ASTGHIK HAMBARDZUMYAN

The National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Armenia

THE ROOTS OF ISLAMAPHOBIA IN THE WESTERN EUROPE

Abstract:

"Islamophobia is the shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (Runnymede Trust (1997)

The Term Islamaphobia has a fairly recent origin. It became popular for European anti-racist activists after September 11, 2001. The term came out of a growing need to address the place of Muslim migrants in Northern countries, and the supposed divide between the Western and Islamic worlds. Islamaphobia-enacted by Westerners and perceived by Muslims-plays a critically central role in convincing many that a civilizational clash will be inevitable and all-consuming by establishing the fact of an essential and irreconcilable difference between "them" and "us" .

More than 1.2 billion people identify themselves as Muslim globally-that is, one in five people. The majority of these Muslims do not participate in political violence, and few aspire to establish an Islamic state in their own country. Almost all these Muslims under civil laws fashioned after Western models and relatively few seek to replace these with sharia (Islamic law). If the case were otherwise, the world would be incalculably more convulsed than it is.

The question, then, is how in the minds of people from all over the world but muslims, has Islam become synonymous with the Middle East, Muslim men with violence, and Muslim women with oppression? The answer points to a history-as old as Islam itself-of confrontation between an overwhelmingly Christian Europe and predominantly Muslim Middle East over economic resources, political power, and religious sites or so it would be portrayed: in fact, the antagonists never represented a united Europe or Middle East and often battled among their coreligionists as much as against their supposed enemies. As this competition unfolded Europeans came to negatively portray Muslims so effectively and so universally that the terms "Islam" and "Muslim" have come to inherently evoke suspicion and fear on the part of many. These are the roots of Islamaphobia.

Keywords:

Islamaphobia, Western Europe, anti-racist activists