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AN OPINION PIECE ON
HATE SPEECH
WHIRLING FOR ANOTHER HOLOCAUST

WRITTEN BY

ASIF TANVEER AWAN ADVOCATE

Research Associate, MUSLIM Institute

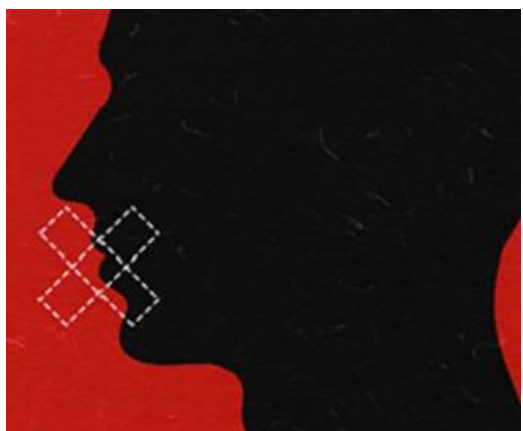
An Opinion Piece on

Hate Speech Whirling for Another Holocaust

By Asif Tanveer Awan Advocate, Research Associate, MUSLIM Institute

It goes without saying that violence germinates from words. Words if not calculated prudently can cause havoc. Hate speech is the manifestation of such “miscalculated” words which unveils one’s prejudice against a particular race religion, ethnicity, ancestry, and other such underlying hatred. There is fine line between free speech and hate speech after which others start feeling threatened.

To respect others is the most basic aspect of human morality. Freedom of expression without limits leads to insult and threat others, and to insult and threat others is referred to as treating them with gross violation of basic human rights. The obligation is upon those who want to allow such behavior and support this immorality. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1976 clearly endorses that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. Moreover, Paragraph 9 of the Human Rights Council Resolution 7/19 also urges states to provide, within their respective legal and constitutional systems, adequate protection against acts of hatred, discrimination, intimidation and coercion resulting from the defamation of any religion, to take all possible measures to promote tolerance.



The idea of absolute free speech is theoretically flawed and practically politicized. The idea of absolute freedom of expression has never been implemented anywhere not even today in the liberal societies. One of the most important factors is that it is difficult to differentiate between the international standards of freedom of expression and the double standards of freedom of expression. This freedom of expression is

being misused to derive hate speech thus targeting a particular faction of society for the vested interests. In the past few decades, the rise in Islamophobia is also the gruesome outcome of such hate speech and now culminating into assaults on Muslims.

There is growing trend of Islamophobia and systematic discrimination against the adherents of Islam. In its [report](#) *Countering Racism and Xenophobia* in the EU (March 2019), the European Commission highlighted the connection between the normalization of Islamophobia, online far-right networks, and violent attacks against Muslims. Hence, surveys published in 2018 show that “within the EU, on average 37% of the population admits to having unfavourable views of Muslims.” Similarly, “a study by the European Parliament Research Service shows that “the perception of incidence of anti-Muslim hatred by the Muslim community rose from 12% in 2010 to 25% in 2016.”

A horrific side of this picture is that Islamophobia is also being used by different political parties for their vested interests. In its *12th Report on Islamophobia* ((March 2019), the Islamophobia Observatory of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation highlighted the connections between far-right movements that pave the way for the spread of hate ideologies. The report focuses particularly on the links between the UK Independence Party, Marine Le Pen’s French National Rally, Geert Wilders’s Dutch Freedom Party, the Italian Lega (League), the Alternative for Germany, the Hungarian Fidesz party, and also Steve Bannon, the American political strategist and Former White House Chief Strategist. The report notices that all those parties are on the rise according to the latest elections. All these actors share similar anti-EU, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigration ideology.



Hate speech is referred by Human Rights Watch as “any form of expression regarded as offensive to racial, ethnic and religious groups and other discrete minorities, and to women.”¹ The human development in science and technology leads the world in a global village where humans in spite of cross cultural and ethno-linguistic differences can interact with each other. It not

only provides the opportunity to exchange viewpoints but also influence other cultures and ideas. These cross-culture interactions through modern means are being misused by different religious and ethnic communities for hate speech and perception building. Similarly, media is generally considered the source of knowledge but some media outlets have been misused as the tool for political and social propagation by different republics against their counterparts to seek certain interests.² It is preceded that holocausts and genocides were the result of hate speech by ethnic, racial, and religious bases.

