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Indexing



Orientalism as a Cultural Root of Western Islamophobia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Islamophobia as a phenomenon in the western context in order to understand its cultural roots that produce such a stereotype about Islam and the Muslims. It aims to discover these roots relying on the analysis of a sample of intellectual texts expressing the western biases and the concept of western supremacy over Islam, the Muslims and the Islamic civilization, which are contradictory to historical evidence. Therefore, it focuses on the expansion of the western civilization all over the world and its use of orientalism as a justifying tool which consequently formed the underlying foundation of Islamophobia. The paper seeks to pave the way for the intellectual revision of the western standpoint towards Islam, to open the door for a new understanding of Islam and the Muslims that goes beyond the complexities of the Crusades, the oriental discourse, and the colonial period. The findings of this study imply that the western scholars and opinion makers should develop their view of Islam and the Muslims on the basis of an in depth understanding of Islam based on the knowledge extracted from the genuine sources of Islam in a scientific manner.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Orientalism, Islam, conflict, distortion

Introduction to the Problem

Today's technological development, digital revolution and communication technology have made different nations of the world interconnected in respect of the various areas of life. It is a historic stage where everything tends to be universally oriented. Therefore, it becomes almost impossible for one to live a secluded life without taking into account the destinies and lives of others.

However, some phenomena, practices and perceptions that hinder coexistence still exist, and they continue to cause confusion, preventing human aspiration towards peaceful co-existence, fruitful communication, and the mutual recognition of one another. Moreover, human civilization today is in real need for the contribution of all without exclusion or racism, or prejudices based on the religious and historical traditions that cannot tolerate scrutiny, criticism, and judgements based on the historical and existing facts.

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Among the obstacles that hinder the coexistence of nations, people, religions, and civilizations, is the phenomenon of Islamophobia. It has been sweeping the world east and west for quite a long time, causing unjust and irrational attitudes towards Islam and the Muslims. It has produced hate speech towards the Muslims based on prejudices, as well as attitudes that are hostile to the Muslims, their religion, civilization and symbols.

In this regard, intellectuals, scholars, religious leaders, elites and decision-makers must work together to dismantle this phenomenon, in order to overcome the hate it causes and the unfair judgements on the Muslims' rights and their religious, social and cultural presence. It is an imperative task to move humankind from exclusion to communication, from conflict to coexistence, and from incompatible privacy to integrated universality.

In this context, this paper raises a question about Islamophobia as a phenomenon in the Western context, to understand its cultural roots that produce such stereotype about Islam and the Muslims. It aims to break down these roots, and relies on the analysis of a sample of intellectual texts expressing Western bias and supremacy over Islam, the Muslims and Islamic civilization, which contradicts history and reality.

The conclusion of this paper seeks to make the westerners realize the need to pave the way for an intellectual revision of their standpoint towards Islam, to open the door for new understanding of Islam and the Muslims that goes beyond the complexities of the Crusades, the orientalist discourse, and the colonial period. Consequently, it opens the door to cultural cooperation and coexistence instead of conflict, especially since the world has become more interconnected than ever before.

2. Conceptualizing Islamophobia

Perhaps the term Islamophobia is one of the most widely used terms, without specifying an accurate concept for it, and without agreeing to what it represents. The researchers have gone in various directions to determine its meaning. Therefore, by analyzing the definitions that were given to it, we may come to a thread that links them together, come up with a description that helps us to understand the phenomenon and to know its various roots that contributed to its emergence, development, and the problems it entails.

On the other side, although the fear of Islam and hatred towards the Muslims are as old as Islam itself. However, the term Islamophobia or "phobia of Islam" is a relatively recent and new concept, used to draw attention to unjustified prejudice and discrimination against the Muslims.¹

Islamophobia is a new word for an old concept. At least since Edward Said's "Orientalism" book was published in the late 1970s. While another fact is that the West has long associated Islam with negative images, feelings, perceptions and stereotypes,

¹A. Cluck, *Islamophobia in the Post 9/11 United States: Causes, Manifestations, and Solutions* (Georgia: University of Georgia, 2012), 1-2.

however, Islamophobia officially appeared- for the first time- in contemporary discourse with the publication of the report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for All of Us" by the British NGO The Runnymede Trust in the year 1997.

Since then, especially since 2001, it has been used regularly by the media, NGOs, and by the public in Britain, France, and the United States. This is to draw attention to the seriousness of the discourse directed against Islam and the Muslims and the harmful measures directed against them in Western liberal democracies.

