



Politics of Islamophobia in Western Society and its Socio-Cultural Implications

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Abstract:

The term “Islamophobia” refers to actions motivated by hate, hostility and prejudice towards any individual or group identity. It represents a new socio-cultural order in Western society that operates at cognitive, cultural and structural levels. Consequently, it has become common in the Western world to target Muslims based on race and religion. Islamophobia leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance, manifesting as threats, harassment and abuse towards Muslims in both online and offline contexts. Thus, the notion of Islamophobia is associated with discrimination against Muslims and has risen rapidly over the last three decades in Western society, largely through social media and other means. This issue is an intrusive element of contemporary multi-cultural Western society. In this discourse, Islam is symbolized as a “systemic problem,” which problematizes Muslims as a security threat to the socio-political and cultural continuity of Western society. Nonetheless, the West must remember that discrimination and unfair treatment towards Muslims will create fear among minorities, ultimately harming peace and harmony in society and perpetuating unending bigotry and intolerance.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Critical Discourse Analysis, Muslims, Islam, role of media, populism, multi-culturalism, peace and harmony

INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon; it has been influenced by various factors over several centuries but it has intensified in the last couple of decades, especially since the incident of 9/11 (2001) and the beginning of the global War on Terror. It is a new type of nationalism that is based on racist and xenophobic discourse and other forms of intolerance or hatred, including religious intolerance, which has become central to political dialogue in Western society. Moreover, it acknowledges the varying spheres in which Islamophobia exists, particularly in the political and socio-economic arenas. There are varying degrees of populist nationalism that sustain ideas targeting Muslims, often expressed in terms of religious and cultural inferiority (Gafu, 2019). In Western discourse regarding Islam, it is frequently combined with culture, race, ethnicity and religion (Mandaville, 2017). Therefore, hostility based on religious differences is arguably problematic to disengage from bigotry based on cultural and ethnic differences. Many scholars have attributed the fear of immigrants, specifically Islamic immigrants, as a contributing factor to Brexit (Roy, 2016).

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The term “Islamophobia” was coined in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, a British think tank on race and cultural diversity, to refer to an ‘unfounded hostility towards Islam’ (Runnymede Trust, 1997, 4). The report provided a comprehensive portrait of the various forms of anti-Muslim sentiment, which continue to have negative repercussions in society, particularly affecting the lives of Muslims. Thus, Islamophobia is commonly understood as a process of radicalization or homogenization of Muslims (Allen, 2010; Halliday, 2003; Sayyid & Vakil, 2010). Within academic disciplines, Islamophobia began to be theorized as both a concept and a field of inquiry to a greater extent in the social sciences. In geography, the term started to be used in the late 2000s (Hopkins, 2019).

Muslims faced discrimination in socio-cultural and geographical contexts, often referencing Muslim identities in different countries and regions as a minority (Dwyer, 1999; Falah & Nagel, 2012). In this regard, social and cultural geographers usually refer to Islamophobia as a form of systemic racism against Muslim populations and discrimination against people perceived as Muslim. Western perceptions often regard Islam as a racialized religion and, the process of racialization occurs through violence and discrimination directed toward visible signs of Islamic identity (e.g. beard, veils, mosques) (Dunn et al. 2007; Hopkins, 2004). Moreover, drawing on theories of intersectionality, this racialized dimension of Islamophobia is also gendered. Anti-veiling laws have significantly impacted young Muslim women who wear a head-scarves, more so than young Sikh or Jewish men who also wear turbans or a *kirpan*. Additionally, racist attacks and interpersonal aggression in public spaces tend to target visibly Muslim women (Gökariksel, & Secor, 2015).

With this background, the post 9/11 context has been accompanied by the conflation of Islam with terrorism, legislation against clothing associated with feminine Islamic piety (i.e. anti-headscarf and anti-‘burqa’ laws), as well as anti-immigration protests and xenophobia directed toward Muslim migrants, to name a few examples. Indeed, in Muslim-minority countries, we are witnessing the rise of openly anti-Muslim politicians and political parties. Anti-Muslim political discourse in the global North often revolves around the following tropes: Muslims come from ‘backward’ cultures and are foreigners who do not belong in Europe or North America; the Islamic veil oppresses passive Muslim women; and Muslim men are ‘terrorists’ (Katz, 2007; & Nagel, 2008). These narratives and policies, reflecting a long history of Orientalism (Said, 1978), are based on false analogies and cultural prejudices and impact the socio-spatial dimensions of Muslims’ lived experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamophobia is a concept based on racial and socio-cultural discrimination against Islam and Muslims. The study explores trends of Islamophobia in Western countries and focuses on core factors that contribute to Islamophobia as exploited by the media to demoralize Muslims in Western society. In this regard, the study reviews some Western countries, including Britain, Germany and America, where Islamophobia has fashionable and Muslims are victims of right wing hardliners. However, the study found that Islamophobia in the media has gained significant attention and requires further investigation to understand current trends and develop solutions. The study critically analyses Samuel P. Huntington’s theory of the “Clash of Civilizations,” which emerged in 1993, before the events of 2001 and his idea confirmed the issue of conflict particularly between Islam and other civilizations. Thus, Huntington was the first person to target Islam and its followers, defining the future clash as one between Muslims and Western civilizations.

