

WESTERN ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE GLOBAL WORLD

Pr Michel Naumann,
UCP, CICC, SARI.

Is islamophobia the result of an “excess” of Foreign workers in the West ? I doubt it very much, especially when referring to the case of France. Although we have a very high rate of unemployment (12 %), the difficulty to find workers in the most important economic zones concerns 40 % of the jobs and the unfilled positions are evaluated at 20 %. As the migrants represent 0.02 % of the population, one cannot seriously pretend that Foreigners take French jobs.¹ The number of migrants in Europe is actually very moderate when compared to their number in Africa. Most of them (70 %) speak French, which should make their integration rather easy. If the French citizens are asked whether migrants are too many, most of them (70 %) agree but if they are asked to list the problems of our country most of them forget about the issue of migrants (except 16 % of the people concerned by the survey) and say that unemployment is their most important cause of anxiety (56 %). It is true that French people are worried about their social protection : do foreigners cynically use our social system ? Actually they are mostly young adults (25-50 years old) whereas social spending is mainly dedicated to older people so that the migrants contribute more than they get. The balance should be around 12 billions in Euros. Recently a referendum on immigration in Switzerland gave strange results: the prosperous regions were favourable to it whereas unsuccessful ones, where migrants are not many, voted against it. So the facts are clearly that migrants settled in the former regions and the conclusion might be that immigration brings prosperity.

¹ El Mouhoub Mouhoud, « Interview », *Témoignage Chrétien*, 26/12/2013, p 45.

So islamophobia is to be divorced from the question of emigration. It is rather an ideological problem and a new one because in the 50s, 60s, 70s the fear of the other concerned the “Arabs”, not the Moslems. It seems that the racism linked to the periods of colonization and decolonization has been replaced by a cultural fear which is now the typical way of rejecting the other at the time of Globalization. How could racism against the North Africans survive decolonization and reappear as a prejudice against a religious community? One reason could be the decay of democracy in the West.

I) POLITICAL REGRESSIONS IN THE WEST:

In 1989 the *metus hostilis* of the divided Cold War world disappeared and left us in a world whose politicians thought that the universe had been unified. Revolutionary opposition to capitalism had become romantic, obsolete and irrelevant.

The Communists gone out of the battlefield of History, the Socialists, instead of taking over from them the task of criticizing capitalism, accepted the new global and liberal dispensation. This policy cruelly hit the poor. The productive gains of the end of the XXth century had already started transforming the proletariat, thrown out of work by machines more than by delocalization and harshly hit by the assault of the Liberals against the Welfare State, into a precariat (an invented word coming from the word precarious) whose self-declared saviours, from now on, were to come from the right wing of the political world : FN in France, BNP in Britain, PVV in Holland, PP in Norway, FPO in Austria, Golden Sunrise in Greece... These parties took advantage of the despair of many people to explain that their frustrations were due to the fact that the National State had been spoilt by rich and poor non-Nationals. When they realized that their success was linked to the conquest of larger sectors of the right wing electors and elite, they shifted from a racist position to a culturalist

position: the enemy was no longer the “inferior races” but the “inferior cultural and religious elements” that rejected the National identity of the host country.² Their success was such that very soon right wing politicians like Sarkozy started competing with the far-Right on this issue. This ideological convergence went along with the fact that the traditional conservative parties had been infiltrated by the neo-cons’ darwinist ideas, already used by Thatcher, Reagan or Bush. According to these theories the poor are not the fittest, they are therefore bound to fail anyway, which discredits the hopes of welfare as a ridiculous and costly illusions. The quality of the Western democratic culture is therefore presently very low.³

The left paid a hard price for not dealing harshly with racism, for neglecting to create a feeling of solidarity with the Third-world Revolution and for accepting the contempt of the media against Nasser, Fanon, Nkrumah, Lumumba, Nyerere, Ho Chi Minh, very often described as monsters. Most people were therefore unable to understand that there are no inferior races and no inferior cultures and that the domination of one province of the world is but a historical stage which might not last long although. Even to generous individuals, Western superiority appears as a fact to which they find no serious objection : our technology and democracy show that we are obviously the best, how can we think that civilizations are equal when hearing about the famines and the wars which take place in the other parts of the world ? Unfortunately, too often, Al Qaida and the Talibans confirmed them in such narrow minded opinions.

Let’s be very clear. I have no objection to criticism against any religion as well as criticism against narrow minded secularity. The

² I say « supposed » because what is called the National identity of France by Sarkozy or Marine Lepen is actually highly questionable as it forgets the French Revolution.

³ Nothing can show this low level as well as the insults thrown against the French minister of Justice, Mrs Christiane Taubira, in 2013.

Christians must deal with a past of violence and intolerance. Criticism helps them to do so. The behavior of Moslem families towards inter-religious marriages must be changed. Such critical stances concern practical problems and archaic remains but they do not pretend that these religions will never be up to their ideals. This is the difference between criticism from a friend and criticism from an enemy.

