



## Book Reviews

**Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia.** *Sindre Bangstad.* London: Zed, 2014. xv + 286 pp.

DOI: 10.1111/amet.12172

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In his compelling analysis of far-right political formations in Norway, social anthropologist Sindre Bangstad builds a strong case for the need to better understand how the mainstreaming of Islamophobic discourses across Europe creates grounds for the naturalization of violence. The focus of Bangstad's work is the Norwegian right-wing extremist Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 individuals in Oslo and nearby Utøya on July 22, 2011. Rather than targeting Muslims in his bomb attack and subsequent shooting spree, Breivik chose as his victims Social Democrats, or those whom he considered to be part of a "culturally Marxist" political elite. In his mind, these individuals were bent on advancing multicultural policies that would lead to the demise of Norwegian racial and cultural survival and facilitate the Islamization of Europe. Significantly, Bangstad shows that, according to Breivik's own understanding, the mass violence was not an end in itself. Rather, in court testimony, Breivik claimed that his violence was meant to serve as a kind of "fireworks" display that would draw attention to his 1,500-page online manifesto. Entitled "2083: A Declaration of European Independence," the tract contained a blueprint for an ethnic cleansing of Norway that would be accomplished through curbing its Muslim populations. Breivik had it timed so that this tract would be published online on the day of the attacks.

In laying out Breivik's story, Bangstad presents us with a kind of analytic conundrum that requires we make sense of the links between Breivik's ideological ties to the extreme and populist right, his intensive participation in the Islamophobic blogosphere, and his decision to translate violent speech into action. Bangstad asks us to think through theoretical questions that are often contemplated in the abstract, but with the specter of Breivik and his victims solidly in our frame of analysis. What is the connection between hate speech and hate acts? What is universal about the "freedom of expression" concept, and how must this value be balanced by concerns for other human rights? How do hegemonic assumptions about the rational and self-regulating way that speech circulates in the public sphere hold up in the Internet age? For this last question, Bangstad synthesizes the work of contemporary theorists to argue that Internet speech communities may facilitate the production of parallel, insular universes, as they did for Breivik, in which users are more likely to shore up their opinions rather than test them through exposure to contrary ideas.

After the mass murders, members of populist right-wing parties took pains to publicly distance themselves from Breivik, claiming that his manifesto contained merely the garbled thoughts of a "lone madman." Bangstad's work sets out to problematize this claim and to show what would be at stake for Norwegians and Europeans if they accepted the ideological complicity of a host of other influential forces in the mass murder. Bangstad successfully demonstrates how Breivik's manifesto can be seen as part of a genre of Islamophobic writing known as "Eurabia" theory. Promulgated by internationally known figures such as Bat Ye'Or, Eurabia thinking hinges on the idea that members of the European left and the Muslim elite are actively engaged in a political conspiracy to advance an Islamic caliphate in Europe. The first step in this "Islamization by stealth" is to shift the demographics of Europe through the mass-migration of Muslims, and then through efforts of Muslims in Europe to intensify their fertility. Bangstad links this Eurabia genre to older forms of Orientalist and racializing discourses. However, in a productive section in which he defines, qualifies, and historicizes the "Islamophobia" concept (pp. 18–25), Bangstad points out the way that the Eurabia version of Islamophobia in particular tends to orient its proponents toward urgent action by positing a scenario in which it is either "us or them," and in which the future of the European racial and civilizational survival depends on combat. Bangstad further shows how, by asserting that all Muslims in Europe are part of this conspiracy to overtake Europe—whether they admit it or not—the Eurabia genre implicitly encourages indiscriminate retaliation against Muslims and creates the grounds for a refusal to recognize their rights as citizens.

Bangstad devotes a chapter to Eurabia thought in Breivik's manifesto itself, which is discovered to be mainly a cut-and-paste pastiche scavenged from different blogs and print media. Another chapter focuses on analyzing how Eurabia thought suffuses the anti-immigrant rhetoric of populist right-wing Norwegian parties and is also promulgated by the mainstream press. A third substantive chapter analyzes how anxieties over Islam in Europe triggered by the Rushdie affair and the Danish cartoon controversies have contributed to the rise of free speech absolutism among the political, legal, and media elite. For Bangstad, this absolutism eclipses a more balanced perspective that would ideally also be concerned with protecting individuals from racist or discriminatory speech. Bangstad successfully shows that the different registers of speech and writing he covers belong to a unified Islamophobic discursive formation that is becoming more familiar, naturalized, and normalized in Norway and in Europe. He accomplishes this by assembling and analyzing an impressive range of materials from the blogosphere, online and print media, legal proceedings, and documentary film sources. In doing so, Bangstad takes pains to draw lines between discursive formations of the populist right and the extremist right. It is the mainstreaming of extremist right-wing rhetoric by

right-wing populists who habitually “dip into” and then “sanitize it,” which Bangstad identifies to be the most problematic feature of Norwegian society and indexical of “the greatest threat to equality of citizenship and liberal democracy” across Western Europe (p. 219).

In the midst of the rising popularity of Eurabia thought, Bangstad successfully makes an appeal for holding the politicians, public figures, and media elites who promulgate Eurabia ideologues to account for the violent potential inherent in this genre of speech. Bangstad reminds us how foundational 19th-century thinker John Stuart Mill asserted that speech falling outside the limits of protection includes that which incites violence, and that which is unconcerned with truth. For Breivik, Eurabia rhetoric fits both criteria. Against what he finds to be a *laissez-faire* state and popular attitude, Bangstad launches his theoretical engagements to strengthen his claim that Islamophobic utterances must be taken seriously, whether articulated in their softer form by right-wing populists or in more extremist manifestations. In contextualizing these ideas within the horrific story of Breivik, Bangstad has produced a highly effective call for increased introspection on the part of Norwegians about how they represent their Muslim minorities, which also holds great resonance for those in other countries with growing Muslim minorities across Europe and North America.