The growing phenomenon of Islamophobia in the West: its causes and targets

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Abstract

The phenomenon of Islamophobia has been increasingly pervasive in Western societies, manifesting through widespread prejudice, discrimination, and hostility towards Islam and its adherents. The research tries to explore its reasons and objectives. This growing trend can be attributed to several interrelated factors, including historical grievances, geopolitical conflicts, and the portrayal of Muslims in the media. Historically, the Crusades and colonial encounters sowed seeds of mistrust and enmity, which have been exacerbated by recent events such as the 9/11 attacks, the rise of extremist groups, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. These events have been sensationalized by the media, often depicting Islam as synonymous with terrorism and extremism, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes and fears. The primary targets of Islamophobia are ordinary Muslim citizens who face discrimination in various aspects of life, including employment, education, and social interactions. Muslim women, particularly those who wear visible symbols of their faith such as the hijab, are especially vulnerable to hate crimes and social exclusion. Additionally, Islamic places of worship and cultural centers have been targeted, further marginalizing Muslim communities.

Meaning of Phobia:

In the West, the term "Islamophobia" is commonly used to describe the fear of Islam and hatred towards Muslims. The term "phobia" is derived from "xenophobia," an ancient term that evolved into the neologism. Its Arabic meaning is "terror," indicating fear of everything. Phobia is a psychological disorder where the patient feels fear and anxiety when encountering anything unfamiliar. There are various types of phobias, such as acrophobia (fear of heights) and autophobia (fear of being alone). The term "phobia" has been applied to Islam for approximately 40-50 years, suggesting that Islam is perceived as a rigid and intolerant religion towards non-Muslims, rejecting concepts like equality, tolerance, human rights, and democracy. However, the widespread use of this term began after the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States.

Technical Definition of Phobia:
In the Oxford Dictionary, phobia is defined as fear, dread, and aversion, referring to a morbid mental state where fear or hatred is directed towards something. The Chambers Dictionary describes phobia as:
"A fear, aversion, or hatred, especially morbid and irrational."

Definitions of Islamophobia by Western Scholars:
They see Islam a monotheistic, rigid, and unchangeable religion. It is a unique religion with values different from other religions and cultures. It is an irrational, conservative, gender-discriminatory, dangerous, terrorist-promoting religion that promotes civilizational conflict. Islam is a political ideology that severely criticizes Western thought and culture.
According to the Runnymede Trust report, Islamophobia is defined as:
"An outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, resulting in exclusion and discrimination practices." [1]

American Author Stephen Schwartz's Definition:
Stephen Schwartz defines Islamophobia as condemning everything about Islam, portraying its history as violent, denying the existence of a moderate majority among Muslims, presenting Islam as a problem for the entire world, blaming Muslims for conflicts wherever they are involved, insisting on changing their religion, and waging wars against them.
"Islamophobia is the fear and hatred of Islam, Muslims, or Islamic culture. It can be characterized by the belief that all or most Muslims are religious fanatics, have violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and reject concepts such as equality, tolerance, and democracy."

History of Islamophobia in Europe:
Origin of the Term:
The formal use of the term "Islamophobia" first appeared in a report titled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us," published by the British organization Runnymede Trust in 1997. The commission's chairman, Professor Gordon Conway, noted that while the term gained widespread acceptance after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the concept predates the term itself. The fear and aversion towards Islam began when Islam started to spread, and enemies of Islam perceived it as a threat to their dominance and identity.

Early Instances of Islamophobia:
The earliest instance of Islamophobia can be traced back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when the leaders of Quraysh approached Abu Talib, saying, "O Abu Talib! Your nephew has cursed our gods, criticized our religion, made our wise men look foolish, and misled our ancestors. Either you stop him or do not stand between us and him."[2]

Historical Development:
This mindset continued to solidify over time, with anti-Islamic sentiments becoming more apparent. According to Karen Armstrong, the history of Islamophobia is linked to the Crusades, indicating that the Christian world's hatred and fear of Islam and Muslims have

been documented and preserved. Over time, these sentiments were used to serve various purposes, gaining strength and becoming more pronounced, especially after 9/11.[3]

Islamophobia During the Prophetic Era:
Hostility, fear, and hatred towards Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) began with his mission to spread the message of Islam. Enemies of Islam would reach any place where the Prophet preached and would falsely accuse him of being a soothsayer or poet, warning people not to listen to him.

