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Explaining Islamophobia. A Test of four Theories Based on the Case of a Swiss City

Jörg Stolz*

1 Introduction¹

“Islamophobia” is receiving much attention at present. Countless television programmes, newspaper articles, scientific journal articles, trend reports, books and conferences deal with the current rejection of Islam in the western world. One of the reasons for such a remarkable career of both the topic and the term Islamophobia is doubtlessly the event of September 11th 2001 and the following terrorist attacks linked to Al-Qaeda. Since then, islamophobic societal tendencies rejecting Islam and Muslim communities by amalgamating them with terrorism have become an extremely important phenomenon. Yet it is precisely the politicization of the term that renders its scientific treatment difficult. While opponents of “Islamists” and enemies of “Islamophobes” fight each other on various battlegrounds (in politics, science, and the media), interesting sociological questions are pushed into the background and few are those who ask in a scientifically detached way what phenomena can be observed, how they evolve and how they can be explained sociologically.

In this article, we discuss four theories which explain Islamophobia, testing them against data drawn from a representative quantitative survey which we realised in the city of Zurich in 1995. At the time, the *term* “Islamophobia” was only at the beginning of its career; but we will see that the *phenomenon* was already very much in existence. The aim of the article is threefold:

- 1) to *define* Islamophobia in a satisfactory manner;
- 2) to discuss the best way to *describe* Islamophobia, in particular using statistical methods; and
- 3) to evaluate existing theories on the subject in order to find the best *explanation* of Islamophobia in a specific case.

Given the state of current discussions about the “role of Islam” in a large number of western countries, there can be no doubt that questions like these are of great importance.

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¹ I thank Rachel Mathey for her help with the english version of this text.

2 Framing the research

In the following paragraphs we shall deal with our first objective, namely the attempt to find a useful definition of Islamophobia and possible ways to tackle the epistemological problems linked to the concept.

2.1 Definitions

Western rejection of Islam has a long history and has undergone a variety of forms and phases (Colpe, 1989). This long history is not, however, in itself a valid explanation of current Islamophobia (Halliday 1999). While concepts like prejudice, stereotype, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism are well established in the literature, the term “Islamophobia” was not coined until the end of the 1980s. Alternative terms in use are “Anti-Islamic racism” (Fekete 2004) and “Anti-Muslimism” (Halliday 1999). Etymologically, *islamo-phobia* means “fear of Islam”. The term was obviously created in analogy to “xenophobia” or “homophobia”. Sociologically, however, we are faced with the task of defining Islamophobia independently of its etymological meaning. In our view a good definition of Islamophobia has to be:

- attuned to already existing definitions from research in the field of racism, stereotypes and prejudice, in order to enable the comparison between Islamophobia and other out-group phobias
- large enough to include all the phenomena normally meant by the term (not just its emotional dimension, for example) and directed not just towards Islam but also Muslim groups
- devoid of any theoretical explanations of the phenomenon (for these have to be tested by research).

Many existing definitions do not meet these criteria.² We therefore propose the following very simple definition: “Islamophobia is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e. g. discrimination, violence)”.³

2 We name just a few examples. The “lexique du respect mutuel” (<http://www.agenda-respect.be/fr/lexique/islamophobic.htm>) defines Islamophobia in a too complicated way as “haine, rejet d’un islam réduit à une essence maléfique alors que l’islam est de fait pluriel tant au niveau social, géographique, historique que culturel. Cette haine est alimentée par des préjugés et des stéréotypes négatifs qui, le plus souvent, pratiquent l’amalgame entre : ‘islam, arabe, musulman, islamiste, terroriste, intégriste’ mais aussi entre culture et religion”. The Runnymede Trust report (1997: 1) defines Islamophobia as “Dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, (..) fear or dislike of all or most Muslims.”, thus not showing the relation to other phobias and not including the stereotype/prejudice factor. The free dictionary (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/bias>) defines Islamophobia in a much too narrow way as “prejudice against Muslims”.

3 We define stereotypes as relatively stable, over-generalised and distorted cognitions; prejudice may be understood as an evaluation built on a stereotype (Zick, 1997, Gardner, 1994).

Starting with this definition, one can distinguish individual, institutional and cultural Islamophobia. While individual and cultural Islamophobia is based on cognition, ways of thinking and the action of individuals, institutional Islamophobia integrates islamophobic practices into organisational rules and procedures. In this article, we shall concentrate on individual and cultural Islamophobia. It is important to see that using a definition including stereotypes and prejudices has the effect of “pathologizing” Islamophobia: an islamophobic person or institution is said to act on “false” assumptions. Definitions that try to circumvent the “pathological element” in stereotypes, prejudice or Islamophobia are generally not very convincing.

2.2 Epistemological problems and solutions

When researching individual or cultural Islamophobia, it is important to note that we are working on the level of “second-order representations”. In other words: we reconstruct the understanding of other people concerning “Islam” or “Muslim groups”; and then decide whether these reconstructions are “distorted” or “based on false assumptions” – if the answer is “yes”, we are faced with “Islamophobia”. Obviously, there are important difficulties in such an undertaking. We might make mistakes in the reconstruction of their understanding as well as in our choice of criteria for “distortion”.

Following these insights, five epistemological problems can be distinguished which have to be solved in any research on Islamophobia. These are listed below, each time followed by the specific response we give in the present study.

