
VIOLENCE AGAINST MOSQUES AND HIJĀB AS A MEASURE OF INTERNATIONAL ISLAMOPHOBIA, CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL INEQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Islamophobia impacts the economic and social progress of Muslims around the world. This research focuses on the worst consequences of Islamophobic tropes, extant since the colonial era, and permeated into post-colonial international tensions, feminist misrepresentation of women in the Muslim world, and culminating in continued foreign economic and military intervention in favor of suppression and erasure of Islamic heritage in many parts of the Muslim world. This paper identifies the destruction of mosques by official State policy, as an example of, and an indication of wider attempts to disenfranchise and suppress Muslim culture, security, and economic and social growth. Collating historic and contemporary attempts to erase Islamic heritage in both times of war and peace, this research finds that substantial international indifference to overt Islamophobia persists throughout large parts of the modern world, obstructing the growth and progress of Muslims individually and as political societies. Pertinent examples such as in Bosnia, India, and Palestine, further demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the United Nations as a postcolonial arbiter.

Keywords: *Islamophobia, Mosque destruction, Feminism, War on terror.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 15 March 2019, two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand suffered a symbolic far-right marauding terrorist attack. The incident sparked global condemnation and public opposition to Islamophobia by political leaders, with calls from the United Nations for global cooperation to hold the perpetrators to account (Delattre, 2019). Such a blatant targeting of mosques was an overt act of Islamophobic hatred. However, while this attack was outrageously broadcast live on social media (Hutchinson, 2019, p. 19), global violence against mosques is far more common than one would think, hinting at the prevalence of simmering Islamophobia permeating communities around the world. The resulting silent disenfranchisement of Muslims, obstructing social, economic, and political progress is the topic of this research.

The modern world can easily appear divorced from its not-too-distant history of world wars and colonial empires, but the global landscape cannot escape the influence of the past. There is an obvious economic gap between major Western powers, and the weaker subordinates of their hegemony. The Muslim world, as both nations and diaspora, continue to hint at a remarkably common Islamic heritage, while also experiencing a shared suffocation of that legacy with profound pressure and intimidation to conform to the interests and ideologies of primarily Western powers. This paper will argue that “Islamophobia” has been weaponized to exert significant pressure on the Muslim world, ultimately to the economic, social and security detriment of Muslim nations and their populace.

With the rise of Western civilization in the age of colonialism, European nations reshaped the image of Oriental cultures and heritage according to their own vision. Unsurprisingly, Islamophobia has played an integral part in Western discourse about the Muslim world since its rapid rise and the centuries of successive Crusades and wars that followed. With the fall of the last Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 CE, the fear of a successful Islamic empire returning to rival Western domination never abated. With ontological Islamophobic prejudice a common feature, postcolonial politics facilitates Western domination and suppresses Muslim autonomy, including by military conquest resulting in the loss of millions of lives.

This research seeks to examine the impact of Islamophobia on the Muslim world, economically, socially, and the security of Muslims around the world. This research aims to assess the impact of, and provide recommendations to mitigate the negative effects of Islamophobia on the lived experiences of Muslims and their economic, social and security welfare. Due to the overly wide scope of Islamophobia, this research will focus on two perspectives of international relations, that of feminism and postcolonialism.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Definition of Islamophobia

Despite the undeniable impact of Islamophobia on global politics, especially in the wake of devastating terrorist attacks and the never-ending 'War on terror,' it is surprisingly difficult to find a coherent, agreed upon, universal definition of the term. With many contributions describing a 'social anxiety,' or 'fear' or 'dread' toward Islam and Muslims, while others focused on

localized incompatibility 'with Euro-Americanness.' Blich (2012) has excluded genuine criticism from the term, defining it as, "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims." (Bleich, 2012, pp. 180-181)

Mondon & Winter elaborates on Islamophobia as being a dichotomy of Illiberal and Liberal Islamophobia. Illiberal Islamophobia justifies itself as 'breaking taboos' and promoting secular freedom of speech, while the latter condescend and discriminate in the guise of 'civilizing' them. (Mondon & Winter, 2019, pp. 6-9). Fornara traces these attitudes as far back as the Crusades with Islam seen as erasing Christian heritage (2018, p.484).

