


Christopher Dickey and “Anti-Muslim Hysteria”

by Hugh Fitzgerald (April 2016)

After the latest attacks in Brussels, Christopher Dickey, a senior American journalist based in Paris, was alarmed. What alarmed him was not the homicidal hatred of Muslim terrorists or the Islamic State’s demonstrated ability to wreak havoc in yet another European capital. No, he was worried that “rampant Islamophobia” would only increase because of this attack, and “make it more and more difficult for Muslims and Arabs to integrate into European society. The level of suspicion is very high, and that translates into xenophobic politics. The kind of thing we see with Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, or Marine Le Pen in France, or the really, really fascist Nazi parties in... Greece. So I think all of that translates into a situation of more and more of a cultural divide. Harder and harder to integrate people. And then that, of course, will be used for more recruiting by the jihadists.”

It’s a longstanding concern for Dickey. After the November 2015 terrorist  attacks in Paris, he worried that “the right-wing politicians” in France were “going to do their best to take advantage of it and probably successfully to further divide this country”; his MSNBC interviewer Tamron Hall echoed his alarm, claiming that a “tsunami of hatred may await Muslims.” They must both have been disappointed, for no tsunami of hate rolled in, and those “really really fascist Nazi parties” never made a goose-stepping appearance.

In April 2011, after the fire-bombing of the offices of Charlie Hebdo, Dickey knew who was really behind it:

It’s a cliché among amateur detectives and conspiracy theorists, of whom France has a great many, that those who benefit most from a crime are the likeliest perpetrators. But that logic isn’t much in evidence when it comes to the burning of the satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo, its Paris headquarters firebombed in the dark hours of Wednesday morning.

In this case everyone’s obvious suspects are Muslim radicals...But there’s also little doubt that those who’ll benefit most from this crime are the right-wing

politicians in France, including President Nicolas Sarkozy. They play on a generalized resentment of Muslim immigrants in thinly veiled but suggestive language that may broaden the anger still more. Here and throughout Europe—and indeed in the U.S.—Muslims are attacked intolerantly, and the acts of very few are attributed by implication to many. The attack on Charlie Hebdo fits perfectly into that picture.

Dickey's reasoning recapitulated:

- The question always to be asked after a terrorist attack is committed is *cui bono*? Who benefits? In this case, the French are not following that logic, because they are blaming “Muslim radicals” as the “obvious suspects” (implied contemptuous curl of Dickey's upper lip). But Dickey knows it is not Muslims who benefit from these attacks.
- The people who benefit are “right-wing politicians,” for “they ride the wave of that anti-Muslim intolerance.” Because these “right-wing politicians” and “islamophobes” stand to benefit the most, don't discount the distinct possibility that they are the ones most likely to be behind these attacks that everyone is so busy blaming on inoffensive Muslims.
- We should be worrying not about Muslim terrorists, but about those who, after every terrorist attack, whip up completely unjustified anti-Muslim sentiments to further their own intolerant ends. They are the true danger to European society.

When the second attack on Charlie Hebdo came, with the murders of twelve of its staff, and the swift locating and killing of Said and Cherif Kouachi, Dickey did not this time dare to deny that Muslims were responsible, or attempt to suggest that “right-wing politicians” might have been behind the attack. But in reporting on the Charlie Hebdo attack, he managed to include in his report references to “anti-Muslim sentiment [that] has been on the rise throughout Europe,” including “anti-Islam rallies in Dresden” and mosques being “burned” in Sweden (no mosques were burned down in Sweden, though there were three cases involving the tossing of burning brands) and legislation in the U.K. that “would require kindergarten teachers to monitor potential radicalization among their students” (no such legislation was ever proposed).

Dickey claimed that Europe had always “righted itself” after terrorist attacks

(Baader-Meinhof, the Red Brigades) in the past, by “refusing to succumb to hysteria.” His implication was clear: Europe’s main worry now ought to be its “succumbing” to the “hysteria” directed at Muslims, with Dickey’s vivid imagination conjuring up these Nurembergesque anti-Islam rallies, this Kristallnachtish burning down of mosques, this thought-police monitoring of five-year-olds. Something terrible was happening in Europe as a reaction to these terror attacks, and it all had to do, according to Dickey, not with growing fears for the public’s security, but with the growing intolerance – that “xenophobia and islamophobia” – of non-Muslims.

It is Christopher Dickey who long ago succumbed to his own hysteria. It is he who has suggested we might blame “right-wing politicians” for attacks that later turned out to be by Muslims, that furthered their “right-wing” agenda. It is he who greatly exaggerated and deplored the “anti-Muslim sentiment” he finds in Europe, while he cannot allow himself to recognize a single reason that might justify that sentiment, though there are more than 28,050 such reasons available to him: the number of Muslim terrorist attacks that have been recorded since 9/11/2001. “Europe has suffered terrorism many times before, and always righted itself, refusing to succumb to hysteria. But the risk of radical overreaction to radical terror looms as large today, or larger, than at any time in the past.” Is it the “risk of radical overreaction” that is “larger than at any time in the past,” or is it, rather, the risk of Muslim terrorism that is “larger than at any time in the past,” in Paris and Brussels and everywhere else in Europe where ISIS, we have now learned, has managed to deploy its bezonians? When, in Brussels, the March Against Fear had to be cancelled because the government feared it might prompt another Muslim attack, was that an example of “overreaction”?

What, for Christopher Dickey, constitutes “radical overreaction”? Does he think that border controls in wide-open Schengenland have now become too strict? Has he noticed raids on mosques at midnight? Rounding-up of Muslims en masse? Gestapo knocks in the night? Has a single European leader – other than the much-maligned truth-tellers Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen, always presented by Dickey and other *bien-pensants* as beyond the pale – even dared to affix the epithet “Muslim” to the noun “terrorists”? Haven’t they all stuck to the same script, the one Cameron read from this Easter:

When terrorists try to destroy our way of life, as they have tried to do again

so despicably in Brussels this week, we must stand together and show that we will never be cowed by terror. We must defeat the pernicious ideology that is the root cause of this terrorism by standing up proudly for our values and our way of life.

So who are these terrorists, what is this “pernicious ideology” whose name we dare not speak that is the “root cause” of all this terrorism? If it is “our way of life” they want to destroy, then what “way of life” do they favor, and where, in what texts, might one find the rules and regulations of that way of life? Is it possible that reading the Qur’an and Hadith might be of help? Or would suggesting that be a sign of “anti-Muslim intolerance” and a “succumbing to hysteria”? When every government in Europe hastens after every attack to assure people that they should “stand together” (meaning that non-Muslims should continue to take part in the collective prefabricated farce and pretend that the Muslims in their midst give them no cause for alarm), have they “succumbed to anti-Muslim hysteria”? When the Prime Minister of France, just a few days after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, declared that “Muslims are the first victims of fanaticism, fundamentalism, and intolerance” and the same sentiment is repeated in the capitals of Europe again and again, with European leaders always bending over backwards to reassure the Muslims who ought to be reassuring them, does that constitute “anti-Muslim hysteria”? And one last question: did Europe “succumb to anti-Muslim hysteria” by admitting more than a million Muslim migrants and refugees in just the last year?

Christopher Dickey need not answer all of these questions. But perhaps, if he can find the time between outrunning that tsunami of anti-Muslim hatred that still has yet to roll in, and warning us about all the right-wing politicians in Europe exploiting those terror attacks on “our way of life” to further their xenophobic and islamophobic and “right-wing” agenda, he could try to answer for us at least that last one.

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