

ABSTRACT

ENGLISH only

Islamophobia: Europe`s Identity Crisis

-Roots Behind, Routes Ahead-

by

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"This paper addresses the question of Islamophobia as an identity crisis/self-perception and otherness in Europe. In order to do this, the paper first recaptures what islamophobia is, that Islamophobia is not a post 9/11 phenomenon, that it is deeply rooted in Europe's essentialist orientalist perception of non-European cultures-especially Islam, that it was inherited from the core medieval Western Christian orientalist anti-Semitic essentialism converted to Islamophobia from 19th century on. Based on this articulation, the paper deals with the fact that Islam and Muslims are not monolithic in Europe, that Islamophobia can be tackled with only if it is fought against in relation to the questions of pillarisation, ghettoisation or integration in Europe, that as a form of racism and discrimination it must be fought against just like any other form of racism, that a final solution can only come through education and in the long term, that in order to meet the Islamophobic prejudices on a broader front, education systems should offer more factual and neutral knowledge about Islam (and other religions), and that there is no single homogeneous Islam or a community of Muslims that would pose threat to Europe as such, that Europe should be careful in developing policies of integration –religion culture politics- not through security measures but `interculturally civilized transformative power` acting as an example. If not, any public policy to deal with Muslim immigrants/citizens under the category of `security measures` only, will be like a Bumerang creating a Don Quixote syndrome which is self-damaging for European societies. Muslims themselves also should take initiative to reduce the potential causes/effects of Islamophobia, joining the discussion in constructive way."

Bülent Şenay CV

Bülent Şenay, professor of history of religion, is currently Counsellor for Religious Affair at the Embassy of Turkey in the Netherlands. Following his PhD in religious studies from Lancaster University, UK, with a thesis on Messianic Jews – Hybridity, Identity and Tradition, Dr. Şenay started his teaching career as a lecturer of Islamic studies and Muslim Ethics at the University College of St. Martin's (1996-1999) in UK. He continued as associate professor of history of religion at the Faculty of Islamic Theology, Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey (2000-2008). His biography includes various publications and lectures on `religious other`, `teaching religion in multicultural / plural society`, identity and religion in Europe. Dr. Şenay is a participant at both academic and diplomatic level in the Intercultural Exchange Project of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. He was recently William James Visiting Professor at Bayreuth University, Germany, and visiting professor at the Department of Near Eastern Studies in Princeton University, US. His research interest is focused on religion in multicultural societies, identity and religion in Europe.

Islamophobia: Europe`s Identity Crisis -Roots Behind and Routes Ahead-

by

Bülent Şenay

I would like to begin by a quote. Kofi Annan told a UN conference on Islamophobia in 2004: *"When the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry, that is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with Islamophobia."*

"Fighting Against Islamophobic Hate Crime & Law Enforcement" is a huge topic. There are various ways to address the issue of overcoming Islamophobia - or dealing with discrimination in general. Some stress the importance of laws and legislation; that these need to secure peoples rights and that punishments should be enforced on those not respecting the human rights. Others take a more educational approach, declaring that the solution lies in changing peoples attitudes and making them experience diversity as a positive, not threatening, thing.

There is also the question of definition

-Stereotype: A generalisation and simplification that helps us to think faster. Often one group has stereotypes of another group. Stereotypes can form a psychological perspective be positive, negative or neutral. Stereotypes influence our behaviour and problems arise when stereotypes are negative.

-Prejudice: When you make assumptions about persons in beforehand and without proof. The consequences are often intolerance and discrimination. Prejudices arise from guesses, and are fuelled by rumours and ignorance.

-Phobia: From psychological perspective Islamophobia is not really a phobia. Also it is not really fear of the unknown, as people do not fear what they do not know but they fear what they think they know.

It was clear that Islamophobia is present in different ways in different countries. The reasons for the situations are various, it can be because the nation is y homogeneous, like in Sweden, or there are other big problems like in Romania ana Hungary who struggle with Romaphobia. Somewhere Muslims and Christians can live together like in Bulgaria. In some countries Islamophobia is strongly present in the media (Denmark), in some countries even politicians are Islamophobic (The Netherlands, Belgium, France), and in some countries Muslims have to face verbal or direct abuse (Belgium, France, United Kingdom, Bosnia-Herzegovina). In general, it was evident that 11th September 2001 made everything worse. Yet I would like to point out that Islamophobia in Europe goes farther back before 9/11. There are deeper roots of Islamophobia in European history parallel to the history of anti-Semitism.

