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The Political Economy of Hate Industry: Islamophobia in the Western Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT: Minority communities across the globe are increasingly being targeted for vilification and demonization which consequently result in their marginalization and persecution, among other forms of physical, psychological, structural and cultural violence. These may be on account of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities or other demographic indicators—a phenomenon which summatively came to be known as hate speech/crime. When such violence ballooned beyond bearable level against the black community in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, it triggered counteroffensive under the veneer of “white devil,” insighting the production of “How Hate Begets Hate” and Bigger Thomases of that world. In recent times, nowhere is such hate more pronounced than the one directed at the Muslim communities living in various countries of the West. Their framing as irrational, incompatible and security threat to the West has resulted in a number of stringent legislation/policies targeting them, beside organized violence by individuals and a propaganda industry feeding on this. This rising Islamophobia, as the study found, is a byproduct of historical experiences, fuelled contemporarily by the economic and political interests of individuals and organizations. Using qualitative content analysis and political economy as methodological and theoretical frameworks respectively, this study identifies the key players in heightening anti-Muslim sentiment in the West, as well as their motivations and strategy of public deception. It also explores the phases and causes of tension in West–Muslim relations, the role of media and the solution to this, among other things.

Keywords: Islamophobia, media, political economy, West, Muslims, free speech

INTRODUCTION

The crackdown on Rohingya Muslims by Myanmar security agencies and the dust it raised in international media and the United Nations had hardly died down when public attention was shifted to China, where similar persecution was ongoing. AP, the BBC, Reuters, the *New York Times* and *the Economist* etc. consistently reported and commented on the continual clampdown of the minority Uighur Muslims and their detainment in concentration camps by Chinese authorities under the guise of assimilation and de-radicalization. In such facilities (euphemistically called rehabilitation centers), these Muslims are being treated for “mental illness” that Islam is perceived to be by the Chinese authorities. The purgation process involves forceful renunciation of *shabadah*, denunciation of self and the Deen, eating pork meat, drinking alcohol and repeated recitation of the Communist Party manifesto. In the process, family members are being separated, including children from their mothers. Once arrested, fathers disappear—not to be seen again.

Tazamal (2019) argues that China is just taking a cue from Western government policies and academic discourses on counterterrorism, which largely and respectively target

Muslim communities and criminalize Muslim identity symbols such as the hijab and beard. Even the diction that likens Islam to a disease, according to Tazamal, was imported from the West, citing copious examples of how various American and European politicians have typified Islam as such. Among these are Trump's national security adviser who equated Islam with "malignant cancer;" Pauline Hanson, a far-right Australian politician, who also called it "a disease; we need to vaccinate ourselves against that;" Caroline Santos of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), who also termed it a "cancer," among others. What, however, Tazamal misses is the consolidation of such viewpoints in Western media, where patented images project Muslims as prone to violence and fanaticism. Both the media and policy-makers, on the other hand, according to el-Nawawi and Powers (2008), are influenced and thrive on the simplistic notion of a clash of civilizations for its moralistic appeal to binary opposition.

As an impact of globalization, communication technologies have shrunk both time and space (Said, 1993; Mazrui, n.d.). So in a world increasingly interconnected by communication hardware and software, even if Muslims do not interact freely in their host communities in the West due to their increasing marginalization as immigrants and other socioeconomic factors (Dekker & van der Noll, 2009)—reminiscent of Spivak's subaltern group—their presence as a threat is prevalent in the media. Dissemination of patented images of Muslims as irrational, susceptible to violence, medieval, anti-modern and incompatible to Western civilization, have been the thrust of Western media since the late 1960s (Schwartz, 2005; Said, 1993, 1980, 1981). And after 9/11, hostile essentialization of Muslims intensified in the US media, according to Professor K. A. Powell (2011, 2018). Her study notes that since the events of 9/11, 11 other terrorist attacks have occurred or were nipped in the bud on US soil between October 2001 and January 2010. However, those planned and/or committed by Muslim individuals/groups are usually framed as conspiracy by Arab, Islam and Muslims to destroy the West and roll back its civilizational advancement due to their hostility to "our" way of life, especially "our" cherished value of freedom. In contrast, those by non-Muslim individuals and groups are toned down as isolated cases of crime by mentally unstable individuals ("psychological troubled, perhaps schizophrenic," to borrow from the *New York Times*'s description of the pipe bomber, Mr Helder) who pose no future threat, unlike the Muslim extremists. This thread in the coverage, Powell concludes, is a byproduct of the symbiotic reinforcement between policy environment and media outlets. Yenigun (2004), on the other hand, observes a departure in the characterization of Muslims as monolithic block and Middle Eastern in the US mainstream media in his study of 9/11 and Afghan war coverage. A strategy of *differentiation*, according to him, was introduced, which significantly draws a line between moderate Muslims (who, as patriots, were saddened by and victims of both the attack and reactions to the attack by fellow citizens) and, on the other hand, extremists, radicals and fundamentalists who are prone to violence through suicide bombings and plane-hijacking. This can also be regarded as a cue from the policy environment. In his speech, the then US president, George Bush, noted that

{t}he terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. (Washington Post 20 September 2001)

Mamdani (2004) followed the same policy strategy of *differentiation* to conceptualize and contextualize the War on Terror in his book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*.

Newsweek of February 2, 2019 quoted recent research by academics at the University of Alabama and Georgia State University: “Muslim terror attacks get 357 percent more media coverage than those by other groups.” Why such selective frequency and prominence? Francis Fukuyama (2002) would argue it is because Muslim terrorists are more notorious in terms of regularity and damage through violence. Why are they so penchant in blowing themselves up and claiming innocent lives, not to talk of property? How can one make sense out of this “senselessness”? What are the motivations and contexts—social, political, economic, historical? One is left to wallow in the ocean of imagination unless one is lucky enough to stumble upon the Indian political scientist, Aijaz Ahmad (2003), or his Pakistani colleague, Eqbal Ahmad (2001), or their Palestinian friend, Edward Said (2000, 2001), or their African counterpart, Ali Mazrui (n.d.).

As if to negate the thesis of terrorism as Muslims’ monopoly, Joseph Conrad’s (the same Conrad of the famous *Heart of Darkness*) 1905 novel, *The Secret Agent*, is about terrorism precipitated by ideological leaning. Specifically about “an attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory, on February 15, 1894, an attempt in which the perpetrator—someone whom Ford called ‘half an idiot’ and whose sister soon committed suicide—was himself torn into pieces” (p. 5). Therein one gets insight on the strategies, plotters, perpetrators and activators of (suicide) bombings and the physical and psychological effects of such, quite similar to those of modern times. In the labyrinth of ideologies and international conspiracy (read: suppression) of liberating forces in some countries, observed George Orwell quite prophetically in 1938 (1970), the seed of terrorism was sown and the danger (of spillover) loomed, to which Britain was oblivious “till jerked out of it by the roar of bombs” (1970 p. 221). Specifically, before the present heart-wrenching, maddening activities of Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and co. became prominent on the global stage, other extremist religious organizations like Hinduist Tamil Tigers, Buddhist Sinhale, the Catholic Irish Republic Army, Protestant Ulster Union followers, Brahminist Shiv Sena, the Bhartiya Janata Party and Jewish Defence League members have committed similar atrocities, but only the Muslim terrorist is qualified and premodified with religious identity by the international Western media, according to Abdallah (2005).

