term is a portmanteau, combining burqa and bikini, and, therefore, creating an oxymoron, but one that is well-established in the media.

23 Jung, Cindy, “Criminalization of the Burkini”, *Harvard International Review*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2016), <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=14508>, accessed 21 June 2017.

24 For the evolution of Muslimophobic attitudes in the European political spectrum, see Mondon, Aurelien, and Aaron Winter, “Articulations of Islamophobia: from the Extreme to the Mainstream?”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 13 (2017), pp. 1–29.

25 “Burkini : Manuel Valls désavoue Najat Vallaud-Belkacem”, *Le Monde*, 25 August 2016.

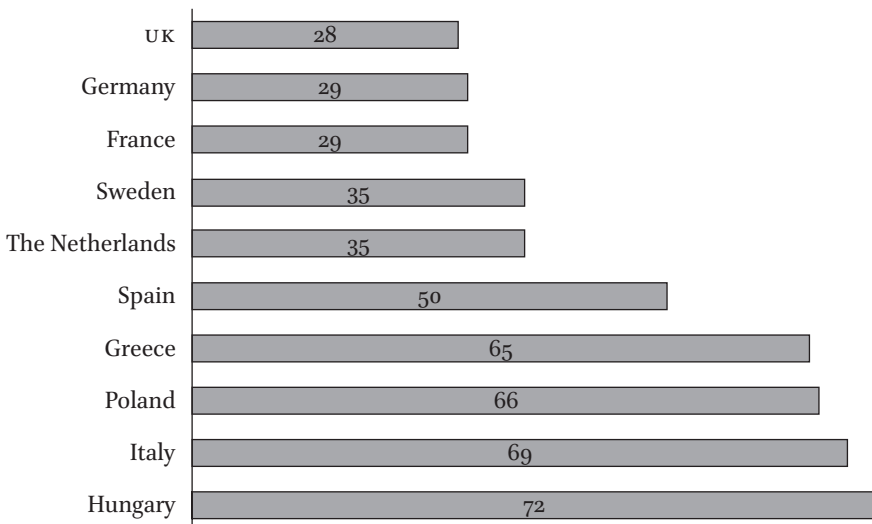
26 “Pour Mélenchon, ‘le burkini est une provocation politique’”, *Le Figaro*, 25 August 2016. The same Mélenchon, who obtained 19% of the votes during the last presidential elections, sent a tweet in 2015, saying “I contest the term Islamophobia. One has the right not to love Islam as one has the right not to love Catholicism”.

27 “Burkini: pour Marine Le Pen, ‘c’est de l’âme de la France dont il est question’”, *Le Point*, 17 August 2016.

28 Jung, “Criminalization of the Burkini”, p. 2.

garment was invented in Australia, precisely to promote the integration of Muslim women into Australian culture and society.²⁹ In both cases, the discourse is centred on “French values and lifestyle”, and those who are incriminated are not considered to be individuals.

Young people eating a hamburger, or young women swimming in the Mediterranean, are a blur, they exist only as a part of a stigmatised group, itself loosely defined. Having said that, one may nuance these debates in France. Surprisingly, negative views of Muslims are sharper in the countries of Eastern Europe with their “old” Muslim minorities. In Western Europe Muslims belong to “new” minorities, related to migratory flows after World War II; it was in these countries that terrorist attacks related to Islam occurred, as in France and the UK. Therefore, one may understand Islamophobia in Eastern Europe as situational, due to the refugee and migrant crisis, rather than structural. Nevertheless, there is a structural element to Islamophobia in Eastern Europe as well, mainly because of the Ottoman past and the post-Ottoman nation building processes.



*Unfavourable Views of Muslims in 2016 (as %)*³⁰

29 Under the name “hijood”, another portmanteau of “hijab” and “hood”: Limoochi, Sima, “Reflections on the Participation of Muslim Women in Disability Sport: hijab, burkini, Modesty and Changing Strategies”, *Sport in Society*, vol. 14, no, 9 (2011), pp. 1300–1309.

30 “Europeans fear wave of refugees will mean more terrorism, fewer jobs”, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/>, accessed 17 June 2017.

