# Islamophobia

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## What is it?

*Islamophobia* literally means fear (from the Greek term *phobia*) and dislike of, and therefore prejudice against, Islam, and therefore people who practice that religion. It is a racist ideology that views Islam as a static, backward, and even violent religion, views Muslims as all being the same, and all being inferior, thus the enemy against whom violence is justified. The term has been in academic use since the early 20th century, but still draws discussion on its definition and legitimacy as an analytical concept. *Islamophobia* as a discourse is defamatory, used by a majority to out-cast the Muslim minority, and thus it transcends any academic and cultured discussion that could contribute to intercultural dialogue. Further manifestations of *Islamophobia* are microaggressions, physical attacks - especially victimization of Muslim women - vandalism of property, and structural discrimination. It is thus closely connected to power hierarchies in society, and can be regarded as part of a continuum, including other oppressive ideologies such as Orientalism and Anti-Semitism, racism and colonialism. Like these other forms of discrimination, Islamophobia can be blatant, but it can also be coded and subtle.

## Who uses the concept?

Sociologists, political scientists, psychologists and scholars of ethnic studies, gender studies and communication, theorize about *Islamophobia* and study its varied manifestations, its influence in foreign and domestic policies - such as the "war on terror" in the USA - as well as its impacts on Muslim populations and intergroup relations.

## Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Intercultural dialogue is one way to dissolve Islamophobia – getting a chance to talk with, to know, and to work with individual members of a group is often effective as a way to manage over-generalized fear and prejudice. Combating societal, cultural and political Islamophobia enhances social inclusion of Muslim minorities, promotes open societies, and dismantles discrimination. Intercultural competence in this regard requires understanding of the role of Islam and Muslims as part of world history, knowledge of the heterogeneity of Muslim peoples, and of Islam as a composite religion.

## What work remains?

Apart from the already well established "Western" perspective, studies on *Islamophobia* in countries such as India, China, Russia, or Burma, and as part of complex conflicts, can broaden the understanding of how racialization and othering of Muslims produce violence and discourse in different cultural and political contexts.

## Resources

Kumar, D. (2012) *Islamophobia and the politics of empire*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Green, T. (2015) *The fear of Islam: An introduction to Islamophobia in the west.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.