

# opción

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, diciembre 2019 N°

24

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNc: 2477-9385  
Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela



# American Empire: An Overview of Orientalism of Muslims and Islamophobia

**Sadiya Abubakar Isa<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>School of Humanities Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

[haleesad@usm.my](mailto:haleesad@usm.my)

**Md Salleh Yaapar<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>School of Humanities Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

[Mdsalleh@usm.my](mailto:Mdsalleh@usm.my)

**Suzana Muhammad<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>School of Humanities Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor, 11800, Penang, Malaysia

[Szna@usm.my](mailto:Szna@usm.my)

## Abstract

The research highlights how media, cinema, political discourse or literature portrays Muslims and Islam in a negative light by dwelling on the crimes of only a few Muslims, which in turn creates a stereotype for the Muslims via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, Orientalism and Islamophobia are rooted in the development of the American empire. In conclusion, the principal subject of discrimination in America today is the Muslims; therefore, it concludes that Islamophobia is the newest and ongoing form of racism in America.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Orientalism, American empire, Muslims.

# Imperio americano: una visión general del orientalismo de los musulmanes y la islamofobia

## Resumen

La investigación destaca cómo los medios de comunicación, el cine, el discurso político o la literatura retratan a los musulmanes y al Islam de manera negativa al insistir en los crímenes de solo unos pocos musulmanes, lo que a su vez crea un estereotipo para los musulmanes a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, el orientalismo y la islamofobia están enraizados en el desarrollo del imperio estadounidense. En conclusión, el principal tema de discriminación en Estados Unidos hoy en día son los musulmanes; por lo tanto, concluye que la islamofobia es la forma de racismo más nueva y continua en los Estados Unidos.

**Palabras clave:** islamofobia, orientalismo, imperio americano, musulmanes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In China, Islam is considered as a mental illness that needs to be cured immediately. This belief has subjected Muslims in China to undergo inhuman treatments in concentration camps. Similar to Chinese rejection of the Islamic faith is the Myanmar persecution of Muslims which took the form of ethnoreligious cleansing that caused a mass migration of the Muslims from their homes in Burma to neighboring countries (JHAVERI, 2004). India is not left out of the oppression of Muslim minorities bearing in mind the revocation of article 370 that guaranteed Kashmir's independence and exclusive rights and also the statelessness of the Muslim-majority Bengali

community in Assam following the foreigners' declaration by Indian Government JUHASZ (2013) these trends are similarly found in other Christian majority countries, considering policies made against Muslims in France, Germany, Russia, and other Western countries. The world has been made to believe that Muslims are the problem of the world today, that they are raised terrorists by default, misogynist, violent and bloodthirsty through the commendable efforts of the international media as well as literature.

Muslim women have as well been represented as oppressed and completely voiceless and powerless to the oppressive patriarchy and its structures in Islam. These overbearing representations (which are mostly economic and political) systematically paved the way for the continuous imperialism of America in Muslim majority countries which is guised as War on Terror, and has provoked series of wars in the Middle-East countries; Syria, Palestine, Iraq, etc. (AHMAD & AHMAD, 2018; FOUSKAS & GÖKAY, 2005).

The misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in media, cinema and literature are arguably oriental considering the rejection of the peaceful nature of most Muslims around the world and the deliberate reiteration of the abnormality of Muslims, this propaganda has been condemned and criticized by various Muslim and non-Muslims but yet, it still reproduces. This study intends to emphasis that Oriental representation of Islam and Muslims in media, political discourse or literature have the tendencies to inflate stereotypes against Muslims which then propagate Islamophobia, especially in America. In the above regard, the oriental outlook of the phenomena of

misrepresentation of Islam is based on the idea that Islam has been reduced to the position of the colonized as seen in the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western writings which points towards the colonial positioning of Islam by the American writers (KRAMER, 1999).



## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The history of the empire can be traced all the way back to ancient times, down before the Middle Ages. As long as the history of man can be remembered, empire existed in one form or another. As hegemonic domination of one group of people or nations over a few others for social, political, economic or religious reasons, more than thirty empires have existed in human history with the most populous one like the Roman Empire, which was considered the superpower of middle ages. It was the most significant and longest-lasting among others lasting beyond two thousand two hundred years, evidence of its success is the prevailing widespread of Catholicism till today. Ottoman Empire is regarded as the most daring among all, the Mongolian Empire of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries is the most contiguous among them all. The British Empire is one of the modern age European empires which is historically the largest of all empires, spreading across almost all continents of the globe, owning twenty-five percent of the world's population and stretching its coverage to twenty-two percent of the earth's landmass.

### **3. RESULTS**

The phrase the empire on which the sun never sets is used to imply its multiplicity of colonies across the globe, i.e. at every point in time the sun shines on at least one of the many British empires. This is where the postcolonial spirit emerged from, more precisely from the colonized Blacks who suffered colonial torture and oppression more than any other colonized race. After freeing the Americas, British Empire began to weaken in strength, it continued to decline strategically as it witnessed a financial challenge after funding the two world wars and its complete fall occurred when India and other significant African countries like Nigeria and Ghana gained independence from its colonial domination in the mid-twentieth century. One is to pause here and ask, was that the end of empire? Are all former British colonies free from her in all senses of the word free? Well, these have been the subject of various debates and postcolonial discourses.

The answer is evidently no, and this is where neo-colonialism comes into play. After the cold war, America emerged as the world's superpower and thereafter claimed to be the mother of all. In this twenty-first century, America continues to strive to maintain its position as the controller of all, despite threats to its superiority from China and Russia. While Britain is tacitly manipulating its colonies and undertaking an indirect form of colonization, America is considered as the empire of this century which evidently occupies almost all parts of the world, especially the Middle East and other oil-

rich countries. Looking at her military presence in different countries and tactical expansion of her empire, Artyom Lukin concurs that:

Babones draws parallels between the contemporary American empire and the late Roman republic. Rome's internal regime was also a kind of democracy. Rome had a circle of close and privileged Latin allies, which resembles the relationship the U.S. maintains with four other Anglo-Saxon countries — Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Rome's non-Latin allies can be compared with the U.S. partners in Europe and Asia. All of them closely collaborate with America in order to keep in subjugation those nations who are outside the elite circle (ZEVIN, 1972: 14).

American imperialism is pejoratively seen as the United States' policies aimed at extending her socio-economic, political or cultural control over places beyond her boundaries. may include military conquest, intervention or regime change, economic penetration, gunboat diplomacy, unequal treaties, or by subsidization of preferred factions (KIRKPATRICK, 1989).

Starting from the ethnic cleansing of the native Indians of America and then to conquering European colonies in the pacific in the 1820s, Imperial America gained the dominance of most Spanish territories after the Spanish American war. So towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup>c, it owned countries like the Philippines, Hawaii and Latin America. In the early 20th century, the U.S. obtained the Panama Canal Zone and occupied Haiti and the Dominican Republic. After fighting World War II, it administered many Pacific islands captured during the fight against Japan. It acquired military bases in Germany and Japan as a



result of NATO formation, but The Cold War reoriented American foreign policy to focus on opposing Soviet communism while prevailing U.S. foreign policy embraced its role as a nuclear-armed global superpower. America still claims a full-fledged dominance of Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Meanwhile, her involvement in regime change included overthrowing the democratically elected government of Iran, the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, occupation of Grenada, and interference in various foreign elections, successful disposal of Iraq and Libya's dictators and the gulf war that occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> is believed to take heed in America's economic Imperialism which has been motivated by her interest in the Middle-east oil. After the September 11 attacks, her imperial ambitions became obvious through her manifest invasion of Afghanistan which supposedly harbored the attackers and Iraq (which the U.S. mostly claimed had weapons of mass destruction that necessitates disarmaments). (O'MEARA, 2006). Today, America's Imperial actions and foreign policies are debated whether as neocolonial or petroimperialism, where petroimperialism is a modern form of hegemony that uses economic rather than military power and is sometimes used as a synonym for contemporary imperialism.

