

Book Reviews

The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims
by Nathan Lean. London: Pluto Press. 2012.

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Islamophobia can be understood as a concept, phenomenon or discourse influencing both state and non state forums and relations. Globally, Islamophobia has varied and broad interpretative aspects and characteristics. However, the most significant aspect of Islamophobia is that it has challenged the overall co-existence of a plurality of cultures and probabilities for harmonious interactions of different cultures. In the context of globalization, recession and disquiet over immigration, many in Western Europe and North America are reconstructing their identities in contention to the “orient” (i.e.) to Islam and Muslims. The Recent studies have disclosed that Islamophobia has become culturally acceptable and the Muslim communities in multicultural societies are facing a disturbing wave of bigotry and outright animosity. Nathan Lean’s study has been lauded as ‘The most comprehensive and analytical study of Islamophobia needed in the contemporary times’. The work examines the issue of Islamophobia and unearths the genealogy of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States of America and Europe. The primary aim of the book is to analyse the very notions of Islamophobia and how these are being nurtured and fomented by xenophobes, political leaders and institutions who are “ bent on scaring the public about Islam” (p.13).

The work under review seeks to understand the rising tide of anti-Muslim hatred and the basic motivation behind it. The rapid flow of populations is one of the most fascinating developments in the contemporary era of globalization.

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In particular, the rapid settlement of Muslim communities into the Western societies has raised many questions about how policymakers maintain cultural diversity and integrate minorities. In spite of the overwhelmingly positive responses of Muslim communities and the political establishments on matters relating to integration, the predominant sentiment among many xenophobes regarding Muslims is that they are not welcome in “our” countries. Such conditions often lead to feelings of intense hatred and exclusion among minorities. Lean, therefore, attempts to explain this protracted conflict, attempting to explore its internal dynamics as well as some of its more apparent contradictions and blind spots.

Islamophobia in America has a long history and this book explores how it has led to a significant fear of a largely misunderstood religion. Lean illustrates that Islamophobia needs to be seen as a phenomenon that emerged as part of an intense clash between Western nations and the Muslim world. Significantly, the fear was not so intense during the formative period but perhaps, it was only after 9/11 that Islamophobia increased in frequency and notoriety. The Islamophobia propaganda network has its roots in years of an earnest online, media and political campaigns. This network of hate mongering has received a lot of attention from several groups and institutions globally. Nathan Lean offers a new and critical insight into this complex phenomenon, as he peers, he tries to analyse the major online and media coverage of the ‘controversial’ establishment of an Islamic centre “Ground Zero Mosque” in New York. Thereafter, he analyses the “web of deception” created by Palmela Geller, an online blogger and political activist, who regards its establishment as a “symbol of conquest”. Further, Lean argues that the small rightwing Christian groups in the United States of America have managed to influence the prominent media networks to capture the national spotlight.

Lean’s work features 7 chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the history of Islamophobia in America. The impact of major online and media outlets in propagating hate and violence are discussed in the next 2 chapters. Chapter 4 analyses the role of religious and conservative organizations in vilifying Muslims. Chapter 5 offers fascinating overview of Israel’s role in spreading fear and Islamophobia in America. Chapter 6 discusses the impact of Islamophobia in shaping governmental policies. Finally, chapter 7 analyses the deadly consequences of hate enterprise in Europe.

Islamophobia has influenced the political thinking and emerging policy developments in the United States of America. The governmental collaboration with security agencies for observing activities in different areas has created a lot of mistrust between the Muslim communities in America and the governmental agencies. Lean contextualizes the contemporary setting by assessing the intense wave of anti-Muslim rhetoric evidenced in the

works of a handful well resourced groups and institutions. Research undertaken on the issue of Israeli-American nexus in promoting Islamophobia indicates the prominent role of Israel as an active perpetrator in the unleashing of many campaigns targeting Muslims. He successfully discloses a nexus between the funding of an anti-Muslim propaganda and the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank.

The rise of Islamophobia in Europe is both striking and disconcerting. This ideology of vicious discrimination has marginalized Muslims and threatened their existence as the pertinent political and social stakeholders. Anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and extreme right wing groups have structured this wave of antagonism. Lean indicates that it was this fevered atmosphere that provided impelling theme to Anders Brevik, the right wing extremist, for savage and violent massacre of people in oslo. Brevik drew inspiration not only from the writings of a leading cadre of Islamophobes but his country also had a share in fostering such a destructive mentality. Overall, Lean expertly points out that the policies adopted by several European countries have forced Muslim minorities to rethink about their status in these societies. The gross marginalization of Muslims in Europe is often attributed to the rise of anti immigrant parties and has lead several European countries to impose restrictions on dress, mosque construction and reunification of families through immigration law.

Globally, Islamophobia impacts politics and in a sense it undermines the tolerance for religious and cultural diversity. The various research institutions and groups have provided a plethora of data analyzing the various aspects of this phenomenon. This study serves as a snapshot of an extensive review displayed by Nathan lean that involves an in-depth analysis of Islamophobia and the factors responsible for the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from societal, political and civic life. Lean deserves a special commendation for writing such a comprehensive, lucid and well documented book. The book, therefore, will appeal to a variety of readers — whether those from academia or the educated public — interested in the genesis of the phenomenon and its perceptibility in politics, society and culture.

