



## Constructing the Muslims as Other: A Theoretical Overview of Select Texts

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### ABSTRACT

After the advent of western imperialism in the modern times, the western identity primarily came to be materialized in terms of a difference which defined that the self is both different from and superior to the non-self, the Other. And this difference did not imply any actual depiction of the reality but a hierarchical difference which was based on asymmetrical power relations where the balance was heavily tilted in favour of the western self in terms of political, economic and military structures of domination and power. In this case, thus, it is actually the marginality which is conjured up as difference which enables the western self-identity to assume the centrality while the identity of the Other is pushed to the peripheries. This paper examines samples of western literary and non-literary texts to bring to light their monolithic representation of Muslims in how they are constructed as the "Other." It also examine how these narratives are imbued with power relations and metanarratives which help in the propagation of the imperial outlook while casting the Other, in this case, Muslims, in the demonizing stereotypes.

**Keywords:** West, Islam, Muslims, Orientalism, Discourse, Other, Stereotyping, Imperialism.

The relentless discourse of orientalising and otherizing of Muslims especially in the aftermath of 9/11 helps in building the essentialist images and stereotypes about their representation in the western imagination. The construction of the Other as an epistemological abstract helps in creating the notions of domination and superiority. While theorizing this process of constructing the Other, Cara Aitchison states:

Characterized by dualisms, this process inevitably defines norms and deviants, centers and margins, cores and peripheries, the powerful and the powerless... First, the construction of the Other is dependent upon a simultaneous construction of "the Same," or something from which to be Other to. Secondly, this relationship is one of power whereby that which is defined as "Same" is accorded greater power and status than that which is defined as Other. Thirdly, that which is defined as Other is accorded a gender and this gender is always feminized.-(Aitchison 2000)

In this centre-periphery dialectic, the self at the centre assumes the role of a subject and takes upon itself to describe what is reality, truth and history by endowing itself with a self-righteous universality while the Other which is at the periphery becomes an object which could be represented, misrepresented or even distorted depending upon the pure subjective considerations. The self at the centre promotes its specific

values as normative principles having universal validity. The Other simply is not deemed capable of having any universal significance. Hence, one sees the proliferation of such discourse as “White Man’s Burden” or the whole enterprise of Orientalism as Edward Said makes us understand. But precisely what such self-serving discourses fail to see critically is the intricate historical, economic, cultural, and political realities of other cultures and their relation to the purported centre. But of course, the stipulations of relationship between the Self and the Other are generally dictated from the subject’s power position. This is what will be explored in this particular chapter by reviewing the various western texts which cast Muslims and their culture in the orientaling terms. These texts greatly shaped the western imagination regarding the East in general and Muslims in particular.

English Historian Richard Southern in his work *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* observes that during the Middle Ages in Europe, “Islam was considered as the greatest problem” (3). As David Blanks and Michael Frassetto conclude in their work *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*:

The West was engaged with the Muslim world in countless ways. The crusades and the Reconquista were only part of the story; and while these episodes and others like them were the source of much of the hostility toward Islam, there was nearly always an undercurrent of conflicting viewpoints that flowed back into Europe to ameliorate the dominant tradition. Diplomats, merchants, theologians, artists, poets, women and children, people from every class, pilgrims, slaves, criminals, camp followers — all had East-West connections, and those who returned brought home tales of wonder and disgust. These varied impressions, mixed with a set of preconceived ideas, were spread through stories, poems, folktales, and sermons, but mostly through word-of-mouth, and eventually a set of notions was formed from which all Europeans drew their collective perceptions of the “other” and from which every European would have to choose those elements that informed his or her personal opinion.(10)

