Instances of Islamophobia
Instances of Islamophobia

*Demonizing the Muslim “Other”*

Edited by
Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini
and Hossein Rouzbeh

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London
Contents

1 Introduction: Islamophobia as a Global Concern beyond Muslim Communities 1
   Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini and Hossein Rouzbeh

2 Fear under Construction: Islamophobia within American Christian Zionism 11
   Steven Fink

3 Implicit Islamophobia?: Behind the ‘Muscular Liberalism’ of the British Prime Minister 25
   Brian Klug

4 Islamophobic Populism in Austria: Discourse Strategies of a Far Right Politician 37
   Farid Hafez

5 From Suspect to Suspecting: Muslim Communities in Ireland and the Irish Gaze 53
   James Carr

6 Islamophobia and Australia’s Asylum Seeker Debate 67
   Halim Rane and Nora Amath

7 Intersection of Sexism and Islamophobia: Media Construction of “Muslim Woman” 81
   Laura Navarro

8 Whose jihad?: Re-conceptualizing Islam and Citizenship to Face Islamophobia 97
   Stéphane Lathion

9 Understanding Islam and Islamophobia Today 111
   Nazeem Goolam

About the Contributors 123
Introduction

Islamophobia as a Global Concern beyond Muslim Communities

Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini and Hossein Rouzbeh

[1.0] Islam has the divine message of ultimately meaningful human life with beauty and justice for the world. According to the Holy Quran, the prophet of Islam has been sent “only as benevolence to the creatures of the world” (21: 107) and all believers are called to enter peace: “O’ believers, enter the peace, all of you.” (2: 208) Muslims are advised by the Quran to practice patience and kindness: “Those who council each other to patience and council each other to kindness; those are the companions of the right.” (90: 17–18) The Holy Quran even asks them to be careful about their words when facing non-believers and not to confront them with unpleasant words let alone cruel deeds: “Do not revile those who pray apart from Allah.” (6: 108)

[1.1] In encountering the non-believers, in calling them to worshipping Allah, in preaching the faith, the teaching of the Quran for Muslims is: “Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom and words of good advice, and reason with them in the best way possible.” (16: 125) When coming to people who are believers of other faiths, instead of shouting the differences, Muslims are to raise the agreements, similarities, and commonalities conducive to a climate of peaceful coexistence: “Tell them, O’ people of the Book, let us come to an agreement on that which is common between us.” (3: 64) Despite the worldwide projected killer-image of Islam, according to the direct teaching of the Quran, in the Islamic worldview killing a single innocent per-
son is a horror as huge as killing the entire human being: “Whosoever kills a human being, except for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, it shall be like killing all humanity; and whosoever saves a life, saves the entire human race.” (5: 32)

However, Islamic beliefs, along with enflaming hope for human communities, shape a threat to forces that aim to subdue the human sphere and to oppress people. In living with people of other faiths, the teaching of the Holy Quran for Muslims is to face them in a fair way but the clear exception is about oppressors, regardless of their faith: “Do not argue with the people of the Book unless in a fair way, apart from those who oppress” (29: 46). Along with the call for entrance of all believers into peace, it is stated that “there is no hostility” but to avoid a passive pacifist peace, a sharp exception is specified; “except against those who oppress” (2: 193). Not only permission is granted to the oppressed to fight oppressors (22: 39) but Muslims are forbidden from approaching them in a friendly manner:

\[
Allah does not forbid you from being kind and acting justly towards those who did not fight over faith with you, nor expelled you from your homes. Allah indeed loves those who are just. He only forbids you from making friends with those who fought over faith with you and banished you from your homes, and aided in your exile. Whoever makes friends with them is a transgressor. (60: 8–9)
\]

Who is afraid of this Islam? As the religion of peace, Islam is also the religion of justice; and justice is what those on the camp of oppression fear, be it oppression to a person or a tribe, or be it oppression at the global scale. Therefore, the hegemony of the global regimes of dominance does seem justified to be vitally afraid of Islam whose obvious teaching is not only to allow for standing against the oppressors but to set it as a duty: “What has come upon you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and for the oppressed men, women and children.” (4: 75) Therefore, the unitary cause of peace-justice equally strongly calls for peace and justice. In in calling for fair argument, the exception is those who oppress (29: 46), and in inviting to fighting for justice, aggression is forbidden: “Fight those, in the way of Allah who fight you, but do not be aggressive; Allah does not like aggressors.” (2: 190); “If they incline to peace, make peace with them.” (8: 61)