A UK Home Affairs Select Committee rejected a definition proposed by All-Party-Parliament Group on British Muslims (APPG), "*Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.*"

Each of these definitions are problematic. Overemphasizing the West, excludes Islamophobia in Asia and Africa. Framing the matter as racial is relevant to Rohingya, Uyghurs, and immigrant communities in the West, but underemphasizes places of shared ethnic heritage, such as India, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. While rightly hoping to preserve freedoms of expression, Blich's (2012) limiting definition excludes the most pernicious forms of reasoned political Islamophobia by knowledgeable politicians and journalists.

Instead, a proposed definition should be comprehensive, such as "*Prejudice or hostility towards perceived Muslimness, toward the religion of Islam, or its proliferation.*" While this definition may

appear to hinder freedom of speech for those expressing genuine dissent in a pluralistic debate, that is not the case. The definition does not seek to make any value judgement upon such hostility, but to acknowledge its existence, and identify its impact. It is for the dissenter to justify whether their hostility is morally justified or not.

2.2 The Global Impact of Islamophobia

Islamophobia was overtly present in past Orientalist writings that downplayed the rapid advancement of the Muslim empire during its golden age. Yet echoing other Western writers, such as Kuran and Fachini, Khalfoui asserts that Islam negatively correlates with economic growth, pointing to the comparative lack of development over the past three decades, Khalfoui identifies Islam as the common denominator in the low rates of literacy and employment (Islam and Economic Growth, 2015, pp. 62-69).

The underlying assumptions however presumes a fair market comparison without considering Islamophobia as a global phenomenon, or foreign interference to suppress growth. The most telling omission from such studies is the role of secular government displacing Islamic law in modern Muslim countries, severely restricting Islamic influence on GDP and. Indeed, economic decline is often a desired outcome of foreign intervention, such as economic sanctions, war, and foreign control of resources and even internal legislation. Where Islam is seen as an enemy or a threat, such a decline could be viewed as a result of uncontained Islamophobia. Sikander (2021) cites rampant Islamophobia as Indian political strategy responsible for the deliberate disenfranchisement of Muslims, justification

for violence and even exclusion from citizenship (Islamophobia in Indian Media, pp. 120-129) similar to the exclusion of Rohingya (Afroza, 2018, pp. 91-95) and Palestinian Muslims in Israel (Molavi, 2013, pp. 147-182).

Feminist literature has also repeatedly attracted accusations of Islamophobia. While seemingly in favor of universally accepted noble intentions to empower women and improve outcomes for women around the world, the approach, arguments, and solutions offered by Western feminists can sometimes rely upon prejudicial assumptions about the source and causes of obstacles to women's rights and progress. Pasha Zaidi (2015, p.745) argues the Western feminist struggle against corsets led to the assumption that female empowerment contradicts the notion of covering the body (Pasha-Zaidi, 2015, p. 745). This led to promoting "the exposed female body, active in the public sphere" as "the marketable image of women in free market capitalism." (Wazni, 2015, p. 3)

Consequently, feminist rhetoric presumes misogynistic intent for Islamic rules and propagates aged colonial stereotypes that paint Muslim men as patriarchal, oppressive and sexually licentious (Wazni, 2015, p. 4; Bijdiguen, 2015, pp. 105-106), actively rejecting female voices that report empowerment through the *hijāb* (Fornara, 2018, pp. 467-477).

Mondon & Winter (2019) point to the phenomenon of securitization of Islamic symbols, such as the banning of *hijāb*, *niqāb* or *burka*, giving license to Islamophobic crimes and State sanction (Mondon & Winter, 2019, p. 4; Rahman, 2023, p. 154). *Hijāb* has become a common indicator for radicalization (Qato, 2017, p. 42) and women suffer "Islamophobic victimization as

an ongoing pattern of harassment, abuse and violence,” writes Chakraborti and Zempi (2014), with overtly veiled Muslim women locked into a cycle of emotional and physical abuse.