Beyond these general public debates, what can actually be defined as Muslimophobia are the concrete actions of discrimination against Muslims in education, housing, the job market, and within other aspects of life on the one hand, and physical attacks on the other. One needs to emphasise that, very often, it is very difficult to measure discrimination against Muslims, as related to their “Muslimness”, in the education, housing and job sectors. The 2017 report by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights points to several “test” methods in several EU countries that show that, at least in the job market, there is actual discrimination against those who are perceived as Muslim.³¹ Also, SETA, a GONGO (government-oriented non-governmental organisation) very close to the Turkish AKP party, published a *European Islamophobia Report* in 2015 and 2016 in Istanbul. In this the editors, Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, underlined an increasing number of activities that targeted Muslims, especially mosques and imams.³² It is true that in some European countries, definite acts targeting Muslim individuals and/or institutions have regularly occurred, particularly since 2001.

Recently, in France for example, a man was stabbed to death at home by a neighbour shouting, “I am your God, I am your Islam”.³³ In 2017, two men attacked a homosexual Algerian in the quiet village of Beaucet, near Avignon in Southern France.³⁴ In Munich, in 2016, a young man killed nine people, apparently for Muslimophobic (or at least xenophobic) reasons.³⁵ In Italy, in 2008, two handmade bombs were thrown at an Islamic centre, destroying the main gate.³⁶ Among many other similar incidents, in 2016, a Muslim woman was dragged along a pavement by her head scarf in London.³⁷ Muslimophobia, in

31 Fundamental Rights Report 2017, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/annual-reports/fundamental-rights-2017>, accessed 17 June 2017.

32 *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015.pdf. The 2016 report is not available on the website anymore (June 2017).

33 “Moroccan man in France killed at home in front of wife in ‘horrible Islamophobic attack’”, *Independent*, 17 January 2015.

34 “LGBT activist ‘kidnapped and raped by man angry at Donald Trump being mocked’”, *Independent*, 13 March 2017.

35 “Munich gunman saw sharing Hitler’s birthday as ‘special honour’”, *The Guardian*, 22 July 2016.

36 Human Rights First, *2008 Hate Crime Survey* (New York: Human Rights First, 2009), p. 12, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/FD-081103-hate-crime-survey-2008.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2017.

37 “Muslim woman dragged along pavement by hijab in London hate crime attack”, *Independent*, 16 December 2016.

the sense of physical attacks against Muslims or discrimination against them, is a reality.

Islamophobia as a Shield

If we consider Islamophobia as a form of racism, we must admit there has been a shift in targets during the 20th and especially 21st centuries, from “Arabs”, “Turks” or “Asians”, to “Muslims”.³⁸ However, religiosity is easier to defend than ethnicity, whose defences are fragmented. As “Muslimness” has a more sacred and taboo character than any ethnic or racial group, Islamophobia became, at the same time, a protective concept, a shield against all discourses, attitudes and criticisms. This shield is used by Muslim minorities themselves (which is understandable), but also by the Muslim authorities of their countries of origin.

The status of Islam as a system of behaviour, criticism of which is perceived as politically incorrect and immediately associated with racism, gives some European intellectuals, from the right in particular, a sense of being limited in their freedom of expression. Thus, the French author Pascal Bruckner considers that “Islam is in the process of acquiring a patent of an untouchable religion”.³⁹ This point of view is exaggerated, and there are many mainstream publications criticising Islam and Muslim behaviour, some in a racist and culturalist way, while some others do this in the name of freedom of expression. However, there is no doubt that, in 2017, in Western countries (and of course even more so in Muslim majority countries) a movie similar to Monty Python’s 1979 *Life of Brian*, that mocks Muhammad’s life in a similar manner, can simply not be created without blasphemy accusations and, if instrumentalised, without reactions including violence. Such reactions happened after the publication of the Danish cartoons in 2005 and 2006 and in the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in 2015.

Politically active groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and states like Turkey and Qatar, tend to limit, prevent, punish and target all types of criticism against any kind of Islamic behaviour, as well as any type of anti-religious humour against Islam, where it is characterised as blasphemy. The Turkish

38 Moon, Charania, Al-Issa Ferdoos Abed-Rabo and Stéphanie Wahab, “Undoing Islamophobia: awareness of Orientalism in Social Work”, *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2017), p. 58.

39 “Pascal Bruckner: ‘Désolé M. Castaner, Daesh appartient bien, hélas, à la sphère musulmane’”, *Le Figaro*, 5 June 2017.