Although Fox News and CNN can be awash with images of bomb explosions with glaring flares of flames and heavy fog of smoke among innocent people helplessly crying or running helter-skelter for dear life, the following day one is likely to see newsstand cover pages adorned with gun-totting, fierce-looking Arab Muslims (see *Newsweek*’s cover of September 28, 2001 with the headline “Why They Hate Us: The Root of Islamic Rage” as an example), but cannot, in all fairness, be blanket in blaming the Western media. The *Guardian* in the UK, for instance, differs in terms of depth and sympathy to minority communities such as European Muslims compared to, say, the *Telegraph* (Saeed, 2007). Whereas one is likely to read such headlines as “The forgotten Muslim heroes who fought for Britain in the trenches” (November 12, 2017) in the former, one is more likely to come across “Muslim convert ‘The Eagle’ who planned Oxford Street terror” (March 6, 2019) in the latter. As *Newsweek* in the US is susceptible to consistently churn out “The Age of Muslim War” (February 2002), Time magazine is likely to intersperse with “Europe’s Muslim Success Story” (February 11, 2008). But on the whole, the representation is negative in both content and frequency. All things being equal, the media is just an ally, coalescing with politicians and policymakers, scholars, writers and most recently, a network of non-governmental organizations feeding on the same pool of Islamophobia.

As a caveat, the West itself is not a monolithic entity (Hedges, 2015). It is rather shaped by various cultural and ideological influences (as Eqbal Ahmad, 1998, specifically noted, there is broadly speaking, the imperialist West and the anti-imperialist one; both

competing within). And the way respective ideologies assert themselves in the public domain or gain acceptance, differs from one Western country to another (Habermas, 2006). However, the dominant class remains white and capitalist, whose interest is undergirded by law, policies (Butler, 2009; Asad, 2009) and the mainstream media (Saeed, 2007). To equally quickly dispose with concepts, this study's conception of the public sphere relates to Habermas (1991) (for differences among scholars and philosophers as to what constitutes the public sphere, see Kperogi 2011); that is as a discursive platform where opinions are formed and moulded; where the players freely coalesce and cross-fertilize ideas and feelings as coequals without any fear of personal or public censorship. The manifestation of the public sphere is noticeable in the present-day media (print, electronic, the internet) and extends to such public places as town halls, theatres, hotels, cafés, salons etc. It includes activities like the use of placards and flyers during protests, graffiti on walls and public transport system, T-shirts with inscriptions and such like. However, equal access and use of public space, as Habermas hopes, cannot be guaranteed, especially in the case of media, as socioeconomic and political factors are, not infrequently, intervening variables determining who is heard and who is suppressed (McQuail, 2010; Pember & Calvert, 2008). This is the context within which capitalist values get entrenched and minority voices suppressed.

Furthermore, enormous intellectual resources have been expended on the study of Islamophobia or anti-Muslimness in the West. But its political economy, its exposition as a thriving industry, is, to borrow the phrase of Professor Abdullahi Smith, "a neglected theme." More neglected, however, is the deconstruction of its ideological subterfuge—the use of the free speech principle as smokescreen. This, therefore, forms the crux of this research. It focuses largely on print media and instantiate cases in US and UK.

ISLAMOPHOBIA: CONCEPT, "DEFECTS" AND EFFECTS

As neologism, "Islamophobia," emerged in the 1970s to describe a long-existing phenomenon—fear and hatred of Islam, which invariably translate into violence, prejudice, stereotype and discrimination against Muslims. Such violence includes physical assault, verbal insult and spitting on Muslims (or persons perceived as such) based on such markers as the hijab or beard, bombing and desecration of places of worship with urine, excrement and pigs, and inscription of hateful graffiti etc. Discrimination, on the other hand, includes rejection from employment in public and private organizations on account of Muslimness, abrupt job terminations, rejection for admission into school, extraordinary surveillance in public places like banks, streets and hospitals because of recognizable Muslim identifiers, exclusion from political affairs and state policies targeting Muslims (e.g. Trump's ban and Denmark's handshake policy).

A number of events from the 1970s onwards coalesced to complicate and foreground Muslims in the Western public sphere. Notable among which include the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the hostage-taking of American consuls in their embassy after the fall of the Shah, the controversies surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, the emergence of a clash of civilization thesis as prelude, the Gulf War and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1998. Then the climax: 9/11, which was accompanied by the London underground and bus bombings, alternatively known as 7/7. All these acerbically compound to project Muslims (usually framed indiscriminately) as irrational, irreconcilable to Western ethos, extremists, terrorists and generally a threat to Western wellbeing (Perocco, 2018; Alexander, 2017; Nazroo & Bécare, 2017; Allen,

2017; Sarwar & Raj, 2016; Awan, 2016; Hammerbeck, 2004; Bazian, 2018; Alshammari, 2013; Saeed, 2007; Meer & Modood, 2009).

Academic definition of the concept usually premodifies the fear as “unfounded” (The Runnymede Trust, 1997), “irrational” (Alshammari, 2013), “unjustified” and “baseless” (United Nations in Allen, 2017, p. 6). The upsurge in this phenomenon in the United Kingdom led to the establishment of the Runnymede Trust on behalf of the Commission for British Muslims and Islamophobia, which produced a landmark report in 1997 on the issue, entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. Its definition is widely cited as it enshrines comprehensive features and dimensions of such prejudice, namely:

1) Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change. 2) Islam is seen as separate and “other”. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them. 3) Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist. 4) Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a “clash of civilizations”. 5) Islam is seen as a political ideology and it is used for political and military advantage. 6) Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand. 7) Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society. 8) Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal (p. 5).

