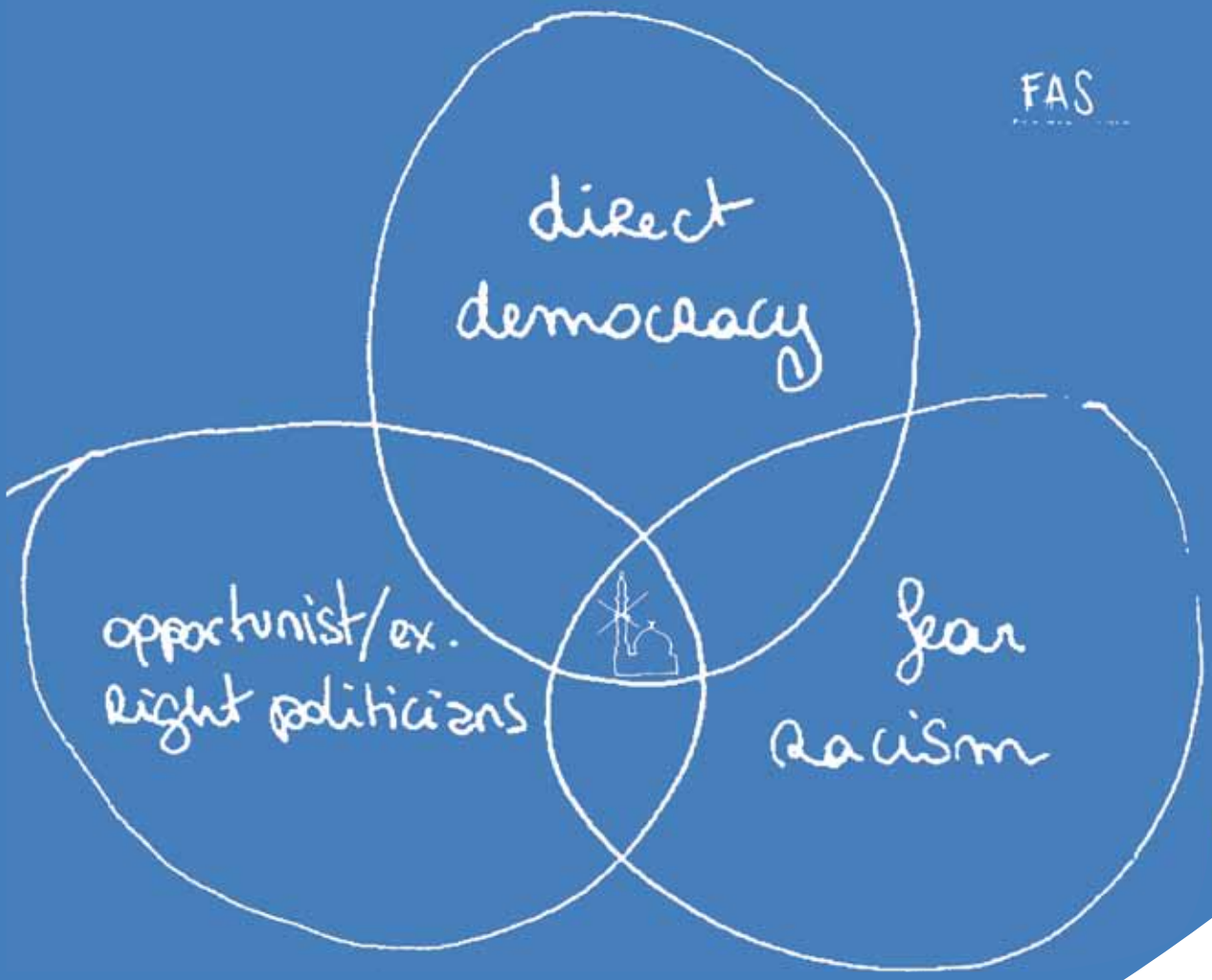
Islamophobia and progressive values



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INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

Proceedings of IRR seminar (1) **'End the Isolation: building solidarity networks against Islamophobia in Europe'** held at Garden Court Chambers, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London on the afternoon of Wednesday 20 October 2010 and chaired by Liz Fekete

Published by the Institute of Race Relations

2-6 Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS

Web: www.irr.org.uk

Email: info@irr.org.uk

Tel: +44 (0)20 7837 0041

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A second seminar focusing on Islamophobia and the anti-terrorist laws also took place on 20 October 2010. The transcript of the second seminar can be downloaded at <http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/seminar_two.pdf>

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Image taken from a slide-show presented at the Architecture Foundation symposium 'Faith in the City: the mosque in the contemporary Urban West' in which FAS critiqued the November 2009 Swiss referendum on minarets which led to the change in the Swiss Federal Constitution prohibiting the future building of minarets in Switzerland.

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NETWORK OF EUROPEAN FOUNDATIONS

Epim European Programme for Integration and Migration

Preface

On 20 October 2010, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) organised two seminars in London on the theme of 'End the Isolation: building solidarity networks against racism and Islamophobia in Europe'. These seminars, to which participants had been invited from all over Europe, were organised as a response to the toxic tone of public and media debate about Muslims. The IRR had earlier noted with alarm the growing number of campaigns against mosques and minarets, and that physical attacks on Muslims had culminated in July 2009 in the grotesque murder in a German courtroom of Marwa El-Sherbini, a Muslim woman who wore the headscarf. Laws that discriminate, or even criminalise women who wear the veil, were also of concern to IRR which pointed out that laws such as these were not only creating new forms of religious discrimination but fuelling the culture of violence and hate, to which Muslim women in particular are vulnerable.

The aim of the first seminar, the proceedings of which are recorded here, was to bring together scholars, voluntary sector organisations and activists in an attempt to outline the general parameters of hatred towards Muslims with a view to increasing the possibility for pan-European action and collaboration in the future. We were conscious of the fact that though in the UK the term Islamophobia can be used in public debate as a tool to understanding specific forms of discrimination facing Muslims, this is simply not the case in other European countries. During the course of the seminar, speakers from France, Germany, Belgium and Austria all confirmed that if they use the term Islamophobia in their countries, they are accused of instrumentalising Islamophobia in order to make false claims of Muslim victimhood, to censor free speech and criticism of Islam and religion, or acting as 'apologists' for 'Islamic terrorism'.

What emerged from this first seminar was a thorough-going exposé of the combination of intellectual currents which today foment Islamophobia and racism. Stereotyping and demonising of a single group may start with the extreme Right - one only needs to look at websites like *Die Grüne Pest* to see the levels of hate promoted by the extreme Right. But what is frightening today is that Islamophobia is as much the preserve of the liberal intelligentia, whose arguments against Islam and Muslims are also based on gross generalisations and stereotypes. In fact, most of the arguments that our modern extreme Right parties use against Muslims today, draw directly from the vocabulary of liberal and left discourse. Laws against the veil have been put in place by both right and left administrations, with centre-left political parties also acquiescing to discriminatory measures on the grounds of defending progressive values, particularly pertaining to women's rights. All this means that Islamophobia is no longer a politically exclusive phenomenon, and that a progressive aura surrounds the discriminatory laws promoted by many diverse political parties. And such a closed circuit of thought, with its uninterrupted path from Right to Left, ensures that in Europe today Islamophobia is now the respectable face of European racism.

We hope that identifying the specific role that a discourse on 'progressive values' is playing in shaping Islamophobia will act as a spur to action. There is no time to spare if we are to win back true progressive values from those who have hijacked them in order to promote a reactionary monocultural creed, based on hatred towards Muslims. ■

Liz Fekete, seminar chair

Introduction and welcome

Liz Fekete, executive director, Institute of Race Relations

Sinan Ertugrul

Just when you were beginning to think that things can't get any worse, they do. Over the last eighteen months or so we have seen the gradual unfolding of an extremely frightening chain of events. First, the criminalisation of women who wear the burqa or the niqab in France and Belgium; then the formation of a coalition government in the Netherlands that includes the notorious Islamophobe Geert Wilders, then the electoral breakthrough of the far-Right Sweden Democrats on the basis of a general election campaign that targeted Muslims. And just when you were beginning to think things can't get worse, you witness a dramatic deterioration of the terms of the integration debate in Germany. First, Thilo Sarrazin, former member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank, publishes *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany abolishes itself) in which he argued that as Muslim immigrants were genetically of lower intelligence and of higher fertility this would eventually lead to Germany becoming 'a nation of dunces'. Then, in October, shortly before Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that multiculturalism had 'utterly failed', the president of Bavaria, Horst Seehofer, declared that '*Multi-kulti* is dead', that there was no more room in Germany for 'alien cultures', and that immigration from the Muslim world to Germany must end.

It is this poisonous climate, where hostility spreads like an oil slick from one European country to the next, which provides the backcloth for our discussion today. We have set ourselves the task of building effective solidarity networks across Europe to combat Islamophobia. Looking around this room, at so many familiar faces, I can see that this is an audience which is already very well-informed about the dangers of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. But the purpose of today's meeting is to discuss Islamophobia within a pan-European context and within a space that encourages open discussion and practical reflections on how to act more effectively against structured racism against Muslims. The idea of this meeting is not to launch, from above, any new network but to encourage a greater fluidity within existing networks, so that we can move more quickly to work in solidarity with one another when solidarity is called for.

And, in this, the title of this Forum, 'End the Isolation' is key. For us, 'End the Isolation' has at least three meanings.

First, it refers to the geographical isolation we face, in that Islamophobia is a pan-European problem and yet we are combating it nationally. But if we are to be more

effective, we need to come together on a pan-European level, and create networks that allow us to accentuate the European dimension of our work.

Second, 'End the Isolation' refers to the isolation of Muslim organisations, who should not be left alone to combat Islamophobia. We need to spread out – to inform a whole variety of different civil society actors about the role they can play. And that is exactly what we are doing today – spreading out – as we can see by the fact that the audience today includes people from across the professional and activist spectrum - educationalists, students, scholars, people from the arts world and from human rights organisations, civil rights activists, etc.

The third aspect of isolation that needs to be confronted is the isolation of issues – Islamophobia from structured anti-Muslim racism, racism and discrimination from the culture of national security, the global war on terror and the anti-terrorist laws these engender. We, at the Institute of Race Relations, believe that the growing hostile climate against Muslims cannot be isolated from the structures in society that give credence to that prejudice and hostility. And what we would like to challenge is the idea that you can fight Islamophobia, on the one hand, but ignore the anti-terrorist laws on the other. And for us, particularly in the UK, it is so obvious that there are links between Islamophobia, the interventions made in the name of the war on terror, and the separate regimes for Muslims that are now being institutionalised within our justice system. This, then, comprises the final dimension to the title of today's forum on 'End the Isolation: Building Solidarity Networks Against Islamophobia'.

Our first speaker, Dr Sabine Schiffer from the Institute for Media Responsibility in Erlangen, is someone I admire enormously. After the Egyptian pharmacist, Marwa El-Sherbini, was murdered in a Dresden courtroom by a neo-Nazi sympathiser, Sabine was one of the few voices in Germany prepared to raise critical questions both about the institutionalised negligence of the courts and the possible impact of media scare scenarios about Muslims on the police officer who shot Marwa's husband, mistaking him for the perpetrator of this ghastly murder. For voicing this critical position, Sabine faced prosecution for libelling the police – an ordeal that was only ended last week, when the appeal against the not guilty verdict in an earlier trial was withdrawn. Nevertheless, the intimidation of Sabine for speaking out against injustice continues, and she receives constant death threats that the police fail to take seriously. Then, Murat Batur will speak about cultural racism in Austria. Murat is a member of the Kanafani Inter-cultural Initiative in Vienna, whose name derives from the Palestinian novelist and pan-Arabist Ghassan Kanafani. The Kanafanis are attempting to provide important frameworks in which to situate rising Islamophobia in Austria. ■

Germany at the crossroads

Dr Sabine Schiffer, Institute for Media Responsibility, Erlangen

Sinan Ertugrul

The murder of Dr Marwa El-Sherbini in July 2009 was the first anti-Islamic murder in Germany. Yet the discussion we are now having in Germany, particularly following the publication of Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany abolishes itself), demonstrates that Germany is further away than ever from adopting a preventive strategy to counter Islamophobia. What we are offered instead is an intensification of hostility towards and campaigning against Muslims.

