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# ISLAMOPHOBIA AND XENOPHOBIA IN SLOVENIA THROUGH THE EYES OF COVERED MUSLIM WOMEN

M a j a P u c e l j

## Introduction

Issues of Islamophobia and xenophobia have become an important part of discourse (in the public, in the media, and in political rhetoric) in recent years. The phobias, which do not have a psychopathological origin, represent a stereotypical discourse that the members of one group, who perceive themselves as superiors (non-Muslims living in the West), are against the other group that is placed opposite them, placing the other group's members (Muslims and foreigners) automatically in inferior position because they do not share the characteristics of the first group. It is an artificially created construct, which was created without any real foundation since there is no reason for a justifiable fear of Islam and Muslim or foreigners. The arrival of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa has, in recent years, further influenced the rise of various worrying phenomena such as racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism and deviation / hostility towards anything that is different. Since there is an evident lack of scientific literature in the field of Islamophobia and xenophobia studies as perceived by Muslim women, we have decided to carry out the following research. Our research, therefore, attempts to first identify Islamophobia and xenophobia through theoretical discourse as the fear of the "other" – that is, the fear towards Muslims (Islamophobia) or towards the foreigners (xenophobia). The research then lingers at the question on how Muslim women perceive the question of the existence and the increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Slovenia. The aim is to analyse this question through the method of partially structured interviews which we

carried out in the period between August and October of 2016 among fifteen covered Muslim women in Slovenia, with the aim of determining their own perception of the existence (and the increase in recent years) of both phenomena in Slovenia. The article concludes with a reflection on the findings of empirical research, which is further placed in the wider social context.

### Defining Islamophobia and Xenophobia

A phobia is defined in the dictionary<sup>1</sup> as a very strong resistance or fear of someone or something. In recent years, a specific phobia has developed in Western societies, namely, Islamophobia. Richardson states that Islamophobia dates back to the early and mid-1990s from the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>, while the Runnymede Trust report states that the word was "formed" in the late 1980s<sup>3</sup>. The definition of "Islamophobia" in the United States claims that the term "Islamophobia" was first introduced as a concept in the Runnymede Trust report in 1991, where it was defined as "unfounded hostility to Muslims and as such constitutes a fear or a feeling of reluctance to all or most Muslims." Berkley faculty then established the following definition of Islamophobia: "Islamophobia is a fictitious fear or prejudice that is exacerbated by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global structure of power. It is focused on an alleged or actual Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of the existing differences in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while at the same time it rationalises the need to use violence as a method of achieving "civilization rehabilitation" of the target communities (Muslim or any other). Islamophobia reinstates and confirms the global racial structure, through which the uneven di-

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<sup>1</sup> "Merriam-Webster," Phobia, accessed June 26, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phobia>.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Richardson, *Mis/Representing Islam: the racism and rhetoric of British broadsheet newspapers* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Runnymede Trust report, "Islamophobia a challenge for us all," accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>.

tribution of resources is maintained and expanded."<sup>4</sup> According to the Gallup survey, researchers define Islamophobia through various details, but the essence of the term remains unchanged, irrespective of origin, namely excessive fear, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, which has been maintained by negative stereotypes and which results in prejudices, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of Muslims from social, political and public life<sup>5</sup>. The negative perception of Islam and Muslims in the West represents a perpetual agony, lasting for many centuries, which also manifests itself in Islamophobia, discrimination, and finally, in the less successful integration of Muslims into the West than desired. The point of initial dispute between Muslims and Western countries was in principle set in the time of the Crusades and it has continued through colonialism, imperialism, and is still noticeable now. According to the EUMC report, Muslims are experiencing Islamophobic outbursts ranging from oral threats to the physical attacks<sup>6</sup>.

Islamophobia can be manifested in latent, institutional, or obvious form. It is more difficult to detect latent, institutional Islamophobia, than obvious Islamophobia, as it is often hidden. It can be perceived, for example, in the statistics of economic integration that have been shown in the terms of Muslims. Obvious Islamophobia is much easier to recognize, as it perceives obvious forms of violence and hostility towards Muslims, which are also often reported to the police. Forms that exist are, for example, making (particularly offensive) jokes about Muslims / Islam, harassments, attacks, insults on the street, etc. The reasons for the occurrence of Islamophobia, as represented by various research, can be found in the lack of knowledge about Islamic faith and the way of life of Muslims, in the distorted image of Islam, which is represented by the mass media, in the historical or current disputes, in the political and economic reasons, and in the lack of adequate educa-

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<sup>4</sup> Berkley, "Defining »Islamophobia," accessed May 19, 2017, <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia>.