In the contemporary times, this is sometimes reinforced by the proliferation of such discourse in the western power structures. For instance, a former general secretary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Willy Claes, is said to have claimed that, “after the fall of communism, Islam is the western world’s new world enemy” (qtd. In the *Telegraph* 2001). But this repugnant portrayal of Islam goes back to the medieval times. Scholar Sophia Arjana’s 2015 book, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, explores this construction of a feared and monster image of Muslims far back and much earlier than the contemporary heady times. Arjana maintains that an “imaginary Islam” has been shaped over many centuries and not just as an immediate outcome of the events of 9/11 and the responses to it. It has served as the locus for fear and resultant demonization, a much-needed aspect to mobilizing political projects of self-defense and military campaigns for the dominant powers. In the early medieval times, Muslims were commonly referred to as “Saracens” and “Moors”. As early as in 14th century, famous Italian poet Dante Alighieri, in his work *Divine Comedy* portrays Islam in controversial terms when he rejects it as a religious, social and political system. It regards Islam as a mere heresy and Prophet Muhammad as a schismatic personality (qtd. in *Rouhi* 2015). There are also disturbing depictions of Prophet Muhammad and Caliph Ali. In “Man of Law’s Tale” in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, a Syrian woman is depicted as unequivocally evil. *Gerusalemme Lib-erata* (Jerusalem Liberated) by Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), which celebrates the liberation of Jerusalem during the first Crusade in 1099 AD, portrays Muslims as sorcerers and pagans (ibid.). As Edward Said concludes in his work *Covering Islam*:

Stripped of any existential or historical context, these views of Islam as a violent and irrational religion that compels people to commit aggression against Israel in effect vitiates anything like the reporting of what takes place on the ground and deny it from inhabiting a more humane and more understandable context... The misrepresentations and distortions committed in the portrayal of Islam today argue neither a genuine desire to understand nor a willingness to listen and see what there is to see and listen to. Far from being naive or pragmatic accounts of Islam, the images and processes by which the media has delivered Islam for consideration to the Western consumer of news perpetuate hostility and ignorance. (28)

Mark Twain's much acclaimed travelogue *The Innocents Abroad* occupies an essential cultural position in the American consciousness. Even some critics like Gorman Beauchamp regard it as the most popular American travel book ever written. The book is also noted for its scathing accounts of other cultures especially that of the Arabs or Muslims who are portrayed as the devalued "other". Mark Twain goes on to create typically worst stereotypes in his portrayal of Arabs and their culture as he orientalizes them as inferior, irrational, violent, and thus untrustworthy. What is more despicable is the violent fantasies of Twain wherein he dreams about ripping "Bedouins" or "Mohammedans" into two halves. Coming from a popular writer, such orientalized depictions only reinforce the othering of Arabs and Muslims in the readers' consciousness. Such portrayals verbal venues expose high levels of lurking insecurities and desirable violence toward the different culture. In this context, a critic Reinaldo Francisco Silva detects the colonial and imperial undertones which characterize *The Innocents Abroad*. Consequently, she argues:

Contemporary postcolonial critics would not hesitate to note that Samuel Clemens's mindset when publishing *The Innocents Abroad* was similar to that of a "colonizer"—that is, an individual who looked at Otherness with patronizing eyes". . . . The dialectics of a dominant versus minor or subordinate culture present in narratives about empire—such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*—is comparable to the one we encounter in the *Innocents Abroad*. . . . In Said's words, the "inferior" will always be inferior no matter what, and this is what we gather from Twain's narrative. (19)

Such patronizing stances and supremacist attitudes can be found in other western texts like Voltaire's *Mahomet*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, and Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. Voltaire's *Mahomet* is a five-act tragic play written in 1736 which was staged for the first time in 1741. The play portrays Islam, its Prophet and his companions in a very bad light. The play, overlooking every critical perspective, viciously attacks the moral character of the Prophet of Islam. In a letter written on August 17, 1745, and addressed to Benedict XIV, Voltaire strongly defends his controversial portrayal of the Prophet of Islam in his play. In the letter, he describes the Prophet as a "founder of a false and barbarous sect who [possesses all] the cruelty and errors of a false prophet" (Voltaire 1745). In his reading of *Mahomet*, and in view of its misrepresentations about Islam and Muslims, David Hammerbeck writes in his 2004 article "Voltaire's *Mahomet*, the Persistence of Cultural Memory and Pre-Modern Orientalism":