Impact of the Prophet's Message:
The revolutionary message of Muhammad (PBUH) transformed customs, traditions, and thoughts, not just in Mecca but across the world. He taught the rights of the weak, ended oppression, and eliminated the exploitation of women prevalent in society at the time.

Reactions from Jews and Christians:
When the teachings of Islam began spreading in Mecca, enemies of Islam, including Jews and Christians, strongly opposed it. A hadith narrated by Tufayl bin Amr Dosi exemplifies this opposition. Before accepting Islam, he was warned by the Meccans about the Prophet's message, claiming that it had created division and chaos, fearing that Tufayl and his tribe might also be affected.[4]

Early Opposition:
As Islam began to gain more followers, two main forces emerged against it—one within the Arab region and one outside. The internal forces included the polytheists of Arabia, the Jews of Medina and its surroundings, and certain Christian tribes. The external forces were the Persian and Roman empires. The Jews in and around Medina, including the tribes of Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa, and Banu Qurayza, initially broke their covenants with the Prophet (PBUH) and opposed the Islamic call vehemently.
This historical overview highlights the deep-rooted and longstanding nature of Islamophobia, showing how it has evolved over centuries but continues to persist in various forms today.

Islamophobia After 9/11:
The hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims in Europe peaked at the end of the 20th century and intensified after the 9/11 attacks. Europeans began to perceive Islamic teachings and values as inferior to their own, leading to widespread criticism and discrimination against Islam and Muslims. This perspective fueled Europeans' desire to maintain dominance over Muslims, employing various tactics to oppose them.

Impact of 9/11:
On September 11, 2001, militants attacked the World Trade Center in the United States, an act that contradicts Islamic teachings. Following this, Western powers heavily criticized Islamic history, culture, and justice. Since then, attacks on Islamic schools, centers, and mosques have increased. In Europe, a recurring narrative emerged that Islam is a source of extremism. In March 2002, 25% of Americans held this view, which rose to 50% by 2014.

General Perception in Europe
In Europe, the atmosphere is such that anything related to Islam and Muslims is associated with extremism. Muslims living as minorities face constant scrutiny, their citizenship is questioned, and veiled women are subjected to suspicion. Islam is the most criticized religion, according to research by the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), which indicates that Muslims are the most targeted group for hate crimes.[5]

Discriminatory Treatment
In the West, if a Muslim commits a crime, the individual is scrutinized, and Islam is blamed. In contrast, if someone from another religion commits a mistake or crime, only the individual is criticized, not their religion.

Causes of Islamophobia
The causes of Islamophobia can fundamentally be divided into two categories:
1. Causes originating from the nature of Islam:
The various aspects of Europe's relationship with Islam are multifaceted, but the intensity of the damage in these relations increased significantly in the past two decades, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and after 9/11. Europe's enmity towards Islam became apparent. Religion was made the target of hostility because it is based on interpretations that can lead to condemnable actions such as terrorism and violence. If a deep insight is cast on contemporary European politics, it becomes evident that Islam is considered the greatest enemy in their view, and based on this perspective, positions are taken regarding Arab and other Islamic countries. If Europe attempted to destroy Islam and Muslims through the Crusades in ancient times, today it is launching attacks on Islam with new armies, new ideologies, and new targets.

