

***Islamophobia* – conceptual historical analysis**

Working definition

“Islamophobia” defines prejudices and irrational fears of the Islam and Muslim people. It describes not only an aversion to the religious practice, but also a worldview that sees – above all – political implications often related to terms like “oppression”, “despotism” and “terrorism”. The religious fear is often related to the fear of the religious symbols, like the veil, often interpreted as anti-feministic and anti-liberal. “Anti-Islamism” is a concept often used as a synonym for “Islamophobia”.

The examination of “Islamophobia” and “Anti-Islamism” in social sciences can be understood as an effort to deal with actual religious and political conflicts. Even though there are a lot of publications trying to define “Islamophobia” in order to relate the outcomes to actual political programmes and decisions, the historical perspective on the phenomenon “Islamophobia” is a relative new analytical focus. The 11th September 2001 is a key date for the political discourse to Islamic and anti-Islamic incidents as well as for the scientific reflection on it. There is a large number of publications in the first decade of the 21st century on these topics.

Dealing with the concept of “Islamophobia” in the context of historical learning means to look for the development of anti-Islamic ideas and stereotypes of the past and relate them to actual political discussions.

Analyzing the construction of the “Islamic other” as it is proposed in postmodern (Foucault) and post-colonial (Said) studies might help to deconstruct contemporary “master-narratives”. To rethink the use of this concept helps to extrapolate thinking patterns on other political-historical concepts with actual political implications, as (there is) for example “Anti-Semitism”.

Historical definition (Development of the scientific concept “Islamophobia”)

The first islamophobic rhetoric and actions can be identified in the 7th century. Where the Islam puts down roots, there exists an “islamophobic policy” *avant la lettre*. But the concept of “Islamophobia” is much younger. The word “islamophobe” in French can first be documented in 1912 and the word “islamophobia” in English in 1924. The first concept of “Islamophobia” is created at the end of the First World War by Étienne Dinet and Sliman Ben Ibrahim. In their *La Vie de Mohammed, Prophète d’Allah* (1918) the authors describe by “islamophobie” official French politics towards Muslim soldiers who are, in the depiction of the authors, inappropriately treated by the nation for their sacrifice in the name of the fatherland. Dinet and Ibrahim repeated the concept during the following 20 years in several publications relating it also to the official French politics towards Algeria. Although there is an early translation of the authors Mohammed-biography into English language, the concept “Islamophobia” had not been established in a scientific discourse yet.

It is Hijem Djait who in 1975 uses the concept “Islamophobia” in a critical article that treats Edward Said’s descriptions of the Western “Orientalism”. Said himself, whose ethnological “post-colonial” theory is based on the idea that the “Orient” is a Western created image, adopts the usage of the word by Djait in 1985. Afterwards the concept is used by a larger anglophone scientific community. During the first Gulf War a larger public is reached by an article from the magazine *Insight* (4 February 1991) that makes use of the concept. Since then the word “Islamophobia” is established in the daily political report. In 1994 the *Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia* makes the first effort for an ideal-typed definition of the concept, which is rewritten several times. The final version is distributed in Britain to governmental departments, councils, universities and think-tanks, in order to sensitize the public for a critical view on “Islamophobia”.

Contemporary definitions

The actual theoretical discussion on the concept “Islamophobia” often refers to the definition of the *Runnymede Report* from 1997. The British Committee defines Islamophobia in eight points (adopting historical prejudices, as well): 1. *Islam is seen static/monolithic*, 2. *Islam is not having anything in common with the “other”*, 3. *Islam is seen inferior to “The West”*, 4. *Islam is seen violent/aggressive*, 5. *Islam is seen as an ideology*, 6. *Criticism made to “The West” is rejected*, 7. *Discrimination and exclusion of muslims from mainstream society*, 8. *Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as “natural”*. The main emphasis by the *Runnymede Trust*’s “Islamophobia”-definition was based on social implications of religious discrimination. The *Runnymede Report* was a political effort to deal with educational and labour problems in Great Britain. The programme-slogan is an appeal to civilian duty: “Islamophobia. A challenge for us all.”

Although the concept is used in social, political and historical sciences since the 1980s there were few intents on developing a theory. During the 1990s the central definition was made by the *Runnymede Trust*, which is, after all, only a state promoted political campaign. Nevertheless the discussion during the first decade of the 21st century often refers to the *Trust*-definition, especially in anglophone social sciences.

Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg analyzed in 2007 the media made “Islamophobia” in the USA by studying cartoons. Their research centres on the psychological and individual components defining “Islamophobia” as “social fear”.

Discussion

In the relative new discussion on the concept of “Islamophobia” there are various unanswered questions.

