

Islamophobia, Neo-Orientalism, And the Prophet (SAWS) *

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Beyond the colonial legacy, the relations between Islam and the West have come to be defined largely by the landscape of ideas and events of the post-September 11 world. Several euphemisms are in vogue: clash of civilizations, war of ideas, war on terror, Crusades, Islamofascism, and a milder version of Islamic fundamentalism, among others, with less caustic attributes.

Here we take a critical look at some of these markers of Western cultural delirium. Apart from the military, economic, and political streaks involving invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan, and covert and not so covert intrusions into Pakistan, the most prominent target of the Western diatribes is the life, personality, and character of the Blessed Prophet (may Allah's peace be upon him). A Christian polemicist Ali Sina (pseud.) sums up the mindset in these words: "To understand Muslims, one must understand their prophet. Muslims worship and emulate Muhammad. Islam is Muhammadanism. Only by understanding him can one know what makes them tick."

The Islamophobic literature of the current decade, for which the Internet is a fertile ground, has some former "Muslims" and others with pseudonyms who have vainly attempted to present neo-Orientalism in a respectful theological garb. Moreover, instantaneity in the transmission of text, graphics, and audio-visual bits has added new dimensions to the intensified hate crusade. Here, portrayal of the Prophetic life is a pointed vilification for pedophilia, slavery, polygamy, and "holy" war, as opposed to the dominating Orientalistic approach to the Sira by way of philology, history, and comparative religion.

The hate, rage, calumny, and prejudices against Islam in the West do not distinguish between the Glorious Quran, the Blessed Prophet, and Muslims at large. Both neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia, though recognizing the archetypal status of the Blessed Prophet, target one and all in their relentless assaults upon Islamic dignity and integrity. It may, therefore, be argued that any critical study of modern trends in Sira study in the West must adopt a holistic

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approach in order to expose the ideological *blitzkrieg* that often culminates in invasion and occupation of Muslim lands. Given the fast-paced changes in tactics, instead of a microscopic academic only view of the treatment of Sira in the West, we do need to take a broader and all-encompassing look to understand the dimension of this coordinated assault against Islam. In this context, this presentation barely scratches the surface of this paradigmatic shift.

Exactly a year ago (i.e., March 20, 2011) in Gainesville, Florida, an American evangelical pastor supervised the burning of a copy of the Glorious Quran in a church after finding it "guilty" of crimes. The burning was carried out by pastor Wayne Sapp under the supervision of Terry Jones, who last September threatened to ignite a pile of the Glorious Quran on the anniversary of September 11, 2001 incident. This event was presented as a trial of the book in which the Glorious Quran was found "guilty" and "executed." The jury deliberated for about eight minutes. The book, which had been soaking for an hour in kerosene, was put in a metal tray in the center of the church, and Sapp started the fire with a barbecue lighter.

In spite of the fact that world media has attempted to portray these shenanigans of Terry Jones as an act of an individual from a small church, it is not an isolated incident. There is a pattern to it. In 2005, wide-spread protests broke out after the desecration of the Glorious Quran at Guantanamo Bay prison when it was flushed to rattle Muslim detainees. The same year, American jailers splashed a copy of the Glorious Quran with urine and menstrual blood, kicked and stepped on it and soaked it with water. Two years later, a defaced copy of the Glorious Quran was found on the front entrance of Islamic Center in Clarksville, Tennessee. A German businessman printed the name of the Glorious Quran on toilet paper and offered the rolls for sale. Incidents such as the use of Quranic verses as a tattoo on the lower dorsal side of female body, their imprinting on leather used for women's shoes, and garments printed with these verses worn by half-naked female models in fashion shows are not uncommon. The fascist Dutch MP Geert Wilders issued on the Internet a poor collage entitled *Fitna* and compared the Glorious Quran with Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. An online petition *Ban the Quran as Hate Speech* is actively seeking signatories. The petition states that "The Koran (or Qur'an) is a book which inspires and incites hatred and violence against non-Muslims. The book should be banned in non-Muslim countries." <http://www.petitiononline.com/banquran/petition.html> And joining the Islam-bashing bandwagon was none other than Pope Benedict XVI with an affront to the Blessed Prophet and highly derogatory remarks about Islam. Only his conciliatory visit to Turkey helped calm the Crusading fervor.

