ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE GLOBAL NORTH: ORIGINS, MANIFESTATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Presentation given to the Blessed Summit 2023 of the Hjiaz Community of the Netherlands, held at Leiden university in The Hague, 27 May

Ladies and gentlemen

As-salamu-alaykum.

I am honoured to be here today to discuss the critical topic of Islamophobia in the global North. I would like to extend my gratitude for this opportunity, although I regret not being able to join you in person due to a prior family engagement. Nonetheless, I am confident that the day's proceedings will be enlightening and productive.

Today, I will delve into the origins, manifestations, and implications of Islamophobia, particularly focusing on the Netherlands and Europe at large. It is crucial to understand the nature of Islamophobia and how it permeates the experiences of Muslims in the global North. By shedding light on its roots, manifestations, and consequences, we can work towards finding solutions and promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society.

First and foremost, let us define Islamophobia. It is the fear, prejudice, discrimination, or hatred directed towards Islam, Muslims, or Islamic culture and practices. Islamophobia is a form of prejudice that specifically targets individuals or communities perceived to be associated with Islam. It manifests itself in various ways, including negative stereotypes, bias, hostility, and even acts of violence against Muslims.

In the global North, Islamophobia exhibits certain key characteristics that shape its nature:

1. *Prejudice and Stereotyping*: Islamophobia often involves the prejudiced belief that all Muslims are inherently dangerous, violent, or supportive of terrorism. This stereotype ignores the diversity within Muslim communities and assumes a monolithic view of Islam.
2. *Cultural and Religious Othering*: Islamophobia frequently results in the "othering" of Muslims, perceiving them as fundamentally different and incompatible with the dominant culture or values of the global North. This

leads to exclusion, marginalisation, and stigmatisation of Muslim individuals and communities.

3. *Discrimination and Institutional Bias*: Muslims face discrimination in various aspects of life, such as employment, education, housing, and law enforcement. Institutional bias can occur through policies or practices that disproportionately target, or disadvantage Muslims based on their religious identity.

4. *Media Representation*: Negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the media reinforce and perpetuate Islamophobic attitudes. Sensationalism, selective reporting, and associating Islam with terrorism contribute to the stigmatisation of Muslims, creating an environment of fear and suspicion.

5. *Political Exploitation*: Islamophobia can be exploited by political actors who manipulate public fears and anxieties for their own gain. Politicians may use anti-Muslim rhetoric to advance their agendas, further marginalising Muslim communities and exacerbating social tensions.

6. *Hate Crimes and Violence*: Islamophobia manifests in hate crimes and acts of violence targeting Muslims or Islamic institutions. These incidents range from verbal harassment and vandalism to physical assaults or even acts of terrorism, posing a significant threat to the safety and well-being of Muslim individuals and communities.

Now, let us explore the historical roots of Islamophobia in the global North. The experiences of colonialism and imperialism have played a significant role in shaping and contributing to the development of Islamophobia. These historical factors have influenced its emergence in the following ways:

1. *Orientalism*: Orientalism, as popularised by Edward Said, refers to a Eurocentric framework through which the East, including the Islamic world, was constructed as exotic, inferior, and dangerous. During the era of colonialism and imperialism, European powers often portrayed Muslims as backward, barbaric, and in need of "civilising." These stereotypes perpetuated negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, laying the groundwork for Islamophobia.

2. *Legitimising Colonial Rule*: European powers often depicted Muslims and Islam as obstacles to progress and enlightenment to justify their colonial enterprises. They presented Islam and Islamic practices as incompatible with modernity, democracy, and Western values. This narrative helped legitimise

the subjugation and exploitation of Muslim -majority regions, further reinforcing negative stereotypes.

3. *Divide and Rule Strategies*: Colonial powers frequently employed strategies that exacerbated existing tensions and divisions within Muslim communities. By favouring certain groups or sects over others, they created animosities and conflicts that continue to have an impact today. These divisions and tensions, along with the legacy of colonial borders, have contributed to the perception of Muslims as inherently prone to violence or sectarianism.

4. *Resource Exploitation and Resistance*: Many Muslim-majority regions were colonised or subject to imperial domination due to their rich natural resources or strategic locations. The resistance movements against colonial rule were often led by Muslims, and their struggles were sometimes erroneously equated with religious extremism or terrorism. This association has contributed to the stigmatisation of Muslims as a threat to the global North.

5. *Migration and Post-Colonial Realities*: The waves of migration from former colonies to the global North, particularly in the aftermath of decolonisation, have brought Muslims into close contact with Western societies. These migration patterns, coupled with economic and social challenges faced by immigrant communities, have sometimes led to a perception of Muslims as outsiders or a cultural threat to the dominant society.

6. *Geopolitical Events and Media Coverage*: Contemporary geopolitical events involving Muslim-majority countries, such as conflicts, terrorism, and political unrest, have received extensive media coverage in the global North. This coverage, often sensationalised and focusing on violence, has contributed to the association of Islam with terrorism and reinforced negative stereotypes.

