

Islamophilia: A Threat Towards Combating Islamophobia

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Abstract

This article will attempt to provide a clearer image of the entire discourse surrounding Islamophobia, its relationships with literature, and the imminent peril society faces in attempting to eradicate this pervasive problem. I will start by discussing the history of Islamophobia, including its origins and evolution over the past millennia. In this section, I go beyond the modern interpretation of Islamophobia by contrasting the origins of anti-Muslim intolerance, the relationships between Muslim and Christian kingdoms, and the effect this has had on contemporary views of Muslims. Then, I conduct a similar analysis concentrating on the history of Islamophilia, the positive outlook towards Muslims and their culture, and a new emerging interpretation of the term that may be crucial for altering the future narrative of Islamophobia. I discuss the coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews under various rules and how mutual respect between cultures has contributed to the tranquility of the time. I continue my argument by discussing the numerous and divergent interpretations of the concepts of Islamophobia and Islamophilia, as well as how it is crucial for us to comprehend them because they influence our perception of academic literature. In conclusion, I conduct a comprehensive analysis of the major obstacles facing anti-Islamophobia initiatives, focusing primarily on the complexities of addressing it, such as attitude-based versus systemic Islamophobia, simplified complex representation, and the conflict of ignorance between Muslims and non-Muslims. I propose that, despite its complexity, efforts to combat

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Islamophobia must begin with education for all, and that change is possible as long as we are aware of where and how improvements must be made to be effective. This reading will be useful for everyone, whether they are social science researchers, students, or members of the general public; not only to close the information gap regarding Muslims, but also to encourage a rethinking of Islamophobia, calling for more effective actions by the public and policymakers against this common enemy of discrimination and extremism.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Islamophilia, Radicalism, Deradicalization, Recidivism.

“The best way in curbing extremism for both Muslim and Non-Muslim is by having no Muslims in Western countries and vice versa”

Source: Author.

1. Introduction

Conflicts between various parties continue to occur in every region of the globe despite centuries of technological advancements and the ever-shrinking borders between nations as a result of globalisation. This essay will concentrate on Islam and the difficulties its adherents confront as a result of Islamophobia. Islamophobia, or what is commonly understood to be discrimination against Muslims, has been a very important topic of discussion in the social sciences, including politics, sociology, and many others, and justifiably so, given the issue's enormous influence on mass media and daily interactions. Muslims around the globe, particularly in the West, report racial and religious assaults in various sectors, including education, careers, and in extreme cases, violent attacks. It is common for Muslims to be viewed negatively with remarks insinuating that they are all inherently dangerous, susceptible to becoming terrorists, and that women are oppressed. Clearly, categorising a group of 2.01 billion people based on the less than 1% of them being categorised as terrorists is not only morally incorrect but also poses a significant problem for everyone, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Moreover, a common misconception is that Islamophobia stems from the fear of terrorist attacks, with the attacks of September 11, being the most prominent reference point; in reality, it has roots in racial-based attacks and the historical relationships between Christianity and Islam, the two largest religions by population. Decades of interfaith dialogue, Muslim solidarity events, and policy change advocacy have been ineffective in addressing the negative perceptions and widespread dread of Muslims, despite the efforts of spokespeople

from around the globe. This would be the result of the information divide that exists not only between non-Muslims, but also Muslims themselves who lack a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand and are caught in this exhaustion trap—a result of respectability or Good Muslim Politics.

2. The history of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is the collection of negative attitudes and beliefs towards Islam and Muslims, such as stereotypes, misinformation, and ignorance, which can lead to prejudice and hate crimes. Contrary to popular belief, the use of this term is relatively recent, dating back to the 1920s or 1980s (Allen and Firestone, 2010). Even though the term «Islamophobia» was not coined after the September 11 attacks, it is widely held and dangerously so. This event has demonstrated in virtually all discourse on Islamophobia that it is central and has propelled its utilisation to the present day (Alsultany, 2013). Others contend that before the 20th century, it was not Islamophobia but rather anti-Muslim sentiment (Firestone, 2010). As with anti-Semitism, it is undeniable that historical associations have played a significant role in shaping dread and loathing of Muslims. Islamophobia is rooted in anti-Orientalist bigotry, or the general dread of a distinct culture from foreign regions (McGinty, 2012). Orientalism is the general depiction or notion held by Western civilization throughout history of Middle Eastern and Asian communities as exotic or primitive and in need of European rescue or liberation (Staughton, 2020). This impression would be the result of a lack of communication between the East and West and would be based on the accounts of merchants who can only speak from their own experiences. During the preachings of the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), anti-Islamic sentiments were promptly met with opposition by Meccan tribes due to the prospect of polytheistic pilgrimage to the Kaaba (Firestone, 2010). As Islam expanded westward, the Catholic Christian kingdoms viewed this as a threat to their beliefs because it contradicted their own teachings that their success is the result of God's help. However, this connotation is not unique to Islam; Christians endured comparable persecution during the Roman Empire. It is inherent to the human condition to fear or at least be sceptical of change or the possibility that it will result in distress or aggregation. The desire for conquest to convert people was of the utmost importance to both Muslims and Christians, as the success of their kingdoms was also a reflection tool to indicate that God was on their side, resulting in increased stigmatisation from both of the groups (Firestone, 2010). This resulted in the explosive growth of Christian

