

Preface

This book is born of my experience teaching college students about Islamophobia. I teach two courses in particular that allow me continually to cultivate my knowledge of Islamophobia and to explain this subject to an audience with little prior understanding. The first, a study-abroad course called Islam in Europe, enables me to travel with students to a variety of countries in order to analyze firsthand the tensions between Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim majority in Europe. The second, a survey course on Islamophobia, provides a forum for debating some of the more difficult questions surrounding this topic, including what distinguishes Islamophobia from legitimate criticisms of or disagreements with Islamic beliefs and practices. I am fortunate to work at an academic institution that encourages faculty to explore challenging and controversial topics like this inside and outside the classroom. This book would not be possible without the rich teaching opportunities and the supportive learning environment that Luther College provides.

Teaching about Islamophobia is a daunting task, though in recent years many excellent scholarly sources have emerged that make this topic increasingly accessible to students and nonspecialists. Even so, as of this writing, no single-author volume exists that surveys

Islamophobia in its historical and contemporary manifestations in both Europe and the United States. Most scholarly books and articles focus on one side of the Atlantic or the other, or concentrate on a particular slice of Islamophobia, such as media portrayals of Muslims or constructions of the Muslim enemy in the War on Terror. With this book, I aim to provide an introduction to the problem of Islamophobia that covers a wide range of topics and that draws comparisons between Europe and the United States. This is a massive undertaking, but, in light of the growing interest in the study of Islamophobia, a broad introductory book aimed at nonspecialists seems timely and necessary.

To pull off this ambitious endeavor, I needed plenty of help. After all, no author flies solo. An author's ideas materialize only through an engagement with the ideas and perspectives of others. Writing is always a collaborative endeavor, and I am grateful for so many people whose ideas and feedback have strengthened this book. I want to begin by thanking my editor at Fortress Press, Michael Gibson. Michael is an author's dream editor. He knows exactly when to nudge you in a different direction and when to step aside and let you run with an idea. I benefited greatly from his feedback along the way and from his ability to troubleshoot logistical issues that were all but lost on me. Michael is one of a kind!

I am indebted to those whom I interviewed for the final chapter of the book: Keith Ellison, John Esposito, Myriam Francois-Cerrah, Marjorie Dove Kent, Ingrid Mattson, Dalia Mogahed, Eboo Patel, and Tariq Ramadan. Their impact on this book extends well beyond the excerpts from their interviews found in chapter 9. Their perspectives and insights inspired me to revisit and revise portions of the book and to make some connections that I did not see the first time around. I am grateful for their wisdom and witness, and I am honored to have their voices included in this book.

Colleagues near and far agreed to read drafts of chapters and to offer constructive feedback. The final product is much improved because of their suggestions. To each of the following, I offer my sincere thanks: Kimberly Connor, Jeanine Diller, Kathleen Fischer, Lee Jefferson, Marc Pugliese, Bob Shedinger, and Ria Van Ryan. I can add to this list my wife, Tabita Green, who read the entire manuscript and whose aptitude for writing helped her to see things I might have easily missed in the editing process.

I want to thank my research assistant, Emily Holm. Emily provided stellar support by proofreading portions of the manuscript and by tracking down sources and other supplementary material when needed.

My participation in two seminars prompted considerable thought on this topic and on how one tells and engages the story of a religious tradition and community that are not one's own. I am appreciative of the fellows and instructors of the Luce Summer Seminar in Theologies of Religious Pluralism and Comparative Theology, sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, and the Teaching Interfaith Understanding Seminar, sponsored by the Interfaith Youth Core and the Council of Independent Colleges. My conversations with participants in both seminars made a huge difference in my thinking and writing.

The Koebrick Endowment Fund at Luther College provided generous financial support that enabled me to conduct research trips and interviews for the book. The final chapter is greatly enhanced because of this funding.

Finally, I want to thank my wife and daughter, Tabita and Rebecka, for all of their encouragement. It is not easy to have a spouse or parent who writes and speaks on what is an unpopular topic in many circles. My work on the problem of Islamophobia is increasingly public, and, on occasion, this opens the door for folks

with more intemperate views to write some really nasty things about me on social media or elsewhere on the Internet. Of course, this comes with the territory, but I am always sensitive to the impact this can have on my family. Fortunately, Tabita and Rebecka are unyielding in their support. They are also my partners in the fight to make an unjust world more just, to make a broken world more whole. I dedicate this book to them.

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January 2015

Introduction

In the fall of 2010, the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at a university in the United States invited me to give a public lecture on the controversy surrounding a proposed Islamic center in New York City. The controversy attracted lots of media attention that summer, with many prominent politicians speaking out against the center because of its proximity to Ground Zero. Since my own research at the time focused on mosque and minaret conflicts in Europe, I eagerly accepted the invitation and looked forward to sharing my perspectives on how these conflicts in Europe might shed light on what was happening in New York.

