



PROJECTION OF JIHĀD IN JIHADWATCH.ORG:
A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, there are misconception about the word *jihād* which is often described in connection with violence and terrorism. These misconception cause hatred towards Muslims. The problems arise when people are inclined to believe these misconceptions especially when it comes from the Internet. Yet, it is difficult to differentiate the information about *jihād* on the Internet. Thus, this research chose the most up to date website who writes on *jihād* as a sample to understand the misconceptions of *jihād*. This research covers entries in 2013, specifically on the entries that used Quranic verses to support their arguments. Based on the result, there are three Quranic verses used most frequently to support the argument that *jihād* is violence and it supports terrorism. The verses are 8:60, 9:5 and 9:29. The research is important to help people engage with the current issues on *jihād* and Islam.

خلاصة البحث

في الوقت الحاضر، هناك سوء فهم حول كلمة الجهاد، التي توصف في كثير من الأحيان بالعنف والإرهاب، وهذا المفهوم الخاطئ يسبب الكراهية تجاه المسلمين أو الخوف من الإسلام "إسلامفوبيا:" والمشاكل تنشأ عندما يتجه الناس إلى الاعتقاد في هذا المفهوم الخاطئ وخصوصاً عندما يتعلق الأمر بالإنترنت، على الرغم ذلك، فإنه من الصّعب التمييز بين المعلومات الحقيقية عن الجهاد والمنشورة على شبكة الإنترنت، وهكذا، اختار هذا البحث أكثر المواقع تحديثاً الذي يكتب عن الجهاد، بوصفه عينة لفهم ما ينشر من المفاهيم الخاطئة عن الجهاد، ويشمل هذا البحث مداخل سنة كاملة هي سنة: ٢٠١٣ م، ولكن بشكل أكثر تحديداً يركّز على المدخلات التي تستخدم الآيات القرآنية لدعم هذا الجدل المثار، واستناداً إلى نتيجة البحث، هناك ثلاث آيات قرآنية أكثر استخداماً لدعم حجّة أن الجهاد هو العنف ودعم الإرهاب، وهي الآيات الآتية: [الأنفال: ٦٠]، و[التوبة: ٥]، و[التوبة: ٢٩]. وتبدو أهمية هذا البحث في مساعدة الناس على التعامل مع القضايا الراهنة عن الجهاد والإسلام.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies).

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Mohd Shah bin Jani
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The current advancement of ICT allows people to communicate and exchange information. It offers different types of information in social, business, academic and religious spheres. Meanwhile, Islam is one of the world's religions that has interested many website developers to write about it. Usually, it is easy to retrieve information on Islam from the Internet especially with regard to the Islamic belief system, *Sharī'ah*, *Hadīth* and the Qur'ān. Hence, this research will examine specifically the issue of *jihād* on a website named Jihadwatch.org whereby the main discourse in this website is mainly *jihād*. This website is one of the most active and up-to-date yet very controversial website. Some of the entries refer to *jihād* as an act of violence and terrorism. Meanwhile, according to Heat Sync¹, a website that produces statistics on any website traffic, on 8 April 2015, Jihadwatch.org achieved a high number of references where 29, 557 social websites mentioned it. Thus, it is declared as one of the most popular websites dedicated to the study of *jihād* and *jihād* activities involving Muslims, either as perpetrators or victims.

One of the incorrect definitions of the word *jihād* is holy war.² It describes war undertaken by Muslims against non-believers. This website supports a similar idea of *jihād* as a holy war and it also means the act of killing innocent people, especially

¹ HeatSync <<https://dash.heatsync.com/website/category/traffic/jihadwatch.org>> (accessed on 8 April, 2015).

² Robert Spencer, "Haroon Moghul tries and fails to invest the concept of "Islamophobia" with some genuine substance," <<http://www.jihadwatch.org/2013/01/haroon-moghul-tries-and-fails-to-invest-the-concept-of-islamophobia-with-some-genuine-substance>> (Accessed on January 1 2013). He explains that according to Ibn Khaldun, the holy war is a religious duty because of the universalism of the Muslim mission to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force.

civilians among the non-believers (*Kāfir*). Moreover, *jihād* is pictured negatively in actions like kidnapping, killing, bombing and terrorizing, all of which harm people. Some Muslims take advantage of these wrongful actions. Some people believe that these actions originate from the Islamic law³ and it is permissible in the Qur'ān.⁴ Thus, it seems like it is an obligation on Muslims to carry out with these actions, as they are commands from Allah.⁵

