

# Yearbook of research on Islamophobia 2010 – Austria, Germany, Switzerland

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## Iman Attia and Yasemin Shooman: The reception of the murder of Marwa el-Sherbini in German print media and German weblogs

*Keywords: Marwa el-Sherbini, Anti-Muslim racism, Headscarf, Print media, Weblogs*

On July 1, 2009, Marwa el-Sherbini was stabbed in the Regional Court of Dresden during a court hearing. The murderer of the young woman had insulted his victim – who was wearing a headscarf – calling her “Islamist” and “terrorist” prior to the attack. Nevertheless, this act was initially labelled as a tragic murder in a courtroom and the anti-Muslim dimension was not named as such by the mainstream media and politics. Particularly Muslim bloggers in Germany spread the news of the murder through mailing-lists and put it into the context of their discriminatory experiences as Muslims. When the anti-Muslim background of the murder finally became subject of the public debate, it was accompanied by a defensive reaction by the print media and to a much greater extent by anti-Muslim websites. The emphasis on the one hand was to address the Russian-German background of the culprit – thereby externalizing the problem – and on the other hand, possible violent retaliation from Muslims, reversing the offender-victim relationship. Apart from a few exceptions, the media reception of this homicide case was dominated by the familiar boundary mark between the dichotomous “we” and “they”. Occasionally, the murder of Marwa el-Sherbini was used as an opportunity to reflect on the treatment of the Muslim minority in Germany.

## Georg Kreis: A Swiss version of Islamophobia

*Keywords: Direct Democracy, protection of religious minorities, fighting racism in Switzerland, anti-Islamism, xenophobia*

A majority of Swiss citizens voted for a ban of mosques and minarets in November 2009. This wondrous outcome resulted in a huge international media attention towards the very small country Switzerland. We have to ask ourselves, how such an Islamophobic manifestation came about. This article shows, that besides the very specific framing of the vote, it was right-wing nationalist forces that fuelled this bias. Alarmist wake-up calls against “Muslim superalienation (*Überfremdung*)” could already be observed in 1989/90.

In the following, there are two parallel anti-Muslim manifestations. On one side, you have foreign happenings like 9/11, the murdering of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands, the Chechen terrorist attack at the school in Beslan and the debate on the accession of Turkey to the EU (2004), the Muhammad cartoon-crisis (2006). And on the other side, you have domestic political proceedings (elections and votes, where an Islamophobic electorate was mobilized, like in 2003, 2007 or in referenda on naturalization in autumn 2004). The government as well as the national church, Jewish organisations and especially commissions like Swiss Federal Commission against racism (*Eidgenössische Kommission gegen Rassismus*) have failed in their call for social pluralism and tolerance. Their approach not to take extremist excesses of Muslims but the Swiss reality of Muslim minorities as a point of reference in the debate failed.

## Farid Hafez: Islamophobia and the FPÖ in 2009

*Keywords: Islamophobic Populism – Freedom Party of Austria – anti-Semitism – religiousization of discourses*

„The FPÖ in 2009“ aims to analyse election campaigns of the right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in the year 2009. Since 2004, the Freedom Party has made a shift in its content from a general xenophobic party in the 1990ies to a more islamophobic Party after 9/11, although Islamophobia has also been a part of the general xenophobic attitudes of the FPÖ before 9/11. This article elaborates what role Islamophobia is playing in the election campaign for the European parliament as well as two state-parliamentary campaigns, in Vorarlberg and Upper Austria. In addition a talk of the party leader of the FPÖ during a demonstration against an Islamic centre is analysed for showing how regional conflicts are used by the populist far-right to mobilize voters.

The use of the crucifix and the central role of Islamophobia in the election programmes strengthen a so called religiousization of political discourses. While anti-Semitism is rejected by the political elites of the non-right wing parties, Islamophobia is widely accepted or ignored. This shows that the political elites have learnt but formally from the history of anti-Semitism, but when it comes to other forms of heterophobia, political elites support these or at the very least accept it.