literature containing anti-Islamic narratives, such as the portrayal of the prophet Muhammad and his teachings as threats to Christianity, thereby further sowing the seeds of enmity (Firestone, 2010). Although there have been other conflicts throughout history that posed a threat to the Catholic Church, no civilization has posed as much of a threat as the Muslim civilisation because of their massive success not only in war but also in science, mathematics, medicine, and art, which poses a direct challenge to the clergy's faith in God (Firestone, 2010).

Christians, Muslims, and even Jews have coexisted successfully in various mediaeval societies, such as the Al-Andalus civilisation under the Umayyad Caliphate and the Iberian Kingdom of Castile, when discussing coexistence. (O'Brian and Zgourides, 2017) Both Christian and Muslim societies experienced a period of stability that resulted in the development of trade and the exchange of knowledge in various disciplines, such as art and science, which were sought after by scholars worldwide. As individuals admired each other's cultures, we can observe historical estimates of Christian and Muslim name adoptions and interfaith dialogue (O'Brian & Zgourides, 2017). Due to their coexistence, it is possible to conclude that anti-Muslim sentiments were not prevalent during these periods. During these rules, there was no large-scale genocide, but there was prejudice against various religions, which manifested in racial slurs and physical assaults. Racial stigmas were never completely eradicated, but they were «tamed» or under control during times of social and economic stability, analogous to a «timed bomb» that can be detonated in times of frustration or disappointment, as seen in the Reconquista, which led to the fall of Islamic Spain (Firestone, 2010; O'Brian, and Zgourides, 2017). In response to pressure from the Church and the Pope, monarchs such as King Edward IV called for the «cleansing» of their non-Christian subjects, which included forced baptism, torture, and exile (O'Brian and Zgourides, 2017). In the 15th century, the world witnessed the forced and voluntary exodus of approximately 3 million Muslims from Spain and Portugal over the course of just over three years, thus transitioning away from the relatively nonviolent approach previously held. In order to liberate the sacred city of Jerusalem in the name of the Catholic Church, the Knights Templar also participated in numerous Crusades that resulted in violent confrontations with the Islamic community (Othman, 2014). Years later, when the Ottoman Empire rose to power, a similar process of persecution towards Muslims was also evident, albeit to a much diminished degree, demonstrating that anti-Muslim bigotry has never truly vanished, but rather been controlled or not during periods of stability and instability.

There are contradictory sources and claims regarding the origin of the term Islamophobia, such as the 1925 article «Accès de délire islamophobe» by Etienne Dinet and Slima Ben Ibrahim or the Mullah's description of non-hijabi women adherents during the Iranian revolution (Allen, 2010). However, if we limit our attention to the origins of Islamophobia as the fear of Islam among non-Muslims, we can trace it back to the issue of ethnic segregation in Britain. Following the mass migrations of predominantly South Asian communities in the 1980s, the majority of migrants retained their country-of-origin-based identities but soon adopted a British Muslim identity (Allen, 2010). Despite a growing cry for awareness of racial abuse and stereotypes, which resulted in laws against ethnically-based attacks, there was no true protection for inter-ethnic identities. This created a loophole for attacks on religion, and British Muslims became victims of this anomaly, which normalised hostility against them (Allen, 2010).

Then, on September 11, 2001, the calamity of the devastation of the World Trade Centre occurred, resulting in an ongoing period of scepticism and discrimination against Muslims and their culture. In the years that followed, there was a rise in coverage of terrorist attacks linked to Islam, such as ISIS operations in the Middle East, Osama bin Laden's attacks, and the murder at Charlie Hebdo (Alsultany, 2013). This subsequently prompted the well-known but hardly conclusive debate over the suitability of Islam in the West and George W. Bush's War on Terror. In retaliation, Muslims around the world were subjected to severe prejudice in schools, workplaces, and health institutions, leading to violent and nonviolent assaults on this religious minority in the West. In retaliation, numerous works, both for and against its practise, have been published on various platforms, such as academic journals and television news reports, in the hopes of educating the general public about the peace of Islam and, eventually, ending Islamophobia.