Probably this very fundamental approach of Islam is the reason why those who take pains to highlight the threat of extremist Islam, rarely bother to deal with what Islam is (with no prefix or suffix) (e. g. Act for America, 2015; Lwiv, 2004; Sookhdeo and Gorka, 2012 ). This very trick provides the room for equating Islam with the extremist Islam and shapes the basis of Islamophobia which is realized in numerous ways almost all over the world with “on-going rhetoric about Islamic ‘terrorism,’ ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism,’ both locally and globally” (Wijsen, 2013, p. 76). The rather widely-discussed Islamophobic trends reflect their widespread occurrence as almost a fact of life, especially in the West (Bevelander and
Introduction


On the other hand, true Islamic belief also has to face the cutting blade of the radical Islam. The all-out confrontation of the essentially hegemonic and dominance-seeking Western powers is but one major global force against Islam. A view of Islam as the religion of peace as well as resistance against oppression and tyranny, that is a religion of peace-justice rather than mere pacifism, also has to face a second challenge operating under an Islamic disguise. The so-called radical Islamic groups, forces, and fighters are notoriously too widely reported on and discussed to require any introduction or further description here. Media almost all over the world are replete with the loud and unpleasant messages of these groups which tend to be received as a most visible and viable face of Islam. Therefore, rather than further introducing them, we raise three sets of questions and concerns in this regard.

First, as the apparently best-known face of Islam to non-Muslims worldwide, what is the position of these violent fractions regarding the call for peace in Islam? What does the world know about the positions of notorious gangs like Al-Qaeda and ISIL with regard to specifically peace and tolerance-related verses of the Quran quoted above? Moreover, as the verses of fighting, which are frequently quoted by these groups, seems to be directed at non-believers, why is it that they focus their actions mostly in the Islamic world itself and against Muslims? Even if their reading of the Quran is a meaningful one, why is it that ISIL, for example, is not targeting any non-believer and does not throw even a single stone to Israel? This might be the evidence that the entire radical Islam phenomenon is not merely a version of Islam but probably a fabrication for certain political purposes.

Second, regardless of the justifications for the neglect of the inherent peace-seeking in Islam, one may ask how the so-called radical Islamic fighters managed to raise themselves up to the level of the face of Islam in the world. The world which is boasting the increasing access to information, centrally including the West with the much acknowledged free media, should be able to provide an explanation for how gangsters fighting under the title of Islam have been generally accepted as the true representatives of Islam. Taking the measure of sheer statistics and numbers as a point of reference (as seems to be a viable measure in democracy), the number of Muslims in the world is well beyond a billion, while fighters in the configuration of groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIL, Boko Haram and the like are measured in hundreds or thousands (Blair, 2012; Cassidy, 2006; Partlow, 2009). Taking into consideration their scholarly and theoretical supporters, financial providers, and like-minded communities may raise the figure to tens of thousands, and even adding the purported (imagi-
nary or factual) grassroots sympathizers (Pew, 2011), the peak of the number will not reach 10% of the Muslim population in the world.

With a concern for democracy (that Western politicians, media, and citizens claim to find particularly important) or with a simple perception of this (dis)proportion, based on elementary calculus, one may feel the urge to address a simple question: has there ever been the slightest attempt at confirming that a considerable proportion of the Muslim population anywhere in the world votes for these groups as representatives of any denomination of Islam? What community of Muslims in any corner of the world has lived with these Al-Qaeda and ISIL’s killer conception of Islam during the past fourteen centuries or part of that period? What is the nature of the type of Islam that people have lived with, for example in the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Northeast Africa, where some of the most flourishing societies existed for centuries and some of the most vibrant human communities continue to live today. Simply ask a meaningful proportion of Muslim people in these communities and, they will say that hanging children, burning adults, and relentlessly beheading human beings has nothing to do with Islam.

Third, an irrational killer-image of Islam seems to be the favorite one for the Western politics and media. We would not enter the arguments on the very creation of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and ISIL in Syria by Western intelligence agencies. We would not also enter the discussion on the argument that the US plans like the ones for a new Middle East (Washington Post, 2006), for new crusades (Qureshi and Sells, 2003), and for fulfilling the commitment to Israel’s security (Garamone, 2013) would be left futile without the existence of these groups. However, it is an open secret that these groups act to deny peaceful Islam and to fuel the confrontation of the West against a conception of Islam that merges peace and justice, that is, the lived Islam of peoples. This, interestingly, brings these Islamic gangs into an atmosphere of surprisingly harmonious co-functioning with Western global hegemonic powers represented by the US. These two crushing forces, apparently coming from opposing origins, ironically function in harmony to demonize anything associated with Islam.