1. The problem of the *distinction between Islamophobia and legitimate political opinion*. In fact, apart from experimental designs, it is extremely difficult in sociological research to distinguish clearly between a legitimate political viewpoint and a distorted or false cognition. Failure to see this problem might lead the researcher to use his own political values as a criterion. His text then becomes a political treatise rather than a scientific work.⁴ The Runnymede report (1997: 4) sees this problem and tries to solve it by distinguishing between “closed” and “open” views of Islam. As the examples in their text show, this solution is not entirely satisfactory, since the Runnymede researchers have to claim that they know what “Islam” is “really like”. In our study, this difficulty is circumvented by the fact that we measure positive and negative attitudes to certain Muslim and national groups but do not take a stance on where on this continuum a person becomes “islamophobic”. This is actually not necessary for our purposes, since our goal is only to explain *differences* between individuals.
2. The problem of *distinguishing attitudes towards different groups in the Islamic world*. Although they denounce over-generalisation in the cognition of others,

⁴ A book which runs into this problem is Geisser (2003). A lot of work done in the “discourse analysis” tradition might equally be mentioned.

some researchers seem to entertain a rather monistic view of “Islam”, treating Islam as an entity and conflating specific trends in Islam with Islam in general (Halliday, 1999). Such an approach reinforces the dichotomy between “the West” and “the Islamic world” which is in many respects imaginary. In our study, this problem is treated by distinguishing attitudes towards Muslims in general from attitudes towards Turkish individuals and individuals from Arab countries.⁵

3. The problem of distinguishing *Islamophobia from other types of stereotype-driven attitudes and/or actions*. Failure to distinguish these phenomena might lead researchers to put too much emphasis on Islam and disregard the possibility that there might be hostility also towards other religions and other national, ethnic or religious out-groups. In our study, we treat this problem by using a variety of different items that measure attitudes towards Islam, different nationalities, and other societal out-groups (xenophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.). We are thus able to put Islamophobia in perspective by comparing it to other types of out-group phobia.
4. The problem of observing *differences in the intensity of islamophobic attitudes and actions*. Researchers whose instruments do not allow them to capture such differences of intensity often jump to highly exaggerated conclusions, observing, for example, that “the media in general” are islamophobic. Here, we deal with this problem by making sure that our explanatory variables “produce variance”.
5. The problem of *distinguishing the different groups in society that possibly have varying attitudes towards different out-groups*. This is one of the most important points and one of the least understood in current debates. In fact, most commentators and many researchers speak of the “Islamophobia” of “society”, as if “society” were a collective individual. The main task of the sociologist, however, is to unwrap such a notion and to explain why different social groups show different degrees of out-group phobia. This is what we are trying to do in this article.

2.3 Background information on Muslims in Switzerland

There was a steady rise in the number of Muslims in *Switzerland* in the two decades before our study took place. While there were only 29,800 Muslims in Switzerland in 1970 (0.05% of the population), they were 56,000 in 1980 and 152,217 in 1990 (2.1%). There was a further strong increase thereafter, the number of

5 We would have liked to use more items to differentiate the attitudes towards the diverse reality of “Islam in Switzerland”. However, in quantitative surveys, there is a limit to the distinctions one can make. The social representations of the average respondent lie on a rather abstract level, which means that distinctions that are too specific will not be understood or produce random responses. We thus had to limit ourselves to a very restricted number of categories.

Muslims rising to 310,807 (4.3%) of the Swiss population in the year 2000. The Muslim population in Switzerland comes mostly from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia; other Muslims stem from the Middle and Far East and the Maghreb. Religiously, they are mostly Sunni, with Shiite and Alavite minorities. Socially, they can be divided into five groups: (1) manual labourers who immigrated mainly from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s and their children (a second generation of Muslims born in Switzerland); (2) asylum seekers, mostly from Turkey (often Kurds), Iran and Lebanon; (3) Muslim business people and officials of international organisations; (4) immigrants (often students) from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia); and (5) Swiss converts. The first two groups account for more than 75 percent of the Muslim presence in the country. For information on the diversity of Islam in Switzerland, see: Baumann/Jäggi (1991), Schneuwly/Lathion (2003).

In *Zurich*, the Muslim population amounted to 9,296 individuals in 1990. The three major nationalities were Turkish, Bosnian and Albanian. The percentage of Muslims in each district of Zurich oscillated between 1.0% (district 7) and 5.6% (district 5). In 1995 the different Muslim communities (five Turkish, two Arab, one Bosniac, one Albanian, one Pakistani and one Ahmadiyya) joined together in an "Association of Islamic organisations" in Zurich to negotiate with the local authorities concerning a Muslim cemetery which now exists.

3 Explanations for Islamophobia

How can individual and cultural Islamophobia be explained? What sociological causes can be found in order to explain why some individuals think and act in an islamophobic way, while others don't? In the present article we test and compare four sociological theories that attempt to give an answer to this question, namely a) deprivation theory, b) the theory of the influence of the media, c) the theory of contact and d) the theory of traditionalism (For an overview of existing theories, see Zick (1997)). None of the four theories was specifically formulated with regard to the phenomenon "Islamophobia", but we believe they can be applied to Islamophobia without any problem. In order to be explanatory, a theory must formulate clear theoretical mechanisms, stating explicitly which social situations, opportunities and restrictions lead individuals to adopt specific cognitions, attitudes and actions (Coleman, 1990). The four theories fulfil these criteria.