The foregoing incidents are only a minute fraction of the events and materials that continue to target Islam, its Blessed Prophet, and Muslims in the most denigrate and despicable manner. The language and the graphics employed to create this avalanche of bigotry is, to say the least, unthinkable by any civilized person in any time and age. The verbal and visual onslaught,

especially experienced by Muslims who are on the Internet, hardly ever gets reported in the mass media. The magnitude of this hate of astronomical proportions can be gauged by a simple keyword search on Google. When done on March 26, 2011, under the keyword Islamophobia, it yielded more than 1.7 million pointers! This is an increase of more than 1.2 million entries over a period of ten months. A similar search on March 22, 2012, Google entries had doubled to 3,490,000. Thus, within a two year period Google entries registered a 400% increase!

 islamophobia - Google Search +

Search Page 2 of about 3,490,000 results (0.26 seconds)

Everything	Islamophobia? Not really - Los Angeles Times articles.latimes.com/.../la-oe-0824-goldberg-islamophobia-20100824 24 Aug 2010 – Here's a thought: The 70% of Americans who oppose what amounts to an Islamic Niketown two blocks from ground zero are the real victims of ...
Images	
Maps	
Videos	Islamophobia is America's real enemy Daisy Khan Comment is ... www.guardian.co.uk/.../2012/feb/.../islamophobes-us-muslims-enem... 9 Feb 2012 – Daisy Khan: The hysterical campaign to stigmatise US Muslims poses a far greater threat than radicalisation to America's civic union.
News	
Shopping	
Books	Islamophobia and Homophobia - NYTimes.com opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/.../islamophobia-and-homophobia/ 26 Oct 2010 – Can Americans gradually develop greater tolerance for Muslims as they have for gays?
Blogs	
More	

Images for Islamophobia - Report images

Any time

Past hour

Past 24 hours

Past 2 days

Past week

Past month

Past year



[**Islamophobia: making Muslims the enemy**](#)

Google searches conducted under terms such as Islamofascism, Islamists, desecration of Quran, Danish cartoons, anti-Islam or similar caricatures of Islam and Muslims bring forth extremely disturbing results. A deep search on image repository yields graphic and multimedia sites with animalistic representations. One is awe-struck to witness what is depicted in the name of the Holy Grail of freedom of expression. Invoking the maximum reach of modern technology to broadcast hate, no other faith has been maligned like Islam. No Prophet of Allah has been subjected to such atrocities as our Beloved and Blessed Prophet. No other group of believers has been made to suffer such deep and lasting emotional scars inflicted by this "freedom."

Here is an assorted sample of opinions held and openly expressed by intellectuals, political figures, and religious leaders of the West. President Bush said in a speech: "Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant Jihadism; still others, Islamofascism." Daniel Pipes, a venomous

neo-Orientalist, who is credited with the coinage Islamofascism, said: "Conversion to Islam substantially increases the probability of a person's involvement in terrorism." This loaded statement was made prior to September 11 incident. Franklin Graham, who performed the benediction at the Bush inauguration, is quoted as saying: "We're not attacking Islam but Islam has attacked us," NBC quotes Graham as saying at a dedication of a chapel in North Carolina. "The God of Islam is not the same God. He's not the son of God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion." The Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi asserted that "Western civilization is superior to Islam." Jerry Falwell said on ABC TV that "Muhammad was a terrorist." Pat Robertson on the Sean Hannity radio program said about the Prophet Muhammad: "This man was an absolute wild-eyed fanatic. He was a robber and a brigand. And to say that these terrorists distort Islam, they're carrying out Islam." In the program's second segment, Robertson said: "[The Quran, Islam's revealed text] is strictly a theft of Jewish theology. I mean, this man [Muhammad] was a killer. And to think that this is a peaceful religion is fraudulent." Jerry Vines, at the Southern Baptist Convention in Saint Louis, made statements regarding Islam and Prophet Muhammad that are deeply offensive and inflammatory. He said that Prophet Muhammad was a "demon-possessed pedophile," that, "Allah is not Jehovah either. Jehovah's not going to turn you into a terrorist that'll try to bomb people and take the lives of thousands and thousands of people."

