



A Review of Islamophobic Tropes in The Works of Disgruntled Muslim Insiders

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Abstract: *The ideas of disgruntled individuals can lead to negative stereotypes and misconceptions about religion and its followers. However, it is important to note that the actions of a few disgruntled Muslims do not represent the beliefs and practices of an elite religious group. Islam, like any other religion, is a complex belief system with a long history and wide range of interpretations and practices. The following research article examines the ideas of two disgruntled writers, namely Irshad Manji and Aryan Hirsi Ali. Because of their insider credentials, they are taken seriously by their non-Muslim audience in the West. Their presentation of Islam persuades the audience that the western worries with regard to Islam are justified and that the Islamic worldview is a real threat to the Western values and freedoms. The article concludes that their oversimplified and Islamophobic narrative regarding the alleged misogyny, violence and backwardness of Islam is untenable.*

Key Words: Stereotypes, Multiculturalism, Gender Equality, Middle Ages, Crusader, Polemicist, Tribal Mentality, Fundamentalism, Media

Introduction

Native informants or insiders are usually thought to be more authentic voice of Islam than the non-Muslim critics of Islam. They occasionally address the Muslim population in their speeches and writings but they mostly speak to wester audiences. Their presentation of Islam creates the impression that fears and anxieties vis-à-vis Islam are genuine and Islam is as dangerous as it is perceived to be in the west.

Islamophobia is an irrational fear or prejudice towards Islam or Muslims. It can manifest itself in many ways, including but not limited to discrimination against Muslims in employment, the media, education, and everyday life; hate speech and hate crimes against Muslims; and the exclusion of Muslims from the public sphere. Islamophobia is a form of bigotry and racism. It is rooted in ignorance

and misinformation about Islam and Muslims. Islamophobes often falsely conflate Islam with terrorism, extremism, and violence. Islamophobia had pro-Christian and anti-Muslimism elements during the crusades and colonial eras. In the contemporary world, secular concepts such as democracy, freedom of thought, gender equality, etc., have put religious ideas on the back burner.

The Essential Elements of Islamophobia

The word islamophobia became a part of public discourse in the late 1990s when the Runnymede Report was launched by Jack Straw. According to the report, Islamophobia is a fear, abhorrence and antagonism towards Islam and its followers. The report identified several closed views, beliefs and hostile stereotypes which constitute contemporary anti-Muslim bigotry.

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The Runnymede Trust found that Islam is viewed as unchanging and uniform. The idea that Islam lacks variety, diversity of interpretations and sectarian controversies is the first on the list of closed viewpoints. (Green, 2019, p. 13) In other words, all Muslims have the same worldview and set of ideas. This notion is largely responsible for the Islamophobia that exists in the West today. People will simply assume that Islam is an intolerant and violent religion, if media coverage concentrates on acts of violence or terrorism committed by a tiny percentage of Muslims.

Thinking of Islam as a static and monolithic religion creates erroneous generalizations. For instance, people in the European world might suppose that all Muslim women experience the same problems and restrictions especially if they have happened to land in a country such as Saudi Arabia; but in reality, Saudi Arabia is the exception rather than the rule. Saudi Arabian women are subject to severe restrictions on their public behavior, such as the ban on driving but women in other Muslim-majority countries do not encounter such restrictions. Contrary to the notion that other religions are complicated and multifaceted phenomena and evade categorizations, Islam is supposed to be uniquely opposite.

Secondly, Islam is considered as separate and 'other'. (Green, 2019, p.13) The belief that Islam is incompatible with fundamental principles found in other religions especially Judaism and Christianity is another key component of Islamophobia. Similarly, Islamic ideals and values are thought to be at variance with Western civilization and its ideals like tolerance, religious pluralism, or religious freedom.

Thirdly, Islam is considered inferior. (Green, 2019, p.14) A third Islamophobic notions is that Islam is both different from and inferior to the West. A host of stereotypes are put together to construct the narrative of inferiority: Islam is gender biased; the west is gender equal; Islam is backward; the west is enlightened; Islam is barbarous; the west is tolerant and modern; Islam is irrational and illogical and the west is both logical and rational.