The term also spread among international organizations at the highest levels. When the European Union issued several reports on this subject in the middle of 2000 through the European Center for Monitoring Racism and Xenophobia, and in 2004 the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, opened a United Nations conference on "Facing the Fear of Islam." It is also common in public and academic circles.²

Despite its prevalence, some used it without giving it a specific definition, and others used it vaguely, narrowly or with a general definition without any precision or exactness. For example, Gottschalk and Greenberg describe it as "a social concern for Islam and Islamic culture." Geysler, on the other hand, sees it as "rejecting the religious authority...the Islamic religion as an irreducible identity mark between (us) and (them)."³

According to the "Runnymede Trust" committee report, Islamophobia includes "discrimination against the Muslims in job opportunities, provision of health care, education, exclusion of the Muslims from government, politics and employment (including management and positions of responsibility), and violence against the Muslims; including physical violence, verbal assault, destruction of property, and prejudice against the Muslims in the media, and in daily conversations."⁴

The report above-mentioned, stated what the term Islamophobia represents in the consciousness of the people in Britain and other western countries, namely: (1) Islam is seen as a monolithic homogeneous group, static and does not respond to new realities. (2) Islam is seen as separated, and another: (a) it has no goals or values in common with other cultures (b) it is not influenced by it (c) and does not affect it. (3) Islam is seen as inferior to the West; it is barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist. (4) Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening and supporting terrorism, and a key player in the "clash of civilizations". (5) Islam is seen as a political ideology, used for political or military ends. (6) Criticisms of Islam by the West that have been rejected and not accepted. (7) Hostility to Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards the Muslims and the exclusion

²E. Bleich, "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept," in *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no.12 (2011): 1581.

³*Ibid.*, 46.

⁴*The Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All," in *The Runnymede Trust web*. (April, 1997). Retrieved April 8, 2021. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>

of the Muslims from mainstream society. (8) Hostility towards the Muslims that has been considered acceptable and natural⁵.

Islamophobia worsened in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States and elsewhere, with the same connotations mentioned above. These representations do not make for any discourse in the context that aims to accommodate the Muslims, nor a friendly or just speech in dealing with them, and it does not create the space for co-existence and a joint contribution to the citizenship or international presence in general.

Rather, by looking into the different definitions of Islamophobia from all sides, the definitions entailed terms about Islam and the Muslims and include a position that carries enmity, exclusion, altruism, disagreement incompatible, otherness, as well as viewing Islam as a religion, nation, and civilization, a view that carries religious, cultural, social, political, and historical negativism.

Therefore, the discourse on Islamophobia is neither a humanitarian, dialogical, nor tolerance discourse; it is not a discourse that objectively represents the essence of Islam. It creates an image that does not contribute in- or rather, prevents - building bridges of communication between Islam and the West: bridges of dialogue, cooperation, coexistence, and positive integration of Muslims into human civilization. Rather, “a phenomenon offends all humanity and is inconsistent with the principles of human rights and the provisions of international law”⁶.

At this point, one may propose the question about Islamophobia, which we see in our time, and makes us wonder if this term is associated with the events of September 11, 2001 only? Or does it precede this event as indicated by the British report? On the other hand, is it extended in history and does it have deeper and more diverse roots?

If it has extended roots in history, it needs more analysis and understanding of its roots, which resulted in the formation of a stereotype towards the Muslims and the Arabs in particular as violent, uncivilized, and inherently hostile to the western ideals.⁷

Therefore, it becomes imperative that we analyze these roots, know their beginnings, and how they can be transformed into a valuable source in this discourse.

Accordingly, this paper tends to raise the question of how these diverse roots shape the Western imagination that has come to control Western attitudes towards Islam and the Muslims. How did they constitute a barrier that obscures the truth, prevents criticism and

⁵Ibid., 4.

⁶A. Bensaid, “Al-Takhwif Min al-Islam (Islamophobia),” in *Al-Safeer Newspaper* (April 17, 2019). Retrieved April 7, 2021. <http://www.essevir.info/node/9391>

⁷Y. Ali, “Sharī‘ah and Citizenshi-How Islamophobia Is Creating a Second-Class Citizenry in America,” in *California Law Review*, vol. 100, no. 4 (2012): 1035.

scrutiny of the positions used against Islam and the Muslims, their civilization and their existence?

