

# Islamophobia

## *In defense of Islamophobes*

by [Anna Zeffiro](#) (June 2026)



The Adam Painting (Nikki Romney, 2014)

### **Beyond stereotypes**

- **Talisma Nasrin** was born in Pakistan in a Muslim family and raised in Bangladesh. While still living in Bangladesh, she published half a dozen collections of poetry, often with female oppression as a theme, and a documentary novel about a Hindu family attacked by Muslim fanatics. As a reaction, hundreds Muslims took to the streets demanding her execution by hanging. After spending two months in hiding, she escaped to Sweden in 1994 and she has been living in exile ever since.

For her critical scrutiny of Islam and her demands for women's equality, she received multiple fatwas calling for her death.

- **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** was born in Somalia in a Muslim family. At the age of 5, she underwent female genital mutilation organized by her grandmother. At the age of 23, she received political asylum in the Netherlands. In 2004, she collaborated with Theo Van Gogh on the short film "Submission," which depicted the oppression of women under sharia. The film led to death threats, Van Gogh was murdered and she went into hiding.

- **Salwam Momika** was born in Iraq, raised as Catholic. After witnessing the persecution of Christians by the Islamic State of Iraq, he joined the Popular Mobilization Forces to fight against the IS. In 2017, he fled to Europe, in 2018 he went to Sweden as an Iraqi refugee. There, he staged demonstrations to raise awareness about the danger of Islam and its incompatibility with freedom of speech. During those demonstrations, with legal permission and police protection, he burned his personal copy of the quran, attracting criticism from the leftists and death threats from the Muslims.

January 29 2025, Momika was shot dead at the age of 38.

- **Mosab Hassan Yousef** was born in the West Bank. His father is a co-founder of Hamas, his grandfather was an imam. Arrested by Israel during the first Intifada, he witnessed the brutality of Hamas inmates towards Palestinian prisoners. He therefore defected Hamas and started a collaboration with the Shin Bet, which led to the prevention of dozens of Palestinian suicide attacks against civilians.

Converted to Christianity in 1999, in 2007 he moved to the US, where he actively speaks out against Hamas and criticizes Islam's treatment of non-Muslims. In 2010, his father publicly disowned him.

- **Yasmine Mohammed** was born and raised in Canada, within a Muslim community. She has been victim of heavy abuses since she was a child. When she was 13, she told a trusted teacher about the abuses she was suffering and showed him her bruises, but when the case went to court, the judge ruled that since her family was Arab, they had the right to discipline her in that manner.

Forced to wear a hijab, beaten for failing to memorize the quran, forced to get married at the age of 19, she later escaped the marriage to protect her daughter from the threat of female genital mutilation. Today, she is an activist for women rights and founder of a non-profit organization that helps ex-Muslims and provides psychological counseling for people leaving Islam, with special focus on LGBT individuals.

She has been accused of promoting “Islamophobic views” and “anti-Muslim rhetoric.”

This list could be much longer but I stop here because I think the point is clear: many people who hate Islam don't fit the typical stereotype of the Islamophobe. They are not White supremacists from a Western country, nor are they fascists, racists, or bigots, indeed, often they are immigrants themselves, refugees from Muslim countries, sometimes ex-Muslims. They are not xenophobes who hate what they do not know, on the contrary, they know Islam very well, often much better than left-wing Westerners who defend Islam but likely never read the quran or the hadith.

Surely, there are also Islamophobes who are racist. Nobody denies that there are also crimes committed in the name of Islamophobia. But can we generalize? Why are the very people who reject any generalization about Muslims so prone to generalize when it comes to Islamophobes? Why should the many cases of Islamic terrorists be considered just extremists, while the few cases of Islamophobic crimes should be considered representative of Islamophobia? Why this double standard? The hypocrisy is blatant.

I don't have statistics but I'm fairly sure that the vast majority of so-called Islamophobes are good and peaceful people who only oppose Islam because they believe it is

incompatible with freedom and human rights. And in order to defend freedom and human rights, they are even willing to take risks. In the best case scenario, they risk their own reputation because we know very well that as soon as you dare to criticize Islam, someone immediately appears accusing: "you're racist, you're fascist, you're blah blah blah!" And this is the best case scenario. In the worst, Islamophobes risk being killed, especially if they are ex-Muslims.

Defending Islam is the easy choice, condemning Islam is a risky choice that requires courage. It deserves admiration but is received instead with cold silence and the unjust stigma of racism.

### **When are generalizations legit?**

Islam is not a monolith, we have heard countless times. Not all Muslims are terrorists, you can't generalize, most of them are peaceful ordinary people who do normal things in life, such as working, picking up their children from school, having dinner with their families... True. But the same is true for Nazis too: not all Nazis were murderers; many Nazis were ordinary citizens with normal jobs, normal lives, normal families. Probably many Nazis did not approve the most extreme aspects of Nazism and actually, according to Nuremberg trials, they did not know about concentration camps. I can even think of a Nazi who was an extraordinary moral and heroic person, surely less anti-Semite than many today's self-styled anti-Nazis: Oscar Schindler. He was in the Nazi party but he saved the lives of thousands Jews.