This normalization and desensitization to Islamophobic violence has led to a rise in underreported and overlooked attacks on Islamic cultural buildings such as mosques. Despite being identified as a war crime by the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954, Walasek & Apaydin (2020) write about the ineffectiveness of the international community in protecting Muslim cultural sites during the Bosnian war in 1992-1995, in which Serbs sought to erase visible signs of Islamic cultural heritage from the landscape (Bosnia and the destruction of identity, pp. 228-229).

In fact, despite writers on Islamophobia increasing, there remains a vacuum of comment about the rising phenomenon of --what ought to be seen as the epitome of Islamophobic violence-- official State attacks on, and destruction of mosques around the world as a symbolic signal to the intended erasure of Islam. While there is ample literature on the cited acts of extreme violence, discrimination and the economic and social impact on the Muslim world, there appears to be an indifferent void about more recent attacks on mosques, particularly when meted out by official State policy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will use a qualitative method, analyzing secondary sources from existing academic literature, and published statistics about attacks and demolition of mosques around the

world, particularly focusing on State-sanctioned attacks. With the advent of social media and accessible cameras, it has also been possible to corroborate reports from witnesses with recorded footage of mosque attacks and their aftermath, as well as satellite imagery from Google Earth, particularly for the most recent and underreported incidents at the time of writing. Care was taken to consider the veracity of such footage and any editorialized narratives that accompany them.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 The Impact of Islamophobic Intervention

Foreign interference, motivated by a sense of threat and fear of Muslim states gaining power, has frequently been employed by Western states to hinder growth, discourage investment, strangle economies, and exploit resources over the last century. Iraqi sanctions devastated the economy, plunging a formerly wealthy nation into poverty and war (Popal, 2000, p. 791). Similarly, sanctions on Iran, openly opposed to nuclear advancement make no secret of being motivated by a fear of the growth of the 'Islamic Republic' as a nuclear rival (Nader, 2013, pp. 25-30). The historic devastation caused by colonialism such as the British official neglect and economic exploitation, leading to the death of three million people during the Bengal famine in 1943 can be identified as a result, not of a lack of food, but of an open dehumanizing hostility toward inhabitants of Bengal and their religion (Gráda, 2008, pp. 29-34). Persistent Israeli military intervention in Palestine and neighboring countries, easily identified as Islamophobic, strangles growth, and causes repeated and extensive damage to economic and social conditions. Amnesty International (2022)

describes comprehensive Israeli state obstruction to Palestinian trade, agriculture, amenities, movement, construction and seizure of land, in a concerted effort to create unliveable conditions for Muslim and Christian residents in the region (Amnesty International, 2022).

Violent Islamophobic pogroms decimate entire societies socially and economically and have found a host of Muslim communities vulnerable to attack in the past century, including, but not limited to, horrific events in Bosnia 1992-1995 (Sadowski, 1995, pp. 10-15), Myanmar in 1994, 2001, 2012 and 2017 (Afroza, 2018, pp. 91-95), Gujarat in 2002 (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, pp. 1-30), and Israeli Nakba in Palestine, 1948 (Nofal, et al., 1998, pp. 5-35). Continuous Israeli settler violence, and military incursions as recent as 2023 (United Nations, 2023) are often designed to destroy infrastructure, homes, economies, prevent trade and agriculture, destroy crops, and are a direct cause of economic decline in Palestine and other war-torn countries.

4.2 A failure of Feminism

The veil “as the symbol of oppression” has long been used as justification to dehumanize “the uncivilized Muslim man,” and normalize violence during Crusades, Western imperialism (Wazni, 2015, p. 3) and even 21st century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Bijdiguen, 2015, pp. 40-41). The irony of this Islamophobia is palpable in the example of French soldiers publicly parading veiled Algerian women, who were violently stripped of their *hijābs* to symbolize a perverse white savior narrative (Wazni, 2015, p. 3).

Recent wars such as those in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, though proposed to be targeting liberation of women, are responsible for some of the worst humanitarian catastrophes with the indiscriminate destruction of infrastructure, economies, and the appropriation of valuable resources for foreign nations as well as the abuse of Muslim women in the region. Islamophobia can even be credited with normalizing the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war and torture by coalition forces, such as in the 2004 scandal of Abu Ghraib leaked torture photos (Apel, 2005, pp. 88-100).

