

## **Intersecting Realities of Muslim-West Relations and Islamophobic Discourse**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite a generally negative understanding throughout history, seismic events, notably the US-led war on terrorism, led to many in the Muslim world feeling targeted. This powered islamophobia, exacerbated by bombings, the ascent of ISIS, and a stressed connection between Muslim nations and Europe. The prevailing prejudice about Islam in the west is rooted in the notion that Islam is an inferior religion posing a threat to the dominant societal values. The period since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and subsequent international developments has seen a considerable deterioration in relations between the so-called Muslim world and the West over the past three decades. This paper aims to explore the underlying realities shaping Islam-West relations and giving rise to Islamophobia. The increased focus on Islam, the Muslim world, and Muslims in Western Europe in scholarly and journalistic publications is spurred by key global events, including the Iranian revolution, the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War, and the growing political significance of Islam.*

**Key Words:** Islam-West relations, Seismic events, Islamophobia, Racism, MiddleAges

The relationship between Islam and the West is a defining feature of the 21st century, particularly in the Middle East. The coming of Islam in the seventh century denoted the development of a groundbreaking religion, setting off getting through sociopolitical and social movements. Following the demise of the Islamic organiser Prophet Muhammad, Muslims embraced a broad military development across focal Asia, the Centre East, North Africa, and even into southern Italy and the Pyrenees. The dominant Muslim presence in the Holy Land was a key catalyst for the First Crusade, resulting in a significant military setback for Europeans and laying the foundation for present-day cultural fault lines. The impact of the crusades on Europe undermined Muslim goodwill, leading to a decline in Europe's prestige and military standing within the Islamic world. The ascent of MiddleEastern patriotism further fuelled clashes between Western powers and Muslims, ultimately coming full circle in the militarisation of Israel and a significant change of Muslim- West relations. The heartbreaking occasions of September 11, 2001, and ensuing assaults in London and Madrid, alongside a bombed besieging endeavour on a US carrier by a Nigerian public, highlighted the viability of revolutionary Islamic physiological gatherings in controlling negative generalizations and fuelling hostility towards the West<sup>i</sup>. Relations between Islam and the West were at that point stressed in nations like France, Italy, and Germany, where obvious bigotry and oppressive moment regulations win. The presence of Muslim terrorists in the Western world, coupled with a Western military presence in the Muslim world, has sustained this contentious relationship<sup>ii</sup>.

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The contemporary Muslim world appears fragmented and seemingly irreparable despite global goodwill. The historical backdrop of Islam- West relations has crossed assorted stages, incorporating coordinated effort, struggles and false impressions. The post-9/11 period essentially reshaped the Western view of Islam, prompting the multiplication of islamophobia and its broad repercussions

The ascent of islamophobia by and large has been seen since the 1990s and is connected to the post-cold conflict international setting and worldwide portability and security issues<sup>iii</sup>. Muslims in the West, particularly in the US, have confronted contemptuous manner of speaking and various demonstrations of brutality post 9/11. Islamophobia, while another term, has traced back to Edward's expressed orientalism in the last part of the 1970s. Different elements, including an environment of dread following the 9/11 assaults, have fundamentally expanded Islamophobia in the West<sup>iv</sup>.

### **Islamophobia shapes the discourse on secularism and rationality**

Islamophobia, deeply rooted in historical events like the Crusades, takes various forms of discrimination against Islam and Muslims. The categorization of Islam as "other" since the 1400s has led to pervasive cultural racism<sup>v</sup>. Post-9/11, Islamophobia has intensified significantly. Mass media wields considerable influence by portraying Muslims in undesirable, one-sided images. This manipulation shapes public opinion against Muslims and Islam, fostering fear, anxiety, and societal unrest among the common people. Consequently, it has given rise to prejudice, racism, and conflicts in various European countries<sup>vi</sup>. The late 15<sup>th</sup> century saw the further division of Jews and Muslims, categorizing them as practitioners of the "wrong" religion and deeming them "savage" and "primitive." This classification, deeply ingrained in historical biases, has evolved into a form of cultural racism. This transformation frames Muslims as inherently different and inferior, echoing colonial racism but now taking shape as a newly formed cultural racism targeting Muslims as being fundamentally distinct and inferior to white Europeans.