Neoclassical and Enlightenment thought tended to discredit Islam, if not condemning it outright. The religion was viewed as a departure from Christianity, a faith formulated by a duplicitous leader (Muhammad), who in creating Islam specifically manipulated the inherent racial traits of Arabs...*Mahomet* is an index of French and Western ethnocentric thought on Islam since the Middle Ages which plays a pivotal role in Western representation of the Islamic Other by reiterating and thus perpetuating key ideological and cultural strategies in the ongoing tensions between the Christian and Islamic worlds. It condenses certain elements of Western ontology concerning the Islamic Other, recapitulating conceptualizations and essentializations that have been transmitted from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and that continue today to represent the many cultures of Islam... Though imbedded in Enlightenment ideas concerning reason, tolerance and a search for moral universals, the play exemplifies an ontology that negates cultural difference while (ironically) attempting to embody these same concepts... Voltaire's tragic vision of the Prophet embodies previous Western biases against Muhammad and Islam, while updating these cultural preconceptions in the then-current dramaturgical codes. (2-3)

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is a novel written in 1900 and 1901. It is set in the Indian subcontinent after the Second Afghan War (1878-1881) which was fought between the British and Afghans. The novel is set against the backdrop of The Great Game, the political conflict between Russia and Britain in Central Asia. The novel made the phrase "Great Game" popular and introduced the theme of great power rivalry and intrigue. The novel also provides an account of the life in the Indian subcontinent under the British rule. As an Orientalist, Kipling is known for his unabashed championing of imperialism while ignoring the histories and struggles of the colonized people. In the novel, while the British conquest of the subcontinent is justified, Muslims alongwith Hindus are portrayed in the stereotypical terms. In the novel, the belief system of Muslims and their relevance

is also questioned. Rahim Moosavinia observes about Kim: "The narrative voice in the novel treats the Oriental as an inferior being. The oriental tells lies, takes commission, is accustomed to disorder, and has no sense of time" (qtd. in *Mugijatna* 2014).

In his book *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington predicts that the future of global politics would be based on inter-civilizational and cultural conflict, more precisely, between the "Islamic world" and the "West". For Huntington, the future would no longer be a battleground between economic, ideological or political struggles, and that the fault lines of future discord would originate from the Islamic world. Casting Islam and its civilization in the grossly generalized terms, he describes it as inherently violent and eternally non-plural. He completely overlooks the pluralistic history of the Islamic culture and civilization and paints it in the most homogenous and monolithic terms. Huntington seems to foresee the end of the West through a hostile takeover by radical Islam. He resorts to religious determinism while looking at the Muslim societies which, according to him, have asserted cultural identity through the reaffirmation and resurgence of religion. He regards religion is the primary factor that distinguishes Muslim politics and society from other countries. In the book, Huntington describes that the re-assertion of Islam "embodies the acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western culture, and the recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world" (110). Edward Said responded to Huntington's thesis in his 2001 article, "The Clash of Ignorance". Said dismisses Huntington's rigid categorization of the world into civilizations which overlooks the dynamic interdependency and interaction of cultures. In his book of essays titled *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap* (2004), Said also argues that the clash of civilizations thesis is an example of "the purest invidious racism, a sort of parody of Hitlerian science directed today against Arabs and Muslims" (293). Eminent contemporary thinker Noam Chomsky, in one of his lectures, has criticized the concept of the clash of civilizations as just being a new justification for the United States "for any atrocities that they wanted to carry out", which was required after the Cold War as the Soviet Union was no longer a viable threat ("Noam Chomsky," 3:29).