Another remark must be done : we have seen that islamophobia was not really due to the frustrations of the subalterns but to the manipulation of frustrations by unscrupulous very right wing politicians who were soon joined by top decision makers of our post-modern global world who shouldn't, as political forces who continuously invoke good governance and democratic and liberal modern values, have been involved in such issues. This is why we should describe islamophobia :

- first : concretely as a new form of xenophobia.
- second : as a global strategy of the elite.

II) NEO-XENOPHOBIA IN THE WEST :

The neo-xenophobia of the West is no longer mainly linked to the concept of race. We have seen that culture has become the main issue. Researchers like Paul Scheffer have assessed multiculturalism as a failure because it underestimates the necessity of a dialogue with the host culture.⁴ Chaos comes from the fact that communities, engrossed in their own reality, do not bother to live with their neighbours. Some thinkers add that creeds or groups that do not want or cannot do so must be excluded from a common social, political and cultural project.

The religious question is very difficult because the political class is nowadays less able than in the past to understand what religion is. On the one hand the Left has an anti-clerical culture which is based

⁴ Paul Scheffer, *The Multicultural Drama*, Handleblad: NRC, 2000.

on a criticism of religion as such and on the other hand the Right is no longer associated with Catholicism whose social impact has receded. Actually the former Catholic regions now vote for the Left because of its values of solidarity, but the Christian militants are not recognized as people whose views count very much. The Right, conquered by liberal ideas, neo-cons and materialistic trends of thinking, now feels very secular. Both sides understand secularity not as a dialogue of different religions and cultures, which should be the real definition of secularity, but as a culture which is superior to the religions which they see as archaic remains of the past that modernity should wipe away. Religiophobia has therefore opened a path to islamophobia.⁵

According to the anti-islamic trends, those who do not want to be part of a nation are also people who fight against it. They pretend that such is the project of Islam everywhere in the world. So France is an invaded country and the Whites are the victims of fanatics (and anti-White racists) who hate the West. Marine Le Pen compares the use of the streets by praying Moslems to the Nazy occupation. Hallal diets when respected by friendly French hosts during a multicultural social occasion are seen as a deprivation of something due to the French : pork and alcohol. Delinquency is often ascribed to the Moslem community. The suspicion of segregation against women appears whenever Moslem people organize a festival or a cultural or religious group. Veils and minarets are seen as aggressive refusals to accept French culture. Against such cases of invasion and victimization Ariana Falaci calls for a proud and angry resistance of the West against Islam.⁶ Such primitive reactions share the violent paranoia and the regressive political features of Déroulède's

⁵ Vincent Geisser, *La nouvelle islamophobie*, Paris : La Découverte, 2003, p 10-11.

⁶ Ariana Falaci, *La rage et l'orgueil*, Paris : Plon, 2003.

Nationalism, the Maurrasian Nationalists and of the anti-Semitic and colonial racists.⁷

Nevertheless one shouldn't see this kind of islamophobia as only a primitive expression of fears and hatreds coming from social and political marginal sectors of nostalgic nationalists and colonialists. Sarkozy's infamous conference on French identity, which criticized the Moslems so harshly, also came from personalities of the liberal elite.⁸ So, isn't islamophobia an ideology of the hyper-global bourgeoisie ?

III) ISLAMOPHOBIA AS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE GLOBAL ELITE :

Why do our politicians in France insist so much on the value of secularity ("laïcité") as a necessity and why do they wish to create courses at school on the secular moral system (hoping that such a thing exists) ?

...un tel enseignement pourrait permettre de « civiliser » les nouveaux barbares, ceux qui « pourrissent l'école », et portent ainsi atteinte au « contrat social » dans ses bases mêmes ?⁹

Who are these people so determined to oppose the "contrat social" ? Instead of accusing the anti-social behaviour of the free market fanatics who are responsible for the pollution, the inequality,

⁷ We advise our readers, if interested in the psychoanalytical causes of such a regressive incestuous paranoïa, to read Daniel Sibony's works.

⁸ When the Christians and the Jews invited to this conference realized that its function was to attack Islam and the Moslem community, they immediately left it.

⁹ Ruwen Ogien, *La guerre aux pauvres commence à l'école*, Paris : Grasset, 2013, p 14.

the poverty and the wars that destroy our world, the Western elite accuses religions:

Certains penseurs estiment que le conflit politique principal au XXI^e siècle est celui qui oppose la « civilisation » (pacifique, tolérante, pluraliste, ouverte, etc.) et la « barbarie » (violente, intolérante, intégriste, fondamentaliste, etc.). Ce diagnostic inspire leur vision de ce qu'il convient de faire à l'école et ailleurs.¹⁰

Why is the problem of secularity so tightly connected to the mission of the Republican school in France ? It is a system of education which is historically committed to the task of overcoming social prejudices and handicaps. Education provides what the French call “l'égalité des chances”.¹¹ Unfortunately, according to Ruwen Ogien, the elite have betrayed this mission. Nowadays the elitist prejudices against the poor prevail and, according to the new conservative and neo-darwinian vision, the poor themselves are responsible for their poverty.