I will return to consider the current situation later. But first let me say that the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini revealed the extent to which the authorities had totally underestimated the levels of Islamophobic hatred in Germany today, an underestimate also revealed by the failure of the authorities to react to a letter that the murderer, Alexander Wiens, a German citizen of Russian descent, had previously sent to the court. In this letter, Alexander Wiens made clear that he had no understanding whatsoever as to why this prosecution was being brought against him as, in his view, Muslims had no right to exist, at least not in Germany. Their presence made him nervous, he explained, and, as such, he felt it incumbent upon him to do something, to act. Another thing he made clear in this letter was that he considered that the headscarf Marwa El-Sherbini was wearing was a sign of oppression, on the one hand, and radicalism, on the other. As he considered Marwa an Islamist and a terrorist, he also considered it was entirely justifiable to attack her.

So in relation to this letter, I think we need to sit back and ask ourselves some pretty basic questions. One of which is, what would the reaction of court officials have been if they had received such a letter from a Muslim? If a Muslim had written such a letter, wouldn't the danger for a woman giving testimony against her assailant have been immediately acknowledged? And wouldn't appropriate measures have been undertaken to ensure her security in court? What is imprinted in one's mind from this tragic case is the complete absence of any reaction from our elected political representatives.

And this failure to react ensured that, immediately after the murder occurred, no attempt was made to address our Muslim communities, to reassure Muslims that the authorities recognised the murder for what it was, an Islamophobic crime that would be taken seriously. The press office of Angela Merkel issued some vague, non-committal statements. But Angela Merkel herself said nothing whatsoever, to Germans at least, on the subject of the murder. In fact the first time Merkel made any official comments about the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini was when she addressed the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak – a clear sign, in and of itself, that she regarded the murder as a foreigners' thing. Even when Stephen Kramer, the general secretary of the Jewish community in Germany, questioned why our political representatives did not react, and even called on them to make a public statement, there was still no reaction from our elected politicians. Even the minister for internal affairs, who had initiated the so-called Islamic Conference in 2006 and whose responsibility was to build mechanisms to integrate German Muslims within the context of officially recognising Islam, even this minister did not take it upon himself to address Germans (whether Muslims or non-Muslims) to make the condemnation of the crime clear.

This systematic failure to recognise the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini as an Islamophobic crime sent out a dangerous signal – a signal which also explains why anti-Islamic hatred, which has to all extents and purposes been legitimised, is growing, unchallenged today.

And seeing that I have mentioned the Islamic Conference let me say that this inability to treat German Muslims as an equal part of German society also conforms to my experience of working within the forum. In fact, I was invited to be part of the Conference, but the evidence I presented to it on the media's portrayal of Islam was never published. It seems to me the whole Islamic Conference was just for show – and that it has achieved absolutely nothing whatsoever in real terms.

But let's return to the current situation. I think that we can take the whole debate that occurred after the publication of Sarrazin's book as symptomatic of the failure to recognise the power of Islamophobia and to protect Germany's Muslim communities from its impact. While Thilo Sarrazin's theses are criticised from time to time, its misleading energy seems to be very welcome. There seems to be a complete lack of any critical awareness, or questioning as to why issues of integration have become of paramount importance to the political classes and the media at a time of economic crisis. Sarrazin is a banker, or he was a banker, but in this overwhelming debate centred on 'migrants' nobody is discussing the interests of the bank system, or the financial sector, or failures in economic policy. On the contrary, all the focus is on the migrants, the Muslims, or other marked groups. And in this way we seem to be bolstering the extreme Right, and popularising the views of racists towards marked groups. Even to the extent that we forget the disastrous response to events in the very early 1990s. Then, we pandered to the extreme Right through a campaign against asylum seekers, in which media frameworks for discussing immigration used slogans like 'the boat is full' and the constant metaphor of 'floods' to describe refugee movement. It led to pogroms against asylum seekers and migrants at Rostock and Hoyerswerda, for instance, and an arson attack on the home of a Turkish family at Solingen in 1992 which claimed the lives of five women and children. The political response to this extreme-right violence was not to challenge racism and fight discrimination. On the contrary, a whole package of measures were brought in to restrict immigration, under the name of a better asylum and immigration law. This sort of reaction only served to reinforce the racist logic of those who carried out the violence in the first place – in short, they were successful and got what they wanted.

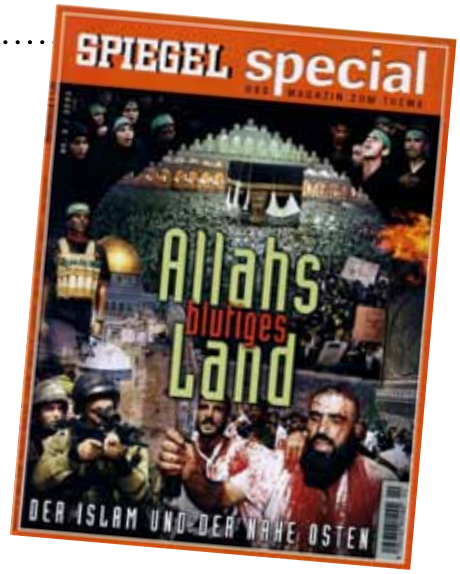
But today, we ignore these lessons from our recent past. Once again we see influential politicians claiming that they cannot leave the topics of integration, or Islam, to the extreme Right, which of course means that they themselves move the terrain further and further to the Right. This was indeed the prevailing view after the results of an opinion poll undertaken by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung were made public. The results suggested that sixty per cent of Germans do not like Muslims and would like to see restrictions imposed on the civil and religious rights of Muslims, and even to see Muslims sent 'home' (wherever 'home' is meant to be for German Muslim citizens). Once again, this poll is used to legitimise the view that taking over the polices of the extreme Right, weakens them. In fact, the contrary is the case, as proved by scientific studies [*Taking over the interests of the right wing doesn't weaken, but strengthen them* http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-08-31-mudde-en.html]

Now I would like to show you some covers from the magazine *Focus*, which is one of Germany's most popular weekly magazines with an estimated readership of 730,436. Looking at these *Focus* magazine covers demonstrates that there is no qualitative difference in the anti-Islamic discourse before and after 9/11. The first magazine cover is from 1995 and the second from October 2001. In qualitative terms, there is continuity between the images in that Islamic terminology and pictures are used to illustrate topics of violence, with the idea of oppression, at least oppression of women, linked to a backward ideology that is said to characterise Islam. After 9/11, the only differences in anti-Islamic media discourses are

a) in terms of the quantity of headlines and images with anti-Islamic themes, and b) the use of headlines and imagery to illustrate stories that focused not only on events abroad but on the Muslim community within Germany. In short, the imagery which was first popularised during the 1980s and '90s, and was mostly linked to events abroad in the so-called Muslim world, was, after September 11 (and this was even more the case after the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004), projected onto Muslims within Germany. (I am using a broad brush here – of course, prior to 9/11, there were some 'hints' that 'our' Muslims too were a problem.)

We can see that the imagery and metaphors used to frame Islam and Muslims have a potential to sow hatred, particularly when it comes to the endless media imagery linked to the headscarf debate. These images, from the magazine *Spiegel Special* – the title and a caricature on page 21 are from 1998 and we see here how the headscarf is linked to violence, and women who wear the headscarf are portrayed as threatening. For me, what is terrifying is the thought that this is what people actually see when they see a woman who wears the headscarf – a fact that perhaps provides a partial explanation for the lunacy of the debates that surround the headscarf.

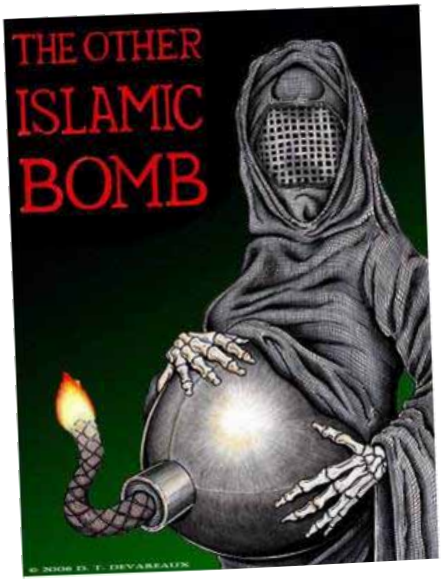
The next magazine cover, from a *Der Spiegel* special on war and violence, headlined 'Allah's bloody country', is from 2003 and is illustrative of yet another very dangerous tendency on the part of the media, namely the religification of violence, especially within the context of the Middle East conflict. You see that



picture editors illustrating such stories feel the need to draw on a toolbox of Islamic symbols – the Islamic crescent, mosques, headscarf, Mecca and images of Muslim prayer – that can be associated with all Muslims, anywhere. Such a combination of images to illustrate stories of violence has become common place over the years. So, perhaps, instead of our politicians asking themselves how they can isolate voters who hold racist opinions, they should ask themselves who and what nourishes this racism?

I also want to share with you two examples from France. The first, a cover from the weekly *l'Express,* speaks of *'la fièvre de l'Islam'* (The fever of Islam) in the context of Putin's war in Chechnya. The second cover, from the weekly magazine *Le Figaro,* is an illustration for an article inside the magazine on *'Islamisme – peut-on arrêter la contagion?* (Islamism – can the contagion be stopped?) Here we see the use of metaphors of illness and metastatic disease to accentuate the themes of a story on Islam which in the text is also linked to terror. In fact, absolutely everything is mixed up. No distinction is made between Islam, on the one hand, or so-called 'Islamism', extremism, and terror on the other. It is

interesting but not exceptional what *Le Figaro* is doing here. There is a similar example from a German daily regional newspaper *Nürnberger Nachrichten*. Very often the phrase 'Islamist cancer' is used or alluded to – a term freely used by Geert Wilders, the leader of the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands and one of the reasons why he is currently being prosecuted for inciting hatred and discrimination. Wilders' defenders argue that the use of terms such as 'Islamist cancer' are examples of legitimate free speech, and as they are directed against Islam and not Muslims per se they do not incite hatred. But have we learnt nothing from history? Can we really not see the logic implicit in the utilisation of such terms? Ask yourself what you would do if you were diagnosed with a cancer that was in danger of spreading from one organ to another. Wouldn't you try to defend yourself from this cancer, through medical intervention? So implicit in an argument that speaks of Islam as a cancer or other types of dangerous illness is a call for the introduction of special measures to quarantine you from those associated with spreading the cancer/illness.



In Germany, metaphors of disease are popularised through rabidly Islamophobic internet portals such as *Die Grüne Pest* (The Green Pest, a reference to Green as the traditional colour of Islam, with 'pest' a reference to the Black Death, one of the deadliest contagions in human history) which receives over 50,000 hits a day. The design I am now showing you by a Belgian cartoonist can be found on many Islamophobic websites. It depicts the womb of a burqa-clad Muslim woman as a ticking bomb/hand grenade, about to ignite. And as you can see, this takes the imagery deployed by the Italian writer, the late Oriana Fallaci (who talked of Muslims giving birth like rats) to yet another hideous level. I am sorry to have to show such an image, but we have to address the ways in which Muslim fertility has become central to Islamophobic discourse – in a way that alludes to future threats and legitimises 'self-defence' measures. And it's not just confined to the extreme Right. For it is precisely this theme that Thilo Sarrazin exploits when he argues that if Turkish and Arabic immigrants in Germany 'keep producing more little girls in headscarves', who are only good for selling fruit and vegetables, then Germany will be overtaken by Muslims who are not only more stupid than us but also pose a threat to German culture. Looking at this image, I don't get the impression that you would want to ban the headscarf because you wanted to save this woman, to set her free (which is of course the mainstream argument for legislating against the headscarf).