Prominent British-American Middle Eastern studies scholar and Orientalist, Bernard Lewis holds Muslims responsible for their alleged "rage" towards the West on account of their faith, beliefs and inability to modernize. He does not look at the intricate history and civilizational spectrum that characterizes Islam and Muslims but just puts forward sweeping generalizations by casting Muslims in a set of negative emotions with regards to their relationship with the west. In his book, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Lewis comes up with monolithic analysis of Muslims under the guise of a scholarly work. For instance, he traces Muslims' "irrational hatred" of "Judeo-Christian civilization or the west" to their old beliefs including the "revival of ancient prejudices" among modern day Islamic extremists. He claims that Muslims are averse to any change and progress which is what is hampering their engagement with modernity (50-60). While exploring the distorted representation of Islam in the western discourse, Edward Said stridently observes in his *Covering Islam* about Lewis' work:

One of the worst offenders in the cultural war against Islam has been the senior British Orientalist — now a United States resident, and retired Princeton Professor — Bernard Lewis, whose essays appear regularly in *The New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Foreign Affairs*. Over many decades his views, which have remained unchanged and indeed have become more strident and reductionist over time, have seeped into the discourse of the "think" pieces and books undertaken by ambitious journalists and a few political scientists... All of Lewis's emphases in his work are to portray the whole of Islam as basically outside the known, familiar, acceptable world that "we" inhabit, and in addition that contemporary Islam has inherited European anti-Semitism for use in an alleged war against modernity. (15)

This othering of Muslims was reinforced after the collapse of Soviet Union or the Fall of Communism. So for the west to fulfill its self-image, it needed an "other", and hence it was deemed to construct the image of Islam in such lines. As Daniel Pipes writes in 1995 in an essay titled "There are No Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam": "While fundamentalist Islam differs in its details from other utopian ideologies, it closely resembles them in scope and ambition. Like communism and fascism, it offers a vanguard ideology; a complete program to improve man and to create a new society; complete control over that society; and cadres

ready, and even eager, to spill blood” (qtd. in *National Interest* 1995). Pipes stripes Islam of its religious character by refusing to look at it as a traditional religion, but rather as a movement closer to communism and fascism. Pipes regards Islam as essentially “fundamentalist” and which he regards a threat to the world in general and the west in particular. In other words, Pipes is giving call for an all out fight against Islam as was the case with communism during the cold war, and in fact, Pipes says the battle is graver, more profound and dangerous with Islam. In this context, *The Sunday New York Times* “Week in Review” headlined its January 21, 1996, issue with: “The Red Menace is Gone. But Here is Islam” and a long article by Elaine Sciolino which provides an idea of what she calls “one of the hottest, nastiest debates in academic circles today, mirroring the old debate on how well-organized and monolithic the Communist menace was”, and also pushes the reader toward viewing Islam (“the green menace”) as a new danger to Western interests which had replaced communism (qtd. in *Said* 1997). A similar repulsive account of Islam and Muslims was given by Peter Rodman, a former US National Security Council member, in an essay in the *National Review* in 1992. Rodman writes: “Now the West finds itself challenged from the outside by a militant, atavistic force driven by hatred of all Western political thought, harking back to age-old grievances against Christendom...Much of the Islamic world is rent by social divisions, frustrated by its material inferiority to the West, bitter at Western cultural influences, and driven by its resentments. Its virulent anti-Westernism does not look like just a tactic” (ibid.).

Another Orientalist feature of many western narratives is their paternalistic posturing on the part of hegemonic Western subjects. This is one more subtle way of proliferating the dominant discourse. For instance, these trends can be found in some novels and memoirs about the First Gulf War, such as Anthony Swofford’s *Jarhead* or Daniel Folz’s *Into a Dying Sun*. In such accounts, one may encounter humanistic critiques of the war as wasteful and destructive, but the critiques generally remain within mainstream accounts of the war as necessary evil done for noble ends, thus helping the dominant narratives. In other words, such critiques rarely remain logocentric or ethnocentric. They rarely question already established hierarchies and power relations. The questions usually are raised about whether the decision to go to war has been beneficial or necessary.

