

Narratives of Fear and Stereotypes: Analyzing Rudy Fransisco's Poem "Islamophobia"

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This study examines the stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding Islam through the poem "Islamophobia" by Rudy Francisco. The analysis method uses the hermeneutic reading method so the poetry can be interpreted contextually and related to the historical or social issues regarding Muslim stereotypes in the world. The data are collected from any expressions in the poem that imply the words or phrases that express stereotypes. The researcher supports the data from the poem with historical facts about stereotypes toward Muslims that happened around the world. The main findings are that the concepts of stereotypes and misconceptions in poetry are not only expressed through discriminating words but also directly refer to factual events. The implication is that the concept of stereotypes can occur based on religion, not just race, ethnicity, culture, or gender. In conclusion, this study shows how powerful stereotypes and misunderstandings about Islam also significantly impact religious groups and affect prejudice and discrimination against Muslims globally.

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are the tendency to generalize a group or individual based on the behavior of a small number of its members. Marx and Ko (2019) stated in their journal article that stereotypes are commonly accepted generalizations about the behaviors and characteristics of individuals belonging to specific social groups. This involves applying certain assumptions to an entire group without considering individual differences within it. Although stereotypes can be either positive or negative, the most significant concern for many Muslims is the rise of negative stereotypes about their faith. These harmful generalizations often lead to misunderstanding, fear, and discrimination, changing the more positive or neutral perceptions. Tama and Sulistyaningrum (2023) found that these stereotypes frequently arise in violent or conservative settings, so it creates deeper skepticism and excessive anxiety toward Muslims as a community. The fear is not only in the personal impact of these biases but also in how they shape the broader narrative about Islam, encourage prejudice, and strengthen existing misconceptions in society. As a result, Muslims are forced to face these negative stereotypes, which can affect their daily lives, relationships, and sense of belonging. There are numerous cases and facts that demonstrate how Muslims frequently face stereotyping in various aspects of their lives. Television shows, such as *Homeland*, and films, such as *Argo* and *American Sniper*, are culpable for depicting Arabs and Muslims as dangerous, furious, duplicitous, violent, and extremist (Gandhi, 2023). Sutkutė (2019) claimed that most article authors in *The New York Times* and *The Independent* do not represent Muslim voices, which can explain why Muslims are often portrayed negatively in both UK and US media.

This situation is also reflected in popular culture, one example being the poem "Islamophobia" written by Rudy Francisco. The poem deeply explores the fears and stereotypes often faced by Muslims. It was written by Rudy Francisco, but it was performed with Natasha Hooper and Amen RA at the prestigious *National Poetry Slam (NPS)* Final in San Diego in 2016. Through powerful and emotional delivery, they brought the message of injustice and negative stereotypes about Islam to a wider audience and presented a conversation about the growing presence of Islamophobia in modern society.

Islamophobia is a topic that has been widely researched in political discourse or media, but still a lack of studies that analyze how these fears and stereotypes are expressed and internalized in literary work. Stereotypes and prejudice in American-born Chinese (Dlabová, 2024) Gender Stereotypes in Movies (Kumar et al., 2022) Masculine stereotypes (Okea, 2021) Gender stereotypes in poetry (Sankaran et al., 2024) (Yamamoto, 2022)

detect prejudice and stereotype indicators (Salsabila, 2022) Group Antagonism in Literature (Uslu & Aslan, 2023) Social stereotypes (Muslikha, 2023) Deconstructing Stereotypes of Black Women (Biswas, 2021) Stereotypes in Legally Blonde (Lestari, 2021) Stereotypes in romance novel (Janja, 2023) Racial Representation in Literature (Phan, 2019) Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication (Bilotserkovets et al., 2023) Stereotype in diasporic novel (Tiwari & Chaubey, 2020) Arab Stereotypes Post-9/11 (Al-Shara, 2020) Gender stereotype in Angela Carter's exploration (Marchetti, 2019) Challenges of Muslims in America. (Al-Amro et al., 2021) Countering Black Stereotypes in Literature (Kayla, 2023) Female Asian stereotype (McGowan, 2020) Stereotypes in Nigerian Films (Ibrahim, 2019) Gender Construction in Afghan Society. (Rehman & Anwar, 2020) Historical Roots of Islamophobia (Isa et al., 2022). The previous research showed that there were many analyses about stereotypes in literary works, either novels or poems, but no one has analyzed stereotypes in the poem by Rudy Fransisco, Natasha Hooper, and Amen RA entitled "Islamophobia." This article aims to analyze how the author expresses stereotypes that face Muslims in poetry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of Islamophobia in recent decades has prompted much research to understand its origins, forms, and impact on Muslim communities. Islamophobia, which is an unreasonable fear or hostility towards Islam and Muslims, often arises from a lack of understanding, political agendas, and media bias. This review looks at how Islamophobia is driven by common views and stereotypes that view Muslims as a single group when, in fact, they are diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religious practices. It also discusses how these stereotypes lead to discrimination in various areas and hinder interfaith harmony.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a term used to describe the irrational fear, prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed towards Islam and Muslims. Islamophobia refers to an ignorant fear of Islam by non-Muslims who resist its peaceful principles (Dauda, 2021). Islamophobia can manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, physical attacks, social exclusion, and discriminatory policies. It can be fueled by factors such as ignorance, political agendas, media bias, or the actions of extremist individuals or groups, and it often contributes to the marginalization and discrimination of Muslims in various societies. In the last few decades, the phenomenon of Islamophobia has been increasing significantly, especially in