<sup>5</sup> Gallup, "Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West," accessed May 25, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.asp>.

<sup>6</sup> EUMC (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia), "Muslims in the European Union – Discrimination and Islamophobia," accessed June 2, 2017, [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Manifestations\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Manifestations_EN.pdf).

tion and inadequate / insufficient mutual dialogue (between Muslims and the majority of (non-Muslim) population). The failure of existing integration policies and models of integration, which resulted in the unsuccessful integration of Muslims in the West, has been the topic of the numerous discussions in recent years. Whatever the causes of Islamophobia are supposed to be, the real "justification" for the execution of it cannot be found, since discrimination or re-examination only on the basis of religion (which have occurred over the centuries) are not really understandable, as this means that a person of a certain religion feels superior to the person of another religion. There is no basis for such feelings since religions are (or at least should be) equal to each other and differ only from the content of religious belief and the number of followers. Western societies (at least declaratively) strive to integrate the Muslims who came into their societies, and should, consequently, limit or eliminate Islamophobia which manifests itself through the discrimination against Muslims and, consequently, a sense of (social) exclusion, and can also result in the unsuccessful integration of Muslims into Western society.

What is xenophobia? As given by Guide to the Law for Youth (Xenophobia), in its literary sense, xenophobia indicates the fear of everything foreign, mostly foreigners and their culture,<sup>7</sup> which is confirmed by the Dictionary of Standard Slovenian Language.<sup>8</sup> The Guide to the Law for Youth further states that "xenophobia can appear as a mere discomfort in contact with a foreigner. However, this discomfort may turn into a more or less violent reaction to foreigners, which is seen as nationalism. This is followed by calls for the expulsion of foreigners, and also violence over them could follow."<sup>9</sup> So, it is a prejudice against everything that is foreign. Concerning the situation in Slovenia, Čotar notes: "In the last decade, both the defensive and offensive forms of ethnocentric nationalism have been observed among the Slovenian public. Generally speaking, for Slovenians, the defensive form is more

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<sup>7</sup> Guide to the Law for Youth, "Kažiprav, Rasizem and xenophobia," accessed June 27, 2017, <https://kaziprav.wordpress.com/diskriminacija/rasizem-in-ksenofobija-2/>.

<sup>8</sup> SSKJ, "Ksenofobija," accessed June 15, 2017, [http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/cgi/ao3.exe?name=sskj\\_testa&expression=ge=ksenofobija](http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/cgi/ao3.exe?name=sskj_testa&expression=ge=ksenofobija).

<sup>9</sup> Guide to the Law for Youth, "Kažiprav, Rasizem and xenophobia."

characteristic, which is expressed in self-esteem and xenophobia. This form of nationalism was shown to immigrants from the area of the former Yugoslavia, to a lesser extent to refugees, occasional excesses with the Roma occurred, followed by illegal immigrants, where defensive nationalism began to turn into an offensive one. The still present problem / ... / of building an Islamic religious centre in Slovenia is a sufficient indication that we have not seen the disappearance of xenophobia and ethnocentric nationalism, but only their enlargements."<sup>10</sup>

The current formation of the society with the tendency of a capitalist touch, demands from people almost complete denial of private life and dedication almost exclusively to the demands and needs of the employer, which manifests itself in the increasing alienation of people among themselves, the increase of depression, the withdrawal within itself and the questioning about the meaning of life. It also manifests itself in feelings of hostility towards each other, which reflects in the occurrence of hostile speech, Islamophobia and xenophobia, which we have been witnessing for quite some time. On one hand, the apathy of the people to react to the acts of hostilities and, on the other hand, a strong feeling of nationalism and the words / expressions of hostility that we can witness in Western countries (as well as in Slovenia), lead to frightening situations, also implied by statistical data, which we can bear witness to all over Europe. However, the situation is very worrying in the United States, where we witnessed an increase in anti-Muslim incidents (from 2014 to 2016 this percentage rose by 65 %, from 1,341 cases in 2014 to 2,213 cases in 2016), while hate crimes in this country also increased from 2014 (when dealing with 38 such cases) to 2016 (when 260 cases were dealt with), by as much as 584 %<sup>11</sup>. Will our passivity, following the perception of hostile speech / acts, Islamophobia and xenophobia, be followed by the US example, due to the high-level standards to prosecute such acts, or will we seriously consider various

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<sup>10</sup> Roberta Čotar, »Nacionalizem in ksenofobija v Sloveniji – analiza trenda v zadnjem desetletju«, Thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Buncombe, "Muslim hate crimes: Reports of Islamophobic incidents in the US soared again in 2016," accessed June 5, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/muslim-hate-crimes-increased-2016-islamophobia-donald-trump-latest-a7735141.html>.

preventive and repressive measures in terms of the elimination of hate speech, Islamophobia and xenophobia?

