ISLAMOPHOBIA AND EMPIRICAL REVISIONISM: A CRITIQUE OF BUKAY AND BOSTOM

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War saw the Western media, the Christian right, and the pseudo-intellectuals working stridently to project a specific image of Islam – both repulsive and retrogressive in nature – in the consciousness of the West. This leads to a form of Islamophobia in which pseudo-intellectuals write about Islam, aiming to obscure its positive attributes, amplify its supposedly repressive values, and capitalize on those areas of civilizational incompatibility and conflict with the Judeo-Christian West. An objective analysis of this hype provides two interesting revelations. One, a deliberate attempt to rubbish Islam through exaggerated lies and distortion of historical reality. Two, create and perpetuate fear about Islam in the consciousness of the West which ultimately breeds the desire for exterminating Muslims due to the existential threat which they pose to the West. In this review, we critique the assertions embedded in this type of discourse using the books of David Bukay and Andrew Bostom. We also discuss the specific Islamophobic frame through which most of these writings that fall short of intellectual rigor. In the final analysis, we show that, owing to this failure to adhere to the basic principles of scientific research, these writings are intended to misinform rather than enrich the current discourse on Islam.

Key Words: Islamophobia, Judeo-Christian civilization, *da'wah*, *sharī'ah*, *jihād*, orientalism.

This paper is a critique of the core assertions made by two Islamophobic writers in their recent books. The first book entitled *From Muhammad to Bin Laden: Religious and Ideological Sources of the Homicide Bombers Phenomenon* was written in 2008 by David Bukay, a professor of political science at the University of Haifa in

Israel.[1] Four years later in 2012, Andrew G. Bostom, an associate professor of medicine at Brown University in US, wrote *Sharī'ah versus freedom: The Legacy of Islamic Totalitarianism*.[2] Both books share a common theme. Their authors worked to degenerate Islam and project its fundamental principles as retrogressive, reactionary, and completely at odds with the liberal values which their Western Judeo-Christian civilization hold. Both books fall within the wider pseudo-scholarship that developed after the Cold War when West and its liberal ideology conquered and triumphed over communism and its totalitarian ideology and values.

This new scholarship has taken as its mission the branding of Islam as the new "enemy," post-communism, with an ideology grossly incompatible and perpetually in conflict with Western liberal values of freedom and pluralism.[3] Consequently, demonizing Islam and its over a billion followers all over the world has not only become an alluring pastime of some "scholars" in the Western world, but also part of the wider propaganda campaign promoting the imaginary clash of civilizations. Islam bashing by champions of Western civilization, represented by the troika of media, academia, and the Christian right, is today a thriving industry complete with its research agenda. Experts, mostly self-proclaimed and self-appointed, and media pundits parrot clichés deliberately conceived to distort and obscure facts about Islam and its message in order to create an artificial, but culturally unbridgeable gulf of "us" versus "them" ideological and civilizational schism. This propensity creates suspicion and enmity between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world.

Edward W. Said's book, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, possibly

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[1] David Bukay, *From Muhammad to Bin Laden: Religious and Ideological Sources of the Homicide Bombers Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008).

[2] Andrew G. Bostom, *Sharī'ah versus Freedom: The Legacy of Islamic Totalitarianism* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2012).

[3] "The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam," *New York Times*, Sunday 21, 1996.

represents the first serious intellectual attempt at exposing the ignorance, lies, and misconceptions that have developed into a form of cultural and intellectual consensus on how the West sees and relates with Islam and Muslims. This consensus, according to Said, allows those who share it to perceive and, in turn, cast Islam and Muslims as primitive, violent, evil, and a negation of the progress and values which the West upholds and promotes.[4] Analyzing this inclination for cultural and ideational antagonism against Islam and Muslims in the United States and other parts of the Western world, Said felt that three groups were almost evenly responsible for promoting, mostly through their actions, this hostility and for perpetuating the negative imagery of Islam in the consciousness of the West.

Media, both print and electronic, is the first.[5] The penchant of the media not only to consider Islam as news, but as bad news always is appalling and a vivid manifestation of Islamophobia in the West. Said notes that this disposition creates a psychological mindset that overshadows and makes any attempt at objective reporting of Islam quite impossible and totally unattractive to the Western media. As a result, the West's understanding of Islam – its nature and principles – is not only biased but lacks the basic rigor and objectivity that attends serious intellectual pursuits. The reason for this rather strong view by Said is simple to fathom. In most cases, the West's knowledge of Islam comes from a bevy of pundits and pseudo-intellectuals who thrive and achieve eminence based on their ability to cast Islam in bad light irrespective of their complete ignorance of its historical and contemporary contexts. Media is not the only one guilty here. Muslims, Edward Said, also felt, had to share part of the responsibility for perpetuating this unwholesome imagery of Islam in the Western consciousness and for making it an object of ceaseless cultural and intellectual ridicule and of imperial attacks.