Islamophobia is deeply rooted in European orientalist anti-Semitic essentialism. Unfortunately anti-Islamic prejudice is almost a perennial, entrenched phenomenon in European history, and the Orientalist modes of discourse are relatively constant over time. Orientalist discourse up until the Enlightenment was predominantly Christian-led, and the

language and discursive field were primarily religious and theological, with Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islamic theology being the main areas of discussion. European Christian anti-Islamism was anti-Semitic because Jews were seen as the allies of the Muslim in the medieval times. **EXAMPLES of Christian PAINTINGS. See the slides..**

The rise of secular humanism in the Enlightenment period and beyond gave rise to a reassessment of Islam, sometimes resulting in more positive views, for example secular-oriented admiration of Muhammad as a robust and effective leader, in contrast to Jesus' lack of worldly success. However, it also led to a view of religion in general as irrational - a view which still often finds favor in the secular-dominated media. There are enough literature that provides a vivid description of images in art and literature which appealed to the European imagination in the Romantic period, in which the themes of exoticism (i.e. foreignness), sensuality (usually gender-related) and violence are intertwined.

Unlike other parts of the world, Europe has a long history of conflict with Islam, and this has clearly influenced the development and evolution of its views of Islam. The colonial period gave rise to more geographically- and politically-oriented forms of Orientalism; anti-Muslim discourse now embraced a new function which has been amply documented in Said's Orientalism: the justification of the imperial project, with a corresponding need to show the irrationality, barbarity, obscurantism and backwardness of Muslims and Islam (and therefore their need to be "civilized" and "enlightened"). (Ernest Renan's famous lecture on "Islam and Science" (delivered at the Sorbonne in 1883). **Most of the depictions showed Islam as antithetical to reason, progress, creativity and reform, was an early example of such attitudes.** *In the postcolonial period, postmodernism has had conflicting and contradictory results, its championing of the "underdog" having a leveling effect with regard to genders, sexualities and races and (in theory at least) giving a voice to oppressed and disadvantaged minorities.* In light of global inequalities, Muslims may be seen as such minorities, both internationally and in Western nation-states. **The dominance of human rights discourse offers hope to dispossessed Muslims but can also give rise to the construction of Islam as politically repressive and intolerant (continuing the colonialist theme of the Oriental despotic ruler).**

However we should downplay or ignore the fact that both historically and in the present, other foes such as Jews, gypsies or rival Christian sects, have been equally demonized at different times.

Although everyone here knows what Islamophobia is, for the sake of setting the argument in my paper **let us remember what it is today.**

Islamophobia is certainly not a new phenomenon in Europe. Non-governmental organisations have also reported more serious incidents of hate crimes targeting Muslims – ranging from verbal threats to physical attacks on persons or property. Islamophobia as negative behaviour towards Islam and Muslims includes 'hostility', 'violence', 'rejection', 'exclusion', and 'discrimination'. It is also related to the question of attitude. The major characteristic of an attitude is its affective nature. An attitude is 'the amount of affect for or against some object' (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975: 11) and 'is simply a person's general feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness' (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980: 54). Among the European youth, Islamophobia is partly the result of frequently received negative messages about the Islam and Muslims from the grandparents, parents, favourite teacher, one's best friend, and the mass media. It can also partly be explained by a low level of knowledge, having negative beliefs, and negative emotions with respect to Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia can again be explained by the perception that Islam and Muslims threaten concrete and symbolic interests, such as labour market opportunities, safety, and European cultural

values. Islamophobia does, therefore, refer both to a negative attitude towards Islam, as well as to followers of Islam – Muslims.

Although the first occurrence of the term Islamophobia appeared in an essay by the Orientalist Etienne Dinet in *L'Orient vu de l'Occident* (1922), it is only in the 1990s that the term became common parlance in defining the discrimination faced by Muslims in Western Europe. Negative perceptions of Islam can be traced back through multiple confrontations between the Muslim world and Europe from the Crusades to colonialism.¹ However, Islamophobia is a modern and secular anti-Islamic discourse and practice appearing in the public sphere with the integration of Muslim immigrant communities and intensifying after 9/11, although it has centuries long roots in European history.