4.3 War Crimes

Attacks on places of worship have historically been recognized as one of the gravest forms of hateful humiliation, and erasure of enemy heritage. It is peculiar, however, that Islamic scripture, despite being an evangelical religion, also made mention of the phenomenon as a war crime, "Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said: "Our Lord is Allāh." For had it not been that Allāh checks one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the Name of Allāh is mentioned much would surely have been pulled down." (al-Qur'ān, p. 22:40)

It is a wonder that the Islamic empire reached the far reaches of the world while avoiding harm to indigenous places of worship. Indeed, some of the oldest churches in the world have survived under a millennium of Islamic rule and protection despite Muslim conquests (Schick, 1998, pp. 74-108; Guidetti, 2013, pp. 229-258). After widescale destruction of cultural heritage during the great wars, a United Nations convention in 1954

declared harming, vandalizing, and misappropriating cultural property as a war crime.

4.4 Indicator of Islamophobia

This research has selected the government hostility against *Ḥijāb* and State-backed destruction of mosques as key indicators of Islamophobia – both as popular opinion in the nation, and a state effort to suppress, discriminate, and potentially erase ‘Muslimness.’ Islamophobia has most commonly been cited as the cause for overtly practicing Muslim women suffering negative lived experiences while wearing *Ḥijāb* (Rahman, 2023; Allen, 2014, pp. 137-159).

Targeting the more vulnerable half of the practicing Muslim population directly, while simultaneously provoking the naturally protective remainder, this form of Islamophobia affects all Muslims and has historically been a key feature of Islamophobia. The first instances of violence against Muslim women includes an incident during the lifetime of Muhammad ﷺ, where a tribesman of *Banū Qaynuqā'* uncovered a Muslim woman in the marketplace, who called for help of a nearby Muslim man resulting in violence and the ultimate expulsion of the tribe by the Muslim state of *Madīnah* (Ahmad, 2013, pp. 284 – 290). Upon abolishing the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, the rapid secularization of Turkey over the past century took the form of erasing Islamic symbolism, replacing the Arabic script, the conversion of *Hagia Sophia* to a museum, and the prohibition of *Ḥijāb* in all schools, universities and public offices were specifically enforced to secularize and combat religiosity (Rankin & Aytaç, 2008, p. 276).

Places of worship are central to the social life of committed adherents of the faith, and “represent identity, tradition, history, family, and belief systems” (Malji, 2021, p. 108). The destruction of mosques represents the social exclusion, intimidation, vulnerability of Muslims, and disenfranchisement. This has also been an historic theme in Islamic history. The Qur’ān dedicates a chapter to the “Year of the Elephant,” the event of an army of war elephants that descended to destroy the Ka’bah during the year of the Prophet’s ﷺ birth (2011, pp. 105: 1-5). Islamic sources further speak about the necessity to defend against the destruction of “monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques” and similar places of worship (al-Qur’ān, p. 22:40). Muhammad ﷺ and his successors have been recorded as prohibiting assaults on monasteries and monks, whether during peace or war (Shaybah, 2004, p. 483; al-Jawzīyah, 1997, p. 1:110). The persistence of this expression of Islamophobia was foretold in scripture to include a prophesied Abyssinian army that will attempt to destroy the Makkan Ka’bah in its war against Islam in the end times (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, pp. 2909a, 2909c).

It is fair to infer that such a drastic State policy against mosques, in the absence of any public outcry from subjects of that State, tells a story of a suffocated Muslim community without opportunity for economic growth or security. Malji (2021) has further argued that destruction of places of worship is evidence of genocide (People Don’t Want a Mosque Here, pp. 108-128).

4.5 Historic International Inaction

4.5.1 Bosnia

The Bosnian war in 1992-1995 saw the ethnic cleansing of Muslim inhabitants of the country, as Serbs systematically erased Islamic heritage from the country, demolishing minarets from the skyline to reshape the nation without Muslims (Walasek & Apaydin, 2020, pp. 228-229; Malji, 2021, pp. 108-122). Despite the 1954 UN convention designating such actions as war crimes, the international community was entirely ineffective, and arguably apathetic, toward these crimes. While such an extreme case was ultimately condemned and prosecuted after the fact, the international indifference to the Islamophobic destruction of cultural heritage elsewhere has been evident (Amineddoleh, 2017, pp. 37-48).

