

Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*

Oakland, California, University California Press, 2018

The purpose of this book, according to the author, is to provide general readers, students, and activists with a comprehensible introduction to Islamophobia. With this publication, Beydoun attempts to shed light on the phenomenon which has an international cluster of terms and phrases that include "anti-Muslim prejudice", "anti-Muslim bigotry", "intolerance against Muslims", "demonization of Islam", and "Muslimophobia". As a Muslim American law professor and a civil right activist, the writer hopes to give his readers a different perspective on Islamophobia. He bases his speculations on the chronological explanations of attitudes of American people due to certain events; discusses various court cases on granting American citizenship to Muslims; and discusses newspaper and TV news headlines as well as his own life experience. Last but not least, the author attempts to connect the old system of intolerance against Muslims to current policies and rival ideologies.

The book was written during a period of high interest in research of Islamophobia, and expanded the author's field of study. References to works by Edward Said, Samuel Huntington, Evelyn Alsultany, Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri and other scholars show the depth of the author's concern for and the scope of his study of the issue. The author highlights seven essential points relating to the topic, which he presents in the seven chapters of his book.

In Chapter One – What is Islamophobia?, Beydoun discusses the beginning of modern Islamophobic fear and the nation's expectations of its leaders in combating that fear. The election of Trump and his continuing "fully-fledged anti-Muslim campaign" reflect and consolidate what the majority of the population supports these days (p. 30). The private reactions of American people towards American Muslims, who have a "Muslim look" by covering their heads with headscarves or wearing a beard, are reviewed in this chapter. The reactions include the murder of Muslim students, armed and unarmed anti-Muslim protests in various states, the vandalization of mosques, etc. Apart from the attacks on Muslims, one can be quite surprised when reading the book to realize how easily and impulsively similar looking people have been victimized.

In Chapter Two – The Roots of Modern Islamophobia, the author examines cases where Muslims were barred from receiving American citizenship and considered to be "unassimilable within American values and society" (p. 46). Beydoun references authors who have mentioned the clash of Western and Eastern ideologies. The phrase "Islam was everything the West was not ..." (p. 51) sounds just like what Edward Said once wrote in *Orientalism* (1978).

Those who wish to get closer to the events which besmirched the reputation of the Muslim community in the US can turn to Chapter Three – A Reoriented "Clash of Civilizations". It discusses the case in the state of Oklahoma where a born-and-bred

Catholic citizen of the United States executed an attack. Although the media habitually blamed Muslims for being involved in terror, this case turned out to be an exception. This one and only exception could not improve their reputation, which was ultimately “undermined” on the 11th of September 2001.

Chapter Four – War on Terror, War on Muslims continues the discussion of the polarization of the nation in the US. The line between the poles was drawn by Bush’s phrase “You are either with us or against us” (p. 119). The president addressed Muslim Americans, warning about the consequences of being “bad Muslims”. Several years later, President Obama shared similar ideas, saying that Muslims are responsible for keeping Muslims communities “clean” from extremist ideologies (p. 119), even while Obama’s Arab/Muslim identity gave great support to some American Muslims. Another division of Muslims in America discussed in this part is “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”. “Good Muslims” are those who limit their religious affiliation. “Bad Muslims” are those who freely exercise their faith and end up being suspected of terrorism. The author supports his arguments with autobiographical memoirs of his student life. Having a Shiite father from Lebanon and a Sunni mother from Egypt resulted in a marginalized identity. However, Beydoun found power in being in the margins.

Chapter Five – A “Radical” or Imagined Threat? narrates stories of people who brought some changes into their lifestyle (keeping a beard by young men or fasting during Ramadan, etc.). The changes caused suspicion and prejudice-driven fear that this kind of “radicalization” among the younger generation might induce terrorism. Therefore, CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) policing turned its attention to so-called “homegrown radicals” and might-be “apprentices” of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or other Islamic transnational terror networks. Thus, any Sunni Muslim was considered to be vulnerable to radicalization, and accordingly radical or imagined subject to the surveillance of the state.

Chapter Six – Between Anti-Black Racism and Islamophobia is full of memoirs about the greatest Black Muslim American, Muhammad Ali. The author supports his attitude to the issue by saying “despite the heights Ali reached in sport, and the throne he claimed in the hearts and minds of everyone, the black Muslim experience and people he represented are still, today, marginalized and ignored” (p. 154). The reader can conclude that African American Muslims and non-black Muslim individuals are in the same boat, “created” by Islamophobia.

In the final part, in Chapter Seven – The Fire Next Time, Beydoun introduces us to another victimized group, LGBTQ Muslims. As can be expected, this minority group also fights for its “share of the limelight” in the US. However, there are some people whose minds were struck by the unimaginable integration of Islam and homosexuality.

Although Beydoun offers readers a solid analysis of the political and social history of Islamophobia in American society, and his insights are applicable to a broad spectrum of other western societies, his book falls short of showing some kind of support of the American people. These people have witnessed terrorist attacks by

extremist groups, sometimes developing a phobia of going to public places, and sometimes experienced the loss of their loved ones during the attacks. Moreover, the media has presented faces with beards as nothing but negative. These foreign looks and “modern threats” are posed by a culture which is different, as we all know from the books of Huntington and Said, to the “host” society.

How could you prove that the associations American people have recently obtained of Muslims with extremism, Muslims with terrorism, and Muslims with gender inequality did not originate after Muslim/Islamic immigration to the US? Could it not be after 9/11?

A thorough consideration of an issue necessitates a balanced approach. Therefore, the book is unapproachable in a balanced fashion and does not consider the issues experienced by the mainstream community along with the issues faced by Muslim Americans in the framework of this “clash of cultures”.

Furthermore, the author includes the following assertion: “I found myself wedged between the hate and its intended victims. Muslim Americans like myself were presumptive terrorists, not citizens; unassimilable aliens, not Americans; and the speeches I delivered on campuses and in community centers, to Muslims and non-Muslims, cautioned that the dangers Islamophobia posed yesterday were poised to become even more perilous today” (p. 13). It may seem to contain a little bias regarding the narratives of the events concerning Islamophobia in this book. The latter is naturally understandable due to some dramatic events and brutal ends some Muslims American met while living in the US.

American Islamophobia contains a critique of western society’s reaction towards Muslim American, Black Muslim, and LGBTQ Muslims. The issue faced by Muslim Americans is called scapegoating, hostility, hate crimes and even a war against Islam (p. 179). Unfortunately, it is a story about a minority who went to the West to establish a foothold but were opposed by the majority which has its own culture and rules of life. Muslim people make up a minority who fight for their rights and cultural peculiarities to be exercised in their full sense in a different land, which has its own history and peculiarities of being a “melting pot” or a “salad bowl” – assimilation of various cultures and having as a result a culture which favours gender equality and freedom. If we imagine the situation other way round – American people living in the Middle East, this surely would not be a case of “smooth” assimilation but would cause similar debates between the majority and minority cultures.

Despite some minor weaknesses, the book makes a great contribution to current American studies and Islamic studies in general. By exploring the association between Muslim Americans and marginalized minorities and tracking the policies addressed to migrants in the US, Beydoun cleverly underpins his sharp analysis with a detailed discussion of ethnicity issues under the administration of different US presidents. In particular, a focus on Muslim issues that are “unassimilable and irreconcilable with American identity” is found throughout. What Beydoun has managed to achieve is to usefully explore, analyse and conceptualize the issues relating to the carrying out

of policies in this area. The book is easy to read and can be called a page-turner, with a detailed autobiography, authentic references, and congruent case study material.

Gaziza Tolesh