

Does Germany need just another Islamist, anti-Israel and antisemitic infusion by John L. Esposito?

By Clemens Heni

75 year old John L. Esposito, Georgetown University's Director of the Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and professor of International Affairs at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., will be the keynote speaker of a big conference in Germany, Jan 14–16, 2016, about „anti-Muslim racism and hostility towards Islam in Germany and Europe.“

The conference will take place at the University of Osnabrück in the North-West of Germany, over forty speakers are invited to speak. The event is organized by the “Center for Islamic Theology,” and supported by the German Federal Government and its Ministry of Education and Research, Lower Saxony's Ministry for Research and Culture, and the Post Graduate Program Islamic Theology.

This Center for Islamic Theology is headed by Bülent Ucar, who is the main organizer of the event alongside with his co-worker, Nina Mühe, an anthropologist and Islamic studies scholar known for her attack on Berlin's Anti-Hijab Law in classroom. Mühe is a former fellow at a German branch of George Soros' Open Society Institute.

Obviously, attacks like the Charlie Hebdo and Kosher supermarket massacre in Paris in January 2015 are a “reason” for many academics in the humanities and social sciences to focus on an alleged “anti-Muslim racism” and not on Jihad, Islamism, Muslim anti-Semitism and Muslim terrorists. This is

mainstream in Europe and the Western world ever since 9/11. We are facing in part a racist and nationalist climate in Germany, indeed. But this has nothing to do with the rejection of most academics in the field of Islamic Studies to deal, let alone fight Islamism in all its forms. The true antifascism of the 21st century deals with both the neo-Nazi and Islamist threats.

In his book "Who Speaks for Islam?" (2007, together with Dalia Mogahed), Esposito used the equivalence of anti-Semitism and "Islamophobia." In his distorted view, Jews aren't but a "religion" and just one of two "religions with Semitic origins." In fact, hatred of Jews is a worldwide ideology, while "Islamophobia" is rather an invention by some specific circles, namely Iran and Islamist organizations and their followers.

More recently, Esposito also started to defame Egypt's anti-Muslim-Brotherhood stance and started his "Brigde Initiative," dedicated to the analysis of "Islamophobia" and the defamation of all critics of jihad and Islamism.

Esposito is fascinated by the "Iranian Revolution" from 1979, as can be seen in his edited volume "The Iranian Revolution. Its Global Impact" (1990) and his chapter "The Iranian Revolution. A Ten-Year Perspective," where he also emphasized the outreach of Iranian style Islamism to Muslims outside Iran. In 2010, he co-edited the volume "Islam and Peacebuilding. Gülen Movements Initiates," where he promotes the Islamist approach of Fethullah Gülen and frames him as a kind of Islamic version of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Both share a "similar belief in mutual understanding, dialogue and optimism," murmurs Esposito.

This "optimism" (a nice word for the spread of Islamism, no?) can also be seen in the work of leading Sunni cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, another protagonist of Esposito. In his book "The Future of Islam" (2010), the Saudi (Prince Alwaleed) funded

scholar says, al-Qaradawi “claims that everything is acceptable (halal) unless proven forbidden (haram).” This makes him a moderate according to Esposito and his German colleagues Gudrun Krämer and Bettina Gräf. Gräf co-edited a book, “The Global Mufti,” with pieces by another Georgetown academic, Barbara Freyer-Stowasser (1935–2012), about “gender equality” in a fatwa about female suiciding bombing against Israel by al-Qaradawi.

In “The Future of Islam,” Esposito also invokes an equivalence between Islamic and Western “fundamentalism,” taking Ronald Reagan and the Iranian Revolution as examples, he also compares George W. Bush to Osama Bin Laden. This cultural relativist approach is well known. But jihad and the rule of religion (Islamism) is not the same as whatever democratic government in the US, Britain or Germany and France etc. does. Mustafa Ceric, former Grand Mufti of Sarajevo, is another Islamist portrayed as kosher, by Esposito. Ceric once went to the Auschwitz Memorial site, not to remember the Shoah but rather to invoke the Muslims-are-the-new-Jews-analogy. Ceric has also been criticized for his ties to the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, among other Islamist aspects of his approach.

Finally, Esposito refers to German security expert and former head (1996–2000) of the “Federal Agency for the Protection of the Constitution,” Peter Frisch. In his 2010 book (finished in 2009), Esposito writes about Frisch as if he was head of that important institution in 2009, which is a minor problem compared to the lie, the Georgetown scholar spreads about Frisch. Esposito writes: “In Germany, Peter Frisch, head of the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), has repeatedly asserted, ‘Muslims want to rule the world.’” He does not quote from a single article by Frisch. In 2001, after 9/11, Frisch argued against the defamation of all Muslims. In 1997, Frisch argued against the rise of Islamism and the reluctance in Germany to even deal with that problem. To my knowledge, he never said

that all Muslims want to rule the world. This reproach is rather a lie, invented by Esposito – who runs short to substantiate his claim. But Esposito is obviously not interested in research and quotes.

August 5, 2014, during the latest Gaza War, John L. Esposito tweeted the following: “Elie Wiesel plays the Holocaust trump card in Gaza” and links to an antisemitic homepage – “Mondoweiss.” Wiesel had said, that Jews stopped using children as sacrifices some 3500 years ago, Hamas should stop it now, too. Truly a correct statement, taken the fact that Hamas is verifiably known for abusing children and others as human shields. For Esposito this was just another reason to defame Israel and make fun of the Shoah and a Holocaust survivor.

Esposito compares Israel to Nazis, uses even more antisemitic language, promotes Islamists as possible allies and defames German officials, who headed federal offices in the fight against Jihad and Islamism.

Are these enough reasons for the Jewish Museum Berlin’s Yasemin Shooman, the mainstream weekly “Die Zeit” and its author Yassin Musharbash, the left-green-wing daily “taz” and its Daniel Bax, scholars like Andreas Zick from Bielefeld University, who even sits on Board of the US based “Journal for the Study of Antisemitism” (JSA), or historian Wolfgang Benz, former head of the “Center for Research on Antisemitism” at Technical University Berlin, dozens of other scholars, activists and authors, the Government of Lower Saxony and the German Federal Government to support and join such an event?