Halliday (2003) and Allen (2010) referred to the post 9/11 scenario in which the US adopted an offensive policy and Hopkins (2019) described it as the worst situation for Muslims in Western society because they were targeted openly. Dwyer and Nagel (2012) identified the post 9/11 situation as critical for Muslims in terms of discrimination and discernment. Dunn (2007) and Hancock (2015) also characterized the situation as a new conception of Islam about racism within the context of 'frustration, anger and intolerance'. Todd H. Green (2015) and Johnson (2016) broadly explained that the situation was manageable, but it was mass media that encouraged anti-Muslim biases and Jews also helped the mass media to turn common people against Muslims. On the other hand, the media also presented European considerations of Jews as the 'internal enemy' and Muslims as the 'external enemy' (Anidjar, 2003).

In the same way, the study by Rosenberg (2022) has enhanced the understanding of Islamophobia, as other research has attempted to define Islamophobia purely as anti-Muslim in all dimensions. In fact, for fourteen centuries, Islamophobia has pertained to the intricacies of historical, economic and political realities. The contemporary scholarship recognizes 'Islamophobia' as an accepted form of racism, an amalgamation of race and religion (Nieuwkerk 2004; Werbner 2005; Meer & Noorani 2008; Modood 2009; Dunn et.al. 2007). Some Western writers perceive Islam as the religion of the sword, the prophet Muhammad as a violent person and the Quran as a book of theological gibberish, with roots in Medieval Europe (Kalin, 2005). Kalin (2005) define Islamophobia in terms of a 'theological and political threat to Christendom'. The study by Black and Ward (2022) associated with Islamophobia includes negative portrayals, structural bias and a lack of understanding of Islam, which contribute to anti-Muslim sentiment. The study also identifies stereotypes, such as Muslims being suspected of attacks, seen as a societal threat, labelled as "other" and women wearing headscarves being stigmatized as religious fanatics. It found that Islamophobia in the media has gained significant attention and requires further investigation to understand current trends and develop solutions.

The renowned scholars Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkin initiated a particular brand of atheism that attacked Islam through a rudimentary and inveterate fondness for controversy. This approach restored overt racism against Muslims and categorized them as a 'race' on religion, reinforcing prejudice and bias against Islam and its followers. Their arguments were deleterious race propaganda embedded in religious fears. Fulton (2004), in her essay, assessed the implications of Islamophobia in race relations across Europe. Nonetheless, scholars such as Roald et al. (2013) and Bunzl (2017) also defined Islamophobia as a fear or phobia directed against the religion of Islam and its followers, Muslims, as well as a campaign against Islam and Muslims stemming from this fear. Expressions of Islamophobia are built upon the majority's perceptions of the minority. Bunzl (2007), however, highlighted the similarities between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, identifying a common enemy for both Jews and Muslims in a right-wing Christian fundamentalism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative and analytical research. It depends on empirical methods to seek information about Islamophobia in Western society. Thus, qualitative research classifies, describes, compares and measures the causes and effect of events. Therefore, research is an art of scientific investigation that aims to gather more information. The nature of this research is qualitative in that

the facts must be recounted based on information obtained from primary and secondary sources. The research demonstrates that the current socio-political climate has magnified the stigma and discrimination that Muslims continue to face. Muslims are increasingly portrayed as villains and the study justifies the view that contemporary Muslims in Western countries are a marginalized group, often in need of support. However, the study must seek to incorporate and advocate for multi-cultural perspectives in theory, research and practice. In this regard, social science researchers and practitioners must recognize the multiplicity of factors that impact others and engage in the ongoing discussion about why Muslims are marginalized, stigmatized and misunderstood in European society.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

Muslims and Western people have been trapped in a cycle of misunderstanding, caught in a fourfold vicious cycle and there remains confusion in many areas of religion. The root causes of these misunderstandings and confrontations lie in both history and contemporary politics. Moreover, material issues and national interests have played a significant role in inter-group encounters and socio-cultural dissimilarities and have ultimately shaken the system in which these clashes are symbolized and conducted. In this way, ethically and culturally charged ideas shape the intellectual frameworks that alienated groups apply to their conflicts. These perceptions of difference also inform the nature of the relationship between Muslims and the West.