Former Muslim and well-known opponent of Islam Ayaan Hirsi Ali regularly makes use of

these criticisms in her writing and speeches. She compares Islam with the Enlightenment values that are prevalent in the West, such as freedom of research and individual freedom. Islam, according to her writing, "is irreconcilable with the libertarian ideas at the core of the legacy of the Enlightenment." (Ali, 2008, p.35.) She claims that one of the reasons that make Islam so repugnant is its "obsession with subjugating women." Being convinced of the backwardness of Islam, she maintains that Islam cannot contribute any valuable thing to the west in terms cultures, ethics, and intellect. (Ali, 2008, p.36)

Fourthly, Islam is feared as a threat. Seen from the fear perspective, Islam is looked upon as hostile, belligerent, and aggressive. (Green, 2019, p. 15) Islam is a conquering religion, hence there will unavoidably be a "clash of civilizations" between the two entirely antagonistic worldviews, namely Islam and the West.

Fifthly, Islam is viewed as being manipulative. (Green, 2019, p. 15) The belief that Muslims are suspect because they are perceived as cunning and depending on their faith to offer them a tactical military or political edge is another typical characteristic of Islamophobia.

Sixthly, anti-Muslim racial prejudice is acceptable. The report points out that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Asian attitude are frequently linked since racism and Islamophobia are frequently combined in the British context. (Green, 2019, p. 16) Though westerners usually denounce racial discrimination in any form and shape, it becomes acceptable when it is meted out to Muslims and Arabs in various Western societies.

Seventhly, Muslims' critique of the West is counted as invalid. (Green, 2019, p. 17) The Western criticism of Islam is seen as a one-way track as Muslim opinions on and critiques of Western ideals or practices are rarely or never taken into consideration by Western politicians, religious leaders, and media, despite the fact they themselves enjoy the freedom to criticize and satirize Islamic beliefs and practices.

Finally, Anti-Muslim discourse is treated as natural. According to the study, anti-Muslim

discourse is so pervasive that even some well-known persons who fiercely support tolerance and equal rights for all people show little or no alarm for the discrimination that Muslims face in their society. (Green, [2019](#), p. 17) Prejudiced remarks or viewpoints concerning Muslims are commonplace rather than hateful.

Muslims typically feel powerless to defend themselves in front of Western audiences, and some believe that when they do speak up, their voices are not heard. They don't have the power to change how Islam is depicted in the media, to put it another way. In the context of international political and military operations as well as domestic security, influential politicians have an influence on negative perceptions of Islam. In the wake of significant events like the Danish cartoon issue, we have also seen instances of the media distorting the portrayal of Islam in the news.

Medieval Christian Stereotypes of Islam

European Christians deliberately represented Islam as a debauched type of paganism. Alternatively, maybe as a result of this, Christian authors may have projected onto the fears of the Saracens their own troubled relationships with holy objects.

The medieval poets, chroniclers, and hagiographers eloquently depicted denigrating caricatures of Saracens. The Saracens were depicted in the twelfth century as having a plethora of gods with Mahomet (or Mahon, Mahound, or Mahamet) as their main god. (Tolan, [2019](#), p.6) Even Peter, Abbot of Cluny, who commissioned the first translation of the Qur'an in the 1140s, was undecided as to whether to categorize the Saracens as "pagans" or "heretics." These Saracens are hostile to civilization and desert raiders. And God gave Ismael and his lineal descendants a permanent genetic disposition to be hostile and savage. Furthermore, these people, who are more appropriately known as Ishmaelites call themselves Saracens to conceal their descent from the slave Hagar and trace their origin to Abraham's real wife, Sarah. (Bachrach, [2017](#), p. 144) However, the fact of the matter is that none of the Muslims have ever identified as Saracen.

Similar false stories were propagated during the crusades. Crusade chroniclers narrate the glorious victory and chivalrous

deeds of Christian knights. They fought valiantly and broke open the doors of the Templum Domini and discovered the image of Muhammad (peace be upon him), fashioned of silver, and too hefty for six men with strong arms to lift, sitting on a high throne. (Bachrach, [2017](#), p. 144) It was dressed in purple and gold and completely encrusted in stones.

Needless to say, neither at the Dome of the Rock nor anywhere else did the crusaders ever come across idols of "Mahummet." (Tolan, [2019](#), p.27) A number of crusades chroniclers have concocted fiction that paints a vivid justification of how the crusaders abolished paganism and restored the true religion of Christ. A crucial component of the theological defense of the crusade is the Saracens' pagan beliefs: the idolators crucified Jesus, and his devout followers will take their revenge on them for the crucifixion of their "parent."