If we could facilitate the prosecution of hate speech, Islamophobia and xenophobia, we could consequently lower the level of discrimination and achieve an improvement of psychological integration in terms of greater acceptance. In addition, employers' prejudices could also be reduced, which would have an impact on the increased involvement of Muslims and foreigners (of course, those who want it) into the labour market. However, the conditions for proving the existence of hate speech / acts, Islamophobia and xenophobia in all Western countries are set very high, which means that it is necessary to change the criminal law legislation in these countries in order to facilitate the prosecution of such acts, which, ultimately, could lead to extreme acts, committed because of hatred (which can even result in the death of victims of such acts). Although we are aware that there is a high degree of probability (given the fact that this problem has been pointed out for many years) that there will be no change in the criminal law legislation, we hope that in Slovenia we will not witness such a brutal increase of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and hostility, as has been witnessed in the United States, where such acts are even being promoted by the political rhetoric of President Donald Trump. Slovenia is obviously on the right track to achieve successful integration of Muslims (as we can conclude on the basis of our research<sup>12</sup>), therefore, all future steps that will be taken towards facilitating the integration of these social groups (i.e. Muslims and foreigners), need to be taken thoughtfully and with extreme caution, and at the same time we need to consider how to reduce the level of hate speech, Islamophobia and xenophobia, which we bear witness to in Slovenia.

### Islamophobia in Europe and Slovenia

The EUMC survey states that Muslims in European Union Member States are the victims of discrimination and marginalization in the area

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<sup>12</sup> Maja Pucelj, *Nivo uspešnosti integracije priseljencev islamske veroizpovedi v zahodne države* (Ljubljana: Založba Vega, 2016).

of employment, education, and residence, and are also the victims of negative stereotyping by the majority (non-Muslim) population and the media<sup>13</sup>. In recent years, Islamophobia in Europe has been fuelled by the immigration of refugees / migrants from the Middle East and North Africa (which linked the "refugee crisis" to the Muslim population in Europe, as confirmed by Bayrakli and Hafez<sup>14</sup> and Zalta<sup>15</sup>) and the unsuccessful / less successful integration of Muslim minorities into majority of Europe's society. Factors like the economic crisis, the rise of nationalist parties, and the terrorist attacks carried out by Muslim extremists across major European cities, contributed to the increase of Islamophobia. In our scientific monograph<sup>16</sup>, we found that discrimination against Muslims is present in all major Western (reviewed) European states, and can be most notable in the labour market. Bayrakli and Hafez have found that Islamophobia represents a major risk to the democratic foundations of the European constitutions and to the social peace, as well as to the coexistence of different cultures in Europe, and they have added that both civil society and countries should recognize the seriousness of this problem and formulate concrete policies to combat Islamophobia<sup>17</sup>.

As Zalta<sup>18</sup> points out: "Islamophobia is present in Slovenian society. Its consequences can be detected in the stereotyping of Muslims based on the ignorance of the heterogeneity of Islamic tradition and the rejection of Islam as a European (and consequently Slovenian) religion." According to the research carried out by Dragoš<sup>19</sup> and Pašič<sup>20</sup>, the existence of Islamophobia in Slovenia can be noted in printed media,

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<sup>13</sup> EUMC, "Muslims in the European Union."

<sup>14</sup> Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, "European Islamophobia Report," accessed June 27, 2017, [http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR\\_2015\\_NORWAY.pdf](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_NORWAY.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Anja Zalta, "Islamophobia in Slovenia – national report 2016," accessed July 03, 2017, <http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SLOVENIA.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Pucelj, *Nivo uspešnosti integracije priseljencev*.

<sup>17</sup> Bayrakli and Hafez, "European Islamophobia Report."

<sup>18</sup> Zalta, "Islamophobia in Slovenia".