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Misinterpretation or misinformation about the concept of *jihād* is a serious problem facing Muslims today. This misunderstanding has created Islamophobia⁶ and it is widely disseminated on the Internet. Usually, the word *jihād* is depicted in the discourse on terror, terrorism, and violence against non-believers who mostly come from the Western countries. There are many writings about this issue and the solutions to overcome the problems. Yet, there is still no writing that focuses on *jihād* on the website. Perhaps the best way is to analyse the information gathered on the Internet and refer to the trusted and authentic sources of Islamic creed - the Book of *Sīrah*, *Tafsīr*, *Fiqh* and scholarly views.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

³ Robert Spencer, "MyJihad in Kenya: Somali jihadists threaten to murder non-Muslim hostages unless Kenya releases all Muslims held on terror charges," < <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2013/01/myjihad-in-kenya-somali-jihadists-threaten-to-murder-non-muslim-hostages-unless-kenya-releases-all-m>> (Accessed Jan 24, 2013).

⁴ Robert Spencer, "MyJihad in Afghanistan: Five civilians murdered in *jihād*-martyrdom suicide attack on NATO convoy," < JihadWatch, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2013/01/myjihad-in-afghanistan-five-civilians-murdered-in-jihad-martyrdom-suicide-attack-on-nato-convoy>> (Accessed Jan 25, 2013).

⁵ Robert Spencer, "MyJihad: As we ascend in this new era under the Global *Khilāfah* we smell our victory over the west," < <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2013/01/myjihad-as-we-ascend-in-this-new-era-under-the-global-khilafah-we-smell-our-victory-over-the-west>> (Accessed Jan 22, 2013).

⁶ Islamophobia defines by the Oxford dictionary as: Dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force. Oxford Dictionary, "Islamophobia," <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Islamophobia> > (accessed on 1 October, 2015)

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To investigate the method used by Jihadwatch.org to project the concept of *jihād*.
- 2- To identify the level of objectivity Jihadwatch.org maintains on their website.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the method used by Jihadwatch.org to project the concept of *jihād*?
2. To what extent does Jihadwatch.org maintain objectivity on their website?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study manifests in the lack of research on this issue, particularly on the misinterpretation of *jihād* in cyberspace.⁷ However, there are numerous classical and contemporary studies on *jihād* in the Qur’ān. Unfortunately, studies on specific websites remain limited. This research concentrate on Jihadwatch.org because it is found that it is the most active website that seeks to project *jihād* in relation to violence, increases radicalization of young Muslims and militant groups against non-Muslims or seeks to annihilate non-Muslims and their

⁷ There are few researches found which relate *jihād* to the Internet. One of them is a research focusing on the Malaysian perception on war against terrorism. As a response to September 11, the US immediately attempted to build a broad-based anti-Terrorism, which is known as “War Against Terrorism” (WAT). As a result, it proved that the majority of the respondents, which is 60.7%, believed that the Western media provide almost all of information on terrorism. This indicates that they have a big potential to influence others. 71.7% agreed that because of the freedom of the press in the West, it can sow hatred among people of different culture, races, and religions. See Abu Daud Silong, Zaharah Hassan & Steven Eric Krauss, “Perceptions of the War Against Terrorism (WAT): A Malaysian Case Study”, *Alternatives Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2008): 11.

political establishments. This research will analyse the entries in the website and shed light on the issues of misinterpretation of *jihād* according to scholarly interpretations-

1.6 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Jihād is one of the most common issues discussed by scholars. It has wide interpretations and forms. However, the interpretations of *jihād* have worsened after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 where the true meaning of *jihād* was questioned and equated with terrorism. The number of research conducted on this issue grows after this horrifying tragedy. Up to now, there are many researches about *jihād* especially those which concern the modern interpretation of *jihād* from the Qur'anic and hadith perspectives. Despite the existence of numerous researches on websites that respond to the argumentations against Islam, most of them are not concerned about *jihād*, but focus more on the issue of Islamophobia. Therefore, there is no research about *jihād* from the perspective of a specific website found at the time this research was done. The researcher believes that jihadwatch.org is utilising the media to fabricate the meaning of *jihād*. It also misuses some of the Qur'anic verses to support the allegations. To increase understanding of this matter, this research endeavours to analyse critically the role of the website in providing understanding of *jihād*

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research will focus on a website called www.jihadwatch.org by conducting content analysis of blog entries that contain discussion on *jihād* based on the Qur'anic perspectives. This research will analyse projection and misunderstanding of *jihād* as

presented in its blog entries. The sample involved within the entries are the Quranic texts. These samples would be looked at or analysed in comparison with classical and contemporary interpretations of *jihād* by Muslim scholars. Many of their views have been made available in various websites but many are quoted out of context which has unfortunately, further intensified the fear of Islamophobia in the West.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research mainly applies the analytical method in collecting data as well as other additional methods to gain better results.