Scholars like Fred Halliday (1993), however, consider the concept too defective in defining the phenomenon in question—specifically arguing that it showcases Islam as monolithic, thereby abnegating the diversity of interpretation within (this criticism might have stemmed from Said’s argument that there is nothing as one Islam). Second, the fear and hatred suggested is against Islam itself and not Muslims. In other words, the thrust of the concept is on the faith and not on the people who are the object of attacks—sort of shielding Islam from attack, tacitly. Finally, it does not give an insight into the nature of prejudice directed towards Muslims. In counteracting, Allen (2017) advanced the caveat that no a single social science concept that adequately describes the range and breadth of the phenomenon it is concerned with. Thus Islamophobia is just a cohort to similar concepts as homophobia, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, and this argument insidiously waters down the existence and effects of the phenomenon in reality. Meer and Modood (2009), on the other hand, observe that such critiques stop short by impressing Islam as a dichotomous entity from Muslims, whereas in reality the two are inseparable; noting further that those who reported attacks and discrimination to the Runnymede follow-up research maintained they experienced these when they conspicuously appear as Muslim—wearing the hijab, turban, beard, dress like Arabs etc. Along this line Alexander (2017) wonders how possible it could be to fear and resent Islam without actual reference to Muslims.

Another debate surrounding Islamophobia is its consideration as racism like anti-Semitism. Some stakeholders resist its referral as racism because racism essentially deals with immutable, innate features such as skin color, whereas religion can be subject to change. One can move from one to another. Other interlocutors consider this viewpoint as limited in conceptualizing racism due to its multifacetedness and dynamism. In other words, it is not exclusively biological—there is cultural racism too. The ultimate determinant here is culture, to which religion is subsumable. Because of common religious practices/markers and similar physical features, Muslims, especially those from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Algeria, are often considered as an ethnic entity in most Western countries.

That is why the spycams of the War on Terror and intelligence agencies target their homes more; they are stopped and searched by police on the street more; they are investigated at airports more etc (Bazian, 2018; Nazroo & Bécare, 2017; Saeed, 2007; Sarwar & Raj, 2016; Alexander, 2017). Furthermore, Meer and Modood (2009) noted that what biological racism pundits miss is the fact that one has no choice in regard the religion of the family or country one is born into.

Often orchestrated by far-right groups, this new form of racism saunters into the public sphere under the veneer of protecting national identity (English, white, Christian) and countering the negative effects of immigrant culture on the “superior culture”—here crime is often conflated with race (Perocco, 2018).

Statistics about the level of antipathy against Muslims in both Europe and America are staggering and scary. A 2008 poll by Pew Research Center reveals that virtually one in every four Britons has a negative feeling about Muslims and Islam (see Pew (2008)). A follow-up survey by the same Center in 2016 found the pervasiveness of such feeling across Europe—where specifically 72% of Hungarian, 69% of Italian and 66% of Polish respondents revealed antipathy towards Muslims and Islam (see Pew (2016)). The picture is similar in the United States (see Pew (2017)). After 9/11, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia noticed a hike in violence and discrimination towards Muslims (Allen & Nielson, 2002). Specifically, Allen (2001, 2004) recounts how Muslim women were thrown off a moving bus or denied boarding, spat on and their hijabs torn publicly, or verbally assaulted on account of their faith in such countries as Germany, Italy, Denmark and the UK. Hasan (2015), on the other hand, discusses how Muslim men were repeatedly denied job and educational opportunities, particularly in Germany and France, while Power (2008) details their ordeals in workplaces, especially in France and Spain.

The net effect is that Muslims become social anathema and pariah. Their participation in political space is consequently winnowed, if not blocked completely. On this basis, Dekker and van der Noll (2009) observed that Muslims generally have high poverty levels, below average education, live in poorer areas of towns and cities, are overrepresented in low-wage jobs and have little access to standard healthcare. They share these situations with other minority communities such as blacks, Irish, Hindus, Boers and Latinos (Fabregat & Kperogi, 2018; Halliday, 1993). However, what makes Muslims stand out according to Perocco (2018), is that theirs “is the deepest, most acute and widely spread form of racism” (p. 26); in the words of Nazroo and Bécare (2017, p. 31), they “are repeatedly described as the social group most frequently discriminated against.” The cumulative effects of all this bears on their mental and physical health (Nazroo & Bécare, 2017). The duo’s research and those of their peers found that “chronic exposure to everyday racial discrimination is associated with poor sleep, coronary artery calcification and hormonal stress responses such as altered diurnal cortisol patterns and a higher cortisol awakening response” (Nazroo & Bécare, 2017, p. 32).

When all these are taken into cognizance, in addition to stringent policies targeting Muslim communities, the chances of their vulnerability to radicalization are very high (Dekker & van der Noll, 2009). During the BBC program (of February 14, 2019) “Salman Rushdie radicalized my generation,” Alyas Karmani, among others, recollected how social rejection by his white liberal friends following their disgust over the fatwa against Rushdie, had pushed his journey to the fringed radical politics of “Islamic” identity. In other words, there is nexus, in practice, between the thesis of frustration–aggression theory and the cyclic interaction of structural and physical forms of violence.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

The exponential rise of far-right groups and other hate-mongering organizations in the West, especially in the United States, has been a cause for alarm among various stakeholders, particularly those at the receiving end. A source gives the figure at above 1,000 such organizations in the US alone (*New York Times*, 2019). They are notably well financed, highly interconnected and have a strong presence in the internet as well as influence on the mainstream media. Prominent Islamophobic purveyors in the United States include individuals and organizations like Daniel Pipes, Robert Spencer, Steven Emerson, Frank Gaffney, Pamela Geller, Jihad Watch, Act! For America, Middle East Forum, American Freedom Defence Initiative, Center for Security Policy, Clarion project, Center for the Study of Political Islam and the David Horowitz Freedom Center (Carter Centre, 2017; Council on American-Islamic Relations & University of California, 2016; Center for American Progress, 2011). While in the UK they include the English Defence League, Britain First, National Action, No Shariah Here, among others (Perocco, 2018; Allen 2011, 2017), who partake not only in political rallies but organize protests against the building of mosques, and stir up citizens about supposedly creeping Shariah and Jihad, among other things. Their xenophobic aura becomes manifest in their targeting immigrant communities, particularly Muslims, and sustained attack on immigration/multi-cultural policies under the pretext of national security and purity, identity protection, nationalism etc. They do not openly call for violence against Muslims but the persistent demonization arguably triggers people with violent impulses to act thus (at least Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who killed 77 people in July 2011 mentioned Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller more than 170 times in his 1,500-page manifesto, describing them as experts on Islamic mission in the West [Center for American Progress, 2011], while the Christchurch far-right attacker, Brenton Tarrant, who killed 50 Muslims while they were praying in mosques in New Zealand, showered praise on Trump as “a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose” [*Aljazeera* March 16, 2019]). Such groups are more widely spread in the United States because of the extraordinary privilege and protection available under the First Amendment. Simon Boazman (2018) of the Aljazeera Investigative Unit has recently traced the origin and development of such Islamophobic organizations as Robert Spencer’s Jihad Watch, Pamela Geller’s American Freedom Defence Initiative, Brigitte Gabriel’s Act! For America, Frank Geffney’s Center for Security & Policy, and Daniel Pipes’ Campus Watch, their missions and connection with members of Trump’s administration, their strategies of penetrating (social) media, policy environment and law enforcement agencies, and most importantly their sources of funding.