<sup>19</sup> Srečo Dragoš, »Islam in suicidalno podalpsko pleme,« in *Poročilo skupine za spremljanje nestrpnosti 02*, ed. Tomaž Triplan and Roman Kuhar, 34-53 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed Pašič, *Islam in muslimani v Sloveniji* (Sarajevo: Emanet, 2002).

Dragoš<sup>21</sup> adds that a variety of Islamophobic statements given by Slovenian politicians and intellectuals can be found in numerous Slovenian printed media, whereas Pašič<sup>22</sup> adds that: "The articles written in a negative spirit prevail / ... / the most common prejudices are the global fear of Islam and the "Islamic fundamentalism," the spread of faith with the fire and swords and the support of terrorism, the confusion with the expressions of Muslim and Mohammedan, the status of Isaa a.s. and Muhammed a.s., the suppression of women, the construction of the mosque in Ljubljana and sects in Islam." In his study that Dragoš titled *Islamophobia in Slovenia*, he draws attention to the history of the problems Muslims encountered while building a Muslim religious centre, highlighting certain prejudices and opinions of certain politicians<sup>23</sup>. Zalta<sup>24</sup> adds: "Yet Islamophobic discourses mainly related to the construction of the mosque as the central symbol of Muslim presence in the country, are continuing, in particular on Internet networks and public forums, but also in certain media outlets (which will be discussed in the next chapters). These kinds of discourses are not (only) a result of the fear of terrorist attacks, but are fuelled by the fear of medieval Turkish incursions, embedded in the Slovenian collective memory."

Muslims in Slovenia, like Muslims around the world, are perceived as "the others." They face discrimination and Islamophobia, which we also confirmed in our research<sup>25</sup>. In Slovenia, after the terrorist attack in Paris in January 2015, an additional increase in the level of discrimination and Islamophobia can be detected (for example, in January 2015, the inscription "Ubi sve muslime" (Kill all Muslims) appeared in Jesenice, while throughout Slovenia, leaflets appeared with intolerant content directed against Muslims, which were glued primarily to the places owned by the members of Islamic religion). Zalta adds that: "The year 2016 witnessed one of the first known Islamophobic acts to be

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<sup>21</sup> Dragoš, *Islam in suicidalno podalpsko pleme*.

<sup>22</sup> Pašič, *Islam in muslimani v Sloveniji*, 123-124.

<sup>23</sup> Srečo Dragoš, »Islamofobija na Slovenskem,« in *Poročilo skupine za spremljanje nestrpnosti 03*, ed. Tomaž Triplan, Sabina Autor and Roman Kuhar, 10-27 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Zalta, "Islamophobia in Slovenia."

<sup>25</sup> Pucelj, *Nivo uspešnosti integracije priseljencev*.



given media publicity in the country: heads of pigs and jars of blood were dumped on the building site of an Islamic religious and cultural centre.” Due to the fact that Zalta<sup>26</sup> points out that “islamophobia is felt most by those Muslims who outwardly show their religious affiliation (either visually by way of dress and / or participation in the media)” the following chapter presents how covered Muslim women in Slovenia perceive Islamophobia and xenophobia in Slovenia.

### Perception of Islamophobia and Xenophobia through the Eyes of Covered Muslim Women in Slovenia

In this chapter, the problems of the existence and increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Slovenia are dealt with as perceived by the covered Muslim women. This is determined by using the method of partially structured interviews conducted in the time period between August and October 2016 among the covered Muslim women in Slovenia. The main goal of the analysis of semi-structured interviews is the interpretation of data which is read as a narration of the covered Muslim women in Slovenia about their subjective perception of the existence and possible increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia towards them. This interpretation includes opinions and / or experiences of fifteen interviewees with whom interviews (personal, telephone or electronic) were conducted in the time period between August and November 2016. The main goal of the analysis of semi-structured interviews is the interpretation of data that is read as a narration of the covered Muslim women in Slovenia about their subjective perception of the existence and possible increase of hostile speech and Islamophobia directed against them, as well as the level of their integration success. The youngest interviewee was 22 years old, while the oldest was 37. Ten interviewees were born in Slovenia, four in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one in Yemen. One interviewee, born outside Slovenia, has been living in Slovenia for two years now and has a temporary residence permit, the other has been here for eight years and has a permanent residence, the next one has been here for ten years and also has a permanent residence,

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<sup>26</sup> Zalta, “Islamophobia in Slovenia.”

the last one came to Slovenia as a seven-month-old infant in 1981 and has Slovenian citizenship. Women who were not born in Slovenia came to this country primarily with the aim of family reunification, since their husbands first came here as workers, and later they joined them.