Historically, over the past fourteen centuries, the great power system has fluctuated at least twice between Eastern and Western power relations, characterized by mutual fear, imitation, dismissal and eventually a reluctant granting of legitimacy to another. The shifting power structures and civilizations from the Persian and Roman Empires to the Islamic Empires between the 7th to 13th centuries, followed by the Renaissance, Reformation and the transition from the Industrial revolution to modern technological advancements, serve as reminders of the intertwined histories of both sides. Moreover, sentiments regarding the Crusades remain strong and enduring among both Christians and Muslims. Historically, in the battle (1920) of Maissaloun, when the French General Henri Gouraud conquered Damascus (Syria), he famously visited the tomb of the Umayyad Mosque and declared, "Saladin, listen, we have returned" (Barr, 2012). The message was clear to Muslims: Islam has been a significant factor in shaping Western identity and continues to play a leading role in the relationship between the two communities, both as a "rival" and in a theological or ideological context.

The main factor in Muslim retaliation towards the West began to weaken following the Muslim loss of Spain in the 15th century and the subsequent decline of Ottoman influence over a large part of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, contemporary Muslims are aware of the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) and the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarja (1774), which marked the Ottomans' withdrawal from Europe and their diminished role in international politics as Christian empires redefined the contemporary world. During this time, many Muslim states struggled to establish political legitimacy and become subordinate in terms of nationality, ethnicity and territoriality to the bonds of religious solidarity. In this context, Middle Eastern states faced legitimacy issues in the post-colonial era, undermined by both longstanding Islamic affiliations and the competing ties of ethnic and national identities. Moreover, within the Muslim world, there are many types of perceptions about the West, leading to a multitude of images and associations. Consequently, socio-political confrontations have

intensified and the politics of identity in Western countries are often viewed as provocative and aggressive (Hobsbawm, 1996). Thus, competition between Islamic and Western civilizations is fundamentally rooted in geopolitical rivalries as well as in the politicized cultural legacies of the past. The concept of struggle between “Islamic civilization” and “the Western civilization” reflects a history marked by mutual suspicion and recrimination. The West frequently presents Islam through a crusading lens, with media often suggesting that the Muslim religion is based on the pursuit of domination.

However, the attacks of the September 11 (2001), had a profound impact on the political and cultural landscape of the United States, leading to widespread concerns about a powerful Muslim enemy that could destroy Western values and freedoms. According to Todd H. Green (2015), the fears surrounding an “Islamic threat” were not confined to the United States; Europe harboured similar fears. This threat was mainly perceived as targeting the security of the West, exacerbated by the growing number of Muslim refugees and immigrants (Green, 2015). On the other hand, Donald Trump particularly targeted Muslim immigrants and symbolically mentioned Mexicans. As a result, Muslims are often seen with suspicion and overt hostility, unable to speak for themselves to Western audiences and when they do speak, they are not heard (Johnson, 2016). Green argues that Muslims lack the power to control the public narrative surrounding Islam. Additionally, the media often dictate this narrative in the context of key affecting the Western world. Furthermore, the far right in the West perceives Islam – and by extension, Muslims— as the fundamental ‘other’ in Western societies. Far-right populists hold an intuitive opposition to Islam and immigrants from Muslim countries, viewing them as a threat to national values (Kallis, 2015; Rydgren, 2007). Nonetheless many moderates today believe that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of the main political challenges in the West. The development of these relationships and interactions significantly impacts social and political cohesion within these societies. If Islamophobia continues to escalate, it may lead to increased marginalization, discrimination and social isolation of Muslims.

Islamophobia: New Version of Anti-Semitism

Currently, “anti-Semitism” is not merely focused on one particular community, such as Jews, as a form of social prejudice; it can also be directed towards Muslims in Western societies, which is same as it was once with the Jewish community (Rosenberg, 2022). Thus, the term ‘anti-Semitism’ is no longer confined to Jews alone and it has become the subject of intense debate, as there is no universally accepted definition that exclusively highlights Jews. The definitions used by scholars are often working definitions tailored to specific research interests. For Jews, the term anti-Semitism is defined by the well-known Holocaust scholar Helen Fein, who explains it as a persistent latent structure of hostile beliefs towards the Jewish community as a collective, manifested in individual attitudes and expressed in culture through myth, ideology, and imagery, as well as actions. She also characterizes anti-Semitism with reference to social or legal discrimination against Jews, as well as collective or state violence aimed at destroying Jews as Jews’ (The Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism, 2022).