4.5.2 India

The 1992 destruction of the 400-year-old Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu extremists, backed by BJP politicians in government, was met with a weak response and an unfulfilled promise to rebuild the mosque (Parikh, 1993, pp. 673-684). However, the now ruling BJP, publicly expresses State support for this war crime. The announcement of an official 2020 decision to build a Hindu temple at the ancient mosque site is even more concerning (Malji, 2021, pp. 108-109). Prime Minister Modi has been accused of direct involvement with the destruction and other pogroms, and since 2019 has instituted an array of overtly anti-Muslim legislation, including the destruction of several more religious sites (Malji, 2021, pp. 108-128).

4.5.3 Myanmar

State policy and police-backed pogroms saw destruction of Rohingya mosques across Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Rakhine state in Myanmar after decades of marginalization. Badar Makkam mosque, Musa Pali, Shindhikhan, and Jama mosques were among those destroyed or closed, as hundreds of thousands of Rohingya were systematically chased out, displaced, or even killed and their homes burnt over many years of pogroms (Malji, 2021, pp. 108-128).

4.5.4 China

China has adopted similar tactics of genocide and cultural erasure in an attempt to secularize the nation, seeing the State-sanctioned destruction of religious sites and even the institution of alleged concentration camps, detaining 10% of Uyghurs of Xinjiang. According to some estimates, over 16,000 mosques in the province alone have been damaged (Malji, 2021, pp. 108-128). More recently in May 2023, state attempts to demolish 13th century Najaiying Mosque has resulted in protests in the region, though there has been little outcry internationally (The Times of India, 2023).

4.5.5 Ethiopia

State-sanctioned demolitions have been on the rise in African countries, such as in Mali, Nigeria, and Ethiopia where a series of mosque demolitions have met with protests and viral videos posted online by witnesses since June 2023 (Politics Today, 2023; [Social Media Video footage of Mosque Destruction and report of 20 mosques destroyed], 2023).

4.5.6 Palestine

Perhaps, the bleakest example of Islamophobic violence on mosques is modern day Palestine, where settler pogroms, and military incursions routinely target mosques, and the Israeli parliament openly discuss plans to demolish the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the holiest sites for all Muslims. Frequent brazen attacks are openly captured on video, including military assaults ([Social Media Footage of 2023 Military Assault destroying 800 homes in Jenin], 2023) on homes and hospitals (Wilkinson, 2023), desecration of the mosque ([Social Media Footage of Al Aqsa Mosque set on fire during Israeli Assault in June 2022], 2022; [Social Media Footage of 2023 Israeli Settler desecration of Jenin Mosque], 2023), arson attacks ([Social Media Footage of 2023 Israeli Settler pogrom and arson in Huwara, Nablus], 2023), military beating of unarmed worshippers during the holy month of Ramaḍān (Al Jazeera Newsfeed, 2023). The relentless campaign would seem to be a concerted effort to break the will of Palestinians clinging to the site, and terrify them into abandoning the mosque (Larkin & Dumper, 2012, pp. 31-52) and homelands. Coupled with the wide array of discriminatory laws, and denial of access to amenities, roads, transport, and illegal settlements, there is evidently a deliberate policy to impoverish Palestinians (Ajluni, 2003, pp. 64-73; Amnesty International, 2022).

The military assault on Palestine by Israel in October 2023 following an incursion by Hamas across the borders of Gaza has been particularly devastating. Besides the siege and blockade, and bombardment against civilian targets, several mosques have been targeted for airstrikes in a single day. On 9 October

2023, among hundreds of civilian targets, Yarmuk Masjid, Soussi Masjid, Yassin Masjid, Al Gharbi Masjid and many others were destroyed, all within a single refugee camp, killing civilian worshippers therein (The New York Times, 2023).