For the author of *Chanson d'Antioche*, Mahomes—an idol kept up by huge magnets—serves as the focal point of the pagan ritual. After the idol failed to provide its devotees' victory, Sansadoines, a beaten Saracen general, strikes it, forcing it to tumble to the ground and be destroyed. The angry pagan recognizes the futility and helplessness of his idols and smashes them with his own hands.

In both French and English, this word (mahon, mahum, mahun, mahoun, etc.) comes to be used to denote idols, such as those that the ancient Greeks and Romans worshipped, the gods of the Vikings or other northern heathens, and the purported deities of the Saracens.. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 36)

Amurack is instructed by Mahomet to lead his men to Naples and overthrow the kingdom of Aragon. Belinus shouts out loud: we are going to emerge victorious in the battle because our lord, Mohound will support us, as they go forward (IV.186–87). Amurack acts like a defeated Saracen king would when he finds out that Belinus has been murdered and his army defeated at the close of act IV: he curses and threatens Mahomet.

The medieval stereotypical and polemical depiction of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as an idol or a false prophet who carries the sword in one and 'Alkoran' in the other hand still pervades the contemporary western discourse

on Islam and feeds their Islamophobic prejudice. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 41)

According to Boccaccio, it was during the era of monarch Heraclius, that the false Mahound called himself the divinely appointed apostle and enacted fatal commandments. (Hedeman, [2008](#), pp.42-46) his biography of the prophet, Laurent de Premierfait referred to him as "the traitorous traitor Machomet," and used negative epithets for a description of his personality such as a "false, dishonest prophet and magician," (Hedeman, [2008](#), p.47)

Medieval Christians described the holy Quran as "vile and undignified Alcoran". They maintain that one day when Muhammad (peace be upon him) was giving a sermon and big bull appeared out of nowhere. It was acclaimed as a divine messenger, and the book it brought in its horns was cherished as the divine message.

The authors of these polemical biographies of Muhammad (peace be upon him) were worried about the spread of heresy among the Christian community at a time when issues of reform and heresy sharply divided the Church and European culture. They had disagreement controversies over the beliefs and authority of the Church. Therefore, rather than being inspired by curiosity about Islam or its prophet, their disparaging images of Muhammad (peace be upon him) mirrored their own concerns and anxieties about fake reformers and heretics. (Tolan, [2019](#), p.47)

Mendicant friars studied Arabic and the Qur'an to better oppose the "Saracen heresy" in a mostly failed endeavour to convert people to Christianity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Latin theologians began to challenge what they dubbed the "Saracen" heresy in the twelfth century. They violently (mis)read Muslim writings in order to depict Muhammad as a heretic (and relied on older Arab Christian sources).

The predominant view of Muhammad in Europe from the twelfth century all the way up to the sixteenth century is that of a heretic and false prophet.

Guibert believes that the cow revelation is sufficient, especially in light of the fact that the rule it exposes caters to the perverted libido of these Eastern folks. Theophanes had criticized Mahond for assuring his adherents of a paradise filled with sensuous pleasures.

(Nogent, 1996, p. 32) Guibert takes it a step further by speculating that the new law's core component and the reason it appeals to a sensual population is sexual license.

Muhammad, he says, had been an idolater in the past and had become wealthy via commerce and his marriage to Khadja. He chose to pose as a prophet in order to rule over his tribe, and his friends—naive itinerants who were unaware of the prophecy's indications—accepted his claim to prophethood. He and his men made money via plundering and going to battle. According to the Christian author, these deeds suffice to disprove Muhammad's status as a prophet; his military fiascos, particularly the debacle of Ohod, where he suffered injuries, are persuasive evidence. A true prophet would have anticipated (and prevented) defeat. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 56) The Christian author frequently contrasts Muhammad with Jesus (either expressly or inferentially) in this passage: Muhammad passionately sought after both worldly power and sex, whereas Christ eschewed both. Muhammad also failed to predict his military setbacks, while Christ performed miracles. This disparity is continued in his account of Muhammad's demise. He claims that Muhammad gave the command to his friends not to bury him after his passing because angels would transport his body to paradise in three days. When he passed away, his followers carried out his instructions: His odor altered after three days of waiting, and their hopes of seeing him brought up to paradise vanished. They buried him after being let down by his false promises and understanding his deception. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 57) The Qur'an explicitly states that Muhammad did not perform any marvels. He led a depraved life, "reveling in rapacity and theft, and so burned with the fire of passion that he did not blush to contaminate another man's bed in unlawful sex, precisely as if the God were commanding it." (Petrus & Alfonsi, [2006](#), 146) One cannot tell how much of the Alcoran represents Machomet's teachings because it was written not by him but by his students after his passing. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 59) Peter identifies Arius, Muhammad, and the Antichrist as the three main foes the devil employs to mislead Christians. (Tolan, [2019](#), p. 61) Muhammad (peace be upon him) is depicted in the Summa

