

Causes and Grounds of The Distortion of Perceptions About Islam in Modern Media

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Abstract

This article examines the historical, ideological, and socio-political factors that have contributed to the distortion of perceptions about Islam in modern media. The study investigates the roots of Islamophobic narratives and stereotypical representations of Islam that have developed over centuries and continue to influence contemporary public discourse. Particular attention is paid to the role of medieval Christian polemics, Orientalist scholarship, missionary literature, Soviet atheistic propaganda, and modern mass communication technologies in shaping negative images of Islam and Muslims.

The research employs a historical-analytical methodology to explore how political conflicts, civilizational rivalries, and ideological agendas have affected the portrayal of Islam in Europe, Russia, and the post-Soviet space. The article analyzes the intellectual foundations of Orientalism and its influence on the production of knowledge about Islam, highlighting how Eurocentric perspectives often generated biased interpretations that became deeply embedded in academic and public consciousness. Furthermore, the study examines the impact of Soviet anti-religious campaigns, which systematically promoted negative attitudes toward religion in general and Islam in particular, leaving a lasting legacy in public perceptions. Special consideration is given to the contemporary media environment, including social networks, citizen journalism, and digital communication platforms. While these technologies have expanded access to information and facilitated intercultural dialogue, they have also accelerated the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and unverified religious content. The article argues that sensationalized media coverage, the misuse of concepts such as “radical Islam,” and the activities of extremist groups have contributed to the persistence of negative stereotypes that associate Islam with violence, intolerance, and opposition to modernity. Such representations hinder constructive dialogue between different religious and cultural communities and reinforce social prejudices. The findings demonstrate that distorted perceptions of Islam are not solely the result of contemporary media practices but are deeply rooted in historical narratives, political interests, and

ideological conflicts. The study concludes that overcoming these misconceptions requires the active participation of Muslim scholars, the publication of academically grounded research, constructive cooperation with media institutions, the development of responsible digital communication, and the dissemination of reliable information based on authentic Islamic sources. These measures can contribute to a more balanced and objective understanding of Islam in the modern information age.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Media Representation, Orientalism, Religious Stereotypes, Digital Communication, Islamic Studies.

Introduction

Islam has a thousand-year history in Europe and Russia, and during this time many peoples have absorbed its ideological and spiritual principles. Despite this, for hundreds of years, historical, philosophical, orientalist literature, as well as the media and mass media have been disseminating various aspects of Islam to the public.

Since Europe encountered such a phenomenon as Islam, it has become an object of careful study for many Western authors. However, the works and studies written by most European authors cannot claim to be an objective study of this topic. The stereotypical portrayal of Islam in the works of past Orientalists, as well as in modern media, has become a matter of course. Edward Said wrote extensively about this in his famous work "Orientalism". Anwar al-Bilal also devoted his dissertation to this issue. Ali Muhiddin al-Qaradaghi devoted a separate chapter to this issue in his book "We and the Others".

The demonization of Islam in the works of European authors in the Middle Ages was due to the military conflicts between the civilizations of the Christian West and the Muslim East. The Italian historian Franco Cardini writes: "The comparison of the European world with the Islamic world, no matter how it is made, always has a contradictory character. Perhaps this is because such a comparison is still perceived - at least subconsciously - as a permanent or recurring historical conflict between Christianity and Islam"¹.

Dr. Ali Muhiddin al-Qaradaghi, speaking about the relations between the West and the East, writes: "Thus, the history of the West's relations with Islam is a conflict that arose from ignorance of and fear of the true nature of Islam; the struggle for territory and economic resources; the church's fear of converting Christians to Islam by imposing Islamic teachings on them, thereby fanning the flames of sedition. For this reason, they declared the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) the Antichrist and incited Christians against Muslims in 1189, depicting a statue of Jesus supposedly slaughtered by Muhammad's knife"².

The military and ideological conflict forced Western scholars to study Islam more deeply. Considering how much Islam influenced the minds of not only Muslims but also Christians, it became a political necessity to study it and present it in an ideologically convenient way.

¹ Франко Кардини. Европа и ислам: история непонимания / Серия «Становление Европы» / пер. с итал. Е. Смагиной, А. Карловой, А. Митрофанова. – СПб.: «Александрия», 2007. – С. 9.

² Али Мухиддин ал-Карадаги. Мы и другие: Фундаментальное правоведческое исследование отношения мусульман к немусульманам (в мирное и военное время, в положении меньшинства и большинства) в свете Писания, Сунны и фикха равновесия. – Махачкала: Издательство «Лотос», 2015. – С.189.

According to Ali Qaradogi: “Perhaps the science of “Orientalism” has become an ideological expression of the civilizational conflict between the West and the East, playing the greatest role in presenting the East in an unfavourable light for the West”³.

It is also necessary to take into account the influence of the "persecution of science" led by the Catholic Church in medieval Europe on the image of common religions. This was the main reason for the formation of the image of religion as anti-scientific and irrational.