In answering the above-mentioned questions, this paper, gives awareness of the multi-aspect roots of Islamophobia, suggests that there are many historical roots of the phenomenon of Islamophobia. However, this paper will limit its analysis to the intellectual or cultural root that began to take shape with the context of the discourse of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and modernity, which have paved the way to the emergence of the modern West. This discourse is locked up in a vision characterized by turbulence, pragmatism and turmoil that looks at Islam with fairness at times, and with cynicism and indignation at other times. This is embodied, for example, in the positions of Voltaire, who admitted that Islam was not spread by the sword, but at the same time he considered the Prophet Mohammed, may God bless him and grant him peace, as a “rebel,” “a traitor,” and “a criminal.”⁸

Moreover, this root was enriched later on with Orientalism, which was considered to be an academic field to establish an informed contact with the East, built from its beginning to be an imperial field of study; “imperialist view of the world.”⁹ Therefore, it reveals the lenses of superiority that this discourse takes regarding Islam, the Muslims, and their civilization. The same way, it reveals the unscientific stereotyping of the Muslims by branding them as mentally retarded, uncivilized and idle, controlled by the varieties of natural shortcomings that prevent them from diligence, creativity, and progress, which in turn projects Islam, and the Muslims as a dark, inhuman and uncivilized.¹⁰

3. Islamophobia and the Zeal of European Expansion

Carrying the burden of the Crusades, the conflicts of the Middle Ages, and the fearful religious attitude towards Islam, the West began its modern ages. Although, the Europeans did not totally ignore the influence of Islamic Sciences and civilization, they did not consider Islam as one of the mainstream sources of its modern ages.

It was during the centuries that followed the renaissance era, the enlightenments age, and the modern zeal of European worldwide expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Western powers promoted the civilization of the West as the standard of human development.¹¹

Through direct or indirect domination since the 16th century, the West has played an ever-increasing role in fashioning the world and giving it many of its practices and values.¹²

⁸T. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 63.

⁹E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978), 16.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹S. Clough, *The Rise and Fall of Civilization: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Economic Development and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press), 3.

¹²A. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

Four centuries later, the impact of the West is extensive and persistent. The process of expansion over the “Rest” (as Huntington termed non-western civilizations),¹³ has been shaped by the “unfinished project” of Western modernity,¹⁴ and accompanied by Orientalism and Christian missionaries who proposed a Western worldview, subdued the “other,” and achieved the “Western civilizational mission” or “civilizing mission,” as described and justified by the Westerners.¹⁵

Gordon asserts that as by 1800, Europe controlled about 35 percent of the land surface of the world, by 1878, 67 percent and by 1914, 84 percent. After World War I the percentage rose even higher when England and France established mandates over some of the succession states to the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. This was the height of the Western global hegemony, the culmination of the expansion of the West traceable to the crusades in the eleventh century.¹⁶

Many historians of colonialism agree support Gordon’s notion. Loomba, for example, was of the same opinion.¹⁷ The groundwork for what were to become the great modern Western empires can more accurately be dated from the 17th century, after which the energies of the West were exported rather than focussed on internal discord to establish once and for all the European supremacy of the secular over religious authority. “Europe” as a self-aware civilization emerged from the matrix of “Christendom” sensitive to its distinction from the “rest,” while the other, be it Asia, the Orient, or the East, was always “exotic,” “negative,” and “despotic.”¹⁸

The western expansion which in William McNeill’s words led to “the irremediable collapse of the traditional order of each of the major Asian civilizations” and to the penetration of the West into “the issue of weaker societies,” became progressively more irresistible.¹⁹ Finally, during the 19th century the last resistance of “traditional” forces of other civilizations collapsed, only to later give way to the resistance of new forces inspired by Western nationalism.²⁰

¹³S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 33, 80, 96.

¹⁴J. Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project,” in *D’entreves*, Ed. Maurizio Passerin and Syela Benhabib *Habe* (Massachusetts; MIT & Policy Press, 1996), 38.

¹⁵F. Mauro, *L’expansion Européenne (the European Expansion) 1600-1870* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 203; H. Chapin Metz, *Algeria: A Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, 1994), 23.

¹⁶D. Gordon, *Images of The West: Third World Perspectives* (Rowmand: Littlefield Publishers, 1989), 3.

¹⁷Loomba, *Colonialism*, 15.

¹⁸Gordon, *Images of The West*, 15.