The colonial mindset significantly impacts the reality of Islamophobia in the global North. Here are some ways in which it influences the manifestation and perpetuation of Islamophobia:

1. *Cultural Superiority and Hegemony*: The postcolonial mindset often perpetuates a sense of cultural superiority among the dominant groups in the global North. This mindset can lead to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of cultures and religions perceived as "other" or non-conforming to Western norms. Islam, being seen as a symbol of the postcolonial "other," can be subjected to prejudice and discrimination.

2. *Binary Thinking and Stereotyping*: The postcolonial mindset can perpetuate binary thinking, creating an "us versus them" mentality. This mindset often reinforces stereotypes, leading to oversimplified and essentialised understandings of Islam and Muslims. Muslims may be homogenised and portrayed as a monolithic group, erasing the diversity within Muslim communities and perpetuating negative stereotypes.

3. *Power Imbalances and Structural Inequalities*: The postcolonial mindset can perpetuate power imbalances and structural inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including Muslims. Historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism, coupled with the ongoing dynamics of neo-colonialism, can result in systemic discrimination and socio-economic disadvantages for Muslim communities in the global North.

4. *Historical Memory and Collective Trauma*: The postcolonial mindset can shape collective memory and perpetuate historical narratives that further stigmatise Muslims. Historical traumas, such as colonial violence and imperialism, can have a lasting impact on the perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims. This memory and the associated traumas may influence the development of Islamophobic sentiments.

5. *Exoticisation and Othering*: The postcolonial mindset can contribute to the exoticisation and othering of Muslim communities in the global North. Muslims may be seen as inherently different or exotic, and their cultural practices may be reduced to superficial stereotypes. This exoticisation can create a sense of "foreignness" and contribute to the marginalisation of Muslim communities.

6. *Intersectionality and Multiple Identities*: The postcolonial mindset intersects with other social categories, such as race, ethnicity, and class, shaping the experiences of Islamophobia in different ways. Muslims who belong to marginalised racial or ethnic groups face compounded forms of discrimination, as Islam intersecting with other dimensions of their identity, such as race and ethnicity, can lead to further marginalisation and discrimination.

Now, let us turn our attention to the role of race, racism, and racialisation in understanding Islamophobia in the global North. The significance of race, racism, and racialisation cannot be overlooked when examining Islamophobia. Here are some key points to consider:

1. *Racialisation of Muslims*: Muslims, particularly those from non-European backgrounds, are often racialised in the global North. Racialisation refers to the process by which individuals or groups are assigned certain racial characteristics, leading to their categorisation and treatment based on these perceived racial identities. It is important to note that Muslims are not a monolithic racial group, as they encompass diverse ethnic backgrounds. However, the perception of Muslims as a racialised group influences the experience of Islamophobia, as racial prejudices intersect with religious prejudices, contributing to discrimination and marginalisation.

2. *Intersectionality of Islamophobia and Racism*: Islamophobia intersects with racism, as individuals who are both Muslim and from racialised backgrounds face compounded forms of discrimination. Islamophobic acts and rhetoric can be informed by racial biases, leading to the targeting of individuals based on both their religious and racial identities. Islamophobic incidents often disproportionately affect individuals perceived as non-white, highlighting the entwined nature of racism and Islamophobia.

3. *Stereotyping and Racialised Othering*: Stereotypes and racialised othering play a significant role in shaping Islamophobia. Muslims are often subjected to racialised stereotypes that portray them as a homogeneous, monolithic group with negative attributes. These stereotypes perpetuate the perception of Muslims as "foreign" or as a threat to the dominant culture. Racialised othering contributes to the marginalisation, exclusion, and the denial of full citizenship rights to Muslim individuals and communities.

4. *Racialised State Surveillance and Security Policies*: State surveillance and security policies often disproportionately target racialised Muslim communities. Racial profiling and surveillance practices based on racial and religious profiling perpetuate a sense of suspicion and mistrust towards Muslims. Policies such as counterterrorism measures can disproportionately impact racialised Muslim communities, further exacerbating the experience of Islamophobia.

5. *Historical Colonial Legacies*: Historical colonial legacies have influenced the racialisation of Muslims and the subsequent experiences of Islamophobia. The legacy of colonialism has shaped perceptions of Muslims as "other," perpetuating racial hierarchies and attitudes of superiority and inferiority. The racialisation of Muslims can be traced back to colonial-era discourses that constructed Muslims as inferior or exotic, contributing to the perpetuation of Islamophobia today.

6. *Anti-Muslim Racism*: Islamophobia can be understood as a form of racism, commonly referred to as "anti-Muslim racism." This perspective recognises that Islamophobia is not solely based on religious differences but is deeply intertwined with racial prejudices and discrimination. Anti-Muslim racism acknowledges the racialised nature of Islamophobia and the interconnectedness of racism and religious bias.

Having examined the historical roots, manifestations, and racial dimensions of Islamophobia, we now turn our attention to the counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives in the global North and their implications for Islamophobia. While these initiatives aim to address the threat of extremism and promote community safety, it is essential to approach them with caution to avoid reinforcing Islamophobic narratives and perpetuating discriminatory practices.

Counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives can inadvertently contribute to Islamophobia in the following ways:

1. *Targeting and Profiling*: Counter-extremism initiatives may disproportionately focus on Muslim communities, leading to profiling and surveillance based on religious and racial profiling. If these initiatives are perceived as unfairly targeting Muslims, it can reinforce the perception that Islam and Muslims are inherently linked to extremism, fuelling Islamophobic sentiments.
2. *Stigmatisation and Marginalisation*: Initiatives that treat all Muslims as potential suspects or as needing to be "de-radicalised" without evidence of involvement in extremist activities can stigmatise and marginalise entire communities. This approach perpetuates the notion that Muslims are inherently prone to radicalisation and reinforces negative stereotypes, exacerbating Islamophobia.
3. *Lack of Cultural Competence*: De-radicalisation and counter-extremism programs may lack cultural competence and fail to consider the diverse experiences and nuances within Muslim communities. If these initiatives rely on simplistic or stereotypical understandings of Islam, they can perpetuate misunderstandings and deepen divisions, reinforcing Islamophobia.
4. *Counterproductive Strategies*: Some counter-extremism measures, such as heavy-handed law enforcement tactics or discriminatory policies, can alienate Muslim communities, erode trust, and create a sense of isolation.

These approaches may inadvertently push marginalised individuals further towards radicalisation and reinforce narratives of victimhood and grievance, which can be exploited by Islamophobic groups.

5. *Negative Impact of Racialisation*: Counter-extremism initiatives that ignore or downplay the racialisation of Muslims can contribute to Islamophobia. If racial biases are not addressed within these initiatives, they can perpetuate discrimination, further marginalise racialised Muslim communities, and reinforce existing Islamophobic narratives.

To ensure that counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives do not inadvertently fuel Islamophobia, it is crucial to take the following steps:

1. *Ensure Inclusivity*: Adopt an inclusive approach that engages and involves all relevant communities, including Muslim communities, in the development and implementation of these initiatives. It is essential to work with community leaders, organisations, and experts to create strategies that are culturally sensitive, respectful, and empower communities rather than stigmatise them.

2. *Address Structural Factors*: Recognise that extremism is often rooted in complex social, economic, and political factors. Addressing these structural issues, such as inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion, can help address the root causes of radicalisation and mitigate the risk of reinforcing Islamophobia.

3. *Promote Community Engagement and Trust-Building*: Foster open and constructive dialogue between law enforcement, policymakers, and Muslim communities. Encourage initiatives that build trust, enhance community resilience, and create opportunities for positive engagement.

4. *Cultural Competence and Education*: Provide training and resources for professionals involved in counter-extremism efforts to enhance their cultural competence and understanding of Islam and Muslim communities. Promote accurate and nuanced representations of Islam in educational curricula, media, and public discourse.

5. *Human Rights and Non-Discrimination*: Ensure that counter-extremism initiatives uphold human rights standards, including non-discrimination principles. Avoid profiling, racial, or religious targeting, and any measures that disproportionately impact Muslim communities.

By adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to counter-extremism and de-radicalisation, we can effectively address the threat of extremism while safeguarding against the perpetuation of Islamophobia. It requires recognising the diverse experiences of Muslim communities, addressing structural inequalities, promoting cultural competence, fostering trust, and upholding human rights for all individuals, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

In conclusion, it is important to recognise the complex and multifaceted nature of Islamophobia, shaped by historical legacies, contemporary socio-political dynamics, and systemic prejudices. The impact of colonialism and imperialism cannot be denied, but we must approach the topic with nuance, understanding that Islamophobia is influenced by various factors beyond history alone.

We cannot address Islamophobia without acknowledging the role of race, racism, and racialisation. It is crucial to challenge and dismantle intersecting systems of discrimination, promoting social justice and inclusivity. Recognising the concept of intersectionality, we understand that Islamophobia intersects with other forms of discrimination, compounding the marginalisation faced by Muslim individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups.

To effectively combat Islamophobia, we must tackle broader issues of structural marginalisation, social disadvantage, and exclusionary discourse. This requires efforts to promote social inclusion, equal opportunities, intercultural understanding, and policy reforms. By fostering inclusive societies that value diversity and respect the rights of all individuals and communities, we can work towards a more equitable future.

Addressing Islamophobia demands interdisciplinary collaboration, involving sociologists, policymakers, community leaders, and individuals. Together, we can challenge stereotypes, promote dialogue, and foster inclusive environments. It is through a holistic and inclusive approach that counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives can be more effective in addressing the root causes of extremism while avoiding the inadvertent perpetuation of Islamophobia.

Let us stand united against Islamophobia, embracing diversity, promoting understanding, and working towards a future where every individual is valued and respected, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

Thank you all for your attention and participation. May we strive together to build a world free from prejudice and discrimination.

May peace be upon you all.

Further Reading

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