The term Islamophobia is contested because it is often imprecisely applied to very diverse phenomena, ranging from xenophobia to anti-terrorism. The term «Islamophobia» groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is an «irrational fear» (a phobia) of Islam.² However, the term is used with increasing frequency in the media and political arenas, and sometimes in academic circles. Therefore, I will continue using it as well, although I prefer the term antiIslamism.

Fighting against Islamophobic Hate Crimes in terms of Law Enforcement is the main theme of this roundtable/side event today.

Let us make a few observations first.

1. Islamophobia is not a religious question only, or related with religion only. Islamophobia is a manifestation of racial/ethnic discrimination disguised sometimes behind religious and sometimes cultural rhetorics. Yet it specifically targets Islam and Muslims. The ever increasing Islamophobia in the politics, media and culture shows us that religion being an integral component of every civilization and culture, the misperception and lack of understanding of Islam in the West poses a serious threat to the peace and security of the present and the future generations in Europe.
2. When we deal with Islamophobia, let us remember that we deal with religion in European public sphere. In more specific terms, the problem in Europe is not only religion in public space but more specifically Islam in European public space. Let me give you a definition of `public sphere` in Charles Taylor's analysis: "*The public sphere is a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these.*"² Common mind, common perspective, common good. Islamophobia emerges where common mind and common sense is lost in European public sphere and public policies.

The European Monitoring Centre on Xenophobia and Racism (EUMC) reports document the backlash against Muslims in Europe. The recent EUMC reports focused on the situation in the member states of the European Union and tried to assess the more structural aspects of the discrimination. It concluded that many Muslims face unfair treatment in employment, education and housing in EU countries. Young Muslims in particular meet barriers to social advancement.

The EUMC reports examine the European response towards Muslim minorities in their own countries, identifying attacks against Muslims, anti-Islamic rhetoric and the efficacy of the government in the European countries in minimizing community tensions. What has changed? Has it got worse or better?

It is well known that increasing migration and the redrawing of national boundaries, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, have forced European societies to rethink the approach to cultural, ethnic,

¹ These confrontations were often phrased in terms of religion—Islam v. Christianity—as demonstrated by Maxime Rodinson, Daniel Norman, and Edward Said. See: Daniel Norman, *Islam and the West, the Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980); Maxime Rodinson, *La fascination de l'Islam* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1978) ; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1978).

² Charles Taylor (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Duke University Press, p.83.

linguistic and religious diversity. It is in the middle of this `rethinking` period that Islamophobia and hate speeches, hate crimes became significant in European societies.

Manifestations of Islamophobia within European societies have taken the form of persisting prejudice, negative attitudes, discrimination and sometimes violence.

Laws against discrimination as well as complaints procedures now exist in most countries. However, it is not always easy for individuals in minority groups to claim their rights in cases of discrimination. There is a need for support initiatives. Perhaps today`s roundtable is one of the many.

Islamophobia, which constitutes discrimination against Muslims, runs contrary to the fundamental values of mankind and principles of human rights that provide safeguard against discrimination and intolerance. Acts of racism, discrimination and intolerance against Muslims that challenge the exercise of fundamental human rights and freedoms of Muslims, continue to be prevalent in many Western societies. This situation has contributed to misunderstandings and misperceptions about Islam in non-Muslim societies and resulted in the rise of discriminatory treatment, negative profiling and stereotyping of Muslims living in or visiting Western countries. The situation has been further aggravated by anti Islam publications, video productions and pronouncements by motivated individuals and groups. This has created mistrust and suspicion between the Muslim World and the West that requires urgent and common stand against all forms and manifestations of discrimination and intolerance.³

We need to look into the roots behind:

Founded on historical, cultural and psychological reasons, the contemporary forms of Islamophobia have also been reflected in the research works, reports, articles and writings of reputed institutions and academicians.

Among the factors, contributing to Islamophobia is the negative and incorrect portrayal of Islam in schools and educational institutions. Institutional Islamophobia in education manifests in several ways including: i) By ignoring the correct knowledge about Islam; ii) By advancing negative images of Islam and Muslims; iii) By downplaying incidents of slurs and verbal or physical abuses; iv) By denying the need to confront and address the issue of Islamophobia.