So what can we do? There are some encouraging signs. Since the Swiss banned the construction of minarets in November 2009, the German media has at least begun to use the term Islamophobia. Perhaps, unlike the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini which is not understood as an Islamophobic crime, the German media could see the Swiss as Islamophobic. For Islamophobia could be externalised, associated with the racism of others. Nevertheless, it is a beginning. But if we are to take this discussion forward then we need to say quite clearly that what we do not need is more information about Islam. Let's be frank. We would not fight anti-Semitism by providing information on how Jews live, explaining the *Halakah* and things like that. We should know by now that anti-Semitism and other forms of racism are the problem of the racist – the problem of his projection. All this, albeit well-meaning, information we are receiving on Islam, especially in Germany, is in my opinion actually reinforcing the basis of the conspiracy theory that Europe is in danger of Islamisation. And it sometimes seems to me that our government is happy to go along with this conspiracy theory – as indeed are groups like the bankers – because it suits those in power if the debate becomes more polarised, if fear, resentment and antagonism is directed at Muslims, as well as migrants or those on benefits, eastern Germans and other 'marked groups'.

Where does all this fear and resentment against Muslims come from, how does it manage to get into our heads, our hearts, our feelings? We need to address these questions to civil society, but, again, there are encouraging signs that more people are beginning to see through conspiracy theories. I will give you just one example from personal experience in the peace movement. What I have experienced over the past few years is that the peace movement has understood and gone to great lengths to explain to people that Islamophobia today is being used for war propaganda. Those active in the peace movement did not come to this view through attending courses on 'understanding Islam', but because of their opposition to war they understood that Islamophobia has a function, that fear of Muslims was being instrumentalised to make us see war as a way of helping, for example the oppressed Muslim women of Afghanistan. The peace movement understands that the creation of scare scenarios and enemy images of Muslims has been used to justify greater surveillance within Germany as

well as a justification for our government to support and participate in war. In addition to this, the peace movement understands that it is precisely when people feel that a draconian law does not affect them, when people feel antagonism and anger against a marked group, that the state can introduce 'security' laws. Such security laws create a more authoritarian climate for everyone. But because of manufactured antagonisms, or let us say, a divide and rule policy, the prospect of coordinated resistance is eroded. Recently, Professor Wolfgang Benz, the head of the Centre for Research on Anti-Semitism, published several articles that sought to compare anti-Islamic discourse today with anti-Jewish discourse of the nineteenth century, paying particular attention to how anger over the economic crisis at the end of the nineteenth century was diverted into hatred of the Jewish community. There are, of course, many differences between the nineteenth century and today – but still you can see clear parallels, particularly in the discourse. I believe that a centre for research on Islamophobia is very much needed at a European level, a scientific institution which would lend its weight to the research on and documentation of what is happening on the ground, providing quantitative data as well as specific case studies. And such a centre could, in turn, play a strategic role in the networks we are attempting to create to counter racism and Islamophobia. ■

The Austrian FPÖ and the cultural racism behind the liberal mask

Murat Batur, Kanafani Inter-cultural Initiative

Sinan Ertugrul

In my presentation I will try to provide a broad outline of the situation in Austria concerning Islamophobia, taking into account the electoral success of the extreme-Right Austrian Freedom Party – the FPÖ. Much of my presentation will focus on the ways in which Islamophobic arguments have been developed by the FPÖ, first under the leadership of Jörg Haider and then his successor Heinz-Christian Strache. But Islamophobia is not just the preserve of the extreme Right. In Austria today, as we shall see, Islamophobia is becoming more respectable thanks to liberal arguments.

Anti-racist civil society and its limitations

In 1993 the FPÖ, then under the leadership of Jörg Haider, initiated the 'Austria First' petition, calling for the closure of Austria's borders and a change to Austria's constitution to state that Austria is not a country of immigration. Known, in short, as the anti-foreigner referendum, it took classic xenophobic positions, based largely on biological racism, anti-Semitism and anti-foreigner sentiment. The reactions to this referendum were unprecedented. A demonstration, the 'Sea of Light' was called, with more than 300,000 people pouring onto Heldenplatz to oppose the referendum. There was broad support from popular artists, politicians and other people of influence, with statements of support from the main political parties, from the Social Democrats even through to some of the right-wing university fraternities, the *Burschenschafts*.

At the time of the *Anschluss* [*annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938*] there was already a 500,000-strong Austrian Nazi party which drew its strength from the movements of anti-Semitism and pan-Germanism which had begun in the nineteenth century and accelerated after the first world war. After the second world war, the Austrian political classes wanted to make a clean break with the past and, hoping to establish a *tabula rasa*, they sought

to restore democratic structures from above. But the 'Sea of Light' demonstration offered a new point of departure, the possibility of democratisation from below, and linked to the development of a real anti-racist civil society in Austria.

At this point, the FPÖ was totally isolated – the racism it promoted was addressed predominantly to working-class sentiment and insecurity. But its Austria First petition had attracted 417,000 signatures, forcing a parliamentary debate. The governing parties – the centre-left Social Democrats and the centre-right conservative People's Party (ÖVP) – responded by adopting ever more restrictive migration and asylum policies – even when such policies ran against their own ideological positions. All this helped the FPÖ gain electoral success. And in the October 1999 general election, the FPÖ, which scored 26.9 per cent of the vote, emerged as kingmaker. So that when coalition talks between the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the ÖVP broke down, the ÖVP entered into negotiations with the FPÖ and eventually formed a coalition government with the FPÖ as junior partner. The European Union protested and Austria was politically isolated for a short period. Again the newly-founded civil society groups organised a big demonstration on Heldenplatz, but this time against the new coalition. And again there were up to 300,000 demonstrators.

Although these developments were perhaps important for Austrian politics as a whole, both mobilisations were really only of the 'white' majority. The mobilisation didn't include migrants – not really. Yes, there were some migrants participating, but only those within easy reach of or liberal enough for the organisers. For the mobilisers' primary aim was to reassure the majority that they, the demonstrators, represented the good guys. And most importantly, that the 'good guys' were mobilising in a way, and against a particular form of racism, that the majority had no understanding, or sympathy, for. Anti-foreigner sentiments, biological racism, anti-Semitism are all forms of racism which are even today opposed strongly by the majority in Austria. In a liberal arena you are not allowed to speak in an anti-Semitic or racist way. And I think the liberals working in the media and other important institutions really don't understand working-class racism, or where it comes from and what it means. For them working-class racism exists in a totally different world which they have no access to. And it is this that makes them blind to their own racism – a subject I will return to later.

So, to summarise, the civil society campaign in Austria was formed in opposition to the extreme Right – with its classic xenophobic and anti-Semitic positions. But today, the majority that supported the positions adopted against the extreme Right at the rallies at the Heldenplatz, no longer reacts against the Islamophobic positions and actions of the FPÖ. What has changed?

The FPÖ, Islam and the Christian-Occidental community of values

Let's look first at how the FPÖ's focus on Islam began to evolve. Haider, then leader of the FPÖ, had as far back as 1993 published *The Freedom I Mean* in which he argued that the social order of Islam was in total opposition to 'our western values' and that human rights, democracy and women's rights were incompatible with Islam. But it was not until 1999 that the FPÖ started to introduce anti-Muslim sentiments into its electoral campaign. By the 2005 Vienna local elections, the FPÖ was in a position to make Islamophobia more central, as demonstrated by the election slogan 'Pummerin instead of Muezzin'. [*Pummerin is the bell in Vienna's St Stephen's Cathedral which was forged, in 1683, from canons left by the Ottoman army that had laid siege to Vienna.*] And that centrality remains to this day, with the promotion of Islamophobia not only leading to a deepening of the party's xenophobic positions, but also to certain significant shifts in arguments and tactics. For instance, the FPÖ – previously known for its anti-clerical positions – began to defend Western culture against the alleged Islamic threat. The focus on Islam began to force it to move from its classical anti-clerical position. Western culture was presented as a homogenous Christian culture, with Europe defined as a Christian-Occidental community of values. This explicit defence of western Christian values is reflected in election literature today, as well as its repeated manipulation of Christian symbols, such as the crucifix (Strache waved a crucifix at his supporters during a rally against an Islamic community centre in Vienna). Another example of this approach was a recent election poster entitled *Abendland in Christenhand* (The West in Christian hands). The FPÖ also founded a platform called 'Mayday Western World', the purpose of which is to try to defend as well as re-animate Christian customs and values. Another project is associated with the new leader of the FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache. He has set himself the task of founding a new 'patriotic European party' - a European network of the extreme Right which, while embracing the Ataka party (Bulgaria), the Front National (France) and the Vlaams Belang (Belgium), sets out to 'rescue the Western world' from the alleged Islamic threat. In an attempt to secure the votes of Serbian migrants in the communal elections in Vienna, Strache even went so far as to show up with a Serbian Orthodox prayer rope (*Brojanica*). He posed with the *Brojanica* for election posters, in discos and at public events. By so doing, Strache explicitly drew a culturally coded distinction between good migrants, especially of Serbian descent and Orthodox Christians, and bad migrants, like Turks, Bosnians and Arabs – in short Muslims.

Drawing on liberalism

The next big development within the racist policy of the FPÖ was its incorporation of liberal arguments against Islam and Muslims, particularly those pertaining to women's rights. The FPÖ has never had

a gender policy but over the last few years it has taken it upon itself to assume the role of defender of women's rights. A recent election poster is entitled 'Free women instead of forced headscarves'; another 'We protect free woman – the SPÖ protects forced headscarves'. Of course the FPÖ is not against the 'forced' headscarf *per se* – it is against the headscarf as foreign to the species – as foreign to the customs of Austria.

In the electoral campaign in 2010 in Vienna, Strache directed his bile particularly towards two Muslim Social Democrat candidates for the city council, Omar Al-Rawi and Gülsüm Namaldi. Gülsüm Namaldi, who wears the headscarf, was one of the most popular Social Democrat election candidates. I think no further explanation is needed as to why the FPÖ targeted her – a fact that Namaldi is proud of, promoting herself as Strache's nightmare. Omar Al-Rawi has been a member of the Vienna city council for many years. During the last Israeli attack on Gaza, he spoke at the mass demonstration against Operation Cast Lead. Strache targeted Omar Al-Rawi on the basis that he attended a demonstration in which, Strache alleged, some anti-Semitic slogans were seen on the posters of protestors. Strache further claimed that Omar Al-Rawi engaged in hate speech against Israel and supported anti-Semitism.

These arguments are of course disingenuous. Could anyone possibly believe that Strache is a liberal or an anti-anti-Semite? Yet the fact that he was allowed to set the tone of debate, shows just how easy it is today to be a racist and put on a liberal mask. The question surely is: who created such a language in which you can easily formulate Islamophobic racism? Most of the arguments that the FPÖ deploys against Muslims have their origins in the liberal left. In Germany, feminists like the TV personality Alice Schwarzer, former left authors like Henryk Broder, Ralph Giordano or 'critical' migrants like Necla Kelek, Mina Ahadi and others first argued in these terms. Because Austria has the same language, discussions taking place in Germany have had a great impact on the liberal and leftist movements in Austria. You only have to look at the left liberal weekly magazine *Falter* which uses exactly the same language and terms. In fact, the liberal media constantly make generalisations against Muslims, their alleged anti-democratic positions and anti-Semitism. A supposedly objective sociological study of Islamic religious teachers (in fact based from the outset on bias) caused a heated debate, because it claimed, in the most emotional terms, to reveal how anti-democratic Muslims were. And the demonstrations in Vienna against Israeli war crimes were not regarded as a part of the anti-war movement; because Muslims were involved they were widely portrayed in the liberal left media as anti-Semitic.