The struggle between Christian Spain and Islam, dating back to the Crusades and reaching a turning point in 1492, had profound consequences. The Christian Spanish monarchy re-conquered Islamic Spain, forcibly displacing Jews and Arab Muslims from the area. Simultaneously, they discovered the Americas and embarked on conquests worldwide. During this period, they marked Jews and Muslims as the internal "other" within Europe. While Islamophobia primarily discriminates against Muslims, it is crucial to recognize the role of gender in this cultural racism. Veiled women in Western Europe increasingly face classification as inferior due to the overt "Islamic marker" of the headscarf<sup>vii</sup>. Discrimination against Muslim women encompasses both physical and subtle forms. The headscarf plays a pivotal role in constructing imagery, deemed a "subversive force" when emerging in the secular public sphere. It asserts its own unconventional and non-secular (Islamic) norms of privacy. Consequently, when Muslim women wear headscarves in public spaces, the piece of clothing imposes an Islamic frame, labelling these women as inherently different and posing

a threat to secularism. The concept of secularism traced back to the political conditions of the eighteenth century in European states, was invented by Holyoake in the context of the church-state dispute<sup>viii</sup>. The evolution of beliefs connected with secularism, particularly religious liberty and tolerance, occurred through disputes in the United States. Peter Berger's revised secularization theory aids in conceptualizing how secularism is framed in Western European countries and the United States today.

Scholars widely recognize Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism<sup>ix</sup>. Research often focuses on patterns of prejudice towards Muslims and the subjective identity of Muslim citizens within their respective societies. The underlying premise of othering and the discriminatory experiences of European Muslims have resulted in involuntary identities. Unfortunately, these identities often fail to recognize the dynamic nature of Muslim identities, intertwining race, ethnicity, religion, and citizenship. The emphasis on racial otherness is discursively constructed as a threat to the imagined racial homogeneity of European nations. This process of racialization is tightly connected to the image of the other, so much so that even converted Muslims, who logically cannot be localized within the usual frame of immigration, experience discrimination due to their ethnic and racial identities being misrecognised by their religious affiliation<sup>x</sup>. Social media platforms have become instrumental in fostering and entrenching negative attitudes about Muslims online. Racism exists at various levels: incorporated, relational, institutional, and foundational. Islamophobia, working in basically the same manner as racism focusing on individuals of minority ethnic foundations in light of their skin tone, works at a relational level. This is particularly striking in a contemporary world where discrimination and racism are widely condemned. However, despite the prevailing global norms against discrimination, Islamophobic discourse has become increasingly common and even legitimate in almost every segment of the Western landscape. The discourse surrounding Islamophobia has taken new forms not previously seen in the history of Muslim-Christian/Western encounters. The fear of Islam has become a driving force behind many modern Western anti-Muslim policies, primarily expressed in security legislation, immigration practices, prosecution, and oppression. It's crucial to bear in mind that contemporary Islamophobia is a constellation of both new and old ideas. Over the years, new trends have developed, shaping the discourse into what we see today. This contemporary Islamophobic discourse represents a complex interplay of historical biases, media influence, and societal attitudes. The multifaceted nature of Islamophobia necessitates a nuanced understanding to address its roots and manifestations adequately.

## **Conclusion**

The mind-boggling and complex nature of Islamophobia originates from a verifiable inheritance set apart by occasions like the Campaigns and the Reconquista, as well as later international movements and worldwide security concerns. The post 9/11 period has seen a huge increase in Islamophobia, powered by media depiction, social prejudice, and international turns of events. Victimization of Muslims, especially Muslim women, is obvious at different

levels, from relational to foundational, with online entertainment stages assuming a part in propagating negative perspectives. The anxiety toward Islam has appeared as an enemy of Muslim arrangements, affecting regulation, movement rehearses, and cultural mentalities. Perceiving Islamophobia as a type of social bigotry features the requirement for a nuanced understanding to address its well-established verifiable inclinations and contemporary signs. Tending to Islamophobia requires an extensive methodology that considers verifiable settings, media impact, and cultural mentalities to advance resistance, understanding, and a more comprehensive future.

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