



BOOK REVIEW

Gabsi, Zouhir. *Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia: From Misconceptions to Reason*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2024; xxi + 329

Zouhir Gabsi's candid shared perspectives and timely publication of his book is a remarkable accomplishment during an exceptional xenophobic period in our history when communities, cultures, and perspectives continue to conflict and collide on multiple fronts. Gabsi's focus on the Islamophobic reality on the international front provides counter-arguments throughout the book to the ever-increasing misconceptions about Islam in the present era are carefully scripted. It takes courage and commitment to justice to call out escalating Islamophobic actions. Gabsi's commitment to enhancing understanding and mutually acceptable perspectives across the religious divide is a noteworthy accomplishment.

Gabsi asserts that "the problematic nature of Islamophobia lies in its inextricable relationship with racism and xenophobia or the "racialization" of Muslims" (p. 5). Islamophobic media narratives are interrogated and contested throughout the book, where he poses an important question about the political agendas of media tycoons: "What fuels Islamophobia, and who gains from its narrative?" (p. 42). Gabsi maintains that "media discourse, further discussed in Chapter 5, is often carefully crafted ..." (p. 50). Gabsi's courage in addressing the very nature of Islamophobic agendas and attacks on Islam and Muslims worldwide is commendable. He refrains from "preaching" to the world masses who are ignorant about Islam. Gabsi utilizes peaceful, religious perspectives and moral obligation to uphold peace, justice, and humanity.

He clearly states the essence of key arguments and explains the complexity of the Islamophobic label which remains detrimental to the Muslim community at large. The book is divided in four parts with nine chapters: (1) Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Islamophobia; (2) Muslim Perspectives on Islamophobia; (3) Islam: From: Misconception to Reason; (4)

Islam in the Modern World: Towards Combatting Islamophobia.

The authors' key arguments from across chapters are listed below. Chapter one "introduces the historical context of contestations about Islamophobia" (p. 24). Historical contexts place a perspective the importance for readers to trace the trajectory of the Islamophobic assault on Believers and to ascertain how the phenomenon is projected, received and re-enacted through the decades under various titles from the perspective of the Believers and non-Believers. In chapter two, Gabsi's observation of "the two central positions or trajectories: the apologist/defensive view and the intellectual interpretation..." is an important distinction carried forward in an age in which Islamophobia attacks the nerve center of Believers. The author "contextualizes Islamophobia" from Western and Islamic viewpoints (p. 24). Two important questions this chapter raises are: "What fuels Islamophobia, and who gains from its narrative?" The author makes an exemplary effort to focus on key issues in this "difficult-to-write" chapter.

In chapter three, Gabsi interrogates the vast impact of particularly "apologetic" language influence on Muslims and Islam (p. 24). In this chapter, the author presents various historical, contextual Islamic narratives of Islamophobia and carefully navigates views expressed among Muslim and Western perspectives. Chapter four extrapolates the manner in which Muslims and Muslim scholars and preachers "demonstrate how language is inextricably linked with ideology" (p. 25). Gabsi utilizes western models of discourse analysis, as he states "This chapter examines the texts using some of the fundamentals of critical discourse and the Foucauldian approach to discourse." Unfortunately, this maybe the only choice to avoid further skewed and misunderstood messages, should the Western world receive these messages through the Islamic lens and literature.

Chapter five discusses the vilification of Muslims and deals "with the notion of the 'unperson', and how Muslims have been denigrated in media and political discourses" (p. 25). This chapter contains the reality of one of the most disparaging truths, namely that Muslims are being regarded as inferior (the "unperson"), which is also the manner in which Muslims and Islam are viewed throughout centuries. In chapter six, Gabsi contends that "application of reason is feasible with Islamic teachings" (p. 155). This is an important factor in understanding Islam. Yet, "Islamophobic narratives ignore the significance of reason in Islam" and this chapter aims to debunk one significant myth about Islam, namely the place of reason in Islam. It is a significant contribution toward assimilating Muslim and Western views on Islam. Chapter seven discusses Sufism and its role as

the rebuttal of Islamophobia because it is perceived as the “softer” and more acceptable version of Islam. Gabsi encourages the broader community to revisit the relationship between Islamophobia and Sufism because it “can help to reduce Islamophobia by debunking myths” (p. 191).

Chapter eight discusses Muslims’ cultural memory (CM). It is the glue that binds Muslims in various communities and among generations. Gabsi advocates that “Muslims must rewrite their history with pride and diligence by untying the knots of inferiority complexes and taking a leading role in tracing their future trajectories” (p. 27). However, it would take a whole Muslim community to engage in a fair and appropriate manner according to Islamic principles to undertake such an enormous task. Such an effort requires a combined cultural effort across religious barriers. Last, chapter nine provides his main conclusion, main findings, and limitations of this study. The chapter identifies the limitations, and at the same time creates spaces in which whole communities together, from across religious divides and within religious sects can inform governments and communities together about the necessity for commitment to humanity first, with Muslims reiterating their Islamic obligation to abide by the fundamental principles of Islam to uphold humanity in every sphere of their lives.

Gabsi’s powerful message to current and future generations of world communities is that it places in context facts about Islamophobia, misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, and about Prophet Muhammad, the last prophet mentioned in the Qur’an. An important chapter in the book is chapter 5, as noted earlier. The chapter confronts the vilification of Muslims as the “unperson[s],” a term borrowed from George Orwell (1984) referring to the non-existence of a person. Gabsi claims that “The notion of unperson is tacitly practised, rehearsed, and manipulated by Western imperialism and invasions, aided by sympathetic media outlets” (p. 122). Within the Islamophobic dialogue about Islam and Muslims, the notion of the “unperson” completely annihilates the existence, worth, and essence of a human being.

Gabsi’s powerful contestation about the prejudiced, violent assault (of the media, and other religious and non-religious communities) upon Islam and Muslims impacting further cultural, racial, stereotypical, discriminatory, and prejudicial biases that demonize Islam and Muslims is highly commendable. He amplifies the humanitarian and moral agendas of Islam in his book (p. 8) through critical analysis of the Western world’s misinterpretation of Islam, as noted in the book via references to Prophet Muhammad as cited in hadiths

(pp. 161, 183, 192, and 200) and the Qur'an (p. 158; Q. 38:29. 2:239, 3:7, 13:19, 14:52. 38:43, 39:9, 39:21, 40:54.

Gabsi's book and arguments may be further strengthened with dedicated chapters that demonstrate the commitment of Muslims and of Islam to peaceful coexistence and justice to enhance the impact of Gabsi's message. Documenting real-world scenarios of Islamophobia, misconceptions about Islam, and genocidal acts which annihilate whole communities of Muslims requires truth-telling on personal levels of communication. Sharing of scriptures across religious boundaries, life events of atrocities that fell upon religious communities, and sharing Islam's commitment to share natural resources among world communities opens the door for peaceful coexistence. Truth-telling by victims and perpetrators of violent assault upon their persons, families, religion, existence, land and homes, among a myriad losses of fathers, mothers, babies, families, livelihood, and body parts provides a life and death moment to express pain, anger, and grieving, albeit confrontational, leading to exchange views and facts about Muslim and non-Muslim community's trauma and seeking a pathway to peaceful coexistence.

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