

# Countering Islamophobia: An Analysis Of Orientalists' Strategy To Defame Islam And Its Effects On Muslim World

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## Abstract

Islam is a religion which has its contribution to make the world peaceful and prosperous. However, some anti-Islamic writers portray it as a religion of violence a department of Islamic Studies and barbarity. Holy Prophet PBUH also faced this enmity and Holy Qur'an has mentioned it through several verses. The propaganda against Islam can also be seen at present era. The objective of this study is to analyze critically the orientalist's strategy to defame Islam and Muslims and to make recommendations for competing it. This is a qualitative research in which data is gathered through secondary sources; books articles and online sources. The study suggests that the basic objectives of orientalist are to create hate between Islam and the rest of world as well as to create hate in Muslims against Islam. They defame Islam by anti Islamic writings, attaching Islam with terrorism and violence, images, cartoons and movies. Moreover they put doubts in minds with baseless explanations of different concepts of Islam. To tackle the orientalist's strategy, Muslims need to remove misconceptions against Islam by their writings, images and using social media.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia; Anti Islam Sentiments; Orientalism; Suggestions to end Islamophobia; West; Muslim Response; non-Muslim academics

## Introduction

Islamophobia is a term that is used to describe baseless hate, fear and prejudice about Islam and Muslims. The hatred feelings are also associated with the things that are attached with Islam like mosques, Islamic centers, Hijab (women veil) and Holy Qur'an. Different minds perceive it showing multiple attitudes. Some goes to extreme level and reflect in violent actions such as killing innocent people, burning mosques, abusing those Muslim women who wear scarf and insulting Holy Prophet PBUH through images and sacred things associated with Islam. Islamophobia is also shown through negative perspectives, statements, behaviors and gestures about Islam. After the incident of 9/11, Islamophobia is rising in different parts of world by organized campaigns to spread hate and fear about Islam. In result, Muslims, mosques and people wearing Islamic attires were attacked.

The terms Arab, Middle Eastern and Islam have been depicted in an unfavorable light by anti-Islamic writers. Due to this hate crimes increased in USA and the rest of Western world. FBI reported 1700 percent hate crimes increased in USA during the aftermath of 9/11 between 2001-2002 (Sandstedt, 2020).

### **Historical Review of Anti-Islamic Propaganda**

Since the dawn of Islam, the pagans of Makkah, Jews and Christians opposed Prophet PBUH and its teachings. However, neutral observers and intellectuals of these religions accepted Islam. Holy Qur'an exposed Jews' intrigue against Islam. Qur'an says: "And a faction of the People of the Scripture say (to each other), Believe in that which was revealed to the believers at the beginning of the day and reject it at its end that perhaps they will abandon their religion" (Qur'an 3: 72). Jews prepared a group of people to sit near Muhammad PBUH, accept Islam and at the end of day reject it so the people who have accepted Islam may revert from it.

John of Damascus was a Christian Priest, born in Damascus in 675. He is the one of first well known critics of Islam. He accused Prophet PBUH that he produced the book Holy Qur'an by taking some part from Christianity and some from Jews. He said:

From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration. (The Fathers of the Church, 1958)

This was a baseless accusation on Prophet PBUH. He had no teacher, then how he could understand the books other than Arabic language and produce a new book.

Moreover, King Najashi reined Abyssinia for 18 years in 614 CE. When infidels of Makkah did cruel treatment with newly Muslims, they migrated towards Abyssinia. People of infidels chased them and asked Najashi to handover them. Najashi listened the Muslim and asked them to share the book of God which was revealed on their Prophet PBUH. Hazrat Jafar R.A recited the verses of Surah Maryam. After hearing the verses Najashi could not help weeping and proclaimed that the Holy Qur'an and Gospel have come from the same source of light. Najashi then denied to handover Muslim to the non-believers of Makkah.

Holy Qur'an is itself a miracle and word of God which cannot be duplicated by humans. The Arabs were challenged through the verses of Holy Qur'an that if they think that it is work of any human then bring a book like it. Another challenge was to produce ten Qur'anic Surahs. Finally, God challenged to produce only one Surah like of Qur'an. Qur'an says: "And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to My servant, bring a single chapter like it, and call your witnesses besides God if you are truthful" (Qur'an 2:23). One poet produced a Surah similar to Surah Al-Kauthar of Holy Qur'an which only consists of on three verses and presented in the meeting of his fellow non-believer poets. They rejected his Surah and said that there is difference like the difference between earth and sky in your produced Surah and the Surah of Holy Qur'an. Modern orientalists still use the arguments of John of Damascus for their baseless critique against Islam, Muslims and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in their books and articles.