Another problem lies with the intervention of certain politicians, such as Efgani Dönmez from the Greens. Dönmez argues that we should face the problems of integration, we should take the fears of Austrians seriously, and that we should ensure that we get only the migrants that we really need – well educated, assimilable, good for the economy and so on. What a horrible neo-liberal diction! One of his last blog entries

stated that before we focus on migration policies we should subsidise or support Austrian families, so they can give birth to more children.

Then there is the warmongering faction within the Left which also supports Islamophobia. For example Cafe Critique is a leftist platform which is against anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism –which is so far OK – as well as anti-Zionism. But as a consequence of all this it also supports the neo-conservative wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and promotes war against Iran and hate speech against Muslims – and all this in very offensive language. In Germany there are home pages like 'Politically Incorrect' which act in the same way. I think there may be similar home pages in Britain too.

The point is this: in Austria, Islamophobia, unlike anti-Semitism, is not accepted as a form of racism. This is largely due to the closed circuit of thought promoted by liberal arguments, particularly pertaining to the equality of women, alleged anti-Semitism or anti-democratic attitudes. The extreme Right has adopted this liberal discourse in order to gain public legitimacy. That's why it is no longer possible to isolate the FPÖ in the way that it was possible to do in 1993.

Islamophobia is a phenomenon which is of course closely linked to the war on terror, colonialism and imperialism. But this link, while known to those who feel the impact of Islamophobia, is neglected by large parts of the Left in Austria today. It is impossible to ignore media coverage on issues such as the war on terror. Even if Austria was never really implicated directly in European colonialism, it is part of Europe as a whole. And our presence in Austria today is due to post-colonial circumstances; and our life here is determined by post-colonial conditions.

A way to work against Islamophobia

I want to conclude by highlighting some of the ways in which we are working against Islamophobia in Austria. The Cultural Initiative Kanafani was founded in Vienna by radical left and Muslim students about ten years ago. At that time, most students in Vienna were not really interested in classical political action, so we tried to think of ways in which we could gain the interest of students for anti-racist and anti-war topics. We guessed that one way to reach largely apolitical students would be through a cultural programme which was at the same time political – for instance by showing films from Third World filmmakers, organising small concerts of migrant musicians and so on.

Furthermore, we organised lectures about topics which were not discussed within the Left. At the same time as introducing new topics to apolitical students, we wanted to challenge the level of discussion within left circles and convince politically engaged people to rethink the ways in which they were conceptualising certain issues. It is proving very hard to convince people on the Left that Islamophobia is a form of (cultural) racism. For one thing, the Left does not even accept the term Islamophobia. We decided to start a discussion on cultural racism and its links to Islamophobia by inviting Etienne Balibar to speak at a public meeting. The fact that Balibar is a hugely popular writer here in Austria helped us draw attention to the topic and gain media interest.

But there are issues that we need to focus on. The self-empowerment of Muslims and how to deal with problems that arise from Islamophobia were subjects we needed to discuss within ourselves, as Muslims. We also felt it important to network with anti-racist groups that include Muslim migrants, like Kanak Attak in Germany. We think it's important to discuss and understand the framework within which Islamophobia and xenophobia are working. So we organised a symposium to critique the term 'integration', and to draw attention to a debate that blames migrants for failing to integrate while saying nothing about the conditions in the so-called majority society which need to change. To this end we invited the German writer Mark Terkessidis. And because, more and more we are finding that the Islamophobic liberal discourse is promoted with reference to both the Enlightenment and secularism, we have, through our journal der. wisch, taken a critical look at the ways such reference points reinforce Islamophobia. We do believe that, even as the political atmosphere becomes more toxic, this kind of way of working against Islamophobia can be effective at the local level.

I want to close my presentation with a short remark on the situation today. As I mentioned at the start, the FPÖ won 26 per cent of the vote at the communal elections in Vienna; it is not improbable that it will gain an even greater share of the vote at the next national elections in 2013. Even though, in the years to come, it will remain an opposition party, its influence on the way politics is done in Austria can only increase. To describe the way the governing parties handle this problem, allow me to cite a short passage from an article published in the *Guardian* this month by Slavoj Žižek which for me encapsulates the way the governing parties have dealt with this problem over the last twenty years – and no doubt continue in the immediate future:

'After righteously rejecting direct populist racism as "unreasonable" and unacceptable for our democratic standards, they endorse "reasonably" racist protective measures … some of them even Social Democrats, tell us: "We grant ourselves permission to applaud African and east European sportsmen, Asian doctors, Indian software programmers. We don't want to kill anyone, we don't want to organise any pogrom. But we also think that the best way to hinder the always unpredictable violent anti-immigrant defensive measures is to organise a reasonable anti-immigrant protection.'"

ASIM QURESHI, CAGEPRISONERS

I was very interested to hear about Marwa El-Sherbini's case. I tried to follow what happened, as did a lot of Muslims here in the UK who were deeply affected by the murder. But we experienced a real sense of hopelessness. We really did not know who to contact in Germany to take up the issue and that was something that we struggled quite heavily with. Can you tell us more about the responses in the Muslim community to the murder?

SABINE SCHIFFER

The trouble is that we don't have Muslim organisations on a scale comparable with the UK, and we don't have a good cooperation between Muslim groups and anti-racists, only on the level of individuals. At the moment, the tendency within the Muslim community is more towards addressing politicians. But there are individuals, such as Nina Mühe, who is here today and works in Berlin, who are doing good work in trying to bring Muslim and anti-racist groups together.

NINA MÜHE, EUROPE-UNIVERSITY VIADRINA IN FRANKFURT/ODER

Sabine is right. The situation is so different from the UK. In Germany, the general picture is that many Muslims feel discouraged; they don't trust their own ability to change their situation. The general attitude is 'don't speak too loud, don't speak out too much'. It really is a very big problem. That is why there has been no real opposition to the headscarf bans which are now in place in over half the German states. There are initiatives, but they are very small scale. For instance, following Marwa's murder, there was a Facebook campaign aimed at petitioning Angela Merkel to speak out for Muslims in Germany. But, to confirm what Sabine has said, it's all very much geared towards lobbying the politicians.

SUKANT CHANDAN, SONS OF MALCOLM

I wanted to thank the panel for their contributions and for all their work and share some ideas with them. It seems to me that we have to be clear about what battles we are fighting today and what battles have already been won. We have won certain battles as black people – and I use black in the 'old school', political sense. As black people we have won the battle to stay here, we won that decades ago and today there is not going to

be a mass transfer of Muslims or black people in general. This is not going to happen. Why is that? Because our communities rose up before and we said to Europe and the West, we are here to stay and you have to respect us. And they have more or less respected us and more or less we have been able to walk in the streets, I mean relative to the situation that existed before. The battle today is more for the right to be *who* we are – whether in political, ethnic or religious terms – that's the battle we're fighting today. Furthermore, we're fighting to support our brothers and sisters who are resisting in the Third World. These are the two issues. Clearly we're under attack from western governments: you cannot be who you are, you have to hate yourself, you have to despise your people, you have to criminalise your people and you have to assimilate into white supremacy, into neo-colonialism. So I think there is a battle to fundamentally change the West from a neo-colonial racist white supremacist entity into one which has a neutral and equal relationship to the rest of the world. And, just to finish, it seems to me that those in power, in government only respect one thing and that is the power of us, here as a global community. So if you look at the US, by the years 2040-2045 it will be a majority non-white nation – not only that we are already seeing under the impact of globalisation the rise of Latin America and the Third World, as well as demise of the West. What is important is that we recognise that we are only at this point because of the sacrifices made by people in previous decades. All the organisations in our society, they only have a voice because our communities rose up, as they will do again today. One French boy is killed, and all of France was in flames. In Belgium, likewise, it was only because of the interventions of Dyab Abou Jahjah that Antwerp did not burn to the ground. So I think we have to be very clear where our strength is, from where it derives and what the battle is that we face today.

PENNIE QUINTON, CAMPAIGN AGAINST CRIMINALISING COMMUNITIES

I want to come back to the murder in the courtroom, particularly in relation to the constant discussion in the media about women's rights and gender oppression. This was the case of a woman murdered in a courtroom. So how exactly did the press deal with the fact

that a woman lost her life, that a murderer essentially oppressed her in the greatest way that any human can be oppressed, by taking her life?

SABINE SCHIFFER

I monitored the media for the Braunschweig Georg Eckert Institute for about two months following the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini. First of all, the murder was not considered at all within a feminist, or women's rights framework, and that is because feminist discourse, especially during the 1990s, held that women who wear the headscarf are not our ally, because they are oppressed, they are outside feminism, and have to be freed. This is why many Muslim women blame feminists, like the TV personality and founder of the feminist journal *Emma*, Alice Schwartzer, in Germany, or Julia Onken, the Swiss feminist who campaigned to ban minarets from mosques, for excluding them from the discourse on women's rights...

PENNIE QUINTON

... So a man killed a woman and it was not discussed in those terms?

SABINE SCHIFFER

Absolutely. It was not discussed in these terms at all. First of all, it was presented within the framework of the problem that exists within east Germany, *their* problem, the problem of the east Germans. The next framework was to present it as an 'immigrant' problem, because the murderer was from Russia, he was an ethnic German from Russia ...

PENNIE QUINTON

... So it was all racist discourse...

SABINE SCHIFFER

Racism was in every detail, yes.

MOHAMMED EL BUSHRA, ISLAMIC HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

You talked about the way the murder was discussed as a foreigners' issue. But from what I could see, it was also a big part of the discussion online which focussed on the fact that she was Egyptian and it was framed in terms of the need to stand up for the rights of Egyptians.

SABINE SCHIFFER

But even if it would have been a Muslim from Germany, I fear it would have been the same excluding discourse.

MOHAMMED EL BUSHRA

Precisely, they always try to frame it as an issue of immigrants, it shifts the focus and allows for complacency.

AISHA MANIAR

I have a question about another case in Germany, a more recent case about a young man who earlier this year lost a case he had brought for his right to pray at school. I think he is about 15 now, but he was about 12 when he was told he could not pray in the corridor of the school, or at the school any more. Essentially, the argument seemed to be that only Christian prayer could be allowed at school, that the act of praying at school contained the potential for radicalisation. So what I would like to know is first, what has happened to this case and second, what has been the general debate in Germany about this issue particularly in the context of the isolation of young people, not just through Islamophobia, but the marginalisation of the voice of young people generally?

SABINE SCHIFFER

The general way in which it is discussed, if you follow the blogs, is that it is proof that Muslims are asking for a special right, or let's say, a special demand, that Christians do not ask for. Furthermore, this call for a special right is in and of itself a sign of 'Islamisation' It is said that Christians do not ask for such a special right to pray in the classroom, because when they want to pray they leave the school, go to church and pray there. I don't actually know more about this case which I think will take a long time to go through the courts, but perhaps Nina can say something more, as it occurred in Berlin.

NINA MÜHE

Yes, the case was from Berlin. So far, there have been two decisions. In the first decision, the court ruled in favour of the boy, arguing that the school does not have the right to stop the boy from praying and that they should give him a space. The school authorities used many arguments to support its case. First, the school argued that 'if we allow this boy to pray, we have to give him a special room in order to protect others from his demonstration of religion which might put them under pressure'. But, then, it also argued that 'if we do give him a special room then not only is the secular principle of our state school violated but large amounts of students will follow his example and we won't be able to deal with the situation anymore'. But to both these arguments the court said, 'no, just give him a small room

and tell him to go to the room once a day'. An appeal was launched, this time headed by the senator for education in Berlin. There had been a big discussion in Berlin, the tone of which was quite anti-religious. At the second court hearing, the argument made on behalf of the school, was that the boy did not use the room enough, and that the real motive for taking the case to court was not religious, but political. So from the first argument, that floods of praying students would use the room, the ground moved to the second argument, that the room was not used enough. But the case is ongoing.

