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WHY IMPERIALISTS AND ZIONISTS ARE ISLMOPHOBES ?

[By Dr. Mohamed Elmasry]  
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[A summary of an invited talk given at a Toronto's forum organized by the Canadian group Not in Our Name: Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism (NION) on Friday November 28, 2008]

Islamophobia has been a political tool of convenience that has been used at least since 1492 CE and is still in use by Western imperialist powers. For the past 200 years it has also been adopted by Zionists. Both groups willingly accepted it as part of their historical makeup and have continued to use it up to the present moment as a means of advancing their respective agendas of domination, occupation, exploitation, torture and killing of Muslims, including the genocide of their language, religion and culture as well.

Dehumanizing "the Other" -- the opposite, the enemy, the foil to mainstream society -- was, and still is, an integral part of the West's aggressive crusading campaign aimed at conquering foreign lands and oppressing both peoples and nations.

Columbus did much to cultivate a negative, even threatening, image of non-white and non-Christian "others" by describing aboriginals of the New World (the Americas) as cannibals, which was apparently enough to justify unlimited genocide against them. Between 1494 and 1504, three million South Americans died as a result of Spanish "pacification" campaigns.

North American natives fared as badly as their cousins of the southern continent, being portrayed as abductors of women, child-killers and collectors of scalps. As the period saying went, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," although Indians who assisted whites were grudgingly accepted as useful.

In his 1826 novel "The Last of the Mohicans," James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) portrayed American natives as barbaric and blood-thirsty: "The flow of blood might be likened to the outbreaking of a torrent," he wrote, "and as the natives became heated and maddened by the sight, many among them kneeled to the earth, and drank freely, exultingly, hellishly, of the crimson tide."

In 1896 Theodore Roosevelt wrote scathingly that, "The settler and the pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as a game preserve for squalid savages."

These and other historical precedents illustrate how convenient and effective it was to paint powerless groups as being inherently evil. Such views made it easier to publicly justify any number of invasions, occupations and genocides. Racial stereotypes thus became vital to the colonialist world view.

Twinning evil with Islam was a significant aspect of medieval Europe's form of Islamophobia. Islam was seen (falsely) as an outright negation of Christianity; Muhammad the Prophet was dismissed as an impostor, an evil sensualist and even the Antichrist. Because Islam was seen as the main force behind African and Asian resistance to Europe's domination, the entire Muslim world was stereotyped as being Anti-Europe. Post-Crusader Europe never really emerged from its "Holy Wars" against Islam and Muslims; this period shaped the motivation of all imperialists from Napoleon until the present.

In 1920, when France's Gen. Gouraud entered Damascus, he went to the tomb of Salah al-Din who had defeated the Europeans in the Third Crusade and announced, "Nous revoila, Saladin!" -- We are back, Saladin!

In Medieval Europe's narrative of the Muslim East, the prevailing trend was to stress religious and cultural differences that would encourage hatred, dislike and fear of Muslims. Positive aspects -- such as the Islamic stress on personal hygiene, or Islamic contributions to science, art and architecture -- were scarcely mentioned, if at all. Instead, there were insistent claims that the Muslim East was a place of sexual promiscuity and inherent violence. At the peak of European imperialist aggression against the Muslim East during the 19th century, Muslims were still being characterized as slothful, sexually preoccupied, violent, and incapable of self-government. These apparent moral failings justified the imperialist motive to invade and rule.

"Political domination and economic exploitation need the cosmetic cant of 'mission civilisatrice' to seem commendatory," observed British author Dr. Rana Kabbani. "For the ideology of empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason, and recruited science and history to serve its ends. The image of the European colonizer had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener. He was not seeking mere profit, but was fulfilling his duty to his Maker and his sovereign, whilst aiding those less fortunate to rise toward his lofty level. This was the white man's burden, that reputable colonial malaise, that sanctioned the subjugating of entire continents."

Hostility to Islam and Muslims has thus been all too common in writings dating back to Medieval times. David Roberts, who painted scenes from Muslim countries, wrote that the region was full of "Splendid cities ... reduced by mismanagement and the barbarism of the Muslim creed to a state as savage as [the] wild animals by which are surrounded."

James Elroy Flecker, a writer of travel journals, proclaimed: "I hate the East -- the Lebanon is Christian, thank God -- but I have written ... the best Eastern poems in the language."