### **Orientalists' Strategy to Defame Islam**

The purpose of orientalists is to create hate between Muslim and the rest of world as well as create hate in Muslims for Islam through their writings. Orientalism is basically a study of Muslim world by non-Muslim academics. According to Sulaiman Lebbe Rifai Orientalism was created as an academic discipline to study Islamic civilization, religion, language and societies. Western motives behind this were to colonize Muslim lands. (Rifai, 2021)

Historically, the confrontation of Islamic and Western world, initiated from crusade wars. In crusade wars the Christians gathered the masses of Christians and tried to defeat Muslims but they could not be successful. Then their think tanks declared that in future, they will fight with Muslim with pen instead of sword. This was the era, when Western powers started to establish oriental studies departments in their universities. At present, these are known as area studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Western rule used to study Muslim area before they launch army attack. Napoleon Bonaparte sent the team of academic scholars in Egypt. While using their studies he launched successful attack on Egypt and got victory. Hilal Gorgun (2013) argues that Napoleon Bonaparte founded orientalism in France as an academic discipline in 1975.

Similarly, around nineteen thousands British army and administrative staff successfully occupied Indian-subcontinent near hundred years. They did not give up study of native religions and people after the occupation. Through study they used the power of local people and divided them. Islam was spreading in India rapidly, because the native people preferred the teachings of

Islam on the teachings of Hinduism. Hindus were not satisfied with their cast system and unequal justice between different casts. When British observed that local Hindu people were accepting Islam, they published pamphlets to create hate between Hindus and Muslims. They wrote how a Hindu, who is native of this land, can go to a Muslim preacher (who is stern enemy of their idols) and accept Islam. So, they used their study to divide and rule. They kept their occupation as long as they wanted and left India when they had to engage their armies to compete Japanese forces.

The study or orientalists started when Western regimes feared from the expansion of Ottoman Empire and the spread of Islam from Muslim Spain. At that time, there were two main reasons for oriental studies, first, to stop the spread of Islam, second, to understand oriental civilization, culture and tradition to get hegemony and political influence in Muslim countries. According to Todd H. Green (2015)

Fear of Islam and Muslims has shaped the lives of Christians in Europe, Africa, Asia for centuries. Following the lead of John of Damascus in the seventh century, Christians frequently viewed Islam as the last and most dangerous of heresies. For centuries, European Christians demonized Muhammed as the forerunner of the Antichrist. In sometimes and places, Christians and Muslims live in relative harmony. There was regular trade and military alliances repeatedly crossed religious borders. Nonetheless, a negative image of Muslims and Islam often dominated attitude.

According to Edward Said (1979) some orientalism studies are based on denigration, slanders, ignorance and fabrication rather than being an attempt to search for truth. Rifai highlights different groups of orientalists with different motives. He argues that there are different groups of orientalists. Some of them study Islam without sound knowledge of Islamic sciences. Some study Islam to fulfill their special motives. Some study Islam with neutral mind to fulfill their intellectual curiosity. Some became Muslims after studying Islam and visiting Islamic cities. (Rifai, 2021)

There are many non-Muslims who wrote about Islam and Muslims. The graph below shows some popular kinds and works of different orientalists;

<b>Kinds of Orientalists</b>	
<b>Antagonist Orientalists</b>	Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Patricia Crone, Burton. John, Schacht. Joseph
<b>Moderate Orientalists</b>	Montgomery watt, Esposito .J, Arnold Toynbee
<b>Orientalists who accepted Islam</b>	Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad) Marmaduke Pickthall, Abdullah Quilliam, Timothy William
<b>Orientalists with their Works</b>	
<b>Ignatz Goldzhiher</b>	Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law

