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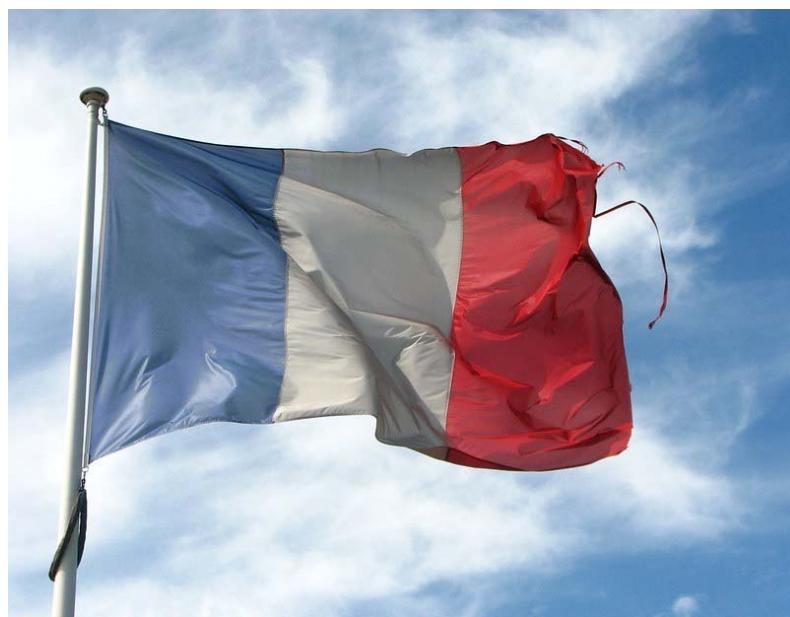
زبانهای اروپائی

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First English, Then American, and Now Muslim

Francophobia



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Francophobia has been a persistent part of French history, transmitted and modulated through several centuries. 17th century England constructed the first significant layer of Francophobia. The Americans may have borrowed Francophobia from England and then developed its version in the 20th century. In the 21st century, the Muslim world has begun to manufacture its variety of Francophobia. There are common themes in all three cases, though each version is era-specific. The French colonies and the French neighbors, particularly Germany, may also have views about France and its people, partly sharing the Francophobia accounts discussed here.

C-Phobias

In broad terms, phobias are sore beliefs about things, creatures, events, peoples, and nations. Prominent phobias involve persons and communities. Personal phobias are anxiety-producing states of mind, such as fear of heights, flying, and crowded spaces. By contrast, communal phobias (c-phobias) such as Islamophobia and Francophobia are disdainful stereotypes about race, religion, ethnicity, and nations. Racism, xenophobia, religious fanaticism, and supremacism nurture close bonds with c-phobias. Unlike personal phobias, no therapies are available to resolve c-phobias.

As fables, c-phobias carry both elements of falsehood and truth. Exaggerations, miscomprehensions, misinterpretations, skewed observations, and plain lies constitute the organicity of the c-phobias. However, no enduring c-phobia is entirely untruthful. Almost always, the originators of the c-phobias see more truth in them than the target communities. Francophobia is credible for the English, the Americans, and the Muslims, but not for the French.

C-phobias are cross-communal, as they arise from intense interaction between the phobia-originators and target communities. Cultural contrast, war, competition, and domination/subordination, all stretched over decades, grow mutually phobic misapprehensions. C-phobias become worldwide if a target community is globally influential. Thus, Muslim Francophobia is likely to acquire an international accreditation given the history of French colonialism, Muslims' presence in France, and Muslim populations' size and spread globally.

Furthermore, c-phobias are mutually solidifying. If the French people are Islamophobic, Muslims are likely to engender Francophobia. One phobia feeds the other. This cross-feeding was most spiritedly present in English Francophobia, as both the English and the French cooked stereotypes about each other, particularly during wars. This article does not examine the French views about the English and Americans. However, the current c-phobias raging between the French and the Muslims warrant a discussion of both sides.

