

Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West, edited by George Morgan and Scott Poynting, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2012, x + 241 pp., £49.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4094-3119-0

This insightful collection of case studies contains a selection of modern articles from across the world, addressing the increasingly complex phenomenon of Islamophobia. It details a wide variety of incidents and examples of intolerance over the past decade towards Islam as a faith and Muslims as a collective group of people. *Global Islamophobia* is a robust book that examines and tackles the fear of Islam with great brio and optimism. It is a carefully balanced academic collaboration: simultaneously sympathetic, elegiac and open, whilst also argumentative and at points dispassionately critical. The breadth of vision and depth of research demonstrates an assuredly lucid grasp of the variegated societal problems and the all too human vicissitudes covered by the subject matter.

The book starts with a brief Foreword by Michael Welch: “Once again we are met with a prevailing calculus: Muslims equals terrorists” (p. xi). The overall purpose is to provide the reader with modern sociological literature on the subject and the contributors have certainly communicated their aims, objectives and perspectives with erudite empathy and confidently articulated some useful insights into recent events. There are many references scattered throughout to Stanley Cohen’s popular *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1972), which examined the idea that societies – modern or primitive – are subject to episodes of entirely irrational moral panic, mass hysteria or cultural trauma, often involving scapegoats and stereotypes he called “folk devils”. Cohen identified five areas or stages of development of this panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility. These and other points are more than satisfactorily addressed in this book. Editors often face a challenging task in assembling research material. They must set the general trajectory through the micro-management of narrative goals and structural content based on their own expertise. The value and importance of a venture such as this is hard to overstate.

The highlight of the book must be the last entry: “Where’s the Moral in Moral Panic? Islam, Evil and Moral Turbulence”, by Greg Noble of the University of Western Sydney. Noble states that “a highly moralized rhetoric of good and evil has become increasingly strident in Western political discourse in the last decade or so, not just as a result of the ‘war of terror’ but also in the wake of the resurgence of social and political conservatisms and their critique of the moral relativism of liberalism and multiculturalism” (p. 215). Noble’s entry is based on an earlier paper (Noble [2008](#)) that focused on Arab experiences and internecine cultural relativism. Here, he expands his discussion on the perennial problems of defining “moral” in the verbal quiddity “moral panic”; the caustic and causative role of the media; the notorious complexity of moral turbulence; and the paradoxical (even contradictory) social constructions around public conceptualizations of evil in a post-modern secularized state. The ephemeral existential details of the *res publica* cannot seriously be determined entirely by any one individual, agency, institution or nation. Essentially, he argues that every idea and every “folk devil” – however popular in certain quarters – is merely an abstract fantasy until it is put to work and only then does it become definitive, meaningful or worth something.

Overall, *Global Islamophobia* presents a guarded and cautiously optimistic view of the future. There is a mature clarity in the expositions, a depth of judgement and a breadth of scholarship that helps provide this intellectual omnibus with great authority, integrity and authenticity. This is no mere pontifical collection of superficial rants or semi-hysterical literary cadences targeting the omnishambles of modern Western society or politics. Rather, this book allows the reader to perceive and comprehend the broad direction of issues and events – so central to Muslims living in Western

societies and frequently so peripheral to many Westerners themselves – with some degree of dispassionate impartiality and objectivity. Equally importantly, however, the editors' selection not only provides the reader with analysis and acumen both weighty and cerebral, but also remains accessible and approachable. The contributors see room for positive developments in this field in the course of time, and few folk are more dedicated to a cause or issue than sceptics who have become convinced! In the final analysis this work will appeal more to sociologists – graduates and undergraduates – than to scholars in other areas of study. The editors have produced a useful, germane and well-considered book, liberal in its approach and accurate in its working methodology.

References

- 1. Noble, Greg. 2008. Faces of Evil: Demonising the Arab Other in Contemporary Australia. *Cultural Studies Review*, 14(2): 14–33.