As indicated by the 2nd OIC Report on Islamophobia, the defamation of religions, as it manifests itself in the assault of Islamophobia in the West, is not limited to the realm of religion per se as an abstract idea that could be a legitimate target of criticism and mockery. On the contrary, **the real consequences of this defamation is an outright campaign of hate speech, and negative stereotyping, targeting all the tenets and adherents of Islam, individually and collectively.** It depicts them as vicious, uncivilized and terrorists. **The tool used to reach this goal is concealed under the banner of the freedom of expression.** In real life, the target of this campaign of defamation is every Muslim`s identity, honour, self-worth, and selfconfidence. Islamophobia triggers a cultural attitude in which anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural and normal.

There is the other side of the coin as well. Major European cities provide amazing sceneries to us. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, London, and now Istanbul, will perhaps strike the visitor who has not been out from his/her own `quarter` as threatening, but also offer charmingly exotic mixture of cultural/religious colors, the Doner Kebaab restaurants, the women in black in their hijaab, the halal food shops, the Aladdin cafes, the Marhaba minimarkets. The visitor will be offered durum kabaab, falafel, and will soon realize that Mecca Cola perhaps has already replaced Coca-cola

³ 2nd OIC OBSERVATORY REPORT ON ISLAMOPHOBIA

in these parts. The visitor will pass by mosques, though not many, since most are in side streets or in suburbs. Music is also an essential part of this scene. The Turkish rappers in Rotterdam and Berlin compete with the French Algerian rappers in Paris. Considering the fact that orthodox Muslim are strictly opposed to music, it is inevitable that there will be intra religious cultural conflict as well, especially when one notices the emergence of `religious` rappers who become famous among the young rather than the imams; and they refer to Islam, Allah, and Muhammad in their music (often to the dismay of the preachers). Such visits by visitors can be taken as an educational experience, but folkloristic interest quite apart, it is also a glance into the future. For these quarters are slowly spreading, and within a generation they will cover larger parts of big European cities. In what direction will these quarters in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Berlin expand? Should we worry?

Today, putting aside the new Romanian, Polish, Bulgarian immigrants and their potential future problems –social and religious (polish catholics and Romanian-Bulgarian orthodox), many Muslim immigrants of 2009 and 2010 live in quarters mostly separate from those of the host societies. This is true for big and small cities. Most of the Muslim kid have no long term Dutch, German, or British friends, they do not meet them, and frequently they do not speak their language. Now those who are in school speak the language yet still do not mix. While their/our imams preach them that their values and traditions are superior to those of the infidels, the real social fabric tell them that they do not receive the respect and care as their imams tell them to have. Young people, instead of self-criticising their lack of interest in further education or qualified work, complain about being victims and being excluded, regardless of the fact that their social and cultural separateness is also very often voluntary. Many young Muslims are not practicing Muslims yet when comes to protesting against any form of discrimination they suddenly turn to `religious jargon`. Western European governments and societies often criticized for not having done more to integrate these new citizens. But I believe that it is legitimate and timely to ask even if they had done much more, is it not now time that Muslims ask themselves what they can do for a proper integration without necessarily losing contact with the root culture and identity which is not necessarily against integration. Integration is not a one-sided-affair. We must however ask to what extent has ghettoisation been enforced by the outside world, and to what degree was it self-imposed? Yes housing practices, school dropouts, unemployment all influence the way ghettoisation emerge. **First of all, it is crucial to recognize that young generation will not advance socially and culturally unless they have mastered the language of the land.** Young people should be told by their elders and imams today that young people should not defend themselves through `victimization` jargon. They should ask them and their parents where it went wrong, what was their own failure? Only after this question one should question the system. The elders and the religious leaders are the best channels to prevent the emergence of frustrated violent youth culture. This has nothing to do with religion per se. Local authorities should work together with the imams and community leaders. Let us also remember that the weekend Quran school attendance does not mean that hundreds or thousands of Muslim young people come out as practicing Muslims. Most of them are not well versed in their religion at all. What you have at the end is an unsettled restless hybrid identity of swinging from one end to the other. Many of them may go to mosque for Friday prayer and then will drink and take drugs afterward despite the religious ban and community pressure. The main influence on these young people is neither the parental home nor the imam but the street gang, the Dutch street gang, the German street gang, the French street gang. `Old fashioned` Islam is of no great interest to many of them, either; the race card is a scapegoat for many of them.