This co-functioning can hardly be seen as a mere coincidence. The global regimes of dominance may actively fabricate and fuel such terror mechanisms as a tool of reinforcing their dominance under an Islamic-looking disguise, as they may do under other covers like the pro-Western militia groups in South America and recently the opposition groups in Ukraine. Therefore, the two blades of neoliberal hegemony and irrationalism under the disguise of radical Islam come together against genuine Islamic thought around the world. This once-covert marriage unprecedentedly surfaces as Islamophobia. Considering the triple issues discussed above, it would not be out of place to suggest that the entire Islamophobia enterprise, or ‘Islamophobia Industry’ as Lean (2012) eloquently calls it, is probably based on a broad plot by Western security
agencies. Even the most vulnerable portions of the Western lay communities who may rather easily fall prey to the Islamophobic tides, would find this suggestion worth contemplating, before labeling it as just another conspiracy theory.

In a detailed discussion of ‘The roots of the Islamophobia network in America’ (Ali, et al., 2011), the authors investigate the processes and sources of funding for the Islamophobia trends, the central role of ‘misinformation experts,’ the influence of the religious right, and the anti-Islam propaganda of right-wing media. However, they see the contribution of politicians as a crucial element in Islamophobia, and this along with the positions of other high ranking politicians (Garamone, 2013; Qureshi and Sells, 2003; Washington Post, 2006) may be well taken as the contribution of politics and the US political system:

Messages can spread far and wide because of the small but effective groups of funders and think tanks, right-wing grassroots and religious groups, and their right-wing media enablers on cable TV, radio, and the Internet.

But the ability of this tightly knit network to drench the public with misinformation is greatly enhanced by elected officials at the state and national level—politicians who push these myths as “facts” and then craft political fundraising campaigns and get-out-the-vote strategies based on debunked information about Muslims and Islam. (Ali, et al., 2011, p. 109)

One may put these authors’ examples of politicians who push Islamophobic myths as facts next to many examples of government-supported Islamophobia (including the ones presented in some of the chapter of this volume) and next to the argument for the very creation of Al-Qaeda-like gangs by Western secret services. The picture that such a combination may provide is a simple pair of scissors: As the lower blade, the Western hegemonic powers, represented by the US government, created fabrications like Al-Qaeda and ISIL and cultivated a brutal so-called extremist Islamic attitude for purposes like facing the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980’s or crushing Syria and grappling with its anti-Zionist allies like Iran and Hizbollah; As the upper blade, the same godfathers of terror enflamed the Islamophobic blaze and extremely publicized it through their media to forge and naturalize a conception of extremist Islam as Islam. The final stage is just a simple co-working of the two blades; fight anything related to Islam (which is all extremist) including its inherent cause of seeking justice and resisting oppression. The world would be easier to tame in the absence of such a cause.

A final argument in this regard is that if Islam can be equated in the public eye with something which is clearly non-Islam and then exploited as a terrorizing instrument, then, any other belief structure potentially threatening to the dominance of the global hegemony can fall prey to such
evil intentions; be it Indian American community-life, Soviet-type communism, Chinese socialism, Nazism, or Fascism (regardless of the drastic differences among them and regardless of the inherent disasters in some of them); or be it Nationalism in its diversity of realizations by different people in different countries, form Sukarno in Indonesia to Nehru in India, and form Mosaddegh in Iran to Mugabe in Zimbabwe and to several US-challenging leaders in South America. Therefore, Islamophobia processes may be viewed as an illustration of aspects of a broad global othering plot that can potentially target any country “to prevent the rise of any society that might serve as a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model” (Blum, 2013, p. 214).

With this view of Islamophobia as a global concern beyond Muslim communities, the fairly growing literature and increasing problematization of Islamophobia (Instead, 2013) may appear to be thin. Its diverse faces and facets in different contexts around the world need to be extensively explored; and awareness, sensitivity, and questions need to be raised on the part of Muslim communities, Western populations, and non-Western non-Muslim people. Books on aspects of Islamophobia have been proliferating in the past decade (Allen, 2010; Bulkin and Nevel, 2014; Ernstn, 2013; Esposito and Kalin, 2011; Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2007; Helbling, 2012; Kumar, 2012; Morgan and Poynting, 2012; Sayyid and Vakil, 2010; Sheehi, 2011). However, it may well be argued that so are instances of this phenomenon. Therefore, the diverse aspects of the issue; the very complicated sociopolitical nature of the concerns in this regard; and the diversity of the geographical settings where the issue is relevant, cause many problems and discussions that remain far from exhausted even in the case of multiple treatments of similar topics and contexts. Therefore, this volume, despite similarities in some topics and titles, is intended to add new dimensions and depth to existing books.

