Islamophobia

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Introduction

A phobia is an extreme or irrational fear of, or aversion to something. In recent times, Islamophobia is increasingly prevalent in the media. But what exactly does Islamophobia entail and is it being used currently?

Usage and Definition

Generally, it carries the meaning of general distaste towards the religion but its' usage is highly inconsistent. The term Islamophobia is commonly used in labelling crimes involving Muslims, whether Muslims be the victim or perpetrator. In the case of being a victim, Islamophobia is cited as a motivation to commit the crime against the Muslim. And if a Muslim were to commit a crime, that too is labelled Islamophobic. The term should be clarified to be either for or against Muslims. One thing consistent is that that fear is found in both cases. Fear may stem from the idea of the religion itself, or from the followers of the religion.

Fear

The panel members agreed that there definitely exists a degree of fear which accompanies the hate and negativity thrown at Muslims, all which is bundled under the term Islamophobia. Fear is not only to be afraid of something, but to be worried or concerned by it as well. There is definitely a correlation between fear and hate, but further analysis would determine how closely linked they are. Most violence targeted towards Muslims is found to have stemmed from hate, especially in the post 9/11 era. Propaganda further instigates fear which is reinforced by acts of violence carried out by Muslims, which in some cases, are even justified through texts. The media is biased in its portrayal of violence by Muslims as all

actions are classified as terrorism. For other religious groups like Christians or Jews, the same approach is not taken. In fact, normative society in North America is based on White Christianity. And deviations, like Muslims who cannot follow the standard, nor will they "reform" like Christians have, will face backlash in the form of hate and fear. Hence there is an organized and racist conditioning against Muslims. Take the Clarion Project for example, on their site they state, "Clarion Project is a non-profit organization that educates the public about the dangers of radical Islam." But such projects have received criticism for their false propaganda.

Inner Struggle

There exists a hate and fear within: Islamophobia amid Muslims. The mentality of "they don't practice like we practice" is prevalent among all groups. Increasingly the religion has become more and more restricted and specific; it has become sectarian. Major organizations and institutions are built around a core monopolized understanding. Events, conferences, and curriculums are structured around strict core concepts. But Islam cannot, and should not be monopolized in to a single understanding of application. While Islam does not reform, it can go back to the basics, back to its inclusivity based on the established principles.

Muslims, through their actions, promote and encourage Islamophobia. The constant separation from normative society does not help the fear and hate, but rather fosters it. There is no effort from Muslims to assimilate, rather the opposite happens. Islamic renditions of every social infrastructure are sought by Muslims: Islamic Schools, meat shops, clothing stores, etc. This results in Muslims being labelled as *others* from a community, and not a part of it. Islam itself doesn't segregate from society, Muslims do.

Islamophobia is a problem caused by Muslims; segregating feeds into the hate of Islamophobia, in being highlighted as others. In fact, there is a promotion to segregate, to obtain an "Islamic identity" different from the status quo. This concept is backwards as culture and religion help shape one another. While there remains no compromising in religion, culture is free to evolve within those bounds. Even the sunnah was a culture of a particular time and place. The fear of becoming too "westernized" is to hold on to the traditional sect, a set method of practice which stemmed from a particular culture as well. It makes no sense to

continue to push monopolized identities which came about from cultures of different eras, often within a few hundred years.

Islamism

From the established ideologies, there exists an imposing of theocracy on the wider community. As a result, it is likely that people fear theocracy more than the religion of Islam. An argument can be made that the religion is a private endeavour through personal interpretation that cannot be imposed on others. The monopolization of the religion takes away the aspect of personal and private practice: everyone must belong to a group.

The Prophet's mission was to spread monotheism. But as time went on, it is debatable whether expansion was political or religious. In the current environment, a lot of fear stems from the idea of sharīʿah law. Islam remains one of the most political religions. Even the collection of the sciences such as fiqh, tafsir, etc. can be attributed to political motivations. Thus, they will be found to be plagued with political interpretations. Historically, groups have debated with regards to the motivations of Islam, whether it be political or personal. Islamophobia makes sense if political Islam was the only option. But realistically, not all Muslims practice the same way. As time goes on, especially in western lands, the normative practice is slowly moving away from a systemic political version of Islam to a personal private practice.

Politicizing Islam

Common understanding is that political Islam is required to be able to practice the religion. The notion is that without the systemic regulation, the laws of Allah cannot be properly established or regulated. While systemic dissemination of the religion does help propagate the religion, there exists the underlying problem of the agenda to establish the religious laws or influence globally through politicization. All groups agree that declaring monotheism is the first step, but whether the second step is establishment of the religion among the masses is highly debated. To practice individually does not necessarily require a

system. However, a system can help guide the individual practice so long as it does not limit and monopolize a particular methodology.

Conclusion

Islamophobia as a concept is unclear, it is not clearly defined in its present-day usage. It is found being used both for and against Muslims. The negativity associated with Islamophobia likely stems from fear surrounding the political nature of Islam imposed by Muslims. Their allegiance to particular monopolized versions of Islam alienate themselves from the greater community. This fosters further negative feelings which are labelled Islamophobic. However, Islam does not need to be a monopoly motivated through political goals. An individual approach to Islam is still an option, the personal and private practice established through known principles. Muslims have to make an effort to expose this side as most Islamophobics view political Islam as the one true Islam.