<b>Edward William Lane</b>	Arabic-English Lexicon
<b>Alloys Sprenger</b>	Al-Isabah-fi-Tamzis-Sahabah
<b>T. W. Arnold</b>	Preaching of Islam
<b>Wensink</b>	M'·ojam-ul-Mufahras-Ii-Alhifz-il-Hadith anNabawi
<b>H. A. R Gibb</b>	Modern tend in Islam
<b>G. B. Strange</b>	Lands of the Eastern Caliphate
<b>William Montgomery Watt</b>	Muhammad Prophet and stateman, Muhammad at Mecca, Muhammad at Medina
<b>Schacht</b>	Origin of Muhammeden Jurisprudence
<b>Bernard Lewis</b>	Muslim discovery of Europe
<b>Area Wise Experts</b>	
<b>Holy Qur'an</b>	John Burton, Andrew Ripen
<b>Hadith</b>	Joseph Schacht, Coulsdon
<b>Seerah</b>	M.Watt, Patricia Crone
<b>Islamic Civilization</b>	Bernard Lewis, A. Hourani
<b>Islamic History</b>	H. A. R Gibb, A. Hourani
<b>Islamic Political Thought</b>	Anthony Black, Gerhard Bowering
<b>Islamic Philosophy</b>	Corbin. Henry, Oliver Leaman
<b>Islamic Shariah and Law</b>	W. Hallaq, Anderson
<b>Islamic Ideological groups</b>	Kepel, Gilles, John L. Esposito
<b>New Atheism</b>	Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Denial C. Dennett, Christopher Hitchens
<b>Critique of Orientalists</b>	
<b>Edward Said</b>	Orientalism
<b>Dr. Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Namlah</b>	Contributions of orientalist in the dissemination of the Arab-Islamic heritage, Orientalism in Arabic Literature, Orientalism and Islamic Studies
<b>Dr. Sulaiman Rifai</b>	A critique of orientalism and orientalist

According to Dr. Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Namlah the religious competition between Christianity and Islam motivated orientalist to attack on Islam academically. The Holy Qur'an says that the book of Jews and Christians have been corrupted by human interference to fulfill their specific objectives. In response to this description by Holy Qur'an, orientalist started their works of finding faults in Qur'an, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Seerah of Holy Prophet (PBUH), Islamic history and civilization etc. For instance, about Holy Qur'an, they claimed that original ideas of Qur'an were taken from Old and new testaments and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was taught by some Christian monks and priests (Namlah, 2008). He further argues orientalist also studied origin and development of Islamic civilization in it all branches like Islamic culture, history, traditions and

languages. He highlights the connection of orientalists with its objectives: “Colonial powers, missionary workers and orientalists collaborated one another in their projects and programs of onslaught on Islam and Muslims. In addition to these objectives, orientalism is created to secure some other political, economic, and cultural interests as well” (Namlah, 2008). The majority of orientalists wrote on Islam with their anti-Islamic agendas and to maintain Western hegemony on Eastern nations.

About Hadith, orientalists claimed that Hadith is not a historical document of Islam, instead a reflection of the interests that raised in Muslim society during its development. Moreover, some Hadiths have many contrary narrations. Furthermore, junior companions transmitted more Hadiths than senior companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They also blame that Hadith is plagiarism by Muhammad PBUH followers from Jewish and Christian teachings. These objections of orientalists are not logical and irrational. Prophet PBUH lived with companions and guided them about religious and worldly affairs. All of his teachings were remembered and conveyed to the following generations on the directions of Holy Prophet PBUH. The objective of orientalists is to put doubts about the originality of Hadith, its narrations and texts.

They also claim that Hadiths are not source of Islamic law because Prophet PBUH was not sent to establish law. This objection is not valid. The Prophet PBUH taught the basics of Islamic law to his companions. At the appointment of Hazrat Muaz Bin Jabal R.A as the ruler of Yemen, Prophet PBUH asked how you would decide about the cases of your people. Muaz Bin Jabal replied I would follow Qur’an and Sunnah, if I found nothing then I will decide with my own Ijtihad in line with Qur’an and Sunnah. Prophet PBUH appreciated him and said that now my companions are able to serve the Ummah.

Orientalists attach Islam with terrorism and link contemporary terrorists’ attacks with Islam. However, Islam is from ‘slm’ which means peace. The sole aim of Islam is human’s peace with god and peace with His creations. Holy Qur’an teaches that “whoever kills an innocent person is as if he has killed all of humanity” (Qur’an 5: 32).

### **Effects of Orientalists’ Works**

Baseless and targeted anti-Islamic writings affected negatively the Islam and Muslim world. Western world also became successful to colonize most of Muslim areas and super powers. Furthermore, they divided Muslims in sects and area wise.

### **Colonization**

Most of the Muslim regimes were dethrone and colonized by Western world. Karen Armstrong wrote that “The European powers colonized one Islamic country after another. France occupied Algeria in 1830, and Britain Aden nine years later. Tunisia was occupied in 1881, Egypt in 1882, the Sudan in 1889 and Libya and Morocco in 1912” (Armstrong, 2011). She further argued about the non-Muslim hegemony on Muslim world that

Even after some of these countries had been allowed to become independent, the West often continued to control the economy, the oil or such resources as the Suez Canal. (Armstrong, 2011)

Through studies of Muslim masses and religion, the orientalist writers guided their ruling elites that how can they attack and occupy Muslim countries. They became successful in colonizing the Islamic world politically as well as economically.