¹⁹W. McNeill, *The Expansion of The West: A History of The Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 653-64, 726-30.

²⁰Gordon, *Images of The West*, 4.

The whole world after the 16th century and until about 1914 became a vast frontier for the West to exploit, and from which it derived its fabulous wealth. The Western rule was justified by benevolent doctrines such as the *White Man's burden* or the *mission civilizatrice*, but at the same time it used cruelty and caused serious psychological, social, and cultural damage to the host cultures.²¹ In Bennabi's words, "Europe did not dominate the colonies only, but imposed its own rule on them" as if they were original parts of Europe or part of its ownership.²²

The West implemented the newly emerging -so called- sciences of anthropology, archaeology, and sociology to ensure the rationalization and scientificity of its claimed civilizational mission to civilize the indigenous, the barbaric, the primitive, and like terms used to denote colonized peoples and civilizations. It followed the dichotomy of distinction between it and others. For example, we/them, civilized/primitive, civilization/barbarism, West/ rest, West/ East, etc., were widely used in the various Western circles.

In addition, the West presented itself as the centre while other civilizations were the periphery. The proclamations of the West as the rational, the civilized, the industrialized, and the free world were always antonyms to the East, the despotic, the aesthetic, the romantic, and even the barbaric and the feudal.²³ The Western relationships with different parts of the "East" took various forms, and varied from the romantic view of certain Eastern civilizations to the hostile view toward others.

The European imperialists, while invading the Muslim world in the early 19th century, maintained an inherited distorted image of Islam.²⁴ Islam lived on in the European imagination as a religion rooted in deceit, violence, and misogyny. The fear of the Muslim "Other" as an obstacle and threat to European power and hegemony did not fade but rather intensified in the face of Europe's increasing interest in colonial expansion in the nineteenth century.²⁵

The "European nations expanded their empires in the nineteenth century; Europeans developed a greater interest in studying the languages, histories, cultures, and religions of the colonized peoples."²⁶ Accordingly, the term *Orientalism* entered into European languages by the nineteenth century to describe the scholarly study of the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Consequently, Orientalism became the main cultural tool of that

²¹Loomba, *Colonialism*, 8; Gordon, *Images of the West*, 6-7.

²²M. Bennabi, *Wijhat al- 'Ālam al-Islāmī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), 92.

²³W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree (trans.), (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 111-115.

²⁴M. Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, Asma Rashid (trans.), (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1988), 20.

²⁵Green, *The Fear of Islam*, 65.

²⁶Ibid, 78-79.

expansion, and Europe used Orientalism to form its image of the East in general and of Islam in particular, and to form an image of itself in the East as well.

Moreover, Orientalism as a newly established field of knowledge was carried out in a relatively organized manner in which European thought and institutions cooperated closely with official colonial institutions with the aim of providing them with the knowledge necessary to control colonial societies.²⁷

Hence, Orientalism represents the underlying structure of the cultural roots of Islamophobia. Orientalism worked on studying the East to understand, control and stereotype its image in Western consciousness, and it constituted a tool for modern Western colonialism of the world. It also constituted a tool for modern Western colonialism of the world, focusing the Western supremacy over the world, and the struggle with it, especially with Islam, which the orientalists realized the impossibility of undermining Islam before the Muslims, so they warned that it is the constant opponent that forms a challenge to the West. Therefore, they warned that Islam is the constant opponent who poses a challenge to the West and threatens the Western civilization, according to their opinion, which in fact is a mere “ideological exclusion.”²⁸

4. Orientalism: Justifying the Distorted Muslim Image

In his monumental book *Orientalism*, Edward Said linked orientalism to Western colonial expansion. Although orientalism as a field of knowledge, according to Said, it has three sides: first, Orientalism is an academic discipline pertaining to anyone who researches, writes, or teaches about the Orient (primarily the Middle East and North Africa); second, Orientalism is a mode of thought that theorizes a sharp dichotomy between “the Orient” and “the Occident”; and third, orientalism is a discourse of power over the Orient, i.e., Orientalism was a Western style for controlling, restructuring, and having power over the Orient.²⁹

Orientalism as a field of knowledge had an important role in forming stereotypes about Islam in the West, within its intellectual cultural function. It undertook the task of representing Islam, not as Islam represents itself. Rather, it represents Islam in the eyes of the Christians. Western people refer to the Orientalist works as they are the first and only evidence for the knowledge of the East, and they believe that the Orientalist works present proven truths about Islam and the Muslims.