In this context, scholars have reached consensus that anti-Semitism is a racialized form of social prejudice in the Western world, specifically targeting Jews, who are identified by others as fundamentally different. They discuss the role of anti-Semitism in terms of the structural inequities

that underpin all other forms of bigotry and oppression. Historically, Jews were persecuted by tyrannical Western governments or by the directives of society's upper echelons (Rutledge 2001, 9-10). These persecutions manifested in daily acts that caused devastating, often fatal consequences, with Jews frequently being the primary targets of anti-religious hate crimes committed by Christians. Moreover, it is also evident that most of Western political literature and fiction defines anti-Semitism about Jews, describing it as "hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group" (Berenbaum, 2022). However, in contemporary time, the term anti-Semitism has also been used for Muslims, who are equally victims of hostility and hatred from Western societies. It is just a different manifestation of prejudice based on beliefs or behaviour towards Muslims. Scholars argue that this Western attitude is against the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), both of which condemn all kinds of "discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against any community." They believe that there should be no segregation based on caste, race and religion.

Thus, while anti-Semitism historically referred to perceptions of Jews, it can now similarly apply to Muslims, manifesting as hatred towards them. It might be rhetorical and physical forms of anti-Semitism that are directed specifically at Muslims or non-Christians (Black & Ward, 2022). Scholars define contemporary anti-Semitism as encompassing anti-Muslim beliefs, attitudes, actions or systemic conditions. This includes negative beliefs and feelings about Muslims, hostile behaviour directed against them and conditions that discriminate against Muslims, significantly impeding their ability to participate as equals in political, religious, cultural, economic, or social life (Ehsan, 2020). Conversely, the definition of "anti-Semitic acts" should not be used in an inflationary manner. The desecration of Christian or Jewish property sometimes occurs alongside attacks on Muslim shops, with neighbouring Catholic or Protestant shops also being damaged in such incidents. The Sikh community faces similar discrimination, often due to their visible religious practices, such as wearing beards, which is a religious obligation in many major faiths.

Moreover, traditional anti-Semitism, particularly 'after Auschwitz,' has become politically unacceptable, while animosity towards Muslims or Jews persists despite the Holocaust. As a result, anti-Semitism has been expressed through certain coded language referring to Jews in Israel or Muslims in Europe and America, as well as through comparisons suggesting that Jews in Israel are treating Palestinians in a manner akin to how Nazis treated Jews. In this regard, criticism by Muslims of Israeli policy does not necessarily equate to anti-Jews sentiment; rather, it can reflect broader opposition to anti-Zionism or specific criticisms of Benjamin Netanyahu's anti-Palestinian policies, which should not be perceived as anti-Jewish. Muslim scholars thus differentiate between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israeli policy or anti-Zionism as a political stance. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism can be tenuous, with many grey areas complicating the discourse. The people of the world, particularly Muslims, are concerned about Israel's war against innocent and unarmed Palestinians, who are victims of Israeli brutality and atrocities. Muslims perceive this an ethnic cleansing, which is not only discrimination but also anti-Semitism, necessitating a distinction between anti-Semitism and criticism of the Israeli government. While Israel may have grievances with HAMAS and should take action against the organization, but its actions to eliminate Palestinian people are unacceptable to the world. Further, the ongoing crisis has nothing to do with Islam or common Muslims; it is Israel and its leadership that are provoking the situation, often exhibiting a self-perceived Islamophobia that extends the

conflict in the Middle East. Although Muslim communities may identify with Palestine— as Jews do with Israel—this does not automatically lead to hatred or violent acts. Many scholars agree that Israel's actions against the Palestinians reflect both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which are forms of discrimination that cannot be ignored.

Jean-Paul Sartre once stated that an anti-Semite is someone who “is afraid of himself, of his conscience, of his freedom, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of loneliness, of change, of society and of the world.” He argued that hatred of Jews allows such a person to feel a sense of existence. Moreover, Sartre posits that anti-Semitism is the self-created phenomenon and cannot be compared with “ordinary racism,” as it has a distinct nature (Embacher & Rybak, 2015). This uniqueness makes it difficult to fully understand why some Jews react to anti-Semitic actions as they do. In this regard, the Israeli-Palestinian situation, along with the United States support for Israel, has exacerbated tensions and complicated the crisis. Muslims logically perceive anti-Semitic acts through this lens, often considering Israel and the United States as embodying the similar values policies (Bryan, 2003). Thus, legitimate democratic criticism of Israeli government policy can quickly escalate into an anti-Semitic attack.