In Sir Richard Burton's translation of one story from The Arabian Nights (please remember, this is entirely fiction), one scene shows a queen is discovered in the arms of her black slave. Burton added his own commentary, saying: "Debauched women prefer Negroes on account of the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somaliland who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is characteristic of the Negro race and of African animals (e.g. the horse), whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average Europe[an]; one of the best proofs by the way, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a Negro partially whitewashed. ... No honest Hindi Moslem would take his womenfolk to Zanzibar on account of the huge attractions and enormous temptations ..."

Medieval Europe also put Jews on trial for a list of mythic and wholly unsubstantiated crimes – the killing of Christ some 1400 years earlier, poisoning wells, murdering children for their blood, cannibalism (through supposedly crucifying victims and eating them – all of which apparently justified waging genocide against them.

Women were also associated with the Devil and viewed as enemies of the Church and of civilization, thus justifying witch-hunts that condemned them for such atrocities as "for sexual rapaciousness, cannibalism, consorting with evil spirits, and being generally intractable and capricious." (MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 1970)

There were a few exceptional times in history, however, when Islamophobia in the West was somewhat suppressed in order to achieve higher political gains. During the Cold War, the West saw Islam as a good tool with which to fight Communism. Similarly, under the 13-year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, members of the Afghani resistance were admirably called Jihadi, Mujahideen, heroes, and freedom fighters by Western media.

In the 2006 book *Media, Terrorism, and Theory* (edited by Anandam P. Kavoori and Todd Fraley), Dr. Daya Kishan Thussu, professor of international communications at the University of Westminster (London) lists five myths propagated by the Western media in their campaign against Islam and Muslims.

#### 1. The Myth of "Islamic" Terrorism:

While it is rare to find a Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, or Buddhist brand of terrorism, it has been common both before and after 9/11 for the media to use the term "Islamic" terrorism. Additionally, while the use of other terminologies (e.g. Islamic fundamentalist/fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, Islamists, political Islam, etc.) is familiar, all of them point in one direction – to the label of "Islamic" terrorism. This already dark distinction is compounded by bracketing Islam with the heinous Nazi legacy through the increasing usage of "Islamofascism."

#### 2. The Myth of Madness:

Prof. Thussu notes that the media effectively frame conflicts involving opposing Muslims within a binary context where Muslims are "projected as irrational and fanatical, pitted against a firm, rational, and reasonable" Western political leadership. "The demonizing of supposedly bigoted leader can be effective tool for propaganda," Thussu continues, "as it helps to personalize an invasion by reducing the entire country and its population to one person." In more recent developments, the American administration under George Bush Jr. did that with Saddam Hussein prior to invading Iraq and then treated Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad similarly in making threats against his country.

#### 3. The Myth of Nuclear Threat:

The threat that a Muslim country – whether Iraq, Syria, or Iran -- will soon develop nuclear weapons and use them to attack the West or Israel, is very popular with imperialists and Zionists. We now know that "The argument that Iraq was in possession of nuclear weapons and had the capacity to deploy them within 45 minutes notice" was a lie, yet it disseminated by global media without proof and given out as a compelling reason for invading that country.

#### 4. The Myth of Atrocities:

Double standards define the media's presentation of "atrocities committed in the name of the war on terrorism, with terrorist groups receiving maximum opprobrium and the state-sponsored terrorism (and torture) often being ignored."

#### 5. The Myth of Morality:

The most important myth used by the media, according to Prof. Thussu, is "about the U.S. crusade to spread democracy, freedom, and human rights in the world. It has been proposed that force may be needed to democratize the international community. However, the undermining of democracy in the United States and Britain was evident during and leading up to the Iraqi invasion. A historically unprecedented number of ordinary citizens -- as many as eight million -- marched on the streets of five continents on February 15, 2003, demonstrating against the U.S.-British plan to invade Iraq, and yet the democratically elected governments chose to ignore popular sentiment."

Amid the fervor of America's open-ended "war in terror," Western media and governments are advancing a heightened level of Islamophobia in the interests of a shared neo-imperialist and Zionist agenda to dominate, exploit, torture and kill Muslims. It's the same Islamophobic cycle returning once again, worse than ever.

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