Islamophobia has been primarily the result of ethnic and xenophobic stereotypes and has rarely involved the discourse of the religion's teachings, as is evident from the outset. As a result, Islamophobia is the result of centuries of accumulated resentment from the limited integration between both religious groups and the fear of change in their society, despite the fact that change has always been constant and terrorist attacks have never been its source.

3. The history of Islamophilia

Islamophilia is not as prevalent in academic literature as Islamophobia and its meaning has not changed significantly. Contemporary Islamophilia is commonly understood to be a fascination with and reverence for the progress brought about by the religion of Islam. Its meanings are contingent on the author's or user's intention, despite the fact that academicians are still unable to agree on its precise meaning. Such admiration for Islam is prevalent throughout all of history, but we have seen eras where Islamophilia was dominant and, consequently, as I would argue later on, leading to a reduction in Islamophobia.

As many scholars would concur, the Islamic Golden Age during the Umayyad Caliphate (9th–14th century) was the zenith of reverence for Islam. Despite the fact that these were times of war and intense competition for religious dominance (the Reconquista and the Crusades), the achievements of Islamic scholars in various fields such as philosophy and medicine captivated Christian intellectuals, leading them to seek knowledge in these Islamic societies (O'Brian and Zgourides, 2017). As a result of the collision between Eastern and Western cultures, traders and academicians of various ethnicities and religions interacted with one another in search of new business and academic opportunities. It was believed at the time that the Christian Kingdoms were technologically inferior to the Muslim Kingdoms; consequently, many Christian scholars sought out knowledge from their Muslim neighbours and incorporated it back home (Al-Hassan and El-Gomati, 2006). During Islamic rule, acquiring Arabic was viewed as advantageous because it gave non-Muslims access to highly sought-after Greek and Latin literature. The relatively «good» treatment of non-Muslims as guests and the respect for their culture, such as hosting non-Islamic literature and allowing their philosophy and mathematics to be contemplated by non-Arabs, were viewed favourably by Western tourists (O'Brian and Zgourides, 2017). Consequently, during this period of increased trade and globalisation, scholars and students of the Abrahamic faiths engaged in a novel exchange of knowledge that resulted in the translation of their religious literature into their respective languages and promoted interfaith understanding (Kusi-Obodum, 2017). Instances of this nature include accounts of the personal experiences of Juan de Segovia of Castile and his efforts to comprehend Islam as a result of his enslavement to the Islamic religion (Wolf, 2020). As argued in the preceding section, although Islamophobia had always existed to a reduced extent under this Islamic rule, the positive perception that non-Muslims had of Muslims and their culture played a crucial role in preserving peace and order in the region. These so-called Islamophiles facilitated open discussion, dialogue, and

cultural assimilation (Kusi-Obodum, 2017). Scientific and mathematical discoveries advanced due to the exchange of knowledge and art. Note that such accomplishments were possible even during periods when monarchs and religious leaders, both Christians and Muslims, prohibited religious discourse. In a time when religious dialogue can occur anywhere and at any moment, Islamophilia can and should spread rapidly, but this is not the case.

The Emir-Stein Centre, which studies and promotes Islamic literature and its contribution to the West, has resulted in more positive discussions about the compatibility of Islam in the West (Emir-Stein, n.d.). Although to a reduced extent, admiration for Islam can also be observed today, where institutions such as the Emir-Stein Centre that study and promote Islamic literature and its contribution to the West have led to such discussions. The recognition of Islam's culture and teachings has generally been met with approval by its adherents, and it facilitates a more civilised discussion that is not motivated by emotive backlash. It has also led to less discriminatory policies in society, such as when Americans of all faiths united to protest the «Muslim Ban» imposed by the Trump administration (The White House, 2021). The eventual revocation of that executive order by the Joe Biden administration was influenced by pressures from individuals and organisations from around the globe (The White House, 2021). During the Christchurch mosque shootings, New Zealanders joined together to advocate interfaith dialogue and the wearing of the hijab, demonstrating that there is no distinction between them (ABC News, 2019). This appreciation for Muslims and their culture has improved social interactions and promoted a positive image of Islam and the inherent dangers posed by untreated Islamophobia. There is a widespread perception that Islam contributes positively to society, which has facilitated greater tolerance and coexistence between people of different faiths.