the West area. This discourse often referred to unclear fear and prejudice toward Muslims as a homogeneous group. Baker et al. (2013) found that Muslims were often portrayed as a homogenous community and linked with conflict. Assume that Muslims as a homogenous group means to treat all Muslims as if they are one group who have the same characteristics, beliefs, and behavior. In fact, Muslim comes from various backgrounds, ethnic, cultures, and different religious practices. “Humans are created with diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds” (Rofiqi & Haq, 2022). This means that people cannot generalize based on minority behavior.

Stereotype

Stereotypes are often formed from hasty initial perceptions about a group or individual. Stereotypes refer to the tendency to define or claim something first before actually seeing or examining the reality in detail (Lippmann, 1921). This theory shows that how stereotypes often lead us to draw conclusions without sufficient evidence, which can cause unfair views of others. Generally, stereotypes arise from a person's thoughts which are directly concluded based on related informations. Gilmour (2015) said that people use general images that are often associated with certain social groups in their minds when they apply stereotypes to people. Those perceptions can be shared with other people, so it might build broader stereotypes. This situation, of course, causes a negative impact on those affected by the stereotype, especially Muslims, which will be discussed in this article. Stereotyping occurs in almost all aspects of life, and the presence of stereotyping often leads to social discrimination that arises as a result of stereotyping (Azizah, 2019). Negative stereotypes about religion, especially Islamophobia, can create unfounded fear and prejudice against Muslims, which then triggers discrimination and unfair treatment in various aspects of life, such as employment, education, and public services. In addition, Islamophobia also strengthens social inequality and hinders interfaith dialogue, thus preventing the creation of a safe and peaceful environment in society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative content analysis approach to examine racial discrimination in poetry that addresses themes of Islamophobia. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena, allowing for a deep understanding of the narrative's themes and their relation to real-world contexts of discrimination against Muslim communities. The primary data for this study consists of a poem that explicitly engages with themes of Islamophobia. The poem was selected based on its representation

of racial discrimination and its critical engagement with the portrayal of Muslim identity. The process of data collection involves a close reading of the poem. Close reading includes a careful understanding of each sentence and then interpreting it. During this reading, key parts that reflect Islamophobic narratives are highlighted for further analysis. These parts are selected based on their reference to discriminatory language and depictions of marginalization.

Hermeneutics allows researchers to understand hidden messages and symbolic meanings in poetry, which are often not immediately apparent. Al-Shabab (2017) stated that from the perspective of hermeneutics, language is considered to have the power to capture something infinite. So, interpretation is like looking for wide meaning in the everyday experiences that we go through. In the context of poetry, every word and phrase has the potential for layered meanings, and this method helps reveal the relationship between language, emotions, and the author's experiences. The use of this method is beneficial because it can capture the essence of the complexity and richness of meaning in poetry, resulting in a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of Rudy Francisco's "Islamophobia" poem reveals how stereotypes about Islam are manifested through poetic narrative and contextual references to real-world incidents. Although the poem is delivered orally, it provides insight into the patterns of discrimination often applied to the Muslim community. Francisco presents a clear social critique of how Western society filters and magnifies violence based on the background of the perpetrator through specific examples such as Dylan Roof's Charleston church shooting and other acts of violence committed by non-Muslims. For clarity, this analysis refers to the transcript of Francisco's performance, quoting each line directly.

Real Incidents

In his poem, Francisco begins by recounting the 2015 incident involving Dylan Roof, who murdered nine black church members but whose religion and community were not highlighted for his actions. Ortiz & Arkin (2015) said that based on a police report, Dylann Roof, who allegedly shot dead nine worshippers at a black Charleston church, has been charged with nine counts of murder and illegal weapons possession. Dylan Roof is an American white supremacist who carried out a murder case in 2015 in Charleston church. Midweek means the day in the middle of the week, that is, Wednesday. Dylan went to the bible study on Wednesday. Dylan butchered people in the church without feeling guilty.