All interviewees were born into the Islamic faith, they made their decision to cover up by their own will. Two of them have covered up early, during their childhood, one said that she started covering herself because of the cultural environment in which covering was expected from her, while one pointed out the desire to hide in order to protect her from the views of other men. One of the interviewees also stated the (negative) fact that after she had covered up with the niqab, her family gave her up. They have been covering themselves up primarily because of religious reasons, the desire for obscurity and modesty, for cultural reasons and for the preservation of one's identity. Most interviewees use hijab (N = 11), to a lesser extent niqab (N = 2), galabiya, kimar (N = 1) and abaya (N = 1), while one of them uses both hijab and niqab. An interviewee who started covering herself up the last has been covering up for one year now, while the interviewees who have been covering up the longest have been covered up for 17 years. Covering has an impact on the quality of their lives, especially in terms of obtaining greater respect from the others, a greater sense of security and protection, greater self-esteem, happiness, personal refinement and a declaration of devotion to God. Some interviewees (N = 4) state that covering does not affect the quality of their lives, while two interviewees have noted a negative impact, especially in terms of employment limitations. Most of the interviewees (N = 12) used Slovenian language in the interview, two used Bosnian language, and one used English. Due to the knowledge of both languages, an interpreter was not needed, interviews were held in the desired language of the interviewees (i.e. in Slovenian, Bosnian and English). The search for interviewees was carried out orally by the snowball method as well as on social networks (Facebook, etc.). During the search for the suitable interviewees, numerous covered Muslim women were helpful in finding the right persons for the author to conduct the interviews with, especially by searching through their own personal circles of covered Muslim women.

Interviewers perceive both the existence as well as an increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Slovenia. They detect it indirectly and directly. They detect it indirectly through the media, social networks (such as Facebook), on media websites (such as RTV SLO) or in politics. One of the interviewees states: "I repeat myself. Media, media. Politicians who want voices and people who cannot read and educate themselves... but are becoming more and more Americanized ... sheep."<sup>27</sup> They directly perceive Islamophobia and xenophobia in the restrained relationship of others, and by visiting shopping centres, streets, and health facilities (one interviewee<sup>28</sup> points out that she had a problem with a doctor who was very Islamophobic and therefore she stopped visiting her). However, some of them warn that it also depends on individuals (in some cases it is possible to observe Islamophobia and xenophobia, while in others it is not, as some reject Muslims, while others accept them). The interviewees see the reasons for the existence and increase of both phenomena (i.e. Islamophobia and xenophobia) in particular in:

1. the misrepresentation of cultures, religions, and events by the media. One of the interviewees states that: "Islamophobia exists and is increasing. Especially due to reporting about extremists who were supposed to be Muslims. Media report about Muslims only when it comes to negative cases. So it is not surprising that people get the feeling that everything that starts with "Islamic" is bad and means something terrible."<sup>29</sup> One of the interviewees adds that: "Islamophobia exists in Slovenia. Fear of Islam and Muslims is absolutely visible in the eyes of people, not just fear, but also hatred towards Islam or Muslims. I cannot say whether xenophobia has increased in recent years since I have not been living in Slovenia for so long, but it does exist. The reason is mainly that people are not well educated about different cultures, religions and backgrounds / origin of Muslims. The media play an

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<sup>27</sup> INT 9, interview (interviews are a part of author's Ph.D. dissertation and all information about the interviewees, who decided to be anonymous, are available at the author of this article).

<sup>28</sup> INT 8, interview.

<sup>29</sup> INT 12, interview.

- important role in creating fear and hatred, so I personally think that people should educate themselves better in this sense"<sup>30</sup>;
2. the events that occur around the world (such as the Islamic state, terrorist acts, the arrival of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, etc.). One of the interviewees notes that: "Islamophobia and xenophobia have always been present, but they have increased even more due to the arrival of refugees, not only in Slovenia but also in Europe. Islam was "revived" even more than before"<sup>31</sup>;
  3. the insufficient knowledge about Islam, which is illustrated in the following quote by one of the interviewees: "I think that islamophobia exists, I perceive it most in the media, everything that the Muslim do, all allegedly comes from their religion, although if they knew the situation, they would see that it derives from him, from his family. This should be regulated at the level of education, the ministry, people should know what the religions are and that the negative actions are not allowed on the level of Islam. Xenophobia exists, I have seen it on the example of a friend from Morocco who is covered and black, people have a totally different attitude towards her than, for example, towards me. She is always under scrutiny, wherever she goes, and I think the reason for that is that Slovenia is small, there is not much multicultural intertwining and that is the biggest problem. There is very little work done on integration, for example, employment of a black man. For instance, if a black man or a covered woman worked in a bank, then it could be said that we have a successful integration. The biggest issue among all these problems is the unemployment and, consequently, it leads to a deviation in opinions"<sup>32</sup>;
  4. the diversity of the cultures.

