Once Upon a Hatred: Anti-Muslim Experiences in the USA
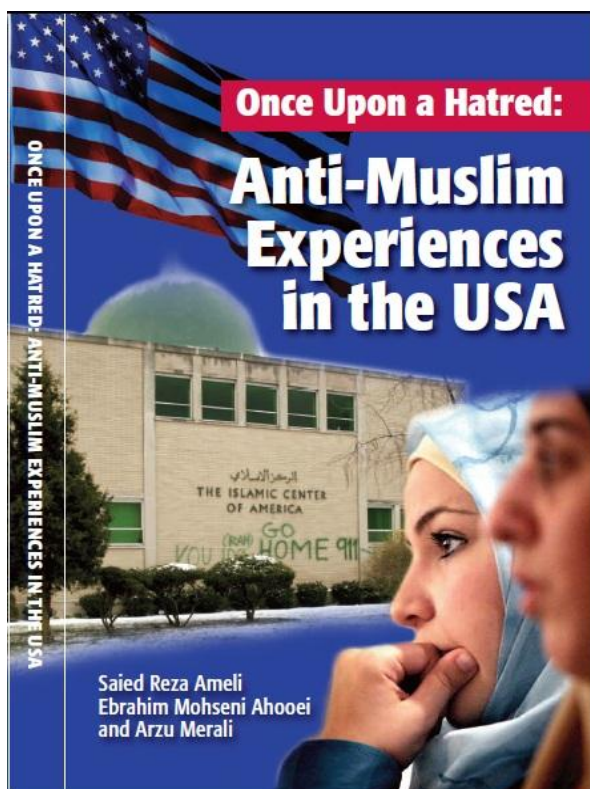
by Saied R. Ameli, Ebrahim Mohseni Ahooei and Arzu Merali

Publication date: 23 May 2013

Introduction

This book presents the findings of a survey of Muslim experiences in the USA. In addition to analysing the findings of the survey, the authors provide a historical and political context for the work they have undertaken. This includes a thorough critique of ethnocentrism in academia and in the social sciences in particular. They set this critique within the political history of the USA as a colonial enterprise from the time of Columbus through the founding of the USA until the present day. Muslims, they find, are caught up in a cycle of demonisation and social and statutory targeting that is not new but part of the US's very DNA when it comes to the treatment of people of colour within and without its shores. What emerges is a deeply disturbing picture of a community under daily physical threat, surveilled by state agencies and disciplined by law and political and media discourse.

In attempt to do more than simply deconstruct and criticise, the authors also present a strong set of recommendations are targeted at distinct groups and many are sourced from previous works that speak to the same and similar challenges. They are addressed to Law and Policy Makers, the Media, Civil Society groups including Muslim groups and discuss: the Law; Media; Securitisation; Education and Community Work. The recommendations look to previous specialised research, national commissions and the recommendations of Muslims from the survey, in the hope that a start can be made to transforming the situation.

Background:

This report is part of a project to assess the experiences of hostility and discrimination against Muslims in various states. The project sprang from the need to find a way for civil society (in lieu of any serious government undertaking in any country) to collect reliable statistics of hate crimes and discrimination in a manner that was sustainable. The traditional approach of relying on reporting or seeking out report of individual cases has been proven to be unreliable, unsustainable due to the immense financial, personnel and time resources required, and prone to under-representing the scale of the issue particularly where the minority groups in question are numerically a large and diverse population.

The pilot project findings for the UK and France were published in 201 and 2012 respectively. This book is the third publication to come out of this project. The survey of Muslims took place in California in early 2012 and 1264 persons took part.

The research method and analysis have been refined after the pilot project and the findings are analysed and presented within discrete categories – demonised media and political discourse fall within the category of ideological hatred; being mistreated, demeaned, patronised, insulted on the basis of one's faith are included in the category of being a member of a hated society (a term coined in Ameli et. Al's earlier work in 2012 on France); and finally the category of Discrimination and Double Discrimination, which includes discrimination at work or school, as well as discrimination or repercussions when reporting discrimination to supervisors or agencies.