1. Thematic analysis: The researcher performs word-coding method to look for the meaning of *jihād* in the website.⁸
2. Archival records: The website entries have been archived for 2013. The archive of each monthly entry is only selected if there is any Qur'anic verse mentioned. The archival records are meant for analysis.⁹
3. Verification of Data: The researcher verifies the projections of the website on *jihād* through the analysis of samples and in accordance with the principle of Qur'anic interpretation derived from the writing of classical and contemporary.

1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review identifies relevant scholarly research conducted on the projection of *jihād* as well research on *jihād* and website in Western literature that

⁸ Muhammad Ahmad, Construct of Credibility Tools as Viewed from The Perspectives of the Qur'anic and Ḥadīth, *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, Vol. 1, (2012), 185.

⁹ Neil J. Salkind, *Exploring Research*, (New Jersey: Pearson Educational International, 2009), 210.

disseminates the projection. Edward Said in his book “Orientalism”¹⁰ explains the definitions of orient, oriental studies, Orientalist and Orientalism. There are important issues highlighted in his book that provide the information needed for this research such as the misunderstanding of Islam from the so-called Orientalist scholars. Besides, Said also included the agenda behind the idea of Orientalism, lists of Western scholars involved in Islamic studies and his own analysis of this information that helps to identify the origin of ideas. This book gives additional information on Islam from the Western perspective. This information is needed to perform an analysis of the posts on Jihadwatch.org and to know the extent to which the ideologies of Islam have been disputed and misinterpreted. As the research is to find out the source that inspires groups to dispute the understanding of Islam and the chronology that leads to the hostility against Muslims, this book provides some information brought by Orientalists on Islam, which is similar to the information needed to relate to the disputation of Islam in Jihadwatch.org. Yet, no research has been done that points out this misinterpretation of Islam on the Internet.

Another book that gives a vital overview is “*Jihād in the Qur’ān*” written by Louay Fatoohi.¹¹ This book focuses on the meaning of *jihād* in the Qur’ān. Louay further explains the historical context of *jihād* in early Muslims. He writes about the causes that led to distortion of the meaning of *jihād*. He describes the conditions, rule governing armed *jihād*, and the vital and permanent role of peaceful *jihād*. He also discusses the role of *jihād* in the world today. There is no doubt that the author has done a brilliant job in clearing the misconceptions about *jihād* often found in Western literature but the book does not include any serious study about the projection of *jihād*

¹⁰ Edward W.Said, *Orientalism*, (England; Penguin Group, 1978).

¹¹ Louay Fatoohi, *Jihād in the Qur’ān*, (Kuala Lumpur; A.S. Noordeen, 2004).

on websites which is more dangerous because this misconception about *jihād* can be easily accessed.

A very good research conducted by Ngoma E. Iroabuchi-Moghalu¹² pertaining to the existence of Orientalist stereotypes in public discourse focuses on certain blogs in America. Ngoma focuses on the use of language to make arguments about Muslims by Western writers. This study is about finding dominant orientalist stereotypes that emerge and the semantic cluster that supports these stereotypes of Muslims in Jihadwatch.org. Ngoma further discusses the way these Orientalist stereotypes connect to the historical stereotypes, which date back to the 18th century. The author agrees that Orientalism persists in the 21st century. However, the author does not discuss about the way orientalists play a role in disseminating the misunderstanding about *jihād* in this century.

Siti Nor Amalina¹³ conducted a research regarding the issue of the misconceived projection of the British media in reporting on Muslims and Islam. Her research examined the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media particularly on the ideas of people living in the era of colonialism where the power of writing can develop or destroy a person, a group of people, a society as well as a nation and this is found in news reporting. She also recognises the issue of *jihād* or so-called holy war which covers topics on violence, suicide bombing or any other negative projections. These conditions frame Islamic fundamentalism that covers issues such as Muslim extremists, fundamentalists, religious fanatics and Islamic atavism. Such news and articles do not just cover negative projections but constitute a constructed fear of the

¹² Ngoma E. Iroabuchi-Moghalu, "Orientalist Stereotypes of Muslims in Web Logs (Blog)," (M.A Thesis, Howard University, 2008).