Orientalism is the basis of the vision that formed the main references for the most offensive images of Islam and the Muslims that flooded European popular thinking;

²⁷E. Said, *al-Istishrāq: al-Mafahim al-Gharbiyah li Al-Sharq* [Orientalism: the Western conceptions of the East], Mohammed ‘Inani (trans.), (Cairo: Ro’ya Li al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi’e, 2006), 134.

²⁸T. Figueroa, “All Muslims are Like That”: How Islamophobia is Diminishing Americans’ Right to Receive Information,” in *Hofstra Law Review*, 41, no. 2 (2012): 467.

²⁹Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

including the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, as the antichrist who came with a false call. Moreover, it is behind the portrayal of the Muslims as reactionary barbarians, corrupt corruptors, or terrorists who practice violence in cold blood, oppressors of women, and other popular images that are not based on factual evidence, but which have become popular in the West, as if they reflect the reality of the Muslims.

This orientalist vision creates the Western imagination: whether official or public. The ideas of orientalists are transmitted in the various channels of thought, knowledge and media and they go to the policy and decision makers in the West, as well as to public opinion through sophisticated media and propaganda devices to confirm or distort stereotypes.³⁰ Along with that, the West looked to the East - including the Muslim World - in a manner that has become a model for studying the established distortion that one civilization can make to the image of another civilization.

This view, which we have referred to, played a twofold dangerous role in shaping the image of Islam and the Muslims in the West. The first dangerous role is the distortion of the image of Islam, and the second is to justify European colonialism, the European systematic depletion the East and the Muslim world under the rubric of its liberation and assistance to its development and urbanization.

Although some orientalists presented more objective image of Islam and the Muslims, the majority of them, however, developed images of Islam and the Muslims that either continued medieval stereotypes, supported by appeals to science and even racial superiority of Europeans over the Muslims.³¹

5. Orientalist's Stereotype Making

The tendency to construct the Muslims as essentialized "Others" over against Europeans, often with the assumption of the latter's inherent cultural and civilizational superiority, ties together much Orientalist scholarship, literature, and art.³²

Perhaps one of the first people who sought to create a stereotype of the Muslims in the modern era is the English traveler John Lewis Bouchart, who died in Cairo in 1817 CE and used to travel among the Arabs under the name of Sheikh Ibrahim bin Abdullah. In his book (*Notes on the Bedouins and Wahhabis*), he draws a negative image of the Muslims, as he saw that the Arabs could be classified as a nation of thieves, whose main profession is looting, which is the subject that dominates their thinking³³.

³⁰J. Matar, "Hiwar Al-Hadharat Al-Siyasi, Awwalan," [The Political Civilizational Dialogue First], in *Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi*, vol. 28, no. 325 (2006): 57.

³¹Green, *The Fear of Islam*, 80.

³²*Ibid.*, 83.

³³J. Lewis Burckhardt, *Bedouins and Wahhabis* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1/72, 114, 119, 134; A. Hussein, *Sira' Al-Gharb M'a Al-Islam; Isti'radh Li al-'Ada al-taqlidi*

This is what Buchhart came out with, in which Western scholars followed, and confirmed his racist argument. In this regard, we find Edward William Lane (1801-1867 AD) in his book (*An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egypt*), depicting their lives as if they were the part of the stories of (*A Thousand and One Nights*), which he translated.

He portrayed men as frivolous and women being immoral. His views on the East became like a law for understanding the East. Edward Said was of the view that Lane presented in his book, *An Encyclopaedia of Exotic Display and a Playground for Orientalist Scrutiny*.³⁴

As for Charles Doughty (1843-1926), in his *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, he described the Arabs as being from the backward peoples and that the religion of the Arabs: meaning Islam is the religion of the sword that should be subjugated by the sword, and that Islam is the terrifying face of the Arabs³⁵.

