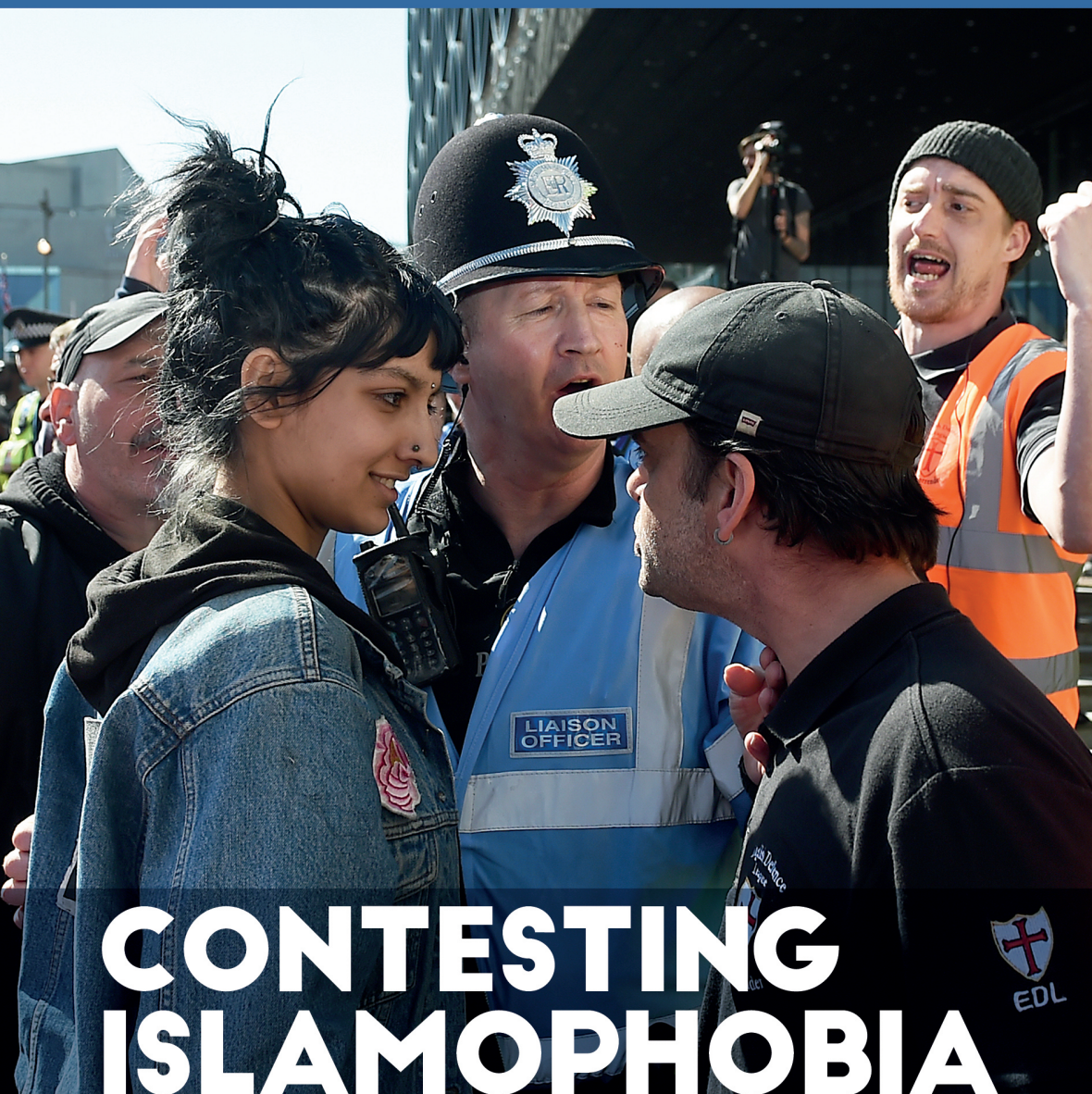


I.B. TAURIS

Edited by Peter Morey,
Amina Yaqin & Alaya Forte



CONTESTING ISLAMOPHOBIA

**ANTI-MUSLIM PREJUDICE IN
MEDIA, CULTURE AND POLITICS**

Contesting Islamophobia

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*Anti-Muslim Prejudice in Media,
Culture and Politics*