These groups get millions of dollars annually as donation from such foundations as the Lynde and Harry Foundation, Jewish Community Federation of Sans Francisco, The Peninsular Marin & Sonoma Counties, Jewish Community of Los Angeles, Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, among others. “Almost 80% of the donors,” says Boazman (2018), “have vocally or financially supported causes that promote the state of Israel.” According to a 2016 report released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations and University of California, Berkeley, Centre for Race and Gender, 33 of these organizations received at least \$205,838,077 between 2008 and 2013. The Center for American Progress, on the other hand, revealed that seven of such donor foundations spent \$42.6 million between 2001 and 2009 on spreading Islamophobic rhetoric in the US alone (Considine, 2017). According to Saylor (2014), the David Horowitz Freedom Center received \$488,953 in 2011 alone, while Brigitte Gabriel’s

Act! For America witnessed a hike in donations from \$87,300 in 2010 to \$156,473 in 2011. While Boazman's documentary exposed a document in which Daniel Pipes requested \$120,000 for his Campus Watch to counter the Muslim Students Association's voice and activities, Saylor's (2014) investigation noted his Middle East Forum's disbursement of funds of \$1,242,000 to Steve Emerson's Investigative Project on Terrorism between 2009 and 2010 and \$450,000 to Yagal Carmon's Middle East Media Research Institute within the same period of time, among several others. On the whole the Council on American-Islamic Relations and University of California's (2016) investigation acknowledged the existence of 33 well-funded groups for the spread of antipathy and prejudice against Muslims, and 41 foundations funneling funds to the cause. But the top seven of the donor groups, according to Center for American Progress (2011), remain: 1) Donors Capital Fund, 2) Richard Mellon Scaife foundations, 3) Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, 4) Newton D. & Rochelle F. Becker foundations and charitable trust, 5) Russell Berrie Foundation, 6) Anchorage Charitable Fund and William Rossenwald Family Fund, and 7) Fairbrook Foundation. The primary objective of this movement is to galvanize public sentiment against Muslims so that they can be pariahs in the American public sphere. The pervasiveness of fear and hatred toward them would ultimately drown or suppress the voices of American, nay Western Muslims, from canvassing for Palestinian rights (Carter Center, 2017).

In 2007 Professor Mazrui noted that of all the minority communities in the United States, the Jews are the most successful in penetrating into America's cultural, political and economic sphere as well as media. Speaking at Chatham House in January 2007, he submitted that:

*Today, though barely two percent of the nation's population is Jewish, close to half its billionaires are Jews. The executive officers of the three major television networks and the four largest film studios are Jews, as are the owners of the nation's largest newspaper chain and the most influential single newspaper, The New York Times...The role and influence of Jews in American politics is equally marked...Jews are between two and three percent of the nation's population and comprise eleven percent of what this study defines as the nation's elite. However, Jews constitute more than 25 percent of the elite journalists and publishers, more than 17 percent of the leaders of important voluntary and public interest organizations, and more than 15 percent of the top ranking civil servants. Two well-known Jewish writers, Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, pointed out in their 1995 book, *Jews and the New American Scene*:...“During the last three decades Jews (in the United States) have made up 50 percent of the top hundred intellectuals...20 percent of professors at the leading universities...40 percent of partners in the leading law firms in New York and Washington...59 percent of the directors, writers, and producers of the 50 top-grossing motion pictures from 1965 to 1982, and 58 percent of directors, writers, and producers in two or more primetime television series”. The influence of American Jewry in Washington, notes the Israeli daily *Jerusalem Post*, is “far disproportionate to the size of the community, Jewish leaders and US official acknowledge. But so is the amount of money they contribute to (election) campaign”. One member of the influential Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations “estimated Jews alone had contributed 50 percent of the funds for (President Bill) Clinton's 1996 re-election campaign”. (pp. 9–10)*

From the above, one can appreciate the successes and interconnection of the Islamophobia industry with media, and the emergence of such politicians as Donald Trump, who, even if there is no financial support, can cash in on the popularity of such sentiment for votes. (For example, according to Aijaz Ahmad [2003], the popularity of President Bush Jr. rose abruptly from its low ebb among the US populace after exclaiming “crusade” and

similar stuff following the 9/11 attack). However, this is not to say that the entire (Western) Jewry is connected to or support activities of this hate-mongering industry or the brutality of Israel against the Palestinians. On the contrary, there are well-meaning Jews (the vast majority, probably) like Oxford University professor, Avi Shlaim and the Exeter historian Ilan Pappé who are as vehemently critical of the state of Israel policies on Palestine and Palestinians as anyone could be. Similarly, among the donors there are some who are not exactly aware that their donations are being directed into such cause, as latter investigation found (Ali, 2017).

Furthermore, these groups are internationally interlinked, so much so that they even exchange staff and expertise among each other, according to Perocco (2018). One can sniff such interconnection even in the nomenclature (consider, for example, Stop the Islamization of America, Stop the Islamization of Britain and Stop the Islamization of Australia) and messaging which focuses primarily on Shariah and Jihad. In addition, Peter Hervik (2008) has equally exposed the ties between Flemming Rose (*Jyllands Posten* art editor who initiated the 2006 Danish cartoon controversy) and Daniel Pipes, and how both were beneficiaries of the Free Speech Society's prizes for Freedom of Expression and of the Press—a prize which also went to Kurt Westergaard in 2008 for the circumstances surrounding his portrayal of Prophet Muhammad (and by extension Muslims) as a terrorist. In another study, Boe and Hervik (2008) maintained that:

Like Flemming Rose, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is one of the transnational actors who holds discourses that involve sweeping generalization about Islam and Muslims and who actively takes part in spreading de-contextualized stories stating that the cartoons were a matter of self-censorship and freedom of speech...Interestingly, The Jyllands Posten Foundation financed a quick translation of her book "I Accuse" (2005) into Danish in November 2005. She also has ties to Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, with whom she met that same month when she was awarded the Freedom Prize of the Liberal (Venstre) Party. (p. 219)

