
The book under review Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century is a collection of articles edited by John Louis Esposito, an American professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C, and assistant to the President of Turkey, Ibrahim Kalin. The book highlights the viewpoints related to Islamophobia from different viewpoints and discusses the challenges that Muslims face in the 21st century. The following report analyses the first two chapters of this book.

In the first chapter, Ibrahim Kalin talks about a range of key factors with regards to Islamophobia and multiculturalism in the west. He describes how an insignificant ‘Islamic’ subject can be inflated in the public eye, highlighting how perception can be assumed as reality. Kalin references excessive media coverage of conflicts in Muslim majority countries which will shape an individual’s thought surrounding that community. Kalin uses this to expose the double standards of the western media. Even though there are conflicts all around the world, he purports that western media concentrates on the Muslim majority countries disproportionate to other faith communities. From Kalin’s arguments, it appears there are strong political links steering most of the western media.

Kalin also talks about multiculturalism as a key to strengthening western societies. Although Kalin discusses Islamophobia broadly, Chris Allen provides a deeper historical narrative in his book Islamophobia, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010.

Ibrahim Kalin also discusses possible political interests in demonising Islam, predicting further secularisation in Europe, dismissing the long heritage of Christianity in Britain.

In Chapter 2, Joselyne Cesari goes on to imply that Islamophobia is not a post-9/11 phenomena, rather its origins date back to 1922. However, it only became a common parlance in the 1990s in defining the discrimination Muslims faced in Western Europe.

Cesari argues that the term ‘Islamophobia’ has been increasingly used in public spheres, political circles, the media and even in Muslim organisations, especially since the publication of the 1997 Runneymede Report. She mentions that there is still a continued debate of the definition of the term and how it is different from racism, anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism.

Cesari makes many interesting points, including a comparison between discrimination in
Europe and the United States of America (US). Specifically, she highlights that Muslims in the US are on a higher than average salary in contrast to the United Kingdom (UK), where citizens are asked about their religion in almost all job applications.

She states that most Muslims are immigrants or have a migrant background. Furthermore, she implies that it is often difficult to identify Islamophobia in Europe due to most immigrants being labourers hence they are socially marginalised. In comparison, the majority of US immigrants are well educated and economically established.

In addition, most the Muslim immigrants in the UK are from South Asia (almost 33%).² They are very often on benefits and welfare due to having poor education in contrast to the US where most often the South Asian Muslims come from a higher educational background. An American student at Markfield Institute of Higher Education highlights the economic issues that could arise from discrimination in employment in the US. He stated that the US economy could not afford to be racist or show any sort of discrimination towards the South Asian Muslims because the majority of the time they were either doctors, lawyers, engineers or had a professional career.³

To conclude, this book is a superb and deeply relevant contribution to current debates and various fields of studies.

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