Edited by
Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin and Alaya Forte

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The seeds of this book were planted at the Beyond Islamophobia conference, held at SOAS, University of London, in 2014. Academics, activists and artists from around the world gathered to share experiences of Islamophobia and the fruits of their research into this global form of prejudice, and to consider the means by which anti-Muslim prejudice might be challenged. The conference was part of the RCUK-funded 'Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue' project, and we would first like to give thanks to the combined UK funding councils for their generous support during that project. Thereafter, this volume took its present shape owing to the dedication of its contributors who have risen to the challenge of reflecting on the ways in which Islamophobia might be contested in the various walks of life where it is most prevalent. Our gratitude is owed to those who have written for us, allowed their discussions to be transcribed and permitted us to interview them. We hope the resulting volume captures something of the dynamism with which individuals and groups are banding together to better understand and fight this form of prejudice.

Intellectually, we are indebted to those who have charted this area before us, no one more tellingly than the late Edward Said. His work in describing how Islam is 'covered' – in the sense of both being heavily reported by Western media forms and, in the process, being smothered by limited, stereotypical framing – provides the foundation for all the work we have done in this field. In his attempts to expose the one-sidedness of Western views of Islam – and especially Arabs – Said was followed by the redoubtable and much-missed Jack Shaheen, whose work on Arab stereotypes in cinema remains the benchmark for all accounts of media representations of Muslims. Their legacy can be seen in the present volume's concern to bring together perspectives from disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, art and media studies. This is important since it is by means of a broad array of discourses, touching on all walks of life, that our views of the world and its inhabitants are shaped for good or ill.

We are extremely fortunate to have had the support of John L. Esposito, the leading figure in the understanding of Muslims and anti-Muslim prejudice in the world today. The foreword he has provided is only one of the ways he has helped us since his attendance at that initial conference. As such he is to be

heartily thanked. Several others represented in this volume have, likewise, been generous with their time and advice, so that any shortcomings the reader finds here must be held against the editors, rather than our contributors who form a roster of some of the leading figures in their respective fields.

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Foreword: The Roots of Modern Islamophobia

John L. Esposito

The roots of Islamophobia in America and Europe are long and run deep, providing the context for attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, government policies and mass and social media coverage.

In 1981 Edward Said presciently warned the following:

For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is 'news' of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and – although they are marginal to the culture at large – the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to western civilization. Now this is by no means the same as saying that only derogatory or racist caricatures of Islam are to be found in the West. ... What I am saying is that negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not with what Islam 'is' ... but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate that particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others.¹

Yet it took until 1997 to create a term that effectively names this phenomenon of negative responses to Islam and Muslims. In November 1997, the British Runnymede Trust's report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, launched in the UK, defined Islamophobia as 'the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims'.² It results in the following: exclusion from economic, social and public life; discrimination in the blatant form of hate crimes and subtler forms of disparagement; the perception that the religion of Islam has no common values with the West is inferior to the West and is a violent political ideology rather than a source of faith and spirituality, unlike the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity.³

The naming of this reality continues to gain momentum. The term 'Islamophobia' has generated increased scholarly and popular understanding

and communication as well as multiple responses aimed at addressing its negative consequences.

Islamophobia's contemporary resurgence

In recent years, Islamophobia has grown exponentially, triggered by many events: the Iranian Revolution, hijackings, hostage-taking and acts of terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s, attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda and ISIS in Europe. As a result of these events and the responses to them, the same period has seen a significant influx of Muslims into the West.