Conversely, it is overly simplistic to label criticism of Israel attacks on Palestinians as “anti-Semitic.” This perspective overlooks the fact that unnecessary attacks come from HAMAS, while ordinary Palestinians are not responsible for these actions, which Israel perceives as self-defense in the context of killing innocent people without any sound reasons. Consequently, many people are critical of Israeli policy and consider it as anti-Semitic. It is definitely anti-Semitic when anti-Semitism manifests through stereotypes and claims of a Jewish conspiracy (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) 2003). It is also anti-Semitic to highlight disregarding the rights of Palestinian to exist. Asserting that Palestinians are collectively responsible for every action of HAMAS is illogical. However, there is a need of dialogue between religious communities for making progress, particularly to combat the circulation of erroneous representations of Islam as backward and hostile, which contradicts reality.

Western Islamophobia and Myth of Anti-Semitism

The events 9/11 (2001) and Israel's attack on Gaza in October 2023 have unprecedentedly provoked anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate speech, rooted in the extreme Islamophobia prevalent in Western countries, including America. The reality is that Muslims have faced surveillance and imprisonment, with fewer procedural safeguards against anti-Muslim legislation, leading to discriminatory and unconstitutional practices. Such actions not only infringe on Muslims freedom to practice their faith but also marginalize their engagements in civics society. While respect for human rights and the elimination of discrimination are essential features of the Western concept of peace and liberal democracy, it is regrettable that Western leaders often turn a blind eye to discrimination against Muslims. Consequently, they cannot genuinely claim adherence to their socio-cultural values while deliberately tolerating discrimination against Muslims and undermining their cherished principles of religious freedom.

Experts in international relations assert that the term of “Islamophobia” emerged in the early 1980s and gained prominence after 9/11 (2001), reflecting fear and hatred towards Islam that ultimately manifests as violence, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination against Muslims. This violence

includes physical assault, verbal insults and acts such as spitting on Muslims based on visible markers like the hijab or beard, as well as bombings and desecration of places of worship with excrement and pigs, alongside the inscription of hateful graffiti (Bukar, 2020). Discrimination, on the other hand, includes rejection from employment in public and private organizations, abrupt job terminations, and rejection for admission into school, heightened surveillance in public places like banks, streets and hospitals due to identifiable Muslim features. Additionally, Muslims often face exclusion from political affairs and state policies that target them (Bukar, 2020). In this context, xenophobic sentiments manifest in various areas, particularly affecting immigrant communities, particularly Muslims and are often directed against immigration and multicultural policies under the guise of national security, identity protection and nationalism (Abdallah, 2005). Racists openly abuse Muslims, employing violence and demonization and using aggressive tactics to incite hostility. Notably, far-right extremists have attacked Islamic places of worship; in one incident, Brenton Tarrant killed 50 Muslims while they were praying in mosques in New Zealand (“A summary of attacks,” 2019).

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) has reported that minority communities worldwide are increasingly targeted for vilification and demonization, leading to their marginalization and persecution, along with various forms of physical, psychological, structural and cultural violence. The research indicates that this violence occurs based on factors such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities or other demographic indicators (EUMC, 2013). Amnesty International has also reported that, following the incidents of 9/11 (2001), individual citizens in European countries, including America, have targeted Muslims, employing tactics of harassment. In many countries, Muslims have become victims of discrimination and violence, often encouraged by the state authorities. Attacks on Muslims have included campaigns against halal certification of food items, assaults on Muslim businesses, properties and homes, as well as false narratives aimed at promoting boycotts of Muslim businesses (Amnesty International, 2022). Thus, European countries have been sullied by violence against Muslim minorities, carried out in the name of religious and ethnic nationalism. Muslims, in particular, have faced repeated incidents of violence, with media reports highlighting that attacks against them often focus on emblematic moments in European history that have set the stage for the anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination that proliferates and manifests in severe violence. As Yenigun notes, Muslims have been targets of recurrent violence, which has become systematic over time and is reflected in official state policy. The perpetrators of this violence have not only been non-state actors, but have also included armed groups and, at times, even the state itself (Yenigun, 2004).