¹³ Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin, "Misconceived projection of British Media Reporting on Muslims and Islam: A study of The Times Online Newspaper," (M.A Thesis, International Islamic University of Malaysia, 2009), 51

so-called Islamic threat against Western hegemony and security. The aims of these projections are to design a picture that tells people the civilian support for a cause, assassinations and any unlawful actions done by terrorist groups, which are all considered as acts of terrorism. Although this research focuses on the negative projection of Islam in websites, it does not bring attention to critique, or to provide scientific appraisal of these projections from the Islamic perspective.

Another work that might closely resemble this study is a Master's thesis by Siti Aisyah Ramli¹⁴. Aisyah focuses on the terminology used in the media to describe a negative situation associated with certain groups of people. In her research, she found that there are certain words with negative connotation to describe what Islam is all about; these words convey specific meanings but to the Western media, they are used to convey different meanings, contrary to their original and semantic meanings. She used the Guardian Weekly and the USA Today to investigate how the Western media portray Islam to their readers through the use of terminologies with new negative connotation. In Arabic, Taliban means student or disciple but instead it is seen as a turban individual with naïve view of the world.

Another important work that needs to be mentioned is *Fiqh al-Jihād* by Yusuf al-Qardhawi¹⁵. This book provides a complete guide to understanding *Jihād*. Al-Qardhawi is one of the prominent scholars in this age. Through this book, al-Qardhawi develops a theory of Islamic *waṣaṭiyya* or known as moderation theory. He also discusses the essence of *jihād* and its form. In addition, he explains the objectives of *jihād* and the differences between defensive *jihād* and pre-emptive *jihād*. The author discusses at length about the Verse of Sword or known as *Āyāt al-sayf*. He

¹⁴ Siti Aisyah Ramli, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Muslims and Islam in The Guardian Weekly and The USA Today,"(M.A Thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2012) , 24

¹⁵ Yusuf al-Qardhawi, *Fiqh Jihād*. (Indonesia:Mizan, 2010).

highlights the discussion on the levels of *jihād*, the field of *jihād* in society and people's attitude when dealing with local *jihād*. This book is a complete guide to understanding *jihād* as the author refer to several scholars of *tafsīr* and *fiqh* from medieval and contemporary times. However, the author does not cover any discussion about *jihād* on websites.

Muhammad Khalid Shahzadali and Muhammad Idress Lodhi in an article entitled "Negative Image of Islam and US Mass Media: How to Improve the Image of Islam and Muslim Countries"¹⁶ highlight important suggestions that are very relevant to our contemporary efforts to combat the negative projection of Islam. They argue that the mainstream media in the United States have been disseminating fake information about the Islamic world for several decades. The authors do not hesitate to argue that such negative images are the consequences of the hidden agenda of the American foreigner office to invent new phantom to fill 'the vacuum', which had come into existence due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The article focuses its study on the negative images of Islam found in blogs, many of which were created by authors who have hostile attitudes towards Islam and the Muslims. However, the authors only focus on the image of Islam in general instead of the negative projection of *jihād* and they do not touch on Jihadwatch.org which is the main concern of the researcher in this study.

Apart from this, there is an interesting article written by Daniel Martin Varisco entitled "Muslims and the Media in the Blogosphere"¹⁷ that gives a comprehensive overview of the involvement of the virtual *Ummah* in cyberspace in the last two

¹⁶ Shahzadali, Muhammad Khalid and Muhammad Idress Lodhi, "Negative Image of Islam and US Mass Media: How to Improve the Image of Islam and Muslim Countries", *Gomal University Journal of research*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2009).

¹⁷ Daniel Martin Varisco, "Muslims and the Media in the Blogosphere", in *Contemporary Islam*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2010).

decades. Varisco discusses the methodological problems when studying Islam especially in relation to blog contents from both private and religious scholars, including Muslim websites that feature comments from the observers. The main objective of this study is to analyse different blogs about Islam or by Muslims. The author prefers to act as a watchdog or contribute views on mainstream media that compete with Muslims groups. The author states that Jihadwatch.org belongs to a group of websites that have a political agenda even though it writes about Islam. Although this article has briefly highlighted interesting information about the historical background behind the construction of Jihadwatch.org and its corporate function and objective, it does not evaluate most of the entries about *jihād* posted on the website nor does it analyse the epistemological mistakes committed by Jihadwatch.org in the *jihād* entries. The article is more interested in figuring out the hidden agenda and political motive of the website coverage on *jihād* in Islam. Thus, this research will try to analyse relevant entries, which have directly projected *jihād* as a militant ideology, which according to Jihadwatch.org, can be found in the teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). It must be acknowledged however, that the article has made a significant contribution in making Muslims become aware of the misuse of the Internet to project negative images of Islam to the world.