The spread of Islam in European countries:
After 9/11, Islam began to spread significantly in European countries, surpassing Christianity for the first time. An American institution, the Pew Institute, issued a survey in 2010, selecting five European countries for a survey, focusing on three aspects: population, current Muslim population, and expected population growth in the coming two decades, which are as follows:

Number	Country	Total Population	Current Muslim Population	Expected Muslim Population
1.	America	37 million	3.5 million	8.1 million
2.	Russia	14.5 million	25 million	70 million
3.	Germany	82.7 million	4.6 million	5.9 million
4.	France	67 million	5 million	8.6 million
5.	Britain	66 million	3 million	6.5 million

The population was 1.6 billion, while the Christian population was 2.17 billion. If this proportion continued to increase, the Muslim population in European countries would be as follows by 2050:

Number	Country	Muslim Population in 2050	Percentage of Total Population
1.	France	8.6 million	12.7%
2.	Britain	6.5 million	9.7%
3.	Germany	5.9 million	8.7%
4.	Italy	6.3 million	8.3%
5.	Spain	1.8 million	4.6%
6.	Holland	1.5 million	9.1%
7.	Belgium	1.2 million	11.1%
8.	Sweden	1 million	11.1%

The increase in the Muslim population in European countries is not viewed favorably by their biased classes, as Muslims include not only the common people but also intellectuals and scholars.[6]

Contemporary Causes of the Rapid Spread of Islamophobia:
Misunderstanding and ignorance about Islam:
The fundamental reason for Islamophobia is not spreading misconceptions about Islam. Amnesty International published a 123-page report in 2012 titled "Choice and Discrimination against Muslims in Europe," which stated that prejudice against Muslims increased significantly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City. However, it was also clarified that prejudice against Muslims was not only related to 9/11 but had existed there for a long time. For example, most Europeans prefer not to have a Muslim family as their neighbor. The situation in Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Greece, Malta, Romania, and Finland is very severe. Negative opinions about Muslims have been expressed in public surveys. For example, 68% of respondents in France and 75% in Germany said that Muslims were not welcome in their society because they did not want to do so themselves. This report indicates how misinformation about Islam is spread, which becomes the cause of Islamophobia. Ignorance about Islam and Muslims is also a significant factor in Islamophobia.[7]
Former Pakistani Ambassador Aqil Nadeem writes in his article: "According to a survey, the majority of Americans do not know anything about Muslims or Islam. Only 38% of Americans have met a Muslim or know them personally. At least 62% of Americans have not met a Muslim or had the opportunity to talk to them."
This survey indicates how weak Muslims themselves are in terms of knowledge about Islamic preaching, so the proportion of awareness about Islam is extremely low.

Negative Role of Media:
A significant contributor to the spread of Islamophobia is Western media, which consistently presents negative propaganda against Islam and Muslims.
After 9/11, we are witnessing how the media has set a clear agenda, presenting incidents with exaggeration. In the reports of Western media, Islam is associated with terrorism. It keeps reminding British Muslims that if they are Muslims, then they must be terrorists. This is why, according to their European society, Islam poses a severe threat to existence.

There has been an 80% increase in anti-Islamic propaganda in major American news networks such as CNN and CBS, while Fox TV has recorded an increase of nearly 60%.

Increasing Muslim Population:
The increasing Muslim population is also a reason for Islamophobia, which makes Western powers apprehensive, and based on this, they fear that in the near future, Islam will emerge as the largest religion in the world, and with it, they also keep their people informed about the expected scenario.
"National Front leader in France frightens people by saying: 'Europe will not be Europe after some time; it will be transformed into an Islamic Republic. We are at a historic turning point, and if we do not protect our civilization at this opportunity, it will disappear from the scene."

Fear of Political Islam:
The fear of Islam's dominance in the political arena is also a significant cause of Islamophobia, as Western politics considers political Islam the biggest threat to its power. This is why non-political statements of Islam are supported through various means. During the construction of more than 150 mosques in Switzerland, the National Swiss Party, which has a majority in parliament, launched an organized campaign against the minarets of mosques. According to the party's claims, minarets of mosques are signs of political dominance of Muslims, based on which a public referendum was held in favor of the ban, with 85% of the public voting in favor of the ban.[8] The above measures taken against Islamophobia are currently challenging as a challenge to preaching.
Islamophobia aims fundamentally to obstruct the path of Islamic propagation so that firstly, the message of Islam doesn't reach others, and even if it does, it creates such an impact that people become fearful and refuse to accept it due to its negative aspects. Therefore, the Quran, Hadith, Prophet's biography, and Islamic culture are specifically targeted to achieve this goal.