An interesting study carried out by J. A. Progler under the title “The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West: An American Case Study,” looks at the construction of the image of Muslims in the western world in terms of the historically varying degrees political and economic expediency. Progler studies “Islamic-Western encounters from the perspective of utility” so as to “locate the correlations between imagery and political economy” (“Utility”). He argues that Western political and media interests construct a certain image of the Muslim other that usually fits certain political-economic goals. He states that:

When the Ottomans were at the peak of their power in the 17th century, European princes viewed them as a respected and powerful rival. However, with the waning of Ottoman power, the Muslim world was seen as a place of exotic trials and espionage. This newly exoticized Orient began to be loved for its objects, while its people were despised or belittled. By the 19th century, race-based explanations for colonization had fully re-emerged. (120)

Similarly, according to this study, Islamic sexuality receives two opposite evaluations depending on Western own views of sexuality at a certain historical juncture. For example, Medieval West used to consider Islam as sexually licentious and lax while modern West considers Islamic sexuality as restrictive.

In addition, the media through news programs, Hollywood movies, local radio stations, and news networks consolidate and further reinforce such stereotypical images. This has grown sharply in the recent decades after 9/11 attacks, and in view of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Generalized perceptions of Islam as anti-democratic, and a threat to the West, continue to persist in the west. Although over the years the media have paid detailed attention to conflicts involving Muslims and Islam, there are grounds to assume they have failed to comprehend the sociopolitical and economic reasons behind such issues. In the generalizability of assumptions, “The West” and “Islam” can be expected to be defined as opposites, propagating the idea of confrontation (Poole 2002). Scholars have argued that what is said or written about Muslim thought, nature, religion, or culture in the mainstream Western media is not the same as what is said or discussed about

Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians (Said 1997). As Ahmed and Matthes find in a recent study, in the recent times, much of the mainstream western media continues to represent Islam as a monolithic, homogenized, or sexist religion, and Muslims are often framed as heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics as militants and terrorists (222). Ahmed and Matthes further conclude that Islam is presented from the perspective of a “white man’s world” and Muslims are categorized as “them” and presented as a threat to “us” (ibid.). In September 2001, the then Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, claimed that the West was “superior” to Islam. He said, “We should be conscious of the superiority of our civilization, which consists of a value system that has given people widespread prosperity in those countries that embrace it, and guarantees respect for human rights and religion. This respect certainly does not exist in the Islamic countries” (qtd. in *Telegraph* 2001).

Such kind of a discourse on Islam is, of course, motivated by the deep political ends. Such a discourse helps the West in its dominant political and economic objectives. This means that the Western perceptions of Islam, which are based on the stereotypical assumptions, are influential throughout the world and highly affect the Muslims everywhere as is evident by the recent wave of Islamophobia across the western world which at times takes a violent turn. But what is intriguing is that what is portrayed is not so much the reality concerning the Muslim world but rather the Orientalist generalizations and misconception of Islam. As a result, many Muslims around the world now feel that the West is against them through such demonizing discourses. Besides this, the process of profiling of Muslims is also accompanied by creating a dichotomy within the Muslims between the so-called Moderates and Extremists. This is corroborated by a study carried out by Syed Farid Alatas:

Related to the process of the demonization of Islam is the “moderate-extremist” and “modern-backward” Muslims dichotomy. What do we make of the notion that there are two versions of Islam, as we often hear about in the media, that is, moderate and extremist Islam? This perception has to be corrected. Muslims do not understand Islam in that way. In fact, there is no distinction between moderate and extremist Islam because Islam as a system of beliefs and practices is quite internally consistent and homogeneous. There are, of course, Muslims who act in an extremist way, but the problem with the extremist/moderate dichotomy is that it implies that those who are stricter in the practice of Islam are the ones more prone to extremism. The problem with that line of reasoning is that it further implies that the greater the devotion to Islam, if you measure this in terms of the strictness in following the tenets of Islam, the greater the propensity to extremism. It is because of this kind of thinking that some people get alarmed when they see Muslims being concerned about saying their prayers on time, being uncompromising in their dietary restrictions, or being more “orthodox”. Perhaps for such people, it is better for Muslims to be moderate, that is, to be less devout, less strict Muslims. This idea is completely at odds with the way Muslims understand and practice their religion. They understand Islam as a religion based on “the middle way”, which is captured by the Quranic term “*ummatah wasatan*” meaning the community of the middle way, the middle between two extremes. And it is this middle way, which is the “straight path”, that Muslims are told by the Quran to travel.(43-44)