SABINE SCHIFFER

What I might add, because I find this point really important, is that this is one of these cases where we mix up the secular concept with the laic concept (coming from the French laïcité) in ways that also relate to Islamophobia. What I observe is that all these discussions take place as though Germany was a laic state – namely a country that practises an extreme form of secularism in which all state institutions are totally free from any religious influence. This is simply not the case. Germany is a secular state but it practises a form of secularism whereby the state takes on the responsibility of including and regulating religion, as well as safeguarding it. But this point of view seems to be reserved to the Christian and perhaps the Jewish community, whereas our Muslims' issues are discussed in the framework of laïcism. So there is a dishonesty within the argument and another example of a discussion in which you find a double standard.

KLAUS DIK NIELSEN, OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

At the Open Society Foundations, we work for the social inclusion of those who are marginalised including minorities within European countries, as well as for a change in public policy and discourse on these groups and issues surrounding them. As such, I was very struck by one of the concrete measures you proposed - for a research and documentation centre, as you put it. Could you not only tell us a little bit more about that, but also a little bit more about your engagement with civil society, because I think it's very important that we try to go beyond academia.

SABINE SCHIFFER

The idea for a European research and documentation centre came from my experience at the so-called Islamic Conference where I was confronted with the situation that, at the very highest level, German political scientists and politicians were not ready to accept that Islamophobia exists. This seems to be something very typical of the German situation, where the authorities mistrust the evidence presented to them by those who feel the impact of Islamophobia, and therefore dispute the very term. So we need this sort of research organisation to lend weight to the work of NGOs on the ground, to give academic evidence to what is clear to all of us. But we also need something independent, a sociological institution that while not directly working with groups on the ground, is not cut off from them and does not exclude them from its work.

We need also to reach, let's say, with slogans and programmes, the general public. In Germany, we have a very good satirical TV programme which parodies the news – it made very many jokes and sketches about the whole Sarrazin debate. It was a very good thing, as it reached many people. So we shouldn't exclude working at this level but we need back-up, scientific research to lend credibility to our arguments.

MURAT BATUR

In Vienna, our main target has been students not academics. But we have also tried to make connections with other civil society groups and NGOs which are working on similar topics such as racism. But it's exactly as Sabine has said, there has been this problem that they simply don't understand the issue of Islamophobia. We have begun to work for example with the NGO SOS Mitmensch – this is the group which organised the large demonstrations, that I mentioned before. But it is very difficult attempting to work with other groups.

LIZ FEKETE

The next contribution is from Marwan Muhammad, from the Collective Against Islamophobia in France. I only met Marwan for the first time a couple of weeks ago and since then I had the good fortune to meet Nawel Kelda, another member of the Collective. I think what is actually amazing about Marwan and Nawel is that they are representative of a new generation of French young people who are highly educated and working in top professions and yet are so fired-up by the levels of Islamophobia in society that they are prepared to sacrifice their glittering careers to help the Collective. Then, there will be a final contribution from Nadia Fadil, a sociologist and current affairs writer based at the Centre for Sociological Research at the Catholic University of Leuven, who has herself come under attack for her work on the dissemination of Islamophobia.

Nationalism, identity and the French consensus against 'visible' Islam

Marwan Muhammad, Collective Against Islamophobia in France

From the outset, let me remind you that this is an informal discussion on the causes of Islamophobia in Europe and, most importantly, the ways we can help each other to combat it.

For decades in Europe, we have been watching the rise of nationalism as though it were an alien phenomenon, something we didn't want to see, something we didn't want to talk about, something that needed to be kept where we thought it belonged – out of our life. This denial resulted in a feeling, amongst those embracing nationalist ideas, that no one really cared about their opinions. In France, traditional parties, such as the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) or the PS (Socialist Party) instrumentalised the nationalist vote in order to win elections and then, once in power, ignored the concerns of these voters. And this only resulted in an even greater sense of frustration and isolation on the part of the voters. Mainstream political figures, like Nicolas Sarkozy, even went so far as to claim that his party had won the fight against such nationalist movements.

The Front National and mainstream discourse

But if the Front National's Jean Marie Le Pen has indeed been defeated as an electoral force, what is most apparent today is how successful he has been in spreading his ideas across the wider society, with his policies adopted across the political spectrum. For Sarkozy to claim that he has exterminated the Front National (FN) is rather like a doctor claiming that he has eradicated the threat of HIV just because he has spread it to everyone!

It was partly because extremism was personalised in the figure of Jean Marie Le Pen, that we concentrated our efforts on fighting and demonising the individual rather than fighting his ideas. So that today we find that no major political figure has brought to the table clear analytical answers to the issues raised by the FN or broken the three major claims of the Front National which have been repeated since the 1980s. The first of these claims is the alleged link between immigration and unemployment, so that you will find that in all European countries immigrants are stigmatised as a group of people in competition with local workers trying to take their jobs, to take over their companies, to limit their opportunities to build a better life. And the higher the unemployment levels, the more this feeling grows because when you are at the 'lower end' of society it is riskier for you to lose your job and you don't have the perspective to see that it is not the fault of the immigrant worker.

The second big claim made by the nationalist forces is the amalgam of ethnic groups and social groups. We will

all be familiar with what happened in 2005 when there were 'riots' in France (also in 2006). These were, in a nutshell, 'social riots' that took place after two young men were killed fleeing the police. These social riots occurred because all the inhabitants of the suburbs felt some sympathy with these two young men, not least because, even prior to a proper investigation into the circumstances of the death, Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, gave his unqualified support to the police officers who were chasing the youths. So that across France, in all the suburbs, people from the same social class as the victims joined the 'riots'. But the way these riots were depicted in the media, whether it be *Le Soir* or Fox News, or anywhere else, was that these were ethnic riots, or religious riots, and that Muslims were rising up against the French government. The 'rioters' were essentialised to their ethnic belonging and their religious belonging, rather than their social belonging. But it was the social factor that explained the manifestation, rather than their ethnic background or their religious background.

The third idea that has not been explicitly combated is the ideological definition of French identity. The way that identity is discussed in France maintains that the different aspects of identity you have in yourself are mutually exclusive. So you will be asked the question 'are you Muslim or are you French?' But are these two identities mutually exclusive? No they are not. For myself, I am Egyptian by origin, I am French by nationality and language, I am Indian by cooking, I am American when it comes to shoes and I am Swiss when it comes to watches. Identity is not something that is mutually exclusive. You can have multiple identities; this does not mean you are being schizophrenic, it just means that you are being diverse.

So not only have these ideas, once associated with the FN, survived, but they have made their way into the rest of society, changing form and taking on different arguments, but targeting the same groups and leading to the same consequences. Let me give you an example from the current situation. The rejection of the practice of Islam takes different forms in French society, but it always targets the same group and achieves the same objectives. So on the far Right, the argument goes that Islam is threatening our societies, that there has been this phenomenon called a Muslim invasion and that our security is not guaranteed any more. But in targeting a specific group, the Muslims, the FN objective is either to force people to move, or to make their live so disagreeable in France that they move, which amounts to the same thing. But if you look at the Socialist Party you will also find that the same group is targeted but in a way that uses different arguments. The Socialists will say 'you cannot live here unless you endorse the idea of laïcité which as far as we are concerned entails the denial of any visible form of religion.' So you have to leave your headscarf at the door, you have to shave your beard to enter business, you have to carry out a series of acts that will progressively eliminate any visible manifestation of your religious or cultural choices. So, you see, the arguments are not only targeted at the same group but they end up achieving the same outcome.

Nationalism and social disaggregation

So let's look at this from another perspective. Why are these things happening? The truth is that we suffer, as a people, every day. Not only Muslims, not only Jewish people, not only minorities but we, the people as a whole. We suffer because we live in a society where we are physically close to each other, but we are so, so far from each other. When we are in the tube, we are one against another. People who are strangers and with whom you never mix socially are physically very close to you. We live in the same neighbourhoods, work in the same companies, share the same bus every day, but it doesn't mean that we care about each other. There is no social link whatsoever. We don't talk much to each other because we don't have time. We don't have time because we need to work. We work hard to pay the mortgage. We take a mortgage because we want to own. We want to own because we want to exist in a society where individuals are defined by their material possessions. We spend most of our energy trying to accomplish an idea of life that will never make us happy.

We make those who don't have a job feel like they don't have a place in our society. Some are nostalgic about the country where they have spent their childhood and want their memories to live on and never change. When some see that changes are occurring all around them, they immediately identify these as negative and a threat to their emotional identity. Some others have a taste for domination and want to force their vision on the rest of the world, whatever the consequences. Call this tendency what you want – perhaps a neo-colonial paradigm which is constructed on what no longer exits, as France is no longer a military or economic power. Yet this sense of domination lingers on in a cultural form.

So to face our frustrations about our own lives, we need to find reasons and we need to find someone to blame. Someone has to pay. That is precisely what your local nationalist will provide: he will provide you with a reason and a person who is guilty for these hard times. And because nationalist speech is built for the masses, it has to be simple. So it ends up that there is one person who is almost always responsible for everything – the Muslim immigrant.

Muslims are responsible for unemployment because they steal the good man's job. They are responsible for the lack of national security because, as all of us should know by now, Islam is a religion of violence. They are responsible for the financial crisis, because Islamic finance is invading Europe. They are also responsible for the destruction of our identity, because

headscarves and beards obstruct the landscape when it comes to looking at Coca-Cola ads in the streets. It goes on and on forever. The Muslim immigrant is also responsible for the disaggregation of our social life because they marry our daughters and our sons, so we can't go to the pub with them anymore. And so on, and so on....

A few years ago, we would have considered this a joke, or a form of unacceptable populism designed to appeal to desperate people. But let's face it, this speech is spreading everywhere in Europe now. In the UK we have the English Defence League growing stronger every day. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' party has won twenty-four seats and has entered into an alliance with the Liberals, which, even if he has no ministerial posts, grants him legitimacy to seek actual power in the next elections. Right-wing extremists now also have twenty seats in Sweden and forty-six in Hungary (which represents 16.7 per cent of the vote). In Denmark, an anti-immigrant populist party has participated in the government since 2007 and in Italy, Roberto Maroni from the Northern League, known for his virulent anti-mosque campaigns, is Berlusconi's minister of interior.

In France, the situation is no better. It's sad to say that in the country that I live the only thing that seems to make for consensus at a national level is a hatred of the practices of Islam. It's the area on which Left or Right, high or low, can agree. We don't want to see headscarves in our society, we don't want our daughters to marry a Muslim. If we weren't living in such hard times, we would laugh at this discourse. (I'm sorry I wanted to put the blame on Mr Muslim immigrant for climate change, but I still have found no clue, but at least I can say he has no alibi!)

But I need to be a bit more precise about what exactly is being objected to. In France, there is no problem with Nadia doing the Oriental belly dance for a birthday or Mo' bringing cakes for Eid. But if Nadia starts wearing the hijab or if Muhammad grows a beard, or if I ask if there is a place to pray at the office, then the trouble starts. Nicolas Sarkozy has no problem hiring people like Fadela Amara or Rachida Dati, and using them as proof that France is not racist, because when someone like Rachida Dati is asked about her religion, she answers that 'my religion is laïcité, positive laïcité'. Now this is a strong claim, and we respect it. But it's also important that you don't tell us that by appointing Rachida Dati you have created some form of representation for Muslims in France. In fact, there is only one elected person who has tried to represent the Muslim community, and that is the Green Party Paris senator Alima Boumediene, who has recently been prosecuted for anti-Semitism just because she supports the Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions campaign.