The objectives of Islamophobia are as follows:
1. Objections to the Quran.
2. Objections to the Prophetic Hadiths.
3. Objections to the Prophet's biography.
4. Objections to Islamic culture.
5. Fragmenting Muslim unity and alliances.

1. Objections to the Quran:
Many orientalist scholars raise doubts about the Holy Quran. Some say that it is utterances of Muhammad ﷺ as Hamilton Gibb said.
Arthur Jeffery mentions that the Uthmani Mushaf (the standard copy of the Quran) was devoid of dots, diacritical marks, and vowel signs, so one reader might read a word as 'ya'lamo' while another as 'na'lamu'. Some even read it as 'ta'alamu'. This caused confusion, and the purpose behind it was to ensure that the recitations were dependent on tradition rather than the text itself.
Among those who object to the Quran, the name of George Sale also stands out. George Sale, in his work, writes about the Quran, affirming it with the Seal of the Prophets, Hazrat

Muhammad (peace be upon him), saying:

"The words have a tremendous impact on the present minds of the attendees. Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not unaware of this. That is why he only employed this method of expression in his divine inspirations to maintain his dignity and loftiness. He used all his abilities to maintain that solemnity and elegance which they attribute to his personality. He adopted a style consistent with the ancient prophetic style, which could harmonize with the style of the ancient scriptures, rather than ignoring other principles of rhetoric, and to such an extent succeeded in shaping the minds of his opponents that many of them attributed it to the effect of magic."

Arthur Jeffery introduces his readers to the Quran in his book with these words:

"The Quran is the Scripture of Islam, it is called the Noble Quran, The Glorious Quran, The Mightily Quran, but never the Holy Quran save by Modern, western educated Muslims who are imitating the title holy bible it contains the substance of Muhammad's (PBUH) deliverances during the twenty odd years of his public ministry. It is clear that he had been preparing a book for his community which would be for them what the Old Testament for the Christians, but he died before his book was ready, and what we have in the Quran is what his followers were able to gather after his death and issue as the corpus of this revelations."

The idea of W. Montgomery Watt:

The style of W. Montgomery Watt is completely unique; he tries to present the Quranic revelation as a reaction to the political, social, and economic conditions of Mecca at the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Sometimes he attributes the Quranic book to the imagination of Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him), and sometimes he tries to connect the Quranic book with the Old Testament and the New Testament; in all these things, he tries to show that his thoughts are not opposed to Islam.

Observe his style of thinking; he tries to prove that the Quran must have emerged from the conditions of Mecca during Muhammad's (peace be upon him) time. A new religion cannot come into being without a sufficient motive in the experience of Muhammad (peace be upon him), and his early followers; there must have been some need that was satisfied by the practices and doctrines of the embryonic religion."

2. Objection to Hadiths

In the present era, Islamophobes try to achieve their goals by objecting to collections of hadiths. In this regard, Arthur Jeffery writes:

"After the death of the Prophet ﷺ, the growing community of his followers felt that there were countless religious and social issues emerging for which there was no guidance in the Quran. Therefore, guidance on such issues was sought in the hadiths. Hadiths refer to those things that the Prophet ﷺ said in his own words or acted upon, as well as things said to be the Prophet's statements or actions, whether authentic, partially authentic, or fabricated hadiths were extensively compiled in hadith books. Six collections of hadiths are considered reliable. However, since most of the hadiths in the Sahih collections related to jurisprudential issues, it was necessary to rely on non-authenticated collections of hadiths for many other religious matters. But even for the study of Islam, the hadiths that Muslims themselves had cherished and attributed to Muhammad ﷺ were important.

Rather, some hadiths are sometimes given such importance as those that were truly attributed to the Prophet ﷺ. Montgomery Watt's statement:

"The plethora of hadiths has given Islam a new color. Muhammad ﷺ did not claim to have the power to perform miracles, but hundreds of hadiths show the miraculous deeds attributed to him. How he fed a crowd with barely enough food for one person, made rain fall with a prayer and stopped it with another prayer. He touched the udder of a barren camel and it started giving milk, touched the sick and they were healed, so it seems that many hadiths have been shaped under the influence of Christian teachings, instructing love for enemies, whereas Muhammad's ﷺ stance was harder, the concept of prayer before God was taken from the Bible, farming, wedding guests, and vineyard workers were represented by Muhammad ﷺ in his own words. In short, he was presented as the best Christian, despite having wives."