The wilful refusal to acknowledge the outrageous war crimes and denial of justice, aid, or intervention for the Palestinian people is indefensible. The overt Islamophobia by the Israeli state is justified by, and even defended by, the strongest world powers such that Israel has near total impunity. The strangulation of Palestinian Muslims and Christians and the erasure of their heritage has become entirely normalized, and is an indication of the slow genocide taking place in front of the world, with the complicity of Israel's allies (Ajluni, 2003, pp. 64-73).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The abundance of underreported violence against Muslims, perpetrated by civilian and State actors, should be interpreted as a signal of significant levels of Islamophobia across the international community. A local and global community that ignores such overt Islamophobic war crimes, is highly unlikely to empower or include Muslims in economic, social, or political prosperity. On the contrary, as frequently observed, such State-backed cultural erasure is an indication of wider policies of hostility, obstruction, or even genocide. Islamophobia is alive and well across the world, and majorly contributes to explaining the global inequality persisting between the West and the postcolonial Muslim Orient.

5.1 Europe and the West

While discriminatory laws focused on suppressing or disenfranchising Muslims have risen in Europe and other parts of the West (Winter, 2006, p. 279; Rahman, 2023, p. 153), examples of State-sanctioned destruction of mosques are rarer than in Africa and Asia. But does this mean that State Islamophobia is absent in Europe and other Western countries? Discriminatory legislation in the West takes different forms, including the recent ban on niqab, and headscarves in France, Belgium, and the 2023 French legislation against loose Islamic female dress (*‘Abāyah*).

This does not mean violence against mosques is not prevalent. Hundreds of extremist arson attacks, firebombs, desecrations, and Christchurch-style marauding terrorist attacks have plagued Europe and Western countries for decades. While these are not sponsored by the State, many Muslim observers have complained that the State indifference to these attacks and persistent reluctance to declare or treat them as terrorist incidents, is inherently Islamophobic. However, this is not as apparent, nor can it be considered as direct complicity on a par with the military and legal protections for settler pogroms against mosques in Bosnia, India, Myanmar, or Israel.

European legal suppression of mosques does occur however, in the form of planning restrictions, bans on minarets and the call to prayer, and counter-terrorism monitoring, and Narkowicz & Pędziwiatr (2017) argue there has been a shift in European perception against mosques, contextualized by Islamophobia (p. 441). If State violence against mosques is a measure of Islamophobia, as argued by this paper, it might be argued that

the reduction in mosque destruction in Europe indicates a reduction in Islamophobia. This would conflict with other measures and research indicating rising Islamophobia in the West generally, including in the legislation cited above, undermining the argument of this thesis. However, this anomaly must be contextualized.

5.2 Western Foreign Policy

European colonialism, arguably the birthplace of modern Islamophobia, was characterized by extreme violence in foreign lands, while preserving the enjoyment of their stolen treasures in peaceful prosperity in the European motherland. A disparity has long existed in European violence and subjugation abroad compared with expectations of rights and freedoms at home. Historically, Crusades and imperial armies have conducted horrendous violence against mosques around the world, and recent years are no different. Testimony from soldiers and video footage of British and US military activities in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia include documentation of bombings, drone strikes and military assaults on mosques during the recent wars over the last four decades. Significantly, these have been without legal repercussions.

The relative calm in the West is refuted by the attitudes and violent conduct of Western soldiers against mosques abroad. A further indication of military attitudes can be inferred from the retaliatory mosque firebombing by former British soldiers in the UK following the killing of a British soldier in 2013. Though the soldiers were prosecuted in the UK for arson, the case was not treated as terrorism (Pitt, 2013). Video footage and interviews viewed during this research includes testimony of similar

revenge attacks on mosques following the deaths of comrades by coalition soldiers in Iraq, and unprovoked shelling of mosques in Iraq with impunity (Turner, 2008).

The European states also expressed open support for Israeli violence against civilian targets in the October 2023 (Council of the EU, 2023), which includes widespread war crimes such as the widespread targeting of mosques, hospitals, ambulances, residential homes, and withholding food, water, electricity and fuel (United Nations, 2023). European consistently participates in atrocity propaganda, justifying the genocide against and dehumanizing Palestinian civilians, equating them to Islamic terrorists. This further supports indications of widespread international Islamophobia directly leading to social and economic inequality in affected countries, and indicates that former colonial empires still play a pivotal role in this violence despite the relative calm portrayed in Europe.

