

The Mainstreaming of Islamophobia in Western States

News:

On Monday 7th December, front-runner for the US Republican presidential candidacy, Donald Trump called for a, *“total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the US.”* He previously declared his support for the registering and tracking of all Muslims who live in the country and for them to carry special ID cards which bears similarities to the fascist policy adopted by the Nazis against Jews in Europe. Trump has not been alone in this open expression of anti-Muslim rhetoric. His rival Republican candidates for presidential nomination have followed suit. Both Florida Governor Jeb Bush and US Senator Ted Cruz have stated that the US should only accept Christian Syrian refugees for resettlement in the country due to the ‘Terror-risk’ that Muslim refugees may pose, while Ben Carson likened Syrian refugees to ‘rabid dogs’ and stated in a CNN interview, *“I would have problems with somebody who embraced all the doctrines associated with Islam; if they are not willing to reject Shariah and all the portions of it that are talked about in the Qur’an.”*

Comment:

Many commentators and politicians – domestically and internationally - have rightly condemned Trump’s outrageous and abhorrent comments. However, what has been absent is the condemnation of the US’s secular democratic system which allows such bigoted remarks from Trump and his like to be openly expressed and entertained under the dubious label of political discourse, rather than being classified as crimes of incitement of religious or racial hatred. These US Republican Presidential candidates are by no means alone in publically propagating this anti-Muslim bigotry. The media in the US, and indeed within other Western secular states have also been given a free-hand to promote this inflammatory, dangerous, and divisive Islamophobic venom, licensed by the liberal value of ‘freedom of expression’ and justified under the disguise of creating debate and discussion. CNN presenter Chris Cuomo for example called Muslims, *“unusually violent”* and *“unusually barbaric”*. Bill O’Reilly, a well-known anchor on Fox News described Islam as *“a destructive force”*, while the media station provided a platform to a member of a far-right group who promoted the false, inflammatory accusation that Muslims were organising secret paramilitary communes that were poised to commit acts of terrorism on US soil. Andrea Tantaros, another Fox News host suggested that the violent actions of ISIS were typical of Islamic behaviour and history, arguing that the, *“only thing these people understand”* is a *“bullet to the head.”* In a similar vein, on Friday 4th December, Jerry Falwell Jr., President of Liberty University, one of the largest and most influential evangelical colleges in the US urged a gathering of 10,000 students and staff to carry concealed weapons. He stated, *“I’ve always thought if more good people had concealed carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in.”* And in the UK, The Sun Newspaper recently ran a false and provocative front page headline suggesting that 1 in 5 Muslims in the UK support terrorist actions committed by groups such as ISIS. Although such comments and news pieces have been condemned by many, an environment has been created within many secular states where Islamophobic journalists, politicians, far-right groups, and individuals feel relatively comfortable, indeed empowered to express their xenophobic views in a free manner, and furthermore believe that it’s well within their right to do so.

There is no doubt therefore that this anti-Muslim bigotry has become mainstream within these societies and normalized within the political realm. Indeed, the politics of Islamophobia has become the dish of the day in the political life of such secular societies, where it is employed as a tool by politicians and parties to garner support amongst a public that has become increasingly suspicious and fearful of Islam due to the relentless political and media hysteria generated towards Muslims and their beliefs. In France for example, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front Party, once seen as a fringe movement due to its extreme xenophobic views that have their roots in Nazi ideology, won first place in the initial round of the country's recent regional elections. This is a woman who compared Muslims praying on the streets to Nazi occupation and called for non-pork meals in French schools to be banned.

Surely serious questions need to be raised about the credibility of a system which permits bigotry to be used as an acceptable electioneering tool and become a normalized theme of political debate. Surely doubt should be cast upon the validity of any political model that has allowed such abhorrent attitudes to move from the fringes of society to the centre of politics, or that increases the popularity of politicians, propelling them to front-runners in leadership campaigns, based upon their harbouring and expressing of such views.

It is to be expected that some racists and bigots will exist within any society. But what is astonishing is that the secular, democratic system which has enabled dangerous xenophobic ideas to become mainstream within societies is still marketed to the world as the best model by which to govern a state, while Islam, the very ideology they attack and vilify provided a formula of beliefs and laws to eradicate such noxious views from people 1400 years ago as well as an unrivalled approach of guaranteeing respect, rights and protection for the religious minorities it ruled. The classical scholar Imam Qarafi stated regarding the responsibility of the Khilafah to the dhimmi (non-Muslim citizen of the state), *"It is the responsibility of the Muslims to the People of the Dhimma to care for their weak, fulfil the needs of the poor, feed the hungry, provide clothes, address them politely, and even tolerate harm from them even if it was from a neighbour....The Muslims must also advise them sincerely on their affairs and protect them against anyone who tries to hurt them or their family, steal their wealth, or violates their rights."*

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