3.1 Deprivation/frustration theory

The deprivation theory states, in its most simple form, that deprived individuals are more likely to develop xenophobia in general, or Islamophobia in particular, than non-deprived individuals (Zick, 1997, 98 ff.). Why should this be the case?

Different accounts of the causal link exist. A first version states that frustration leads with considerable probability to aggression which is then redirected towards a person or group which is normally weaker (out-group). The individual or group in question thus has the function of a scapegoat (LeVine, 1972; Heckmann, 1992). A second version holds that deprivation leads to a negative social identity. In order to compensate this problem, an individual will try to improve his view of himself by using “downward comparison”, that is by comparing his own group to another social group which is even lower socially. Again, this latter group will often be an already established societal out-group (Hewstone, 1988; Turner, 1978; Zick, 1997). Muslim groups in western countries may – due to the religious and ethnic difference or sometimes lower social status and limited rights – be used for such displaced aggression or downward comparison. We test the theory in two ways. First, we examine whether individuals with lower positions on different socio-demographic scales (formal education, income etc.) show more Islamophobia. Second, we investigate the relationship between different dimensions of subjective life satisfaction and Islamophobia, the hypothesis being that individuals who are in some way frustrated and unhappy will be more likely to show islamophobic tendencies.

3.2 The theory of the influence of the media

Following the second theory, xenophobia and Islamophobia are mainly a product of media discourse (Zentrum für Türkeistudien, 1995; Rebetz/Lorentzi, 2000; Runnymede Report, 1997; Fekete, 2004). The major part of the empirical literature on Islamophobia seems to be centred on analyses of media products (Allen 2003), very often without making a theoretical or empirical link to the actual effects that islamophobic media might have on individual perceptions and actions. The basic argument is usually the following: The media apply a singular logic which often has non-intentional effects on the picture of “Islam”. Journalists speak about what is new and sensational; they have the habit of dramatising and of shaping their message in such a way as to render their “story” as interesting as possible (very important in this respect are the titles and photographs). Moreover, since they have to deal with a great amount of information, journalists are necessarily ignorant of many details concerning the realities they write about. This is the reason why, when it comes to immigrant groups, the media mainly concentrate on problems (e. g. non-integration, criminality, etc.); and, with Islam, they mainly concentrate on Islamism, terrorist attacks and danger. All of which combine to create a negative “social representation” of Islam.⁶ How might one test these assertions? The theory allows for two types of hypotheses. First, one may think that the media in general reinforce Islamophobia. This assumes that the

⁶ Another variant of the theory of the influence of the media thinks that intentional (rather than unintentional) effects are at work. Those in power use the media to suppress certain parts of the population. One example is van Dijk (1993).

various media products take a rather islamophobic stance overall. While this may seem a rather far-fetched assumption at first, the Runnymede Report (1997, 20) makes precisely this claim. We test this theory by investigating the effect that frequent consumption of different media (TV, radio, newspapers) has on Islamophobia. Second, one may think that individuals who consume sensationalist and reductionist media products will be more islamophobic than individuals who adhere to media products that inform in a more differentiated way. We test this hypothesis by comparing readers of different types of newspapers.

3.3 The theory of contact

The third theory explains xenophobia and Islamophobia by differences in personal contacts (Thomas, 1993; Stolz, 2000, 251). The causal story is not simple: social interaction may reinforce or reduce stereotypes and prejudice, depending on the social context. Given certain conditions (for example superficial contact, unequal economic status, situation of competition), contact between different cultures will provoke phobias and prejudice, or increasing awareness of differences that lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Given certain other conditions (for example, close personal contact, equal economic conditions, situation of cooperation), interaction may reduce prejudice and stereotypes. By getting to know people of other cultures personally, one may become aware of the fact that stereotypes are unfounded. One may also gain a large amount of new knowledge which renders the image of the “other” more complex – up to the point where the stereotypes vanish completely. We will test these assertions in two ways. On an aggregated level, we shall investigate whether the percentage of Muslims and foreigners in general in the different districts (Stadtkreise) of Zurich has an effect on xenophobic and islamophobic attitudes. The hypothesis is that, other things being equal, the mere perception of a large percentage of Muslims or foreigners in one’s district (= superficial contact) strengthens out-group phobias. Second, we examine the effect of personal contact between the respondent and different types of foreigners. Here the hypothesis is that personal contact (= close contact) reduces out-group phobia.

3.4 The theory of traditionalism

Next, we turn to the “theory of traditionalism” (Stolz, 2000). With regard to Islamophobia, this theory states that

1. *Islamophobia is part of a larger phenomenon called xenophobia.* Xenophobic rejection of out-groups is found in all western societies. The specific groups which are rejected, however, vary from country to country, region to region and may even change quickly within a certain country in the course of history. (The Swiss population for example changed its stereotypes of “Italians” from a very negative to a very positive social representation in the course of only 25