A person who still lived was Polly Sheppard (a woman from Florence). The reason why she was not killed by Dylan is Dylan let her tell the story. After the murder incident, Moslem did not inquire about his beliefs. The lines "When Dylan Roof killed nine innocent black people, we did not question his God" and "He committed the crime alone. We did not question his people"(10) highlight how society often fails to generalize non-Muslim perpetrators, even when their actions are violent and racist. Through these lines, Francisco shows how such acts are viewed as isolated incidents rather than representative of an entire community or religion.

Francisco then extends this argument by mentioning other figures, such as Timothy McVeigh and Adam Lanza, to provide further evidence that crimes committed by non-Muslims are not always as problematic as those committed by Muslims. Adam Lanza is a 20-year-old person who is talented as a shooter. On Friday, December 14, 2012, our state and nation were rocked by the overwhelming tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School; twenty children and six educators were massacred in the school. (Avielle et al., 2014). Timothy McVeigh is an American domestic terrorist who carried out the Oklahoma City Bombing. The Oklahoma City bombing was undoubtedly a watershed moment in American history (Reese, 2018). In lines such as "When Adam Lanza shot a classroom full of first graders at Sandy Hook Elementary, we did not ask him to leave the country."(13–14), and "When Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people in Oklahoma, we did not call this a crime against every American"(15), the poet shows how acts of terror committed by non-Muslims rarely result in collective abuse or societal prejudice against their community. These observations are emphasized to demonstrate the disparity of reaction when similar acts are committed by Muslims, who are often collectively condemned as the actions of a minority.

The poem also highlights the implications of Islamophobia in everyday interactions, symbolized by Francisco's call to "stop staring at Muslims at the airport"(35). This behavior illustrates the ongoing distrust that Muslims face in routine situations. Mogahed and Ikramullah (2020) found that airports were the most common place Muslims experienced institutional religious discrimination; it is for about 44% compared to other religions. It also shows how fear, fueled by media and political narratives, can shape public perceptions that lead to exclusion and prejudice.

Misconception

The poet delivers a strong message in the line, "Islam is not synonymous with terror"

(28); this line is an affirmation of the common bias that associates Islam with violence, regardless of the true teachings of the religion. The next line, "It is literally submission. It is devotion. It is peace."(29), clarifies the true understanding of Islam as a religion that focuses on submission, devotion, and peace. This explanation aims to eliminate the wrong perception of Islam, which is often associated with extremism.

In his poem, Francisco explicitly separates Islam from terrorism by defining the word Islam literally. By saying that Islam means "submission" or "devotion" rather than "violence," he wants to emphasize that violence is against the main tenets of Islamic teachings. In this line, the poet attempts to deconstruct the negative view of Islam, which is often reinforced by media coverage or stereotypes that associate Muslim identity with radicalism. This statement is the poet's attempt to encourage readers to reconsider their views of Islam and understand that peace is the essence of this religion.

The poem also addresses misunderstandings about Islamic terms and values, specifically opposing misinterpretations such as "Jihad does not mean "holy war." It means "struggle." It means survival(30-31). This line attempts to destroy common stereotypes about Islam, especially the notion that Islam encourages violence. By emphasizing the true meaning of jihad, the poet shows the spiritual and internal side of the concept, which more often reflects a spiritual or ethical journey than a physically visible act of violence. Having the awareness that every Muslim is different is important, and the Islamic religion also has differences within it, like other religions (Jensen et al., 2019). In addition, the way to start reducing stereotypes is to change our perceptions and thinking.

Double Standards

This analysis reveals some of the key stereotypes and fears reflected in Francisco's poem. The poet skillfully uses comparisons and historical references to expose the double standards that often emerge as Islamophobia. For example, in lines such as "How we don't label all white men based on the sins of a few. Do you see it?" (19) and "Therefore, we should not condemn all Muslims for the radicalism of a group."(24). The poem shows that these social prejudices are often based on irrational fears and a lack of understanding. Here, the poem highlights society's tendency to unfairly label Muslims, as opposed to the treatment of non-Muslim perpetrators whose individual actions are rarely associated with their group at large.

CONCLUSION

Rudy Francisco's poem "Islamophobia" is a trenchant critique of stereotypes and

misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, highlighting the negative impacts of Islamophobia on individuals and communities. Drawing on real-life events, Francisco shows how societal biases often result in double standards, where acts of violence by non-Muslims are seen as isolated cases, while similar acts by Muslims are seen as collective accusations. Through his careful choice of words, he invites his audience to see the humanity in Muslims and to distinguish between a diverse community and the actions of a few individuals. The analysis of Francisco's poem in this study shows how literature can be a medium to expose and challenge deep-rooted societal prejudices and emphasizes the importance of eliminating harmful stereotypes in order to build understanding and peace.

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