The author set their project and the findings in a historical and political context. They begin with a critique of academia per se and social science in particular as ethnocentric and thus complicit in replicating demonised representations of 'others' against the ethnic, religious, racial, gender and political norms of the dominant community represented in the field of study i.e. white, European men. It goes on to provide a demographic overview of Muslims in the USA and the history of Muslim interaction, arrival and existence on its shores. It then provides a summary of existing literature on Muslim concerns, as well as on hate crimes, discrimination and the issues Muslim face. The sources range from academic papers, to the US State Department, decolonial texts, community organisation publications and large international surveys.

The findings of the survey are presented according to the categories referred to above, and involve both cross tabs and charts based on the quantitative findings, as well as responses to the open ended questions. The recommendations that follow look at past thoughts of commissions of enquiry in the USA, as well as other work by the authors where they apply. The authors conclude that only systemic change can bring about an end to the ceaseless demonsiation and targeting of minorities of which Muslims are simply the latest victims. They propose through their recommendations, the coming together of civil society actors to work in the fields of education, outreach, media and law to sustain and empower the existing movements for such change.

A Problem in Mainstream Intercultural Communication Research
The first chapter seeks to provides a self-critical review of the theoretical framework within which this work operate i.e. intercultural communication. This review argues that ethnic, religious and gender bias exists under the banner of scientific objectivity and that the researcher must critically reflect on how they inadvertently replicate stereotypes without interrogating research ontologies and epistemologies.

Muslims in the US – Then and Now
This chapter overviews existing research and statistics with regard to the demographics of Muslims in the USA, from polling organisations, academics and the US State Department. It brings together in one place competing narratives of immigration, the growth of Black Muslim communities and conversions amongst Hispanic communities, enslavement and pre-Columbian contact and interaction between Muslim peoples and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. It also outlines the complexity and diversity of Muslims in the USA including their concerns as outlined in existing research including mainly a concern with increased securitisation and Islamophobia.

Despite some variance in narratives, it is clear that Muslims in the USA (in contrast to their counterparts in Europe) are well-educated and mainly economically affluent.

Hate Crimes against Muslims in the US
A summary of existing research on hate crimes is provided, as well as an overview of existing hate crime legislation and procedures. The USA, on paper, has some of the best examples of hate crime laws, yet as the Recommendations at the end of the work explore, implementation and training are

inconsistent and ad hoc. This chapter also explores reports of media, political and social discourses through the lens of two key concepts: hate representation and hate environment, which are elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Additionally, existing work on attacks on mosques, their upsurge and symbolism are discussed, as well as issues persistent issues around discrimination in the workplace, and the reversal of the levelling off of Islamophobia as a result of the Presidential campaign of 2008.

Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (DHMIR)
This chapter introduces the adopted theoretical framework of the study, the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (DHMIR), first formulated in 2011 by Ameli, and developed throughout this project.

The theory holds that hate crimes – those acts of individuals and groups against others motivated by bias against a person's race, religion, sexuality, gender etc. – do not occur in a vacuum. For (a) perpetrator(s) to feel they must commit an act of hate, several conditions apply. Otherisation of the victims is key and this is done systemically and does not spring simply from the biases of individuals. Thus anti-Muslim political and media rhetoric and discourse (hate representation), laws and policies that target specific communities (hate policy), biased implementation of state laws and policies e.g. in law enforcement or schooling (hate practice) all contribute to a hate environment within which individual acts of hatred – whether violent or implicit – take place.

As a result of the hate environment, the hated society (Ameli et al, 2012) is created. The hated society is an otherised community, in this case Muslims, who suffer discrimination (whether at structural or individual levels), double discrimination (fear of or actual discrimination at the hands of institutions when reporting discrimination or hatred) and collective hate (being the subject of demonised discourse e.g. in the media, or being profiled by certain laws e.g. the Patriot Act and NDAA).

The concepts are developed in the US context upon the basis of the field work.

A Mixed Method Approach
This chapter outlines the benefits and critiques of using a mixed methods approach as is used in this project.

In the Field

Findings
Amongst the key findings are:
- 29.9 percent said they had been a victim of a hate motivated physical attack. This is the highest figure found so far in this project. In the UK the project found the figure to be 13.9% (2011) and in France 20% (2012). In the US a further: 37.9 percent reported being overlooked, ignored or denied service in a public; office/places; 39.7 percent report being treated with suspicion; 49.1 percent hearing an offensive joke or comment concerning Muslim people or about Islam.
- The research also found that there is a clear correlation between Islamic appearance (clothing, having a beard, other identifying markers) and negative experience.
- Counterintuitively, those in the middle economic class reported more experiences of bias and hatred. Reasons as to why this might, included the idea that those of a lower economic class (who generally report higher experiences) felt pressured by double discrimination and did not want to report even to this project.

