

Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

Playing the Taqiyya Card: Evading Intelligent Debate by Calling all Muslims Liars

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Trust is a basic element for human beings to live together amicably in a multicultural society. It is unsurprising then that propaganda that has driven societies towards genocide often focuses on depicting a minority group as inherently dishonest and dangerous. For instance, preceding the Rwandan genocide, the Hutus were told by political figures that the Tutsi were a people full of hatred, dangerous, and dishonest.

¹ Nazi propaganda prior to the Holocaust focused on repeating old stereotypes of Jews as dishonest and untrustworthy in their dealings.²

As Dr. Wibke Timmermann astutely observes:

*Hate speech regularly, if not inevitably, precedes and accompanies ethnic conflicts, and particularly genocidal violence. Without such incitement to hatred and the exacerbation of xenophobic, anti-Semitic, or racist tendencies, no genocide would be possible and persecutory campaigns would rarely meet with a sympathetic response in the general public.*³

The contemporary Islamophobia industry has deployed the exact same stereotypes in its characterization of the Islamic faith community and 1.6 billion Muslims. To this end, words like “Shariah” and “Jihad” have been exploited by Islamophobes who affirm the perverted meanings assigned to these terms by terrorists. Meanwhile, mainstream Muslims believe that *Jihad* refers to a struggle undertaken for the sake of God to protect the lives and rights of others, and that *Shariah* refers to a divinely ordained system that enjoins treating all human beings in the best manner. Islamophobes, when faced with this discrepancy between what they want the words to mean and what mainstream Muslims believe they actually mean, resort to a profoundly unsophisticated tactic – they simply declare all Muslims to be compulsive liars.

¹ Mafeza, Faustin. (2016). Preventing genocide by fighting against hate speech. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 4(3), 117-132.

² *Jews in Nazi Berlin: From Kristallnacht to Liberation*. edited by Beate Meyer, Hermann Simon, Chana Schütz. p. 28.

³ Timmermann, Wibke (2008). Counteracting hate speech as a way of preventing genocidal violence. *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 3(3), Article 8. Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol3/iss3/8>

Of course, that alone would be too obviously a fallacious maneuver, so in order to cloak this move with some degree of credibility, Islamophobes claim that there is a doctrine in Islam that teaches Muslims that they must lie to non-Muslims. This doctrine is called *taqiyya*. The presence of an Arabic word is guaranteed to dupe people and send chills down the spines of well-meaning but woefully misinformed patriotic Americans wary of those turban-wearing bearded foreigners, right? What could possibly go wrong?

The Real Meaning of “Taqiyya”

The origin of this conjured term however is a ruling that permits a believer to conceal his or her faith when under the threat of persecution or attack from forces hostile to Islam (Qur'an 16:106, 3:28). The word literally connotes being ‘fearful’ (Lane’s *Lexicon*, p. 310),⁴ and in fact conveys a commonsense notion present amongst all cultures and faiths – in a context in which someone is trying to kill you or others because of your beliefs, it is appropriate to hide those beliefs. Another famous example is Corrie Ten Boom lying to Nazis that she was hiding Jews in her attic – no one with a moral conscience would fault her for lying to save lives from murderous criminals.

Given that the word “*taqiyya*” has only been used in Islam to refer to Muslims saving themselves from mortal danger by concealing their faith,⁵ that should readily dismantle the Islamophobic claim that Muslims are generally taught to lie to non-Muslims. However, when confronted with the fact that their use of the term “*taqiyya*” is a grotesque misrepresentation, Islamophobes run to another concept in an attempt to buttress their caricature of Muslims as dishonest criminals. They cite a saying of the Prophet that “Warfare is deceit (Ar. *khida’ah*).” But here again they find no support as this reference to military strategy involving tricks has been

⁴ Lane, Edward W., and Stanley Lane-Poole. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1955. p. 310. Accessed online at <http://www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/lane/>

⁵ Tafsir al-Qurtubi (4/57): “And Taqiyya is not permissible except with fear of death or loss of limb or tremendous suffering.”

echoed by practically every civilization in human history. It is most famous on the lips of Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu who stated in *The Art of War*, “All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.” Once again, we find that behind the seemingly scary use of Arabic jargon, there are nothing more than run-of-the mill commonsense notions that every civilization has expressed.

