

**Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism. By Jonathan Lyons. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 272, ISBN: 978-0-231-15895-4.**

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Why has the anti-Islam discourse survived from a thousand years through now? How is it produced and deployed? And who benefits from it? These are some of the main concerns of the book under review, *Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism*. Jonathan Lyons believes that the discourse is underpinned by a number of fundamental issues, which “rarely have faced severe critical scrutiny or nuanced analysis” (p. 4).

Thematically arranged, the book consists of seven chapters. The first chapter lays the theoretical foundation of the book; it demonstrates that for the last ten centuries, the Western narratives of Islam have corrupted the true understanding of Islam. In addition, it is the anti-Islam discourse that has provided the grounds for the war on terrorism, Islamophobia, and the Clash of Civilization narrative (pp.1-2). Therefore, in order to analyse the anti-Islam discourse perpetuated by various social groups and institutions (who benefit from sustaining the discourse), Lyons uses Foucauldian methodology alongside a “toolbox” – the works of prominent classical sociologists, Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, and C. Wright Mills, as well as cultural critic, Edward Said. Lyons sets out to analyse “why it is that certain things can be thought and said about Islam and the Muslims and certain things cannot” (p. 6).

Chapter two discusses Lyons’s thematically driven approach to critically analyse the anti-Islam discourse. Following the sociologist Philip W. Sutton, Lyons states that “the absence of a thorough going sociological perspective leaves our understanding of resurgent Islam fragmented and therefore partial” (p. 21). Based on Foucault’s critical discourse analysis, Lyons examines the social condition which contributes to the construction of statements about Islam and Muslims (p. 29). In this way, Lyons endeavours to uncover how the anti-Islam discourse is formed, produced, and who its beneficiaries are.

Next, chapter three explains the formation of Islam as discourse. Lyons sees this discursive formation in its broader historical perspective, by tracing its emergence to the eleventh century Crusades. He also attempts to discuss the discourse's influence on the social, political, and intellectual domains. Lyons traces the "zero point" at which the formation of the anti-Islam discourse was started, that is, Pope Urban II's call for the Crusade. Lyons argues that prior to this, Islam was not seen as an existential threat to the whole of Christendom, but only to the Christians of the East. Lyons further states that Muslim expansionism, both in Al-Andalus and into the Byzantine Empire, presented a real threat in the form of assimilation and mass conversion to Islam. This eventually provoked the local clergy to attack any notion that Islam and Christianity could co-exist in the same social and cultural space. As a reaction, Lyons states, the clergy resorted to apocalyptic traditions; they produced strong polemical rhetoric, pejorative imagery and apologetic stereotypes around which the West's dominant view of the Islamic discourse would later coalesce (pp. 55-59). This view of Islam, which is underscored through the essential "Othering" of the Muslim, completed the process which was started by Pope Urban II's call for the Crusade. Lyons goes on to state that the formation of the anti-Islam discourse allowed for the emergence of a new social actor, the Islam expert, who acts as the "trusted intermediary between the familiar world of Us and the disquieting world of Them" (p. 66). More broadly, Islam was presented as irrational, inherently violent, spread through violence, and promotes sexual perversion. Facts which could have otherwise dispelled the anti-Islam discourse are not treated as facts at all. They are either "ignored, distorted, or never truly mastered in the first place" (p. 69). Consequently, Islam was presented in direct opposition to Christian values.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 investigate Islam's relationship with three concerns – science, violence, and women. They locate the anti-Islam discourse's views of those relationships – that Islam is irrational and anti-modern, is inherently violent, and is anti-women and sexually perverted – in their appropriate social and historical contexts. Lyons argues that while from the modern perspective there is an acknowledgement of the existence of the Islamic scientific tradition (limited to the Golden Age in the medieval age), the lack of human reason, or, in other words, Islamic religiosity (as Ernest Renan propounded) is seen as the root cause of

Muslim decline. The notion of incompatibility between religion and science was further strengthened by the writings of Ignaz Goldziher, which laid the superstructure for later prominent Orientalists such as Bernard Lewis, A. C. Crombie, David Lindberg, Toby Huff, and Edward Grant, to name a few. Employing Foucault's "reversal" approach, Lyons remarks that the other possible and obvious explanations and causes for the decline of the Islamic scientific tradition—economic malaise, geopolitical weakness, foreign invasion, collapse of other vital systems—"are rarely, if ever, given serious consideration" (p. 109). Lyons' arguments are of immense value, as they smoothly deconstruct the notion of Western monopoly on the birth of scientific tradition.

Moving on to the Western discourse of violence in Islam, Lyons states that the discourse has fuelled the war on terrorism, framed its rhetoric, shaped its public reception, distorted its policy choices and determined its outcomes (p. 113). For Lyons, the term *jihad* was hijacked by the Islam experts. At times, those who resist foreign intervention were portrayed as violent radicals. Such a view forecloses the possibility of seeing some of such resistance as the outcome of legitimate grievances, something that could have been used to redefine relations between the West and Islam. Rather, the embedded notion of Islam as essentially violent has shaped official and public understanding of Islam.

Next, Lyons delves into the relationship between Islam and women, a topic that perhaps occupies a most central place in narratives about Islam in contemporary times. It has received much attention and has shaped perception, commencing from the Enlightenment worldview. The symbols of the *harem* and veiling have remained the point of attention and contention. For the West, these symbols, Lyons explains, provoke a sense that Islam and Muslims are, in general, degrading, despotic, sexualising and backward. Consequently, the Western discourse saw in veiled women many of the root causes of the social, economic, and political ills of the Muslim world. What would later happen was the notion that the West had a moral right to fight for the rights of women and to end the despotism prevailing in the Middle East. As such, a campaign was launched in and out of the Western countries to save those 'oppressed' women. Notions such as "reason" and "pre-modern" were put forth and added to the already existing traditional narrative of sexual perversity. This acted as a bulwark in the intellectual

and moral foundations that were first inspired from the Crusade era, to the European colonial enterprise, and finally to the war on terrorism.

In the concluding chapter, Lyons propounds some significant observations. After having investigated and proposed the limitations and fallacies that underpin the dominant Western anti-Islam discourse, he endeavours “to lay the foundations for a new and more useful way of looking towards Islam and the Muslims that recognizes the distortions inherent in past efforts” (p. 192). Invoking Foucault’s principle of “reversal”, Lyons proposes to set free understanding about Islam from the monopoly of the Western discourse. He calls on the Western society and its institutions to recognise and acknowledge the “West’s enormous debt to Islamic science and philosophy”, and to open afresh a broader cultural space in the Western civilization for the Islamic history of ideas. However, a precondition towards the success of the approach, in Lyons’ view, is the major rephrasing of the West’s underlying polemical question—“What is wrong with Islam?”—to a less comfortable query: “What is wrong with us?” (p. 196). Having said this, Lyons acknowledges the need for a fundamental shift of the Western imagination of Islam and the Muslims, which, indeed, is not a simple task. It demands intellectuals in the West to take the lead to shape a more positive public discourse. It also requires those in authority and government to be ready to move away from their traditional egocentric views.

Though its theoretical observations are astute and critical, it is not likely that Lyons’ discourse would be achievable in the near future. Donald Trump’s recent election in the US (a few years after the book was written), while surprising to many of us, can be seen as the victory of the anti-Islamic elements that are insurgent in European and North American politics today. Nevertheless, the book is of immense value, for it intervenes in the anti-Islam discourse. It provides the reader with a clear understanding of the discourse, and is an important book for researchers, students, and for all those concerned with the subject.

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