One of them is about the similarities between “Anti-Semitism” and “Islamophobia”. Can researchers learn one from another and compare their theoretical thoughts? Or is the concept of “Islamophobia” substantially different from “Anti-Semitism”? Is there even a scientific fashion to talk about

“Islamophobia” as a concept, which has nothing to do with “Anti-Semitism” at all? In political science Wolfgang Benz, the former chairman of the *Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung* has investigated parallel motives in the concepts of “Anti-Semitism” and “Islamophobia” (2011). Sayyid and Vakil also quote that a comparison between the concepts “Anti-Semitism” and “Islamophobia” may lead to a learning development. They mention that the theoretical development of the concept “Anti-Semitism” has a much larger scale than the concept “Islamophobia” and point out that more research has been done in this field (also comparing and relating “Anti-Semitism” to “Anti-Zionism” and “Anti-Judaism”), a fact from which researchers on “Islamophobia” can learn.

Another main topic some publishers criticize is that the bigger part of scientific research on the concept “Islamophobia” is focussed on results that can be operationalised in public policy. As Sayyid quotes, there has not been yet a real critical scientific conversation about the concept.

Chart of speaker positions

Year / Context	Hist. confrontations/violence	Religion / Theology	Ideas/Stereotypes/Prejudices	Philosophy/Literature	Art History/ Media	Politics/Political theory
From 7 th century		Islam from the Christian point of view: heresy	Islamic victories are seen as diabolic cataclysm of the end time.			Political Fear: “Islam is gaining ground”

8 th and 9 th century	Battle of Tours and Poitiers/ Karl Martell is celebrated as “Saviour of the Occident” (732)				Churches with figures of the “acrobat”, a dismissive symbol for Mohammed, are built. Mohammed was said having been an epileptic. (since 848)	
11-13 th century	Christian crusades/ Christian conquest of Jerusalem (1099)	Bernhard of Clairveaux legitimizes the Christian massacre in Jerusalem. (1099)				
14 th -15 th century	Ottomans conquer Konstantinopel. (1453)/ End of the <i>reconquista</i> , Spain ex-	“crusade-bulla” by Pope Nikolaus V., in which he entitles Mohammed as the devil’s	The Islamic expansion is seen in apocalyptic tradition as the end of the “last realm”		The pamphlet with the title “A warning to the Christians about the Turks” is	

	pulses Muslims and Jewish (1492)	son (1453)	and the coming of the “antichrist”.		printed before the first bible-print is finished. (1454)	
16 th and 17 th century	Ottomans in front of the city of Vienna (1529)		Stereotypes: “despotic” and “vice” Muslims			Machiavellis <i>Principe</i> as an political answer to „oriental leadership“
18 th century			Muslims: “capricious and sexually insatiable” (Bernard Lewis)	Edward Gibbons: Decline of Rome and the Christian church “due to Muslim violence”		

19 th century			<p>1.) The Islam had its “Golden Age”, now “the orientals” are too vice.</p> <p>2.) Islam is seen as religious and civil backwardness.</p> <p>3.) Positive discrimination: “good”, “romantic” orient</p>	<p>Hegel’s “Lectures on philosophy” (1822-1830)</p> <p>Karl May: „Mater Dolorosa“ (1892)</p> <p>Goethe: “West-östlicher Diwan” (1827)</p> <p>Schlegel</p>		<p>Europe learned from the Arabic world, but: The “Enlightenment” is a European phenomenon and the continent “a step forward” in comparison with the “Islamic world”.</p>
20 th century	<p>II. WW: Nazi persecution (1933-1945), Arabian world vs. Israel, oil embargo/ beginning of an anti-islamic movement in the USA (1973)</p>		<p>Racist discrimination: “Nürnberger Rassengesetze” (1935)</p> <p>“Iranian Revolution” (1979) Political fear: “Islam is gaining ground”</p>			<p>Max Weber: Islam, antithetical to capitalism and progress (1930)</p>

21 st century	Islamic terrorism: 9/11, Madrid (2004), London (2005), Frankfurt (2011), murder of Theo van Gogh (2004) anti-Islamic assaults: M. El-Sherbini is killed in Dresden (2009), A. Behring Breivik (2011), "Dönermorde" (2011)			Thilo Sarrazin publishes "Germany abolishes itself" (2010) His hypothesis: „Backwardness of Muslim immigrants“	„Muhammad cartoons controversy" (2005), minaret controversy in Switzerland" (2009), debate on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools" in France and Germany (21st century)	Foundation of the "English Defense League" islamophobic political program (2009)
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References

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