We would be amiss to believe that these statements were made in a "politically correct" context and had transitory value. Nay, they have come to define the way West looks at Islam, its Blessed Prophet, and Muslims. We do not need to dig any deeper to understand the influence of these opinions in the academia as well as the public square. Not to talk of reformulation of old state policies or introduction of new controls. It would not be an exaggeration to state that over the last one decade we have witnessed a slow death of multiculturalism, an end to liberal thinking, increasing curbs upon personal freedom, enhanced surveillance of individuals, a lowered threshold of tolerance, harassment, unlawful detention, and ultimately a ban on Shariah. In public life, travel restrictions, endless abuse, discrimination, violence, profiling, ban on hijab, denial of permission to raise minarets or to build mosques, restrictions on halal manufacturing are but some of the prejudices faced by Muslims. Anyone who subscribes to the daily newsfeed from the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) or visits websites such as Islamophobia.org or Islamophobia Watch would not go unscathed.

The Oriental romanticism, mystique, and the mystery of Arabia deserta with the feuding Bedouins and the opulent harem now is replaced with a new plethora of stereotypes for the "Arabian Prophet" and his worldwide followers. They now are cast in new dyes. Of all the critiques of Islamophobia, Tariq Ali's words have the most to convey: "Islamophobia is

useful for the authorities because it helps to keep their own populations worried. It helps to justify some of the atrocities that have been carried out in Iraq and Afghanistan. Guantanamo, as some of its inmates tell you, is horrible but nothing compared to the atrocities that have been carried out in Bagram prison outside Kabul in Afghanistan. Islamophobia says: this is terrible, but you know we have to do it really, because you know what these Muslims are. That's why it's taken up and used quite openly in the mainstream media: to justify American wars and occupations and the support Europe has given them."

Importantly, one of the bestselling non-fiction titles in both France and Germany was the terribly Islamophobic *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* by the French pseudo philosopher Bernard- Henri Levy. Few reviewers from both countries bothered to observe Levy's profound and rather burning hatred for ordinary people of Pakistan, whom he portrayed throughout as fanatical Orientals who "scowl" as he passes and "narrow their eyes . . . with a tarantula-like stare." Besides Levy, Daniel Pipes, and Geert Wilders, the new Hall of Islamophobic Infamy is studded with such names as: Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, Brigitte Gabriel, Debbie Schlussel, Walid Shoebat, Joe Kaufman, Wafa Sultan, Ann Coulter, Ayan Hirsi Ali, Ibn Warraq among many others.

It would be erroneous to assume that the new brigade of Islamophobic authors is a pseudonym for neo-Orientalism. On the contrary, it is a new *genre* of its own, devoid of intellectual honesty, conscience, or any moral underpinning. In spite of having carved a new path to profit – for Islamophobia industry is a money cruncher – some of them have laid claim to neo-Orientalism. Remember Bernard Lewis, the flag carrier of "Orientalism in the service of Imperialism," is still alive and kicking with his characteristic question: What Went Wrong? An explosive mix of Islamophobes, neo-Orientalists and neo-Cons is what the "New American Century" is all about.

The term "Orientalism," as we know, was abandoned on the 100th anniversary of the First International Congress of Orientalists. However, Edward Said may be credited with the distinction of having unveiled its true nature: "I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about outside a framework created by passion, prejudice and political interests. This may not seem like a surprising discovery, but included in the indictment is the entire gamut of scholarly and scientific disciplines which, since the early nineteenth century, have either called themselves Orientalism or tried systematically to deal with the Orient."