Authenticity of Hadiths:
To fully document the authenticity of the hadiths can be considered a result of al-Shafi'i's instructions, who were almost in line with Waki. When the practice of fully documenting the hadiths became common, it was the desire of the scholars to convey their knowledge to the companions of Muhammad ﷺ through the chain of narrations, whether they had to add it to their narrations. However, even such additions can be considered credible because they often knew where their predecessors obtained this information, which means that we can only rely on the last links of the chain of narrations and cannot rely on their initial links.

3.Objections to the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ:
The events of battles in the biography of the Prophet ﷺ are presented in such a way that it is suggested that the Prophet ﷺ waged various wars just to establish his power, like ordinary kings. Following this line of thought, the Jewish scholar Khyam Al-Marri writes in his tweet:

"The first century of the Hijra and the beginning of the second century of the Hijra provide as many authentic sources for Muhammad and Arab conquerors. These portray Muhammad as a bloodthirsty Arab."

Enemies of Islam exerted all their power on every such thing that apparently strengthened Islam the most. At that time, enemies of Islam launched countless attacks on the Seerah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ to make Muslims hate the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and adhere to the religion of Jews and Christians. Enemies of Islam established various assumptions to end the family lineage of the Holy Prophet ﷺ:

1. Firstly, they invented the belief of the relationship of the Holy Prophet ﷺ with Ismail, which was cherished by his followers.
2. Secondly, it is no matter of pride that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was from the lineage of Ismail himself, as he was the son of a woman from a tribe.
3. Thirdly, the tribes of Mecca had no importance in terms of family lineage of the Banu Hashim.

Opponents of Islam have made assumptions about the Prophet's ﷺ family lineage:
"The desire that the religion of Islam should be considered the progeny of the Prophet ﷺ and often that the Prophet ﷺ should be considered as born from the progeny of Ismail and often that the Prophet's lineage should be established from the progeny of Ismail. Is. Present ﷺ and

for this purpose, the initial series of his Abraham lineage was thrown and the stories of Ismail and the Israelites were put into the mold of a semi-Jewish and semi-Arab."

Montgomery Watt's argument:

"The reason for attributing the Holy Prophet ﷺ to the foster mother is to place his distribution in a certain context," he writes. "The fact that Muhammad ﷺ was born can be one of the reasons for attributing him to the foster mother," he writes. He also writes:

"The fact that the verse mentions that if you want to refer your children to the foster mother, you are not guilty of it, shows that there was criticism of this act by some circles and Muhammad ﷺ was aware of it."

He then draws a conclusion:

"Psychology teaches us the importance of the painful experience in the first two or three years of the life. The absence of a father must have produced a sense of deprivation in Muhammad (P), and the real experience of poverty as a young man may well have nourished the sense of deprivation."

4.Objection to Islamic Civilization:

Another target of Islamophobia to hinder the spread of Islam is Islamic civilization, which is presented in such an extremist manner that it cannot be harmonized with modern times. Therefore, staying away from such a civilization is indeed a greatness.

Regarding the clash of civilizations, the author S. P. Huntington says:

"The real issue for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism but Islam itself. It is a civilization that has its own separate culture, whose adherents are committed to the superiority of their own identity."

5.Breaking the Unity and Alliance of Muslims:

Lawrence Brown expresses his thoughts in some words on the subject of tarnishing the unity of Muslims: According to Lawrence Brown: "If Muslims unite as an Arab kingdom, then there is a high probability that they will become a curse or threat for the whole world. Or we can say that perhaps they will prove to be a great mercy or blessing for the whole world. But if they remain scattered and divided (as they are now), then they will not weight in the world and they cannot show any influence or effect."

So, we must continue efforts to keep Arabs and Muslims scattered and divided so that they remain engaged in living a life of failure and frustration without any kind of power and influence.

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