Islamophilia is increasingly understood as an excessive affection for Islam and its culture without a solid comprehension of its diversity and doctrines. Some academics and the general public have advocated for this viewpoint, expressing grave concern for the «special» or «tamed» treatment Muslims receive for their practises (Sky News Australia, 2022). Right-wing ultranationalists who oppose the immigration of non-Europeans to their country benefit from this narrative because they are able to refute claims of racial abuse against Muslims, thereby advancing their agenda for a country free of immigrants. Richard Landes, an eminent author on Islamophobia and Israel-Palestine relations, defines the term as the «ignorant romanticization of Islam» (Middle East Forum, 2021). This implies a lack of understanding or even support for Islamic beliefs.

In an interview with Middle East Forum, he defines Islamophilia as the fear of being labelled Islamophobic, which restricts criticism of Islam (Middle East Forum, 2021). This, he argues, is particularly perilous in academic writings, where authors are forced to adopt a submissive and uncritical stance towards everything Islamic (Middle East Forum, 2021).

Other authors, such as Ashraf Kunnumal and Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, disagree and assert that Islamophobia denial is on the rise in France and India (Kunnumal, 2022; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). Dismissing anti-Islamophobic writings and publications as not a real threat, but rather as a threat to national ideals, is Islamophobic in nature and ignores the discrimination that is currently occurring (Kunnumal, 2022). In the future decades, as Islam becomes more pervasive in Western culture and Westerners are pressured to counter this imminent «threat,» the term's usage could increase dramatically. When discussing Islamophilia, we cannot ignore Islamophobia, as the two terms are intricately intertwined, and only by addressing both will we be able to address the issue at its foundation. As a result of this admiration for Islam, not only did Muslims benefit from its improved image, but society as a whole operated with less prejudice, and racial and religious-based offences were not as prevalent as they are now. In the near future, it is likely that literature will be more susceptible to this negative view of Islamophilia, which will result in a number of hazards that will be discussed below. Despite the fact that the negative connotation of Islamophilia is not currently prevalent in the literature, I believe it is imperative to address its threats, as it is creating a narrative that shifts the emphasis from the positive contributions made by Islam to various sectors of a working community to that of a justification for extreme behaviour.

4. The clash and connection of the two concepts

Due to the negative connotations associated with Islamophobia and Islamophilia, the discourse surrounding these terms becomes convoluted. Islamophobia, for instance, is associated with two similar yet distinct definitions: the general dread of Islam and its principles and the fear of Muslims and their culture (Shryock, 2010). It is essential to have a thorough comprehension of their distinctions because a misunderstanding of the causes of these issues will lead to ineffective solutions. The fear of Islam and its principles refers to a phobia of their teachings and beliefs and is commonly associated with the belief that Islamic beliefs challenge the principles of the West and are therefore incompatible with Western beliefs (Shryock, 2010). I would contend that such archetypes are less harmful because such Islamophobes do

not merely judge individuals based on their physical appearance and are much more likely to engage in dialogue with religious scholars. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Islamophobic attacks are much more closely related to ethnic and xenophobic attacks and are not inherently connected to specific Islamic teachings (Salaita, 2006). This is the consequence of centuries of animosity rooted in history for the dangers posed by these «barbaric» individuals. The mere sight of individuals donning Middle Eastern attire or having a particular skin tone may incite Islamophobes to hatred. In addition, it is unlikely that a person would adhere to one interpretation in the absence of another; the phobia of Islam would ordinarily lead to the phobia of its adherents. Addressing these types of issues would necessitate a greater emphasis on racial inclusivity and cultural tolerance. There is a generally accepted definition of Islamophobia, and the majority of the population recognises that it is a pejorative term associated with discriminatory and oppressive treatment of Muslims.

When discussing Islamophilia, the issue is arguably much more complicated, as the spectrums at each extremity are so extreme that they can be characterised as both positive and negative towards Islam, Muslims, and society as a whole. As discussed in the preceding historical section, it is believed that Islamophiles are those who venerate Islam and its achievements, which were primarily prevalent during the Islamic Golden Age (O'Brian and Zgourides, 2017). Maintaining this perception of Islamophilia contributes significantly to the case against Islamophobia and to efforts to end it. It is believed that Islamophilia promotes the embrace of the positive aspects of various religions and cultures, resulting in respectful dialogue between them. If non-Muslims and the West in particular are able to accept Muslims as a group with distinct customs and practises that do not constitute a threat to their own cultures, Muslims will experience less prejudice. Unfortunately, the current discourse has shifted away from this perspective and now carries a rather negative connotation, such that Islam is romanticised without a firm grasp of its beliefs and diversity (Middle East Forum, 2021). This perspective on Islamophilia stems from the perception that criticism of Islam is accorded a rather special status in academic literature and among the general public. British policymaker Douglas Murray applauds this viewpoint in his interview with Tom Bollard on ABC TV, in which he discusses how «different rules» apply to Islam and how this directly threatens the freedom of speech upheld in the UK (Sky News Australia, 2022). Prof. Richard Landes extends the negative connotations of Islamophilia to include the demonization of Christianity and Western cultures, asserting categorically that admiration for Islam will lead to the destruction of the Christian world, which is a position that is simply