Let us remember that, at the end of the day, immigrants from Muslim countries came to Europe for a better life, not to set up an Islamic state. They want a successful and happy life for their kids. It is also important to remember that we have to be careful when we speak about Muslim

communities. To what extent is it accurate to speak in terms of Muslim `communities`, since they come from different parts of the world? **The Muslim communities in Europe are anything but monolithic.** Except in France they have no common language; few have a command of Arabic.

Also I would like to ask HOW orthodox are European Muslims? Estimates vary considerably. Mosque attendance on Friday prayers is thought to be as high as 60 percent in some places and as low as 10 percent in others, with the older generation, as usual, more frequently represented. Pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), one of the pillars of Islamic practice, is organized by Muslim organizations, but attendance is not very high – in the Netherlands approximately not more than 2 or 3 thousand people a year out of 1 million Muslim population, in Germany no more than 15 thousand annually a small proportion of millions of Muslims in Germany. Depending on the definition of the word `religious`, it is possible to find through surveys that not many Muslims are practicing or orthodox in their daily life. Muslim communities are not evenly distributed over the various European countries.

ROUTES AHEAD/Conclusion

What is the way forward? What is the ROUTE ahead?

Religion is a worldwide phenomenon that has played a most significant part in all human culture and so is a much broader, more complex category than the set of beliefs or practices found in any single religious tradition. An adequate understanding of religion must take into account its distinctive qualities and patterns as a form of human experience, as well as the similarities and differences in religions across human cultures. Today lands across the planet have become our neighbors, China across the street, the Middle East at our back door. When historians look back on our century, they may remember it most, not for space travel or the release of nuclear energy, but as the time when the peoples of the world first came to take one another seriously.⁴

In 2007, Louise Arbour, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights at the time and who has now become the president of the International Crisis Group, said that “bigotry and prejudice, especially in regard to Muslims, were common in Europe,” and she “called on governments to tackle the issue.” Basing her remarks on a report by Doudou Diene of Senegal regarding intolerance toward Muslims in Europe, she added that Europeans “are shocked at times when it is pointed out that bigotry, prejudice and stereotyping is still sometimes very present in their attitude toward others.”

Although there is no single homogeneous Islam or a community of Muslims that would pose threat to Europe as such, there is no doubt that Islamophobia is a major problem facing both Muslim minority communities and Western societies. It is a divisive issue and a breeding ground for mistrust, hatred and extremism. Some in the West tend to ignore it as a form of “Muslim exceptionalism.” But this is the wrong diagnosis. Islamophobia is a real problem lived by real, ordinary people. And it is a form of racism and discrimination. It must be fought to defend the agenda of human rights for all.

Some Western governments and secular groups oppose the UN resolution on the grounds that it singles out a particular religious community rather than defending the rights of all individuals. They also argue that this resolution may be used to curb freedom of expression in Muslim countries. Both criticisms are groundless. Defending the rights of Muslim communities does not contradict defending the rights of other individuals. It is not any different from anti-Semitism. The only difference is that while many countries

⁴ Huston Smith (1991) *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, from the `Point of Departure`, Harper: San Francisco, p.7.

have adopted anti-Semitism laws, there are no such provisions for Muslim communities that face similar attitudes of discrimination and incitement.

It is rather baffling to see human rights groups criticizing measures to protect the rights of Muslim minorities in majority non-Muslim countries. Europe should be careful in developing policies of integration –religion culture politics- not through security measures but `interculturally civilized transformative power` acting as an example. If not, any public policy to deal with Muslim immigrants under the category of `security` measures only, will be like a Bumerang creating a Don Quixote syndrome which is self-damaging for European societies. Muslims should however recognize that they have many freedoms in Europe that they did not and would not at this stage of history have in their home countries. That is why they are here as well. And Islam, unless there is an active war against one`s own life such as *daar al-harb*, teaches that a Muslim should obey the law of the land he/she lives in. Muslims should remember that religion is what you do when the sermon is over. Not only *imaan* (faith) but *al-amal al-saaleh* (good deeds) to contribute into the society regardless of religious and ethnic differences. This is what Islam teaches both in the Quran and the Practice of the Prophet. Muslims should ask themselves how they can contribute further in reducing Islamophobia in Europe. However, Islamophobia is not a problem for Muslims only. It is about what kind of society we want to live in Europe.