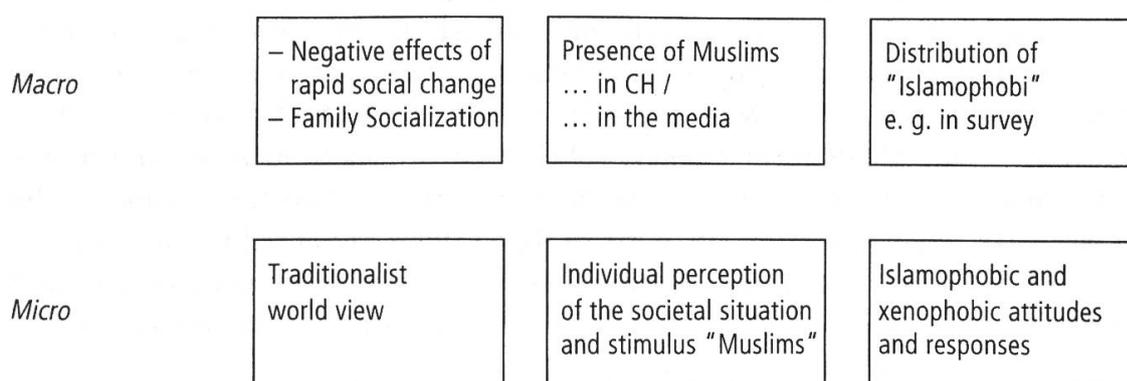
years. See, for an empirical study: Stolz 2001.) Practically, this means that Islamophobia should be seen and studied as a sub-phenomenon of general xenophobia.

2. *The two phobias (Islamophobia, xenophobia) are caused by "traditionalism"*. Traditionalism is said to be a syndrome involving cognitions, attitudes, values and habits which are linked to the desire to conserve traditions in the face of a rapidly changing world. Traditionalists do not just try to keep in line with tradition; they also see modern developments as the beginning of an imminent destruction of society and they try to prevent societal change in an often angry and combative way. Numerous classic authors – from various theoretical backgrounds and using diverse terminologies – have demonstrated that the "traditionalist syndrome" emerges under a variety of historical conditions (Adorno, 1950; Rokeach, 1960; Wilson, 1973; Altemeyer, 1988). In our study, several dimensions of hostility to change were measured, that is: at the cognitive level (anomia), at the moral level (rigorism), at the level of values (conventionalism), at the cultural level (popular culture), at the political level (left-right) and at the level of identity (patriotism).
3. The traditionalist syndrome has, in turn, *two main causes*. The first is *rapid social change*. This explanation assumes individual rationality. It argues that certain categories of individuals (e. g. the aged, people with poor education or people who are not very mobile) have more to lose than gain from rapid social change. Thus, they run the risk that their (often limited) educational, social and cultural capital might be devalued by such rapid change. This is why they combat societal change in a traditionalist manner. The second cause is *traditional family socialisation*. The traditionalist syndrome is a very universal way of apprehending and reacting to the world. Like all other profound value syndromes, it is forcefully transmitted by the family (e. g. Altemeyer, 1988, 65). The impact of parental socialisation on xenophobia is increasingly recognized (See for example Urban/Singelmann 1998; Hefler/Boehnke/Butz, 1999; Rippl 2004; Bacher 2001).

Figure 1 shows the mechanisms advanced by this theory in the framework of a macro-micro-macro explanation (see Coleman, 1990). The macroconditions of being a potential "loser of modernity" or of having been raised in a family with traditionalist values leads to a higher probability that a person has a traditionalist world-view (which includes anomia, rigorism etc.). The individual with a traditionalist outlook then tries to make sense of the current societal situation by taking into account all the information available to him or her (mainly through the media) on Muslims in general, and in Switzerland in particular. On the basis of this information, he or she is more likely to adopt islamophobic and/or xenophobic attitudes than an individual with a non-traditionalist world-view. If we aggregate the attitudes of many individuals (for example, in a political vote or in a

social survey), this creates a new “social fact”: the distribution of Islamophobia in the respective social group.

Figure 1 An explanatory model for the distribution of “islamophobic attitudes”



4 Methods used for the research on Switzerland

4.1 Data

The data used for this study stem from a closed-question face-to-face survey, each interview taking from 45–60 minutes. The population consisted of inhabitants of the city of Zurich in the age range 18 to 65 with Swiss nationality. The survey was conducted between October 1994 and March 1995 by the Sociological Institute of the University of Zurich. The people were chosen randomly from the official files of the state (Einwohnerkontrolle). In all, 1,138 interviews were conducted. The response rate was 72%. The survey can be regarded as representative of the Swiss population of the city of Zurich (Stolz, 2000, 226).

4.2 Operationalisation of Islamophobia

While the survey was not specifically focused on Islamophobia (but on “attitudes towards foreigners in general”), there are three questions (items) that may be used as dependent variables for our purposes. See, for full item lists, wordings and sources: Stolz (2000). In one battery of items, it was asked whether respondents thought that certain (out-)groups in society were “annoying” (stören) – a lot, pretty much, a little, not at all. Among out-groups evaluated in this way were right-wing extremists, alternative people, Jews, Muslims and “others”. The question regarding Muslims can evidently said to be tapping Islamophobia. Another battery of items asked how “likeable” (sympathisch) respondents estimated those individuals belonging to different nationalities or regions of the world to be (e. g. France, Turkey, Arab countries). Each group could be evaluated in terms of “very likeable,

rather likeable, not sure, not very likeable, not at all likeable". The degree of sympathy felt for individuals with Turkish nationality or coming from Arab countries can only be interpreted as Islamophobia on the basis of two assumptions. First, that respondents know that the majoritarian religion in these countries is Islam. This we take as given. Second: that respondents somehow link their evaluation of these groups to the religion in question. We argue that this is the case, for the two items are highly correlated to the first item mentioned in this paragraph (Correlations: Muslims – individuals from Arab countries: .383; Muslims – individuals from Turkey: .341; individuals from Arab countries – individuals from Turkey: .550.) and the determinants of all three items can be shown to be largely similar. For some of the analyses presented in this article, a common factor was extracted from the three indicators, which was then used as a "dependent variable". We interpret this variable to be measuring positive or negative attitudes towards Muslims.