Given these realities, Muslims have faced many challenges. For example, a report by the Public Religion Research Institute describes how 'no religious, social, or racial and ethnic group [is] perceived as facing greater discrimination in the U.S. than Muslims'.⁴

The beginning of the modern cycle of Islamophobia is often located at the time of the Iranian Revolution, which deposed the Western-backed Shah and saw the installation of an Islamic Republic in 1979. Iran's Islamic Revolution stunned global leaders and became the lens through which many in the West first learnt about Islam. Governments, experts and media alike scrambled to understand how the mighty Shah of Iran could be overthrown by a mass movement whose leader was an aged Ayatollah Khomeini, living in exile in a Paris suburb. The example of Iran and the threat of Khomeini's call for the export of its revolution fuelled fears of the spread of radical Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and beyond.

Another strand in the tale concerns the decline of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Its eventual collapse in 1991 increased fears that 'radical Islamic fundamentalism' would prove to be the next global threat. Statements by authoritarian Muslim government leaders, Western policy makers and media commentators reinforced fears of the 'Red Threat' of communism being replaced by the 'Green Threat' of Islam. The portrayal of Islam as a triple threat (political, civilizational and demographic) serves to trivialize the complexity of political, social and religious dynamics in the Muslim world and paints a simplistic picture that can be used to support what Samuel Huntington's seminal article and subsequent book characterized as an imminent 'Clash of Civilizations' between Islam and the West.⁵ With its simplistic view of separate 'civilizations' in

perpetual conflict, Huntington's international bestselling book reinforced fears of Islam as *the* major source of threat to the West and had – and continues to have – enormous influence internationally.

In the period immediately pre- and post-9/11 a slew of selective and biased analyses of Islam and events in the Muslim world by prominent journalists, commentators and some politicians worked to foster a sense of global crisis that fuelled an even more extreme demonization of Muslims. Examples of this scaremongering include articles with titles such as 'Don't Look for Moderates in the Islamic Revolution',⁶ 'A Holy War Heads Our Way'⁷ and 'Prince Charles Is Wrong – Islam Does Menace the West'.⁸ Will Cummins in the *Telegraph* asserted, 'It is the black heart of Islam, not the black face, to which millions object.'⁹ Robert Kilroy-Silk, one-time British politician and talk-show host, wrote in the *Daily Express* that 'Muslims everywhere behave with equal savagery. They behead criminals, stone to death female – only female – adulteresses, throw acid in the faces of women who refuse to wear the chador, mutilate the genitals of young girls and ritually abuse animals.'¹⁰ And Jean-Marie Le Pen, then president of France's far-right National Front party, warned, 'These elements have a negative effect on all of public security. They are strengthened demographically both by natural reproduction and by immigration, which reinforces their stubborn ethnic segregation, their domineering nature. This is the world of Islam in all its aberrations.'¹¹ It is hardly surprising that a climate of fear and violence fed rising Islamophobia.

The impact of 9/11 on popular culture

The 9/11 attacks in America on the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington, DC – both symbols of US economic and military power – reinforced by Al Qaeda attacks in London, Madrid and Bali, proved a watershed moment, prompting what the George W. Bush administration, with strong support from Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, would call a war against global terrorism. The events of 9/11 exacerbated and fed the growth of Islamophobia in the West. In 2002, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia published the *Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*, which documented increased and widespread acts of discrimination and racism against Muslims in fifteen EU member countries and warned them of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

becoming acceptable in European society.¹² In a follow-up report in 2004, the Runnymede Trust concluded that Islamophobia was a pervasive feature of British society. It also characterized media reporting on Muslims and Islam as biased and unfair.¹³

Far-right, anti-immigrant political parties and political commentators in Europe have demonized Islam and Muslims; the net result has been a virulent form of cultural racism. Similarly, in the United States, the Council on American–Islamic Relations documented an increase of reported hate crimes between 2004 and 2005, with a 29.6 per cent increase in the total number of complaints of anti-Muslim harassment, violence and discriminatory treatment.¹⁴ The international scope of Islamophobia was recognized and addressed by the United Nations, when Kofi Annan, then its secretary general, addressed a 2004 UN conference on ‘Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding’. Annan underscored the global need to acknowledge and address this new form of increasing bigotry:

[when] the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry – that it is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with ‘Islamophobia’. ... Since the September 11 attacks on the United States, many Muslims, particularly in the West, have found themselves the objects of suspicion, harassment and discrimination. ... Too many people see Islam as a monolith and as intrinsically opposed to the West.¹⁵