It is a bloody lucrative venture not only for such groups, but also for media organizations that concentrate on similar vilification and demonization (see Murdock & Golding, 2016; Wasko, 2014; Mosco, 2008; Fenton, 2007 for media content commodification). *Charlie Hebdo*, Boe and Hervik (2008) noted, normally publish 140,000 copies, but its special edition that disparaged the Prophet became its best-seller ever, selling more than 400,000 copies. In this vein, one equally recalls how the controversy triggered by Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* proliferated its demand, making it a best-seller at a point in time (Pipes, 1989). In fact a whole genre of literary writing that focuses on the theme is on the rise across Europe, according to Fabio Perocco (2018). His study illustrates the financial successes of such novels and books that caricature Islam, stereotype Muslims as inferior, and cast motive on their immigration to Europe. These include: Bat Ye'or's *Eurabia* (2005) and *Towards the Universal Caliphate: How Europe Became an Accomplice of Muslim Expansionism* (2009), Oriana Fallaci's *La Rabbia e l'orgoglio* (2001) and *La forza della ragione* (2004), Bawer's *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (2009) and *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within* (2006), Christopher Caldwell's *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (2009), Alain Griotteray's *Les Immigres* (1984), Thilo Sarrazin's *Germany Abolishes Itself* (2010), Berliski's *Menace in Europe* (2006), Blankley's *The West's Last Chance* (2006), Thornton's *Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow Motion Suicide* (2007), among others, which all recorded very high sales. To this category also belong films like *Submission* and *Fitna*.

It is interestingly note-worthy that there obviously appears to be a significant rise in the publication of books with such themes after 9/11. The decade was also a turning point marking the emergence and popularity of anti-Muslim movements in public space. In the US for instance, it was the 2009 protest organised by Geller's Stop the Islamization of America against the Ground Zero Mosque that first brought such organizations into the public lime-light. It symbolizes and instrumentalizes the fear of political evasion by Muslims projected as succeeding due to the election of President Obama, who was consistently dubbed by Republican machineries as a terrorist sympathizer, having links with the Muslim Brotherhood. And his name is often subjected to puns due to its rhythm with Osama, al-Qaeda's mastermind. Some even went to the extent of alleging that he was a secret Muslim. To illustrate, his Cairo speech and his autobiography (*Dream from my Father*) are often cited, where he respectively made a case for Muslims' contribution to US greatness and the Muslimness of his paternal grandfather, his fathers' relatives and his Indonesian stepfather. Nowhere, however, in either account did he ever hint at being faithful to the religion. With regards to the politics of identity, he emphasized more his African-Americanness, quite selectively of course. The juxtaposition of this aspect of his life with terrorist attacks in the build-up to and after his election was instrumental in provoking fear that the nation was being gradually taken away by Islamic forces. This period in time therefore became a watershed in the rise of Islamophobic rhetoric (Council on American-Islamic Relations & University of California, 2010).

Reinforcing the agenda of this largely pro-Israel network of donors and organizations are right-wing political groups, right-wing apocalyptic Christian preachers and some despotic Arab regimes that "rely on Western military intervention and the 'War on Terror' to legitimize their rule and silence critics" (Carter Centre, 2017, p. 4). Had this report been released now, one could conveniently conclude that the reference on the last point is particularly to Saudi Arabia for the killing of a prominent journalist who doubled as its acerbic critic, Jamal Kashoggi, and the endorsement of China's "reorientation" of Uighur Muslims in concentration camps under the guise of the "War on Terror." As for the right-wing extremist Christian preachers, one can recall Pastor Terry Jones of = Koran-burning infamy and others like Ruben Israel. In sum, the *New York Times* of February 20, 2019 quoted the Southern Poverty Law Center as saying, "Over 1,000 hate groups are now active in United States." That is why killings by white supremacists alone doubled in 2018 in comparison to 2017, according to the *Independent* (February 20, 2019), which, citing the same report, blamed this on Donald Trump and Fox News' toxic take on Muslims and immigrants as a whole.

Seeing the increasing popularity of Islamophobic tropes, politicians in both Europe and America intensified using them to cast opposition in a negative light (e.g. accusation of sympathy towards terrorism, looseness in security policies etc.) and appeal to the emotion of the populace for mass turnout of votes that would challenge the "laxity" of the status quo on security and immigration. This seems to have been effective in voters' decision-making during the 2016 US presidential election. When republican candidate, Donald Trump became notorious in proclaiming anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment that would form the crux of his policies later. Notably controversial among his statements includes his calling for "total and complete shutdown of Muslim entering the United States" (Vox, December 5, 2015). He also said, "I think Islam hates us" (CNN, March 9, 2016). A little after his election as president, he instituted ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries—Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen—which many viewed as a fulfillment of his campaign promises (BBC, June, 2018).

Commenting on the suicide bombing in Brussels, he said to Fox Business (cited in *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017):

We're having problem with the Muslims, and we're having problem with the Muslims coming into the country... You have to deal with the mosque, whether we like it or not, I mean, you know these attacks aren't coming out of – they're not done by Swedish people.

Earlier on (December 6, 2015), he told CBS News, “if you have people coming out of mosque with hatred and death in their eyes and on their minds, we’re going to have to do something.” In a speech in New Hampshire (June 13, 2016), he descended on his rival, Hillary Clinton’s position after a gay nightclub attack in Orlando: “Hillary Clinton’s catastrophic immigration plan will bring vastly more radical Islamic immigration into this country, threatening not only our society but our entire way of life.” And to NBC News he said, as a follow-up to the Brussels’ attack remark, “This all happened because, frankly, there is no assimilation...They want to go by Shariah law. They want Shariah law. They don’t want the law that we have. They want Shariah law.”¹ He has been variously quoted citing discredited statistics, making up stories like the one about Arab-looking men celebrating in New Jersey when the Twin Towers collapsed in the 9/11 attacks, repeatedly crying wolf over Obama’s birth certificate and the record of his religion. Elsewhere we have learnt about his tweeting and retweeting far right anti-Muslim sources in the UK, which even the UK government discredited and distanced itself from.

Such antipathy was weaponized not only by Trump himself, but by other key figures in his campaign team who later occupied sensitive positions in his administration. These include his national security adviser, Michael Flynn, who, speaking in ACT! For America conference, said: “Islam is a political ideology...It definitely hides behind this notion of its being a religion...It’s like a cancer, a malignant cancer in that case” (QUARTZ, November 18, 2016). Flynn also maintained that “fear of Muslims is rational” (Tazamal, January 21, 2019). Others with similar views are K. T. McFarland (deputy national security adviser) and Ben Carson (housing and urban development secretary) —both of whom believe and state publicly that Muslims orchestrate to invade US. Then came people like Mike Pompeo (the CIA head) and Stephen Bannon (Trump’s senior counsel), who compared Shariah to “Nazism, racism and communism” (Revesz, December 9, 2016). With the appointment of John Bolton to the NSA and Pompeo to the CIA, some observers think Trump was assembling a “war cabinet that will strike his most volatile and hawkish instinct” (*Washington Post*, April 12, 2018).