The ultimate question here is how we deal with our `differentnesses`. Public space is where we essentially deal first and foremost with the **borders** of differentnesses. If we generally agree that it is better to venture beyond the **thresholds** of our own intellectual borders then we might acknowledge that we also need to venture beyond the thresholds of our spiritual borders. To that end, we need **practical wisdom`** something more than rational politics. In public domain, we need to cross thresholds. Surely the experience of crossing thresholds, especially when we are not quite sure at what point we have crossed, is the experience of discovery, surprise, and even therefore risk. Being on the borders is **challenging** and **transformative**. What is the challenge here? The challenge is the multiplicity of `Religious Otherness` in the midst of globalization. **The idea is that differences should not turn into conflict.** The unpleasant job of criticism must be done, yet with reflexivity and practical wisdom (*phronesis* from Aristotle, or *`al-hikmah al amaliyyah`* from Farâbî). This cannot be otherwise. In the world of the oncoming future, which is our world, **nothing cultural or religious is private any more, everything is public.** The tenor of this new world and the momentum with which it is coming leave no room for group likes and dislikes in the matter. No chance of Utopia here. **Borders** are still there. In order to keep the two or many sides of the border together, what we need to do is ‘to listen to the other’. But let us also remember that the borders are not perhaps created by religions themselves but other factors such as human egoistic materialism contribute in the exclusivistic civilisational perspectives.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Europe are part of the fabric of society. European Muslims do not represent a transient historical phenomenon, and there is no evidence of a decline in their presence. Therefore Islamophobic hate speeches pose threat directly to the core of European values and social space. It is important to remember that **hate crimes originate from hate speeches. Hate speeches are examples of the abuse of the freedom of expression. Therefore before any law enforcement we need to focus on public perceptions and education.**

A final solution can only come **through education** and in the long term. In order to meet the Islamophobic prejudices on a broader front, education systems should offer more factual knowledge about Islam (and other religions). The importance of teaching about “other” religions has been stressed repeatedly during the seminars the Council of Europe organised with the participation of religious leaders. Education on religions and Islam in particular should also focus on the theme

of living together and otherness. The theme of foreignness fulfils the overriding function of Otherization, polarizing categories of humanity into “Us” and “Them.” The new generation Europeans should come to terms with the fact that they will live side by side with Muslims.

A specific word of advice to the Muslim fellows as well. Yes we all agree that different Orientalist or Islamophobic motifs are interrelated, often intertwined, and mutually reinforcing: “magical flying carpets, with their implications of exotic and alluring irrationality; genies kept in bottles and lamps, evoking dark, destructive, uncontrollable forces; scimitar-shaped swords, symbolising primitive cruelty; and minarets, implying foreign and outlandish beliefs and practices.”, BUT the most dominant theme behind Islamophobic hate speech is the gender issue. Islamic teachings on male-female relations are highly distinctive when set against the norms of contemporary mainstream Western society. The Muslim men and women should help reducing the Islamophobic prejudice by showing that Islamic teachings do not necessarily contradict with multicultural multireligious urban public life, that Islam honors women, that there is no place for domestic violence in Islam, that there is no honor killing in Islam, that hijab is not a threat to the non-hijab. Different readings of the “veil” illustrate opposing agendas and worldviews; while to the wearer (and to Muslims in general) it often symbolizes piety, and sometimes empowerment, in anti-Muslim discourse it symbolizes women’s oppression, first and foremost. We should not allow Islam as a religion and culture to be hijacked between burqa and burqini.

Yes, there seems little doubt that a significant factor in understanding Islamophobia is the seemingly unusual capacity of Muslims/Islam to resist—in terms of culture, moral values, and religiosity— the supposed Western universalistic aspirations; Islam appears to challenge prevailing intellectual trends of relativism and pluralism. The rapid changes brought about by globalization, including increasing pluralization and shifts in the international political order, contribute to a feeling of insecurity. However, Islam has been and is capable of adapting itself into new situations both hermeneutically and socially. Let us stop creating `folk devils` in Europe.

There is one good thing about Islamophobia. Thanks to the Islamophobia and fighting against Islamophobia, Europe is REDFINING its identity. Whether it will shrink into a racist monocultured culture, or continue to the future as an intercultural society in which there is space for everyone with different ethnicity, religion and culture remains to be seen. We all have to join hands for the better.