And yet, everybody agrees that the existence of such "moderate Nazis" should not prevent us—and luckily never prevented us—from criticizing and condemning Nazism. Why instead should the existence of moderate Muslims prevent us from criticizing and condemning Islam?

In the case of Islam, there is not even the justification of not knowing. We all know what is done in the name of Islam. We all know about the fatwas issued against blasphemers and apostates, the veils and burkas imposed on women, the stoning of adulteresses, arranged marriages, polygamy, child brides, death sentences against homosexuals, censorship, suppression of freedom, honor killings, slaughter of animals. Other things are less known: for example, in many Islamic countries slavery is still openly practiced, usually of blacks. In many Islamic countries persecution, if not genocide, is practiced against Buddhists, Christians and other non-Muslims. In many Islamic countries if a woman is raped, she, not the rapist, is jailed and a woman is not allowed to go out without the permission of the husband, the father or the brother.

This is not a coincidence: this is what sharia prescribes. Luckily, not all Muslims follow sharia, but when they do, this is what happens. And we can't dismiss sharia as a misinterpretation of Islam or something that doesn't have anything to do with the "true Islam," because sharia is—by definition—the Islamic law.

So there are many legit reasons to condemn Islam, even without terrorism. Plus, there is terrorism. Not all Muslims are terrorists of course, but the overwhelming majority of terrorists are Muslims. Are they just bad apples, just isolate cases, which do not represent the true Islam? If they were, they would be strongly condemned by other Muslims, but the condemnation from the Islamic world is always weak and shy if not absent. Vice versa, when a Muslim kills someone shouting "Allah akbar!" there is always at least some other Muslims praising him. For instance, when a Chechen Muslim beheaded Samuel Paty in France and the corpse of the murderer was sent back to Chechnya, some Muslims celebrated a hero's funeral for him. And this is only one of many examples. So can we really think those terrorists as just bad apples? Bad apples are discarded, not celebrated!

## **Islamophobo-phobia**

A thought emerges, spontaneous and natural, overcoming censorship attempts with all the force of logic: maybe terror attacks and other atrocities perpetrated by Muslims do not represent just bad apples but rather the fruits of a tree that has something rotten from the root.

This is exactly the conclusion of an increasing fraction of people around the world, who are usually called Islamophobes. You may disagree with them, but why the stigma, the hatred, the accusation of racism? Why is Islamophobia always portrayed as an unforgivable sin, a great danger to eradicate at any cost from our societies? Why are all the Islamophobes portrayed as horrible criminals? Nothing in the real world supports this view.

We have yet to see Islamophobes hijacking airplanes and destroying skyscrapers. We have yet to see a novelist stubbed for writing a book disliked by Islamophobes. No cartoonists have ever been killed so far for drawing a cartoon mocking Islamophobia and no teachers have been beheaded for showing it. Usually, we don't need to cancel markets or public events to avoid Islamophobic attacks; the risk of terrorism never peaks during Ramadan, but always during Christmas or Yom Kippur. And if you hear of someone driving a car over crowds or shooting random people on the street or on the beach, what would you bet he was shouting— "Islam is bad!" or "Allah is great!"? Statistically, the latter is the safer bet.

Plenty of evidence indicates that Islam, not Islamophobia, should reasonably be considered the greater danger. This obsession with Islamophobia is not rational. Indeed, it looks like a disproportionate irrational fear, which is by the way the exact definition of phobia.

So maybe the true phobia we should worry about is not against

Islam but against Islamophobia: the Islamophobo-phobia, a widespread prejudice that intoxicates dialog, polarizes societies and suffocates any legitimate criticism of Islam. Even worse, it may lead us towards a level of Islamization that we could bitterly regret in the future, a level from which a comeback would be hard if not impossible.

## **Breaking the mental cage**

For decades, Islamophobes have been stereotyped, stigmatized, demonized, accused of any sort of sins. Eventually, not only many people ended up believing this narrative, but it also became a sort of dogma, while criticizing Islam became a taboo. So now millions, perhaps billions people are trapped in a mental cage of fears, dogmas, and taboos. Breaking free from this cage is not easy; it can feel uncomfortable, almost blasphemous. Yet I am sure that many people do not feel comfortable with Islam either and, deep inside, perceive a strong dissonance between narrative and reality.

It is like in the tale *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where the emperor is walking around naked but people have been told he's wearing a cloth invisible to the eyes of the fools and therefore, they praise his cloth to avoid looking fool. In the real world, people have been told that Islam is a peaceful religion but looks bad to the eyes of the racists and therefore, they support Islam to avoid looking racist. But like in the tale, they probably realize that something is wrong.

We know the story ending: an innocent kid says "The king is naked!" and slowly people join his voice, at first just as a shy whisper, then crying loudly. And the truth finally prevails. In this sick world, Islamophobes are like that innocent kid. They are our voice of truth, a pure brave voice, driven not by racism or hatred, but only by love for freedom.

Break the cage, awaken the innocent child inside you and join that voice.



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Italian-born **Anna Zeffiro** is a scientist, mother, and independent thinker who believes ideas should adapt to reality—not the other way around.

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