

become widespread despite not being perfect in their linguistic form.

It is unclear when the term *Islamophobia* originated, but it is often traced to the late 19th century. The Runnymede Trust in the United Kingdom published a groundbreaking report about Islamophobia in 1997, which popularized the term. Islamophobia became more visible after 9/11 and the “War on Terror” due to the frequent association of Islam and Muslims with terrorism. This led to Muslims encountering more suspicion and hostility, but it also led to a growth of activism against Islamophobia.

Academic scholarship about Islamophobia also expanded massively after 2001. It is now better appreciated that there is a cyclical relationship between Islamophobia and terrorism, which is to say that alienated Muslims who experience Islamophobia may find extremist rhetoric appealing and Muslim terrorism may trigger further Islamophobia. More recent studies of Islamophobia have explored how it coalesces with other prejudices in an intersectional manner as well as the ways in which Islamophobia can crystallize as anything from microaggressions to structural-institutional forms.

Islamophobia has existed for centuries; it may even be argued that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, experienced Islamophobia from those who mocked and attacked him and his followers. Throughout the centuries, there were times when Islam was romanticized, but it was more common for clergy, playwrights, poets, philosophers, travel writers, and others to espouse an orientalist demonization of Islam and a dehumanization of Muslims in ways that still reverberate today. This was especially heightened when Christians and Muslims were engaged in power struggles during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and European colonialism.

In the current era, Islamophobia may be underpinned by a religious imperative that considers Islam a heretical superstition, yet it may be more likely to be informed by a secular disavowal of religion in general. There are frequent debates about whether Islamophobia is a form of racism. Those who argue that Islamophobia is not racism are usually advocates of Islamophobia who want to suggest that Muslims are not a race but willing followers of an ideology.

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Islamophobia is a prejudice against Islam and Muslims based on negative generalizations or stereotypes that can manifest subtly as aversion or mocking, or overtly as discrimination or attack. Some commentators define *Islamophobia* in a literal sense as fear of Islam, but Islamophobia may be based on hatred or ignorance rather than on fear, and it may not involve an objection to Islamic doctrine. Due to the limitations of the term, some commentators have proposed *Muslimophobia*, *anti-Muslim prejudice*, and *anti-Muslim racism* as alternatives. Despite its imperfections, *Islamophobia* has become the dominant term similar to how *anti-Semitism*, *xenophobia*, and *homophobia* have

These commentators believe that *Islamophobia* is a term that is used to stifle legitimate criticism of Islam and Muslims. Those who argue that Islamophobia is a form of racism distinguish legitimate criticism from Islamophobia and argue that Islamophobia uses the same logic of racism to essentialize Muslims as inherently negative through a process of embodied racialization. They also point to a deeply entrenched conflation between race and religion that identifies Islam and Muslims with non-Whiteness.

Most of the academic literature on Islamophobia focuses on the West, but there is an emerging awareness about Islamophobia in other regions too. There is Islamophobia in Muslim majority countries that may involve Muslims internalizing Islamophobic stereotypes. Islamophobia has global dimensions given that Islamophobic narratives are often similar throughout the world. For example, the stereotype that Muslim men are misogynistic and Muslim women are passive is pervasive in many locations. However, Islamophobia often takes a local form too, and it can be more intense in some places than others, which means that Islamophobia varies in different milieus. Thus, one may speak of the glocalization of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is promoted by the far right, which declares Islam and Muslims as a threatening nemesis that constitute the main adversary in an inevitable “clash of civilizations.” They may be part of “the Islamophobia industry” that peddles conspiracy theories based on ideological, political, and economic agendas. Islamophobia also surfaces when mainstream politicians target Islam and Muslims as uniquely and especially problematic. The mainstream news media have also been accused of being Islamophobic because they depict Islam and Muslims in predominantly negative ways.

Similarly, entertainment media have been criticized for typecasting Muslims in negative roles. As well as understanding all the preceding as some of the most influential proponents of Islamophobia, the media may also pander to Islamophobic sentiments that already exist among their audiences. There is a misconception that such Islamophobia exists only among less educated people or

those with right-wing views, but it also exists among those who are better educated or hold left-wing views.

The extent to which Islamophobia exists is contested, partly because this question is highly politicized but also because measuring prejudice is difficult. It is also complicated by the fact that non-Muslims who are perceived as Muslims also experience Islamophobia. One view suggests that Islamophobia is underreported and pervasive insofar as Muslims are excluded, disadvantaged, and persecuted so intensely that urgent solutions are required. This view claims that the regular appearance of Islamophobia in social media is indicative of a broader loathing of Islam and Muslims.

A second view suggests that Muslims are more protected, better understood, more successful, and better integrated into non-Muslim societies than ever before. Proponents of this view cite the existence of anti-discrimination laws and the friendship that many non-Muslims have with Muslims. It is possible that both perspectives are correct, and one may conclude that a balanced approach that continues to tackle Islamophobia without sensationalization is required.

Leon Moosavi

See also Anti-Semitism; Fundamentalism; Islam; Orientalism; Postcolonialism

Further Readings

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