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Book Reviews

George Morgan and Scott Poynting (eds) (2013) *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*. London: Ashgate.

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Previous to 2001, Islam was a mere flicker on the radar of popular xenophobic paranoia. A decade and a half and the world's first global moral panic later, this situation has changed entirely, apparently by design. As the editors of *Global Islamophobia* point out, the Terror Scare has elevated Muslims to 'transnational folk devil,' foisting the logic of 'if you think for yourselves the terrorists win' on the public realm in the name of defending democratic values. The paradoxical character of the generally destructive effects of this Terror Scare on democratic culture remains hard to miss, not least given the rhetoric about western values that tends to accompany much of the debate.

Protracted scare-mongering about global Islam has tended to frustrate attempts to understand the meaning of the 9/11 attacks and of their root causes. One might argue that this was its primary function, especially to the extent that blame-shifting through playing the victim and victim-blaming are characteristic facets of moral panics. Despite the well-established link between western military aggression and burgeoning terrorism (for example, Edward Herman's *The Real Terror Network*; Noam Chomsky's *Deterring Democracy*), efforts to hold western governments, corporate media outlets and others to account for that aggression, and for the lies told to justify it politically, have been met with mixed success so far. This fact is reflected in the continuing currency of xenophobia and the tendency of purportedly accountable representatives everywhere to blame Islam for everything from global wealth inequality to military conflict to the burgeoning surveillance state.

It is in this context that Scott Poynting and George Morgan bring us *Global Islamophobia*, a collection of articles examining the eponymous subject as it appears in a variety of countries including Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, the United States, Australia and the UK, in addition to a number of more theoretical treatments. Such diversity of input is a particular feature of this volume: it really draws into meaningful relief the multifaceted ways in which Islamophobia manifests and its tendency to vary according to social and geographical context. It seems unlikely that a book by a single author would have the same breadth as that achieved here.

Global Islamophobia is likewise to be lauded for drawing together disparate threads in sociology, criminology, politics, history, cultural studies, media studies and international relations, another apparent effect of its diverse input. Thus while academia occasionally merits criticism for having its head in the clouds, its ability to combine theoretical approaches to such things as the study of moral panics, and do to so from a diverse range of interdisciplinary perspectives, in this instance is a key strength of the overall work.

Groundwork of this type bears significant fruit throughout, most noticeably in the contribution from Anneke Meyer and also from Joanna Gilmore, with each looking at the production of deviance in the corporate media, and use of the folk devil thus created as a pretext for state repression respectively. In the former case, Meyer analyses the role the Murdoch press plays as a purveyor of Islamophobia by zeroing in on marginal figures like Abu Hamza, and using emotive language ('evil,' 'vile,' 'menacing,' 'wicked') to demonise Muslims, and then create out of them 'folk devils,' or a base stereotype of the purported peril (p. 258).

Particularly useful in this instance is Meyer's discussion of how the Hamza-based stereotype plays into the phenomenon of 'convergence' to prime readers for further stereotyping and scare-mongering. (She quotes *The Sun*: 'Terrorism expert Neil Doyle warned: "Abu Hamza might be out of action but in many ways, he's already completed his mission … there's a jihad army in this country and that's thanks to Hamza and others like him"'; p. 266). Ditto her discussion of *The Sun*'s establishment of a false binary between 'Britishness' and Islam, one that inevitably racialises both (p. 268). This enquiry is supported throughout by copious references to primary material in *The Sun*, as well as solid grounding of the latter in theoretical cornerstones of moral panic studies from such luminaries as Stanley Cohen and Stuart Hall.

In the latter case, Joanna Gilmore brings a criminological angle to the issue by exploring the use of terrorist stereotypes to criminalise and repress entirely legitimate expressions of free speech: in this instance, those protesting Israel's invasion of Gaza through 2008-09 during Operation Cast Lead. Gilmore's article cuts to the heart of the meaning of Islamophobia by looking at the ways the corporate media in particular exploited Islamophobic xenophobia and perpetuated the stereotype of the Muslim as hostile outsider to justify the brutal and violent dispersal of pro-Gaza protests, the racial profiling of protesters via CCTV footage, the sowing of fear and terror among political dissidents, and the punishing of people for exercising their rights.

Of some of the articles in this collection, a relatively minor criticism might be that the mechanics of Islamophobia are understood well enough, but the ultimate purpose of moral panics in reconstructing the legitimacy of the status quo in the midst of crisis is touched on without getting the weight it deserves. One might draw an analogy with someone going to the trouble of discovering Shangri-la, only to look at it from the front door before turning around and heading home to tell everyone what was seen. Surely the point of trying to come to terms with global Islamophobia is to be able to decipher the acts carried out in the name of combatting the perceived threat in Islam, free of ideological baggage. Gilmore's piece in particular saves this from being a criticism of the volume overall.

In obscuring the operations of power, as noted, the Terror Scare has presented multifaceted challenges for the entire world, not only in our ability to understand the world but also to take charge of the conditions of our own lives rather than being swept along by forces beyond our control. In particular, it has necessitated the enhancement of sociological research into moral panics that, most fortunately for us, *Global Islamophobia* achieves. In bringing valuable new perspectives to related areas of study – such as international relations, social psychology and history – and re-establishing historical context, thereby transcending the flotsam of

ideologically-driven xenophobia and scapegoating, *Global Islamophobia* constitutes a significant and valuable contribution.

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