In the same context, Ernest Renan in his 1883 lecture “Islam and Science” portrays Islam as a monolithic religion possessing a fixed essence and set of cultural traits that make it inferior to the European civilization.³⁶ He emphasizes:

All who have been to the Orient or to Africa are struck by what is the inevitably narrow-mindedness of a true believer, of that kind of iron ring around his head, making it absolutely closed to science, incapable of learning anything or of opening itself up to any new idea. From the beginning of his religious initiation, at the age of ten or twelve years, the Muslim child, until then [hitherto] still quite aware, suddenly becomes fanatical, full of a foolish pride in possessing what he believes is the absolute truth, happy with what determines his inferiority, as if it were a privilege. This senseless pride is the radical vice of the Muslims.³⁷

This image of Islam that Renan portrayed is pivotal for French modern thinking as well as Western thinking until today. The Modern Western Thought inherited the image of Islam as inherently irrational, militantly intolerant, and essentially incapable of producing science and philosophy, lacking the scientific outlook and freethinking. Renan's quasi-racist attack was a verdict and a triumphalist announcement of the final victory of Euro-centrism and its new scientific worldview over the Muslim world³⁸.

Li Al-Islam fi Al-Gharb [Western Conflict with Islam: Exploration of the Traditional Hostility against Islam in the West], Mazin Motabbaqani (trans.), (Riyadh: Dar Al-wai' Li al-fikr al-mu'asar, 2013), 53-57.

³⁴Said, *Orientalism*, 161.

³⁵C. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London: The Medeci society, 1921) VI/101, 597; Hussein, *Sira' Al-Gharb*, 53-57.

³⁶Green, *The Fear of Islam*, 80.

³⁷E. Renan, *Islam and Science*, Sally P. Ragep (trans.), (McGill University, 2011), 2.

³⁸I. Kalin, “Islam and Science,” in *Oxford Islamic Studies Website*. accessed April 20, 2021. http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/focus/essay1009_science.html

Bernard Carra de Vaux (1867-1953), also known as Baron Carra de Vaux, the French orientalist, was of the view that Islam and Pan-Islamism is the “great and general danger that threatens Christian powers”³⁹, moreover, he stressed:

I believe that we should split the Muhammadan world, and break its moral unity, taking advantage of the political and ethnic divisions that already exist in it. The Islamism of different races cannot fail but present certain specific differences; one is that of the Sudanese, another is that of the Chinese, that of the Persians and the Malay [and so on and so forth]. We should accentuate these differences among the diverse Muhammadan races in such a way so as to increase *nationalist* sentiments and diminish those of *religious communitarianism*.⁴⁰

Other examples of modern orientalists, is Bernard Lewis, one of the most influential Orientalism theorists. He is known for his devotion to the radical Orientalism discourse, and belongs to the line of orientalists such as Margoliouth, Goldziher and other orientalists who remained highly biased against Islam and the Arabs. He remained faithful to their method of issuing unscientific and unexplained generalizations about Islam and the Arabs. He circulated his biased, non-scientific, and even false statements in academia on Islam, the cultural underdevelopment of the Muslims in general and the Arabs in particular.

Lewis sees that in our modern time, “Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period, and that much, though again not all, of that hatred is directed against us.”⁴¹

Moreover, he was one of the first to talk about the clashes or clash of civilizations. In a cover article in *The Atlantic* in 1990, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” he used the phrase “clash of civilizations” to describe what he saw as an inevitable friction between the Muslim world and the West.⁴² Moreover:

By making the case that Islam and the West are involved in a “clash of civilizations,” Lewis not only inspired Samuel P. Huntington, a professor of government at Harvard University, to develop the clash of civilizations thesis on a larger scale but also helped American and Western politicians shift their focus to a “new” enemy, Islam, as an old enemy, the Soviet Union, was disintegrating. In fact, the clash of civilizations theory that Lewis and Huntington put forth has become so instrumental in defining Western foreign and domestic

³⁹T. Tabrizi, “The Future of Islam as a Colonial Project: Bernard Carra De Vaux on the Segmentation of Islam,” in Berkeley Institute website. Retrieved April 20, 2021. <https://bliis.org/essay/future-islam-colonial-carra-de-vaux/>

⁴⁰M. R Buheiry, “Colonial Scholarship and Muslim Revivalism in 1900,” in *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 1/2, (1982): 5; Tabrizi, *The Future of Islam*, 1-16.