The disposition of Muslims to engage in self-pity or half-wit and time-worn clichés anytime Islam is attacked deliberately and mischievously by the West, according to Edward Said, is defeatist and

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[4] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

[5] Ibid, pp. xviii-xxix.

counterintuitive. The comfort Muslims find in parroting phrases such as Islam is a religion of peace; Islam is not incompatible with human rights, freedom and democracy, and such other banal excuses is soothing in the short run. It forces Muslims "into the apologetic form of a statement about Islam's humanism, its contribution to civilization, development, and moral righteousness." [6] Said feels that anytime Muslims try to defend Islam by saying it does not conflict with Western liberal values and ideology, only engage in a form of grossly defensive posture in the face of charges of primitiveness and incompatibility with modernity which in the long run achieves nothing except to reinforce the claim of moral and cultural superiority of the West and its civilization. Thus, instead of looking inward and discovering what makes Islam unique, Muslims pander to the assumption, untenable in his view, that the West and its civilizational values are the only basis for measuring right from wrong.

The third group is no less responsible in creating and sustaining the image of Islam as an archaic and violent religion. This is the intellectual cycle, which Said calls, the Orientalists, comprising scholars, experts, and researchers, whether of history, religious studies, comparative religion or of other related disciplines. The blame here is on those who carry the appellation of "scholars" and "experts" but are in reality as ignorant of the cultural, historical, and linguistic properties of Islam as any lay person. They do not have the necessary in-depth training and understanding of both the cultural, contextual, and religious issues required for decoding the Islamic mind. Yet they, rather arrogantly and self-righteously, assumed on their shoulders the burden of interpreting and explaining it. In most cases, the little knowledge of Islam these type of scholars have is acquired through other third-rate and highly biased and unreliable Islamophobic and Orientalists' sources. They are, therefore, not properly equipped to engage in the highly demanding and rigorous intellectual assessment and evaluation of textual and other sources on Islam, necessary for any meaningful scholarly discourse on the religion.[7] This makes their assertions useless and their conclusions untenable.

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[6] Said, p. 55.
[7] Said, pp. xxix-xliii.

We should not lose sight of the reasons for Edward Said's wide generalizations. His thesis draws from his dissatisfaction with the crude way in which the West and its apologists disparage other civilizational values and worldviews, including Islamic, without regard to historical and empirical evidence. They do that in a not-so-subtle attempt to promote the superiority of their own values and worldview. Current discourse regarding Islam by scholars who enjoy the appellation of "experts" on Islamic culture and civilization proceeds from this presumption that the Western Judeo-Christian civilization is superior both in form and content to the one being championed by Muslims. These "experts" judge Islam and its principles and values on the basis of their Western values, interpreting them against their cultural, historical, and contemporary experience. In so doing, the experts become not only guilty of arrogance, but also betray their profound ignorance regarding Islam as their subject of analysis.

The civilizational arrogance and cultural ignorance which Said spoke of are evident in the two books under consideration here. These are the book of David Bukay who takes it upon himself to lay bare what he considers as the duplicity of Islam and its evil agenda against Western civilization; and that of Andrew G. Bostom who, rather ominously, believes that the West, together with its liberal values and heritage, faces imminent threat of extermination by the primitive and barbaric Islamic hordes. In a sense, therefore, these books are intended by their authors to serve as a wake-up call to the West regarding the dangers which Islam poses to it in this age.

David Bukay: Islamic *Da'wah* as a Ttool of Hate and Violence

At the heart of David Bukay's thesis is the accusation of intolerance against Islam and its adherents. According to Bukay, there are countless laws and principles in the Holy Qur'an, hadiths of the Holy Prophet, and writings of successive generation of jurists through the centuries which support his assertion that Islam is incompatible, if not totally antagonistic, to liberal values of freedom and pluralism. As a result, Islam is incapable of tolerating, much less accepting, existence of another religion without trying to annihilate it. This attitude breeds repressive and absolutist tendencies among Muslims.

Historically, it manifested in the various campaigns of violence waged against non-Muslims, starting with the forceful eviction and subsequent extermination of the Jewish community of Medina by the Prophet himself. It also accounts for the campaign of terror against the West in this age. In order to achieve his objective of convincing readers that there is nothing tolerant or egalitarian about Islam, Bukay sets for himself the task of deconstructing what he describes as the "seemingly benign concept of *da'wah* [which] provides the religious and ideological justification for the lethal phenomenon of worldwide *jihād*."[8]

Central to Bukay's assertions is the question of *da'wah* and its "true" or theologically original meaning as against the more flexible meaning which Muslims in contemporary period mischievously give it, no doubt with a view to mislead the gullible West and thus conceal their more evil agenda. Taking this as his point of departure, Bukay delves into a highly biased and methodologically flawed selection of his source materials for supporting his extravagant claims. By relying on the writings, select even at that, of few jurists and scholars, not more than five, and a highly disjointed interpretation of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions, Bukay brings a grossly subjective interpretation to his discourse. This methodologically flawed interpretation negates the fundamental principles of logical positivism which his training and background as a political scientist exposed him to. Bukay, like any other person, is at liberty to reject the classical and the traditional conception of *da'wah*. However, giving it an entirely different connotation that does not reconcile with its more objective and widely used interpretation by wide ranging scholars, including non-Muslims, without proof is engaging in empirical revisionism.

Eminent scholars, many among them non-Muslims, such as Bernard Lewis, Edward W. Said, and John L. Esposito have copiously written on the message of Islam, exploring its nature and principles. And although they differ substantially in both their approaches and interpretations regarding many of its principles and methods, yet they appear to have agreed on the basic tenor of Islam, including the classical conception of *da'wah* as calling and preaching

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[8] Bukay, see front cover (inside flap). 2008 Edition.

the message of Islam to non-Muslims.[9]   Discourses from these scholars could hardly pass as conformist or sympathetic to Islam. Bukay does not entirely reject this classical conception of *da'wah*. Nonetheless, by implying the existence of an original meaning and purpose for the concept, he is in essence challenging the understanding of these eminent scholars as significantly narrow and fundamentally apologetic in nature.

The view of Bukay regarding the concept of *da'wah* is that it is much broader and, subtly, more sinister than the laid back meaning that is traditionally given to it. Bukay's view is certainly not calling, preaching, teaching or exemplary behavior and conduct for the purpose of converting non-Muslims to Islam as the traditional conception provides, though he grudgingly accepts some of these elements as its integral parts. However generally, he regards this understanding as erroneous and unacceptable. Though not stated as much in the book, it would appear to those who think like Bukay that this traditional conception is a carefully designed and orchestrated attempt by multitudes of both Muslims and their non-Muslim apologists to mislead the world by concealing the true nature of one of the fundamental aspects of Islamic religion.

Expectedly, Bukay rejects this classical conception of *da'wah* as reductionist and conformist. It is conformist to him because it fundamentally fits in with an image of Islam which Muslims all over the world want to project of their religion. Its position as reductionist is, however, primarily due to the fact that it omits to incorporate and show in its trajectory the critical nexus between it and *jihād*. Thus, relying on supposedly primary sources on Islam, he gives *da'wah* an entirely different interpretation: one which not only departs from what is known and accepted, but also which he tries, laboriously though, to show its symbiotic relationship to *jihād* as a holy war.[10]

In reading Bukay, one gets a sense of the *da'wah* as an evil concept that encompasses in its hierarchy the logic of waging holy war against non-Muslims – *jihād* – and against those that refuse to submit, unconditionally, to the absolute suzerainty of the Islamic

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[9] There is also a general consensus that jihād defined as holy war is only an aspect, albeit one of the most insignificant, of Islamic *da'wah*.

[10] Bukay, pp. 66-71.

Caliph. [11] This logic is the livewire or fundamental motive of *da'wah*. Most importantly, Bukay asserts, *da'wah* possesses and imbues a Muslim with a "chameleon-like quality" that allows him the needed flexibility to adapt to changing situations, especially in contemporary contexts. In other words, *da'wah* allows Muslims to assume appropriate garbs suiting different or changing contexts and circumstances. It legitimazes this posture of a Muslim based on the principle of "take what you can, when you can, from whomever you can, and however you can." This is another way of saying that *da'wah*, which is at the base of the message of Islam, is a deceptive principle meant to confuse and beguile non-Muslims regarding the true intention of Islam. This allegation by Bukay belittles the scholarship and contribution of eminent scholars, both in the orient and occident, who worked for centuries to explain the message and truth of Islam. It also exposes his methodology as fundamentally flawed since he fails to provide us with stronger proofs to substantiate his arguments.

In Chapters Two and Three, Bukay continues with his assertions addressing what he thinks to be the various components of the *jihadic* ideology embedded in the concept of *da'wah*. Chapter Two focuses on the issue of *jihād*, which Bukay indignantly asserts "has no moral or legal foundation in Islam." [12] It is not difficult to understand how Bukay arrives at this conclusion. The logic of Islam as a movement, Bukay notes, was conceived and designed to aggressively subdue other religious communities, subjugate all political entities that fail to surrender to the dominion of Islam and to territorially sweep over all geographic communities and bring them under the Islamic fold. [13] *Jihād*, as he asserts elsewhere in this chapter, is not a religious obligation sanctioned by Qur'anic edicts, but a form of Arab imperialism conceived and launched by the Prophet for economic reasons. [14]

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[11] Bukay actually regards *da'wah* and jihād as the two fundamental foreign policy instruments of an Islamic state. See pp. 99-100

[12] Bukay, p. 78.

[13] Ibid, p. 79.

[14] Ibid, pp. 79-82.

This view, preposterous as it is, surprises no one since Muhammad is depicted by Bukay in less than favorable terms rejecting the noble character which historians showed he possessed. Bukay sees him as "a plunderer who used coercive diplomacy for money and to gain protection to sustain his community, a highway bandit with a religious message."[15]   A person and a community seen in this light by a writer could hardly engender either goodwill or objectivity and unbiased analytical disposition. In making these kinds of outrageous and hate-laced statements, Bukay expectedly fails to provide us with verifiable and empirical evidence to support or substantiate what he says. He does not provide specific historic instances where Muhammad resorted to plundering or used coercive diplomacy in order to establish his budding imperialist ambitions.

Coming from a professor of political science this is all the more galling since, generally, political scientists pride themselves in their value-free approach to research and scholarship. Otherwise, Bukay would not have resorted to generous doses of lies and historical revisionism in order to denigrate Islam and its Prophet. For instance, consider his assertion that the Jews of Bani Nadir were deported by the Prophet after the battle of Uhud for not "supporting him with money and equipment, and even rejoicing at his defeat."[16] Elsewhere, we see an even bigger lie that does violence to all historical accounts—this with regards the Treaty of *Hudaibiyyah* which, according to Bukay, Muhammad conveniently broke and violated its terms only twenty-two months after its ratification. This act, to Bukay, not only demonstrated the unfaithfulness of the Prophet of Islam, but also helps in explaining the behavior of contemporary Muslims which invariably affects the trajectory of world politics and security today.[17]

Chapter Three focuses on issues which Bukay says are relevant to our existence in this modern age. These are the questions of whether Islam is tolerant or repressive to non-Muslims, whether it is egalitarian or oppressive, the place and treatment of *dhimmis* within the Islamic community, and the general pattern of relationship with

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[15] Bukay, p. 87.
[16] Ibid, p. 91.
[17] Bukay, pp. 95-96.

non-Muslims.[18]   It is the view of Bukay, possibly arising from the deeply entrenched resentment which many ultra-orthodox Jews harbor against Islam and Muslims, that Islam is not a religion of peace. To him, it is a fallacy to say that Islam "rejects violence and promotes inter-racial harmony." It is also untrue to say that *jihād* does not mean holy war, but inner struggle by an individual in order to purge and purify himself from filth and worldly temptations.[19]

Bukay conveniently forgets two important facts in taking these positions. One, unlike Christianity, Islam does not accept passivity from its adherents. It encourages them to be active, to struggle to ensure justice for themselves in particular and for their community in general. Consequently, this puts a burden of responsibility, active or proactive as the case may be, to always secure their lives, properties, and freedom to practice their religion without molestation. Two, Bukay forgets that the message of Islam is not like the message of Judaism which was supposedly sent to one chosen nation and race – the Jews. A religion such as Islam with a universal message has no room for accommodating or promoting the superiority of one race over other races. It is not the case as in other religions where the supposedly chosen race, such as the Jews, rejects the rest of humanity as gentiles and thus, filth.

Bukay stands these type of proofs on their heads and moves along with his assertions, noting that Islam's failure to reject violence and promote inter-racial harmony has a basis in a prophetic commandment that requires Muslims "to engage in holy war against non-Muslims…at any time, in any place, and without any pretext or excuse – in the way of Allah."[20]   In other words, this claim negates the fundamental teaching of Islam – no compulsion in religion – when dealing with non-Muslims. In fact, this principle was provided by a Qur'anic verse which Bukay claims was abrogated long before revelation to the Prophet ceased. This provides the basis for the current irreconcilable relationship between Muslims on one side and non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians, on the other side. This problem does not, however, stop at creating labels with some

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[18] Ibid, p. 103.
[19] Ibid, p. 112.
[20] Bukay, p. 113.

communities carrying the tag of unbelievers. It also offers a perfect justification for marking them down for extermination in order to establish Allah's dominion on earth. In Bukay's view, therefore, the only relationship that could possibly exist between Muslims and non-Muslims is that of perpetual hostility since Islam is structured to seek the destruction of other religions and cultures.[21]

In order to conjure proofs supporting these outrageous claims, Bukay in Chapter Four goes on what appears to be a historical and intellectual journey of selective and subjective proportions. Otherwise it is difficult to fathom how Islam, a religion and a community with a rich history and heritage of scholarship, could only produce five important scholars and jurists who defined *da'wah* and *jihād*, and whose interpretations provide the legal basis for all forms of interactions with non-Muslims through the ages.[22] These scholars are: Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyah, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Hassan al-Banna, Abu al-A'ala al-Mawdudi, and Sayyid Qutb. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyah and Sayyid Qutb are the whipping boys of pseudo-scholars like Bukay who believe that they were the ideologues of intolerance in Islam and must bear responsibility for the resurging political Islam that is fuelling the fire of global *jihād*.

It is indeed preposterous, if not out-rightly outrageous to see Bukay trying to decipher the message of Islam based on the selective works of these five pre-selected scholars.[23] However, the most audacious part is his attempt to generalize based on the writings of these scholars and formulate a concise explanation of why Islam is a violent religion that promotes intolerance and wage holy war against non-Muslims. Not surprisingly, sticking to this agenda of selective analysis of few isolated cases in Chapter Five, he not only tries to judge Islam and its over one billion followers, but also to pass a guilty verdict on them—condemning all as supporting, condoning, and or committing acts of terror and violence against non-Muslims.[24] His reason for this extremely harsh verdict has nothing to do with

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[21] Ibid, p. 165.

[22] Bukay, p. 194.

[23] Ibid, pp. 194-226.

[24] Ibid, p. 352.

logic and common sense. Literally speaking, he looked around him and found in the statements and ideas of persons like Abdullah Yussuf Azzam, Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Muhammad al-Zawahiri, Yousef al-Qaradawi, and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi enough fodder to satisfy his desperate desire to project Islam in a bad light.[25] He, naturally, forgets to point that these figures represent an insignificant constituency within the Islamic world.

However, to seek to define Muslims in the light of what a Bin Laden or an al-Zawahiri did or an Azzam or al-Qaradawi said and taught is like trying to judge the Jewish race as a band of murderers on account of what the *Sicarii* or Zealots or more recently the Haganah and butchers like Ariel Sharon did in Palestine. After all, the Zealots and the Sicarii were among the first terrorists organizations in recorded history. These were not isolated cases. Christianity, the other religion that many Orientalists and Islamophobic scholars so eloquently believe champions "progressive" values and provides Western civilization with its liberal foundation is also full of historical instances that point to the violent nature of its adherents. The Crusades have always been cited as manifesting the violent streak of Christianity. The atrocities committed in the name of Christianity by dangerous and militant religious orders such as Knight Templars are still subjects of scholarly investigations. These are not the only instances of violence or intolerance. Before the Crusades, in fact centuries before the message of Islam, Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity was followed by forceful mass conversion and systematic slaughter of the so-called heretics throughout the Roman Empire. Much later, after the Crusades, the world witnessed a repeat performance of this sanctification of terror in the Inquisitions ordered by the Church throughout Europe in the Middle-Ages. This was a time when science and enlightened discourses were violently suppressed, and killings of scholars holding views different from the mainstream were sanctioned by the Pope and the Church. Even the word – terror – has Christian etymology. It first entered human consciousness in the Reign of Terror that followed the French Revolution.

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[25] Bukay, pp. 255-314.

The proclivity of condemning an entire community based on the speech or action of very few of its members could also apply to the Western world and its Judeo-Christian civilization in the contemporary period. The world could have, on account of the crimes and atrocities which Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini committed during the World War II, not only held these leaders and their acolytes responsible, but could have also condemned their entire races as inhuman and barbaric. Sweeping generalizations like these ill-suit serious intellectual and objective discourses. They are more appropriate for propaganda books, a place where most certainly David Bukay's book belongs.

Andrew Bostom and the Totalitarian Spirit of *Sharī'ah*

The fundamental difference between Bukay and Bostom is the question of style and approach. There are no significant differences in their goals and objectives. Bukay seeks to destroy the image of Islam by attacking *da'wah* which is considered at the base of the religion. Andrew G. Bostom, on the other hand, channels his vituperations on *sharī'ah* which is considered as the outward manifestation of Islam. *Sharī'ah* could, in a sense, qualify as the signpost or an edifice indicating practical expressions of Islamic ideology. Thus, by attacking the foundation and the edifice together, these pseudo-intellectuals seek to destroy the image of Islam and cast doubt on its message by distorting the truth and historically verifiable proofs.

In the introduction to his book, Andrew G. Bostom states the concerns that compelled him into focusing on *sharī'ah* and its relationship to the values of liberalism and freedom. He feels betrayed by the apologetic tone with which eminent scholars like Bernard Lewis and Karen Armstrong write about Islam.[26]   Works by such scholars should be seen as an apologia that prevents an objective understanding of the real dangers which Islam poses to Judeo-Christian civilization of the Western world. It "hindered the ability of sincere American policymakers, as guardians of Western

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[26] This is quite ironic. Edward Said described Bernard Lewis as "one of the worst offenders in the cultural war against Islam." See Said, p. xxix.

civilization, to think clearly about Islam's living imperial legacy, driven by unreformed and unrepentant mainstream Islamic doctrine."[27] The task as Andrew Bostom sees it is, therefore, simple and straightforward. There is the need for Jewish and Christian writers to expose Islam for what it truly is, and lift the smokescreen of deception, confusion, and ignorance that clouds the eyes of the West and give it the false hope of finding accommodation with Muslims in this age.

In order to achieve this task, Bostom focuses on *sharī'ah*, which he believes is at the core of the Islamic belief system and principles. *Sharī'ah* is not just a set of legal pronouncements or religious edicts guiding the life of a Muslim. To a Muslim, *sharī'ah* is a system of freedom – *huriyyah* – defined as complete negation and rejection of all form of authority and sovereignty on earth except that of Allah.[28] In accepting the sovereignty of Allah over all forms of sovereignties, a Muslim is in effect dividing the world into two distinctive camps. The first is the camp of Muslims as believers who live under the sovereignty of Allah as the Lord of the worlds. The second camp belongs to non-Muslims including peoples of the book – Jews and Christians. All that a person needs to belong to the former camp is profession and belief in the Islamic creed. Subjugated non-Muslim communities, otherwise known as the *dhimmis*, also belong to this camp. They, however, live not as equals with the Muslims, but as subjects under their protection. The latter camp comprises those considered as enemies of Islam. They live in unceasing hostility and state of war with the camp of the believers. This camp is called *dar al-harb*. Those living in this camp are known as *harbis*.[29]

There are two interesting dimensions which Bostom believes accurately and adequately explain this situation. The first is the purported claim of Muslims to the universality of *sharī'ah*. Muslims, as a matter of faith, believe in the immutability of the Quran and its universality. They also believe in the necessity of active exertion to ensure that this message reaches and covers all corners of the world.

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[27] Bostom, pp. 51-55.
[28] Ibid, pp. 53-54.
[29] Bostom, pp. 62-77.

This first dimension, naturally, leads to the second. Since Muslims believe in the universality of their religion and its message, confrontation with other religions and or belief systems, either local, such as Judaism and Hinduism, or with similar claim to universality, like Christianity, is inevitable. In this type of worldview, the choice, at least, for the Muslims is very simple. An unbelieving community could accept life of total submission by believing in the message of Islam and thus becoming part of the greater Muslim *ummah*. Alternatively, it could choose to live as a subjugated community by paying the protection tax – *jizya* – and living under the protection of the Muslim *ummah*. If any of these two options fail to materialize, the third option is hostility and war which could only be lifted with the complete subjugation of the unbelieving community.

Bostom, believing in the superiority of the Judeo-Christian values upon which the edifice of Western civilization is built, finds this situation unacceptable and arrogant. It is unacceptable because, based on his interpretation which he shamefacedly considers as the only correct and valid one, Islam poses an existential threat to Western civilization. Its arrogance, however, stems from the presumption of Muslims that their religion and its value system could even contemplate competing, talk less of replacing his cherished Western civilization with its liberal values. However, since Bostom, like dozens of other Islamophobic scholar, is utterly blinded by their antagonism to Islam and Muslims, he fails to see that in rejecting the imperial aspirations of Islam, assuming these exist at all, in favor of his own religion and civilization he is, in effect, guilty of the same crime and unacceptable disposition towards others which he accuses Muslims have purportedly harbored.

Since Islam, as a religion, is full of totalitarian tendencies grounded in *sharī'ah* and a universal outlook of conquering the entire world, it naturally engenders values, tendencies and outlook among its followers that are basically antithetical to freedom and pluralism. In order to show how it exactly achieves this, Bostom painstakingly concentrates his energy in the remaining pages of his book, which even though voluminous are devoid of evidence of serious scholarship or logical argumentations, to showing the linkage between *sharī'ah* and totalitarian tendencies in Islam.

Depending on contemporary, though mostly isolated and disjointed cases, Bostom paints *sharī'ah* as a resurging phenomenon with a violent tempo that is on the verge of engulfing the United States as the leader of the free world.[30] The consequence of this, should *sharī'ah* be allowed to overwhelm the free world, he warns, it would be catastrophic. This is because Islam tolerates no other logic and accommodates no other worldview except its own. The focus of Bostom is not confined to the United States though. As expected, he continues with his elaboration showing this resurgence in Europe and in other non-Muslim dominated countries, especially India where though Muslims have a very long history and tradition, constitute an insignificant percentage of its population.[31]

Of particular interest, however, is the feeble attempt by Andrew Bostom to rewrite history by "digging and exposing" what he claims to be the anti-Semite credentials of Islam in the classical period.[32] He believes that it was this historical hangover that is fuelling the contemporary debilitating anti-Semitism in places as varied as Africa, Middle East, and India. In any case, it is important to point out that the concern of Bostom has less to do with analytical scholarship and more to do with whipping emotion, stirring passion, and casting Islam as the greatest threat to the Judeo-Christian world in this age. Consequently, there is little in the book to indicate signs of rigorous research and scholarship. Bostom, like David Bukay before him, falls within a cycle of Jewish pseudo-intellectuals who harbor deep, albeit baseless, resentment against Islam. It is difficult to trace accurately the source of this hate. Nonetheless, it is quite possible to surmise that it might not be unconnected with the pervasive air of Islamophobia blowing in the Western world since the collapse of communism at the end of the last century.

Islam, *Da'wah, Sharī'ah* and Mainstream Religious Discourse

Fortunately, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Bukay and Bostom do not come close to understanding and interpreting the message and basic principles of Islam. Eminent scholars, Muslims and

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[30] Bostom, p. 124.

[31] Ibid, pp. 169-201.

[32] Ibid, pp. 203-280.

non-Muslims, whose renown and scholarship are widely acknowledged, have written extensively on fundamental questions concerning Islam, including *da'wah* and its meaning and principles, *sharī'ah* and its purpose and scope, and freedom and its conception and nature. These writings easily negate the distortions and revisionism of pseudo-scholars, such as David Bukay and Andrew Bostom, who often resort to methodologically flawed and selective use of fundamental sources in their analysis of Islam.

Da'wah, which no doubt is at the core of Islam, has received considerable attention from scholars who have examined its nature and centrality to the propagation of Islam. One of these scholars is Reza Aslan, an associate professor of creative writing and religions at the University of California. Aslan holds views, many of which challenge some of the most widely accepted orthodox interpretations of Islam. Interestingly, some of these such as rejecting the view that Muhammad, prior to his prophet-hood, never worshipped idols of Mecca or that he was an unlettered person not only pitches him against mainstream Islamic teaching but also places him in a position that could hardly pass as apologetic to Islam.[33] In *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam,* Reza Aslan shows the centrality of *da'wah* to the message of Islam, especially in the early period of Muhammad's mission. At the heart of the *da'wah* launched by Muhammad in Mecca, notes Aslan, was to convey "a message for those in his community who continued to abuse the orphans, who did not induce others to feed the needy, who prayed to the gods while remaining oblivious to their moral duties, and who withheld things of common use from others."[34] It is quite difficult, in whatever milieu one lives, to fault the logic of this type of message, especially since Muhammad, as Aslan further notes, "was not… establishing a new religion; he was *simply* calling for sweeping social reforms."[35] To

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[33] Reza Aslan captures these points in a more objective and dispassionate way in his book, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005). Concerning the first observation, see pp. 16-17. The second observation is addressed in pp. 35-36.

[34] Ibid, pp. 40-41.

[35] Ibid, p. 41.

put it differently, *da'wah* was the instrument which the Prophet, as a social reformer, used to rally people around his message.

Regarding *jihād*, Aslan recognizes the perception of Islam in the West as a militant religion that was spread and sustained by the sword for a millennia. This view of Islam as a violent religion, Aslan notes, is far from the truth. It is completely erroneous since it has no empirical or historical basis. Islam was not spread by the sword. According to him, "this deep-rooted stereotype of Islam as a warrior religion has its origins in the papal propaganda of the Crusades, when Muslims were depicted as the soldiers of Antichrist in blasphemous occupation of the Holy Lands."[36] It is this image, deeply ingrained in the psyche of the West, through the centuries, which gave way to the contemporary stereotype of an average Muslim as a turban-wearing, bearded terrorist clad in a bomb studded vest on a suicide-mission seeking martyrdom.[37] Other images, beside this, recede in significance in the peripheral vision of the West, its policymakers, intellectuals, and the media.

Another scholar who pinches holes in the assertions of Islamophobic writers like David Bukay and Andrew G. Bostom is John L. Esposito. A world renowned professor of international affairs and Islamic studies at Georgetown University, Esposito has written volumes about the aspects and doctrines of Islam from a more critical, but purely objective, and non-apologetic angle. In his *The Future of Islam*, Esposito explores major themes connected with the message and principles of Islam and their place in Western culture and values. For Esposito, the nature of this message and its call is very clear. It is, he notes, both political and religious. Islam, he further points, "is not only a faith that inspires personal piety and provides meaning and guidance for this life and the next. It is also an ideology and worldview that informs Muslim politics and society."[38]

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[36] Ibid, pp. 78-79.

[37] In *The Missing Martyrs: Why There are so Few Muslim Terrorists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Charles Kurzman provides us with a detailed and highly objective analysis of the issue of "Islamic terrorism." He, drawing on statistics and other form of reliable data, shows why it is fallacious to assume that Islam fuels violence against the West, or that the West is not safe because of Muslim terrorists.

[38] John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.

This view is not substantially different from what Tariq Ramadan, a professor of contemporary Islamic studies at Oxford University, wrote earlier in his book: *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. The message of Islam and its nature constitutes "a universe of meaning elaborated and constructed around a certain number of fundamental principles."[39] It is these basic principles, consistent through ages, which define the relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims in every generation, giving them a clear point of reference – transcendental in nature – that allows them to shed and overcome their national and parochial cultures and form a single eternal "community of faith."[40] However as Esposito notes elsewhere, it would be the height of poor scholarship to try to separate the "text and context" of a religion when trying to understand and explain the forces that shape its outlook and that of its followers in any given milieu.[41] While certainly not denying or excusing isolated cases of intolerance exhibited in contemporary period by Muslims, it is important to note that these acts do not represent the mainstream view of Islam.

Like Edward Said, Esposito also believes that the media is highly culpable "both indirectly and directly to linking Muslims to negative image."[42] In other words, it is not the true nature of Muslims, to whom "Islam is the spiritual path that gives meaning and purpose – its worshipping a God who is compassionate, merciful, and just, a God who brings peace and social justice," to be intolerant or violent.[43] Rather as Karen Armstrong, a renowned scholar of comparative religions, candidly admits in the foreword of Esposito's book, part of the explanation for this negative imagery of Islam is as a result of a deep-rooted ignorance of it that is widespread in the West and the associated reluctance even by scholars to see "Islam in a more favorable light." Furthermore, she continues, "people often look balked and vaguely mutinous when, for example, you explain

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[39] Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9.

[40] Ibid, p. 9.

[41] Esposito, *The Future…*, pp. 5-6.

[42] Ibid, p. 30.

[43] Ibid, p. 36.

that the Qur'an does not in fact advocate indiscriminate slaughter of the infidels or the propagation of the faith by the sword."[44] This admission is instructive in one important respect. It tells of the existence of an entrenched mindset, as we have seen in the work of Bukay and Bostom, which refuses to accept the positive message of Islam even in the face of mountains of evidence and proof.

Generally, we can discern two themes that are at the center of most of the negative imagery of Islam in the West and which are the subject of intense, sadly biased, scrutiny. *Jihād*, as we have seen in the writings of David Bukay and Andrew Bostom, is one of the major themes at the center of most of the negative stereotyping of Islam by Islamophobic pseudo-intellectuals in the West. Esposito, however, believes that it is unfair to accuse Muslims of waging a *jihad*ic campaign against non-Muslims. In *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam,* he observes that at the heart of Islamic doctrine is the emphasis for action, "performing the will of God." In his view, there is nothing incongruous between this Islamic teaching and what is in "Judaism with its focus on following the law." Interestingly, Bernard Lewis, a British-American historian and scholar of oriental studies, makes similar connection between the similarity of the Islamic *sharī'ah* and the Jewish *halakha*. Specifically, he says, "for a Muslim, the law was the divine law, the *sharī'ah*, a word that means a path toward something and is, therefore, an almost exact literal equivalent of the Jewish term *halakha*."[45] Consequently, a Muslim is not only expected to believe and to act. He is also expected to struggle (*jihād*) in order to lead a good and exemplary life, to defend his beliefs, and "to contribute to the development of a just Islamic society throughout the world."[46]

Quite clearly, thus, the idea of *jihād* is about self-defense of the Muslim community and its dignity and freedom to uphold its beliefs and values. It was only much later that this classical

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[44] Karen Armstrong, "Foreword," John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. ix.

[45] Bernard Lewis, *Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 40.

[46] John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

conception of *jihād* gave way as Esposito puts it, "into a militant *jihād* culture, offensive in nature, and worldview that targets unbelievers, including Muslims and non-Muslims alike."[47] It is this "militant and violent interpretation" by a section of Muslims, to use the words of Bernard Lewis, which is responsible for the incidences of intolerance, violence, and terrorism.[48] Ironically, Muslims are the major victims of this violent and militant interpretation of Islam than non-Muslims in virtually all corners of the world. In Africa, Middle East, and in Asia, Muslims are targets of insurgencies, terror attacks, and other forms of violence from their supposedly religious "brethren."

Sharī'ah is the other theme. Mentioning the concept itself in the West is enough to evoke an imagery of a system that suppresses fundamental human rights, abhors liberty, and oppresses and subjugates its adherents. Tariq Ramadan captures this sentiment vividly. In the West, he notes, "the idea of *Sharī'ah* calls up all the darkest images of Islam: repression of women, physical punishments, stoning, and all other such things" barbaric and inhuman.[49] This imagery creates the impression that *sharī'ah* is antagonistic to human dignity and freedom. It negates all the values and principles upon which Western Judeo-Christian civilization rests. *Sharī'ah* is also totalitarian and rejects all forms of plurality as Bostom painstakingly endeavors to prove in his book. This perception of *sharī'ah* as a totalitarian system has important consequence on how the West and its scholars and media continue to perceive and engage with Islam, Muslims, and things Islamic. More than anything, it clouds their claims to objectivity with the fog of sentiment, suspicion, and in ever growing instances, extreme disdain and hate.

Conclusion

For the over one billion Muslims in the world today, Islam is not only a system of beliefs as in, say, Hinduism or Christianity. It is also a system of life complete with clear and distinctive principles of personal, inter-personal, and community interactions. It provides a

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[47] Ibid, p. 16.

[48] Lewis, p. 8.

[49] Ramadan, p. 30.

comprehensive set of principles that guide its adherents and create for them a universal community in which membership is defined by submission to the Islamic faith. In this system, principles of *da'wah*, *sharī'ah*, *jihād*, and many others are central to the harmony, stability, sustainability, and security of the community. However, because other systems with claim to universality and worldview as well exist parallel to this worldview, disagreements and confrontations, often occasioned by ignorance, untruth, misinformation, propaganda, and hate are very rampant, especially in this present age.

Many scholars, specifically those grounded in Western Judeo-Christian worldview, are finding it difficult to tolerate the Islamic worldview alongside theirs. This results in a distorted and highly biased reporting, and in many cases, provocative and wildly outrageous publications. These are meant to deepen and entrench the existing ignorance of the West concerning the true nature of Islam. Here in this review, we dealt with two of these scenarios carefully conceived to entrench the ignorant. The first is a book written by David Bukay, a professor of political science, who attempted to show the connection between Islam and culture of intolerance that leads to violence and terrorism in this age. The second is by Andrew Bostom who, convinced of the superiority of Western Judeo-Christian civilization, wrote his book as an expose and a warning of the dangers which the resurgence of *sharī'ah* poses to the free world.

Drawing from the works of Edward W. Said, Bernard Lewis, John Esposito, Tariq Ramadan and Reza Aslan, we showed in this review that there is no basis for the assertions contained in the works of David Bukay and Andrew Bostom. Their accusations against Islam are unsupported by historical or empirical evidence. They relied on unsubstantiated conjectures for making their claims. It is apparent that these pseudo-intellectuals suffer from a creeping Islamophobia which is holding many scholars in the West hostage. It thus become quite difficult, if not altogether impossible, to engage them in an objective and meaningful discourse about Muslims, Islam, its principles and their relation to the West.