4.3 Operationalisation of the correlates of xenophobia

A xenophobia scale was built from four items, which measured the positive or negative attitudes towards "foreigners in general". The items were: 1. "Do you think that there are too many foreigners in Switzerland" (überfremdet?); 2. "The presence of the foreigners who live here has more advantages than disadvantages"; 3. "Without all the foreigners, our city would be a lot less lively"; 4. "Can you tell me if you think that the following groups in general are annoying (störend): foreigners". As in the case of Islamophobia, we do not specify a critical level beyond which an attitude is "xenophobic".

4.4 Operationalisation of explanatory variables

The *theory of contact* was operationalised in two ways. First we used the percentage of Muslims and foreigners in general in every city district. The assumption here is that individuals living in districts with higher percentages of Muslims and foreigners will more easily come into contact with these groups. Second we asked whether respondents had individual and personal contact with non-Swiss neighbours – friends from school, leisure time friends (Freizeitbekannte) or other categories. Answers were yes or no. The responses were summed up into an index.

The theory of *deprivation/frustration* was operationalised in two ways. First we used socio-demographic variables in order to measure individual positions on societal stratification dimensions: education (7 levels), income (11 levels), professional status (6 levels). Furthermore, we asked if the respondent had a life partner (yes or no). Concerning these items we assumed that "low" positions on the different dimensions or the non-existence of a life partner would lead with considerable probability to (manifest or latent) feelings of deprivation and frustration. Second, we measured individual contentment. Here, we used a scale com-

posed of different subscales which measured contentment in the domains of work (3 items), partner (3 items), family (1 item), social (3 items) and personal contentment (3 items). The different subscales were integrated into a general scale. We assume that the latter measures feelings of frustration.

The theory of the *influence of the media* was operationalised in two ways. First, we considered whether the frequency of consumption of media in general might have an influence. We therefore measured how often respondents watched television, listened to the radio or read newspapers (5 levels). Second, we asked whether the consumption of specific media might influence Islamophobia. In particular, we investigated if reading different kinds of newspapers could change attitudes. Here the frequency of reading the *NZZ* (a newspaper which is intellectually demanding), the *Tages-Anzeiger* (a middle-class newspaper) and the *Blick* (the largest Swiss tabloid) was measured.

4.5 Traditionalism

The traditionalism scale is a “scale of the second order” which was built from six subscales. We extracted a common factor with factor analysis. Other possibilities to construct this factor were tested (addition of z-standardised subscales, AMOS-model); the substantive results were however very robust. The six subscales are the following:

- *an anomia scale* (5 items). We define anomia as the perception and negative evaluation of a rapidly declining society in which former norms no longer count. Examples for items are: “Everything today is so uncertain and changes so quickly that one often no longer knows what rules one should follow”; “When looking at the events of the last years, one feels really insecure”.
- *a rigorism scale* (5 items). We define rigorism as an evaluative mode which a. finds rules of the utmost importance, b. thinks in absolute alternatives of right/wrong, allowing no “unclear” cases and c. takes a strongly punitive stance towards anything “wrong”. Examples for items are “It is absolutely necessary for an adult to have clear and strong guidelines”; “There’s no sense in staying friends when the friend has let us down once”.
- *a political left-right scale* (1 item; Self-assessment on a scale from 1–10 totally left – totally right).
- *a patriotism scale* (2 items; Self-assessment on a scale from 1–10 unpatriotic – very patriotic; please tell me how important you find the following: being proud to be Swiss).
- *a “popular culture” scale* (3 items: preference for popular theatre, homeland films (Heimatfilme) and ethnic Swiss music (Ländler) on television and on social occasions).
- *a conventionalism scale* (3 items) We define conventionalism as a set of values which prefers traditional, well known and secure forms of thinking and ac-

ting. Items are: 1. Hold on to traditions; 2. Respect law and order; 3. Take security seriously.

