

Book Reviews

Muslim Americans, Islam, and the "War on Terrorism" at Home and Abroad

Review Article by Amaney Jamal and Sunaina Maira

Bin Laden, Islam, and America's New "War on Terrorism," by As'ad AbuKhalil. New York: Seven Stories/Open Media, 2002. 106 pages. \$8.95 paper.

Namaste Sharon: Hindutva and Sharonism Under U.S. Hegemony, by Vijay Prashad. New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2003. 111 pages. Rs. 75.

Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims, ed. by Elaine C. Hagopian. London, UK and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004. xi + 238 pages. Notes to p. 308. Index to p. 318. Contribs. \$75 cloth; \$22.95 paper.

Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears and Aspirations, ed. by Zahid Bukhari, Sulayman Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John Esposito. New York: AltaMira Press, 2004. xlii + 379 pages. Index to p. 394. \$75 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

Since the events of September 11, 2001 there has been an outpouring of writing and scholarship that focuses on the relationship of Muslim Americans to the United States (the nation) and the relationship between the United States (the state) and the countries involved in the "war on terrorism." Although some of these works address the construction of Muslim American identity as a process shaped by both domestic and international factors, most of these books have not taken into account the simultaneous effects of domestic and international geopolitical pressures on Muslim American identity. Today, Muslim Americans reside in an arena where the multiculturalist debate about the politics of cultural inclusion in the United States coexists with the domestic "profiling" of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans as well as the particular political agenda and military interventions of the United States in the Middle East and South Asia.

Four new works provide critical perspectives and important information that shed light on the political implications of the construction of "Muslim-ness" and the "Muslim world" in the post-9/11 era, and even earlier, in the context of US interests in the Middle East and South Asia and the US government's profiling of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans. While the domestic war on terrorism targets both Muslims and Arabs, and also South Asians, in the United States, there is often a conflation of "Muslim" and "Arab" identities, both in public and academic discourse. Two of the books we review here focus specifically on Islam in their titles, while the other two works address questions of Islam and Islamophobia in the context of Arab and South Asian nation-states. The categories of "Muslim," "Muslim American," and the "Muslim world" are political constructions that sometimes elide factors such as the specific history of the relationships of Arabs and of Arab and South Asian nation-states to the United States.

THE DOMESTIC "WAR ON TERRORISM"

Two recent monographs brilliantly illuminate the challenges Muslim Americans have faced in the United States both before and after 9-11: *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, edited by Elaine C. Hagopian, and *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears and Aspirations*, edited by Zahid Bukhari *et al.* Although these books address the key issues and concerns facing Muslim Americans today, each book captures from a different angle the multiple obstacles that Muslims must overcome on a daily basis.

Muslims' Place in the American Public Square discloses, in an elaborate and sophisticated manner, what it means to be Muslim in America today. Chapters in this volume, written by authoritative scholars on the Muslim American community, outline the multiple factors that shape the civic and political life of Muslim Americans. Recognizing that Islam is both new and old and local and global, this compilation of essays enriches our understanding about what it means to be Muslim in the United States. The average Muslim is concerned about a plethora of issues that arise in everyday life experiences. These issues include workplace religious accommodation, raising children, immigrant incorporation and adjustment, homeland attachments, theological interpretations about citizenship rights and duties in America, and similarities and differences within this vast and multi-racial sub-group.

According to the authors represented in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*, Muslims have striven for decades — not as temporary bystanders or as onlookers, but as active, participating citizens — to adjust to life in the United States. The volume by Bukhari *et al.* reveals a history of learning and adjustment by Muslim Americans, who, as the contributors demonstrate, have always been socially marginal. According to the accounts provided by Bukhari *et al.*, the Muslim community has tended to privilege the process of becoming American over the process of combating cultural stereotypes that define the Muslim as "other." The contributors to *Muslims' Place* spend the bulk of their efforts documenting the community's attempts to find a cozy enough space in the public sphere.