Moreover, by unanimous consensus, Muslim scholars have explicitly pointed out that tricking the enemy on the battlefield (*khida'ah*) is very different from treachery (*khiyanah*) or breaking a covenant, the latter being universally prohibited.

The lie that Islam condones lying

What Islamophobes who peddle the myth of *taqiyya* choose to ignore is that while Islam permits believers to conceal their faith in the face of persecution, nowhere does Islam grant Muslims general permission to lie with the intention of deception. In fact, Islam strongly condemns dishonesty as a trait that is antithetical to true faith in God, and a sign of hypocrisy.

Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, said: “There was no behavior more hateful to the Messenger of Allah than dishonesty. A man would lie when narrating something in the presence of the Prophet and he would not be satisfied until he knew that he had repented.”

Moreover, Muslims must be entirely honest and truthful when conveying the teachings of Islam; the Qur'an states that one of the greatest evils is for a person to lie about the teachings of Islam, inventing a lie against God (Quran 39:32).

Manufacturing hate against Muslims in America

Muslims have lived in the United States since its beginnings. We have established mosques, schools, and institutions that have served the greater community. We are socially, culturally, economically, and politically a well integrated community by all measures, a community of proud Americans and proud Muslims who do not see the slightest conflict between those identities. In the over 200 years that this community has existed, never has there been an instance of the Muslim community trying to overthrow the system. Not once has there been a mosque or an Imam implementing an alternative set of laws. Not once has there been an instance of Muslims promoting unconstitutional activities that would infringe on the rights of our non-Muslim friends and neighbors.

In the current heightened climate of Islamophobia, a Texas state Representative sent one of us (and other Muslim leaders) a loyalty test earlier this year to affirm our American values.⁶ Instead of reaching out to us in the spirit of friendship and understanding, he decided to put us through a litmus test that was grounded in intimidation and suspicion. With over half a million Muslims in Texas, surely he could've reached out to one of his Muslim constituents or visited a local mosque. Instead, he chose to negate decades of interfaith dialogue, multifaith cooperation, and civic engagement here in Texas. These loyalty tests are not new in America and they essentially imply a second class citizenship on the part of those who receive them. We reject that status and characterization. And just like the "Anti-Shariah" bills that have passed in so many states, these political maneuvers score cheap points with the fearful masses while having no effect on actual regulation.

You can't trust them. Some of them may be good, but too many of them have a secret agenda. This is the type of racism that festered at both government and community levels before, during, and after Executive Order 9066 which sentenced almost 120,000 Japanese-Americans to internment camps. In one of the most

⁶<https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2017/01/26/letter-from-state-representative-angers-n-texas-muslim-leaders>

shameful episodes in American history, a dangerous trend of anti-Asian attitudes prevailed that obscured facts about the Japanese-American community and allowed them to be brazenly exploited. This same chronicle has now found a home in anti-Muslim bigotry.

The narrative is that the Muslim community is a discrete, unified group, irrespective of nationality, age, or religiosity, all programmed to launch “*civilization Jihad*,” and incapable of an honest mainstream expression of its faith that poses no threat to its neighbors. Islamophobes begin by defining and imposing their definitions of Islamic terms (such as *Shariah* and *Jihad*) in ways that fit the above narrative, and then demand that Muslims reject the terms and texts as they have portrayed them, or risk being deemed extremists for clarifying their meanings. This puts Muslims in an impossible catch-22: Either reject the terms, texts, and tenets of their faith to avoid persecution, or offer the mainstream Muslim interpretation of these “problematic texts” and be accused of *taqiyya*.

CONCLUSION

The tactic of dismissing everything that Muslims say or do that doesn't fit the Islamophobic narrative as "lying" has been remarkably efficient. This is the classic "poisoning of the well" fallacy; if you can't beat the opposition with logic, then destroy their credibility prior to them offering arguments and you'll never have to debate them. Islamophobes complain that the word "Islamophobia" is a buzzword to shut down criticism of Islam, arguing that they just want to have a critical discussion on the subject. However, they use the term *taqiyya* in the very same fashion to deny mainstream Muslims the right to express their own narrative which represents the vast majority of Muslims worldwide. Think about how impossible a situation this becomes: it may start with the falsehood that Muslims don't condemn terrorism, then when proof is put forth that they actually do (see muslimscondemn.com), they're told that they're lying and concealing their true intentions. So beyond the lie that all Muslims lie, is the reality that Islamophobes

actually aren't concerned about any truths concerning the Muslim community or Islam in the first place.