The basic underlying testimony is that Muslims and Islam have been consistently portrayed by global media as a fanatic religion that is diametrically opposed to the West. This question portrayed in terms of a binary opposition between “Islam” and “West” has been the theme of various academic conferences in the USA, Europe, and other countries besides being the subject matter of analytical writings, creative writings, media discourses, and publications. In one of their presentations, Saeed and Drainville argue: “Such binary conceptions not only depict all things oriental as ‘other’, but also define Islam as the ‘other’ religion to Christianity. With the ‘other’ constantly described as inferior, even barbaric, it is easily accepted by a Western audience that terrorism stems from Islam” (qtd. in Saeed 2007).

Edward Said, in his work *Covering Islam*, also explores how the definitions of Islam in the west today are predominately negative which are based on outright subjective assumptions and total ignorance. He says, “The West is radically at odds and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam” (163). For example, this was highlighted when a Danish newspaper published caricatures of Prophet Muhammad suggesting he was a terrorist, among other things. It could therefore be argued that these

publications suggest that Islam is the root of terrorism. Moreover, he notes that: "In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent rage and misery, or irrational gestures. Lurking behind this is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world" (287).

Another issue with the media discourse in this context is that it tends to treat Islam and the West as opposites and different although both West and Islam don't exist as undifferentiated homogenous mass of monolithic entities. However, the creation of this binary distinction is useful to the media in maintaining the stereotypes it creates of Islam as "other" and "different". Such stereotypical images are transmitted to the public at large to fuel hatred and revulsion. Thus, it is one of the ways in which the media reinforces the anti-Muslim hatred in the west which at times takes the form of outright racism. The Council on American Islamic Relations noted in 2002 that media distortion of Islam had led to an increased number of "hate crimes" on Muslims throughout the USA. According to Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University, Americans have quite readily accepted the notion that acts of violence committed by some Muslims are representative of a fanatic and terroristic culture (qtd. in Gerges 1999). Similar findings that highlight the negativity of Islam and Muslims have been found in media research conducted in Canada, Australia and throughout the European Union. As Allen and Neilsen explore in their study focusing on the 15 European Union states in 2002: "[T]he media's role cannot be overlooked, and it has been identified as having an inherent negativity towards Muslims and Islam" (47). And of course, this negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims has seen an unprecedented surge post 9/11 attacks as the newspaper coverage about Islam and Muslims increased more and more. This amplification in reporting about Islam and Muslims at times did include supportive and more balanced views of Islam/Muslims; however, the increase in overall representation was on the whole not indicative of a more positive view of Islam or Muslims. This kind of a misrepresentation creates another problem in the form of putting more attention on the Muslim extremists. And since they become mainstays in these discourses, it further aggravates the "otherness". The greatest consequence of this all has been that it has fuelled Islamophobia across the western world alongwith a rise in the anti-migrant sentiments. The result is that more and more polarization and wedge has been created.

Eminent contemporary scholar on Islam, Ziauddin Sardar, in his 1999 work *Orientalism* argues that Islam has essentially created a problem for the Western universal project of globalisation by its refusal to be subsumed with Western ideals and networks of politics and culture (Sardar 1999). This refusal to comply with the West and their way of life, not having the same shared values or the same common sense beliefs has on a certain level resulted in a fear of an assumed Islamic threat.

Scholar Chris Allen in one of his essays "From Race to Religion: The New Face of Discrimination" in 2005 raises the issue that a new type of racism has emerged that is largely based on culture and religion rather than colour: "While racism on the basis of markers of race obviously continues, a shift is apparent in which some of the more traditional and obvious markers have been displaced by newer and more prevalent ones of a cultural, socio-religious nature" (qtd. in Saeed 2007).