Any form of expression regarded as offensive to racial, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as minorities and women, includes acts incited by hate speech. During the middle ages, many ethnic and religious groups faced persecution as the result of hate speech based on religious and ethnic biases. An example is that of Jews in 1492 and Muslims in 1501 being expelled from Spain. Remaining Jews from Europe were forcefully converted to Christianity, and Muslim converts (called Moriscos) were expelled in the early 17th century. During 1990s, in Rwanda, members of the majority Hutu ethnic group massacred hundreds of thousands of people, mostly minority Tutsis, from April to July 1994. The well discussed ethnic cleansing caused by hate speech based on extremist nationalism was Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany where he spread hate speech against Jews and this campaign ended in the so-called "final solution" i.e. the destruction of Jews in concentration.³



This campaign against Jews was well organized. Mari Matsuda calls this cumulative effect of physical and verbal violence as “the violence of the word.” According to Matsuda:

“Racist hate messages, threats, slurs, epithets, and disparagement all hit the gut of those in the target group. The spoken message of hatred and inferiority is conveyed on the street, in schoolyards, in popular culture and in the propaganda of hate widely distributed in this country...”⁴

Matsuda defined it as a three-tier test that defines hate speech as a message of racial inferiority, message against historically oppressed group, and a message that is persecutory, hateful, and degrading.⁵



There are a number of scholars who agree with the similarity between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia like Cora Alexa Døving, from the Norwegian Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, who argues that there are significant similarities between Islamophobic discourse and European pre-Nazi antisemitism. Moreover, Charlotte Williams, Haluk Soydan and Mark Johnson in their [book](#) “Social Work and Minorities: European Perspectives,” draw parallels between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. They opine that “Islamophobia is as much a form of racism as anti-Semitism, a term more commonly encountered in Europe as a sibling of racism, xenophobia and Intolerance. Likewise, John Esposito of Georgetown University [argues](#), “Like anti-Semitism and xenophobia, it has long and deep historical roots.” He also alarms that, “Islamophobia, like anti-Semitism, will not be eradicated easily or soon.”

The method of portraying and ridiculing the religious figures through hate speech is being adopted against Islam by some European leaders as well. In an [interview](#) with BBC titled “Beware of hate speech, says Auschwitz Holocaust survivor,” Holocaust survivor Susan Pollack, gives a strong warning about the importance of learning the lessons from history. She emphasizes, “We're

not talking about barbarians. We're not talking about primitive society. The Germans were well-advanced, educated and progressive. Maybe civilization is just veneer-thin. We all need to be very careful about any hate-propaganda. This is very important. It starts as a small stream, but then it has the potential to erupt - and when it does, it's too late to stop it.”

The recent unfortunate incident of Samuel Paty in France and the statements by French authorities is a practical manifestation of hate speech. It will not only disturb relations between the West and the Muslim world but will also incite hatred and communal unrest since this activity has been repeated in past following the unfortunate incidents of Charlie Hebdo and Danish newspapers portraying blasphemous material. Through such practices, fascist extreme right-wing ideologues want to transfer their hatred towards Islam to their youth and coming generations.

The practice of France's executive body is in sheer contradiction with its constitution. Muslims, their belief – and particularly their respect for Holy Prophet ﷺ – is not respected under the garb of liberty. This is despite Article 1 of France's constitution of 1958 clearly stating that "*France.... shall respect all beliefs.*"



President of France is duty bound to respect the belief of every citizen under Article 1 as well as Article 5 of the constitution of France 1958, which states: "*The President of the Republic shall ensure due respect for the Constitution. He shall.....be the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity and due respect for Treaties.*"

Moreover, the President of France is also bound to respect the Treaties signed by its country. In this scenario, the behavior of President Emmanuel Macron towards the Muslims, outrightly violates his constitutional obligations. France has ratified the core international human rights treaties ICCPR and ICESCR as well. These conventions speak clear of respect for religions and beliefs of other communities. Despite being party to

these conventions, France persistently breaches respect for the beliefs of Muslims.

United Nations Human Rights Council has also expressed deep concerns over France's anti-Muslim activities on government level. For instance, Human Rights Council Report Number A/HRC/WG.6/29/FRA/3 states, "*Association défense des Droits de*

l'Homme reported that after terrorist attacks, the Government has undertaken a security policy stigmatising Muslim populations. Moreover, the cases of discrimination concerning Muslim women wearing the headscarf, which took place in private businesses.” It is alarming that a Government is fostering anti-Muslim attitude that in no way is justifiable.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan perhaps has rightly criticized his French counterpart. Such a figure of authority should be held accountable since their actions can lead the world towards distress and chaos. French people should understand that their leadership might end up creating turmoil in France



itself. Every society and culture have their respective sensitivities. Majority of the non-Muslims understand the love and sentiments Muslims have for the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They understand that Muslims can sacrifice everything for the love of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, has rightly [described](#) the limits of free speech while defending free speech, by saying that it was “not without limits” and should not “arbitrarily and needlessly hurt” certain communities. “We owe it to ourselves to act with respect for others and to seek not to arbitrarily or unnecessarily injure those with whom we are sharing a society and a planet.”

References

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Contact Us



PO Box: 562, Islamabad, Pakistan
info@muslim-institute.org
www.muslim-institute.org

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