For Muslim Americans, the struggle for social and cultural acceptance has encompassed the kinds of challenges faced by other immigrant and minority groups. Both Muslim immigrants and African Americans, for instance, have had to navigate successfully the American landscape in order to improve their economic conditions. As captured by this book, however, the Muslim path to the public sphere has also been accompanied by specifically Islamic issues like religious renewal in both *fiqh* and *ijtihad* models of Islamic jurisprudence. In order to make sense of their daily lives, Muslims needed to discover compatibilities between the American way of life and Islamic political thought. Islamic political thought has a long history of suppositions on political practice. These models have been less useful in many parts of the Arab world due to authoritarian patterns of governance, which have stifled active Muslim political engagement. Muslim jurists, then, began to focus on notions of pluralism within Islamic political theory and practice in the United States. On the theological side of the debate, prominent Muslim scholars (e.g., Taha Jabir al-Alwani) have linked Islamic political discourse to citizenship requirements in the United States. Ultimately, they believe that the good American citizen is also the good Muslim citizen, both of which in their view bode well for the ideal Muslim.

Muslims' Place in the American Public Square demonstrates the ways in which Muslims have, in the past several decades, begun to institutionalize their presence in mainstream public life. Mosques, Islamic schools, Muslim advocacy groups, and community centers have all grown in number since the 1970s. These community organizations often represent general Muslim concerns, like schooling, discrimination, and hate crimes. But

Muslim politics also center on several cleavages that lead to differing policy preferences within the community. Muqtedar Khan notes an important disjunction in foreign policy preferences between newcomers and the older Muslim generation. Those Muslim Americans who are stronger supporters of social justice issues tend also to be stronger supporters of the Democratic Party, while more conservative Muslims often lend their support to the Republican Party. In most cases, Muslims cannot easily find the ideal candidate to represent both their foreign policy interests and the moral and ethical values they uphold. And although these incompatibilities exist both philosophically and practically, it is precisely these incompatibilities that have generated extensive and vibrant debate within Muslim communities across the nation. These discussions and introspective evaluations have shaped, and continue to shape, the ways Muslims engage with other mainstream sectors. Muslims actively attempt to influence the political process through participation, campaign donations, and active religious involvement. Further, Muslims engage in interfaith activities, thereby attempting to create a better understanding between different faiths in this country.

This book highlights, in precise detail, the heterogeneity of the Muslim community. The book shatters the myth that the Muslim community in the United States is either ideologically or racially homogenous. A special section in the book is dedicated to the majority — and most overlooked group — of Muslims in the United States: Black Muslims. Excellent accounts of the demographic composition of Muslims in this country further highlight the rich diversity of the Muslim community.

Muslims' Place in the American Public Square captures the accomplishments and the issues Muslims still face in the United States. The essays comprising this book emphasize the ways Muslims have addressed the multiple factors that shape their political, social, and economic incorporation — from personal negotiations to involvement in religious and community organizations. Extremely insightful, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square* focuses on Muslim barriers to incorporation and Muslim responses to facilitate passage into the public sphere. The public sphere is characterized, explicitly or implicitly, as a hospitable domain, receptive to, and inclusive of, all minority groups.

Civil Rights in Peril takes issue with the supposed inclusivity of the public sphere. Elaine Hagopian examines the nature of the public sphere in specific reference to the events of September 11, 2001, which highlighted the *inhospitality* of the American public sphere to Muslims and, especially, to Arab Americans. In great detail, this book charts the ways Muslim Americans have become targets of government harassment. Documenting FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) interrogations of community members, detentions, deportations, and countless other civil liberty violations of Muslim Americans, *Civil Rights in Peril* paints the portrait of a disenfranchised population. Legislation accompanying the all-encompassing Patriot Act has specifically targeted the Muslim community, and the overwhelming power placed in the hands of the Executive branch has made judicial bodies less effective in protecting Muslim American rights. In the aftermath of 9-11, Muslim Americans are overwhelmingly vulnerable to overreaching policies that presume the community's guilt.