In her 2002 work, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*, Elizabeth Poole describes how the contemporary manifestation of this orientalist discourse and constructions of the "other" has come to constitute what is now commonly known as "Islamophobia". The term "Islamophobia" has been coined because there is a new reality which needs naming. This reality has come into existence in the form of anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed (Runnymede Trust 4). As C. Weedon defines in 2004 work, *Identity and Culture*, Islamophobia can be described as "an unfounded hostility towards Islam ... unfair discrimination against Muslims individuals and communities" (165). It is often argued that Islamophobia came about because of a desire, by Western powers, to prolong the ideology of white supremacy. The 1997 study report of *The Runnymede Trust* notes:

[This desire or discourse] is based on the claims that Islam is totally different and other often involve stereotypes and claims about 'us' (non-Muslims) as well as about 'them' (Muslims), and the notion that 'we'

are superior. 'We' are civilized, reasonable, generous, efficient, sophisticated, enlightened, non-sexist. 'They' are primitive, violent, irrational, scheming, disorganized, and oppressive. (6)

The kind of a discourse often encompasses alarmist, and encompasses racist, xenophobic and stereotyping elements. It diffuses a disparaging ideology which creates hostility to Islamic culture and history, to communities of peoples whose faith is Islam and whose Islamic character, real or invented, forms one of the targets of hate, prejudice and xenophobia. It also often overlaps with forms of ethnic prejudice or political conflict like in the case of Palestine. Fekete and Abukahlil in 2002 have highlighted that post 9/11 some of the critics of Muslims have actually questioned the Islamic concepts of Jihad and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. These contestations have become entrenched in the so-called Clash of Civilizations debate. This implies that the term "Islamophobia" embeds within itself the effects of such hostility on both the individual Muslim and the wider Islamic community. As Amir Saeed observes in his study carried out in 2007, Islamophobia, like the colonial discourse of its predecessor, Orientalism, does not allow for diversity; contradictions and semiotic tensions are ignored as the homogenizing ethnocentric template of otherness assumes that there is only one interpretation of Islam (457). This self-serving perception of Islam is apparent in Bernard Lewis' views expressed in his 2004 work *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* wherein he argues that: "For Muslims--as also for most medieval but few modern Christians – the core of identity was religion ... and the basic divisions of mankind were religiously determined" (255).

These kinds of attitudes have been found illustrative of the contemporary Orientalist thinking. It raises many contentious questions which need to be put forward in the light of the critical analysis of these Orientalist discourses. This alludes to the Western ethnocentric attitude that homogenizes Muslim identity which assumes that Islam or Muslims are somehow less advanced than Christians inhabiting the western world. It thus reintroduces the already existing notions of the Orient as "brutish", "uncouth", "uncivilized", and "irrational".

Scholar F.A. Noor in one of his prominent works published in 2007 argues that, "Muslim identity and the concerns of Muslims are increasingly being defined in terms of an oppositional dialectic that pits Islam and Muslims against the rest of the world" (261), as Islamophobia has become the mainstream media discourse "where images of Muslims as murderous fanatics abound in movies, videos and computer games" (267). He further suggests that the way out of the current tight spot confronted by Muslims the world over can be found in the corpus of Islamic theology and praxis itself, particularly in the concept of "Tawhid"(Oneness and Unity), which refers to the unity of all creation and the fundamental equality of the singular human race. For Noor, the idea of Tawhid constantly reminds Muslims and the larger humanity that all human beings are equal and are thus entitled to their own share of respect and dignity. Noor further adds that when Muslim concerns for justice, equity, rights and freedom are articulated in the context of a borderless world where the audience is not only Muslims but the world as a whole, that will be the time when "the image of Islam and Muslims will stand above the crude and poisonous images we see today" (276).

Thus, there exist a large number of critical gaps with reference to the representation of Islam and Muslims in both the academic and non-academic discourses of the west. It makes imperative the need to examine the literary and theoretical accounts of cross-cultural or cross-civilizational dynamics have to be explored in close relation with the contextualized historical, political and economic factors. Any sort of lived realities are contained within these factors. This interdisciplinary holistic approach enables to look at the various dynamics and nuances at play to give a varied account which offers alternate perspectives on the reality.

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