

Islam Classes In Germany (Part Two)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Last year, the AfD hung campaign posters in Dortmund featuring women in burqas and the slogan “Stop Islamization.” This year’s poster bore the words “Islam-free schools!” under an image of five beaming, light-skinned children.

Seddiqzai, who was born to Afghan parents in the German city of Bochum and who wears a full beard and Nikes to school, said he worries about the effect on his students. “These posters tell them, ‘We don’t want you here,’?” he said.

Is Seddiqzai also worried about Muslims who take to heart the Qur’anic commandments to wage war against the Infidels until the whole world submits to Islam? Or is he only concerned about the feeling of rejection – “we don’t want you here” – that must surely wound the feelings of young Muslims in Germany? Ought he not discuss with his students some of the reasons Germans might remain wary of Muslims? Could the German wariness about Muslims have anything to do with the Muslim terrorist attacks all over Europe, in Madrid, Barcelona, Paris (many times), Nice, Toulouse, Magnanville, Amsterdam, Brussels, London (many times), Manchester, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Malmo, Turku, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Beslan?

Is the anxiety among Germans about Muslims and Islam not well-founded? Shouldn’t he be describing to his students the deep impression the sexual attacks on 1,400 women by 2,000 Muslim predators in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015 made on Germans? And how should Germans have reacted to the reports of Muslim

grooming gangs in nearly thirty cities in the United Kingdom, and of those tens of thousands of young English girls whom they preyed on, often engaging in mass rape?

I doubt that any of this intolerable behavior by Muslims forms part of Seddiqzai's classroom discussion. The suspicion and fear of Muslims felt by many Germans is not a manifestation of islamophobia, but a result of the behavior of too many Muslims to ignore or discount.

"They are not accepted in Germany, they are not accepted in the countries of their parents, and that produces this craving for a group to belong to," he [Professor Behr] continued. "And then an Islamist comes to you and says, 'Yeah, you don't belong to anyone. Therefore just be Muslim.' They offer them a third way."

Seddiqzai sees it as part of his job to make his students more informed in their consumption of such appeals.

If Mansur Seddiqzai wants to make his students "more informed" so that they will not heed the siren-song of "Islamists," he ought to confront head on, rather than pass over in silence, the most violent and aggressive teachings of Islam. He can explain to students that the "extremists" who take these teachings to heart will, when they inveigle potential recruits into joining them, initially provide a "sanitized" version of Islam, but eventually reveal, and promote, those same violent teachings.

Earlier this year, when local politicians were discussing a ban on headscarves, a group calling itself Reality Islam launched a social media campaign to protest the proposal and recruit students. Seddiqzai showed his students how to trace Reality's Islam's links to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an extremist group banned in Germany since 2003. He also encouraged them to question the group's stance on the headscarf, which it claimed the Koran mandates for women.

"I show them the Koranic verses about the headscarf, and we discuss it and we see there is no clear rule that a woman or girl has to wear a headscarf," he said. "Most of them think the Koran itself has no contradictions, and even that is wrong. There are many contradictions in the Koran."

Seddiqzai did – helpfully – show his students how Muslim extremists who have been banned from Germany use front groups as, in this case, Hizb-ut-Tahrir exploited Reality Islam's campaign against banning the hijab. He further explained that the wearing of the hijab is not mandated in the Qur'an, and wanted his students to recognize that the Qur'an contains many contradictions. That is an important admission. But does he then go on to discuss how those contradictions are resolved, through the doctrine of naskh, or abrogation? He does not. Nor does he appear to tell his students that whenever there is a contradiction between two verses in the Qur'an, it is the earlier, milder, so-called Medinan verses, which are held to have been abrogated by the later, harsher, Meccan verses.

Some German politicians are pushing for an expansion of Islam classes in public schools as a way to encourage the cultural integration of Muslim students and to promote an interpretation of Islam that highlights German values.

How will study of Islam that skips over so much of what the faith inculcates that discourages "cultural integration" by Muslim students in Germany help to ameliorate the situation? If the classes avoid all discussion of the more than 100 Jihad verses, the misogynistic verses, the antisemitic verses, the verses that tell Muslims not to take Christians and Jews as friends, "for they are friends only with each other," the verse that describes Unbelievers as "the most vile of creatures," that doesn't make those verses disappear. These are the very verses that prevent integration of Muslim students, and they need to be held up for study and

discussion. Pretending they don't exist is not a winning strategy.

Shouldn't the students learn that in Islam a man can have up to four wives, but a wife can have only one husband, and that a husband can divorce any of his wives merely by uttering the "triple-talaq"? Shouldn't they learn that a husband can "beat" a disobedient wife? That daughters inherit half that of sons? That a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man, and the reason for that, Muhammad said in a famous hadith, is "due to the deficiency of her intelligence"?

"We need more religious education," Kerstin Griese, a lawmaker from the governing center-left Social Democratic Party, wrote in an op-ed, "because it's the only way to start a dialogue about our own traditions and values and to understand those of others."