false (Middle East Forum, 2021). According to Richard Landes (Middle East Forum, 2021) this «Islamophilia industry» threatens the Western tradition of free expression. It normalises Islamophobia and promotes the notion that the West cannot embrace Islam for its diversity and has the right to send Muslims away by force if necessary. This could bolster the perception that accepting Islamic values is a cowardly act and that the West must stand up to these divergent values. Such an approach would be Islamophobic in and of itself, as all religions have distinct cultures and traditions, but Islam is singled out in the normalisation of condemning racial and religious assaults on Muslims.

Although, in a sense, there is a trend of leaders, policymakers, and individuals arguing that freedom of expression is permitted but a distinct standard applies to Islam, clinging to this definition is problematic because it undermines the past literature against Islamophobia. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that, just as different rules govern criticism of Islam, different rules govern discrimination against Islam. Islam is portrayed negatively more than any other religion, making its adherents much more susceptible to social prejudice and racial attacks; brown Muslim refugees are less likely to be accepted than white European refugees; and anti-Semitism is a much bigger taboo than anti-Islam issues, making Islamophobia a complex issue that must be addressed as explained in the following section (Home Office UK, 2019).

It must be made clear that it is not the definition of the term Islamophilia that is harmful, but how it is used in future literature, due to the enormous influence it has on the discourse of Islamophobia. It is of the utmost importance that the general public understands these various definitions as well as the growing «Islamophilia industry» that can be weaponized to discredit previous literature, as it can drastically alter the global reaction and interaction with Islam and its adherents. Accepting that Islamophilia is and will be increasingly associated with this negative connotation, the academic literature will face the following threats and challenges.

5. Challenges/threats in tackling the issues

Complication of Issue

As previously discussed, Islamophobia is a very complex issue that involves a broad variety of parties and has profound roots in historical events and the interaction between Islam and other religions over time. Years-long efforts to surmount Islamophobia have resulted in enormous

investments in forum discussions, bilateral relations between various countries, and publications defending the position of Islam in the West. House of Commons reports indicate that Islam and Jews have been the primary targets of hate crimes since 2016 (Allen and Zayed, 2022). Muslims in England and Wales experienced a 42% increase in hate crimes, which is disproportionately high given the small percentage of Muslims living there (Allen and Zayed, 2021). However, this trend is not exclusive to Muslims; antisemitic assaults are also on the rise, as evidenced by the steady increase of total hate crimes over time (Allen and Zayed, 2022). Anti-Muslim rhetoric has not only stagnated but also grown steadily, despite the fact that liberal movements have led to an increase in policy change and public outcry for inclusiveness. This coincides with Europe's swiftly expanding right-wing movements. Ultranationalist far-right movements, such as those in Poland, Italy, and Ukraine, pose a threat to past efforts to combat Islamophobia as the narrative of white supremacy and defending Christianity in the West assumes centre stage (VICE, 2021; Strickland, 2018). Therefore, it is fair to say that Islamophobia cannot be resolved by simply preaching the «true» message of Islam; it will require a significantly more in-depth strategy that addresses the fundamental causes of the problem.

Attitudinal vs. Systemic Islamophobia

Previously, we discussed the various forms of Islamophobia and recognised that its origins are deeply rooted in bigotry and centuries of inculcated animosity. Prof. Dr. Nazia Kazi's (TEDx Talks, 2016c) categorization of the two levels at which it occurs—attitude and systemic—requires that we address both. In her research, she sought to comprehend the Muslim perspective on Islamophobia beyond the simplistic defence that Islam is a religion of peace. She defines attitudinal Islamophobia as negative perceptions of Islam or Muslims participating in social interactions, such as the belief that women are oppressed and inherently extremist (TED Talks, 2016c). American Muslims have adopted a rather defensive stance towards Islamophobia, refuting that they are the same as terrorists and seeking to conform to this new American-appropriate Islam, also known as «good Muslim politics» (TEDx Talks, 2016c; Kazi, 2017). Despite their negative views on Islam, American politicians reinforce the notion that Muslims play a significant role and must continue to do so. This Islamophobia can be traced to the indoctrination of Islamic practises and the behaviour of individuals from non-Western civilisations, particularly Arabs. In *Reel Bad Arabs*, Jack Shaheen captures and compares Hollywood films, and he concludes that fewer than ten films have portrayed Arabs negatively since the 1930s (Shaheen, 2003). Such negative depictions include the sexualization of