One of the interviewees pointed out that the problem of the existence and growth of both phenomena can be explained also by the fact that in times of financial crisis, there was a lack of employment for the rest,

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<sup>30</sup> INT 14, interview.

<sup>31</sup> INT 11, interview.

<sup>32</sup> INT 4, interview.

that is, the citizens of Slovenia and, consequently, an increase in fear for one's own existence was noted.

## Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in Islamophobia around the world. In particular, in Europe, after the mass migration of migrants / refugees from the Middle East and North Africa towards Europe, there has been a noticeable public-media anti-migrant discourse. Various reports and surveys (such as Spindler<sup>33</sup>, ECRI report<sup>34</sup>, Vežjak<sup>35</sup>, ENAR report<sup>36</sup>, Zalta<sup>37</sup> and so on) perceive an increase in Islamophobia following the massive arrival of refugees / migrants, the rise of anti-migrant discourse (Spindler<sup>38</sup>; ECRI<sup>39</sup>; Vežjak<sup>40</sup>) and the existence of racism (ECRI report<sup>41</sup> and ENAR report<sup>42</sup>). Also, in Slovenia, it was possible to detect the rise of Islamophobia after the arrival of refugees / migrants on our territory. Islamophobic / hate speech was perceived on social networks, online forums and so on. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in Islamophobia, as well as an increase in terrorist attacks or attacks by Islamists in various major cities, mainly across Europe. Both phenomena are consequently connected, as the rise of Islamophobia is visible after a terrorist attack, as the level of media reporting on a particular terrorist attack increases. With occurrence of any terrorist attacks, we can see an increase in Islamophobic

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<sup>33</sup> William Spindler, "UN refugee chief calls for concerted action to defend asylum on International Day of Tolerance," accessed June 28, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/437b5ea94.html>.

<sup>34</sup> ECRI, "Annual report on ECRI'S activities," accessed June 2, 2017, [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/Annual\\_Reports/Annual%20report%202014.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/Annual_Reports/Annual%20report%202014.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Boris Vežjak, "Sovraštvo Slovencev do beguncev: zelo kratek vodič," accessed April 24, 2017, <https://vezjak.com/2015/08/29/sovraštvo-slovencev-do-beguncev-zelo-kratek-vodic/>.

<sup>36</sup> ENAR report, "Black people in Europe report widespread racism in anti-immigration context," accessed June 27, 2017, <http://www.enar-eu.org/Black-people-in-Europe-report-widespread-racism-in-anti-immigration-context>.

<sup>37</sup> Zalta, "Islamophobia in Slovenia."

<sup>38</sup> Spindler, "UN refugee chief calls."

<sup>39</sup> ECRI, "Annual report on ECRI'S activities."

<sup>40</sup> Vežjak, "Sovraštvo Slovencev do beguncev."

<sup>41</sup> ECRI, "Annual report on ECRI'S activities."

<sup>42</sup> ENAR report, "Black people in Europe."

statements in media and public discourses. The appearance of terrorist attacks as the reason for an increase of Islamophobia coincides with the findings of the 8th OIC Report<sup>43</sup>, which cites terrorism and extremism as the cause of the emergence and growth of Islamophobia. The violent actions of members of the Islamic State, such as beheading, rape, taking over the responsibilities for terrorist attacks in major cities in Europe, undoubtedly does not give rise to sympathy for individuals living in the West, but contributes to an increase in Islamophobia as members of the Islamic State are perceived as Muslims whose actions the non-Muslim Western public has simply generalized onto the entire Muslim population and, consequently, it increases the sense of Islamophobia. The Islamic community also warns about the necessity of separating the actions of the individuals from the Muslim community because actions of terroristic attacks, carried out by individuals, are also condemned by the majority of Muslim members, but until now, such warnings have not achieved the desired effect. Through an overview of the various already conducted research, however, we encountered another "culprit" for the rise of Islamophobia, that is the negative biased media reporting, which is also confirmed by various studies (for example Said<sup>44</sup>, Allen<sup>45</sup>, Shaheen<sup>46</sup>, EUMC<sup>47</sup>, Femyso<sup>48</sup>, Haque and Hossain<sup>49</sup>, Jackson<sup>50</sup>, Jureković