haeresis Saracenorum as a lowly guy who is skilled at duping gullible Arabs.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) is criticized by Peter for his incorrect beliefs regarding the Trinity, Christ (especially his rejection of the incarnation), and heaven as a place of sensual pleasures. (Tolan, 2019, p.61) This argumentative essay contends that Islam is the anthology of all the faults that the Christian world has previously been aware of.

Riccoldo presents a dissertation on the Qur'an that is more thorough and organized than anything that was before written in Latin. The rejection fundamental Christian beliefs and teachings are listed by him as its "main faults." He painstakingly compares the Qur'anic concept to past heresies within Christianity, such as Nestorianism, Jacobitism, and Arianism. (Monterde, 2011) He accuses the Qur'an of being irrational, violent, unorganized, inconsistent, and perplexing.

Unlike other Christian polemicists, Riccoldo is less concerned in recounting the life of Mahomet; instead, he attacks the Qur'an and briefly describes Mahomet's history in order to criticize the Qur'an's revelation and compilation. (Monterde, 2011)

The discussion that follows looks at the justifications, intentions, and power of well-known individuals and organizations that deliberately stifle the diversity of Muslim voices and purposefully sow and profit from anti-Islamic fear in a way that is unheard of in mainstream political and media circles. The term "professional Islamophobia" refers to this behavior. The professional Islamophobia movement is made up of a collection of conservative politicians, right-wing activists, bloggers, and even disillusioned Muslims or ex-Muslims who specialize in denouncing Muslims.

The Center for American Progress and Nathan Lean (2017) both refer to this group as the "Islamophobia Network" and the "Islamophobia Industry," respectively. Whatever we call it, what matters is that those who practise and profit from professional Islamophobia have access to powerful political, media, and publishing platforms that echo and feed Western anxieties about the Muslim "Other." (Green, 2019, p. 205)

Irshad Manji's and Aryan Hirsi Ali's Islamophobic Ideas

Irshad Manji is one of the resentful insiders who frequently plays up false perceptions about Islam. She was born in Uganda into Muslim family. Her family migrated to Canada and she grew up in Vancouver. She repeatedly expressed her academic disagreements with her Madrassa teachers' conservative ideas, which ultimately led to her expulsion. Though the independent study of Islam, she concluded that Muslims had abandoned reason. (Green, 2019) She came into the international limelight when she brought out her book, "The Trouble with Islam Today."

Like Hirsi Ali, she has won several awards and accolades her academic endeavors to reinterpret the teaching of Islam from within. Ms. Magazine conferred on her the title: Feminist for the 21st Century. She is admired for her audacity and conviction. New York University appreciates Irshad Manji's reform efforts and admires her courage and boldness to challenge intellectual conformity and political correctness. Their personal stories share to important features. First, both describe their struggle as a journey from slavery to salvation. They look upon Islam as bondage and the West as liberation. In their personal accounts, they narrate that they have been victims of Islam and now they are determined to fight the tyranny of Islam. Second, they severely condemn the harsh treatment against women legalized by Islam. (Green, 2019, p.224)

These two tropes—namely oppression of Islam and abysmal treatment of womenfolk—feature prominently in the biographies of many native informants. Additionally, two motifs stand out: Islam's restriction on critical thinking and the superiority of Western freedoms and values. They admit that there is some diversity in Islam but Muslims unanimously believe that nobody is permitted to criticize, contradict or revise the fundamental principles of Islam. (Alsultany, 2013) Manji maintains that Arab tribal mentality overwhelms the religious discourse and resultantly independent reasoning (Ijtihad) has been thrown out. She labels the mindless imitation of early Muslim jurists as 'fundamentalism.' Manji argues that Islam would not be able to experience

'enlightenment' until fundamentalism is completely eradicated. Her book, *The Trouble with Islam Today*, puts great stress on the necessity of reform. She believes that Muslim women cannot get rid of their sufferings and abuse within Islam unless Muslim embrace critical thinking. (Manji, 2005) To put an end to oppression, they need to develop the courage and ability to question the sources and founders of Islam.