The paper effectively highlights the portrayal of Muslim communities in the West as irrational, incompatible and a security threat to native societies. This perception has led to stringent legislation targeting these communities, alongside organized violence by individuals and a propaganda industry that supports the agenda of the Islamophobia movement. Such sentiments are viewed as a byproduct of European historical experiences, currently fueled by the economic and political interests of individuals and organizations. In fact, European and American entities have targeted Muslim communities criminalizing symbols of Muslim identity such as the hijab and beard. Language has also been weaponized, with some politicians likening Muslims to a disease (Saylor, 2014). In this context, various US and European right-wing politicians have used derogatory terms to describe Islam. For instance, Donald Trump’s national security adviser Robert O’Brien, equated

Islam with a “malignant cancer;” while Pauline Hanson, a far-right Australian politician, referred to it as “a disease; we need to vaccinate ourselves against.” Caroline Santos of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) similarly termed it as a “cancer” (Tazamal, 2019). With this reference, Western media has also painted the horrible image of Muslims, projecting them as prone to violence and fanaticism. According to el-Nawawi and Powers (2008), both the media and policymakers thrive on the simplistic notion of a clash of civilizations, which appeals to binary opposition (Bukar, 2020). Overall, the representation of Muslims in Western media is still negative in both content and frequency. It seems that the media is just an ally, coalescing with politicians, policymakers, scholars, writers and most recently, a network of non-governmental organizations, all drawing from the same well of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is a Psychological Syndrome Not Reality

Muslims are in an extremely perplexing position, as they can see themselves as primary victims of racism, intolerance and exclusion. In the wake of 9/11 and subsequent terror attacks in Europe (such as Istanbul in 2003, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 and Paris in 2014), Islam has increasingly been regarded as foreign and a danger to ‘Judeo-Christian European society and culture’. Racism and Islamophobia, in general, receive less attention from the media and society than anti-Semitism. Moreover, Muslim anti-Semitism has been instrumentalized by various players, particularly influential European far-right parties (such as France’s National Front, the Vlaams Belang, Geert Wilders’ Liberty Party and the FPÖ in Austria), who use anti-Semitism as an instrument in their campaigns against Muslims or Islam by protesting against Muslim anti-Semitism (Syeda & Molkenbur, 2023).

The portrayal of Muslims as the ultimate perpetrators also serves to suppress debate about anti-Semitism within the majority society. It is a fact that Muslims are not alone in sometimes crossing the line between critique of Israel’s politics and anti-Semitism; however, media and wider political discourse focus on ‘Muslim anti-Semitism’ in the context of the Palestine and Jews controversy. An analysis of mainland European countries’ attitudes towards Muslims demonstrates that anti-Semitism in Muslim communities cannot be seen merely as a side-effect of migration or a transfer of escalations from the Middle East but must be seen in a much broader context that necessarily includes prejudice against Islam as a religion and Islamophobia. Furthermore, ‘Muslim anti-Semitism’ has been instrumentalized in many European countries to whitewash the majority society and its national self-image. It is also undeniable that the Palestine conflict has a negative impact on the lives of the Jewish communities in Europe. The conflation of the state of Israel with Jews and the perception of a degree of anti-Semitism during the “Hebron Operation” and the ongoing operations against Palestinians appear to be direct causes of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. The ramifications of the Israeli escalation extend much deeper, particularly as Benjamin Netanyahu has stymied American efforts to pave the way for peace (William, 2024).

In this context, the conflation of Jews and Israel, along with the linking of Jews to war, plays into long-standing anti-Semitic tropes, such as the concept of ‘dual loyalty.’ This notion suggests that Jews cannot be relied upon to be loyal to their country of residence due to their perceived emotional ties to the state of Israel. This belief is interwoven with a broader conspiratorial belief that through control of private corporations and mainstream politicians, an international Jewish engineer international conflicts for financial profit. In terms of domestic attitudes, British Muslims

have expressed that Jews see themselves as “better” than others, while the general population feels that Jews are to blame for most wars rather than the Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians believe the Holocaust is a myth that has been exaggerated by Orthodox Jews and Western media. Nonetheless, Islamophobia is juxtaposed against anti-Semitism, portraying Muslims globally and domestically as agents of anti-Semitism; attempting to create a competitive, or even a zero-sum scenario between Muslims and Jews—rather than allowing a principled opposition to both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia that could unite efforts for social justice. As a result, legitimate efforts to combat anti-Semitism are disingenuously co-opted to undermine Palestinian aspirations for self-determination and human rights, as well as to defame Muslims and Arab human rights defenders as inherently anti-Semitic.

Rhetorical Perception of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is not merely a rhetorical device that holds an ephemeral and non-specific sway over Western media. On the contrary, it is a ubiquitous ingredient in Western countries wherever Muslims reside. Astonishingly, many responsible people have crossed the red line of rationality simply to appease the Jewish community; for instance, President George W. Bush, during his address to the Israeli Knesset on May 15, 2008, defined a uniquely “Muslim global enemy” (Plitnick, & Aziz, 2023). This special hatred extends to the most ardent defenders of liberty, including Americans and Israelis, which is why the founding charter of Hamas calls for the ‘elimination’ of Israel. Islamophobic reasoning is not confined to public perception; it seems that “Islamophobia becomes an ideological policy funnel through which international and domestic alliances and coalitions are formed, whereby participants use Islam and Muslim subjectivities as the foil to array their varied political, economic and military interests” (Bazian, 2018).