While the issue of misrepresentation, misperception, and mistreatment of Muslims continue to gain attention worldwide, it still remains a complex area of study. Muslims in America are increasingly discriminated against and victimized for hate crimes which have been

on the rise since 9/11, all of which points towards the Islamophobic racialization of Muslims in America. This demonization and dehumanization of the other are what Edward Said's Orientalism explicates, the other becomes Orientalized by the west as a savage, uncivilized and barbaric set of people that needs Western intervention to educate, civilize and save them from doom. This orientalism whether in media, cinema or literature contributes to the growth of Islamophobia and islamophobia in-turn, serves as a tool for Muslim colonial domination by America. So, the history of orientalism in America can be put that the language of orientalism was inherited from the Europeans by the Americans as Professor Deepa Kumar opines that Orientalists like Bernad Lewis migrated from England to America – to spread the knowledge of orients – because they see a shift of power from Europe to America after the cold war.

The emergence of the United States as the strongest power in the West after the Second World War gave rise to its establishment of imperial power in the Middle East which was then dominated by Britain and France. America's interest in oil kept her in the Middle-East and used the oriental language and attitude on them as a means of establishing control over them. Like with all empires, America greatly relies on demonizing the Muslim other, to justify her hegemony. These ideas of the Muslim other do not just exist in the media, cinema or novels for no reason, they are systematically being reproduced in the academy, in think-tanks, used by political figures and continuously reproduced by the media simply as a means of justifying US policies in the Muslim world (UNDERWOOD, 2018).

Said examined Western scholarship of what he calls the Orient, specifically of the Arab Islamic world, even though he was an Arab Christian, he argued that early scholarship; literary and historical documentation of the Arabs by Westerners was prejudiced and biased and had always projected a false and stereotyped vision of otherness of the Islamic world. Such Orientalism, seen as a Western fantasy only facilitated and justified the Western colonial policy.

For Said, this long tradition of romanticized descriptions of Asia and the Middle East in the Western culture had served and still serves as an inherent justification for European and American imperial and colonial ambitions. He, however, highlights how the colonized other is by default, placed at the periphery because of the difference in race, religion, and region, this exactly is what Said has criticized.

With political leaders like Donald Trump fanning the flames of racism in America, the recent attacks on Muslims in the West (Such as New Zealand mosque attacks) paid credence to America's rapidly growing White supremacy and Islamophobia especially with the new wave of orientalism and racism.

Islamophobia designates the irrational fear of Islam that drives people to make blanket judgments accusing all Muslims (over a billion people) of harboring the same murderous fantasies that Muslim extremists express and act upon. Although the term Islamophobia first occurred by its appearance in an essay by the Orientalist Etienne Dinet in *L'Orient vu de l'Occident* (1922), the term only in the 1990s that became common parlance in defining the discrimination faced by Muslims in Western Europe. Negative perceptions of Islam can be

traced back through multiple confrontations between the Muslim world and Europe from the Crusades to colonialism.<sup>1</sup> However, Islamophobia is a modern and secular anti-Islamic discourse and practice appearing in the public sphere with the integration of Muslim immigrant communities and intensifying after 9/11. The term has been used increasingly amongst political circles and the media, and even Muslim organizations, especially since the 1997 Runnymede Report (*Islamophobia: A Challenge for All*). However, academics are still debating the legitimacy of the term and questioning how it differs from other terms such as racism, anti-Islamism, anti-Muslimness, and anti-Semitism.

