

Islamophobia and Securitization: Religion, Ethnicity and the Female Voice

Tania Saeed, **Islamophobia and Securitization: Religion, Ethnicity and the Female Voice**, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 231 pp.

Reviewed by Mr. Abdul Basit*

Tania Saeed has set a clear and consciously critical understanding to the everyday mechanisms of Islamophobia in its contemporary form in her first book. This book (*Islamophobia and Securitization*) is a highly critical academic understanding into unexplored and explored themes around radicalization, race, colonialism, immigration, multiculturalism, gender, security and terrorism. Saeed has fabricated an important content which facilitates acumen into the everyday experiences of Muslim women that provides insight into the complexity of racism, nationalism and Islamophobia in their oft-shifting forms.

This book explores everyday realities of young Muslim women in Britain who are portrayed as antithetical to the British way of life in media and political discourse. Saeed also focused to sightsee how geopolitical events and national tragedies continue to implicate individuals and communities at the domestic and local level that have no connection to such tragedies and events which being associated with a religio-ethnic identity. Her research explores the experiences, encounters, responses and reactions to Islamophobia and the British state's counter terrorism agenda through a narrative study of female Pakistani and British Muslim students with Pakistani heritage in universities across England. The findings are important here to illustrate the nature of discrimination encountered the Muslim Pakistani female students in a socio-political context that continues to securitize and problematize both their ethnic and religious identities.

First chapter of this book begins with explanation of the Muslim community in Britain by illustrating a diversity of religiosity based on ethnicity, sect and culture which is often overlooked when Muslims are homogenized as a single category in media and political rhetoric (p.14).

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Saeed stated that, in Britain's imperialist history Islamophobia is situated within an ideological Orientalist struggle where the heart of Islamophobia is the maintenance of the violent hierarchy between the idea of the West and Islam (p.5). She contended that, Islamophobia and securitization highlights the radicalized religion and gendered identity of the educated Muslim. She argued that, Islamophobia takes the form of a 'Pakophobia' where both identities become problematic in the socio-political imagination (p.4). The narratives of the respondents were collected in this book between 2010 and 2012 at a time when the Pakistani Muslim identity was highly securitized because of the 'Afghan-Pakistan' problem i.e. the 'war on terror' and the eventual killing of Usama bin Laden in Pakistan (p.12).

In chapter-2 Saeed argues that the 'Pakistani immigrant' was categorized by the Britain as 'South Asian' in 1980s. This chapter further focuses on the British South Asian and on the British Pakistani identity (p.14). The author stated that the male is portrayed as a physical threat and the Pakistani Muslim female is viewed as a victim of a particular culture. However, it traces the evolution of the tragedies of 9/11 and 7/7 securitize the problematic British Muslim Pakistani explored in the counter terrorism policies of Britain (p.27). The second part of the chapter engages with narratives of young British Muslims with Pakistani heritage that explores how Muslim and Pakistani identities by media and political actors have been challenged (p.26). Saeed mentioned that, while the British Muslims become politicized around their Muslim identity and the reaction of the 'white' host state and community reinforced the 'alien' status of this politicized discourse (p.31).

Chapter three focuses on the securitization of the veiled figure and its implication for both veiled and non-veiled Muslim women. Saeed sightsees how the Muslim female identity oscillates between the oppressed victim and the hidden radical (p.58). Moreover, this chapter explores how 'degree of religiosity' determined by physical signifier impacts on how Islamophobia is experienced. She stated that, the level of acceptance also varies; where the burqa/niqab is perceived as less acceptable to the basic hijab but the non-veiled Muslim is the most acceptable member of the Muslim community.

In chapter-4 writer focuses on the ‘securitized’ Muslim student. This susceptibility has drawn universities into an Orwellian framework of monitoring and surveillance and the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 was placed; that shows a ‘statutory’ responsibility on universities to inform the students at risk of radicalization. The second part of this chapter highlights, how this fear of radicalization has resulted in security about the educated Muslim identity by exploring the narratives of Islamic Student Society (ISoc) in particular the female wings of ISocs (p. 94). Chapter-5 examines the hyper-securitization of the Muslim Pakistani identities especially during the period of 2009-2011 when Afghan-Pak problem was at its peak. For many of the Pakistani Muslim women, this hyper-securitization takes the form of a Pakophobia, where being both Muslim and Pakistani creates a greater sense of vulnerability and insecurity (p.119).

Chapter-6 explores how young Muslim women are challenging the dominant discourse that informs their realities as discussed in previous chapters by the simple act of *answering back*. Saeed in this chapter examines the different pockets of resistance and dialogue between young people in common room in universities and outside in the streets, as they attempt to take control of a meta-narrative that continues to inform and impact their everyday lives (p.150-155). In the last chapter of this book Saeed concludes by exploring the implications of the discussion for Muslims in Britain and in other countries of the West.

It is very important to counter the threats of Muslims; so the narrative in this book reveals how the existing policy of counter terrorism is counterproductive that breeding greater insecurity and suspicion (p.169-175). The conclusion also highlights the experiences of Muslim communities across Europe and the USA where similar policies of surveillance and insecurity continue to implicate innocent Muslims.

Tania Saeed’s study has not only been instrumental in challenging stereotypes but also providing insights about the problematic nature of counterterrorism policies. This book is also useful for both academics working on Muslim communities and policy analysts not just in the UK but also in Europe and in USA. This book is very important when the narratives of British/Muslim/Pakistani women are at the center of the

conversation, rather than pushed to the periphery. *Islamophobia and Securitization* will be interesting to scholars and students researching Muslims in the West, in particular sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists.