Article

The Roots of Islamophobia: Christian Polemical Texts and the Formation of Fear

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Abstract: This paper explores the historical origins of Islamophobia by examining Christian polemical and apologetic texts produced between the 7th and 14th centuries. While the definition and contemporary application of Islamophobia remain debated in modern scholarship, this study contends that its conceptual and discursive roots can be traced to early Christian reactions to the rise and expansion of Islam. In response to the rapid Muslim conquest of traditionally Christian territories, Christian authors articulated a persistent image of Islam as a religious and civilizational threat. Through theological denunciation, cultural anxiety, and rhetorical hostility, these texts constructed Islam as the archetypal "Other." Employing a comparative textual analysis, the study analyses central themes such as the denial of Islam's legitimacy, the vilification of the Prophet Muhammad, accusations of idolatry, and depictions of Muslims as inherently violent or irrational. These representations functioned not only as theological critiques but also as cultural strategies of resistance, particularly in frontier regions such as 9th-century Al-Andalus, where Muslim dominance challenged Christian identity and authority. By situating medieval Christian discourses within a longue durée framework, the paper demonstrates how these early portrayals established narrative patterns that persist in contemporary forms of anti-Muslim sentiment. Drawing on key primary sources and interdisciplinary secondary literature, the study reveals the deep historical continuities that inform modern Islamophobia, underscoring its embeddedness in Western intellectual and cultural traditions.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Islam; West; Christian Polemic Apologetic texts; fear of Islam

Introduction

The concept of Islamophobia remains contested, with scholars disagreeing over its definition, scope, and even its validity as an analytical term (Allen, 2010; Gardner & Shakur, 2003). Some deny its existence altogether or view it as an exaggerated construct, while others argue that the term is too closely tied to French political discourse and thus lacks broader applicability (Kepel & Jardin, 2017; Hargreaves, 2016). The Runnymede Trust's 1997 report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, marked a turning point by codifying the term and identifying its main features. Later editions (Runnymede Trust, 2017) refined these features and traced Islamophobia's growing impact across Europe. Building on such work, scholars like Todd H. Green (2015) have highlighted the importance of locating Islamophobia not only in contemporary politics but also in long historical trajectories.

Hoon (2021) confirmed that media framing of Muslims as terrorists has remained persistent. Numerous studies have shown that Western media often depict Islam and Muslims as the primary sources of terrorism and as major threats to Western society. Islam is frequently portrayed as a monolithic and homogenized religion, while Muslims are represented as uncivilized and fanatical. Such news coverage, particularly when

Muslims are involved as perpetrators, reinforces a culture of fear toward Islam and Muslims and contributes to the rise of Islamophobia.

Despite this progress, existing scholarship has tended to privilege modern and contemporary contexts such as, colonialism, migration, terrorism, and post-9/11 geopolitics, while offering comparatively less sustained attention to the medieval origins of anti-Muslim discourses. Studies such as Daniel (1993) and Tolan (2002) have provided indispensable surveys of Christian-Muslim polemics, but their primary focus has been descriptive and literary. What remains underexplored is the link between medieval Christian representations of Islam and the conceptual features later identified as Islamophobia. In other words, the historical roots are acknowledged, but their structural continuity with present-day Islamophobia has not been systematically analysed. This is the gap to which the present study responds. This paper argues that medieval Christian polemical and apologetic writings were not merely products of their time but also formative in creating enduring rhetorical strategies that continue to inform contemporary Islamophobic discourses. Beginning with early encounters in the 7th century (Hoyland, 2001), Christian authors responded to the rapid expansion of Islam with fear, resistance, and polemical attacks (Southern, 1962; Tolan, 2002). Their texts, ranging from apocalyptic predictions to distorted biographies of Muhammad, shaped a discursive repertoire that portrayed Muslims as violent, idolatrous, and culturally threatening (Thomas, 2018; Sahas, 1972). Concerns extended beyond military defeat to fears of cultural assimilation, as seen in Al-Andalus where Christian elites criticized the adoption of Arabic language and customs (Menocal, 2002).

By tracing how these rhetorical patterns developed over seven centuries, this study demonstrates that medieval Christian representations of Islam laid the groundwork for what is now recognised as Islamophobia. Unlike earlier surveys (e.g., Daniel, 1993; Tolan, 2002), this paper emphasises how these premodern discourses correspond to the definitional features of Islamophobia articulated in modern scholarship (Allen, 2010; Green, 2015). In doing so, it highlights the deep historical continuities that help explain why certain stereotypes and anxieties about Islam remain resilient in contemporary European thought and policy.

Literature Review

The study of medieval Christian representations of Islam has developed unevenly over the past century, moving from descriptive surveys of texts to more theoretically engaged analyses that situate these writings within longer genealogies of anti-Muslim discourse. Early progress was aided by the translation of polemical and apologetic works, written in Greek, Latin, and Syriac, into modern European languages, which made comparative research possible across regional and confessional boundaries. Yet while these translations laid the groundwork, the interpretive approaches adopted by scholars have varied considerably, ranging from theological contextualisation to cultural history and, more recently, to critical studies of Islamophobia.

In the Byzantine context, Adel-Théodore Khoury's *Les Théologiens Byzantins et l'Islam* (1969) remains a benchmark for understanding how Greek-speaking theologians engaged Islam through the lenses of patristic theology and classical philosophy. His detailed documentation shows how Byzantine authors framed Islam as a theological error to be refuted, situating it within longer debates over heresy and orthodoxy. While comprehensive, Khoury's account has been critiqued for treating polemics primarily as theological exercises rather than as strategies embedded in broader cultural and political negotiations.

In the Western medieval tradition, Richard Southern's Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages (1962) and Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960/2009) remain foundational. Southern situates Islam within Eschatological and Heresiological frameworks, while Daniel catalogues distortions and polemical strategies, showing how medieval Christians systematically misrepresented Muhammad and Islam. Although indispensable, these works have been criticized for their descriptive emphasis: they identify misrepresentations but do not fully interrogate why these discourses proved so durable or how they functioned within broader structures of Christian self-definition.

Ludwig Hagemann's Christentum contra Islam (1979) adds a diachronic dimension, tracing the shift from early ignorance to militarized hostility during the Crusades, and highlighting how polemics evolved in tandem with geopolitical conflicts. Building on this, John Tolan's *Les Sarrasins* (2003) and *L'Europe latine et le monde arabe au Moyen Âge* (2009) demonstrate how images of Islam circulated widely across Europe,

transforming local anxieties into durable tropes, such as Muhammad as false prophet, Islam as violent creed, Muslims as cultural corrupters. His close textual readings reveal how such distortions were not incidental but constitutive of medieval Christian identity formation.

The Iberian context further illustrates this dynamic. As María Rosa Menocal (2002) has shown, cultural anxieties in Al-Andalus centred not only on religious difference but also on fears of linguistic and cultural assimilation, with Christian writers alarmed by the adoption of Arabic language and customs. This strand of scholarship underscores how polemical representations could serve both as tools of resistance and as markers of fragile identity boundaries in zones of prolonged interreligious contact.

Taken together, these works demonstrate that polemical texts were not isolated phenomena but products of specific historical settings, such as Byzantine theological controversies, Latin heresiology, or Iberian cultural rivalries, that nonetheless converged on a shared discourse of alterity portraying Islam as the quintessential "Other." What unites these diverse contexts is not only their hostility but also their discursive utility: by misrepresenting Islam, Christian authors simultaneously articulated and reinforced their own claims to truth, orthodoxy, and civilizational superiority.

Yet, much of the existing scholarship remains limited, either largely descriptive (as in Southern and Daniel) or geographically constrained (as in Khoury on Byzantium or Menocal on Al-Andalus). While these studies point to the persistence of such representations into modernity, they stop short of fully theorizing the structural continuities between medieval polemics and contemporary Islamophobia. This study addresses that gap by synthesizing these strands and showing how medieval rhetorical strategies not only anticipated but actively shaped the frameworks that continue to undergird anti-Muslim discourse today.

Methodology
This study combines intellectual history and discourse analysis to examine Christian polemical and apologetic texts from the 7th to 14th centuries (Thomas, 2018; Tolan, 2002). It focuses on how rhetorical strategies shaped enduring depictions of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

Primary sources include treatises, sermons, letters, and polemical tracts by figures such as John of Damascus, Theophanes the Confessor, Nicetas of Byzantium, and Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (Griffith, 2008; Sahas, 1972). Texts were chosen for their wide circulation, theological influence, and explicit engagement with Islam, accessed through critical editions, published translations, and relevant secondary scholarship. Particular attention is given to authors in frontier regions (Al-Andalus, Byzantium, and the Crusader States) where interreligious encounters shaped polemical intensity (Constable, 2010). Analysis proceeds in three stages:

 i. Close reading of tropes such as Muhammad as false prophet, charges of heresy, or depictions of Muslims as violent or immoral.
 ii. Comparative analysis across Latin, Byzantine, and Syriac traditions.
 iii. Diachronic reflection on the transformation of these narratives and their echoes in modern Islamophobia (Green, 2015; Allen, 2010).

Ethical considerations guide interpretation: although historical, these texts retain religious significance, requiring a non-anachronistic approach that avoids reproducing polemical misrepresentations uncritically. By integrating contextual history with discourse analysis of polemical tropes and narrative strategies, the study demonstrates that Islamophobia has deep historical roots rather than being solely a modern construct (Garner & Selod, 2015).

The Findings

1. A Short History of Islamophobia
The term *Islamophobia* first appeared in the early twentieth century. In 1910, French writer Allain Quellien argued that Islamophobia has historically been, and continues to be, a persistent prejudice in Western and Christian societies, where Muslims are perceived as inherent and insurmountable adversaries of Christians

and Europeans (Quellien, 1910). Chris Allen (2010) challenged the view that both the concept and the term originated in Britain, noting instead that the *Oxford English Dictionary* records its first use in 1991 in the American periodical *Insight*. Farid Hafez (2018), citing Allen, observed that in the Anglosphere, particularly the UK and the US, Islamophobia has become the dominant term for racism directed at the "Muslim" figure and its historical development. By contrast, within Europe, the term remains contested, not only by Islamophobes but also within academic discourse.

According to Kepel and Jardin (2017), the term was popularised by the Muslim Brotherhood as a means to discredit criticism of its religious and political positions by drawing an implicit analogy with antisemitism. This supposed symmetry, they argue, allowed the movement to exploit a sense of victimhood and mobilise moral capital. While anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are often seen as modern phenomena, Quellien's early twentieth-century account underscores that such prejudices have deep historical roots. Contemporary scholars have also pointed to parallels between medieval Christian polemics (8th–13th centuries) and enduring stereotypes about Muslims and Islam (Daniel, 1980).

2. Definitions of Islamophobia

The definition of Islamophobia has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Fernando Bravo López (2011) argued that the term should specifically denote hostility towards Islam and Muslims, grounded in the perception of Islam as an existential threat. Similarly, Bukhtawer Pervaz and Tahama Asad (2022), in their study of Islamophobia in France, adopt a definition aligned with this perspective.

This study follows the comprehensive definition developed by the Runnymede Trust (2017):

> "*Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.*"

The eight features of Islamophobia, first set out in the Runnymede Report (1997), remain significant, as they illustrate how modern anti-Muslim discourse is deeply rooted in early Christian writings on Islam:

    i.   Islam is seen as monolithic and unchanging.
   ii.   Islam is regarded as separate and "other."
  iii.   Islam is viewed as inferior.
   iv.   Islam is perceived as an aggressive enemy.
   v.   Muslims are seen as manipulative.
   vi.   Muslim criticisms of the West are rejected.
 vii.   Discriminatory behaviour against Muslims is defended.
viii.   Anti-Muslim discourse is treated as natural and acceptable.

3. The Emergence of Islamophobia and Its Roots in Christian Texts

The rapid rise and expansion of Islamic civilisation posed a direct threat to Christendom's theological and political standing. Within a century, Muslim armies conquered the Levant, the Holy Land, Egypt, North Africa, and Andalusia (territories central to the Christian world and under Byzantine and Western Christian control). These conquests were not only military but often followed by mass conversions to Islam.

Christian authors responded by producing polemical texts to counter Islam's spread. Over time, many conquered populations embraced Islam, prompting Christian writers to explain these dramatic shifts while assuring their audiences of Christianity's ultimate divine victory (Tolan, 2009). A comprehensive history of Western polemical and apologetic texts from the 7th to the 15th century reveals the enduring roots of Islamophobia and its role in shaping East–West relations.

The Stakes of the Name

The early polemical texts avoided using the terms *Islam* and *Muslim*, instead referring to Muslims as "heretics," "pagans," or "invaders." The term *Islam* appeared in French only in 1697 and in English in 1818; *Muslim* entered French in the mid-sixteenth century and English in 1615 (Tolan et al., 2013). Earlier references were based on ethnic origins (Arab, Turk, Moor) or biblical lineages (Ishmaelites, Hagarenes). Early Christian sources also employed biblical genealogies to frame Islam. For example, the *Chronicle of Fredegar* (c. 658) refers to Muslims as the "sons of Hagar." Laury Sarti translates one passage as follows: "The race of Hagar, who are also called Saracens, had grown so numerous that at last they took up arms and threw themselves upon the provinces of the emperor Heraclius, who dispatched an army to hold them" (Sarti, 2023, p. 10).

The most common medieval term was *Saracen*, later expanded to denote Muslims in general. It used initially by Rome for certain Arab tribes but later applied broadly to Muslims. Other terms such as *lex Sarracenorum* ("law of the Saracens") or *lex Mahumeti* ("law of Muhammad") were used to denote Islam (Tolan et al., 2013).

Even Christian Arab authors such as John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah, fluent in Arabic and living under Muslim rule, used terms like Hagarenes and Saracens. John of Damascus described Islam as "the heresy of the Ishmaelites" and Muhammad as a "false prophet" and "forerunner of the Antichrist". He explained the name Saracens as showed in the followed paragraph translated by Daniel Janosik:

> "*There is also a coercive religion of the Ishmaelites, which prevails currently and deceives the people, being the forerunner of the Antichrist. It originates from Ishmael, who was brought forth from Hagar unto Abraham, and for this very reason, they are called Hagarenes or Ishmaelites. They are also called Saracens from the word "Σάρρας κενοὺς" because of what was said by Hagar to the angel, "Sarah has sent me away empty"* (Janosik & Riddell, 2016, p. 261)."

The consistent refusal to adopt the words Islam and Muslim, despite awareness of them, reflects both a denial of Muslim self-definition and an early form of Islamophobia.

Islam Seen as Other and Separate

John of Damascus described Islam not as a religion but as a "deceptive superstition" and a heresy, calling Muhammad a "false prophet" and "forerunner of the Antichrist" (Janosik & Riddell, 2016). His intention was to warn Christians of Islam's "dangers", as he expressed: "to warn Christians of the dangers of the new beliefs; to demonstrate the rational basis of Christianity, and to provide a model for refuting the challenges of Islam" (Janosik & Riddell, 2016).

Similar depictions appear in later Christian writings. Dominican Riccoldo da Montecroce (13th century), Burgundian theologian Jean Germain (d. 1460), and Zurich theologian Theodor Buchmann all reinforced the notion of Islam as closed off and alien (Tolan et al., 2013). Such views persisted into modern times, as seen in Ulrich Schlüer's 2009 campaign to ban minarets in Switzerland (Green, 2015). The persistence of this trope (Islam as "other" and hermetically sealed) extended not only to the religion itself but also to its places of worship. For example, *Gesta Francorum*, a First Crusade account, described the mosque as the "Devil's Chapel," a place where Muslims buried their dead alongside weapons and wealth (Hill, 1979).

However, the First Crusade launched in 1095 changed the scene of relations between Islam and the West; the war was no longer on the borders of Christendom but in the heart of the Muslim world (Tolan et al., 2013). However, an analysis of the writings of many First Crusade participants, who interacted directly with Muslims in the Islamic heartlands, shows the persistence of the same ignorance and misrepresentation about Islam and Muslims. If the Medieval Christian texts frequently depicted Islam as fundamentally alien. John of Damascus called it a "deceptive superstition" (Rhodes, 2009). Later writers such as Riccoldo da Montecroce and Jean Germain reinforced this framing, presenting Islam as closed and incompatible with Christianity (Tolan et al., 2013). The trope extended to places of worship. The *Gesta Francorum*, a First Crusade chronicle, described the mosque as the "Devil's Chapel" where Muslims buried their dead with weapons and wealth (Hill, 1979). Even direct encounters during the Crusades did little to correct such misrepresentations.

Islam Seen as Inferior

Another recurring theme was the depiction of Islam as an inferior faith. Beda had used "circumcised race, barbarian" to describe the Arabs:

> "*Astrologists warned Emperor Heraclius of his imminent defeat at the hands of a circumcised race; he opened the mythical north gates (built by Alexander the Great), to release a flood of barbarians from the north on the Saracens, but to no avail*" (Tolan et al., 2013, p. 32).

Muslims were accused of idolatry and even devil worship. Defamatory biographies of Muhammad reinforced this theme: Theophanes the Confessor described him as epileptic, Nicetas of Byzantium as lacking moral dignity, and Eulogius of Córdoba as insane and sexually depraved (Khoury, 1969; Tieszen, 2013). Eulogius of Córdoba described the Islamic call to prayer as equivalent to a donkey's bray and portraying Muhammad as insane, demon-possessed, and sexually depraved (Tieszen, 2013). After Theophanes, Muhammad promised all who fell while fighting the enemy a paradise full of sensual delights:

> "*Muhammad taught those who harkened to him that he who killed an enemy or was killed by an enemy entered paradise. He said paradise was a place of carnal eating, drinking, and intercourse with women: there were rivers of wine, honey, and milk, and the women there were not like those here, but of another sort, and intercourse was longlisting and its pleasure enduring. He said many other prodigal and foolish things. Also, his followers were to sympathise with one another and help those treated unjustly, (Turtledove, 1982, p. 35).*"

Theophanes tried to deny all qualities of Muslims even at the Military level, he justified the triumph of Heretics Arabs, as he said, over the Christians because Heraclius accepted the Monothelite heresy (only a single unified will, not two distinct wills, one human, one divine) (Tolan et al., 2013). One of Nicetas's most crucial ideas was his portrayal of Muslims as descendants of the slave woman Hagar, thereby casting them as a community alienated from God. In this framework, Hagar was depicted as a black-skinned servant whose offspring formed a "dark, strange race" (excommunicated from both the Christian and, by extension, the human community) (Sahas, 1972, p. 133). Such portrayals underscored Islam's supposed moral corruption and its alleged inferiority to Christianity.

Islam Seen as Irrational, Primitive, and Sexist

Christian polemicists often framed Islam as irrational and morally debased. Ramon Llull claimed Islam rejected reason and philosophy, relying on ignorance (Llull, 1992). In his Book, *the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, *Llull* wrote:

> "*The actions of Mahomet are so low and ugly; his words, gestures, and prophecies are so unseemly that the wisest Saracens and those endowed with a subtler understanding do not think that Mohammed is a genuine prophet. For this reason, the other Saracens decreed that reading, logic, and natural sciences should not be taught so that believers would retain a coarse intelligence that would not allow them to question their faith* (Tolan et al., 2013, p. 123)."

Writers like Paul Alvarus and Pedro Pascual fixated on Muhammad's sexuality, portraying him as hypersexual and morally corrupt (Tieszen, 2013; Tolan, 2009). Pedro Pascual (c. 1227–1299/1300), born in Valencia under the Muslim Almohad dynasty, spent the last two years of his life as a captive of King Muḥammad II of Granada's forces (Tolan, 2009). Pascual claimed to have composed two biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad, drawing upon both Arabic sources and Christian tradition. However, he frequently supplemented these accounts with polemical commentary and outright fabrication. For instance, when noting that Muḥammad was born in Mecca, Pascual remarked that Mecca in Latin signifies "adultery." He further condemned Muḥammad for his multiple marriages and accused him of practicing divination and dream interpretation. As Tolan (2009) observes, Pascual also reproduced a polemical account of Muḥammad's death derived from Eulogius's Documentum Martyriale.

In Pascual's retelling, Muḥammad was seduced by a beautiful Jewish woman who then betrayed him: her family ambushed and killed him, dismembered his body, and fed it to pigs, sparing only one foot, which she perfumed with myrrh. When Muḥammad's Companions came searching for him, the woman claimed that angels had borne him away, leaving only the perfumed foot as proof. These depictions tied Islam's "evil" to excess, lust, and irrationality. By linking theological error with sexual degeneracy, polemicists reinforced the view of Islam as both spiritually and morally corrupt.

Islam as the Enemy
Finally, Islam was consistently cast as the ultimate enemy. Abu Qurrah accused Muslims of forced conversions (Khoury, 1969). Eulogius and Alvarus repeatedly described Muslims as enemies of Christianity (Tieszen, 2010). During the Crusades, anti-Muslim imagery intensified. In his 1095 call to arms, Pope Urban II depicted Muslims as barbaric enemies of God who desecrated churches, defiled Christian symbols, and violated Christian women—rhetoric intended to provoke outrage and legitimize holy war (Riley-Smith, 2005). Raymond d'Aguilers claimed that Muslims oppressed Christians for centuries, while Robert the Monk described them as a "race rejected by God" who desecrated churches and slaughtered innocents (Sweetenham, 2005). Robert described how the Turks attacked the people during the Mass:

> "*Some of the Turks ran to the Christian camps, and they found one priest celebrating Mass. They cut his head off in front of the altar. What a fortunate martyrdom for that fortunate priest, who was given the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ as a guide up to Heaven! The Turks continued in the same way, killing or dragging away all they came upon (Sweetenham, 2005, p. 87).*"

Islam became the embodiment of evil, with Christianity positioned as its righteous opponent. To summarise the continuities identified across the source, Table 1. maps the features of Islamophobia outlined by the Runnymede Trust (1997; 2017) onto medieval Christian polemical texts. This comparative framework demonstrates that many of the tropes still visible in modern Islamophobic discourse were already fully articulated in the Middle Ages.

Table 1. Continuities between medieval christian polemics and contemporary islamophobia (based on runnymede trust framework)

Runnymede Feature of Islamophobia	Medieval Expression in Christian Polemical Texts	Examples from Sources
1. Islam seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive	Islam portrayed as a rigid, false religion incapable of reform or rationality	John of Damascus (Heresies), Petrus Alfonsi (Dialogi contra Iudaeos et Sarracenos)
2. Islam seen as separate and "other," with no shared values	Muslims depicted as alien to God, outside salvation history, and the enemy of Christendom	Crusade chronicles (e.g., William of Tyre), Riccoldo da Montecroce
3. Islam seen as inferior to the West	Muslims characterized as irrational, primitive, and morally corrupt	Ramon Llull (Liber de gentili), Riccoldo's Refutation of the Qur'an
4. Islam seen as violent and aggressive	Muslims presented as inherently warlike, agents of Satan, and enemies of peace	Crusade sermons, anti-Muslim tracts by Thomas Aquinas
5. Islam seen as supportive of terrorism/extremism	Muhammad portrayed as a false prophet motivated by violence and deception	Embrico of Mainz (*Vita Mahumeti*), polemical vitae of Muhammad
6. Islam seen as a political ideology, not a religion	Islam reduced to a worldly, power-driven system rather than true faith	Nicholas of Cusa (*Cribratio Alkorani*), medieval papal bulls
7. Criticism of "the West" rejected while criticism of Islam accepted	Polemics unidirectional: Islam condemned, Christianity never self-critiqued	Medieval disputation literature, e.g., *Disputation of Barcelona* (1263)
8. Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practices	Theological othering legitimized Crusades, expulsions, and restrictions on Muslims in Europe	Papal decrees, Fourth Lateran Council (1215) canons on Muslims

These parallels highlight how medieval polemical constructions provided a durable template for the stereotyping of Islam, one that continues to resonate in contemporary Western discourse.

Discussion

Although the term Islamophobia was not used in the medieval period, many of its defining features were embedded in early Christian discourse. From the 8th to the 15th centuries, polemical texts depicted Islam as heresy, irrationality, moral corruption, and enmity to Christianity. These tropes endured because they served clear functions: they reinforced Christian identity, legitimised resistance to Muslim power, and offered reassurance in the face of territorial loss and conversion. As Berger notes, while Muslims initially formed a small minority in Al-Andalus, their numbers grew significantly through conversion and immigration: by 850 CE, they represented 20–30% of the population, rising to around 50% by the following century (Berger, 2014). By portraying Islam as a distorted imitation of Christianity, authors could affirm their own community as the guardian of truth and civilisation.

The persistence of these tropes highlights their adaptability. The First Crusade launched in 1095 changed the scene of relations between Islam and the West; the war was no longer on the borders of Christendom but in the heart of the Muslim world (Tolan et al., 2013). However, an analysis of the writings of many First Crusade participants, who interacted directly with Muslims in the Islamic heartlands, shows the persistence of the same ignorance and misrepresentation about Islam and Muslims. Medieval accusations of Muhammad's false prophecy or Islam's supposed violence provided a rhetorical repertoire that could be reactivated in later contexts. Modern discourse has secularised these themes: where John of Damascus condemned Islam as heresy, Ulrich Schlüer (2001) described it as an "ideology of war"; where medieval polemicists mocked Muhammad in defamatory biographies, the 2005 Danish cartoons portrayed him as violent and irrational.

Survey data confirm the endurance of such perceptions. According to Pew Research Center (2019; 2021), majorities in several Western countries continue to view Islam as incompatible with national values, and unfavourable views of Muslims remain widespread in both Europe and the United States. These findings echo medieval portrayals of Islam as irreconcilably "other." Contemporary statistics show the endurance of such prejudice: in the United States, 53% of Americans view Islam unfavourably, while in Europe the numbers are even higher—63% in the Netherlands and 74% in France (Green, 2015).

In a small country like Zimbabwe, a recent study confirmed the prevalence of Islamophobia faced by the Muslim minority (approximately 2% of the population), a phenomenon largely rooted in the dominance of Christianity over other religions (Mabvurira & Yasin, 2023)

The continuity is not accidental. Medieval Christian polemics helped structure a Western intellectual tradition in which Islam became the quintessential opposite—defined by irrationality, excess, and threat. As Thobani (2021) notes, these portrayals connect deeply with European gender constructs, equating Islam's "evil" with sexual degeneracy. The image of the hypersexual Muslim man as a threat continues to resonate in modern Islamophobic discourse (Arjana, 2015). Contemporary media and political rhetoric recycle these categories, albeit framed in terms of terrorism, integration, or security. Recognising this historical lineage is essential for understanding why Islamophobia persists and how it draws legitimacy from centuries-old discursive patterns.

The more recent scholarship has explicitly linked these medieval discourses to modern anti-Islam. The collective volume *Europe and the Islamic World* (Tolan, Veinstein, & Laurens, 2013) emphasises the longue durée of representational strategies, while Todd Green (2015) has argued that medieval tropes remain embedded in Western discourses about Islam today. Arjana (2015) goes further by showing how these stereotypes travel across time and media, resurfacing in literature, popular culture, and political rhetoric. Similarly, Thobani (2021) stresses that Islamophobia is not only a modern sociopolitical phenomenon but also a deeply historical structure of feeling, rooted in Christian Europe's long-standing strategies of othering.

The paper is limited to Polemic and Apologetic texts dating from the seventh century to the end of the fifteenth, but the earlier depiction of Islam remained primarily unchanged. Green wrote: *"Both the Renaissance*

and Reformation, a theological movement, marked significant changes and innovations in European thought, but in the context of the topic (views of Islam), we find very little new.

Conclusion

A survey of Christian polemical and apologetic texts from the 8th to the 15th centuries demonstrates that many of the tropes central to modern Islamophobia, depicting Muslims as irrational, violent, or morally corrupt, were already firmly established in medieval discourse. Far from being corrected through closer contact, the Crusades and other encounters reinforced such misrepresentations, embedding them deeply in the cultural and theological imagination of the West. Recognising these historical continuities is crucial for contemporary debates. Islamophobia is not simply a modern reaction to migration, terrorism, or geopolitics; it is part of a longer intellectual and cultural genealogy that stretches back over a millennium. By situating present-day stereotypes within this broader historical framework, we can better understand their resilience and expose the structures that sustain them.

This awareness also carries practical implications. For scholarship, it underscores the need to trace the longue durée of anti-Muslim representations rather than isolating them as recent phenomena. For interfaith dialogue, it highlights the importance of confronting inherited narratives and creating spaces where religious communities can challenge and unlearn centuries-old distortions. For public discourse, it invites more historically informed approaches that resist recycling medieval tropes in contemporary debates about security, culture, and identity. In short, addressing Islamophobia today requires not only political and legal strategies but also historical literacy. By uncovering its deep roots in Christian polemical traditions, we gain the tools to challenge its persistence and to imagine more equitable and respectful relations between Islam and the West.

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