The media as an enabler of Islamophobia

The mass media’s market-driven sales emphasis, epitomized by the phrase ‘if it bleeds, it leads’, is reflected in a penchant for explosive, headline events and an overemphasis on violence, terrorism and the more sensational anti-Islam and anti-Muslim statements of political leaders, media commentators and a host of ‘preachers of hate’. Minimal coverage of the broader context, the attitudes and behaviours of a majority of mainstream Muslims, has resulted in an imbalance in American and European mass media news coverage. The media analyst organization Media Tenor International discovered that out of nearly 975,000 news stories from US and European media outlets, networks significantly reduced coverage on events in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to the actions of Muslim militants. A comparison of media coverage in 2001 with that in 2011 demonstrated the shocking disparity of coverage. In 2001, 2 per

cent of all news stories in Western media presented images of Muslim militants, while just over 0.1 per cent presented stories of the vast majority of ordinary Muslims. By 2011, 25 per cent of the stories presented a militant image, while only 0.1 per cent presented images of ordinary Muslims: no improvement at all in the balance of coverage over the ten-year period.¹⁶ The year 2015 witnessed an all-time high in the level of negative reporting. In the United States, UK and Germany nine out of ten articles were negative. Over 80 per cent of the coverage of religious protagonists on television was negative. Moreover, even coverage of mainstream Muslims tended to be negative (more than 50 per cent of reports).¹⁷ Finally, in its 2016 Davos report, 'Reviewing Tone and Coverage of Islam: Global TV 2005–2016', Media Tenor reported that at least two-thirds of coverage of Muslims was extremely negative.¹⁸

For over a decade, there has been an explosion of social media websites and anti-Muslim diatribes with international and domestic consequences. This has been accompanied by the emergence of an organized Islamophobia network and its engineered campaigns orchestrated by ideological, agenda-driven anti-Muslim polemicists and their funders. Major reports based on US Internal Revenue Service returns have shed a light on support funding and its sources. The Center for American Progress report, *Fear, Inc.* (August 2011), documented that \$42.6 million flowed from seven foundations over ten years to support Islamophobic authors and websites.¹⁹ A Council on American–Islamic Relations report in 2013, *Legislating Fear: Islamophobia and Its Impact in the United States*, identified \$119,662,719 in total revenue between 2008 and 2011.²⁰

Islamophobia in American and European elections

American and European political elections have been a major driver or trigger of Islamophobia, as seen in the 2008 and 2012 Obama presidential elections and results in American and European elections in 2016 and 2018, as well as the significant performance of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim parties and political leaders. In 2016, the presidential candidate (and soon-to-be president) Donald Trump declared, 'Islam hates us' and called for a Muslim travel ban as well as the monitoring or even the forced closure of American mosques. During Republican presidential primaries, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Ben Carson, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio weighed in warning of the dangers of the implantation of

sharia, calling for a freeze on Muslim immigration and refugee programmes and questioning whether a Muslim could be president or serve in the cabinet.

Trump's Muslim travel ban (officially known as Presidential Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States), designed to halt the refugee resettlement process and bar all immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, mobilized a cross section of Americans and organizations at airport protests. Uri Friedman called it 'a phantom menace', pointing out the following:

Nationals of the seven countries singled out by Trump have killed zero people in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil between 1975 and 2015. ... Over the last four decades, 20 out of 3.25 million refugees welcomed to the United States have been convicted of attempting or committing terrorism on U.S. soil, and only three Americans have been killed in attacks committed by refugees – all by Cuban refugees in the 1970s.²¹