English Francophobia

Tim Harris, an English historian, explains that 17th-century England had little appreciation for the French people and portrayed them as cowardly, gambling, hypersexual, chomping “Excellent *sallats*.” That the French are “lewd and immoral by Anglo-Saxon standards” lingers as a modern stereotype. This English stamp on an entire nation originated in part as an adverse reaction to Louis XIV (1643-1715), the Sun King of France, a triumphant King. Louis XIV transformed France into an art-loving and self-respecting nation. The Palace of Versailles is the King’s outstanding contribution to world architecture.

Unfortunately, a narrow-minded Louis XIV did not understand religion’s dynamics, particularly the emerging Protestant movement. He first used force to convert Protestants to the Catholic faith. Upon seeing failure, the King arbitrarily revoked the Edict of Nantes

(1598), a contract with the Protestants and Huguenots guaranteeing religious freedom. Frustrated more and more in his uneducated mind, the King conducted merciless persecution, forcing thousands to flee France.

The English perceived France as essentially a militarized state in which no laws bind the King and the institutions under him. The “love of the prince” permeated the French consciousness. The French adored totalitarianism, and to please first the Pope and later the King, the French judges ignored the written law. Judiciary was institutionally unfree as the King sold judicial offices as inheritable property. The English phobia toward the French political and legal system was an English yearning not to allow their kings to impose royal tyranny over the English parliament and judiciary.

American Francophobia

Unlike the settlers and immigrants from other parts of Europe, the French who migrated to America were more prone to “forget” their homeland and happily assimilate into the dominant Anglo culture and sensibilities. Except for Quebec in Canada, most French immigrants have willingly anglicized themselves, an argument that constructs American Francophobia: The French were happier to leave an oppressive country without religious and economic freedoms.

Justin Vaisse, a French historian, argues that the negative American perception of the French crystallized in World War II, as France did not put up a good fight against the Germans. Paralleling the English view that the French are cowardly, American Francophobia did not take kindly the French appeasement of the 1930s. That the French inflate their charm and competence also receives tracking among American ruling elites. Senator John McCain (1936-2018) compared France with “an aging actress of the 1940s who is still trying to dine out on her looks but doesn’t have the face for it.” House Speaker Newt Gingrich (the bigmouth) called France a “malicious” nation.

American intellectuals on the left have little confidence in the French democratic order. There is a common perception among academics of all strains that the French laws and courts do not respect minorities. (I share that view). Oppression and disrespect for diversity are parts of Francophobia. American Jews migrating from France brought unpleasant memories, and many Jewish commentators accuse France of anti-Semitism. Even American restaurants joined Francophobia by changing “French fries” (a name that did not originate in France) into “freedom fries.”

French sexuality continues to ignite Francophobia. An article in the *Paris Review* records the views of historians, scientists, sex therapists, and journalists invited to discuss American and French sexual sensibilities. A Stanford feminist scholar says that French love seeks fulfillment in adultery. “Flirting is a civic duty in France,” says another panelist. Older French women entice young men, even teenagers, and carry “repository of sexual history.” For the French, love is not an abstract ideal but “embedded in the flesh.”

American Francophobia is much softer than its English counterpart, perhaps because Americans did not fight any hot wars with France. However, as discussed below, Muslim Francophobia may tilt one way or the other, depending on how hard the French ruling elites come down on the French Muslims and how much violence Muslim immigrants commit to vent frustration over disrespect for their families and Islamic identity.

Muslim Francophobia

Muslim Francophobia is relatively new and under construction. France ruled North African and Middle Eastern countries as a colonial power for decades, leaving behind bitter memories of cruelty. The immigration of North African and Turk Muslims to France has prompted cultural conflict over Islamic hijab, homeschooling, mosque-building, and the Prophet of Islam's cartoons. Islam is the second-largest religion in France, and no other European nation has a comparable size of the Muslim population. Sporadic violence perpetrated by Muslim juveniles invites stricter laws and state oppression.