Criticism of the mainstream media emerges as a second layer of scrutiny in *Civil Rights in Peril*. Alongside the heavy-handed tactics of the Department of Homeland Security, the sensationalizing tendencies of the media reinforce the presumption of cultural guilt. Some media outlets, for instance, maintain viewer interest by playing up the rhetoric of the “war on terrorism” to emphasize a domestic fight against Muslims in the United States; the abuse of language in mainstream reportage is a key point of interest for the authors of *Civil Rights in Peril*. The willingness to characterize certain amicable relations between Muslim community members and law enforcement officials as hostile, or mutually agreed upon interrogations as “raids,” illustrates the ways in which the media benefits

from its portrayals of Muslim Americans as enemies of law enforcement. Although in many cases the actual news stories about presumed terrorist activities have little or anything to do with the Muslims involved, the mere allusion to such a connection raises suspicion of Muslims as terrorists among the mainstream population. Similarly, as the contributors to this volume show, the media has covered instances when there are actual raids on Muslim organizations, businesses, houses of worship, and homes. However, when no incriminating evidence is found, the media does not follow-up on the story, leaving the impression that raids actually result in the curbing of terrorism.

In addition to outlining the ways in which the public sphere is not necessarily a hospitable space for Muslim Americans, *Civil Rights in Peril* directly links the events in the United States to the larger geopolitical realities that inform US foreign policy. Of most concern to Muslim Americans are key scholars who advise the Bush administration on issues relating to Islam and Muslim Americans. Will Youmans' essay demonstrates that several prominent scholars have often been documented making anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim statements. Yet, these scholars have both credibility and legitimacy in policy-making circles. In a time of crisis, where more — and not less — understanding is required to ensure that Muslims do not become further marginalized, the power these policy-makers wield creates more incentive for anti-Muslim backlash.

Several essays in *Civil Rights in Peril* delve further into this morass of anti-Muslim sentiment. According to Samih Farsoun, a new coalition of interests has formed in the United States, which tends to be anti-Muslim. This coalition includes the Christian Right and the neoconservatives. Although each group has different motives and agendas, their complicity galvanizes anti-Muslim positions that have had catastrophic effects on the Muslim American community. From government policy that singles out Muslim Americans, to a media regime that continues to bolster its ratings by placing the threat of terrorism on the shoulders of Muslim Americans, to policy-makers and advisors who vilify all Muslims, to a coalition that in its very essence is anti-Muslim, the "Public Sphere" is anything but a hospitable place for civic, cultural, social, and political interaction. It is in this space that Muslim Americans are deemed evil and despised by multiple actors who wield more power than they do.

Taken together, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square* and *Civil Rights in Peril* offer two distinct but overlapping accounts of Muslim American experiences in the United States. On the one hand, both books try to account for what Muslims are doing to facilitate incorporation and acceptance into the American public sphere. *Muslims' Places in the American Public Square* examines the paths Muslims have been taking to ensure full acceptance in mainstream American life, both from within their own communities and at more systemic, institutional levels. Muslim Americans have been adamant about the fact that a Muslim identity is not anti-American. These books seem to suggest that American Muslims are, can be, or desire to be, a part of the fabric of American multicultural life. Yet, as Muslims continue to work within their communities to facilitate incorporation, it is clear to us that they are also operating within a context that does not necessarily support their inclusion. This is where *Civil Rights in Peril* begins; it raises serious questions about the status of Muslims in the United States. Although Muslims may want to have free access to the public sphere, the public sphere may not want to host them. According to *Civil Rights in Peril*, the spaces available to Muslims in the public sphere are gradually shrinking. On the one hand, Muslim Americans strive for acceptance, but on the other, they have the double burden of proving they are worthy of it. Islamophobia in the mainstream will prevent full acceptance of Muslim and Arab Americans, and for citizens to be effective, they cannot be relegated to spaces of marginality. Advocacy groups may be well suited for this confrontation, but the human toll on individuals is great indeed. It is the Muslim youth population that encounters these contradictory sentiments: learning about the ide-

als of inclusion with simultaneously experiencing patterns of exclusion on a daily basis across public schools in the United States. *Civil Rights in Peril* paints a grim picture of Muslim Americans in America — subject to extensive harassment and further marginalized.