After this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, Steven Fink highlights some religious justifications for forging Islamophobic attitudes and examines positions of American Christian Zionist leaders in connecting Islam with violence. In the context of a narrative of fear, according to which Israel and the US face the imminent threat of destruction, Fink discusses how this discourse of fear may shape Christian Zionist laypeople’s views of Muslim Palestinians, demonstrating that it promotes opposing their land claims and disregarding their human dignity. The chapter also argues that because of its basis in fear, the Christian Zionist narrative also promotes the justification of violence against Palestinians as Muslims.

Shifting to an equally important sociopolitical context and to the arena of political discourse, Brian Klug in Chapter Three reads between the lines of a speech by the British Prime Minister and discusses how he projected a distracted image of Islamic perspectives under an apparent defence of Islam. Klug raises a key question in this regard: Is the speech
Introduction

implicitly Islamophobic? To address the question the chapter examines aspects of the word and the concept of Islamophobia and on this basis the author argues for the existence of an underlying *othering* stance in the Prime Minister’s speech vis-à-vis Muslims. A focus on the rhetoric of a politician also shapes the substance of Chapter Four in which Farid Hafez explores the illustration of Islamophobia in the discourse of an Austrian politician. Through critical discourse analysis, the chapter examines an interview with this right-wing party leader and highlights major Islamophobic discourse strategies used to verbally exclude Muslims and demand Islamophobic politics.

In Chapter Five, James Carr brings together the state-politics position and the perspective of the general public with regard to attitudes of suspicion towards Muslims in the context of Ireland and in light of the experience of people who used to be targets of such attitudes themselves. Based on empirical research data, Carr discusses and illustrates how the Irish State profiles Muslims as a suspect community. He also argues that practices of *suspecting* are not restricted to the State and Muslims are subjected to the suspicious gaze of the Irish public as well.

Halim Rane and Nora Amath, in Chapter Six, focus on the specific problem of asylum seekers in Australia and how Islamophobic trends find their way into the debates over this issue. They examine the policies of the Australian government about asylum seekers as specifically reflected in various Australian media. The chapter discusses the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian media and the extent of Islamophobia in Australian society. A major argument by Rane and Amath in this chapter is that Islamophobic notions shape a major factor in the coverage of the asylum seeker concern and that the media tend to reproduce the government’s views in this regard.

Turning to the issue of Muslim women in Western communities as a target of Islamophobic attitudes, Chapter Seven by Laura Navarro focuses on the role of mass media in the social reproduction of Islamophobia and sexism. The chapter analyses dominant representations of Muslim woman in Spanish mass media, showing how these images reinforce Islamophobic stereotypes about these women in general and migrant Muslim women specially. Navarro also looks at the French *anti-veil law* and discusses how the racist aspects of the law were ignored by the majority of mass media and politicians in the debate over this issue. Overall, the author attempts to analyze the symbolic mechanisms legitimising certain Islamophobic thoughts and practices from a gender perspective.

Chapter Eight generally argues that countering Islamophobic perceptions and practices requires more creativity than simply talking about it. In this chapter, Stéphane Lathion presents an overview of two distinct periods of the discussion of Muslim realities in the past three decades before turning to the specific consideration of the *jihad* to illustrate the
challenges of the application of religious vocabulary. He proposes steps towards reducing tensions and creating awareness on the part of concerned actors including various groups of politicians, journalists, social workers, public administrators, teachers, and Muslim community workers and religious leaders.

Finally, Nazeem Goolam in Chapter Nine sets out form the argument that Islam is a way of life founded on peace and that jihad must not be equated with terrorism and attempts to clarify the Islamic concepts of non-violence and tolerance. The chapter then examines two instances of Islamophobic practices. Referring to the scarf ban in France, Goolam seeks to unravel some Western fears of the Muslim dress code and the practice of double standards in this regard. He also focuses on why Britain fears Islamic extremism in its schools and discusses aspects of the association of British values with being un-Islamic.

The chapters, authored by scholars who specifically work on aspects of Islamophobia around the world, examine various instances of Islamophobia and explore different discursive contexts including those of media coverage and manipulation; political debates and discourses; and general attitudes and attitude-building in the public sphere. The geographical settings of the contributors and the locus of their explorations cover different countries including Australia, Austria, France, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, UK and US. While “Muslims have increasingly been targets of prejudice, stereotypes, and other forms of hostility in the United States and Europe” (Croucher, 2013, p. 46) and Islamophobia is viewed as a security concern (Edwards, 2015), it is hoped that this book serves the purpose of further expansion of the discussions and extension of the distribution of writings on the issue; and to highlight some hitherto less discussed concerns.

REFERENCES


Introduction


Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini and Hossein Rouzbeh