The spreading of nationalist speech is not the only explanation for what is happening. There is large-scale rejection of religion generally in French society and the attitude against the visibility of Islam is widespread across the country. The National Committee for Human Rights (CNCDH) identified in its annual report that 18 per cent of the French population has 'no problem with immigration but have a strong negative feeling about the practice of Islam'. This is an important statistic as it is clear that this 18 per cent of the population does not come from the political Right, as they do not have a problem with immigration. On the contrary, they come from the political Left and have a great deal of influence in the media. They represent a left form of Islamophobia the arguments of which are based on the suggestion that Muslims, who are brainwashed, need to be liberated from themselves and that we should help to civilise them in order that they can enter the twenty-first century. In particular, they are anxious to liberate Muslim women from their fathers, brothers, husbands and mostly from themselves. (Yes, the Muslim woman has no right to self-determination because, as everyone knows, she has been brainwashed.)

Islamophobia in France is not a politically exclusive phenomenon. It involves, at one and the same time, people from the Right of the political spectrum and people from the Left. The perspective of people from the Right tends towards establishing a complex mix between Islam, immigration, delinquency and some nostalgia for the past. Islam is depicted as an inferior culture or religion, with the Right also attempting to minimise the impact of colonisation. One of the first measures Nicolas Sarkozy put in place when he became president was the law to acknowledge the positive impact of colonisation in Africa. Following this, he embarked on a road show in Africa where in various speeches he argued that 'the African man has not entered history. It is now time they did'. So thank you Mr Sarkozy for trying to help us assess the situation, and when we can or cannot enter history, and who will help us to do so!

Islamophobia – words, deeds and what to do

All this translates into a series of Islamophobic acts that we, at the Collective Against Islamophobia attempt to document and quantify. We have established that in France every three days a Muslim woman or man is attacked or abused in the streets. Every three weeks, a mosque is profaned or damaged. Forty-one per cent of Isamophobic acts are carried out by civil servants, the police, teachers and people working in the courts. But what we have also witnessed is the use of negative semantics around Islam to support a political agenda in both domestic and foreign policy. We have seen the introduction of various thematics that could be the names of movies! The first theme or movie title centres around definitions of 'extremist' and 'moderate'. For those of you who don't have a semantic background in Islamophobia, 'moderate' is the word for 'cool', 'extremist' is the word for 'not cool'.

It goes like this.

'This person is a moderate ... I agree with him. He just said what I had in mind.'

'This person is an extremist. I hate this guy, he's so uncool. How come he doesn't agree with me? Gee, I wonder why these guys need to dress like this. He's a weirdo…'

In this way anyone that we do not like or disagree with can be labelled an extremist. But who is this person, where does he live, in outer space? Is he the one who provides the stamp for moderation, the one who draws the frontier between us and decides who is a moderate. It's just a declaration with a loaded meaning.

The second movie title is 'The invasion'. By depicting Muslims as fundamentally linked to the living memory of immigration, we reinforce the idea that they are spreading in our society like an alien force, propagating in every city, in every street. We have seen already in Sabine's presentation the whole use of the metaphor of invasive disease. This vision instils fear in the population and a feeling of being threatened. It is also linked to the notion of the 'enemy within' – another great theme that strengthens the invasion myth by reviving a thematic speech that was widely used during colonial wars, particularly in Algeria where you had people infiltrating French areas of Algiers. The enemy within was in the past the indigenous rebel who infiltrated the troops. Today the same metaphor is used to instil fear that the people who are living here will at some point turn against us; they are not part of us, they are alien, and they have vested interests that will come out at some point. So, by using such terminology, they turn the identity of local Muslims into a doubtful matter by questioning their allegiance to the country.

Then there is the final movie, which is more of a sentimental comedy. It's called 'poor Muslim woman'. In the 1980s, we used to have a lot of pop songs on this theme; pop artists would be top of the charts for weeks on end with songs that contained the lyrics 'whether you are in the Kasbah, or in Paris, I will love you forever. Get away from your brother and come love me'. Now we have a more widespread use of this theme which is more overtly linked to hostility towards Islam. The Muslim woman needs to be liberated, she is submissive to her husband and has no free will. If she asserts that she is already free, it's even worse because this means she has been brainwashed – some form of Stockholm syndrome, perhaps. The 'poor Muslim woman' has been forced into marriage when she was ten. She has to keep her clothes on to take a bath. She doesn't have the right to smile. She's illiterate and needs our help. And underneath her veil, she is crying for our help. (Don't laugh; all of these are actual statements that have been made, not just by people who have had no schooling, but by academics, politicians, journalists who claim they have some form of integrity.)

So, if this is the situation we face today, practically, what can we do about it? First, if we can all agree that this is not really a question of religion but an issue of fundamental rights, let's start with some obvious actions we could all implement in our respective contexts. We need to:

- Define Islamophobia and spread a working definition of it in the knowledge that while the term Islamophobia is widely accepted in the UK this is not the case at all in France;
- Gather data including detailed statistics on each reported incident;
- Carry out field work, convincing the victims to report acts, even if it means interacting with the police, perceived as one of the main agents of Islamophobia; and
- Take legal action when necessary against the perpetrators and spread information about court decisions via the media.

Following on from this we need to:

- Lobby in the media and in politics to convince people to use their votes as a means of creating pressure against extremists;
- Fight the discourse, at every step, and point by point. This means providing scientific answers to the false claims made within Islamophobic speech;
- Work on the terrain of culture producing artistic content that ridicules all the clichés maintained against Muslims. There are things that deploy so much intensity, so much hatred that the riposte cannot be on a purely rational level. Perhaps it's better to step back, respond with a sense of humour and by so doing show just how grotesque Islamophobia can be;
- Engage in positive action (not to be confused with affirmative action). Instead of working within a reaction mechanism (we are insulted, we react), we need to be proactive, emphasising the positive contribution of Muslims to the wider society – within socially responsible development, or ecology and in terms of human respect, for instance;
- Coordinate the work of organisations at a European level and use supra-national organisations, such as the OSCE or the UN, to express our concerns and demands.

Not all of these actions can be accomplished in the short term, but one thing is for sure – we cannot do this alone and we need to benefit from each other's experience by building strong relationships and exchanging best practices and information. ■

Islamophobia and the role of the 'progressive Left'

Nadia Fadil, Centre for Sociological Research at the Catholic University of Leuven

Sinan Ertugrul

What I intend to do, in the next twenty minutes or so, is outline some of the findings from a chapter I wrote for *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, a book edited by Bobby Sayyid and Abdoolkarim Vakil which will be published next year. In it we try to think conceptually about the term Islamophobia, at the same time as offering a cartography of the phenomenon in western Europe. My chapter on Belgium, while focusing on the role the progressive Left played in the dissemination of Islamophobic discourses, attempts to build on previous academic thinking on the Flemish multicultural debate.

Why focus on the Left?

But why focus on the 'self-declared' Left? The first reason was that we tend to link Islamophobia and racism with the conservative Right, but my research led me to investigate the active role played by certain self-declared left intellectuals in disseminating a perspective which culturalises socio-economic problems by linking them to the cultural background of specific migrant/minority populations and, in particular, the role of Islam. And the second most important reason was that in the current climate the Left plays a very specific role in disseminating Islamophobic and racist discourses. The Left possesses symbolic capital in terms of its capacity to add a progressive aura to certain thematic issues. Identifying the discursive shifts in the way left commentators position themselves vis-à-vis multicultural issues is crucial, in my opinion, in order to account for the banalisation and generalisation of racism and Islamophobic discourses. (By the way, I am using the category 'left' descriptively rather than normatively to refer to politicians, intellectuals and journalists who describe themselves as on the Left and/or 'progressive'. While the category spans a range of opinions, the focus here is specifically on those who have argued for the need to adopt a 'new' and 'less politically correct' discourse on multiculturalism, and the way this has increasingly focused on Muslim minorities.)

Besides giving a brief overview of my chapter, I would also like to comment on how we organise and build networks – since this is also the explicit aim of this conference. I would like, in this respect, to capture for you a sense of the fragile and vulnerable position faced by the Muslim scholar-activist, who produces a counter-discourse and is attacked for so doing. For Islamophobia is not only about the discourse on Muslims, it is a societal phenomenon which seeks to regulate and discipline the manifestation of Muslims as political autonomous subjects in the public sphere, challenging existing power structures and bringing their own perspectives to bear. So I think it is crucial that we address the points Sukant made earlier in the meeting and I would like to comment on this as well.

The debate on multiculturalism in Flanders

When we look at where I come from, Flanders, we see that it is one of the wealthiest regions in western Europe. This, the biggest region in the tiny country of Belgium, accounting for 6 million of its 10 million population, is also home to the EU infrastructure and at the crossroads of the major powers of France, Germany and the Netherlands. Its 400,000-strong Muslim population, mostly of Moroccan or Turkish descent, are very much the product of post second-world-war migration. Another central characteristic of Flanders is that it is home to one of the oldest and most established right-wing parties in Europe, the Vlaams Blok (now Vlaams Belang, VB) which has been gaining electoral support since the 1980s when it was at the avant-garde of problematising the multicultural society, linking socio-economic problems to the multicultural composition of the country. In response, there was a huge mobilisation of the anti-racist and leftist front but, as in other European countries, this addressed itself only to the activities of the VB, which was identified as the main carrier of racism. As a result, racism as a structural phenomenon was not tackled.

At the same time as we were confronted with the electoral success of an extreme- Right party, we also saw the emergence of a discourse amongst the Left on the 'problems' of multiculturalism. This stressed that 'although we don't agree with the Vlaams Blok, we believe they ask some pertinent questions; and while they pose the right questions, for instance, on the criminality of Moroccan youth, or on the social *profitariat* of the minorities, the answers they give are problematic'. Thus, we can see that from the 1990s onwards the necessity of acknowledging the problematic aspects of multiculturalism was stressed within left discourse. By the year 2000 this discourse had become hugely popular, and had started to combine with a discourse that problematised not only the presence of minorities and migrants, but also their cultural background, and especially Islam. Added to this was the impact of the shift in the discourse in neighbouring Netherlands which had a major influence on the Flemish Left. Hence, in 2000, the Dutch intellectual Paul Scheffer published *The Multicultural Drama*, in which he declared that multiculturalism was a failure and linked the socio-economic precariousness of migrants to the fact that the cultural integration of minorities was no longer possible as they came from an Islamic background. Scheffer went on to argue that one of the mistakes we had made was to treat Islam as though it were just like Protestantism and Catholicism or like any other religious tradition – whereas Islam was somehow specific.

The taboo on political correctness

This essay had a massive impact in Flanders on the left progressive scene and we started to see the rise of similar discourses. And the main idea that began to be disseminated was the need to break the taboo of 'political correctness' around multiculturalism. In 2000, the Socialist Antwerp alderman and spokesperson on education, Robert Voorhamme, stated that 'the migrant culture impedes every form of integration' and stressed the urgent need to confront non-liberal cultural practices amongst minorities, such as female subordination and homophobia. Similarly, in 2002 Yves Desmet, chief editor of the newspaper *De Morgen*, which defines itself as progressive and independent, denounced the Left's incapacity to adopt a stronger, more punitive discourse towards the criminal behaviour of Moroccan youngsters – whom he described as 'cunt-Moroccans' (*kutmarokkanen*).

This general call for an end to 'political correctness' was also linked to a period of alleged self-censorship within the Left, which, in turn, was regarded as one of the main reasons for its inability to tackle the Vlaams Blok/Belang which had dominated the multicultural debate in Flanders since its electoral breakthrough in 1991. Following on from this, the discourse on breaking the taboo of 'political correctness' and multiculturalism began to narrow into breaking the taboo around Islam, as summarised by the equation 'ending political correctness = acknowledging the problem with Muslims'.