Like other insiders, Manji seldom disparages the West, and when she does, it's more in the form of a subtle complement. For instance, she is critical of western acceptance of multiculturalism and its excessive tolerance towards religious diversity. (Manji, 2005) She argues that Muslim fundamentalists exploit such inclusivist attitudes towards diverse cultures and religions and the West must learn to be less tolerant in these spheres. She proposes that the west should become involved in reform initiatives and make sure that western values triumph over Islamic ones. She maintains that the west need to orchestrate an ambitious struggle deal a decisive blow to Islam's tribal mentality.

The fundamental flaw in their argument is their complete disregard for any evidence in the Islamic sources that complicate or refute their preconceived notions. For example, they argue that Islam does not allow the use of reason depreciates Ijtihad, self-criticism, and transformation. Even a little examination of contemporary Islamic history disproves such statements. To refute their view, we even do not need to go back to any remote history of reform and reformers because the contemporary Muslims reformers will suffice. It would be wrong to assume that Hirs Ali and Manji are the lone or first voices advocating reform within Islam. Such voices are galore. They include: Tariq Ramazan, Amina Wadud, Laila Ahmad, Nurcholish Majeed, Fatma Mernissi etc. Manji and Hirs Ali pay no need to their nuanced understanding of Islam as they challenge their simplistic views of Islam and undermine their uncritical perspective of Western superiority.

They enthusiastically draw attention to the undereducation of Muslim women and the exclusion of women from political space but they never mention high percentages of women in Egypt and Iran getting a university education. In the US, the number of female

Muslim graduates is higher than the number of female graduates in the rest of the population, including Christians. They never talk about countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan where women have served as heads of states. Similarly, they try to persuade their western audience that women's life is miserable in Muslim societies but show reluctance to admit that anti-women violence does exist in western families. Hirs Ali's portrayals of Muslim women paints the impression as though every Muslim woman is a victim of religion-sanctioned violence and abuse. Her audience never hear from her that Muslim women experience love, affection, loyalty, respect, and fulfilment in their relationships with male figures of their families. (Green, 2019) They boldly criticize the oppression of Muslim women but never tell their audience that Muslim women do find a lot of arguments in the Islamic sources to combat patriarchal attitudes and domestic violence.

To protect the glorious façade of the West, they carefully avoid any reference to the fact that one in four women encounters violent abuse from her intimate partner, and one in five have faced an attempted rape. In Europe, one in three women experience physical and sexual attacks. Despite such shocking statistics, Maji's and Hirs Ali's keep blowing the trumpet of western superiority and oppression of women under Islam. They do not want to complicate their Islamophobic narrative of deprived Muslim women vs privileged western women.

Hirs Ali's *The Caged Virgin* celebrates the Western way of life and paints Islam as the sole source for women's problems. She maintains that Islamic culture denies women the right to employment and education forces them into marriage with brutal men who subject them to physical torture and mental agony. Contrary to the horrific treatment meted out to women in Muslim societies, the western culture gives her access to education and lets her marry a man of her own choice. Hirs Ali proudly announces that she can choose to have an abortion and can freely express her opinion on political and religious issues. (Ali, 2006) She further adds that she can contest an election for any public office and run into a business of her choice. "This is what makes the West so great," she concludes.

Hirs Ali owes her prominent status and repute as a media star to her movie called

Submission. The film shows that a large number of women suffer today because of Islam. She holds the revered figure of Islam as responsible of sexual and physical sufferings and agonies that Muslim women have to experience. (Ali, 2008) She argues that multiculturalism has overstepped its bounds and that Muslims, particularly those living in the West, need to understand that Islam, too, is subject to criticism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Hirsi Ali, Manji, and numerous other indigenous insiders downplay the richness and multiple interpretations of Islam,

ignore historical truths, and have limited and decontextualized opinions about how the West interacts with Islam. They have extremely strong beliefs about what ails Islam and what ought to be corrected. They have the ability to injure many people, especially Muslims, by the way they express their criticisms. Both the propagation of an Islamophobic version of Islam and the promotion of an uncritical attitude towards the West and its connection to Islam are risks associated with their criticisms. In return for their Islamophobic narratives, they are rewarded with rich book agreements, respectable lecture fees, significant media exposure, and a prestigious position among the political and cultural elites of the West.

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