## Rüdiger Lohlker: Islamkritik.at – an Austrian sub-discourse of European Anti-Islamism

*Keywords: Racism – Islamophobia – Blogging – Islamkritik*

One of the most important tasks of European research on the transformation of European societies is the creation of non-racist European identities. If Europe is understood in terms of including certain European peoples and excluding everybody else, there will be no place for Europe and the Europeans in a future globalized world. Analysing racism is a critical task for research aiming at developing a true universal mode of thought. Critique in its extreme can/should be reconceptualised in a constructive way as Bruno Latour has shown. But it is to be defended against being appropriated by racist discourses. The concept of 'Islamkritik' in current media and even in academia is used for a kind of critique that seems to use academic standards to criticise Islam and is trying to have a certain distance to islamophobic, racist tendencies. The analysis of islamkritik.at will show that the concept of 'Islamkritik' is used to promote racist worldviews based on academic criticism of Islam and justified by this kind of criticism.

Another aspect blogs like islamkritik.at may illustrate. It shows several traits of blogging analysed by Geert Lovink, e.g. the monologic character of blogging, in this case strengthening the exclusivist worldviews promoted in this blog.

## Thomas Schönberger: On the necessity to explore reservations and fears

*Keywords: Perceptions, group discussion, field-research, empirical data, Islamophobia*

In each social entity there will be, sooner or later, tensions based upon identity-constructions. A post-modern approach might argue that conflict is an integral part of each society. Therefore, a central mission must be containing and defusing social tensions, respectively in fields of conflict, in order to avoid concrete altercations in the long term. Although multifaceted tension-fields exist in Austria, it seems that the recent perception of Islam and Muslims, from the majority point of view, needs an adjustment and deactivation in a particular way.

To that effect, the exploration of fear, reservations and other patterns of perceptions could be a first step to reduce stereotypes, misconceptions and tensions. The article elucidated, on the basis of field research realized in spring 2009, that empirical exploration tools might be useful in researching this kind of issue. Hence, a short outline of the data set will illustrate which conflict fields – concerning the analysed field – are virulent respectively bringing out some patterns of perception, which generate structures of exclusion.

## Alexander Steffek: Islamophobia in Austria – a qualitative report

*Keywords: Islamophobia, documentation, public space, discrimination, internet*

The aim of the „Dokumentationsarchiv Islamophobie“ (DAI) is to look at the phenomena of islamophobia in Austria and to promote it as a central theme in public. A short overview of DAIs monitoring in 2009 is given in this book. Extracts of the categories „politics“, „public space“, „internet“ and „individual cases of discrimination“ are presented showing the effectiveness and point of impact of islamophobia on the lives of individuals. This report has no quantitative claims but tends to show a qualitative abstract of islamophobia in Austria.

Edith Frank-Rieser, Eva Mückstein, and Hermann Spielhofer: Islamophobia – real and unreal constructs of fear as private or national creations of myths. Explanatory approaches from the psychodynamic point of view

Keywords: discrimination, myths of foreignness, fundamentalism, Islamophobia, religion, development of prejudices

Abstract: At the beginning we look at the term Islamophobia as a socially diagnostic term in its significance as an individual fear and as a politically exploited and exploitable mass phenomenon and as structurally anchored discrimination against Muslims in Europe as well. Furthermore, we describe aspects of the Islamophobic reaction as an individual and a collective phenomenon against the background of the current social tendencies and the socioeconomic circumstances in the western world. The concept of the enemy Islam is perpetuated by means of homogenization and creation of stereotypes in order to detract from the upcoming controversies on our own cultural and social upheavals and changes, and in order to stabilize our own frail structure of values and to bypass negotiations in reference to social conflicts of interest as well. The influence of socioeconomic circumstances on upbringing, education and self-development exposed to a constantly increasing pressure to perform and pressure of competition on a tight labour market lead to fear of failure and thus to relief-of-the-strain reactions such as devaluation and discrimination against the “inferior” minority which will be dealt with as part of individualized Islamophobia. Insecure identity structures and the loss of national identity which would keep us grounded bring forward Islamophobic reactions of the individual. The willingness to accept interchange and to develop mutual understanding within the scope of a negotiable dialogue on similarities and differences stagnates because of the dynamics of Islamophobic reactions which distort and misinterpret reality.