Thus, the problems of a multicultural society were narrowed down into the problem of Muslims. And here I quote from an article in *De Morgen* by Robert Van Den Broek, who used to be a leftist publicist and academic but is now working as an advisor to the Socialist minister of equality in Flanders. He asserts:

> 'Before applying Scheffer's article in a Flemish context, we must first clarify our concepts. In what follows, migrants – whether they have acquired Belgian nationality or not – will be called 'allochthons'. *A contrario*, all other inhabitants will be designated as 'autochthons', hence as original inhabitants of this country. It's clear that the notion of 'allochthons' covers many layers. The Americans who work in the Flemish language valley, or a Dutch person who lives here due to the (for him) attractive tax regime are *sensu strictu* also allochtons. Yet in this article, this category will primarily be used to designate the allochthons from the Muslim community. The societal problems many, justifiably or unjustifiably, note are indeed often linked with members of this community'. *Van Den Broek, B. (2000) 'Het kaartenhuis van de multiculturele samenleving' De Morgen 22/07/2000*

So what we are faced with here is the use of the terms *autochthon* and *allochthon*, terms that are very commonly used in Flanders, and are used to differentiate 'natives' from people of 'foreign origin'. As we can see in Van Den Broek's piece, *allochthon* is rarely understood to encompass western Europeans or Americans; on the contrary, it is used in a racialised way to denote 'non-western' ethnic and cultural

minorities, ie Muslims. At least in Flanders, we have the benefit of a discourse that is clear and up front! The *autochthons* are the white people and the *allochthons* are people like me, and the other racialised subjects. In this discursive narrowing down, we see a kind of double culturalisation and racialisation process operating. Societal problems are linked to *allochthons* (the obverse of this being that in the *authochthon* community there are no social problems). From here, the category *allochthons* is further narrowed to denote Muslims. This is the first step of the discourse in breaking the taboo about the multicultural society.

'Truth holders' and experts on Islam

The second step in this discourse is an epistemic one. For the guardians and carriers of this discourse on breaking the taboo on multiculturalism present themselves as the 'truth-holders' – they are the ones who know reality because unlike other leftist individuals who live in the 'green suburbs' they actually live in the same crowded neighbourhoods as immigrants. Because they are the 'experts' who dare to face the 'real problems', their mode of argument leads them to ridicule other voices which are presented as endowed with academic or intellectual *naïvité*. For example, Luckas Van Der Taelen, a member of the Green Party who lives in Brussels criticised the Left for its incapacity to see problems as they are and argued for a model of integration based on integrating immigrants ' into our norms and values'.

But from here the narrative on multiculturalism shifts to a narrative about the 'nature of Islam', with a number of left, progressive intellectuals now presenting themselves as 'experts' on Islam. Dissenting views are cast and dismissed as 'apologists' for Islam. What distinguishes those who dare to break the 'taboo of Islam', then, is a claim to truth that lifts their interventions above and beyond merely different political positions: a claim to *truth* grounded on knowledge of the essence of Islam. For instance, in 2008 a number of left progressive intellectuals wrote an open letter 'Message to the Left. Why we defend the headscarf ban' in support of the ban of religious symbols (ie the headscarf) from public offices in the small Flemish town of Lier. I quote:

> 'What we, and many other decent and not totally irrational intellectuals mean, is that the discussion should be about the essence of Islam. Yet many leftist friends prefer [to maintain] a glowing ignorance about this religion. But it is absolutely important to understand that our criteria – all our dear civil freedoms, of which neutrality is a structuring principle – are meaningless in the theological space of the Prophet. Islam professes a totally different vision about religious and political reality than Judaism and Christianity, the religions on which the Prophet [Muhammad] drew inspiration and which he fought in his Qur'an with fire and sword'. *Benno Barnard & Geert Van Istendael, De Standaard, 08/02/2008*

Those who maintain this discourse put themselves in a kind of epistemic position in which they maintain a knowledge-based superiority on the grounds that they are the ones who have read the Qur'an and other Islamic sources as opposed to other intellectuals who haven't or, even if they are scholars, are apologists for Islam. It is really a tactic and a strategy to discredit other opinions or viewpoints or analysis that refuse to enter into their Islamophobic and culturalist representations of reality. In fact, I see this recent surge of self-declared leftist critical voices on issues of multiculturalism as representative of an attempt to carve out a 'new orthodoxy' – to establish a set of 'truth claims', as 'core values' for a left and/or progressive intellectual standpoint. This is borne out by the claim of Barnard & Van Istendael that the true anti-clerical leftist is opposed in a consistent manner to religion.

The last constitutive element we find in these kinds of accounts is the argument made by several of its proponents that they are the guardians of the true values of the Left, under threat from double standards. We saw this already in Barnard and Van Istendael's text but we also see it in an interview with the Antwerp alderman Robert Voorhamme, which takes the form of a *mea culpa* for the past position of the Left:

> 'Being an emancipatory movement, socialists have traditionally always been tolerant towards other cultures and religions. But they forgot that respect for universal values transcends this tolerance. This resulted in a complete abdication. We wanted to be nice to immigrants, we wanted to protect them. All well and good. But our blindness prevented us from seeing that fundamental issues had been overlooked […]. For years socialists have expected respect for universal values from their militants. But they [the militants] don't see why they should be living with people who don't care about these values. They don't understand why we accept things like that. We even blamed them for signaling those problems. That is totally incomprehensible.' *Robert Voorhamme, De Standaard 28/09/2009*

Expressing himself in the mode of repentance, Voorhamme acknowledges that the Left has erred, and apologises for its slowness in failing to acknowledge and address the problems with multiculturalism. Repentance is shown, first for neglecting 'universal values' in the name of 'tolerance' and in this way 'tolerance' and 'universal values' are set up as being opposed to each other. Secondly, repentance is expressed as regards Voorhamme's past behaviour towards 'militants' who are here depicted as the true holders of socialist and liberal values. Furthermore, the 'militants', who have the truth, are contrasted to 'elites' who have gone over to this whole discourse on multiculturalism and tolerance while disregarding their

own values. In this way, Voorhamme's repentance seems to fulfil a double function. It not only serves to delegitimise his earlier standpoint, casting it off as 'morally wrong', but it also acts as a catharsis which 'purifies' his voice and grants his actual position a new reclaimed orthodoxy.

The role of networks in the struggle against Islamophobia

If we are to understand the dissemination of Islamophobic discourses, we also need to understand how Islamophobia occurs within the Left. This means taking seriously the points of reference from which left intellectuals depart and how they actively reclaim this left progressive legacy to present their actual viewpoints on Islam as consistent with a left, progressive tradition. And to reiterate the point I made earlier, the role of the Left is of particular importance because it retains symbolic capital and presents itself as the traditional 'defender' of the multicultural model of diversity. Thus, shifts on the Left have a greater impact in terms of policy as well as legitimising Islamophobic discourses than shifts on the Right.

But let me conclude with a brief reflection on the role networks could play in the struggle against Islamophobia.

What I and several of my colleagues have been trying to do is analyse Islamophobia as a discourse, mapping its manifestations in different countries across western Europe. But Islamophobia is also, of course, a structural phenomenon which seeks to regulate the political agency and autonomy of Muslim subjects especially in the public space and the claims they make as citizens. If we look at who is being targeted it is really orthodox Muslims, veiled women (Belgium was the first country to ban the niqab) as well as Muslim activists who produce an autonomous discourse which challenges and questions the existing power structure. So it is not only a discourse about Islam, but also a discourse, in which the progressive Left plays a very perverse role, about regulating Islam and regulating Muslims, by discerning 'good' Muslims from 'bad' Muslims. Ever since 2001, we have witnessed growing attacks on Muslim activists and intellectuals. We witnessed the attempt to destroy the Arab European League (AEL), which was at the forefront of critiquing the whole integration paradigm through which minorities were being addressed. We had the attacks on Tariq Ramadan, who is actually a very 'moderate' intellectual, and in the past few weeks, my good friend Souhail Chichah, a researcher at the University of Brussels, has been the object of attack because of his position on Palestine.

So the question becomes what is happening here? And I think what is happening is that we are witnessing the delegitimisation of certain agendas in the process of which the claims of specific Muslim actors are rendered inaudible. We see this most clearly when it comes to Palestine where no trades union dared to advocate the boycott of Israel and where pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist standpoints came under massive attack and were equated with anti-Semitism if they were made by groups like the AEL. But we also saw it in the attempts to delegitimise any discussion on affirmative action – a discussion on which had also been put forward by the AEL. But it goes further. There are also attempts to delegitimise anyone who attempts to challenge racism as a structural phenomenon. In this way, attacking Muslim actors who challenge racism as a structural phenomenon is a way of discrediting the political claims they make.

We also see that those intellectuals who are being attacked are precisely those who question the prevailing paradigm and position themselves as autonomous citizens within the public sphere who place themselves in the position of negotiator with the state in defining the contours of the nation. And here I come back to what Sukant said about the question of white privilege and supremacy. These are no longer articulated in ethnic or racial terms, but increasingly recast in civilisational terms. In order to discipline and regulate Muslim subjects, constant reference is made to the legacy of the Judeo-Christian civilisation on the one hand, or the 'neutrality' and secular character of the state, on the other.

To return to the question: how can we organise against this reality? The first challenge is to make our agendas audible – whether it be the anti-Zionist agenda, or whether it be maintaining an analysis of racism as a structural phenomenon. For this is becoming increasingly difficult when we are constantly told we are living in a 'post-racial' state. And what I observe is that a structural analysis of racism seems to be more audible when it is made by a white person than when it is made by a member of a minority. So this is a question of tactics, how do we play that out tactically?

But then there is another important political challenge, which is how to bring about the inclusion of Muslims and other minorities as full citizens? How can Muslims and other subaltern subjects develop their own discourse as autonomous political actors without paternalism from the Left? What I observe in my field is that too often we are seen as Muslim scholars developing a specific form of knowledge rather than 'real' scholars developing mainstream knowledge. So the final question I would ask is what role do we play as activists from different backgrounds in maintaining this subalternity amongst Muslim and minority actors? ■

Sinan Ertugrul

ASIM QURESHI, CAGEPRISONERS

First of all, let me say to Marwan that as we have all the oil, global warming, climate change and the environment *is* our fault as well!

We have about five days discussion here! Gordon Brown gave a speech to the Fabian Society in 2008 in which he was pushing the concept of Britishness and arguing that we need to find a symbol for this Britishness. But it is ironic that when the BBC did a poll and asked the public what most symbolised 'Britishness', the one thing that practically every one came up with, above all else, was, Magna Carta. If we want to talk about being part of society or community, that's what we should talk about, due process – not whether, if this guy does not go to the pub, can he be British. But this is precisely what a lot of the questions revolve around when it comes to immigration requirements and citizenship tests. If you come from Pakistan and you have lived your whole life in a village, you can't possibly answer these kinds of cultural questions, but this is exactly what they try to push as the test of Britishness.

Both your presentations were amazing and gave me much to think about. Recently, my organisation Cageprisoners came under heavy attack in the media as did human rights organisations who work with us. The premise for much of the attack was that as my colleague, Moazzem Begg, a former Guantánamo detainee, had once written that we would have to talk to the Taliban (a fact that is now the official position of the British government) it was suggested that he thereby rejected the concept of universality and that organisations like Amnesty International (AI) had betrayed their membership by talking to 'Islamists' such as Moazzem and me. And from here Salman Rushdie and human rights groups in other parts of the world joined in the attack, which had the impact of polarising the debate within the Left here in the UK.