Reading these two texts in tandem dramatizes the thinness of the line between acceptance and rejection of Muslim Americans. While multiculturalism is capable of absorbing Islam as an acceptable cultural, and even in some instances, religious difference, the nature of the political relations between the United States and the countries from which many Muslim Americans originate has meant that their civil and political rights are often overridden in the public sphere. The public sphere today seems all the more precarious for Muslim Americans. It is inconceivable, however hard Muslims strive to attain equal civil rights in the public sphere, that they will be able to do so on their own. Mainstream American society must want Muslims to be included in the public sphere as a precondition to their actual inclusion.

THE "WAR ON TERRORISM" OVERSEAS

As'ad AbuKhalil's *Bin Laden, Islam and America's New "War on Terrorism"* and Vijay Prashad's *Namaste Sharon: Hindutva and Sharonism Under U.S. Hegemony* both provide astute insights into the ways in which the domestic and foreign agendas of the United States *vis à vis* Islam and Muslims are linked, particularly after the events of September 11 but also well before, and hinge on an ideological discourse about Islam, terrorism, and fundamentalisms. AbuKhalil focuses on US policies in the Middle East during the Cold War and, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, on US responses to Islamist movements (especially Usama bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida) in the Arab and Muslim world. Prashad's book examines the role of US foreign policy in shaping the alliance between India and Israel and between right-wing Indian American organizations and Zionist groups in the United States, after 9/11. The two works are complementary and fill in each other's gaps, for AbuKhalil does not include a discussion of South Asia or of South Asians in the United States, while Prashad's primary focus is on South Asia and Islam but not on the Arab world or Arab Americans *per se*.

It is illuminating to juxtapose these works by Prashad and AbuKhalil, for both scholars are interested, from their respective Middle Eastern and South Asian studies vantage points, in analyzing the role of Islam and Islamist movements in relation to the ideological, political, and historical contours of the US war on terrorism, within and outside the United States. Their research touches on the assault on civil rights of South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans but they mainly provide an international analysis that complements the US focus of the works by Bukhari and Hagopian. The link between the domestic and international faces of the war on terrorism, for Prashad and AbuKhalil, is US policies that have overtly or covertly supported oppressive regimes and Islamist movements from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan, in furtherance of US national interests in the region.

AbuKhalil seems to be responding, implicitly, to the question posed by some in the United States, "Why do they hate us?" — a formulation that detaches the events of 9/11 from their political and historical context: His book situates the emergence of bin Ladin's movement in the context of US support for oppressive Islamist groupings from the Wahhabi base in Saudi Arabia to the *mujaheddin*, later to become the Taliban, in the 1980s in Afghanistan, as well as US opposition to Arab nationalist movements in Nasirite Egypt and in Palestine. AbuKhalil shows that the rhetoric of "the clash of civilizations" that has been used, from the Cold War on, to justify US military interventions in the Middle East is a cloak for American policies aimed at domination of the region and access to its resources, especially oil. He reminds readers that Orientalist scholarship (e.g., works by

Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington) about Arabs and Muslims has been used to link Islam and Arabs to "terrorism"; this is, of course, not a new critique but is still timely. In addition, AbuKhalil provides a helpful analysis of "theologocentrism," or the "direct connection between Islamic theology and the political conditions of the Arab and Muslim world," as a problematic explanation for the presumed causes of "Muslim terrorism." As AbuKhalil (p. 29) observes of Islamist movements characterized as the "bad Muslims," that is, those opposed to US interests: "It is not theology that drives these clerics, but politics and economics." AbuKhalil is not sympathetic to Islamic fundamentalism as a religious or social doctrine, professing his belief in "secular humanism" (p. 13) at the outset, but he is critical of the double standard applied in the United States to other fundamentalist movements, whether Jewish or Christian (p. 30).