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<sup>43</sup> OIC, "Eight Oic Observer Report on Islamophobia," accessed June 15, 2017, [http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv3/upload/islamophobia/2015/en/reports/8th\\_Ob\\_Rep\\_Islamophobia\\_Final.pdf](http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv3/upload/islamophobia/2015/en/reports/8th_Ob_Rep_Islamophobia_Final.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Allen, "Islamophobia in the Media since September 11th." Paper presented at the conference "Exploring islamophobia: Deepening Our Understanding of Islam and Muslims" University of Westminster, School of Law, London, September 29, 2001, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.fairuk.org/docs/islamophobia-in-the-media-since-911-christopherallen.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Jack G Shaheen, *Reel bad Arabs* (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> EUMC, "Muslims in the European Union."

<sup>48</sup> Femyso, "Islamophobia in the media," accessed May 29, 2017, [http://p9445.typo3server.info/uploads/media/21Jan2006\\_en.pdf](http://p9445.typo3server.info/uploads/media/21Jan2006_en.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Faatin Haque and Mahjabeen Khaled Hossain, "Global media, islamophobia and its impact on conflict resolution," accessed May 16, 2017, <http://www.ihtmsaw.org/resource-files/1260034024.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Liz Jackson, "Images of Islam in US media and their educational implications," *Educational Studies* 46: 3-24.

et al.<sup>51</sup>, Mešič<sup>52</sup> etc.). According to the interviewees, the consequences of populist media reporting do not strengthen only discrimination, but also radicalism in the form of strengthening right-wing political rhetoric, Islamophobia and xenophobia and the use of hate speech.

Interviewees perceive both the existence and also an increase in Islamophobia and xenophobia in Slovenia. They perceived them indirectly (in the media, through social networks (such as Facebook), on media websites (such as RTV SLO), in politics) and directly (in the restrained attitude of others, by visiting the shopping centres, on the streets, in health institutions). They point out that it is also dependent on individuals (since it is possible to feel Islamophobia and xenophobia by some of them, while by others it is not; some reject Muslims, others accept them). The reason for the existence and increase of the two phenomena (by the interviewees) has been mainly detected in: (1) the misrepresentation of cultures, religions, and events by the media; (2) events occurring worldwide; (3) the insufficient knowledge of Islam, and (4) the diversity of the cultures. The existence of Islamophobia in Slovenia was perceived by Pašič<sup>53</sup>, Dragoš<sup>54</sup> and Zalta<sup>55</sup>, and we have also pointed out its existence in our own monograph<sup>56</sup>. The existence of Islamophobia was also shown by the present research. In recent years, we noted an increase in Islamophobic acts in Slovenia. For example, in January 2015, the inscription "Kill all Muslims"<sup>57</sup> appeared in Jesenice. In other parts of Slovenia, leaflets with intolerant content directed towards Muslims, which were glued primarily to the places owned by members of Islamic religion, appeared. From January 12<sup>th</sup> to January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the

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<sup>51</sup> Igor Jurekovič, Matjaž Zgonc and Oskar Opassi, "Večni "drugi": muslimani v slovenskih medijih," accessed May 14, 2017, <http://www.sociologija.si/zapisi/vecni-drugi-muslimani-v-slovenskih-medijih/>.

<sup>52</sup> Mirza Mešič, "The Perception of Islam and Muslims in the Media and the Responsibility of European Muslims Towards the Media," accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.culturelink.org/conf/dialogue/mesic.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Pašič, *Islam in muslimani v Sloveniji*.

<sup>54</sup> Dragoš, *Islam in suicidalno podalpsko pleme*.

<sup>55</sup> Zalta, "Islamophobia in Slovenia."

<sup>56</sup> Pucelj, *Nivo uspešnosti integracije priseljencev*.

<sup>57</sup> Translated from the original »Ubi sve muslime« by the author.

pigs' heads and blood spill were left along the construction site of the Islamic Cultural Centre, and so on.