5.3 Sectarian Violence against Mosques

A further criticism of this thesis could cite the frequent incidents of mosque bombings by Muslims themselves, including sectarian violence between Sunni, Alawite, and Shia armies and militia during the Iraq wars (Speer, 2017), and Syrian civil war. While such attacks cannot be a measure of Islamophobia *per se*, as the perpetrators adhere to Islam themselves, it could confidently be argued that the purpose and nature of these attacks are precisely the same as Islamophobia, except aimed at a subsection of Muslims due to hostility toward their sectarian faith. In other words, hostility toward their “Shianness” or “Sunni-ness” as opposed to less specific “Muslimness,” which has been included in the adopted definition of

Islamophobia for this paper. Far from undermining this thesis, a clear parallel exists. Motivations for sectarian violence is still based on hostility toward the faith of worshippers, further emphasizing that the abundant violence against mosques is an indication of hostility toward the faith of Islam and its adherents. It should also be noted that just as ethnic minorities can also be guilty of racism, Muslims are fallible human beings and are also capable of Islamophobia, self-hatred, and internalized oppression.

6. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

A superficial measure of social and economic success of Muslim countries such as correlating religiosity of the population with GDP, is reductive and misleading. Similarly, measuring the progress of women, and their rights against a Western cultural yardstick is equally ineffective. A history of Orientalist misinterpretation of Islam, and hostile caricatures of Muslim values have severely clouded the modern feminist perception of Muslim success and have even fueled violence against Muslim women in wars and domestic policy. The economic and social impact of Islamophobia on Muslim countries are manifested in the post-colonial world as an international effort to suppress and exploit Muslim countries, formerly governed by European empires. Starting with the erasure of Islamic law from public government, and the intervention by stronger powers in nations deemed to be host to an Islamic threat.

Sanctions, crippling interest on debt, foreign control of resources, selective globalized investment, and even direct legal discrimination against Muslims have all contributed to a decline

or slowed growth in economic advancement among Muslim majority countries. However, the greatest contribution to such decline is the frequent wars, and targeted violence designed to impoverish Muslims and erase their culture. An indicator of concerted efforts to suppress Muslims can be identified in the frequency of sanctioned destruction of cultural heritage in both times of war and peace. Mosque destruction being an extreme case, the Islamic Hijāb has historically been a barometer for Islamophobia. With open efforts to abolish Hijāb and demolish ancient mosques still rampant around the Muslim world, unfettered by international outcry and without recourse to justice, there is compelling evidence that there persists an Islamophobic strangulation of Muslim social and economic progress.

There can be no quick fix to centuries of Islamophobia, and superficial solutions are short-sighted. Moreover, secular international institutions established in the 20th century have been ineffective in protecting the rights and interests of Muslims, including against war crimes such as the destruction of mosques. True solutions to mitigate the impact of Islamophobia lies in long term empowerment of Muslims, including on a state level.

1. Implementation of Islamic laws on a State-level to preserve the religion, lives, wealth, social lineage, and mental health of Muslim populations.
2. Political and military pressure by Muslim states in response to State-backed destruction of mosques by other nations.

3. International cooperation to prevent the destruction of Islamic mosques and heritage sites.
4. Greater education on Islamic heritage, free from historic Orientalist stereotypes, starting in early education.
5. Greater economic collaboration between Muslim states, to reduce reliance and interference by former colonial masters.
6. Promoting a clear consistent definition of Islamophobia.
7. International accountability of Islamophobic State activity, including for Israel and USA.

One significant limitation of this study is the vastness and diversity of the global Muslim population, which spans across all regions of the world. As a result, it is nearly impossible to fully capture all incidents, forms, and manifestations of Islamophobia. Given this broad range of experiences, any attempt to generalize may be prone to scrutiny, and even a substantial sample of documented cases could be criticized as anecdotal or unrepresentative of the experiences in other parts of the world.

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