Philosophiquement, cette guerre intellectuelle aux pauvres s'exprime aussi dans les tentatives pour expliquer la situation des plus défavorisés par des déficits moraux des individus, plutôt que par les effets d'un système social injuste à la base, et d'une redistribution des bénéfices de la coopération sociale et économique qui ne permet pas de compenser les handicaps initiaux.¹²

The islamophobia of the elite links the moral handicap of the poor to the “barbarian” religious background to which the poor are

¹⁰ Id., p 16-17.

¹¹ I do not believe in such an equality : the French School has real merits but it remains a bourgeois institution which, therefore, functions for a ruling and dominating class.

¹² Ruwen Ogien, *Op., Cit.*, p 145.

attached. Instead of recognizing the rationality of this attachment based on the experience of the subalterns who should know better how to cope with poverty and scorn and what culture is helpful in this struggle to survive, the elite criticizes it : Islam is described as an irrational and aggressive cultural heritage and it is seen as a factor of failure at school and in the process of integration to the modern world. If we follow such views, instead of struggling against the privileges of the rich, we should be fighting the beliefs of the poor. The anti-islamic trends of the elite ascribe the world chaos to the religious and cultural “barbarism” of the poor, instead of accusing colonial and post-colonial manipulations, Western aggressions and the ruthless and unfair global system. They cannot see that the pre-capitalist cultures of the poor have produced concepts and visions of life, solidarity and relation to the environment which favour the creation of a better world.

Who could then deny that islamophobia is part of the world war against the poor ? The function of this war is to unify the world economic system. Even when the relation to the paupers is called the eradication of poverty, it involves a so-called modernization process to assimilate them as economic actors of the market system. What used to be called by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) a SAP (a Structural Adjustment Plan, whose function it was to qualify a country for a loan and to conform it to a market economy devoid of State interference and subsidies to the paupers), has become a SDRP (Strategic Document for the Reduction of Poverty) whose functions are exactly the same. Is the transformation of a pauper into a wage-earner his redemption ? Obviously there is a confusion between the struggle against poverty and the expansion of market economy. Capitalism and what we call governance and the so-called shared values of Western diplomats are all based on production and sales for profit and it involves getting rid of the traditional visions of economy as the production of what human beings and communities do need

instead of the selling of what dazzles them.¹³ Islam as a creed that cares for the people (charity and social justice), ecology (the ruler's responsibility on the grass and water), peace (Bani Sadr's conception of "Towid" or Oneness) and responsibility, which rejects the present Chrematistic global economy¹⁴ (speculation), is among these traditional cultures that the global hyper-bourgeoisie scorns and tries to eradicate. So we can say that islamophobia comes from the top.

Gandhi never advised anyone to convert to another religion. He thought that our own tradition was the best to guide us but he did think that we can learn from each other. No one needs to be dominated by Islam to welcome Islamic values and people. Europeans only have to be Europeans in the best sense of this word, that is to say that they have to be faithful to their highest and deepest roots. Rousseau used to say that if our identity can be symbolized by a circle we have to stand close to its outside line. To explain what I mean I would like to end by honouring a slave who spent 5 years in Alger but who, in spite of a very cruel master, learnt to appreciate Moslems to the extent that he ascribed to Sidi Hamed Ben Engeli most of his famous and immortal novel, *Don Quixote*. The reader who has reached chapter eight is suddenly told that the continuation of the duel between the hero and a Basque has been lost and that this is the end of the story of Don Quixote, but, if he turns the page, Cervantes tells him how he found a complete Arabic version of the adventures of the sad knight. So the reading of the novel can go on beyond chapter eight for our pleasure and enlightenment. Already in the first chapter, Cervantes had ironically stressed that Don Quixote had the habit to eat bacon on Fridays, thus exposing the intolerance of a society which would not

¹³ Mahjib Rahnema, *Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté*, Paris : Fayard, 2003.

¹⁴ Of course there is an Islamic trend open to the liberal global economy which is not criticized but rather protected by the West even when it would deserve criticism.

have accepted a hero who might have been a former or a hiding Moslem (or Jew). Later in the story, through the adventures of Zoraide, he reminds us of the feelings of pity of North African Ladies towards the poor Christian slaves. Many other Christian prisoners in North Africa remembered in their writings such touching compassionate attitudes. I do wish that our vision of the other will match the generosity of these kind women and of the Algerian heroines of the greatest European novelist.¹⁵ I also wish that we'll turn the page and discover what comes after chapter eight.

Subalterns, unless manipulated from the top, don't accept the clash of cultures invoked to divide them and rule the world. They freely borrow from each other and this process seems to be endless. The peoples of our planet do need each other. On the contrary the elite pretend to reject the culture(s) of the subalterns and to direct dogmatically the world cultural development in the name of progress and market economy. This is why, in the process, we lose sight of each other and remain so nostalgic as, in spite of migrations, one bank of the Mediterranean sea needs Africa (and her Islamic component) and the other to reconnect with St Augustine, Latin and European cultures. This is the result of God's craft when He got rid of the oppressive language which dominated Babel.

¹⁵ Tolstoï and Dostoievsky too have written beautiful pages on Islam and Moslems.