- 88 percent of respondents stated they had had some sort of negative experience.
- 71. 1 percent said they has seen negative or insulting stereotypes of Muslim people in the media (news, TV, etc); 70.4 percent said they had witnessed politicians philosophise that Islam and Muslims are innately problematic; 64.9 percent said they had heard Islamophobic comments made in particular by politicians or high ranking officials; 52 percent said they had heard or witnessed Islamophobia; 45.7 percent said they had experience having their religious beliefs challenged by work colleagues/school/college peers
- The survey was developed over the pilot to try and assess respondents feelings to where they felt Islamophobia emanates and how it can be overcome. To this end:
- In the range of 0 -100, 77.7 felt that if people has a clear and correct picture of Islam there would not be this level of anti-Muslim hatred.
- A further 71 felt that those who discriminate against Muslims are highly driven by media content.
- 76 percent said they seen political policies (local or national) that negatively affect Muslim people
- 70.4 percent felt that discriminatory acts against Muslims are condoned by politicians, with 60.8% saying that politicians do not care about Muslims, 67 percent said they has seen policies or practices at work or school that negatively affect Muslims.

The demographics of Muslims surveyed for this project in California:
A total of **1268** people were surveyed.
- 55.6 percent of respondents were aged between 19 – 35.
- 49.4 percent of the respondents were male and 50.6 percent were female.
- 40.2 percent of the participants said that they were born in the US and the country of origin is highly diverse with 18 countries. In this group, Pakistan ranked the highest for place of birth (outside the US) with 8.9 percent followed by Egypt with 7.7 percent and India with 6.6 percent. People born in other countries were represented at 3 percent or less in the study. Those countries included Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Canada, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Saudi Arabia.
- 95 percent of the respondents stated they were resident in the USA.
- Over 69 percent said that less than a quarter of their neighbours were Muslims and only 14 percent reported that three quarters of their neighbours were Muslims.
- 62.3 percent were from the economic middle class. 21.5 percent said that they are from the lower economic class, while 13.6 percent categorised themselves as upper class.
- 50.4 percent of the total had finished an undergraduate programme; 16.6 had a graduate degree, and 3.8 held a PhD. 16.4 percent had finished high school and only 0.3 percent had received just primary education.
- 48.3 percent of the respondents had a job; 18.7 percent were students; 14.4 percent were jobless and looking for a job; 11.6 percent were self-employed, and 1.2 percent were retired. Of all employed people, 41.8 percent worked for the public sector while 58.2 percent said they had a job in the private sector.
- 70.7 percent of total said that they were practising Muslims, 17.8 percent said that they were highly practising.
- 3.5% said they were secular Muslim, 3.1% said they were non-religious people of Muslim origin and
- 2.4 percent said they were non-practising Muslims.

Conclusion: Multicultural or Multi-Hated Society?
The conclusion raises a critique of the idea that the US as a multicultural society. It contends that there are a multi-faceted levels of hatred creating a multi-hated society e.g. place of birth of

respondents seems to impact on the level of negative experience they face, as does gender (women face more bias), as does age etc. The research concludes with a call for collaborative advocacy and research between different otherised communities as a way of learning from

Recommendations
The authors notes that without the cooperation of the federal government and its structures, all advocates and campaigners are often left to lobby on state levels for key policy and statutory changes. Yet this is a start that has been made, and must not be undervalued as it may continue to reap rewards. Just as lobbying, protest and advocacy in California on issues of sexual orientation eventually led to a change in attitudes across North America, there is scope. The recommendations are targeted at distinct groups and many are sourced from previous works that speak to the same and similar challenges. They are addressed to Law and Policy Makers, the Media, Civil Society groups including Muslim groups and discuss: the Law; Media; Securitisation; Education and Community Work.

For further information and review copies please contact the IHRC Press Office at media@ihrc.org or call +44 20 8904 4222.