Below, it is necessary to indicate some historical factors that influenced the spread of false information about Islam in the territories of modern Europe and Russia:

- translated works of Europeans. These are mainly the works of the European school of Orientalism, based on the idea of Eurocentrism;

- Russian schools of Orientalism. The study of the East in Russia began during the reign of Peter I, and the main factors can be distinguished: the desire to develop positive relations with the East, the goodwill of the neighboring Muslim peoples, and missionary activity among Muslims. By the 20th century, it is appropriate to distinguish two main schools of Orientalism, says researcher Anna Matochkina: “At the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, the scientific literature on the study of Islamic and Arab-Muslim culture belonged to two schools of Orientalism: the first of them, representing academic Orientalism and associated with many famous names from Kazan, Moscow and St. Petersburg, included V.R. Rosen, V.V. Barthold, A.E. Krymsky, I.Yu. Krachkovsky and others; the second group, the works written by Orientalist missionaries who were directly associated with the pre-revolutionary (1917) Kazan Theological Academy and its anti-Muslim department. The practical goal of Kazan researchers was the fight against Islam, therefore they were distinguished by a biased approach to Russian Muslims, who believed that they could become reliable citizens of the Russian state only after converting to Christianity.”⁴;

- Atheistic propaganda during the USSR. During the former Soviet Union, atheist propaganda, in particular Islamophobic propaganda, was carried out by Soviet scientists: "It was necessary to create and attract specialists in ideology who could demonstrate with vivid examples the harmful effects of religion on social relations and expose the "selfishness" of religious figures." As a religion common to a large part of the USSR population, Islam was no exception and was also subjected to this propaganda campaign.”⁵. In short, the path of ideological struggle against religion during the Soviet era can be described by Lenin's words: “We must fight against religion. This is the alphabet of all materialism, and therefore of Marxism.”⁶.

The above does not indicate all the negative stereotypes of Islam in Europe and Russia, but only the main reasons. European works written in the past centuries [in a critical spirit] serve as the main source for shaping the image of Islam in the present era.

Although in the era of modern technologies a huge layer of research materials has been opened to the world, we still encounter mass disinformation. Despite the vast opportunities that modern

³ That place. – P.193-194.

⁴ Маточкина А.И. Изучение ислама и арабо-мусульманской культуры в трудах российских востоковедов на рубеже XIX-XX вв. // Научно-теоретический журнал Религиоведение. Изд-во АмГУ, №2, 2017. – С. 109.

⁵ Рольский А. И. Атеистическая пропаганда 1920-1930-х гг. как фактор изучения ислама в Советском Союзе. Историографический взгляд // Вестник Омского университета. Серия «Исторические науки», 2021. – Т 8. № 2 (30). – С. 91.

⁶ Ленин В. И. Об отношении рабочей партии к религии // Ленин В. И. Полн. собр. соч. 5-е изд. М.: Изд-во полит. лит., 1968 – Т. 17. – С. 418.

technologies provide for an objective study of the topic under study, the phenomenon of Islamophobia has been fully preserved in the media of the former Soviet Union, which has replaced the image of the class-exploitative nature of religion with the theme of "radical Islam". The problem of "radical Islam" exists not only in the West, but also in Russia. The conditions for the emergence of this label are so numerous that it requires a separate article. Along with the phenomenon of "radical Islam", the media and media content have also formed the image of "backward Muslims" who unconditionally believe in religious beliefs, do not accept science and rationalism, and also oppose freedoms and modern scientific achievements. Muhiddin Qaradagi, speaking about the image of Muslims in the West as people who hate European achievements and modern lifestyles, says: "The West, especially the US media, has succeeded in instilling in the American people and the majority of the European population the lie that Muslims despise their political systems, sciences, democracy, freedoms, and scientific and technological progress. In fact, Muslims do not express hatred for positive developments in the West. They only view with hatred the actions of some Western politicians, in particular their activities in committing oppression, invading Muslim countries, and applying double standards"⁷.

Today's technological age requires a new form of information dissemination, but at the same time it also expands the possibilities for its misinterpretation: "In the modern world, public opinion is formed not only by professional journalists, publicists and editors, but also by those who have the status of readers in the information space, who, thanks to the development of the blogging industry and social networks, are shaping a new face of the information space, a phenomenon called "citizen journalism"⁸.

The emergence of social networks has significantly simplified the process of obtaining information, and at the same time, facilitated access to disinformation. Diversity of opinion and freedom of speech are the foundations of opportunities for the mass media. Many Muslims, taking advantage of the opportunity to freely express their opinions, began to actively express their personal ideas on various religious topics. This has led to informational disorientation. Among ordinary (mass) Muslims who do not have basic religious knowledge, fragmentary, sometimes completely unreliable information obtained from the Internet is shaping their ideological views. As a result, the actions of Muslims are provoking inappropriate actions and, as a result, serving as another negative factor affecting the image of Islam.

The development of information and communication technologies in the CIS coincided with the period of social and political changes associated with the collapse of the USSR, which led to the promotion of various beliefs among Muslims and, in turn, the emergence of various fanatical groups. The actions and slogans of these groups often serve as an example for the image of Muslims in the media, and for new media outlets this becomes a convenient reason for "hype" (denigration). The image of Islam formed in modern media and the media is presented as an obstacle to constructive dialogue with representatives of other worldviews, since a Muslim person is characterized by all negative qualities.

⁷ Али Мухиддин ал-Каррадаги. Мы и другие: Фундаментальное правоведческое исследование отношения мусульман к немусульманам (в мирное и военное время, в положении меньшинства и большинства) в свете Писания, Сунны и фикха равновесия. – Махачкала: Издательство «Лотос», 2015. – С.199.

⁸ Сулейманова Ш.С. Роль новых медиа в современных межрелигиозных конфликтах. Серия «Ислам в современном мире». Том 12. №2, 2016. – С.205.

Taking into account the above information, the following are recommended as solutions:

- activity of representatives of traditional Islam in publishing scientific books;
- cooperation with the media;
- scientific publications in the field of Islamic history and beliefs, based on authoritative Islamic sources;
- development of the blogging industry in the Muslim scientific community;
- filling the information gap with reliable information.