The combination of this industry and politicians’ propaganda has succeeded in making American Muslims the most hated, targeted and discriminated against population group. A study from the University of Minnesota revealed that this fear and aversion nearly doubled from 26% in 2006 to 45.5% in 2016 (Revesz, December 9, 2016).

The situation across Europe is quite similar. Politicians and political parties are increasing their popularity and acceptance through such stereotypical framing of Islam and Muslims. Their antagonistic stand against immigration, especially Muslim immigration, often raises their fortunes from the hitherto fringed to the mainstream. These include parties like: AFD (Alternative für Deutschland) in Germany, FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) in Austria, SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei) in Switzerland, Lega Nord in Italy, Front National in Belgium, the PVV (Partij Voorde Vrijheid) in Netherlands, DF (Dansk Folkeparti) in Denmark, SD (Sverigedemokraterna) in Sweden and Perussuomalaiset in Finland, among others. The only Islamophobic party that has waned, in contrast to the rest, is the British National Party (a subject for other research). The Islamophobic organizations complement and sometimes collaborate directly with these parties in pursuit of a common goal. Their relative successes and popularity seldom make even governments and mainstream parties adjust their position against

Muslims, Islam and immigration. This is sometimes made possible due to infiltration by far-right elements (Perroco, 2018; Allen, 2014; Meer & Modood, 2009; Hervik, 2008; Craft & Waisbord, 2008). All of the above illustrates the contemporary dimension of how “the East is a career” in the words of the Disraeli, or more aptly, Orientalism (representation of Islam and its associates) is a “corporate institution,” according to Edward Said (1978, p. 3).

FREE SPEECH AS SMOKE SCREEN

“This is freedom of expression. This is freedom of speech. It protects all speeches,” said Pamela Geller in reference to publicizing anti-Muslim ads during a CNN interview. There is obviously a deliberate effort to project free speech, based on the wording of the First Amendment, as an absolute, limitless and untrammelled phenomenon. But this is not the case. In fact it has never been the case. Of all the seven theories being used to interpret the amendment in respect of free speech, only one carries absolute aura. Principally championed by Hugo Black and William O. Douglas (supreme court justices from the 1930s to the 1970s), it is concerned with the role of the state in infringing citizens’ rights in that regard (see also Butler, 2009 for caution on the state as an arbiter on what constitute free speech). It culminated and was interpreted thus following colonialists’ suppression, through censorship and sedition laws, of “subversive” opinions. This led to the colonial authoritarianism which the US nationalists/founding fathers wanted to purge. However, the theory is silent on the intervention of cultural and moral variables. More so, the position, which Kunelius and Alhassan (2008) called liberal fundamentalism, has never been favored by a majority in the US Supreme Court. The two jurists were alone. Their colleagues (jurists like Anthony Kennedy, Holmes and Felix Frankfurter) defied and canvassed that various speeches can be censored because of their negativities—inciting violence, defamation, sedition etc. Thus Holmes’ words, “free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing panic” (cited in Baran, 2012, p. 397), become popular. In fact, Eagleton (2004) noted that it is almost impossible to find someone who believes in such a thing as absolute free speech in reality. Not only jurists, but also philosophers and scholars too have written extensively on the subject matter, advocating certain restrictions. These include on the one hand, Socrates, Milton, Locke and Mill—despite being its staunchest defender. And on the other hand, Hedges (2015), Hervik (2008), Phillips (2008), Holst and Molander (2009), Mamdani (2010), Kierulf (2009), Jorgensen (2009), Cole (2015), Bull (2009), Asad (2009), Butler (2009), Kamali (2010) and others, who looked at possible limitations to the freedom of expression from legal, cultural, philosophical, political, economic, social and other perspectives. Specifically, Mahmood (2009) explores how the experiences of various European countries during the Holocaust and World War II forced them into regulating many forms of speech. Such circumstance gave birth to the American Espionage Act during President Woodrow Wilson’s administration (Egbon, 2001) and the Patriot Act during George Bush’s office (Progler, 2005).

The second myth is its depiction as something unique, originating from Western culture. This is the framing that dominated Western media coverage of the Danish cartoon controversy, according to Hervik (2008), leading Helge Ronning (2009) to argue that

one of the most damaging assertions about the idea of human rights (to which free speech belongs) is that it is inherently the possession of what is usually called the West. Seen from such a perspective, human rights is a Western construct, created at a particular moment in time to suit certain interests, and it is now being projected onto the world stage as an ethical mask behind which old imperial and colonial power continues to assert itself. (p. 11)

More specifically, a number of scholars (Hedges, 2015; Cottee, 2016; Falk, 2011; Hill & Fenner, 2010; Chandler & Munday, 2011) posit that freedom of expression is the product and blessing of the Enlightenment—a period (from 1650 and 1799) of remarkable development in the intellectual history of the West, characteristically notable for a radical and rational approach to issues, whether religious, moral, scientific or cultural without much regard to dogma and tradition. This era gave rise to a Protestant movement that sought serious reform of Catholic ideals and dogma. Like the Age of Reason preceding the Renaissance, the Enlightenment allowed secularism, human rights and the idea of representative government to flourish through the philosophical opinions of notable figures such as Immanuel Kant, John Milton, Edmund Burke and J. S. Mill. In his 1784 *What is Enlightenment?*, Kant describes it as an epoch of

man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity—immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of Enlightenment. (cited in Hill & Fenner, 2010, p.8)

However, to those familiar with the scriptures, this view of freedom of expression emerging from the Enlightenment is contestable. It is rather a feature that evolved and developed with God's creatures right before the creation of mankind, transmuting into various shades and forms over time in human history, as it will most probably continue to undergo definitional modification in the future. In other words, freedom of expression with its glamorous character of dissent and fearlessness, is a God-giving right, as graphically illustrated in the pages of the Qur'an, and particularly in the incident involving God Almighty and the angels, on the one hand, and God and Satan, on the other hand, over the creation of Adam and his progeny (Q.2:30–35, 7:12–13, 17:61–62; Ali, 1998). Whereas Wein (2008) and Pember and Calvert (2008) concur that it is a God-given right, Neher and Sandhir (2007) aver that it is a tradition "associated with prophetic communication" (p. 29). Adding that "[i]n the Old Testament, the most striking example may be the case of Nathan, who admonished King David for wrongdoing."

According to Rodman (2006), controversies over freedom of expression "have raged *at least* since the times of the ancient Greeks, who debated whether anyone other than the male landowners should be allowed to express views in public" (p. 475, emphasis mine). Like Asad (2009), Okpoko (2014) too concedes and adds that "it is an idea that had crude beginnings with its roots in ancient antiquity dating back (sic) the times of Greek city-states" (p. 41). But Egbon (2001) credits the famous English poet, John Milton (1608–1674) as the first person to pen an eloquent defence of freedom of expression when he evaded prior licensing and stated in *Areopagitica* that, "Truth needs no licensing to make her victorious. Let her and falsehood grapple, who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberty", (cited in Egbon, 2001, p. 3, when crosschecked by this writer, the quote cannot be found verbatim in Milton's *Areopagitica*. However, it sums up Milton's argument in the essay).