4.6 Control variables

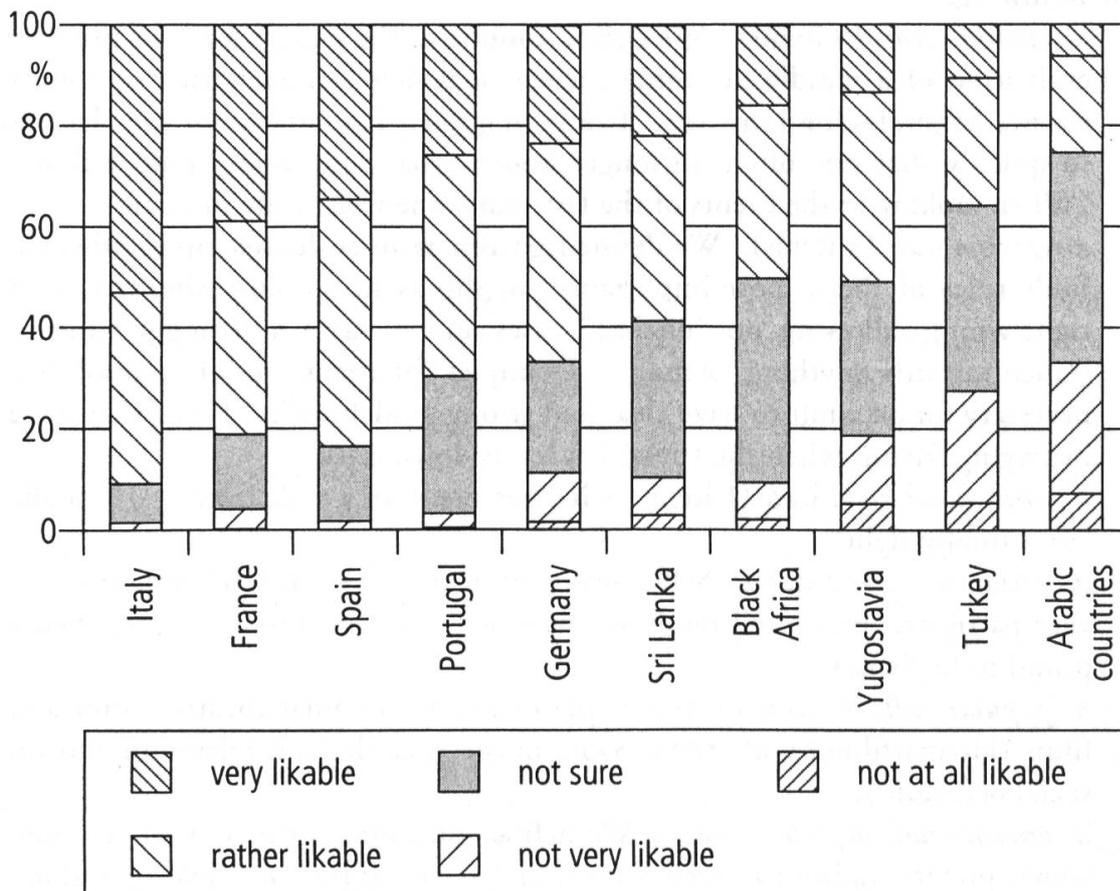
The operationalisation of the control variables is self explanatory when looking at the results. Most variables were transformed in sets of dummy variables. Christian religiosity was operationalised with one item: “God exists. He has shown himself in Jesus Christ” (5 levels of [dis-]agreement).

5 Results

5.1 Description

In this section we deal with the second objective which we set for this article, namely, the description of Islamophobia in Switzerland. We evaluate the impor-

Figure 2 Degree of sympathy towards foreigners coming from different countries and regions



tance of Islamophobia in comparison to other out-group phobias and look at how the different phobias are related to each other.

Concerning the importance of Islamophobia in relation to the rejection of other out-groups, we can see in *Figure 2* that respondents evaluate the various foreign groups very differently. While more than 53.1% find that Italians are “very likeable”, only 6.5% of the respondents find that individuals coming from Arab countries are “very likeable”. One can easily see two kinds of foreign groups in *Figure 2*: on the left side foreigners from Western Europe, whose native lands are geographically closer to Switzerland and predominantly Christian and who immigrated some decades ago. These foreigners are generally perceived as rather “likeable”. On the right side of the graph, we find groups of foreigners whose native lands are geographically distant from Switzerland, are often non-Christian and who arrived relatively recently in Switzerland. Concerning our overall research question, we find that foreigners from Turkey and from Arab countries – two groups largely made up of Muslims – are perceived as the two least “likeable” groups. 27.5% of respondents think that foreigners from Turkey are little or not at all “likeable” and 33.2% answer in a similar way in relation to foreigners from Arab countries.

Let us now look at our third indicator measuring whether respondents thought that Muslims were “annoying in our society”. Our results show that 4.2% of respondents think that Muslims annoy “a lot”, 9.0% think that they are “rather” annoying, 28.5% think that they are “a bit” annoying and 58.3% think that they are “not at all” annoying. We see that there are other out-groups which are felt to be much more annoying, like “right-wing-extremists” or “religious sects”, while still other out-groups – like Jews – are felt to be less annoying.

While it is difficult from this data to judge if there is “a lot” or “not a lot” of Islamophobia in the population studied, we are now able to put Islamophobia into perspective. Indeed Muslims are not the only out-group rejected, though they are clearly among the most rejected ethnico-religious groups.

This leads us straight to the question of whether Islamophobia is somehow linked to the other “phobias”. Indeed, do individuals who reject Islam and/or Muslims also reject other outgroups or are all out-group phobias totally unrelated phenomena? In order to analyse the relationship between Islamophobia and other phobias, we carried out a factor analysis, the results of which can be seen in Table 1. This procedure finds two factors which can be easily interpreted. The first can be labelled “New foreigners”, the second “Old foreigners”. Thus we were able to establish that attitudes towards “New foreigners” – asylum seekers, Muslims, individuals stemming from Arab countries, Turkey, Black Africa, Sri Lanka, Yugoslavia – correlate highly with each other, as well as with the attitudes towards “foreigners” in general. On the other hand, we find a second dimension which groups together the attitudes towards Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese, French and Germans. This means that these variables are also highly intercorrelated. The

finding is highly relevant, since it shows that, in our case study, Islamophobia cannot be differentiated statistically from a general xenophobia. Rather than being faced with a specifically Islam-centred phobia, we thus find a generalized outgroup-phobia directed towards different groups of “New foreigners” who generally come from rather more distant and often non-Christian countries.