Thus, the most obvious influence of Islamophobia on US policy, especially among conservatives, is the prominence of the false narrative of a “clash of civilizations” between the West and Islam, popularized by Samuel Huntington (Huntington, 1993). However, US policy toward the Palestinian issue is purely influenced by Islamophobic propaganda and is situated between Palestinians and Israelis, rooted in a settler-colonial project by Europeans and the concomitant resistance of the indigenous population. But it is erroneously portrayed as a conflict between Judaism and Islam, which is untrue and fabricated. The entire issue is a victim of distrust of Muslims, with presumptions of their anti-Semitic being integral to Americans’ exceptional attitude toward Palestine. This is why followers of Hezbollah chant ‘Death to Israel, Death to America!’ and why the President of Iran dreams of returning the Middle East to the Middle Ages and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map (Teitelbaum, 2008). There is no doubt that the US has a pro-Israel foreign policy, as evidenced by the recent Israel-Hamas War. Their continued support for Israel implies US involvement in the killing of Palestinians, which indicates that US policy is largely obscured by Islamophobia. Noam Chomsky has rightly talked about the US foreign policy dilemma, stating that US policy towards the Middle East is linked to Islamophobic perceptions and serves every administration. In this regard, Joe Biden’s policies have stoked the flames of hatred toward Muslims, with his administration trends in mainstream media further emboldening anti-Palestinian racism in US foreign policy (Abutaleb, & Hudson 2024).

With this background, it is an inescapable reality that the United States’ deep attachment and special relationship with Israel are inseparable from its discriminatory policies toward Palestinians.

There is no doubt that Jewish lobby has a disproportionate influence on US domestic and foreign policy. Thus, irrespective of transitions between the Republican and Democratic parties, bureaucratic support for Israel remains relatively constant, indicating that backing for Israel is not a product of partisan politics but is firmly ingrained in the political agenda and discourse. In this regard, the US political culture is a key explanatory factor in the development of US policy toward Israel and has played a key role in shaping and defining American relations with Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Consequently, Israel's security has been a cornerstone of American foreign policy for every US administration, as both countries have signed multiple bilateral defense agreements, with the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (1952) representing an absolute commitment to Israel's territorial security and US-Israeli relations. Thus, the security of Israel is important to the US from various perspectives (US Department of State, 2023). US experts claim that mutual defense treaty between the United States and Israel is one of its most capable and longstanding partnerships and logical alliance anywhere in the world. Both countries' engagement advances US strategic interests by upgrading and cementing a longstanding pivotal military, intelligence and high-tech relationship.

In this regard, the US-Israel relations are often misunderstood in the Muslim world and they have failed to create any cracks in the US passionate attachment to Israel, which shares little in common beyond geostrategic interests in the Middle East. Some political observers define the US unconditional support for Israel as based on an "unbreakable bond," which depends on the idea of Arab-Israel enmity that lies at the heart of broader US Middle East policy (Spiegel, 2008). Nonetheless, the US unconditional support for Israel is beyond the doubt, regardless of Israel's continued violations of international law and the UN charter. Thus, anti-Palestinian bias in US policymaking is not only attributable to a zero-sum game with favoritism towards Israel but also arises from anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism. The relationship between Islamophobia and Israelophilia further illuminates US policy in the Middle East. The US is also involved in violating a US Congressional bill introduced by Betty McCollum in April 2021, which intended to ensure that US military aid to Israel was not used for the military detention, interrogation, abuse, or ill treatment of children. The bill also prohibited the use of US foreign aid for the seizure, appropriation, or destruction of property, forcible transfer of civilians, or unilateral annexation of Palestinian territory.² Thus, this proposed bill served the same policy objectives found in the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits US funding to governments engaging in "gross violations" of internationally recognized human rights.

Islamophobia Industry in Western Society

The Islamophobia industry in Western society encompasses a variety of non-governmental organizations, think tanks and lobbying groups. These include the David Horowitz Freedom Center, the Middle East Forum, Center for Security Policy, Counter terrorism and Security Education & Research Foundation, Investigative Project on Terrorism, Society of Americans for National

² In April 2021, Congresswoman Betty McCollum introduced legislation to promote human rights for Palestinian children by ending abusive Israeli military detention practices. Her legislation, the Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act, H. R. 2407, amends a provision of the Foreign Assistance Act known as the "Leahy Law" to prohibit funding for the military detention of children in any country, including Israel.