Arab women's exoticism, which has now shifted towards the burqa as a symbol of oppression and Arab men as barbaric and stupid (Shaheen, 2003). As depicted in films such as the Disney classic *Aladdin*, where the introductory tune, «Arabian Nights,» asserts that barbaric practises are prevalent and native to the Middle East, such prejudice is also present in children's programming (Shaheen, 2003). The documentary illustrates how people all over the world, including Arabs, are fed this rather prejudiced presumption and normalises the demonization of Muslims and their practises. In response, Muslim spokespeople have been very active in their efforts to combat Islamophobia, which persists in the West. This politics of respectability proves to be perilous because Muslims are oblivious that, in an effort to demonstrate their contribution to the United States, they shift away from addressing the conditions that have led to inequality (Kazi, 2017).

As a result of Kazi's study interviewing Muslims, she has discovered that, when questioned about their frustration with the West, the majority of Muslims express a desire for better policies in conflicts occurring in the Middle East, rather than a simple desire for social acceptance (TEDx Talks, 2016c). Here, attempts to overcome Islamophobic assaults based on attitudes cannot solve the problem; instead, the «systemic» level of Islamophobia must be addressed (TEDx Talks, 2016c). When Muslims are asked why they do not advocate for such political change to address the root causes of Islamophobia, the fear of receiving backlash from the local government and community due to their precarious position as migrants in the West is cited (TEDx Talks, 2016c). It is possible to incorporate oneself into a strong government, but never challenge it. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of these imperialist systems, a speedy resolution to the Islamophobia problem is unlikely without strong critiques of the discriminatory framework adopted by Western governments. Continuously engaging in respectability politics is the ideal tactic for racism because it distracts the populace, rendering anti-Islamophobic efforts ineffective (TED Talks, 2016c). As a result, as long as Muslims continue to be subjected to racial attacks, it will continue to pose a significant security risk as it fosters animosity among extremists, who will conduct additional attacks out of frustration.

Media and Misinformation

The dissemination of information has long been central to shaping the public narrative and has proven effective in manipulating people's opinions over the years. Governments are able to maintain social stability by controlling and regulating public opinion and indoctrinating their citizens to support a particular policy or belief. To avoid social unrest

and the possibility of revolution, the majority of nations, particularly autocracies, exert tight control over the media and news outlets. Although the West is known for its free press, this does not guarantee the media's objectivity, as there will always be pro-left, pro-right, and centrist mass media with devoted audiences. Islamophobia and Islamophilia have been and will continue to be the subject of media propaganda to advance a particular narrative. Throughout the past several decades, Western media have portrayed Islam and Muslims in a predominantly negative light (Al-Azami, 2021). This is due to the almost assured media sensationalism that results from the use of Islamophobic terms, such as the imminent threat of the expanding Muslim population in the West and hijab, which captivate the attention of the majority of Western readers (Al-Azami, 2021). This supports and reinforces a Eurocentric perspective on the issue of Islamophobia, which is a significant issue.

However, not every publication portrays Muslims negatively. In recent years, there has been a rise in the visibility of decent Muslims who contribute positively to society, such as patriotic American Muslims or Muslims who have achieved success in education or their professions (Alsultany, 2013). Although on the surface this appears to be a positive shift away from the indoctrination of Muslims as bad and oppressed, as depicted in *Reel Bad Arabs*, when combined with the majority of negative representation in various media, it creates a confusing perception of Islamophobia (Alsultany, 2013). A belief that Islamophobia may not be a significant issue, which in actuality parallels the argument of respective and decent Muslim politics discussed in the preceding section (TEDx Talks, 2016c; Kazi, 2017).

