



Non-Acceptance of the Other in the West and How It Threatens Social Peace

Dr. Hamdy Bashir

Researcher in regional security and terrorism cases

A young black gymnast standing among her teammates waiting to receive her medal during a ceremony at a sporting event was ignored by the sports official handing the medals. The Irish community was shocked; the local sports federation apologized, especially after the clip spread on social media, amid an outpouring of empathy for the young girl in what was considered discrimination and racist behavior rejecting the Other.

Recently, Western societies have witnessed rising frequent incidents and evidence of contempt for the other based on religion, culture, race, ethnicity, or even language. A prime example is the recurrent incidents against Muslims and migrants in Western societies, with the escalated controversy over illegal migration and refugees from conflict zones in the Middle East. Perhaps the latest incident in this long series is the burning of a copy of the Qur'an in front of the Swedish parliament by two men in the Swedish capital, Stockholm, on July 31, 2023. This is in addition to the offensive drawings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They all fall within the dilemma of recognizing the Other.

This article examines the factors and causes of the dilemma of rejecting the Other and how it threatens social peace and security in Western societies.

Stance on Immigrants

In the past two decades, European and Western capitals have witnessed frequent attacks on people and places of worship and contempt of them. Some Western racist movements look down on immigrant religions and beliefs, considering that these groups belong to ethnicities and cultures that pose a threat to the homogeneity of Western societies. In this context, it is worth mentioning several incidents that indicate

the dilemma of recognizing the Other in European societies, which can be summarized as follows.

1. **Desecration and Burning of Scriptures: Burning the Qur'an, for Example.** In April 2022, Danish far-right activist Rasmus Paludan led a campaign to burn the Qur'an in Swedish neighborhoods inhabited by Muslim and foreign communities. This incident was not Paludan's first. In 2019, he burned a Qur'an wrapped in bacon. In November 2020, he was arrested in France, imprisoned for a month, and then deported. Five other activists were subsequently arrested in Belgium on charges of seeking to "spread hatred" after burning a Qur'an in Brussels. Paludan also tried to plan a similar burning of the Qur'an in other European countries, including France and Belgium.
2. **Contempt for Prophets and Messengers:** On September 1, 2020, the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo published offensive caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, which sparked a roar of anger and protests from Muslims around the world.
3. **Contempt of Religions and Beliefs, Islam in Particular.** In 2020, Dutch extremist Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing Party for Freedom, posted a video on Twitter titled "No to Islam, No to Ramadan", which also sparked outrage and resentment in Muslim communities around the world.
4. **Attacks on Places of Worship and Persons,** where according to official statistics, reports of the Muslim community in Germany recorded about 124 attacks against Muslims during the first three months of 2023. Attacks varied between verbal and physical attacks and threat messages, in addition to arsons targeting mosques. Community reports confirmed that several mosques received warnings and threat messages from the neo-Nazi terrorist organization, which had previously committed racial hate crimes and attacks against Muslims.

The Dilemma of Rejecting the Other

The dilemma of rejecting the Other has drawn increasing attention from many writers, analysts and experts from various Western and Arab disciplines and cultures. Some writings addressed the issue as an indication of the escalating conflict between Islamic civilization and Western civilizations. This vision was influenced by religious and perhaps extremist sentiment aimed at employing such incidents to fuel religious extremism against Western societies. However, the phenomenon of burning the Qur'an

and the offensive caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) seems strongly associated with the dilemma of accepting the Other among some extremist movements. It is disputable that they reflect a general perception within European societies towards Muslims in general, especially since there are several Western trends that oppose such campaigns against Muslim communities. A prime example is what Friederike Hollerts, pastor of the Swedish Church in Råslätt, expressed in a statement to the Swedish News Agency—as the extremist Rasmus Paludan was preparing to speak in the public square to mobilize supporters of the burning of the Holy Quran, and before the church bells began to ring—that, “It is a call to prayer, a call to love and tolerance, we live here together, and we will not allow anyone to dismantle this harmony between us.”

This tolerant discourse clearly indicates that the phenomenon has nothing to do with a clash of civilizations as promoted by some, but can be explained by the dilemma of acceptance of the Other and diversity, which is natural among human beings. It also refers to the recognition of the principle of equality with no discrimination on any grounds. Recognizing the Other is associated with the idea of coexistence within the same geographical area, despite different religious affiliations. It is also associated with the concept of peaceful coexistence and positive peace that does not accept the transformation of difference into disagreement. This suggests that accepting the Other means respecting them, understanding their concepts, views, and beliefs, and acknowledging their freedom of thought and belief .

