
Book Review

ALLEN, Chris. 2010. *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate. 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-5140-6. Pbk. £16.99.

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The publication of *Islamophobia* by Chris Allen comes at an extremely significant juncture, providing a critical reflection upon what the author identifies as “the first decade of Islamophobia.” Despite over a decade passing since the publication of the seminal Runnymede Trust Report, an absence of critical enquiry and analysis of the phenomenon of Islamophobia has created a context in which the usage of the term remains problematic and its existence disputed. Through a detailed analysis of the nature of Islamophobia, Allen seeks to provide greater theoretical clarity thereby enabling further empirical advancements within the field.

During the first part of the book, Allen seeks to evaluate the legacy of Orientalism and colonialism and the impact of events such as the Iranian Revolution and the Satanic Verses affair in forming early manifestations of “embryonic Islamophobia” which pre-date the contemporary context. Through this detailed investigation, Allen highlights the complexity of the phenomenon through both its disputed historical origins and in the contestation regarding its role within the current period. In seeking to chart the historical development of Islamophobia, Allen transcends the limitations of earlier theoretical endeavours which neglect to sufficiently contextualise the emergence of the Islamophobia within a broader historical and social context.

Following on from this opening historical analysis, Allen evaluates the role of the Runnymede Trust Report which was pivotal in introducing the notion of Islamophobia to the wider public domain during the close of the twentieth century. Central to Allen’s thesis is a sustained critique of the report and the “closed” and “open” conceptualizations of Islam underpinning its model which, he argues, perpetuate the very style of monolithic and static views they seek to negate, contributing to the perpetuation of Islamophobia being regarded as an “ambiguous phenomenon.” Allen’s examination of the report highlights its inability to accommodate the myriad of contemporary expressions of Islamophobia within its limited definition, which is itself based upon essentialized identities and perceptions. Such an analysis further highlights the need for considerable theoretical development regarding the nature and operation of Islamophobic phenomena which Allen seeks to provide.

In order to further substantiate his claim of the need for a theoretically sophisticated definition, Allen moves on to explore contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia within the UK and Europe in a post-9/11 context. Allen highlights the pervasive nature of such an ideology, particularly within inflammatory media representation across the continent, and the perturbing osmosis of Islamophobic ideas into mainstream political opinion which he suggests have become viewed as increasingly “natural and normal.” In particular, Allen draws upon the empirical findings of the EUMC Report which documented the significant

levels of aggression targeted at Muslim communities within the EU after 9/11. Allen seeks to utilize these statistical pan-European findings to inform and generate an increasingly nuanced conceptualization of Islamophobia.

Allen's central contribution rests within the final chapters of the text where he proposes an innovatory and comprehensive definition of Islamophobia. He advocates a threefold conceptualization of the phenomenon, consisting firstly of Islamophobia as an "ideology," with a plurality of "modes of operation" (namely legitimization, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification) which result in significant "exclusionary practices." Central to Allen's definition is recognition of the evolving, multidimensional nature of this pan-European phenomenon, transcending the limitations of earlier attempts to define Islamophobia which relied upon simplistic dichotomous presuppositions. Allen's definition constitutes a significant development in seeking to accommodate the substantial variety of discriminatory acts and practices occurring throughout the European context within a single theoretical framework.

This important study will appeal to a wide variety of audiences, both within and outside of academia, and will be of utility to students and scholars, researchers and policy makers alike. The publication of Allen's *Islamophobia* additionally complements the publication of Vakil and Sayyid's (2011) recently published *Thinking through Islamophobia* to which Allen is also a contributor. As a result of the theoretical clarity and detailed insight provided by Allen's analysis within *Islamophobia*, there is significant potential for empirical advancement which may increasingly document the instances and occurrences of this phenomenon both at national and local level. Such a need for further fieldwork may indeed be considered imperative given Allen's assertion that "exclusionary practices remain far from empirically proven" and there is thus a need to further examine the interrelationship between Islamophobia and processes of social exclusion. Such empirical investigation may enhance the theoretical advancements developed by Allen and might substantiate and add legitimacy to his tri-part concept. Readers of this journal may be disappointed that Allen's study itself does not focus more strongly upon his own empirical findings or upon methodological challenges in engaging with such fieldwork. Nonetheless such a text constitutes an essential theoretical starting point for those wishing to undertake fieldwork on Islamophobia in Europe today. *Islamophobia* is a text of critical significance for all concerned in understanding the operation and effects of this phenomenon within contemporary society, the impact of which should not be underestimated.