Islamist newspaper *Yeni Akit*, very close to the AKP government, commented on the re-publication of *Charlie Hebdo* after the attack against its office, with an article entitled “Charlie Hebdo looks for punishment again”.⁴⁰ The *Daily Sabah* newspaper, that became the semi-official media outlet of the Turkish government in English, regularly emphasises the fact that Europeans in general are Islamophobic.⁴¹ In the same vein, the Washington DC based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) classifies all criticisms and humour directed towards Islam as “Islamophobic”,⁴² creating a constant atmosphere of victimisation. The Qatari news channel *Al Jazeera* also regularly publishes articles and news on criticisms of Islam, presenting them as examples of “Islamophobia”.⁴³

Therefore, there is a shared feeling, among the liberal left, that it has become politically incorrect to criticise Islamic behaviour, even within the framework of liberal values. For example, comments in this context on subjects such as the status of women or freedom of conscience cannot be made without being accused of Islamophobia and without taking the risk of being associated with far right rhetoric. Already in 2010, Chris Allen observed this schizophrenic phenomenon: “In the most vocal instances, claim and counter claim to Islamophobia, typically emerges from bi-polar extremes: from those who decry and denounce any criticism of whatsoever of Muslims or Islam as being ‘Islamophobic’, to those who actively and openly espouse a vitriolic hatred.”⁴⁴

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where criticism of Israeli policies can be equated with anti-Semitism. Thus, if Islamophobia is used as a shield by minorities already in a dominant position, precisely because they are “minorities”, in the framework of a victimisation process, the very same concept is instrumentalised by influential and powerful Muslim majority states in a global struggle to legitimise their own power over these Muslim minorities, presenting themselves as protectors, and therefore creating a power relationship over them.

40 “Charlie Hebdo yine kaşındı”, *Yeni Akit*, 13 January 2015.

41 “Rising Islamophobia in Europe goes unpunished”, *Daily Sabah*, 29 February 2016.

42 <http://www.islamophobia.org/about.html>, accessed 17 June 2017.

43 “The liberal roots of Islamophobia. Today’s worst Islamophobes are not hailing from the ranks of the far-right movement, instead they claim to be liberals”, *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/03/liberal-roots-islamophobia-170302152226572.html>, accessed 30 June 2017.

44 Allen, Chris, *Islamophobia* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 3.

Conclusion

Islamophobia is a “container term”⁴⁵ and each actor fills this container with different components. The real question is: “do we have to define it?”⁴⁶ After all, if Islamophobia is a set of practices that hurt people, it must be seen as a crime;⁴⁷ but if it is “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims”,⁴⁸ it is more difficult to grasp, because how do we combat emotions that are, by definition, irrational. The general opinion is that the appropriate antidote to Islamophobia may be information and knowledge about the heterogeneity of contemporary interpretations of Islam, and of the lived experiences of Muslims in precise and variable social, political, and economic contexts.⁴⁹ In other words, a deconstruction of the category of “Muslims”.

On the other hand, the most terrible crimes have been committed towards groups that the perpetrators knew very well. Serbians knew Bosniaks too well, Tutsis knew Hutus, Germans knew Jews, Turks knew Armenians. Education is useless in the face of ideologies and dogmas. Discrimination against those perceived as Muslims is above all a class problem for the dominant class; and the protection from these actual or imagined discriminations against Muslim minorities, by using the concept of Islamophobia, is a part of a search for legitimacy by these minorities, in the sense given by Simmel to this process.⁵⁰

In other words, Islamophobia is becoming a tool for both sides. Majority discourse uses the fear of Islam to perpetuate its domination of a social class, mainly the descendants of immigrants; minority rhetoric uses the condemnation of Islamophobia both to protect dogmas and to obtain equality as “Muslims”.

That is why Islamophobia is, at the same time, a very pointed arrow and a very thick shield in a domination / legitimation struggle between majorities

45 Sunier, “What is Islamophobia”, p. 139.

46 Larsson, Göran, and Ake Sander, “An Urgent Need to Consider How to Define Islamophobia”, *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2015), pp. 13–17.

47 Bleich, Erik, “What is Islamophobia and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 55, no. 12 (2011), pp. 1581–1600.

48 Bleich, “What Is Islamophobia”, p. 1583.

49 Bangstad, Sindre, “Islamophobia: What’s in a Name: analysing the Discourses of Stop Islamiseringen av Norge”, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2016), pp. 145–169 (152).

50 Noreau, Pierre, “Le droit comme forme de socialisation: Georg Simmel et le problème de la légitimité”, *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 45, no. 2 (1995), pp. 282–304.

and minorities. The only exception is the use of the concept by political and religious authorities outside of Europe. The term here is utilised not to protect minorities, nor to establish social cohesion in Western European countries, but rather to instrumentalise the presence of Muslims, to establish a patronage relationship with them, thereby contributing to the de-humanisation and de-individualisation of Muslims in Europe.