Book Review: *Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia,* edited by Sharmin Sadequee, University of Alberta Press: Edmonton, 2025.

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Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia, an edited collection by Sharmin Sadequee, thoughtfully examines Islamophobia in various geographic, social, and political contexts. Sadequee explores how Islamophobia is not just a form of racism but has specifically religious connotations that separate it from conventional iterations of racism alone. The book aims to "[shift] attention from representations of Islam and the things that Muslims do that cause their racialization to the foundational logic and structural frameworks of the societies, populations, and systems that do the racializing" (xxii). Building on previous works that suggest the contemporary rhetoric around Islam and Muslims reinscribes 'us vs. them' narratives, the contributors to this book illustrate how normative secularism subordinates Muslim populations by governing race, religion, and gender through perpetuating Islamophobia. The work is divided into three sections, "Post-Secularity, Ethnosphere, and Neoliberalism," "Law, Gender, and Secular Translations," and "Combatting Compounded Islamophobia."

Long characterized as 'security threats' and 'religious extremists,' particularly since 9/11, Muslims have been the focus of much counterterrorism policy. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd opens the first section of the collection by putting American and Western counterterrorism policy into the context of religious interventionism in foreign policy, highlighting how counterterrorism policy often focuses on religion and posits the rhetoric around US exceptionalism (freedom of religion, democracy, tolerance, etc.). In Hurd's discussion she finds that counterterrorism measures provide support for "US and European-friendly" religions while subordinating their

rivals, and in so doing, counterterrorism measures frame out 'free' and 'moderate' religions that align with US interests against 'violent' religions that lead to extremism. In so doing, these counterterrorism measures actually exacerbate the religious tensions that they seek to quell. In this section, adding further discussion on far-right extremism and its connection to Islamophobic violence would add insight into this pressing contemporary issue.

Many nations frequently relegate Muslim communities to the status of outsiders. Dustin J. Byrd uses the concept of 'ethno' to argue that, although Muslims can gain legal citizenship in Western countries, they remain framed as 'inherent aliens' in the white ethnosphere, where they remain the ethnic and/or cultural Other. Alain Gabon specifically examines how Islamophobia in France, though having historical roots, is constantly reignited contemporarily, and is debated, theorized, and justified in French political media as well as by France's intellectual and artistic elites, resulting in the stigmatization of Muslims. Gabon argues that French *laïcité* is applied to "civil society and the population itself" which violates the "constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion" (55). Moreover, the application of many of France's new laws do not affect other religious minority communities in the same ways as they do Muslims.

While the framework of Islamophobia is entwined with the movement of capital, economic systems, and global finances, Jinan Bastaki discusses states that grant visa waivers for Muslim citizens of Gulf Arab states, and private enterprises that cater their businesses to Muslim tourists. In this way, these states and enterprises access Muslim capital while simultaneously ensuring that these Muslims do not remain in these states through citizenship or long-term resident and work visas. Muslims are often characterized as threats to national security, but in the second section of the collection, Saul J. Takahashi posits that Muslims are also characterized as threats to "national culture and the very fabric of society" (95). Drawing on police surveillance of Muslims in Japan and Denmark's legal amendments and policies that target Muslims living in 'ghettos' and 'parallel societies,' Takahashi argues that these two countries paint Muslims as both potential terrorists who threaten national security as well as threats to the social fabric of the nation. In another chapter that examines anti-terrorism measures and Islamophobia outside of Western countries, Areesha Khan explores the gendered effects of India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on Muslim men and their female relatives. Khan focuses on four case studies of Muslim women with incarcerated male relatives and shows how these women participate in, and blur the lines between, the public (secular) and private spheres by resisting the implementation of the UAPA, and, importantly, they find a sense of justice through their interpretations of Islam. As a result, Khan argues that these women "supposedly breach the 'secularity' of the public sphere" and challenge Indian secularism and Hindu majoritarianism" (136).

Continuing to focus on intersections of gender, secularism, and Islamophobia, Zeinab Diab surveys a body of literature regarding Law 21 in the province of Quebec. Diab posits that, because secularism in Quebec predates Law 21, the law carves out categories of inclusion and otherness, arguing that it is Muslim women who are most affected by Law 21, particularly through stigmatizing the hijab. Roshan Arah Jahangeer returns the conversation to France, examining the 2021 'separatism law' which France implemented to target 'Islamist separatism.' Jahangeer explores how this law builds on France's 2004 'new secularism,' which also targeted Muslim women with various anti-veiling laws. According to Jahangeer, the 'separatism law'

allows the government the power to "dissolve cultural, educational, religious, and civil rights associations and to limit foreign funding and home-schooling" (168), contributing to the persecution and surveillance of Muslims in France.

Islamophobia is pervasive in various geographic, social, and political contexts, and discussions on methods on how to comprehensively address Islamophobia are necessary. The concluding section of *Secularism, Race, and the Politics of Islamophobia* outlines recommendations to combat Islamophobia. Fatimah Jackson-Best opens the last section by uncovering the racial, gendered, and religious effects of Islamophobia on Black Muslim women's mental health in Canada. Engaging with the ways anti-Blackness has been used to exclude Black people from humanity, Jackson-Best argues that the secular project "has never been the route towards the acknowledgment of Black humanity" (198). Anti-Black and gendered Islamophobia have compounding effects that negatively impact Black Muslim women's mental health, and Jackson-Best provides policy recommendations, recommendations for practitioners, and guidance for Muslim clients to help offset these negative impacts and address the proliferation of Islamophobia by individuals and institutions. In the closing chapter, Khaled Al-Qazzaz and Nakita Valerio argue for a national and cooperative approach for Muslim organizations in Canada by assessing the contemporary strategies Muslim organizations currently take to intervene in Islamophobia in Canada. Al-Qazzaz and Valerio provide an overview of Canadian Muslim organizations' efforts to combat Islamophobia and provide recommendations on how these organizations can work together to fill gaps and avoid duplicate efforts. In addition to the recommendations put forth, this section could go further and address how Islamophobia circulates in social media and is bolstered by influencers, or perhaps engage with methods of combatting Islamophobia through social media, as a discussion of Islamophobia and social media is absent from this collection.

Engaging with pertinent issues around gender, surveillance, race, and Muslims being viewed as both terror threats and threats to the social fabric, the collection highlights various global manifestations of Islamophobia. While the introduction of *Secularism, Race and the Politics of Islamophobia* places the book in the context of the ongoing "conflict between the settler-colonial state of Israel and stateless Palestinians" (xx), none of the chapters within the work are dedicated to the interconnections between anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia. The use of the term 'conflict,' too, should be addressed to account for Palestinian voices who name the violence in the region a genocide and in the wake of the United Nation's commission's findings that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Such a contribution would strengthen the arguments about Islamophobia and secularism put forth by the editor as well as provide an additional example of how race and religion converge in regard to Islamophobia. The publication pushes the reader's attention to the ways secularism organizes varying and diverse societies through politics, epistemologies, law, public institutions etc. in ways that proliferate Islamophobia. This exciting intervention shifts the focus of conversations around Islamophobia from the actions of Muslims that "supposedly facilitate their racialization" (lx) to the ways that Islamophobia becomes embedded in secular institutions and knowledge systems. Each chapter provides consistent depth and research, bringing together original discussions on how such systems reproduce Islamophobia in different geographic and political contexts, as well as how Islamophobia intersects with gender and race, reinforcing Sadequee's foundational arguments to demonstrate how Islamophobia is a global phenomenon that permeates borders.