

Title—Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century
Author—John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin
Year—2011

Categories: Islam, Xenophobia, Migration, Politics, Culture

Place: The West

Time: 1985-2010

Argument Synopsis:

This collection, edited by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, seeks to address the dangerous growth of Islamophobia in Europe and America. The essays discuss topics including the status of Islam and Muslims in the West, the causes of the alarming increase and impact of Islamophobia in domestic and foreign policies, and the role of the American and European media in perpetuating Islamophobic discourse. In his introduction, Esposito defines three characteristics of Islamophobia: exclusion from economic, social, and political life; discrimination in the blatant form of hate crimes and subtler forms of disparagement; and the perception that Islam as a religion has no common values with the West, is inferior to the West (i.e. Christianity and Judaism), and that it is really a violent political ideology rather than a source of faith and spirituality, unlike the other Abrahamic religions. Esposito claims that media coverage tends to lump diverse identity, demographic, economic, and social conflict issues under the umbrella of religion. He highlights how Islamophobia has shaped the public perception of policies of multiculturalism—charge that it delays Muslim assimilation and civic engagement, perpetuates foreign loyalties, and provides a space for militant radicals. The essays are focused on both Europe and the United States, but rarely in a comparative sense.

Kalin's essay argues that the debate over Islam and Muslims in the West has been shaped and largely determined by the secular-liberal ideals of the European Enlightenment which cannot accommodate a non-Western religion such as Islam. The essay "Islamophobia in the United Kingdom," by Abbas, asserts that in contrast to much of Europe, in Britain there is no legal protection given to Muslims, only to ethnically defined religious communities, defined as Jews and Sikhs. He also highlights three case studies that have informed and contributed to British Islamophobia: the Rushdie Affair, the Danish cartoon affair, and Home Secretary Jack Straw's comments on Muslim women's dress. Zebiri's essay examines the relationship between contemporary British Islamophobia and orientalist themes of the past. She claims that a significant factor in understanding contemporary Islamophobia is a belief in the seemingly unusual capacity of Muslims and Islam to resist Western universalistic aspirations and appear to challenge prevailing trends of relativism and pluralism. Her essay reveals the extent to which non-Muslim Britons view 'Muslim otherness' through the prism of the hijab. The first decade of the twenty-first century is characterized by a growing climate of suspicion, deterioration of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the growth of Islamophobia.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Common charge is that Islam is incompatible with the realities of modernity and Western culture and values
- Islamophobia did not suddenly come into being after 9/11, it has long and deep historical roots
- Islamophobia must be recognized as a threat to the very fabric of our democratic pluralistic way of life