⁴¹B. Lewis, “*The Roots of Muslim Rage*,” in *The Atlantic* (September, 1990). Retrieved April 7, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/>

⁴²D. Martin, “Bernard Lewis, Influential Scholar of Islam, Is Dead at 101,” in *The New York Times* (May 21, 2018). Retrieved April 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/21/obituaries/bernard-lewis-islam-scholar-dies.html>.

policies toward the Muslims, particularly since 9/11, that it is necessary to devote some attention to the contours of the theory, including the Orientalist assumptions upon which it is built.⁴³

He became more influential in defining what he once called “the return of Islam” as the next threat to freedom and democracy.⁴⁴ Moreover, he took the leadership of the field of Orientalist studies that was dominated by Zionists or Zionism specialists, centers of the Middle East studies, and the Islamic studies in American universities, such as Leonard Pander, Eli Kedori, David Price, Daniel Pipes, Martin Kremer, Thomas Friedman, Martin Perez, Norman Bodo Ritz, Judith Miller, and others.

In his writings on Islam, the Muslims, the Arabs and the Arab world, he focuses on intimidation, curtailing reductionism, and underestimation. Therefore, the reader of Bernard Lewis on Islam and the Muslims will find Islam as if its civilization and history contain nothing but assassins, Ismailis and Qarmatians, and other groups that have been lost or confined to the general trend of Islam, culture, Islamic civilization and Islamic history.⁴⁵

To sum up the efforts of distorting the image of Islam and the Muslims, which orientalism took as its justifying endeavor and resulted in present day Islamophobia, we may notice that the majority of the Western studies of Islam, which formed the collective perception, depend on the following:

a. Deliberate Selection of Sources; for most orientalists, instead of studying the Noble Qur’an and the noble hadith, most of the ideas, information, and issues related to Islam were taken from marginal sources, from the Crusaders’ experiences, travelers’ impressions, from imprecise translations, and deliberate misrepresentation of sources.

b. The background that frames the orientalists' writings on Islam; evidence that tend to show Islam’s falsehood, frivolity, barbarism, lack of goodness, backwardness of the Muslims, their irrationality, and their lack of productivity and contribution to civilization, were preferable over everything else.

c. Exaggeration was evident in orientalists dealing with Islamic doctrines and laws, morals and rituals, Prophet Mohammed’s life, and Muslim societies including their history and civilization.

The strange thing is that the field of Orientalist studies, despite the centenary of its establishment, and the great expansion and development taking place in the field of the Orientalist studies. In spite of the huge budgets allocated to the field and its projects and

⁴³Green, *The Fear of Islam*, 89.

⁴⁴M. Kramer et al, “Bernard Lewis: Appreciating a Scholar of Consequence,” in *the Washington institute for near east policy* (Jul 24, 2018). Retrieved April 5, 2021. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bernard-lewis-appreciating-scholar-consequence>

⁴⁵R. Irwin, “The Arabs in History by Bernard Lewis: Islam and the West by Bernard Lewis,” in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1994): 416.

plans, it did not get rid of its biases, failures and ambiguities. As a result, “Orientalism is suffering from crises,”⁴⁶ as indicated by Edward Said,⁴⁷ which pushed Orientalism from being a scientific field to becoming a field that feeds Islamophobia, and nurture hatred against Islam and the Muslims, their sacred book, symbols, civilization, history and existence.

6. The Crises of Orientalism

Orientalism fell into multiple crises, as Edward Said, Muhammad Khalifa Hassan and others pointed out. In this context, we mention some of the most important crises that led to Islamophobia and the development of its sentiments.

First, Orientalism divided the world into two unequal worlds; Western superiority and Eastern inferiority. This issue is dividing people into two groups; “we” Westerners, and the “other” Easterners. In fact, this is an obstacle to any opportunity for human convergence between different cultures, traditions and different societies.⁴⁸

Second, Orientalism is subject to the control of ideologies. Just as traditional Orientalism was subject to the control of the religious trends of Judaism and Christianity, so contemporary Orientalism has expanded its ideological base, and varied between atheism, secularism, rationalism, capitalism and communism. With the decline of the domination of Judaism and Christianity, contemporary European and American Orientalism is divided between secular, atheistic and rational visions independent of, and even rejecting, religion, as well as a capitalist and material interpretation of the lives of the Arab and the Islamic peoples.⁴⁹

Orientalism, in its study of Islam, mixes ideology with science, devoid of any scientific standard. Thus, it turns to be an ideology seeking to promote certain perceptions of Islam regardless of whether these perceptions are based on facts or based on illusions and slanders.⁵⁰ This confusion between ideology and science is responsible for the unscientific nature that characterizes most Orientalist writings on Islam. Moreover, it represents Islam in a way that contradicts its actual reality, in order to create an intended representation in the western consciousness as held in the historical understanding of the west.⁵¹

⁴⁶M. Khalifa Hassan, *Azmat al-Istishraq Al-Hadith Wa Al-Mu'asir* [The Crisis of Modern and Contemporary Orientalism]. (Riyadh: Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University, 2000), 146; Hussein, *Sira' Al-Gharb*, 37.