In contrast to Donald Trump and the Republican Party's victory in 2016, in Europe the gains of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant parties were less spectacular. However far-right, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim parties and politicians have championed a white nationalist supremacist message, calling for a halt in immigration and even the expulsion of Muslim refugees from the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Mainstream American and European Muslims have too often been equated inaccurately with terrorists and branded as people who reject democracy. In fact, major polls by Gallup and Pew report that majorities of Muslims desire democracy and freedom, are loyal citizens and reject religious extremism and terrorism. Failure to recognize and appreciate these facts continues to feed a growing Islamophobia that threatens the safety, security and civil liberties of many Muslims in the West and discourages those in the West from joining in partnership with the majority of Muslims to fight the extremist fringe. It is time to distinguish between the religion of Islam and the behaviour of a fraction of Muslims who commit acts of terrorism. President Barack Obama's reminder for Americans should also be true for Americans and Europeans today as they face Al Qaeda, ISIS and other terrorist groups: 'The United States is not – and never will be – at war with Islam Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a

mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own.²²

Contesting Islamophobia provides in one volume a much-needed view of the history and spread of Islamophobia, its major characteristics as well as its diversity of expression in differing contexts. Terrorist attacks by Al Qaeda and especially ISIS both in Muslim countries and in the West in recent years as well as the exponential growth of Islamophobia and xenophobia and their expression in American and European politics make *Contesting Islamophobia* a 'must read' for policy makers, journalists and scholars as well as concerned citizens in America, Europe and Muslim countries alike.

Notes

- 1 Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 144.
- 2 *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997). Available at www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html (accessed 1 February 2018).
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- 5 See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
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Introduction: Contesting Islamophobia in Theory and Practice

Peter Morey

It seems to be open season on Muslims. With hostile statements from press and politicians, physical attacks and discrimination spiking, Islamophobia, or 'anti-Muslim prejudice' as it is sometimes known, is all around us.

We live in an age where the established civilities of everyday discourse are challenged by the proliferation of new media, where opinions, prejudices and threats can be blurted out instantaneously. While they are by no means the only victims of a culture where abuse can travel around the globe in the time it takes to hit a 'post' button, Muslims now comprise perhaps the most recognizable targets. Indeed, in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, Islamophobia has emerged as the dominant mode of prejudice in contemporary Western societies. In North America and across the nations of Europe, concerns about Muslims are central to political debates and policies. As part of the response to international conflicts, acts of terrorism, and state violence by Western nations, the figure of the Muslim has come under increased scrutiny. Muslims and Islam have emerged as the focal point of anxieties about citizenship, loyalty and liberal values. They have been the object of heightened levels of criticism, intolerance and abuse: their cultures homogenized and vilified and their religion depicted as backward and warlike.¹

In addition to the rise of a number of right-wing, anti-Islam political groups across Europe and North America, recent years have seen an explosion in anti-immigrant, and specifically anti-Muslim, popular rhetoric. At the same time, the political attraction of scapegoating grows as populations feel the inequitable effects of the neoliberal economics that led to the 2008 financial crash and also shaped the austerity programmes that responded to it.² The successful Labour Party candidate in the London mayoral elections of 2016, Sadiq Khan, had to fight off a campaign by his Conservative opponents to smear him with the presumed guilt-by-association his Muslim background was felt to carry;³ the

'Brexit' vote in Britain saw a spike in anti-Muslim hate crime,⁴ and the 2016 US presidential election was won by Donald Trump, a candidate running on an explicitly Islamophobic platform, who later cemented his credentials by retweeting Islamophobic videos posted online by the extreme-right Britain First party, causing an international spat.⁵

We ought to recognize the devastating impact of terrorist attacks, carried out in the name of Islam by individuals and groups who choose to affiliate with the so-called Islamic State or ISIS forces battling across Syria, Iraq and Libya. However, what concerns us here is the way in which responses to such criminal acts have come to be orchestrated in particular ways. For example, after the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, Islamophobia in the West reached a new peak of hysteria.⁶ In response to the murder, by so-called Islamic State operatives, of 129 innocent citizens enjoying a relaxing Friday night in the heart of one of Europe's most famous cities, Muslims were attacked and abused, their places of worship vandalized and their loyalties called into question.⁷ This is a pattern that has been repeated in other cities and in response to other terrorist outrages. Equally troubling was the assertion of a collective guilt in which all Muslims were somehow implicated. Commentators and politicians queued up to make fresh demands on beleaguered communities whose despair at the violence was at least equal to their own. Muslims were routinely invited into news studios to be grilled about their supposed responsibilities for terrorism. In the UK, *The Sun* newspaper splashed on its front page the shocking claim that one in five British Muslims had 'sympathy for jihadis' (the inaccurate story was later forcibly retracted), while the *Daily Express* cited research conducted by a right-wing American think tank to claim that, worldwide, '42 million Muslims support ISIS'.⁸ In North America, twenty-three states in the United States closed their borders to migrants fleeing the depredations of ISIS, and Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush suggested only Christian refugees should be accepted, while Trump called for all mosques to be closed down, a database of US Muslims to be established and Muslims to be barred from entering the United States – the latter initiative becoming one of the keystone policies of the early days of his presidency.⁹

