

Islamophobia in a French Muslim's Eyes

By Mr. Sami Danguir

Editor's Note: *In the context of tackling the challenges and the opportunities of the Euro Muslim youth and engaging in the allegation of their tendency towards extremism and as platform for European Muslims' voices, IslamOnline.net (IOL)'s European Muslims Page, paved the way for a French Muslim youth activist to unveil his thoughts and share his experience with IOL's audience. Sami Danguir, is FEMYSO's executive committee member. Danguir simply and freely explains how the situation of Islamophobia and the false attributions of extremism to Islam are developing in Europe and how he combats such allegations.*



Sami Danguir

A long time ago, my interest in adding something valuable to Islam has strongly urged me to search for places where I can fulfil my desire. I was just fifteen when I started to join some Islamic places that have several Muslim-related activities. The Muslim Youth of France (JMF) was my birthplace as a Muslim activist. Then, I was blessed to join the Muslim Students of France (EMF) at the age of eighteen.

As a matter of fact, my ambition for more benefit to a larger number of Muslim brothers and sisters justifies why I joined these particular institutions since EMF and JMF are member organizations of the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) which I headed. Later on, I became the national Vice-President of the EMF for four years, and the executive committee member of FEMYSO.

Through our many years of experience, communication with the European world, and our activities in all these Islamic institutions, I believe that we, Muslims in Europe, have grasped a general idea of what has been going on in the European countries. Not to mention our relations with our Christian and Jewish partners through intercultural and inter-religious dialogues usually arranged by the Council of Europe. Hence, it is true to say that the European communities have what was recently coined as "Islamophobia".

An Islamophobic French Society

Islamophobia, I can assert, is a very deeply-rooted notion in the French mentality. Even if the politicians don't want to admit this fact for political reasons, there are clear signals which reveal the facts that Islamophobia as a phenomenon is getting worse in Europe. Some of these facts are:

- Surveys reflecting what is in the mobs' minds which reject Islamic-related issues. For example, many movements were against hijab in schools, immigration --especially from Africa, and Islamic principles which many French people allege to be against the Republic's values.
- French media is totally dedicated to those in power who described, for instance, the riots of autumn 2005 as an undercurrent manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism. However, in fact it was only a manifestation of some social, economic, and political issues.
- Many people easily and freely claim that Islam is a threat to the idea of going Republic. We can mention here Oriana Fallaci, the Italian islamophobic writer, who describes Muslims as some animals --I tried to euphemize the words. Fallaci received high praise from some well-known Jewish-French philosophers, in their reviews, for her courage to say what it actually

was. Afterwards, Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss professor and intellectual of Egyptian origin, wrote an article on those Jewish French writers and philosophers saying that they were defending Israel as they were more influenced by their Jewish origin rather than being objective in their judgement.

- The acts committed against Muslims are getting more and more common. A cemetery where many Muslims are buried side by side "with some Jews" has some Nazi writings and pictures. Two mosques had arson attacks in less than two weeks. We can even find cases of aggression which, according to the police, were recorded as acts of racism. Whereas according to the injured man, it had been Islamophobic aggression act as the victim was asked first if he was a Muslim.

An Isolated Muslim Society

Realistically, and based on all these aggressive attitudes, Muslims chose to live in seclusion and to be isolated from the whole society, peacefully. They wanted to find some religious justification for what was happening. That was when the scene was totally paved for fundamentalism to appear.

Now sermons openly describe the society as being a secular (kafir) one. Muslims are asked not to take part in any public activity because "their" law is against Islam, and is not based on the Islamic law, Sharia`h.

Moreover, according to those fundamentalist leaders and their followers, voting is strictly forbidden because their democracy is against the principles of Shari`ah which states that the governance is in God's hands and which is applied through Islamic rulings.

Towards Positive Interactive Muslims

So, Muslim organizations such as EMF, JMF, and the Federation of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) develop activities on both local and national levels in order to promote different ways of positive interaction with the society.

Furthermore, we call upon Muslims to take part in all activities since we are part of the society we live in. We do not want to be merely a product of the society but rather to express our views in public matters. So, we urge Muslim youths to do better in their studies and to do post-graduate studies as well.

To be well acquainted with their realities, not only as Muslims but as European citizens, Young Muslims are asked to get involved in Islamic organizations' activities all over Europe. Additionally, the political scene is one of the most important fields that European Muslims are to acknowledge as we believe it is one of the best ways to minimize the fundamentalist and the extremist effects.

Islamophobia vs. Dialogues

Another solution to the Islamophobia phenomenon is the intercultural dialogue programs (ICD) and inter-religious dialogue programs (IRD). We should focus on both categories on all levels: locally, nationally, and internationally.

As a matter of fact, dialogues fall in the area of my specialization. FEMYSO is dealing with international issues with some partners, such as some Christian and Jewish youth organizations, European institutions as the Council of Europe (CoE), and the European Union (EU).



EU Organizations' Role

The CoE often organizes some international forums, with national, international and religious bodies, tackling the ICD and IRD issues with the youth. We are trying to involve young people in those bodies effectively. In those forums, white papers with recommendations of good practises are published and proposed to state member of the CoE. Then, the international youth organizations take the initiative to organize similar meetings based on the available budgets and also on participants.

FEMYSO

In the same field, FEMYSO often works with the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) and with the Youth Christian organization. Both of the prior organizations were part of the creators of the Faith Based Expert Group (FBEG) which gathers World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the European Union of Jewish Student (EUJS), Pax Christi International, and others. This FBEG had published a T-Kit for IRD and its good practices that can be used by any organization wishing to organize such events. FEMYSO and EYCE are now close partners in the campaign "Overcome Fundamentalism."



In other seminars FEMYSO is responsible for breaking stereotypes.

In the seminar of last November "Religion in the Media", which took place in Budapest, the point was to deeply understand the connection between the Media and its echo concerning the religious fact. It was interesting in the sense that not only Muslims felt offended by the Media, but also the Christians. The Jewish participants focused more on the Middle-East conflict and how Israel was shown.

So, after those types of events, some connections were created in order to organize more youth projects and events.

On international level, we use the national relays to promote the dialogue between communities which is a tool to avoid any kind of fundamentalism and extremism.

These were Danguir's thoughts on the issue of extremism among European Muslim youth and how it can be combated in his point of view and his experience as a European Muslim activist. It is now your turn to tell us your experience and how do you see the allegations of European Muslim youth's tendencies towards extremism?

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