Obviously, even before the invention of Gutenberg's printing press in 1450s, censorship seems typical of Renaissance and other periods predating it in Western history. In *On Liberty*, for example, Mill (1859) lamented the execution of Socrates, who was allegedly put to death for unorthodox views that corrupted the youths of Athens. (This is despite his self-censorship in articulating some views he perceived to be "awkward" for the time. For instance, on the notion of philosopher-king, he said to Glaucon, "This is what for so long was causing my hesitation to speak: seeing how very paradoxical it would be to say" [Plato 1968, p. 473]).

Such was the fate of Galileo in 1633, of Dolet in 1546, of William Prynne in 1637 and the bane of Professor David Irving in Austria for denying the Holocaust (Okoye, 2007; Kperogi, 2006; Bumstead, 1992). Religious history is also replete with similar instances of repression through torture and persecution (Hussain, 2006; Khalid & Eleiwa, 2003). Haykal (2008, p. 322) talk of how the Prophet's companions were "subjected to all sorts of maltreatment and contemptuous humiliation" (p. 322) for expression of unorthodoxy which later became mainstream. A fictional rendition of state suppression of "subversive" expressions can be found in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

THE WEST AND THE MUSLIM WORLD: EXPLORING THE ROOT OF TENSION

According to Abdallah (2005), Ruthven (1991) and Lewis (1990), the root of the tension and mutual revulsion which influences media narrative, public discourse and policies, dates back to the seventh century and was precipitated by military confrontation between the West and the world of Islam, which resulted in conquest and reconquest of each other's territory and sphere of influence. Muslim power and dominance extended to European countries such as Spain, Sicily, Portugal and some parts of France during the heyday of Islam between the seventh and tenth centuries; the Crusades turned the tide between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries; the Ottoman Turks reversed this balance and held sway over the Balkans and Constantinople, and twice attempted to capture Vienna between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Then came the era of colonialism whence the imperial hegemony was felt in such Muslim countries as Egypt, Algeria and Libya, which was succeeded by the rise of nationalism and national independence among these colonized territories. This competition for domination, according to Bryan (1974), was largely orchestrated with religious zealotry. But with the triumph of secularism over religious dogma (as a result of Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment in the sixteenth century), the conflict continued via secular institutions of the West, which are conscious, however passively, of their original Christian identity.

Dawn (1980, p. 86) noted that right from the outset of their penetration,

Those Euro-Americans who have concerned themselves with the lands inhabited by Muslims have throughout history thought of Islam as an entity in contradistinction to another entity, the West, which is Euro-American world...{they} generally have believed Islam to be radically different from the West or from other religions, notably Christianity.

More specifically, early European interest on Islam and the Muslim world was ignited by missionary fervor. The aftereffect of the Reformation split Christianity into two rival factions, each striving to win the heart and soul of Europe and beyond. So emissaries were, as far as 1600s, sent to Middle East to collect or purchase manuscripts dealing with all aspects of Arab life. For, it was felt, to refute Islam it had to be understood. This therefore began a chain of polemic scholarship—from Lodovico Marracci to George Sale; Simon Ockley down to Flaubert (*The Economist*, March 6, 2018). Thus tropes such as anti-Christ, impostor, polygamy and Harem (which evoke licentiousness and lasciviousness) started gaining ground in conjuring up the mental picture of the Prophet, and the Arabs generally. Consolidating these are plays staged in cinemas (e.g. Voltaire's *Mahomet* and Dante's *Inferno*) caricaturing Islam to reinforce Western cultural and racial superiority before Western audiences. These not only thrilled them but prepared their minds to accept the legitimacy of imperial domination of foreign lands (Hammerbeck, 2004; Said, 1994). As a result, issues of hospitality, friendliness and coexistence typified by Christian king Negus' reception of persecuted and vulnerable Muslims and by the Prophet accommodating in his mosque Christian envoys in Medieval

times (Haykal, 2008), are conveniently and regularly put at bay. This therefore trails modern East–West discourses, where, for example, instances of Muslims fighting in the world wars on the side of their Christian brethren (*Guardian*, November 12, 2017), or as Mazrui (2007, p. 1) would argue, areas of agreement such as those on “sexual mores (and) gender roles,” are rarely brought to the fore regarding Western relation with Islam and Muslim world. Rather differences, irreconcilability and hostilities are the recurrent themes. One such example being Rudyard Kipling’s (1936) “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet / Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgement seat.”

According to Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*, whether as religious scholars, philologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians of the Middle East, poets, novelists or travel writers, the central concern of Western explorers of the Muslim world for centuries, was to document, quite contrastively and graphically, how the people there, their religion and culture are essentially weird and different from the Occidental. This institutionalized system of representation (starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century) not only allowed the audience in particularly Western theatres to appreciate the uniqueness and advancement of their culture and civilization, but also prepared the ground for subsequent subjugation of those societies by Western imperial powers—British, French and American in particular.

This uneven relationship of knowledge, power and representation between the West and Muslim world, which nurtured the hostility between the two entities, persisted because of three reasons, according to Said (1978). First, the activities of these scholars and writers which represent Islam, Arabs and Middle East as monolithic, exotic, alien, docile, despotic, patriarchal, sensual etc., what he otherwise called Orientalism. Second, Arab/Israel conflict and the role of American Jewish community. Third, the lack of a cultural movement within the West that would counter such narratives or call for a dispassionate representation of Islam and the Middle East. What Said (1978) misses out, however, is the issue of immigration to the West and the economic status of the immigrants, and the rise of crimes such as terrorism and the framing of such in the media as an Arab/Muslim monopoly.

In the twentieth century, Western, particularly American, interest on the oil deposits in the Middle East, their support for despotic and unpopular regimes in the region, and for the survival and wellbeing of Israel (which often shortchanges the Palestinians and spurs the resentment of most Arabs, according to Thussu and Freedman, 2003) have further complicated the relationship between the two entities (Ahmad, 2003; Ahmad, 2001). Any “awry” behavior, such as resisting imperial occupation of Palestine or uprisings within these countries due to socio-political imbalances, is likely to be attributed to Islam as inspirational to the Arab mind by pundits in the Western media and policy cycles. And what applies to Arabs invariably applies to all Muslims. Hence Orientalizing images cherry-picked from the repertoire become dominant in the media.