⁴⁷Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁴⁸Ibid., 104.

⁴⁹Hassan, *Azmat al-Istishraq Al-Hadith*, 146-148.

⁵⁰M. Hamdi Zaquzuq, *Al-Istishraq Wa Al-Khalfiyah Al-Fikriyah Li al-Sir'a Al-Hadhari* [Orientalism and the Intellectual Framework of the Civilizational Conflict]. (Cairo: Dar Al-Ma;arif, 1997), 21-22.

⁵¹Hassan, *Azmat al-Istishraq Al-Hadith*, 161.

The third crisis is generalization and reductionism. Orientalism studies the East as a single bloc, unaware of the cultural and social differences between the various Eastern societies and peoples, which makes it fall into the trap of generalization. In addition, the many debates about the East were characterized by the complete absence of the East itself. This is what made Edward Said consider that the major works attributed to Julius Wellhausen and Theodor Nöldke, for example, are generalized and superficial works, except that they almost completely despise the material of their chosen subject.⁵²

Forth, neglecting the recent changes that have taken place in the Islamic world. The orientalist describes Islam in the way it was in the seventh century AD, and then assumes that the same image exists in this era, regardless of other newer and more important influences such as the influence of colonialism and imperialism.⁵³

The fifth crisis is the inclusion of myths in Orientalist works. The main feature of the mythic discourse is that it conceals its sources and origins, just as it conceals the sources and origins of what it describes. This conflicts with the scientific methodology required in scientific work.

Orientalism reverses the religious truths of Islam and creates false and distorted information about Islam, its civilization and society, which could amount to scientific betrayal because it is so opposed to the truth that science seeks to describe and present in the way it is.

This is true when the orientalists present the Arabs and the Muslims in the images of fixed patterns in the Western imagination, without supporting these images and accusations with evidence.⁵⁴

Sixth, Orientalism speaks on behalf of the East. This makes the orientalist works lack the impartiality and objectivity required by any systematic scientific work. We cannot obtain correct information about any people, religion or culture except from its adherents. However, the orientalist mostly proceeds from his superior position and looks upward, and talks about the Eastern, the Arab, or the Muslim, with his inferior view of him. Moreover, he presents his information as if it were factual. This is what contributed to shaping Western perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and the Muslims over many centuries.⁵⁵

7. Conclusion

In this historical, ideological and cognitive context, we cannot deny that Orientalism is a major root in the genesis of Islamophobia. It produced stereotypes offensive to Islam and the Muslims, all the theses that were put forward against Islam such as Islam's association with violence and terrorism, and Islam's resistance to modernity, the theses of

⁵²Said, *Al-Istishrāq*, 327-328.

⁵³Ibid., 459.

⁵⁴Hassan, *Azmat al-Istishrāq Al-Hadith*, 367; Said, *Al-Istishrāq*, 487.

⁵⁵Zaquq, *Al-Istishrāq*, 11.

the Islamic threat that threatens the West, as well as other forms and manifestations of Islamophobia that is widespread in the West in general.

If there is any resolute intention to rid Islamophobia, the only solution lies in facing its roots. This is because Western Islamophobia finds its roots in historical factors that contributed to the formation of Western collective consciousness since the emergence of Islam, crossing the middle ages, until modern times.

Although the nature of the existing regimes in the West that is based on pluralism and democracy has alleviated the burden of cultural conflict, racist tendencies are renewed from time to time, and their continuity derives from the absence of a homogeneous Arab Islamic policy in dealing with the phenomenon.

Moreover, if the Western people want to understand Islam and the Muslims objectively, then the decision and the responsibility rests with them alone. That is to say, living in a society characterized by racial arrogance or self-deception can only distort a person's understanding of social and political facts.

A globalized world tends to be a space for all people. Seeking to control Islam or distort its image does not build mutual understanding. Therefore, wisdom requires the West to develop coexistence between religions, cultures and civilizations.

Wisdom requires to also go beyond the historical attitudes that are no longer realistic and never were so, and building an understanding of Islam based on the knowledge of it as it is and not as it is imagined, and looking at our contemporary reality in which the world has become one village in which we share a destiny as One.

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