In a similar vein, Prashad argues that Islamophobia provides a rhetorical hinge for the "anti-terrorist" discourses and policies of the United States, Israel, and India, especially after 9/11. His book traces the shift in India from support of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), since the non-aligned movement linked Nehruvian-Nasserite regimes during the Cold War, to the reversal of this policy under the Hindu nationalist government, which conducted its own repression and persecution of Muslims within India from 1988 to 2004. With the rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India officially established relations with Israel and began buying half of its arms from Israel (p. 63), in addition to collaborating on nuclear and missile defense and sharing intelligence. Prashad argues that right-wing Zionism, or "Sharonism," and Hindutva are fundamentalist discourses and programs that have driven the India-Israel entente and the alliance between right-wing groups in the United States, such as that between the Indian American Political Action Committee (USINAPAC) and AIPAC and the American Jewish (AJ) Committee. Prashad has uncovered some interesting details in documenting these organizational networks: since 2000, these groups began meeting to develop lobbying strategies to achieve their common goal of "fighting the same extremist enemy" and "communicating their will" in the United States, according to their Washington, DC regional director (pp. 76-77). The Indian American Center for Political Awareness in Washington, DC, another group formed to influence US lawmakers' policies on India, has shared staff with AIPAC, reportedly to emulate the political strategies of pro-Israel groups (p. 75).

Prashad is critical of the anti-Muslim politics of these groups. Unlike AbuKhalil, he is also critical of religious fundamentalism as such, and of Islamist movements in Kashmir and Palestine in particular. But he aims to uncover the larger picture of "imperialism" in which Islamist movements emerge, balancing the external critique of Islam as a "one-dimensional tragedy" with the possibility of progressive responses to fundamentalist movements of all stripes (p. 80). Neither book really deconstructs the term "fundamentalism" (e.g., by showing its relation to class or gender factors in the context of modernity), but both clearly point to the ways in which this notion is an ideological weapon in the war on terrorism.

The strength of these works is their analysis of the use of "terrorism" as an ideological discourse about violence that often evades a focus on state-sponsored terror, not just by the United States, but also by states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. AbuKhalil considers "Islamic terrorism" one of the most "extreme manifestations" of opposition to US policies (p. 88). He is perhaps more interested than is Prashad in explaining why the "war on terrorism" is wrong for pragmatic and policy reasons, not just on moral grounds (p. 97). Prashad, too, calls in his conclusion for a "programme of authentic security," although he defines this as based more generally on principles of economic justice and "human freedom" (p. 96). The discourse of "state security" (whether in the United States, India, or Israel) is clearly suspect for both authors, and exposed by them as part of a larger program of what Prashad calls the "evangelical imperialism" of the United States (p. 94).

A larger, and very important, question posed by Prashad and AbuKhalil, explicitly or implicitly, is: what kinds of alliances have been, and could be, forged in the post-9/11 era? For the most part, both books focus on right-wing movements and alliances, addressing the issue of liberal or progressive affiliations only implicitly or in passing. According to Prashad, the Hindutva-Zionist alliance is part of a “global alliance of fear and force” (p. 96) that is based on a shared hatred of Muslims and not necessarily on a love of either group for each other, despite structural similarities between affluent Indian Americans and Jewish Americans as presumed “model minorities” (p. 86). Other kinds of less overtly right-wing alliances are mentioned by AbuKhalil (pp. 43-44), who notes the complicity of American liberal feminism with US national interests and military campaigns in the Middle East, such as the Feminist Majority’s support for the war in Afghanistan in the name of female liberation. In general, both books do not really offer a gendered analysis, but the scope of their arguments is broad, historically and geographically, and they take on a range of issues. While Prashad does not address the question of gender directly, he is broadly concerned about “visions of social justice” (p. 80) and explicitly raises the question of a “politics of solidarity” (pp. 89, 96) that would work toward such visions. Given the focus of both books on right-wing responses to the US “war on terrorism,” neither is able to grapple explicitly with what secular or progressive responses might look like after 9-11, though *Namaste Sharon* makes allusions to the model of “Indo-Arab solidarity” exemplified by the non-aligned movement and to critiques of globalization resisting “IMFundamentalism” (p. 96).

Prashad and AbuKhalil have offered pithy political treatises that are timely and important interventions in the current historical moment. When read in conjunction with the works mentioned earlier, they provide an astute analysis of how the rhetorical and political strategies that have been used to define “Islam” and “terrorism” have long concealed a much more complex picture of political and historical forces that have connected the Middle East and South Asia to US national interests. It is amidst this rhetorical debate, overly simplistic and stereotypical, that Muslim Americans find themselves cornered on a daily basis.

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