That is why everything that you both said is going around in my head and I now see that there is an actual ideological root, which has a strong tradition within the Left movement, from where these arguments emanate. So I agree that it is very important that we try and arrest this, because the damage that was done was immense. We were very fortunate that AI stood by us but it could have easily gone the other way which would have been very devastating in terms of the work we are trying to do around the war on terror, extraordinary rendition and the fate of the remaining prisoners at Guantánamo Bay.

MARWAN MUHAMMAD

There is something interesting to study here – there are two mechanisms at play that I would like to identify when it comes to discussions about the Taliban.

First is what I would call the scarecrow mechanism, which involves someone saying to you, 'you are an average Muslim, what do you think of the Taliban?' As you are a western Muslim living in Paris, or London, or New York, your incentive here is to immediately differentiate yourself and create distance and the first sentence you are going to pronounce is 'we're not like that'. And then you'll start to identify a series of things that differentiate you from the Taliban. So you go on to identify yourself with local values, in order to be part of the society and your average position regarding your Islamic identity will be influenced by that.

The second mechanism relating to the discourse on the Taliban, which we witnessed in France, came into play over the debate about the full veil. Actually, it was not a discussion regarding the full veil, it was a discussion about the burqa. Yet I defy any commentator in France to actually come up with a photograph of a woman living in France who wears the burqa. I have never actually seen one. But by using the term burqa, instead of niqab or instead of full veil, you are bringing into the discussion the concept of the hard-core Taliban beating up his wife. So that is what they want to instill in the audience's mind and most importantly in the audience's heart, to come

up with a very negative feeling about the full veil itself. There is no discussion about self-determination or whatever. The decision is already made even before the debate starts in the way the question is asked.

LIZ FEKETE

I just wanted to say, in relation to Asim's point, that part of the reason why we held this as an invitation-only event is that we wanted to create a space where it was possible to get away from some of the pressures of the public meetings where speakers are heckled and interrupted – a space to formulate strategies against Islamophobia in an environment not subject to the kind of mechanisms Marwan describes. There are few opportunities where we have a chance to discuss these issues with European colleagues, and this was far too important an opportunity to miss. This in itself is indicative of some of the pressures we are under.

ANNE GRAY, CAMPAIGN AGAINST CRIMINALISING COMMUNITIES

Thank you for creating this space where we can get away from some of the pressures. The question I wanted to ask relates to one raised by our very first speaker this afternoon - whether it goes beyond that. And if it does go beyond that, where? Maybe there isn't one answer. My experience is that there are several layers of Islamophobia. There is the real prejudice of the members of the English Defence League, for instance, or there is the intellectualised left-wing critique that even attempts to enter into knowledge of the Qu'ran – although often with misconceptions. And there are many stages in between – some intellectualised, some not, some left-wing, some right-wing. And it is the middle ground that is the most problematic. It's the kind of people who will be influenced by the EDL indirectly and will end up like some of the Austrian middle ground that Murat identified, saying that 'we have got to have a sensible debate about immigration'. And yet, there are thousands of converts to Islam in Europe, so it's not just a question of immigration.

ALI FATHOLLAH-NEJAD, SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

I am currently at SOAS here in London and am active in the German and UK peace movements. I would like to make two points. The first is while it is very striking to see the similarities in Islamophobic discourse in the various countries of Europe – and that there is clearly a structural problem related to the war on terror which we need to deal with – there is also another aspect, which is not universal, and this pertains to the political cultures which are specific to these countries. So we have to be informed about the specific political cultures, and the specific sensibilities in different countries and knowing that we have to apply quite different discursive methods to counter the specific context in which Islamophobia occurs. For example, in France, it's difficult but possible to identify yourself as Muslim and French, and in Germany, it's difficult to even use the word racism.

It is these differences which I think pose difficulties in terms of moving towards any kind of European answer to these European Islamophobic tendencies. The lack of knowledge that exists between political cultures, between Germany and the UK, between Germany and France, because of the use of a different language and political vocabulary means that events such as this are very important so that we can be more informed about the specific contexts we face.

The second point – one which I found quite problematic – is about the use of the term progressive Left. We should not attempt a wholesale attack on the political Left. And I think it's not correct to term those 'lefties' as progressive. When you look at the history of neo-conservatism in the United States, we see that many neoconservatives started out from a left background – but is the French author Bernard-Henri Lévy a leftist or is he a neo-conservative? So I think we have to make a differentiation between an anti-imperialist (ie, real leftist, sympathetic to anti-racism struggles) and to make clear that those guys who are using a leftist discourse are perhaps not left, they are actually neo-cons. And I think this is important because it is not in our interest to make a wholesale attack but to get more groups involved

MARK MCGOVERN, EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

My points follow, in some ways, from the last contribution and take the form of a question to Nadia and also a comment, if that's OK. It concerns the extent to which the Left that you are describing is also the pro-war, imperialist Left, and certainly we have seen here in the UK that there is a Left which justifies intervention in relation to Afghanistan and Iraq in the terms you describe. And what this pro-war position leads to is a situation where irrationality and religiosity are equated with one another. I would draw an analogy here with the dominant representation of the conflict in the North of Ireland for some thirty years, which was essentially to present it as a sectarian war. And the consequence of presenting it

as a sectarian war was that the state was allowed to present itself as the holder of rationality and the modern against the pre-modern and the irrational. It was also able to present itself as a neutral force, rather than an active agent of conflict, war and mass violence. So I think you are absolutely right to identify that strand of the Left, and to argue in terms of the symbolic capital that it possesses. It picks up on an imperialist dimension of the Left that has been in existence over a long period of time and equates itself with civility and universality which is also identified with the West.

NADIA FADIL

Let me answer the two broad questions that have been raised. First the question of similarities and differences between the various European countries. I think that it goes without saying that one should take the various political traditions, histories, narratives, as well as the vocabulary that has developed to reflect the political culture specific to each country, as a point of departure for analysing practical problems. For instance, it's difficult to understand the situation in Flanders and the question of Flemish nationalism without understanding why a claim on language can be very sensitive in Flanders. Yet, at the same time, I think it would be a mistake to accommodate to this political legacy as the main structure in discourse, as though there was nothing outside of this framework, or nothing that can be introduced from the outside. For instance, the fact that you cannot address racism in Germany (and this is also a problem in France where to speak of racism as a structural problem, or to claim an ethnic identity, is not allowed), I think not only says something about the way the political, cultural or ideological structure of a specific country has been constructed but also about the space that this political culture allows for its minorities to challenge the structural dominance of a specific group.

In fact I think the discourse is an indicator of that. We know that Britain also has its problems, but the fact that in Britain there has developed a greater capacity to challenge positions of white supremacy says something about the position of the minorities which is much stronger, which is much more visible within the public sphere than in France or Germany.

Secondly, to take up the point about whether the 'progressive Left' are in fact 'left'. My methodological point of departure is that of an anthropologist. So I take people seriously when they say that they are leftists and from there I try to understand this politically. So this is my first answer. If somebody says 'I'm left' I take it seriously and then try to analyse how come as a leftist person you think this way.

But then there is how we analyse racism. The analysis that I make of racism is not one which locates it primarily amongst the right-wing; rather I see racism (and Islamophobia is linked to that) as part of a structural phenomenon that leads to the categorising and 'hierarchising' of specific social groups which are then put at different levels in terms of their entitlement to define the nation. That is racism and it can know different articulations depending on the particular social group so that the racism of the working class, for instance, is different from the racism of the elite. And that is why I think it is important to take leftist racism, leftist nationalism or liberal nationalism seriously and at its word, because to do so allows you also to understand the specific vocabulary or legacy from which it departs and secondly it allows you to face the difficulties in challenging it.

I have had so many discussions with friends and allies who find it difficult to separate what a person says from the fact they are on the Left. If the person is not on the Left then they find it possible to take some distance, but if the person is from the Left they find it much more difficult to be critical of the discourse of that person. We find this particularly the case in Belgium, because of the positions now adopted by former friends, for instance the essayists and literary figures Benno Barnard and Geert Van Istendael who are held in high regard. I think it is also important to grasp the visceral dimension here, which takes the form of basic sympathy for somebody who operates within the Left and it is this which explains why it is much more difficult for some of us to acknowledge what is happening and to take a distance.

MARWAN MUHAMMAD

I want to also talk about the idea of 'left' and 'right'. What I have come to see is that the decision-making process for passing a new law or reform is in its own terms rational, but when it comes to legitimising the legislation then the whole question of ideology kicks in. Take the case of Dominic Strauss-Kahn, who is perceived as the best candidate of the Left to stand against Sarkozy in 2012, for example. When you look at policy, you find that Sarkozy and Strauss-Kahn are actually moving in the same direction. The difference comes when you look at the various ways that they legitimise the decisions they make. Here, we

find that whereas one says that the African man has not entered into history, the other says that African man needs our help to enter into history. Where one says that unemployment needs to be fought by 'selective immigration', the other says that we need to give help to the local people so that they can find a job and thereby gain advantage over the Senegalese tomato producer, etc.

So basically, for me, when it comes to this bunch of people, their religion is the market, their creed is 'buy me', their prophet is Bernard-Henri Lévy, and they question us from somewhere that I'll call nowhere, and this nowhere is the place where universalism sits. The questions I ask are: 'where are you questioning me from? Isn't the nowhere you question me from also an ideological place? Bernard-Henri Lévy, why are you demonstrating for Sakina in Iran and not for Teresa Lewis who was executed in the United States two weeks ago? I did not see you circulating a petition or demonstrating in front of the US embassy. But I did see you support the US aggression against Iraq, so your conception of what is left and what is right is not valid for me anymore.'

But on the other hand it seems to me that when you look at parties in Europe the local militant is way different from the person representing the party who is visible on the television or is heard on the radio. What I find is the local militant has some ideas, some aspiration, some form of hope to change the country. But the other one, who hopes to progress in the political system, has no ideas. He calls himself pragmatic, but the real word for him is realpolitik, which is also the word for cynicism, which in essence means 'I am going to make whatever decision that will lead me to power.' And in this sense I also think we need to differentiate between the way we interact on the one hand with these local militants, whether it be from the Socialist party or from the far Right, because I think that most of them are sincere in their fear of Islam. They have been educated like that by TV, by books, and by any media they watch, as well as by the leaders of their own parties.

Basically, as I see it, there are two ways we can play this. One way would be to say that we are not going to enter into any ideological debate – we just want our fundamental rights – period. And whatever our religion or our culture, we aren't going to answer your questions in a debate. We have fundamental rights, and we want them respected. We want equality of treatment. We want this constitution, this law, to be applied from the first letter to the last. But there is also another way of approaching this, which is to interact more with the local militants, to talk to them about Islam and to explain to them how we live our everyday life and the role that we are playing in the society.

I've spent a few years writing a book. It has nothing to do with Islamophobia, except one chapter. The subject is more finance and the impact of markets on everyday life. But I wanted to write this book as a treatise that would never be attacked, that I can defend academically in any university, and no one can fight against it. Why? Because I'm a mathematician and statistician by profession and for me a reasoning that is flawless is something very important. But what I found is that no one cares about rational debate.

So is this the most useful work that I can do? No. I think to make a movie or write a novel, a story depicting the life of let us say an immigrant, the struggle he endures to cross the desert from Senegal up to Spain, arriving in Ceuta and taking the perilous journey to Spain, only to be rejected and end up in London, is more useful. Because it could be such a powerful story that even the most racist guy, when he watches the movie or reads the book, can put himself in the position of this immigrant and, by so doing, his perception could change so that the 'other' is no longer an 'alien' but someone that he identifies with, and it could give him back a sense of humanity as it allows him to realise all the factors that make us alike.

INSTITUTE OF
RACE
RELATIONS

2–6 Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7837 0041
Fax: +44 (0)20 7278 0623
Email: info@irr.org.uk
Web: www.irr.org.uk