This attitude towards Islam intensified in the second-half of the twentieth century (Said, 1994). And during the 1986 MESA (Middle East Studies Association) debate on “The Media, Scholars and the Middle East” in Boston, the Jewish American journalist and literary editor of the *New Republic*, Leon Wieseltier, candidly admitted that there is institutional pressure in the US to sustain such a skewed narrative about Islam and repress any balancing element in the mainstream media. In that debate, as well as in his similar interventions, such as *Islam through the Western Eye* (1980) and *Covering Islam* (1981), Said argued that this stereotypical representation of Islam as inherently violent, medieval, incongruous and hostile to Western civilization persists because Western scholars of the Middle East (a.k.a. area experts) did little to counteract it by exploring context through references to people, culture, history and society rather than politics. In other words, they appear to tacitly confirm the patented images in the media. As a result, such notions of Islam have permeated not only mainstream newspapers,

magazines and television screens but best-selling novels, motion pictures and textbooks; thus cultivating a generic vision among their audience. The rise in terror attacks (crowned by 9/11) and its close association with Islam, Muslims and Arabs in Western media has only succeeded in worsening the prejudice among their audience (Powell, 2011, 2018). According to a study by academics in the University of Alabama and Georgia State University on media coverage of all terrorist attacks in the United States between 2006 and 2015 (a total 136), Muslim terrorists committed 12.5%. However, those in which the perpetrator was identified as a Muslim, received an average of 105 headlines, while those by others received an average of 15 headlines (*Guardian*, July 20, 2018; *Newsweek*, February 2, 2019). As if to resonate with the theme of this paper, Said (1981, p. 45) says, “[i]t ought to go without saying that the media are profit-seeking corporations and therefore, quite understandably, have an interest in promoting some images of reality than others.” This can only be worse when politics comes in to play (Mazrui, 2007) as will be seen shortly.

Controversies provoking tension along binary divides and tilting the scale in favor of irreconcilability between Islam and the West provide raw material for the media. In recent times these include the Rushdie affair, the Danish cartoons and the “clash of civilizations” controversies ignited by scholars, literary writers and the media—to all of whom Said has been untiring in indicting and confronting.

Scholars who write primarily for American foreign policy such as Lewis (1990), Huntington (1993, 2002) and Fukuyama (1989, 2002, 2014), portray Islam as a potential threat; a potent competitor to the West and an enemy that should be closely watched for its “combustibility” (as evident in the Iranian Revolution of 1979) and from another enemy—communism. In *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, Lewis (1990), for example, contends that Muslims’ resentment of the West is significantly caused by envy of the latter’s achievements in terms of material wealth, science and technology, successful separation of state and church and flexible political institutions which accommodate pluralism etc., the experimentation of which failed in yielding the same result of modernity in most Middle Eastern Muslim countries. Hence the bitterness and disappointment that was further worsened by the increasing descent of Islam as a world power. So “we” in the West, he condescendingly proceeds, should not be tempted to debase “ourselves” by reacting in the way “they” do—thereby allowing the clash of civilizations. (Never mind that a decade earlier Professor Ernest Dawn had argued that “the feeling of hostility to the West (is) a sense of being victims of unfair exploitation by the West” [1980, p. 101]).

In this fashionable drive of pitting the West against Islam, Fukuyama (1989, 2002) postulates that ideologies have reached their final stage of evolution and Western liberal democracy has come to stay as the ultimate form of government for mankind. But it will have to contend intermittently with the forces of what he calls “Islamofascism:” “radical Islamists, intolerant of diversity and dissent” (2002, p. 58). Samuel Huntington, who Fukuyama (2014) acknowledges as having tremendous influence on him, had equally hit the same drum of bellicosity and irreconcilability in “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993) (the coinage of the phrase is often attributed to Lewis but a wiki entry suggests that it developed from colonial clash of cultures and was used by Basil Matthew in 1926, Albert Camus in 1946 and Girilal Jain in 1988) and its sequel, where he theorizes that the future world conflict after the Cold War will be fought along cultural lines as countries in the world are increasingly identifying and aligning with their cultural similarities to form major civilizational fronts. The United States needs to be abreast of such alliances in preparation for an impending clash of civilizations with particularly the Islamic-Confucian front as the major threat to Western “interests, values and power” (Huntington, 1993, p. 45). The same argument is extended to his “Age of Muslim War” (2002) wherein he, more disturbingly, concludes that even if the conflict between Islam and the West is resolved, it will “be succeeded

by a new era dominated by other forms of violence among the world's people" (p. 13); thus giving the impression of a world of endless wars.

In "The Clash of Ignorance" (2001), "The Clash of Definitions" (2000) and more generally in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Said wore the toga of peace scholarship and countered Lewis and Huntington, arguing that the latter in particular, was selfishly bent on expanding the scope of the Cold War through all means possible so as to keep his ilk in the American security enterprise afloat, and that both relied hugely on second- and third-hand sources to arrive at conclusions rather than rigorous engagement with the original cultural sources of scholarship that will enable us understand the actualities of the current global situation. While inviting more nuanced and complex interpretation, he noted that no culture or civilization has remained insular, unaffected by the other(s) due to the intermingling experiences brought by colonial incursion, the rise of nationalism, immigration and globalization. More so, the clash thesis, according to him, ignores the unending tussle among arbiters of each culture over the definition of its genuine composition.

CONCLUSION

It is gratifying to note that organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations are intensifying efforts at exposing the nefariousness of such Islamophobic networks. A number of scholars and institutions are similarly consistently presenting facts and figures about the lopsidedness of Western media coverage of Islam and Muslims. What should be encouraged more is the presence and participation of Muslims in both social and political lives. Their visibility in the public sphere (with Islam relived in accordance with its virtues of patience, peace, reason and benevolence) would ameliorate suspicion their reclusiveness heightens and facilitate an alliance with groups over the menace of Islamophobia.

Overall, there is hope. As the 2008 Pew research showed, such feelings are more prevalent among older people and less-educated youths. So educational projects that promote intercultural discourse would help. Investment in personal education will equally make Western Muslims' social and political visibility more meaningful and fruitful. It would assure their economic mobility from low-waged jobs to high-paying ones. Above all, proper education would help reform the perception of Islam and make it more appealing to their neighbors and society at large.

In this vein comes the significance of media investment. How many authoritative international newspapers and magazines are today owned by the Muslim world? How many world-class television stations? How many Muslims work as journalists, feature as expert commentators in primetime programs or op-eds? In this world of spin, one has to learn to blow one's own trumpet. If the world had half-a-dozen *Aljazeeras*, there would have been little hue and cry over Western media misrepresentation.

ENDNOTE

¹ For details on these and more, see: "'I think Islam hates Us': A timeline of Trump's comments about Islam and Muslims" (*Washington Post*, May 20, 2017).

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