This political mainstreaming of more aggressive attitudes towards Muslims is reflected by a change in the tone in which these things are discussed. Sometimes there are echoes of the most extreme rhetoric from Europe's dark past. In the UK the *Daily Mail* ran a cartoon depicting mainly Muslim refugees as rats swarming to gain admittance to the country, which observers were quick to recognize as echoing a similar cartoon mocking Jews being denied entry

into Austria in 1939.¹⁰ Not long after, Trevor Kavanagh and Katie Hopkins – two stalwarts favoured by the right-wing press – respectively wrote of ‘the Muslim problem’ and advocated a ‘final solution’ to it.¹¹ On one level, such anti-Muslim press sentiment was not unusual. In 2011, the UK government minister Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, identifying the new intolerance, went as far as to declare that Islamophobia seemed to have ‘passed the dinner-table test’ of social respectability, being the only form of prejudice now indulged and approved in the so-called liberal societies of the West.¹² More recently she has written, ‘The dislike of all things Muslims is no longer a fringe practice. ... The fact that as a country we have allowed this scourge of Islamophobia to grow should worry us all.’¹³

Something of this mood was captured in the public attitudes survey carried out by the HOPE not hate organization in England in 2017. While finding that acceptance of immigration had held up, the survey also showed a worrying rise in Islamophobia. Fifty-two per cent of respondents saw Islam as ‘posing a threat to the West’, while 42 per cent were more suspicious of Muslims following that summer’s terror attacks in London, and a quarter believed that ‘Islam is a dangerous religion that incites violence’.¹⁴ This is not an exclusively British or American phenomenon. The latest European Islamophobia Report data on anti-Muslim racism for 2016, which included twenty-seven European countries from Russia to Portugal, shows widespread and worsening animosity and enmity towards Muslims in all sectors of public life (education, employment, politics and the media, both online and offline) with Muslim women emerging as the most vulnerable direct victims of Islamophobia.¹⁵ It is hard to collect figures, however, as very few governments actually record hate crimes against Muslims. Police forces in England and Wales only started recording anti-Muslim hate crimes as a specific category on 13 October 2015, while many other countries rely on grass roots and civic organizations for reporting of Islamophobic incidents.¹⁶

Such views do not grow in a vacuum, and the daily drip-feed of news stories in which Muslim acts and attitudes appear aberrant and threatening adds to the negative atmosphere.¹⁷ Now, in an era of social media where unregulated stories, spin and propaganda swirl all around us, the repetition of Islamophobic perspectives by mainstream media sources marks a serious turn in the propagation of prejudice against Muslims. Resurgent anti-black racism has been a feature of the contemporary political landscape – especially in the United States – but in recent years it has joined forces with the fear of an Islamized world, particularly at a time of low religious literacy. A Pew Research Center survey conducted in Spring 2016 in ten European countries showed that these

perceptions vary according to countries: over half the population surveyed in Hungary (72 per cent), Italy (69 per cent), Poland (66 per cent) and Greece (65 per cent) said they view Muslims unfavourably, with roughly a third holding *very* unfavourable opinions in Italy (36 per cent), Hungary (35 per cent) and Greece (32 per cent). The research also goes to show 'even in countries with more positive views, such as Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, at least half believe Muslims do not want to integrate into the larger society'.¹⁸