In his devastating critique of neo-Orientalism, Shahid Alam brings out how Edward Said dissected the scholarship of Bernard Lewis: "Edward Said gets to the nub of Lewis' Orientalist project when he writes that his "work purports to be liberal objective scholarship but is in reality very close to being propaganda against his subject material." Lewis' work is "aggressively ideological." He has dedicated his entire career, spanning more than five

decades, to a "project to debunk, to whittle down, and to discredit the Arabs and Islam." Said writes: The core of Lewis' ideology about Islam is that it never changes, and his whole mission is to inform conservative segments of the Jewish reading public, and anyone else who cares to listen, that any political, historical, and scholarly account of Muslims must begin and end with the fact that Muslims are Muslims."

It is not out of place to mention that Daniel Pipes and others have made a concerted effort to re-define and re-orient even the intellectual matrix of neo-Orientalism. A reference is made here to an academia-wide sustained campaign to force them to abandon pursuits not in tune with the oppressive occupational policies of Israel. The entity known as Campus Watch is active in ensuring that the entire scale of Middle Eastern studies across American universities is in tune with the existing geopolitical situation at the cost of historical realities. Defamation, harassment, and smear campaigns have been some of the tactics employed in the supervision of truth manufacturing. Academic freedom and liberty to speak truth are no longer counted as some of the cherished intellectual values at American universities. The paradigmatic shift from philology and comparative studies in classical Orientalism now is replaced by political expediency in the name of Empire and intellectual as well as moral dereliction. Calumnies against Edward Said are no doubt a part of the same larger campaign to retain control over truth and legitimacy of studies Oriental, neo or not.

But the tide of time and demography has no longer left Orientalism strictly Western. As Abdallah Laroui points out: "Orientalism is Western when it takes the West not as an event, but as an idea preordained in all eternity, complete and final from the beginning. And if it starts from this point, it has to construct its subject-matter as an explicitly, totally different item, reduced to the form it had at its birth. The two assumptions are clearly related; if the West is a fulfilled promise, the non-West has to be unfulfilled since unannounced. If the first is predetermined the second is necessarily accidental. In both cases no evolutionary process is ever conceived. Positive changes, when detected in the West, are predicated on preexistent seeds, and so are defects, flaws, wants in the non-West. One is a welcome miracle, which can change and remain the same, while the other, particularly Islam, is an unwelcome accident, not permitted to change without betraying itself. <http://nawaat.org/portail/2005/05/14/western-orientalism-and-liberal-islam-mutual-distrust/>

This too vindicates Edward Said's criticism of Bernard Lewis.

In conclusion, it is safe to argue that the classical Orientalism neither had the means nor the evil imagination to portray the Beloved Prophet in a manner akin to what we are observing today. The paradigmatic shift is, to a large extent, technology-mediated and no longer makes pristine intellectual pursuits a trait of this academic discipline. Truth stands sacrificed at the altar of political expediency to the extent that benign scholarship such as that of Henry Corbin or S.H. Nyberg is made to appear as suspect. In the name of

“revenge” for September 11 incident, intellectual and political noose is being tightened with heinous attempts to distort the personality and the message of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon the Last Prophet). Muslim scholarship faces the challenge of uncovering the nature of this evil and to defend the honor of the Beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon the Last Prophet).

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MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN

(Continued from page 89)

لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَوْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

(102) Not for you is the decision; whether He turns in mercy to them or punishes them. Verily, they are the wrongdoers.

When the Holy Prophet (SAW) was wounded in the *Battle of Uhud*, he cursed the disbelievers and invoked evil upon them and said: "How can a people achieve success after having injured their Prophet." [18] Afterwards Allah (SWT) revealed this *ayah* that it is only He who guides whom He wills and no one can interfere in His decisions.

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(103) And to Allah belong all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. He forgives whom He wills, and punishes whom He wills. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

End Notes

[16] Surah At-Taghabun (64): 16.

[17] Sahih Muslim 1: 69, 70.

[18] Fath-ul-Bari 7: 365.