In this study, Islamophobia is regarded as the fear or hatred of Islam and/or Muslims as the consequence of the misrepresentations; oriental stereotyping and vilification of Islam and Muslims in media, cinema, literature or political discourses. It argues that the persistence of orientalism indicates the continuance of America's quest for imperial expansion.

The idea of focusing on the American empire emanates from the concurrent imperial dominations that plague the Muslim world today. Having it that Islamophobia is at its rise in America and Muslims have always been the victims of such hate attacks, this study seeks to delve into modern postcolonial and oriental discourse around the globe with a specific focus on American imperial expansion; considering the contemporariness of the issue. Professor Bobby Sayyid observes that:

The launching of the war on terror has since transformed this postcolonial gunboat diplomacy into full-scale colonial-style

campaigns, including the US-led military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, while operations against or in the territories of Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Iran, and Syria have resulted in the virtual re-colonization of parts of Muslimistan. It is in this new imperial context that the articulation of Islam and empire is currently disclosed (BAILEY, 1931: 14).

Prof. Deepa Kumar observes that orientalism identifies Muslims as a distinct race whose whole lives are governed by the Qur'an. According to them, the Muslims' misogyny, barbarism, savagery, lack of entrepreneurial spirit or scientific advancement, rejection of Western modernization is all blamed on the Qur'an or associated with Islamic traditions which according to her, necessitated the imperialism of the Muslim world.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Despite people's general familiarity with the concept of Orientalism, Edward W. Said's book is often not applied in a detailed and direct manner to contemporary issues of Islamophobia. The review of pertinent literature shows that American imperial dominations are done not only through physical combat and conquest as done in the previous centuries, but also through economic, political and social controls. Although Islamophobia has been in the West for decades, this study finds that the new wave of hate crimes against Muslims surged right after 9/11 and is utilized in the American power structure. After

9/11, anti-Muslim rhetoric increased and many other forms of discrimination, hate crimes and condemnation of the religion. The principal subject of discrimination in America today is the Muslims; therefore, it concludes that Islamophobia is the newest and ongoing form of racism in America. The study recommends the effects of Islamophobia on non-Muslim Americans for further studies.



## REFERENCES

AHMAD, I., & AHMAD, S. (2018). Multiple Skills and Medium Enterprises' Performance in Punjab Pakistan: A Pilot Study. **Journal of Social Sciences Research**, 7(2010), 44-49. [USA](#)

BAILEY, T. (1931). "The United States and Hawaii during the Spanish-American War". **Am Hist Rev**. Vol. 36, N° 3: 552. USA.

FOUSKAS, V., & GÖKAY B. (2005). "The new American imperialism: Bush's war on terror and blood for oil". **Greenwood Publishing Group**. UK.

JHAVERI, N. (2004). "Petroimperialism: US Oil Interests and the Iraq War". **Oxford**. UK.

JUHASZ, A. (2013). "Why the war in Iraq was fought for Big Oil". **CNN**. USA.

KIRKPATRICK, J. (1989). "Beyond the Cold War". **America and the World 1989**. USA.

KRAMER, M. (1999). "Ideology and the Cold War". **Review of International Studies**. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 25, pp. 539–76. UK.

O'MEARA, D. (2006). "American Empire and US Imperialism after the war in Iraq?" **The American state in the global order. Labor, Cap Soc/ Labor, Cap Soc**. Vol. 39, N° 1: 4–33. USA.

UNDERWOOD, A. (2018). "Islamophobia in the US: It goes way beyond Trump". **Vox**. UK.

ZEVIN, R. (1972). "An Interpretation of American Imperialism". **J Econ Hist**. Vol. 32, N° 1: 316–60. USA.







DEL ZULIA

---

# opción

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
Año 35, N° 24, (2019)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.

Maracaibo - Venezuela

**[www.luz.edu.ve](http://www.luz.edu.ve)**

**[www.serbi.luz.edu.ve](http://www.serbi.luz.edu.ve)**

**[produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve](http://produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve)**