This volume aims to cut through the current impasse not only by offering a snapshot of the forms, historical roots and geographical locations of Islamophobia, but also by suggesting ways in which it is being contested and alternative forms of Muslim self-fashioning growing. What emerges is a picture of Islamophobia as demonstrating a particular kind of paranoia that discriminates against Muslims precisely by *not* discriminating – in terms of differentiating – between doctrinal differences, nor between the many intractable geopolitical crises that feed cultural suspicion and that have to do with unequal patterns of development and of historical and current Western policies at least as much as Muslim atavism. It brings together chapters outlining the history, characteristics and spread of Islamophobia in Britain, the United States and parts of Europe, with those indicating how Islamophobia is being contested 'on the ground' by artists, educators, and activists. In our increasingly interlinked world, it is only to be expected that anti-Muslim agitators in one part of the world should reach out to, and become entwined with, their fellows in other countries. Such links have helped shape the face of contemporary Islamophobia as a prejudice with unique reach. They also mean that a Muslim diaspora which now spans the globe can be 'Othered', made into a convenient scapegoat for any and all failings by national governments struggling with the legacies of domestic inequalities and rapacious global economics. Yet, at the same time, that very global interconnectedness means that tactics to fight back against Islamophobia can be quickly shared.

When we consider the very diverse meanings of the term 'Islamophobia' we are immediately brought face-to-face with what AbdoolKarim Vakil has called the 'conceptual stretching' of the term. 'Islamophobia' has meant different things to those enunciating the phrase in different contexts and at different times.¹⁹ The rate at which the term has taken off over the last twenty or so years has meant that actual definitions have struggled to keep up, being many and varied. Chris Allen's book, called simply *Islamophobia*, attempts to trace the contested coinage of the term and some of its potential definitions, and also to point out how more precise usage in the future might clarify and enable questioning of and resistance to anti-Muslim prejudice.²⁰ The nature of Islamophobia and

its relation to pre-existing prejudices such as anti-Semitism was recognized in the 1997 Runnymede Trust report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, which also offered the most precise account of its key features: 'The dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims.'²¹

Indeed, the relationship of Islamophobia to preceding forms of prejudice, such as anti-Semitism, has been the subject of much critical debate. Some see strong connections between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism – emphasizing similarities in the Jewish and Muslim experiences of racialization²² – while others emphasize key distinctions. For instance, in a recent intervention, Michael Dobkowski has insisted on distinguishing anti-Semitism, which, with its basis in an ancient, mythologized prejudicial system, constitutes an ideology, from Islamophobia, which he sees as a 'reflexive prejudice' that is more like a 'troubling social trend'.²³ For him, those baseless conspiracy theories that have circulated around Jews through the ages underline anti-Semitism as an irrational fear, whereas actual violence in the name of Islam – one of the world's most powerful religions – means that Islamophobia does have a rational basis. Dobkowski's interpretation is slippery and problematic, but not unusual. At one point, he suggests that Islamophobia is 'more akin to racism, sexism, ageism and the like' and cannot be compared to anti-Semitism that 'at its core ... is a form of Manichaeism'.²⁴ There are many possible objections to these views. Dobkowski's conflation of violence with rational fear appears oblivious to the state violence done to Muslims in many parts of the world – not least in Israel. Is this violence somehow legitimated by being contained within, and inflicted by, the nation state? The equation of Islamophobia with sexism and ageism is absurd: sexists or ageists do not advocate the expulsion of women or old people from their societies as active threats to their culture. And finally, while anti-Semitism certainly has a long and dishonourable intellectual lineage, Islamophobia too has ancient roots. In its modern form, it has its own 'playbook' of accusation and totalization, a sophisticated and wealthy network of backers and a sort of retrospective Manichaean narrative placing Muslims always outside the boundaries of 'the West' through the selective use of history. In short, each of Dobkowski's assertions can be met with its at least equally plausible opposite.

The limitations of such views are based on too static a view of history, something that can also be claimed of Matti Bunzl's more benign reading, which argues that anti-Semitism in its ideational guise was a product of the era of the nation state, whereas Islamophobia is a post-national, transcontinental phenomenon, 'marshaled to safeguard the future of European civilization'.²⁵