This is a wide-ranging (in terms of approach, subject and geographical scope) and well-edited (in terms of guidance to the material) collection of essays, which addresses a topical and important set of issues. The collection is divided into two parts: theoretical issues and case studies, with the latter including both Western examples (America, Britain, Islamophobia in Europe) and Muslim majority societies (Nigeria, Indonesia, anti-Zionism in the Arab world), enveloped by a concise and well-balanced introduction and conclusion, which provide a useful orientation to the whole collection.

The theoretical contributions include theological (Cragg), hermeneutical/ethical (Shepherd) and political-historical pieces (Gabriel and Geaves). Gabriel’s brief (13 page) answer to the question “Is Islam against the West?” is the kind of essay that is likely to prove useful as an introductory piece to inform and stimulate discussion amongst non-specialist students. It is accessible, and touches on the history of Muslim–Christian relations, areas of contrast between “the Muslim and the Western way of life” (15) and relations between the West and Muslim majority world in the post-colonial period, largely focusing on Palestine. There is a concluding discussion of Wahabbism and the Salafi justification of “suicide” bombing. Geaves’ “Who defines Islam ‘post’—September 11” develops a more sustained argument—specifically, that the British and US governments’ attempts to delineate a “moderate Islam” and to distinguish “terrorism” from mainstream Islam are problematic, indeed that liberal attempts to define moderate Islam may mask a less than liberal political agenda, and that an alternative map of the territory that better fits its contours is available.

Shepherd’s contribution argues that it is important for religionists to face up to the religious roots of some political violence, which he illustrates with examples from Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, rather than try to whitewash religion and shift the blame to its misuse or appropriation by others who are not “really” religious. Neither, however, is religion essentially violent; rather, his is a call to religionists to recognize the ambivalence of their religious heritage. In calling for a self-critical review of tradition Shepherd’s essay complements Cragg’s erudite piece. This appeals to Muslims to review their jurisprudential and hermeneutical prioritization of the Medinan revelation, which he argues should be seen as reflecting the needs of the early Medinan polity, and turn instead to the broader, visionary and prophetic Meccan revelation. While it seems unlikely that such arguments will make much headway beyond the Islamic fringe, in spite of the best efforts of figures such as Abdullah An Na’im, labelled apostate by “mainstream” Muslims, Cragg’s remains a cogent and challenging exposition of the tradition.

The case studies section begins with two surveys of the American Muslim scene post 9/11. Hermansen presents a chronological survey, which shifts from initial reactions beginning with her personal experience as a white convert, moving on to chart the rise of “Muslim public intellectual,” the development of a public discourse differentiating “Good” (“progressive”/“reformist”) Muslims from bad (“terrorist”) Muslims (paralleling Geaves’ account) through to the most recent (and nascent) phase
in which more nuanced discussion both across Muslim communities and amongst broader publics is beginning to develop, reflecting on the interaction of religion and race in the dynamic of broader identity politics. Haddad’s chapter focuses mainly on the Bush administration’s attempts to interact with and influence American Muslims post 9/11, placing this in the context of developments under Clinton, and broader foreign and domestic policy responses to 9/11. Like Geaves, she questions the Bush administration’s construction of “moderate Islam,” concluding with Husain Haqqani’s appeal for a re-definition of moderate Islam not as those who “toe the line” but rather who “want to engage as equals with others in the contemporary world and believe that violence, force and coercion are not appropriate ways in which to respond” (111).

Hussein’s chapter on the impact of 9/11 on British Muslim identity would be a useful introduction to the topic for non-specialists. It begins with a broad survey of British Muslims’ diversity, social statistics and political participation. A discussion of identity is then followed by an incisive section on the impact of 9/11, refuting interpretations of surveys which downplay the rise in Islamophobia, and including interesting MORI data on self-assessments of loyalty to the British polity by religion. Allen’s discussion of Islamophobia in a broader European context is also informative, including extensive discussion of the European Monitoring Centre of Racism and Xenophobia’s Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001.

The presence of Sanneh’s analysis of the Nigerian debate on the re-introduction of sharia sanctions and Sirozi’s discussion of Islamist education in Indonesia serve as a reminder that the repercussions of 9/11 resonate well beyond relations between Europe/America and the Middle East, and in particular for Christian minorities. Sanneh’s essay is broad in its scope, locating the Nigerian debate in post-colonial and post Cold War historical perspective, arguing for the relevance of shifting international relations and explaining the distinctiveness of the Nigerian context. Sirozi’s piece is an exposition of the ideas of Wahabbi-inspired Abu Bakr Ba’asyir’s teachings and their institutional embodiment in schools linked with him. While thorough in its examination, it is also unequivocal in its rejection of Ba’asyir’s “static and legalistic,” and, by implication, unrealistic and irrational view of Islam. Both Sanneh and Sirozi show the importance of global interconnections, and this theme is also to the fore in Chapman’s treatment of Arab Muslim anti-Zionism. This helpfully summarizes Islamic arguments and assumptions underlying Muslim anger towards Israel, as well as Western responses to the Islamic case against Israel, concluding with a plea for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Overall, this is a useful collection for teachers and students of religious studies and politics, which gathers stimulating perspectives on a complex series of interconnected debates between its covers. There are some editorial errors (e.g. the Foreword claims that Part 1 consists of seven theoretical contributions, but there are four), but these are minor blemishes on a thoughtfully edited collection.

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