Table 1 Factor analysis of attitudes towards different groups of foreigners

	“New foreigners”	“Old foreigners”
– Asylum seekers	.813	
– Foreigners	.702	
– Muslims	.627	
<i>Foreigners from</i>		
– Arab countries	.598	
– Turkey	.552	.251
– Black Africa	.524	.249
– Sri Lanka	.499	.263
– Yugoslavia	.465	
– Spain		.672
– Italy		.598
– Portugal		.596
– France		.540
– Germany		.414

Note: We give out the pattern matrix. We used the method of principal axis factoring and the rotation method oblimin. The two factors correlate with $r = .393$.

5.2 Explanation

In this section, we deal with the third objective of this article, and that is: which of the four sociological theories discussed (deprivation theory, media influence theory, contact theory, traditionalism theory) is most successful in explaining differences in individual islamophobic attitudes? Table 2 shows different multiple regression models which give determinants of traditionalism (models 1 and 2), xenophobia (models 3 and 4) and Islamophobia (models 5 and 6). Models 1, 3 and 5 include all respondents, but do not include the variables socio-economic status or income, which have missing data for those without a job or without income. Models 2, 4 and 6 look only at individuals who work 50% or more and include the variables socio-economic status and income.

5.2.1 *The theory of deprivation/frustration*

The explanatory power of the theory of deprivation/frustration may be judged by inspecting models 1 to 6 under the respective heading. Taking models 3, 4, 5 and

6, we see that this theory has a very limited success when it comes to explaining xenophobic or islamophobic attitudes. As to the socio-demographic variables, education, socio-economic status, income and existence of a partner, they have no significant influence. A more thorough analysis shows, however, that the variables “education” and “socio-economic status” have highly significant effects on both xenophobia and Islamophobia when not controlling for traditionalism (individuals with lower education and lower socio-economic status show more out-group phobia). This may be explained by a model stating that socio-demographic factors influence xenophobia and Islamophobia through traditionalism (see more below). Turning to the contentment scale, we find that this variable has a significant, but not very strong, effect both on xenophobia (models 3 and 4) and on Islamophobia (models 5 and 6). Individuals who are more content in different domains of their lives are a bit less xenophobic and islamophobic (all other things being equal).

5.2.2 *Contact hypothesis*

Our contact hypotheses were, firstly, that a high percentage of foreigners in a city district should increase Islamophobia and xenophobia, while, secondly, personal contact with foreigners should reduce them.⁷ Table 2 (models 4 to 6) shows that only the second hypothesis is corroborated. The percentage of foreigners in the different districts of Zurich does not significantly influence Islamophobia or xenophobia. This is an interesting finding, since the percentages of foreigners in the different districts vary tremendously (for example: district 7: 17.7%, district 5: 49.1%). On the other hand, personal contact with foreigners significantly lowers both islamophobic attitudes ($-.146^{**}$, model 3; $-.152^{**}$ in model 4) and xenophobic attitudes ($-.169^{**}$, model 5, $-.207^{**}$, model 6). However, concerning personal contact, we do face the methodological problem that the direction of causality is not perfectly clear. While contact with foreigners might have influenced attitudes towards out-groups, pre-existing attitudes might also have influenced the choice to get involved personally with out-group members.

5.2.3 *The theory of media influence*

The theory of media influence states that either media consumption in general or consumption of “sensationalist” media products may aggravate Islamophobia. As we can see in Table 5 (models 3–6), this theory does very badly when trying to account for out-group phobia empirically. Clearly, overall consumption of TV, radio or newspapers does not have any effect on individual or cultural Islamophobia or xenophobia (at least in the form measured in this study). When it comes to the type of newspaper read, two effects are observable. Reading the *NZZ* lowers islamophobic attitudes significantly in model 5; reading the *Blick* strengthens

7 The model was also tested using percentages of Muslims instead of percentages of foreigners in the city districts. The results are very similar. Percentages of Muslims and foreigners in general in city districts are very highly correlated.

xenophobic attitudes significantly in model 3. These effects, however, are weak and not very relevant.

5.2.4 Traditionalism theory

Traditionalism theory states that Islamophobia is a part of a general xenophobia and that Islamophobia and xenophobia are due to a traditionalist syndrome, which in turn is largely caused by the negative effects of rapid social change and family socialisation. This theory is well corroborated by present data. First, the data show that Islamophobia is in general closely related to greater xenophobia. This is shown in the factor analysis (Table 1) and in the correlation between Islamophobia and xenophobia ($r = .550^{**}$, see table A1, Appendix.) Thus, at least for our case study, islamophobic respondents are with a very high probability also xenophobic. Second, traditionalism is the strongest predictor of both Islamophobia (model 5: $.355^{**}$; model 6: $.321^{**}$) and xenophobia (model 3: $.514^{**}$; model 4: $.522^{**}$). The two phobias are not only strongly related to traditionalism in general, but also to all the subdimensions of traditionalism (see table A1, Appendix). Third, traditionalism is clearly related to age (model 1: $.314^{**}$, model 2: $.311^{**}$), socio-economic status (model 2: $-.172^{**}$) and education (model 1: $-.242^{**}$; model 2: $-.156^{**}$): older individuals as well as individuals with lower socio-economic or educational status are more likely to exhibit a traditionalist world-view. Unfortunately, the influence of family socialisation cannot be tested with this data set, since variables operationalising this theory are missing.

