

# Islamophobia

dehumanisation & constructing otherness

*Dr. Osman Latiff*



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**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
**AWARENESS MONTH**

# Seeing the Human

- Dehumanisation is the relegating of another to a distant, sub-other. It is the seeing in the other much less and sometimes a complete absence of what one sees in oneself. **All that is morally reprehensible is defined in that other.**
- On mental canvases the dehumanised other is painted with broad strokes and wide brushes. **There are no identifications, no fine lines, no nuances, no greys and no subtle outlines.**



# Seeing the Human

- There are too many positive human attributes which prevent us from seeing others as expendable, dehumanised and othered, impeding us from acting in cruelty and with murderous intent.
- Dehumanisation is to undermine those impediments. Chris Weedon defines *Othering* as referring to the process of: “**constructing another people or group as radically different to oneself or one’s own group, usually on the basis of racist and/or ethnocentric discourses.**”



# islamophobia

| ɪz,lamə'fəʊbiə | noun [*mass noun*]

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness



# islamophobia

“An exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life.”

*Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, "Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America" (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 2011)*



# Constructing the ‘other’

“The dehumanised Other is irrational, savage and threatening. On mental canvases the dehumanised Other is painted with broad strokes and wide brushes. There are no identifications, no fine lines, no nuances, no greys and no subtle outlines. The dehumanised is feared, mistrusted and generalised. In rallying calls against the Other, images and narratives of how alien, barbaric and inhuman the Other is are propped up. These ideas are then repeated continuously and relentlessly until believing anything different about that Other becomes incongruous. Any sympathisers with the Other are better placed with that Other, rather than with ‘us’.”

*Osman Latiff, On Being Human: how Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy (Sapience Institute, 2020), p. 2*



Surrounded by  
Torturers He Cannot  
See, Anonymous,  
watercolour on  
paper, 8.27” 11.69”,  
early 1980s.



Image courtesy of the  
Rehabilitation and  
Research Centre for Torture  
Victims, Copenhagen,  
Denmark.

Who and what  
do we see?



Side by side, 30's Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, and a Daily Mail cartoon from 17th November 2015

# Who and what do we see?

“The Arabs so far have demonstrated an incapacity for disciplined and abiding unity. They experience **collective outbursts** of enthusiasm but do not pursue patiently **collective endeavours**, which are usually embraced half-heartedly. They show lack of **coordination** and harmony in organization and function, nor have they revealed an ability for **cooperation**. Any **collective action** for **common benefit** or mutual profit is alien to them.”

*Sania Hamady (1960). Temperament and Character of the Arabs.*





## Who and what do we see?

- Herbert Kelman reminds us that to humanise someone is to “perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices...” *Herbert Kelman (1973). “Violence Without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers”.*
- The same way one’s predispositions to err or one’s likes and dislikes are a necessary part of one’s self then so too must they exist in the other, which would mean an acceptance of being disagreed with or even in being disliked.



## Who and what do we see?

- The idea is to see the other as a **complex human being**.
- To be genuinely curious about another person and to realise that experiences affect different people in different ways, and to **not be presumptuous** about one person's attitude and viewpoints due to an attitude formed about the group to which the other belongs, or because of views his in-group has formed about one's self is a **requirement of empathy**.



## Stereotyping the ‘other’

“They could not see me or any other black man as a human individual because they buried us under the garbage of their stereotyped view of us. They saw us as “different” from themselves in fundamental ways...How could white men ever really know black men if on every contact the white man’s stereotyped view of the black man got in the way? I never knew a black man who felt this stereotyped view fit him. Always, in every encounter even with “good whites,” we had the feeling that the white person was not talking with us but with his image of us.”

*John Howard Griffin, Black Like Me (1961)*

# Why do we dehumanise?

Amongst other reasons, there are potential political motivations:

“The very conception of the human is brought into question; it is not simply “that some humans are treated as humans, and others are dehumanized; it is rather that dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human to the extent that a “western” civilization defines itself over and against a population understood as definitionally illegitimate, if not dubiously human.”

*J. Butler (2006). Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.*

## Why do we dehumanise?

- The one we dehumanise, we now count as the Other.
- The Other consists of incomplete parts, insufficiently human and thus inadequate for a place in the world, our world.
- For the dehumanised, principles of morality no longer apply and any moral restraints against abuse, torture or killing are readily overcome.
- Dehumanisation is effacing, it is to contort another's image and ascribe to it all the qualities one would find repugnant to have within one's self.

# A Historical Othering

The Iberian Crusades/ Al-Andalus and the othered Moor/Pope Urban II, the crusades and the savage other:

“A grave report has come from the lands around Jerusalem ...that a race absolutely alien to God...has invaded the land of the Christians...They have either razed the churches of God to the ground or enslaved them to their own rites...They cut open the navels of those whom they choose to torment...them as they lie on the ground with all their entrails out.... What can I say of the appalling violation of women? On whom does the task lie of avenging this, if not on you?...Take the road to the Holy Sepulchre, rescue that land and rule over it yourselves, for that land, as scripture says, floweth with milk and honey...Take this road for the remission of your sins, assured of the unfading glory of the kingdom of heaven.’ When Pope Urban had said these things...everyone shouted in unison: Deus vult! Deus vult!, ‘God wills it! God wills it!’”