### **Movies**

Western Media also used the studies of orientalist writers and showed the Muslim world uncivilized, barbaric and terrorists. Through their movies and popular news agencies, Islam is still being defamed. Every terrorist attack is attached with Islam without investigation. Edward Said highlights this rule of non-Muslim media. Edward Said argues that in movies the Middle East is shown as land of terrorists and villains. Such imagination about Muslim lands and people are deeply rooted in Western imagination (Said, 1979).

### **Cartoons**

The orientalist writings also aided by the cartoonists to fulfill their special objective to defame the life of Holy Prophet (PBUH) and to put doubts in the minds of non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Danish newspaper 'Jyllands-Posten' depicted Prophet PBUH through editorial cartoons in 2005. In 2010, French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo at Paris published the cartoons. Its office was attacked and website hacked. The cartoons led the protests in France, Denmark and in Muslim countries. These series struggle of publishing cartoons of Prophet Muhammad PBUH created unrest in the whole world.

### **Images**

Images were also used to propagate hostile attitudes towards the Muslim world. There are many anti-Islam images on social media. The purpose of these images is to create hate between Muslim and non-Muslim world. Some of them are following;



Images retrieved from <https://www.google.com/search?q=anti+islam+images&tbm>.

### **Western Terrorist Attacks on Muslim World**

The negative portray of Islam and Muslim world also caused the terrorists attacks by non-Muslims on innocent Muslims. In 2016, a New York Imam killed near mosque in Queens. According to Police, it was a hate crime. The attacker was charged with murder. In the same year, a man entered in the central Zurich and started firing after evening prayer, three men were wounded. In 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette killed six Muslim worshippers in an attack on Quebec City mosque during evening prayer. In the same year, a Christian Jeremy Joseph began stirring on Muslim woman attire; two men were killed in USA. In the same year, a man drove a van into a group into a group of worshippers in London, killed one and injured nine. The driver Darren Osborne shouted that he wanted to kill all Muslims. He was sentenced to 43 years in jail on terrorism-related charges.

In 2019, in New Zealand a twenty eight-year-old Australian Brenton Tarrant killed 49 people at two mosques in Christchurch. He was arrested facing charges of terrorism. In 2021, in Canada, four members of a Muslim family were killed in a "premeditated" vehicle attack.

### **Conclusion**

Islam is religion that promotes peace and harmony within Muslim and in the rest of world. At the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Christian, Jews and Pagans accepted Islam by deep consideration on the life of Holy Prophet (PBUH), his miracles and on Holy Qur'an. However, majority of those people did not accept Islam due to political and materialistic gains and objectives. They further tried to stop the spread of Islam. Holy Qur'an highlighted the intrigues of Jews, Christians and Pagans through several verses. The non-Muslim forces continued their struggle to defame Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Muslim world from the dawn of Islam to present era. After 9/11, they attacked vehemently on Islam and spread anti-Islamic literature in the world through their writings, movies, cartoons, images. The objective of this attack is to create hate between Muslims and the rest of world as well as to create hate in Muslims from Islam. Despite of their severe attack, Islam is still world fastest growing religion. As people try to know about the life of last messenger and peaceful teachings of Holy Qur'an they accept Islam and also become its preacher.

### **Recommendations**

1. Orientalists create myths and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. Muslim scholars should answer precisely about all the misconceptions.
2. Qur'anic and Hadith teachings should be promoted through writings and media.
3. Non-Muslims should be invited towards the Islam with good advice and commonalities.
4. Muslims should also analyze Western world and thoughts, so that they could know the intrigues of non-Muslims about Islam.
5. Different aspects of Seerah of Holy Prophet (PBUH) should be spread through writings and media.
6. There should be study centers in universities to decolonize Muslim world politically and financially.



7. Terrorist's acts of non-Muslims on Muslims should be condemned at every forum.
8. Disgraceful behavior about Islam like cartoons, images, anti-Islam writings and movies should be condemned and legislation should be done to stop creating hate about Islam and Muslims.
9. Muslims scholars should critically analyze the works of non-Muslim academics and highlight their baseless criticism on Islam.
10. Anti-Islam images, cartoons and movies should be removed from social media and images on peaceful teachings of Islam should be uploaded.

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