Traditionalism theory may also account for correlations predicted partly by other theories. Thus, it explains why out-group phobias are clearly influenced by socio-economic status, but only very slightly by frustration. In fact, the theory states that it is not so much frustration as the fight against rapid social change and possible devaluation of one's own cultural capital which makes individuals with a low socio-economic status more probably xeno- or islamophobic.

Theoretically, one might argue that xenophobia and Islamophobia are not a cause of the traditionalist world-view, but belong to the syndrome itself, which would explain the strong correlations. Unfortunately we cannot prove with our data that our chosen model is better than this alternative model. On the other hand, we believe that it is sensible to assume that a very general and long-lasting world-view is able to influence the response to a specific out-group, as opposed to saying that attitudes to any out-group are automatically included in the traditionalism syndrome.

5.2.5 Other control variables

Christian religiosity, marital status, gender, and employment status have no significant effects on out-group phobias. We can note, however, that married individuals are slightly more traditionalist in model 1 and that individuals working part time are slightly less traditionalist in models 1 and 2.

Table 2 Multiple regression models on traditionalism, xenophobia and Islamophobia

Dependent variable Model	Traditionalism		Xenophobia		Islamophobia	
	1 beta	2 beta	3 beta	4 beta	5 beta	6 beta
<i>Theory of deprivation/frustration</i>						
Education	-.242**	-.125**	-.001	.001	.028	.020
Socio-economic status	-	-.184**	-	-.054	-	-.055
Income	-	.042	-	.036	-	.061
<i>Partner</i>						
No partner (basis)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Partner existing	-.013	-.031	.027	.049	.022	.044
Contentment	-	-	-.060*	-.064*	-.082**	-.088*
<i>Theory of contact</i>						
% foreigners in district	-	-	.048	.042	.008	.009
Personal contact with foreigners	-	-	-.146**	-.152**	-.169**	-.207**
<i>Theory of media influence</i>						
TV	-	-	-.030	-.044	-.033	-.036
Radio	-	-	.038	.035	.043	.030
Newspaper	-	-	-.001	-.018	.015	-.028
"NZZ"	-	-	.049	.055	-.089*	.072
"TA"	-	-	.042	.060	.018	.008
"Blick"	-	-	-.070**	-.062	.016	-.014
<i>Traditionalism theory</i>						
Traditionalism	-	-	.514**	.522**	.355**	.321**
Age	.314**	.287**	-.013	-.043	-.087*	-.138**
<i>Control variables</i>						
Christian religiosity	-	-	.020	.021	.028	.036
<i>Marital status</i>						
Single (basis)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Married	.085*	.130**	-.008	-.016	.061	.090
Divorced	.039	.054	-.013	-.033	.017	.013
Widowed	.045	.012	-.001	.009	-.011	.021
<i>Gender-.032</i>						
Woman (basis)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Man	.018	-.002	-.047	-.032	-.034	-.025
<i>Employment status</i>						
Full time (basis)	-	-	-	-	-	-
> 50%	-.148**	-.198**	-.032	-.018	-.048	-.028
< 50%	-.058*	-	.004	-	-.012	-
Unemployed	.028	-	.029	-	.049	-
Retired	.008	-	.001	-	-.030	-
Housewife	.029	-	.015	-	-.035	-
In training	.005	-	-.033	-	.013	-
Not working, other reasons	.012	-	-.038	-	-.042	-
<i>R-Square (Adj.)</i>	24.1%	22.4%	37.0%	37.6%	17.6%	17.9%
<i>N</i>	1199	816	1146	795	1135	792

Note: model 1: only socio-demographic variables included. Models 1, 3, 5: income and socio-economic status not in the model. Models 2, 4, 6: only individuals working 50% or more, income and socio-economic status included.

5.2.6 Explaining the three Islamophobia items separately

The different models were equally tested for each of the three Islamophobia items. Results were largely similar. In all cases, traditionalism was the most important determinant and age the second most important. Some of the differences found were, for example, that sympathy for Turks can be better explained than attitudes towards Muslims and individuals from Arab countries. Another finding was that contentment and contact were important determinants of attitudes towards Turks and individuals from Arab countries, but not towards Muslims.

6 Conclusion

In this article, we first proposed a simple yet effective definition of Islamophobia and discussed the epistemological problems linked to the concept. Secondly, concerning a description, we showed that Islamophobia is, at least in our case, just one out-group phobia among others and that it is strongly linked to general xenophobia. Thirdly, concerning an explanation, we demonstrated that the theory of deprivation/frustration, the theory of media influence and the theory of contact have no or only a slight success when it comes to explaining islamophobic attitudes. In contrast, important evidence was collected that confirms the theory of traditionalism; this states that islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes and responses are largely due to a traditionalist world-view and that traditionalism is, in turn, caused by rapid social change and family socialisation. It should be noted, however, that the results of a study like ours cannot be generalised to other contexts without taking appropriate precautions. However, an accumulation of studies like this one may, over time, lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon in general.

7 References

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8 Annex

Table A1 Correlations between Islamophobia, xenophobia and the subdimensions of «traditionalism»

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Islamophobia								
2. Xenophobia	.550							
3. Anomia	.257	.374						
4. Rigorism	.277	.415	.379					
5. Conservatism	.266	.455	.370	.518				
6. Culture of the people	.229	.383	.367	.383	.466			
7. Left – right (political)	.286	.456	.199	.410	.451	.284		
8. Patriotism	.274	.440	.232	.384	.552	.385	.530	