I arrived in my hotel room the night before the lecture. The MSA president called to welcome me to campus. He proceeded to tell me that campus security intended to station additional officers at my lecture the following day. The fear was that the topic and the presence of Muslims in the audience might raise tensions among those in the community who were already anxious about Islam. The MSA president wanted to reassure me that security was a high priority. Better safe than sorry, I thought, so I expressed my gratitude and how much I was looking forward to giving the lecture.

The following day, I arrived at the campus auditorium about twenty minutes prior to the lecture. The MSA president approached

me and gave me another update. Campus security was now advising him not to stand up in front of the audience to introduce me because it might not be safe for him to identify himself publicly. If someone in the audience wanted to lash out against Muslims after the lecture, he would be the most obvious target. So he asked me if I would introduce myself. I agreed, but at this point I was definitely starting to get a little jittery.

The event went off without a hitch, but, as I was heading home, I could not help but ask myself what just happened. Keep in mind that I am a historian of religion. When I give lectures, I typically do not need extra muscle or security precautions. I am just thrilled if anyone shows up! Of course, *I* was not the reason campus security was on edge. It was the topic. What happened that day was just another example of the extraordinary anxieties that accompany any attempt to have a calm, rational conversation about Islam in the United States and indeed the West.

Many polls confirm just how much apprehension there is concerning Muslims and Islam. In the United States, 53 percent of Americans hold views of Islam described either as “not favorable at all” or “not too favorable.”¹ In the Netherlands, 63 percent of Dutch citizens believe Islam is incompatible with modern European life.² In France, 74 percent believe Islam is at odds with French society.³ Just fewer than one in four people in Britain believe Islam is compatible with the British way of life.⁴

1. Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, “In U.S., Religious Prejudice Stronger against Muslims,” *Gallup*, January 21, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/125312/religious-prejudice-stronger-against-muslims.aspx>.
2. World Economic Forum, *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2008), 42.
3. Stéphanie Le Bars, “La religion musulmane fait l’objet d’un profond rejet de la part des Français,” *Le Monde*, January 24, 2013, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/01/24/la-religion-musulmane-fait-l-objet-d-un-profond-rejet-de-la-part-des-francais_1821698_3224.html.

These statistics point to the larger reality with which this book is concerned—Islamophobia. Islamophobia refers to the fear, hatred, and hostility toward Muslims and Islam. This book surveys both the history and the contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia in Europe and the United States. My purpose in writing this book is twofold. First, I aim to provide readers with an accessible introduction to the fears and anxieties toward Islam that dominate so much of the cultural and political landscape in the West. Second, I want to help improve the conversation about Islam and its 1.6 billion practitioners. Frankly, we in the West are doing a poor job when we talk about Muslims and Islam. We must do better. We must learn where our fears come from so that these fears no longer fuel policies and practices that both dehumanize Muslims and perpetuate discrimination and at times violence against Muslims.

The challenge facing anyone writing a book on Islamophobia is that the news headlines seem to speak against any notion that the West has an *unfounded* fear of Islam. In the year prior to this book's publication, cable news networks inundated audiences with coverage of Israel's invasion of Gaza in the wake of the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers by Muslim militants. Newspapers called attention to Muslims chanting anti-Semitic slogans and attacking synagogues in Europe. Videos circulated of the beheadings of American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff by the radical organization ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Columnists and commentators called on Muslims to denounce terrorism and to affirm their support for freedom of expression after two Muslim extremists killed twelve people at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical magazine with a history of ridiculing Islam. Name

4. Tim Shipman, "Fewer Than One in Four People Think Islam Is Compatible with British Life, Faith Minister Warns," *Daily Mail* (UK), January 24, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2267515/Baroness-Warsi-Fewer-people-think-Islam-compatible-British-life.html>.

the global conflict of the day, and Muslims seem to be right in the thick of it. But as I hope to demonstrate throughout the book, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the way many in the West understand conflicts involving Muslims. At the very least, much of the Western discourse about Islam conflates the actions of a minority with the majority of Muslims. This conflation is also one of the building blocks of Islamophobia.

Because the study of Islamophobia is still a relatively new field of research, misunderstandings about the topic abound. For this reason, let me clarify what this book is and is not. This book is not an introduction to Islam but to Western fears of Islam. I am interested in the historical origins of the anxiety over Islam, the forms this anxiety takes today, and the consequences of this anxiety for Muslims. The book will certainly provide information about Islam along the way. But what readers learn about Islam will primarily be in the service of comprehending the nature of anti-Muslim bigotry.

This book is also not an attempt to condemn every person who has suspicions or misgivings about Islam. True, there are some people who deliberately stir up animosity toward Muslims in order to mobilize voters, increase ratings, generate traffic to blogs and websites, sell books, or justify wars. In other words, there are folks who are in the business of manufacturing Islamophobia for personal or professional gain, and they do deserve special condemnation. But they are also in the minority. In my experience, many of the people who harbor suspicions toward Muslims or Islam do not do so for personal gain or with malicious intent. Oftentimes, they are eager to learn more about Islam and those who practice it in order to see if their fears are justified. It is my hope that this book can be of help to those who may be apprehensive of Islam but who recognize that they need to learn more about where their misgivings come from and how they can be addressed.