What kind of "dialogue" is possible with Muslims, for example, on the subject of Jews? The Qur'an, as Robert Spencer has noted, "describes the Jews as inveterately evil and bent on destroying the wellbeing of the Muslims. They are the strongest of all people in enmity toward the Muslims (5:82); as fabricating things and falsely ascribing them to Allah (2:79; 3:75, 3:181); claiming that Allah's power is limited (5:64); loving to listen to lies (5:41); disobeying Allah and never observing his commands (5:13); disputing and quarreling (2:247); hiding the truth and misleading people (3:78); staging rebellion against the prophets and rejecting their guidance (2:55); being hypocritical (2:14, 2:44); giving preference to their own interests over the teachings of Muhammad (2:87); wishing evil for people and trying to mislead them (2:109); feeling pain when others are happy or fortunate (3:120); being arrogant about their being Allah's beloved people (5:18); devouring people's wealth by subterfuge (4:161); slanderous the true religion and being cursed by Allah (4:46); killing the prophets (2:61); being merciless and

heartless (2:74); never keeping their promises or fulfilling their words (2:100); being unrestrained in committing sins (5:79); being cowardly (59:13-14); being miserly (4:53); being transformed into apes and pigs for breaking the Sabbath (2:63-65; 5:59-60; 7:166); and more.” Muslims will have to reject these verses if they really want “to start a dialogue.”

Such advocates generally don't envision non-Muslim students taking these classes to gain a better appreciation of Islam. While a few German school systems offer religion classes that include multiple faiths or ethics classes that touch on religion, religion as taught in public high schools and supported by Germany's Basic Law is generally targeted at specific denominations.

Non-Muslim students could possibly benefit from classes on Islam, but only if they were to be offered a truthful, and not a sanitized view. It is clear that that is not being done today in German public schools, for Muslim pupils. Were teaching the real contents of Qur'an and hadith to be attempted, whether for Muslim or non-Muslim students, the uproar would be tremendous. So much effort is already being expended by politicians and the media to defend and promote Islam in Germany. Why would they now allow a truthful account of the faith to upset their propagandistic applecart? Private schools have more freedom from government watchdogs, and instruction that is islamocritical might actually be attempted in such places.

A further rationale for Islam classes is to “immunize” Muslim students from fundamentalism, as Protestant leader Heinrich Bedford-Strohm put it.

Of particular concern is radicalization that might lead to violence. Since 2013, more than 1,000 people have left Germany to fight with or support the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations, most of them under 30.

It is hard to see how Muslim students could be “immunized” against fundamentalism if they are never taught what those fundamentalists believe, and from what verses in the Qur’an, and stories in the hadith, they derive their beliefs. If the students cannot learn about, and discuss, these verses and stories in a critical spirit – yes, to “immunize” them – how will they be able to withstand the polished presentations of the fundamentalists?

But some educators and politicians resist the notion that Islam has a place in German public schools.

“Besides the fact that we have much more important problems in schools, it can’t be true that a German bishop is promoting Islam,” Alexander Gauland, a leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, said after Bedford-Strohm voiced his proposal.

No studies have examined the effectiveness of Islam classes in preventing radicalization, according to Harry Harun Behr, a professor of Islam studies and pedagogy at Frankfurt’s Goethe University.

Still, he said, the classes are valuable because they show students their faith is as important as others taught in their schools and because they show Islam as a religion that is open to reflection and self-criticism.

In Mansur Seddiqzai’s class, how is Islam shown “as a religion that is open to reflection and self-criticism”? None of the verses that preach hatred of Infidels, making war on them, striking terror in them, are apparently being discussed. Can Professor Behr offer a single example of Islam being shown in these classes as open to “self-criticism”? Has there been any criticism – even any mention – of the verses expressing contempt for Infidels (“the most vile of created beings”) and telling Muslims not to take them as friends? The antisemitic and misogynistic verses apparently are also being completely

overlooked, for had they been discussed, there would no doubt have been a comment in the article on how such dedicated teachers as Mansur Seddikzai have been “unafraid to tackle the most disturbing and divisive aspects of Islamic doctrine.” The only example of “reflection” that has been mentioned concerns the wearing of the hijab, and the Qur’anic ambiguity on the matter. That is not much.

At Seddiqzai’s school, where almost 95 percent of students are first- or second-generation immigrants, Islam class is highly popular. When he crosses the schoolyard, he can barely walk five steps without being stopped by a student wanting to tell him about grades, romances or plans for the future.

This conveys a soothing sense of normalcy – the schoolyard, the Muslim students who are just normal kids, with the usual problems kids have “about grades, romances, or plans for the future.” There’s no real difference, it is being suggested, between young Muslims and young Germans. Forget about those disturbing passages in the Qur’an and hadith. Forget about those 30,000 attacks by Muslim terrorists. Don’t let the hatemongers, the seehofers and the sarrazins of this world, fill you with anxiety. Relax. We’re diverse, but we’re also all the same. Diversity is our strength!

“What Mr. Seddiqzai is teaching me is not really something you learn at mosque,” said 17-year-old Yusuf Akar. “How to interact with non-Muslims who may not be sure how to interact with us. Or who are scared of us.”

But it is more than that, too. “It shows me I’m welcome here,” Akar said. “Because the school no longer demands that we distance ourselves from our religion. They accept it and even create an opportunity to learn about it. And that gives me the feeling that I’m part of this society.”

Yusuf Akar is right. It’s not so much a course on Islam as it

is a course in raising Muslim self-esteem, making Muslims feel better about themselves, assuring them that they've been accepted, they've arrived, they're "part of this society." Islam is now taught, by Muslims, and for Muslims, in 800 German schools. What could be better? And it's not just a course on Islam, putting its best face forward. It's also a course in public relations, teaching Muslims "how to interact with non-Muslims," how to put them at their ease, allay their groundless fears, let them see that Muslims are just like them, wanting only to be treated like all other German boys and girls. Who could object to that?

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