Root Causes

The issue of hatred and the dilemma of rejecting the Other in European and Western societies has recently raised a lot of controversy about its causes. While some analysts associate it with extremist and biased visions, based on the clash of civilizations, others referred to the attempts of some extremist European political movements to weaponize hatred and reject the Other to achieve political goals. In this regard, here are some factors and causes explaining the restriction on beliefs and the dilemma of recognizing the Other in Western societies:

1. **The Far-Right:** Some extremist political parties and movements in Western countries have worked to increase their popularity by playing the migrants and refugees card. They resorted to developing programs calling for their repatriation as they allegedly threaten the security of European countries. These extremist movements leverage these propaganda campaigns to gain political grounds that strengthen their position in the electoral competition. For example, some reports

addressed the political background of the extremist Rasmus Paludan, who leads campaigns to burn the Qur'an, where in 2017 he established the Stram Kurs political party, after he left the Danish Social Liberal Party because of his extremist tendencies, and the party seeks the establishment of a Western State, and cleansing the country of "non-Westerners."

2. **Conflict between Extremist Movements:** The rising polarization between religious and racist extremist movements fuels sentiments of hostility, hatred and rejecting the different Other. In contrast to extremist organizations that exploit the taint of Islamophobia spread in many Western societies to promote their narrative of rejecting of the Other, extremist racist movements that call for the deportation of immigrants, especially Muslims, operate actively, taking advantage of some terrorist incidents carried out by extremist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and Daesh. A report issued by the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) on June 27, 2023 revealed the growing threat of right-wing extremism, racism and domestic terrorism. It highlighted the theory of "racial purity" of the adolescent generation in order to carry out domestic terrorist operations, and pointed out that there are about 19 violent racist theories based on groups that justify the ideology of violence. Some experts argue that the rising frequent terrorist attacks have been behind the escalation of violence in Western societies.
3. **Abusing Freedom of Speech:** Some extremist movements have often taken the freedom of expression as a pretext for their campaigns against Muslim immigrants, which indicates that they deliberately confuse freedom of belief with freedom of expression to justify their movements and operations aimed at serving their agenda and political interests, rather than serving the public interest, at the expense of coexistence and integration between different groups and affiliations in European society.

Threatening Peace and Security

The dilemma of not recognizing or accepting the Other threatens social and national integration and coexistence in European and Western societies as follows:

1. **The issue of Citizenship and a Sense of Belonging,** in a way that jeopardises Western societies' already high rates of hate crimes. Here, the difficulty of not recognizing or accepting the Other exacerbates the crisis of alienation and lack of patriotism because of a feeling of fear and insecurity that breeds animosity and

intolerance. Additionally, the willingness to accept or justify violence, discrimination, and violations of human and minority rights undermines Western democratic values and fuels a cycle of retaliation-driven stabbings and killings. These events impede the establishment of a democratic society and solidify its stability.

2. **The Escalating Crisis of Integration and Coexistence Between Groups:** Migrants represent a large proportion of the European populations, many of whom hold the nationality of these communities. Thus, it is difficult to marginalize or isolate them. The continued mobilization of supporters of the deportation or exclusion of migrants by some extremist movements shall pose a significant threat to the stability of these societies. The same is true when their beliefs and sanctities are disparaged, as has been evident through the rising protests condemning the burning of the Holy Qur'an or the offensive caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which resulted in the death and injury of hundreds, threatening social peace and national integration within these societies.
3. **Growing Violence and Terrorism:** The fact that some governments ignore the alarmingly rising violence by extremist racist movements may lead to the tendency of these marginalized and excluded groups, based on their ethnic or religious affiliations, to join terrorist organizations. There is no doubt that terrorist organizations benefit from this in recruiting more excluded individuals due to the challenges posed by coexistence in some areas targeted by extremist racist movements .
4. **Obstruction of Counter-terrorism Efforts:** Racist behaviors allow for the emergence of new waves and generations of violence and terrorism in Western societies, which poses new challenges for security services and religious institutions, which may have made great strides in renewing religious discourse and curbing extremism in their societies, only to find themselves facing this phenomenon again.

Conclusion

It seems that the dilemma of rejecting the Other is the most serious threat facing the stability of European societies, especially practices related to contempt of religion, because it provides an ideal environment for terrorist organizations to attract marginalized groups, enabling them to continue with their recruitment and propaganda,

and to carry out terrorist operations in European societies. Therefore, reviewing counter-terrorism policies and laws, including laws criminalizing contempt for the Other based on their religion, race, or belief, is much needed.