Abu Iman Abd al-Rahman Robert Squires's work entitled "Orientalism, Misinformation and Islam"¹⁸ provides an understanding about Orientalism and the Orientalist's effort to fabricate issues in Islam. He asserts that most Muslims who are living in the West would probably agree that the majority of these distorted views of

¹⁸ Abu Iman Abd al-Rahman Robert Squires, "Orientalism, Misinformation and Islam: Copyright Muslims Answer-Orlando," Islamic Awareness, <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/orientalism.html>> (Accessed on 28 December 2013).

Islam come from the mass media. In terms of the number of people reached, the mass media certainly have more widespread impact on the West's view of Islam than the academic publications of "Arabists" or "Islamists". Thus, it is considered as a great opportunity to tarnish the image of *jihād* and Islam. These misunderstandings might be a serious cancer that spreads quickly among people. For example, some websites declare Islam as a religion that produces terrorists simply by picking certain verses of the Qur'ān at face value without any true understanding of what they actually mean. These misinterpretations subsequently spread through other mediums, which do not portray the reality of Islam as a religion of either peace or war.

Another article written by Syed Alim Ashraf¹⁹ from the Islamic Institute of Education and Training in Mauritius focuses on the understanding of Islam and Orientalism. He asserts that the Orientalists aim to disrupt the very image of Islam. In addition, according to history, most of the origins of oriental studies and institutions have a close relation to churches or missionary groups coupled with the ideas of colonialism embarked by Orientalism. In the past century, the policy was to 'divide and rule'. As for today, the policy is to 'fabricate and rule'. Looking at the various posts on Islam in the cyberspace, most of them fabricate for certain purposes. Some people believe that there is a continuation of Orientalist work. This article provides a brief idea on the misinterpretation of Islam that emerged in the cyberspace as part of the continuous effort of Orientalists since the medieval period of Islam. However, this article failed to focus on *jihād* related issues that are currently being fabricated by several websites.

The studies in the literature review focus on three different aspects of discussion; the agenda of Orientalism and its continuity in this century, discussion on *jihād* from

¹⁹ Syed Alim Ashraf, "Islam and Orientalism," the Qur'ān, <<http://www.thequranfoundation.org>> (Accessed on 18 June, 2014).

medieval and contemporary approaches and, the media's role in projecting Islam and Muslims. These discussions are related to this study yet in separated forms. Thus, the researcher chooses these studies to fill the gap left behind and create new discussions. Based on this literature review, the researcher aims to identify the current method used to project the concept of *jihād* especially in this 21st century. The result of this will contribute to other scholarly work done on *jihād*, the media and Islam, and offer something beneficial to humanity. The researcher will examine the entries in the website Jihadwatch.org to find out if it continues the idea of Orientalism or has become neo-Orientalism as it actively disseminates the misconception of *jihād*.

CHAPTER TWO

PROJECTION OF ISLAM IN WESTERN LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly highlights the projection of Islam in both printed and electronic literatures. There is no doubt that Islam and Muslims have been subjects of interest to Western intellectuals led by Orientalists and Biblical scholars who have close association with the church. Their subjects on Islam include; the Qur'ān and Hadith, prophetic mission vis-à-vis other biblical prophets; the concept of *jihād* and the expansion of Islamic empire; Islam and gender equality; and the compatibility of Islam with modernity. Despite its claim of scientific objectivity, many of the printed and electronic literatures are mainly biased, prejudicial and motivated with the objective to portray Islam and its adherents with a negative image that must be confronted because they are a threat to humanity and modern civilization. It must be noted, however, that the following discussion will be focusing on projections of Islam in the electronic media on the internet. It will provide general background for our study of Jihadwatch.org and its projection of *jihād* through its major entries.

2.2 MISCONCEPTION AGAINST THE QUR'ĀN DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF ISLAM

During the early days of its revelation, the Qur'ān was subject to baseless allegations by the *Quraysh* and their Jewish counterpart as the people of the book. They appreciated the uniqueness and beauty of the Qur'ān, but they questioned its divine origin and accused Prophet Muḥammad (P.B.U.H) as a poet or sorcerer who had the