Finally, this book is not an attempt to dismiss legitimate criticisms of Muslims. I recognize that for those most skeptical of the study of Islamophobia, such an enterprise comes across as a blatant attempt to ignore all of the problems that exist in Muslim communities inside and outside the West. Islamophobia skeptics often ask the same questions to make their point: Aren't many of the people committing violence in the name of religion Muslims? Don't women in many Muslim-majority countries have restricted freedoms and rights? Isn't it true that many Muslims hold anti-Western or anti-American sentiments? And if the answer to all of these questions is yes, then doesn't it seem like a fear of Islam is more than justified?

These questions sound so simple and are often asked rhetorically. The answer to each question is supposed to be an obvious yes. But when we dig beneath the rhetorical questions and wrestle with the underlying issues, we quickly discover that there are more profound questions we must ask, questions that require considerable self-examination from the non-Muslim majority in the West.

To take one example—the issue of violence: Why do a small minority of Muslims commit violence against civilians in the name of Islam? Why are their efforts increasingly aimed at the West, and why now? If the Qur'an or something inherent to Islam supposedly makes them commit this violence, why aren't the majority of Muslims following suit? What do we make of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the victims of Muslim terrorism are other Muslims? And is it possible that the roots of what is called "Islamic terrorism" are found in historical and political conditions that include European colonialism and Western intervention in Middle Eastern countries and governments?

Conversely, why are Muslims constructed as violent whereas Western governments that carry out extensive military actions in Muslim-majority countries are considered peaceful? Why is the

killing of innocent Muslims by US drone attacks in Pakistan not an act of terrorism, but the killing of innocent Americans by Muslim extremists is? What does the United States' history of supporting regimes that practice torture, from prerevolutionary Iran to Jorge Videla's Argentina in the late 1970s to Egypt's current military dictatorship, say about its commitment to peace and human dignity? What does the United States' own practice of torture in the War on Terror, a practice supported by a majority of white Christian Americans, say about its dedication to human rights?

When we wrestle with these types of questions, the answers become more complex and easy assumptions about "violent" Muslims versus the "peaceful" West dissipate quickly. However, wrestling with these questions does not prevent us from criticizing or condemning the violence carried out by some Muslim extremist groups. We can analyze the problem of Islamophobia *and* critique Muslim individuals or groups when appropriate.

As an introduction to the problem of Islamophobia in the West, this book traverses considerable historical, political, cultural, and geographical terrain. The book begins this journey with an opening chapter that discusses both the debates over how to define Islamophobia and the most common questions concerning the concept of Islamophobia. The next two chapters cover the history of anti-Muslim prejudice. Chapter 2 surveys European views of Islam and Muslims from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment. Chapter 3 examines the European colonization of Muslim-majority regions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and includes a discussion of how the colonial enterprise generated Orientalism, a particular way of thinking that has shaped the modern study of Islam.

Chapters 4 and 5 illuminate the key events in the modern West that have heightened fears and anxieties toward Muslims at home and abroad. Chapter 4 discusses the terrorist attacks of September

11, 2001, and the subsequent US War on Terror. The focus is on how US politicians constructed the Muslim enemy to justify the war and to deflect attention from imperial ambitions in the Middle East. Chapter 5 surveys the most significant events on European soil in recent decades that generated fears of the Muslim “enemy within” and exacerbated tensions between Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim majority.

The next two chapters analyze the most influential sources of the negative images of Muslims in the West today. Chapter 6 addresses the rise of individuals and organizations that make a living manufacturing and perpetuating Islamophobia. Chapter 7 examines the negative representations of Muslims and Islam in the mainstream news media, in television programming, and in Hollywood movies.

Chapter 8 shifts our focus to the practical consequences of Islamophobia for Muslims living in the West. It surveys the discrimination, exclusion, and even violence experienced by Muslims due to surveillance programs, detentions, deportations, renditions, hate crimes, and restrictions on the free exercise of religion.

The book concludes on a constructive note for combating Islamophobia. Chapter 9 invites readers into a conversation with eight prominent individuals who are invested in the battle against anti-Muslim bigotry. Readers have the opportunity to gain insights from Keith Ellison, John Esposito, Myriam Francois-Cerrah, Marjorie Dove Kent, Ingrid Mattson, Dalia Mogahed, Eboo Patel, and Tariq Ramadan on how best to respond to the problem of Islamophobia.

It is impossible to do complete justice to any one of the topics covered in these chapters. As with all introductory books, the intent here is to provide a bird’s-eye view of the subject in an effort to stimulate critical thought and encourage further exploration. This

THE FEAR OF ISLAM

book marks only the beginning of a conversation about the most widely accepted prejudice in the West today.