Existence, Jihad Watch, American Congress for Truth, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. Some of these organizations are overtly Islamophobic, while others are intentionally more suitable in casting suspicions on Muslims. Many of their leaders have been highly influential within the State Department and other US administrative sections. Consequently, this Islamophobia network is well-funded and growing. All these organizations and demagogues seek to criminalize Islam by propagating Islamophobic tropes that suggest Muslims are presumptively anti-Semitic, especially those who defend human rights of Palestinians and Kashmiris.

The Center for American Progress listed the top eight charitable foundations that funded Islamophobic organizations and reported that they had contributed \$42.6 million between 2001 and 2019 (Harb, 2019). By 2021, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) found that 26 Islamophobic organizations had received over \$105 million between 2017 and 2019 (Rutgers University Law School, 2023). Such massive amounts support a wide array of projects aimed at vilifying Muslims and politically penalizing advocacy for Muslims victimization and human rights. Some of these groups work directly with the Mossad (Israeli Secret Agency) and Indian Secret Agency – Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in the United States to vilify Palestinians and Kashmiris (Pink, 2018). The worst example is Jihad Watch, a project headed by Robert Spencer, a man who explicitly states his objectives of fomenting hatred of Muslims. He wrote that “there are, in short, very good reasons to be an Islamophobe, that is, to be concerned about Islam for the devastation that it brings into the lives of human beings both Muslim and non-Muslim” (Spencer, n.d.). Thus, in the US, organization like Jihad Watch and the Southern Poverty Law Center are defined by Spencer as “one of the most prolific anti-Muslim institutions in the United States... he insists, despite his lack of academic training in Islam, that it is a reality that the religion is inherently violent and that extremists who commit acts of terror are simply following its most authentic version” (Spencer, 2017). In this regard, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Alex Jones and the late Rush Limbaugh associated their Islamophobic propaganda with anti-Palestinian racism. Likewise, Hannity, commenting on Israel’s 2023 bombing campaign in Gaza, was logical and rational, disregarding the voices of innocent Palestinians.

Beck argued that the sole motivation for Palestinian nationalism and for the support Palestinians get from progressives, is hatred of Jews (“The real story behind,” 2014). Nonetheless, Islamophobia in the West has emerged as a belief among specific people that Islam and Muslims are alien and that their socio-cultural and religious practices have negative implications on a much larger scale in Western society. This notion serves socio-political goals and has been proven fabricated, untrue and false. The term used to discriminate Muslims through social media in mainland of Europe explicitly targets Islam to decrease its growing influence in the Western world. Pro-Islamophobia elements represent Islam as an aggressive religion, portraying Muslims as violent and generally antifeminist. This is fundamentally a misguided propaganda, based on misleading and incorrect arguments about Islam and Muslims; in reality, Islam is a religion of peace, freedom and tolerance. Moreover, the socio-cultural ills in Western society are signs of native governments mistakes, not the fault of Muslims. Innocent Muslims are not responsible for any outrage, massacres and bloodshed; these are the results of their own governments system.

CONCLUSION

Islamophobia is a new wave of racism based on hatred and animosity towards others and it has spread vastly over the last three decades in Europe and the United States. Researchers and scholars have analyzed the core causes of Islamophobia, identifying the immediate reason for its rise in Western world as the increasing trend of Muslim migration to Europe, which has steadily increased in the recent past. Moreover, the 9/11 (2001) incidents also fueled the situation, as xenophobic and ultra-nationalist initiated movements emerged against anti-immigration, particularly targeting Muslim migrants and exploited the narrative that Muslims undermine Western secular values and spirit of national laws. It is regrettable that opponents mainly targeted Muslims through social media, labelling "Islam and Muslims" as 'outcasted' and associated them with violence, terrorism and extremism. They presented Islamophobia in various forms, including physical, political, socio-cultural, linguistic and religious manifestations of hatred and fear of its expansion and influence. In most mainland European countries, challengers have shown ethnic biases and prejudices, showing little respect for Muslims and their religion. Nevertheless, it has become evident that the media and policies of Western governments ultimately lead to discrimination, harassment and threats which faced by Muslims. Some leading countries, including the United States, have banned citizens from seven main countries in the Muslim World. There is no doubt that the cost of Islamophobia is horrible because its socio-cultural consequences are dangerous and counter to the spirit of co-existence. It has damaged the soft image of Western world, which has always emphasized peace, harmony, secularism and tolerance in the modern world.

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