France is undoubtedly nervous about the influx of Muslims in its cities and towns. However, facts do not demonstrate that post-colonial France is anti-Islamic. In foreign relations, France distinguishes itself as a U.N. Security Council veto-holding member that supports reluctantly and sometimes opposes Muslim nations' invasions and the global war on terror, provoking American ire. Ayatollah Khomeini, who brought down the Shah of Iran in 1979, planned the Iranian revolution's final details "in a sleepy village outside Paris." Nearly 10 Muslim-majority nations, mostly in Africa, use French as an official language, though the French troops in Mali infuriate many Africans.

Like everywhere else, the right-wing political parties in France exaggerate the threats Islam poses to French secularism. Jean-Marie Le Pen (1928-) and his daughter Marine Le Pen have introduced a vicious concoction of Islamophobia and xenophobia, arguing that the French Muslims are corroding the French way of life. In 2015, Marine Le Pen compared Muslims praying in the French streets to the Nazi occupation, a case of hate speech for which she was tried but acquitted.

Right-wing Islamophobia and the consequent Francophobia, as the synergistic opposites, bolster each other. French values and Islamic values, despite noted similarities, are portrayed as mutually exclusive. Right-wingers see French Muslims as stubborn foreigners, unwilling to dilute their faith in favor of secularism, a concept central to modern Frenchness. They maintain that France cannot accept a view of Islam that, in addition to faith, imports the Arab and Turkish culture.

What is most worrisome is the spill-over effect of the right-wing ideology into mainstream politics. A significant majority of the French lawmakers are willing to pass legislation that would allow mosques' surveillance and curb homeschooling. This legislation justified under the national security pretext will spawn a wide-reaching disdain against France. Already, Muslim governments have communicated their displeasure with the bill. Though not

exclusively related to Muslims' surveillance, a new Security Bill bans the filming of police activities. Such oppressive legal measures breastfeed Francophobia.

Elsewhere, I have argued that anti-religious secularism, a formula practiced in the Soviet Union, is far less sustainable than non-religious secularism, a form adopted in the First Amendment. Secularism that allows religious freedom to individuals and communities but prevents state institutions from adopting any "official" religion is empirically superior to a model that condemns religion as non-scientific or anti-development. Like the Soviet Union, France will fail to impose anti-religious secularism under which both the state and ordinary individuals must be non-religious.

As the prior versions of Francophobia assert, the 21st-century French judiciary has been, for the most part, subservient to political forces (the King). Muslims have been unable to find relief in domestic courts. From trial courts to the highest courts, the judges uphold Islamic clothing restrictions and acquit politically influential hate-mongers. After exhausting local remedies, Muslims, their French sympathizers, and human rights organizations have challenged several discriminatory laws in the European Court of Human Rights, located in Strasbourg. This trend will continue as France legislates even harsher measures to suppress homeschooling, mosques' surveillance and the Islamic notions of privacy and sexuality.

If anything, Francophobia's sexual notions will likely become part of Muslims' critique of the French culture. The French sexuality tied to adultery will gain a wider negative press in the Muslim world, portraying the French as morally decadent, just as the Anglo-Saxons did in the prior centuries. The French laws prohibiting the Islamic hijab even in private schools will be propagandized as a state-sponsored policy to corrupt Muslim families and lure Muslim women into debauchery (what the French might call sexual enlightenment).

Conclusion

Francophobia has lingered over the centuries, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries. Among frivolous insults, Francophobia contends, carrying hints of truthfulness, that the French laws do not respect diversity, that the French judiciary is submissive to political forces, and that the French sexuality is unfettered, bordering compulsive sexual disorder. Though partly inflated, unfortunately, these claims are likely to become parts of widespread Francophobia. How badly the French ruling elites treat the French Muslims and how much violence the French Muslims perpetrate to protest their existential marginalization will further forge Francophobia.

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