The extensive definitions of the terms Islamophobia and Islamophilia are a significant issue, as there will be a conflict between the intended use of the terms by publishers and consumers' preconceived notions of these issues. Misrepresenting Islamophobia as a critique of its values would result in the unnecessary spread of animosity when such discussions of fundamental beliefs can be conducted for the exchange of knowledge. By accurately reporting Islamophobia as a form of racial-based assault and a consequence of incited animosity, users will be able to empathise with the unjust treatment of Muslims, which constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights. Using Islamophilia in a manner that minimises anti-Islamophobic statements and literature would only exacerbate the Islamophobia denial condition (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). This denial is problematic because it minimises the severity of mistreatment encountered by Muslims, making it more difficult to advance efforts to combat it, particularly at the systemic level, where public support is low (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020).

Further complicating the use of Islamophilia in public discourse is the extent to which it will be subject to social and mass media propaganda. In the current era, the public's narrative is no longer dominated by academic publications, but rather by discussions on social media platforms like Twitter and opinion articles on news websites. Today, anyone can publish their views and opinions online and present them as news or facts. Now, with social media platforms such as Twitter and Tik Tok, news and general opinion on matters related to Islamophobia are disseminated much more quickly and easily, making it nearly impossible to monitor such instances as millions of data points are processed every second (Hunt, Agarwal, and Zhuang, 2020). Islamophobes will be quick to use Islamophilia and this new negative narrative to rationalise racist statements and criticisms of Islam. As a result, it will be much more difficult to combat Islamophilia, as the concept will enter a somewhat ambiguous area where it will be difficult to classify criticism as either Islamophobic or Islamophilic. In addition, many reports of terrorism or extremism will be heavily influenced by misinformation and disinformation due to the fact that there are few requirements for publishing information to the public (Hunt, Agarwal, and Zhuang, 2020). Due to the need for swift information, a study demonstrates that consumers do not actually cross-check the information they obtain from media publications, particularly during disaster outbreaks (Hunt, Agarwal, and Zhuang, 2020). Such a result will only encourage the dissemination of inaccurate information, as unique and negative reports are more likely to acquire momentum among users, thereby advancing the publisher's desired agenda.

The Clash of Ignorance

In this final section of the article, I would like to emphasise one of, if not the sole, most significant barriers to addressing Islamophobia: the general public's ignorance. Thus far, we have discussed in depth the history of Islamophobia and Islamophilia, as well as their relationship. However, this is not the only publication on these issues; numerous academics and security analysts have attempted to raise awareness of the complexities of Islamophobia, but awareness, particularly in the West, remains extremely low. Marc Scarcelli and other security analysts have identified pervasive misconceptions about Islamophobia, such as its origins and the inherent threat that Islam poses to the West (TEDx Talks, 2016a). Due to their small population in the West and the false allegation that «normal Muslims» do nothing to combat terrorism, a large number of people are unaware of Islam's actual attack capability, which is actually quite low. In reality, the majority of terrorist attacks occur in the Middle East, where the majority of fatalities are Muslims, and Muslims are the most active in combating these threats (TEDx

Talks, 2016a). The risk of clinging to these misconceptions is that it will encourage more terrorist attacks and extremism, as their aim is to create the perception that the West cannot embrace Islam, thus justifying the need to combat them (TEDx Talks, 2016a). Dr Shafique Virani echoed the extent of this misconception amongst Americans and Europeans based on the negative reports on Muslims in news publications and the information gap on the Muslim world in the West (TEDx Talks, 2016c).

The denial of Islamophobia, which is pervasive in the West and, according to some, has its foundations in France (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020), poses a growing threat to public education initiatives. Islamophobia denial is the position held by those who believe that Islamophobia is false and that it is a plot by Muslims to diminish or illegitimately critique Islam, thereby undermining the foundations of French or Western culture regarding freedom of expression (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). Although these groups haven't always used the term «Islamophilia,» they have made efforts to reduce anti-Islamophobia campaigns over the past decade. Evidently, academic literature plays a significant role in shaping the narrative surrounding Islamophobia; thus, the introduction and use of this negative Islamophilia threaten to alter the narrative in favour of these extremist far-right groups. By upholding this new term, assaults against Islam and Muslims can be justified because they are deemed necessary for protecting the national and cultural integrity of their nation. Additionally, since it is not used with a solution in mind, the pejorative use of this term will only serve to further confound the discourse on this topic. Instead, it will result in a game of pointing fingers because no one is willing to accept responsibility for Islamophobia's origin. Such denials are heavily entrenched in racism denial and «white man guilt,» which view the accusation of racism as a grave moral offence and an absurd accusation. Not only is this a form of denial, but it is also a form of reverse racism, as they believe they are the victims of an agenda to vilify them, despite the fact that this is contrary to the reality of the situation (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020).