*Robert of Rheims, account of Urban II's speech at Clermont, taken from L. and J.S.C. Riley-Smith, The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274 (London, 1981), pp. 42-45. For the full text of Robert of Rheims's chronicle, see Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade, tr, C. Sweetenham (Aldershot, 2005).*

# A Historical Othering

- The Spanish inquisition
- ‘Hagarene beasts’
- Radovan Karadžić and the genocide of Bosnia – *“Muslims will disappear, that people will disappear from the face of the earth...”*



# Othering and Race

- Chris Weedon defines “Othering” as referring to the process of “*constructing another people or group as radically different to oneself or one’s own group, usually on the basis of racist and/or ethnocentric discourses*”.
- Differences in colour as a sign.
- Abu Dharr insulted Bilal with reference to his mother - “*O son of a black woman!*”
- The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “*Have you insulted Bilal by his mother? By the One who revealed the Book to Muḥammad, no one is better than another except by righteous deeds.*” *Shu’ab al-Imān 4760*
- Prophet’s final sermon on ‘Arafat.



# The Psychology of Hate

- Radovan Karadžić was infamous in describing Bosnian Muslims as filth, as traitors and vermin that needed to be annihilated. In the words of Biljana Plavsić, Karadžić's deputy, *“It was [Serb] genetically deformed material that embraced Islam.”*
- Rwanda 1994 - Tutsi were castigated with a “spoiled identity”, a state of nothingness, as “things”, “cockroaches”, as “animals”.



# The Psychology of Hate

June 5, 1942, the human beings marked for death in mobile gas chambers at Chelmno are always referred to as “the cargo” or “the items.”

Tarrant’s manifesto ‘The Great Replacement’ describes that the motive for his attack was to create fear and calls for the killing of Muslims in Europe. It threatens Turks, referring to them with the dehumanising “roaches”: *“But if you attempt to live in European lands, anywhere west of the Bosphorus. We will kill you and drive you roaches from our lands.”*

Katie Hopkins - In April 2015, Hopkins wrote a column for *The Sun* titled “Rescue boats? I’d use gunships to stop migrants” in which she began by stating “NO, I don’t care. Show me pictures of coffins, show me bodies floating in water, play violins and show me skinny people looking sad. I still don’t care.” Later in the piece she called migrants in Britain “this plague of feral humans” and stated, “Make no mistake, these migrants are like cockroaches.”

# Overcoming Islamophobia through effective engagement

- Responding with what is better: “And who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, ‘I am one of those devoted to God’? Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness. If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing.” *The Qur’an, Chapter 41, Verse 33 to 36*



# Overcoming Islamophobia through effective engagement

“Dehumanisation is a blurring of distinctions, a rendering of Others as faceless, and unlike ourselves. As discussed, the rise of drone warfare in our skies today, of remote-controlled air war, has generated a new mode of depersonalised killings, of dehumanisation, distance and detachment. Chamayou in *Drone Theory* explained: “Thousands of miles can now be interposed between the trigger on which one’s finger rests and the cannon from which the cannonball will fly.” The mechanism of dehumanisation and the way it betrays the trueness of human conscience in its forcible self-antagonising to ‘look away’ from what lies of ‘itself’ before itself.”

*Osman Latiff, On Being Human: how Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy (Sapience Institute: 2020), p. 131.)*





# Overcoming Islamophobia through effective engagement

- “Be patient about what they say...”
- Thumāma ibn Uthāl – Makkan stereotyping and propaganda – Balbir Singh – Joram van Klaveren
- Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) and Abu Bakr’s father
- The spiritual presence of a Muslim – “The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, ‘Peace’.” *The Qur’an, Chapter 25, Verse 63*
- Defining your own narrative: Abu Sufyan and the believers on the day of Uhud – active engagement – challenging stereotypes - bias



# Overcoming Islamophobia through effective engagement

Consequences of othering and dehumanisation: The Holocaust/Bosnia/The case of Rwanda 1994.

“Our world is rapidly changing. More than 300 million people live outside of their native homelands and the average person is today more alert to his world than ever before. The dichotomous relationship between Self and Other, sometimes between spectator and spectated, has become more pronounced. The crisis of refugees of the Rohingya in Myanmar or Syrians in their mass exodus out of their country to escape the ongoing conflict; terrorist attacks and indiscriminate killings committed by ISIS, by neo-Nazi white supremacists or by Hindu nationalists create anxiety in our world and sometimes the insecurity we feel generates feelings that can range from anxiety, insecurity and abhorrence. At these junctions, humans together, we become fearful and untrusting. These feelings of fear, mistrust, generalisations, in-group pressure to conform to prejudices of the other, feelings of betrayal and recurrent discrimination in hostile communities become potential barriers to empathy.” *Osman Latiff, On Being Human: how Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy (Sapience Institute: 2020), p. 131.*



# Questions?



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