In our midst (i.e. in Slovenia), the Muslims are practically unrecognizable with their behaviour and appearance – there are few covered women and they mostly use hijab for covering up (there is a significantly lower number of those covered with niqab or other forms of coverings). Moreover, the cultural and geographical proximity of Muslims living in Slovenia has contributed to facilitating the integration of Muslims, due to the fact that in many Western countries, different cultural origins of Muslims cause problems in integrating them. The media thus reflect and also affect the social relation towards the Muslims, and form a public opinion, which, unfortunately, is often negatively perceived both towards Muslims and foreigners in general. “Despite the fact that the media are not the main factor influencing the decisions of the people how they will perceive a subculture or a group of people, the negative picture provided by the media undoubtedly does not contribute to a better / more successful integration, but it even prevents or obstructs it to some extent.”<sup>58</sup> After the events of September 11th, the media image deteriorated considerably, since Muslims are considered terrorists, despite the fact that research<sup>59</sup> suggests that the vast majority of Muslims reject extremist / terrorist acts. The stereotyping of Islam and Muslims in today's media has a long history. Following the preconceptions of references to Islam from the 8th century onward – prejudices later transmitted by the Reformers such as Martin Luther, dramatists and poets such as Shakespeare, Dante, and historians such as Gibbon, a distinguished diplomat and scholar, Erskine Childers observed that the subject of Islam as a curse of the world, of revenge, of its own leniency, which begins with Mohammed and then infects all Muslims, has been held in western academic circles even to this day<sup>60</sup>. Similarly, Said<sup>61</sup> argued that

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<sup>58</sup> Pucelj, *Nivo uspešnosti integracije priseljencev*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Open Society Institute, “Muslims in Europe - A Report on 11 EU Cities,” accessed May 11, 2017, [https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/a-muslims-europe-20110214\\_0.pdf](https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/a-muslims-europe-20110214_0.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Muzaffar v: Sucharita S. Eashwar, ed., *Dialogue, understanding and tolerance: First Asia Media Summit 2004*. Kuala Lumpur: Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.

<sup>61</sup> Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).



for the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is a particularly unpleasant type of "news." Media, government and geopolitical strategists and academics are all sceptical although this is marginal to culture in the broader sense, Islam is a threat to Western civilization. Said further notes that negative images of Islam are far more widespread than any other and that such images do not correspond to Islam, but to what the reputable sectors of a particular society want it to be. These sectors have the power and the will to propagate a certain picture of Islam which becomes more widespread, more present than all others.<sup>62</sup>

Since we have very limited knowledge about Islam and Muslims, and we do not acquire knowledge (at least not fast enough), we can – because of (biased and incorrect) media coverage, terrorist attacks, discussions in politics, on social networks and forums – quickly allow ourselves to be “dragged” into anti-Muslim rhetoric, which consequently leads to Islamophobia. Islam is, in its primal basis, just like any religion in this world, formed positively, and has, like every religion, extremists who want to interpret a religious book for their evil intentions. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to separate the actions of extremists from the actions of the majority of Muslims. It would also be necessary to raise the level of knowledge of Islam among non-Muslims (mainly through fairly documented programs, reportage, newspaper articles, round tables and, nevertheless, also with interaction with Muslims), since we can learn a lot from each other if we do not yield to fear, which some deliberately produce for their different (mostly negative) purposes. And instead of concluding, we would like to point out the thought given by the Islamic Community after the public speech of the Slovenian politician Branko Grimšič, claiming that the security problem exists due to possible infiltration of foreign ideas or individuals into the functioning of the Islamic Cultural Centre, which they say is: "fantasy, undermining and exploiting the crisis in international relations to create a stigma over Muslims in Slovenia."<sup>63</sup> Islamic Community completes their press release with a strong substantive connotation, which questions the level

<sup>62</sup> Said, *Covering Islam*, 1981, 136.

<sup>63</sup> Islamic Community, "Načrti za rušenje džamije," accessed June 27, 2017, <http://www.islamska-skupnost.si/novice/2017/06/sporocilo-za-javnost-islamske-skupnosti-v-zvezi-z-izjava-mi-branka-grimsic/>.

of Islamophobia that the Muslims feel in Slovenia: "Do you want us to start apologizing for being Muslims?" (Ibid.). We do not think that an additional comment is needed, since it is clear from the above written that the level of Islamophobic rhetoric in Slovenia (especially in the field of political rhetoric) is almost absurd. All this poses new questions to the Muslims living in this country. What do the non-Muslims want from them, perhaps even to renounce their own faith and consequently their own identity? Where is the end?

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