Such actions not only undermine activists' efforts to educate and bring about change, but also endanger their safety, as media outlets and the general public criticise and abandon their efforts (Alsultany, 2013). Due to the normalisation of Islamophobic assaults, Muslims and non-Muslims who actively participate in the battle against Islamophobia experience exhaustion and dread of public rejection (TEDx Talks, 2016b). Connoting that supporting Islam will automatically result in the decline of Western culture will only lead to further conflict between Islam and the West, as it leads back to the issue of respectability and good Muslim politics, where their efforts to combat discrimination fail (Kazi, 2017).

This will increase the number of echo chambers, as dialogue between the two parties will be rare. Both Muslims and Christians will remain in their respective communities, fostering further animosity and leaving the problem of Islamophobia unresolved. Social ignorance will reach unprecedented levels. Therefore, the contested boundaries between freedom of expression, religious separation, and religious freedom are central to the problem of Islamophobia. This necessitates clearer, more inclusive laws defining what constitutes free speech and what constitutes hate speech.

6. Islamophobia and Islamophilia: A Way Forward

So far, we have drawn upon the historical connotations of Islamophobia and Islamophilia and examined how the relationships between Islam and Christianity have impacted neo-Islamophobia. The conception of Islamophobia's origins from the September 11 attacks or terrorist attacks was debunked by drawing on how resistance towards Islam existed from the moment of its formation and was actually a natural process faced by any new faith at the time. The existence of anti-Muslim bigotry outside of war was also discussed in the cases of the Kingdom of Al-Andalus and the Kingdom of Castile, showing discrimination existed even in periods of "peace" and how the extent of discrimination was dependent on the stability of a society at a single time. Although the association of Islamophobia with terrorism was the result of the relatively new War on Terror, it proves to be a focal point in modern day discourse on the issue. Then, the origins of Islamophilia were presented through a historical lens and how it has resulted in positive interactions between Muslims, Christians, and Jews throughout time, drawing on their relationships during the Golden Age of Islam. The admiration of Islam and its culture during this time resulted in inter-faith understanding and the exchange of knowledge, maintaining order and peace. The rising interpretation of Islamophilia as excessive love for Islam will pose a threat to future literature as it can undermine anti-Islamophobic efforts. Understanding the wide interpretations of these two conceptions is important as it can help to address the information gap, consequently addressing the issues that were presented in the last section of this article. Understanding that Islamophobia is a problem of racial abuse and not simply the challenge of its practices changes the conception that Islam is incompatible with the West and that it is a result of a discriminatory system. Islamophobia is not getting "special" treatment and is not threatening Western freedom of speech, but it is crucial to be addressed due to the fact that Muslims do face the worst levels of discrimination and are the most susceptible to attacks.

By misrepresenting Islamophilia negatively, it will only add to the complexity of the issue at hand and extend the already large information gap that exists, which is why I argue that holding such views is only forwarding an anti-Muslim agenda. The problem of misinformation in news publications, filmographies, and mass media must also be acknowledged, as it is an important weapon used to control the public narrative in favour of a particular group. Simplified complex representation, an increasingly common practice on these platforms, must be addressed as it is dangerous for screening the severity of inequality that exists in reality. Wrapping up the discussion of Islamophobia's complexity, the severity of ignorance amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike is of utmost importance, as in the end, it is the people who bring about change. Turning a blind eye to such discriminatory practices only encourages more hatred in society, increasing the dangers of extremism and terrorist attacks. Islamophobia denial is an enemy to this effort to increase awareness, as it not only refutes the existence of this racism but also encourages the normalisation of doing so, reducing the threats faced by Muslims to mere hoaxes or myths.

Again, I emphasise that this article does not go in depth, drawing on specific case studies or the conceptions behind some theories presented, such as representability politics and the threats of growing right-wing ultranationalist movements. The goal of this article is to present the reader with inclusive writing that addresses the main issues surrounding Islamophobia. What I must reiterate is that Islamophobia is very real and that, as complex as it is, it does not necessarily entail complex solutions, and something as simple as education can be the answer. This education must cover areas such as the history behind Islamophobia, the need to address it at systemic levels, and anti-Muslim propaganda that threatens their efforts. Through this reading, readers should be able to understand the issue better as well as where the main misconception lies, suggesting the need for more involvement amongst Muslims and non-Muslims to combat this issue. By abolishing the "us vs. them" attitude that most ignorant Islamophobes hold on to, society as a whole, no matter their background, can come together and accept that this is not a discussion of the compatibility of Islam in the West but a question of combating discrimination and the desire to uphold humane values.

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