

Barbara Kay: How academics portray Islam a 'victim' of oppression — even as they defend violent Islamists

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Patrick Doyle / Ottawa Citizen

Protestors hold signs at a protest against Islamophobia at Dundonald Park in Ottawa on Sunday, December 13, 2015

April 21 marks the opening, at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, of the sixth annual academic conference on Islamophobia. If past conclaves are a guide, the conference will be marked by a morass of impenetrable academic jargon and an unremitting flow of anti- Western rhetoric.

Here, if one cares to observe, one may see the academic pistons of the blasphemy- law promotional industry pumping vigorously away at its task, to ensure that expression of hostility to the religion of Islam achieves cultural parity on campuses as a shaming thought crime, morally equivalent to expressed hostility to women, blacks, gays and aboriginals.

What ends in law often begins in academia. And the Berkeley conferences are ground zero in North America for hardline theories around Islamophobia. This cadre does not shy away from definitions of Islamophobia, unlike those who promoted and voted for Motion 103, championed by Liberal MP Iqra Khalid and recently passed by Canada's Parliament. The motion calls for a committee to "study" how to develop a "a whole- of- government approach" to reducing and eliminating Islamophobia, specifically. That word, Islamophobia, left truculently undefined by all politicians supporting its inclusion, glows with radioactive intensity.

Does M-103's "Islamophobia" mean expressed hatred of people — the West's normal definition of hatred — or hatred of a belief system, normally a protected category of expression here, as religious Christians know to their chagrin? Canadians have no idea if their right to express distaste for Islam would still be protected in a bill premised on the recommendations of this "study."

I therefore contacted Jasmin Zine, who teaches race, ethnic, gender and postcolonial studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a regular — and ideologically representative — participant in the Berkeley Islamophobia conferences, including this one.

I asked her to define Islamophobia for me, which she promptly did: "Islamophobia is a fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression." This is quite an insidious, though admittedly clever, definition. Note that it puts "fear and hatred" of Islam, not Muslims, at the centre of the phobia. And the word "translates" is a masterstroke.

Under this definition, if I write publicly that Islam is inherently Christophobic and anti- Semitic according to its own texts, and a Muslim declares himself "oppressed" by my statement, who would be the interpreter for the alleged "translation"? The courts? Iqra Khalid? Prime Minister Justin Trudeau?

As one can see from her defined area of study, Zine is an intersectionalist, who sees the world in Marxist tropes of power and powerlessness, with white imperialists and their issue holding the power, and all disadvantaged minorities, into which category Muslims are now tucked, as the systematically disempowered.

It takes a certain chutzpah to hold that Islam, given its history of conquest of indigenous peoples, sexism, homophobia and violence against Christians and Jews, is equal in victim status — given their respective histories — to blacks, native Americans, gays and Jews. Yet that is the basic narrative thrust not only of Zine's work, but of all the "scholars" promoting the Islamophobia blasphemy- law agenda.

Their guru is Hatem Bazian, faculty sponsor, IRDP creator and effective leader of the Berkeley conference. Founder of Students for Justice in Palestine, Bazian is also a former fundraising speaker for the anti- Israel organization KindHearts, shut down by the U.S. government in 2006 for its alleged ties to Hamas.

(Bazian is often cited for what appeared to be a call to violence at a 2004 San Francisco rally, when he shouted: "Well, we've been watching an intifada in Palestine, we've been watching an uprising in Iraq ... How come we don't have an intifada in this country? ... they're gonna say (I'm) being too radical. Well, you haven't seen radicalism yet!")

At a former conference, Jasmin Zine spoke on “Constructing the ‘Enemies Within’: Muslim Youth, Islamophobia, and the Racial Politics of Canada’s ‘Home Grown’ War on Terror.” Zine concluded that it was not jihadist ideology at the root of homegrown terrorists — rather, it was Islamophobia, the “politics of empire” and the “racialized security industrial complex.”

Zine does not outright condone terrorism, but insists it is necessary to “situate these acts within a broader historical context ... such as the racial violence of colonialism, genocide, slavery, occupation and apartheid.” She has likened America’s Guantanamo Bay detention centre to a “colonial plantation” and a Nazi concentration camp. And Zine sees Omar Khadr’s radicalization as the result of Canada’s failure to properly integrate his family. Uh- huh.

Ominously, Zine calls Canadian Muslim reformists like Raheel Raza and Tarek Fatah — Muslims who want to see an Islam emerge that is compatible with democratic principles — “native informers,” because they are eager to co- operate with security services in identifying radicalizing elements within the Muslim community.

Will Zine be invited to participate in the M-103 study? I am guessing she will be. Will Canadian patriots and democratic Muslims Tarek Fatah and Raheel Raza be invited as well? I would hope so. If all three are, to whose testimony will greater weight be assigned, to whom more deference shown?

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