

BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

Love, Erik. *Islamophobia and Racism in America*. New York: NYU Press, 2017, 267 pp., \$28.00, paper (9781479838073)

I*slamophobia and Racism in America* is a remarkably timely contribution to the important scholarly literature on race, discrimination, and social exclusion. Grounding rigorous empirical research within established theoretical traditions of racism and discrimination, Love shows how a narrow understanding of Middle Eastern political identity was constructed at the nexus of state policy, institutional autonomy, and social anxiety. While not discounting the diverse experiences of groups within the study or the complexity of today's political climate, Love illuminates the ways in which racism – and institutionalized racism targeting Islamic communities, in particular – has remained prevalent despite tremendous efforts by advocates to bolster civil liberties. Wedding institutional analysis with in-depth interviews with civil rights advocates, the book traces important issues related to the persistence of racism in the twenty-first century for a number of stakeholders interested in the future of civil rights, not simply, as the title suggests, in America.

The book contains six chapters and a rather vague methodological appendix. While this is a minor critique, the appendix ignites questions pertaining to the kinds of information Love gathered to create his own “database” of all active Middle Eastern American advocacy organizations. The chapters that comprise the book detail the historical and contemporary origins and practices of discrimination targeting South Asian, Muslim, Middle Eastern, and Sikh communities. In the first chapter, the author introduces the concept of a “racial dilemma.” This is a question of whether it is strategically beneficial for civil rights advocates to call out Islamophobia as racism, or whether they should sidestep questions of race altogether. By introducing the book's foundational question in this way, Love positions the racial dilemma as the arena by which the rest of the book's content will play out. As a technique analogous to the introduction of a novel, Love's use of creative imagery and empirically grounded storytelling immediately catches the reader's attention.

The second chapter explores how sociological theories are useful for understanding how race is constructed, and how it is paradoxically

both a “cause and effect of Islamophobia” (33). Effectively titled “The Racial Paradox,” it details Love’s adoption of racial formation theory to explore the relationship between race and civil rights advocacy. Racial formation theory posits that race is not only socially constructed, but that the content and importance of racial categories produced are determined by social, economic, and political forces. Racism occurs when a racial project “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities” (Omi and Winant 2015: 128). Love builds upon Omi and Winant’s theory to suggest that “discursive racial projects – the stories we tell one another, the things we say in casual conversation, and the rhetoric amplified in mass media – all contribute to racism, but racism does not begin or end with statements like these” (67). Yet, as noted by Love, institutional racism is not merely discursive – structural racism crystallizes at the nexus of several factors. This approach to institutionalized racism is an important strength of Love’s theorizing, as scholars often overlook relationships between discourses, institutional elements, and material practices. Love therefore convincingly argues that we should challenge how stakeholders interact in the arenas where racial dilemmas play out.

The author then details the history of racism in America, paying particularly close attention to discrimination against Muslims in culture, politics, and social policy. Relying on Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Love connects the misrepresentation of Middle Easterners with a parallel history of discrimination in America more generally. Juxtaposing racial stereotypes for which Said spoke of against a backdrop of the development of racial ideology and discrimination against Muslims in the United States, this chapter documents how political rhetoric and social policies enacted in the name of counterterrorism and (in) security clearly discriminate against Islamic communities.

In chapters four and five, Love shifts his focus to advocates working on the ground to confront racism against Muslims. These two chapters represent the book’s innovative character, as Love challenges both the historical development of Middle Eastern American advocacy and the strategies adopted by civil society organizations in attempting to solve the racial dilemma. Reminiscent of Christopher Bail’s (2015) work, Love eschews reductionist analyses that approach successful advocacy in terms of the economic or cultural elite, instead highlighting the complex interplay of strategy and outcome. In doing so, Love outlines the challenges faced by Middle Eastern advocacy group strategies that focus on bolstering universal civil liberties instead of advancing reforms to protect their own communities. According to Love,

advocacy groups are better off tackling racism head-on, rather than focusing on civil rights protections more generally, though he does not provide instructions for advocacy groups on their best course of action. While some might argue that such neutral detachment is impossible, Love carefully navigates his role as observer whilst wrestling with the study's implications for the persistence of racism.

The book concludes with a timely discussion of the future of American civil rights in light of the persistence of Islamophobia. Here, Love presents his most controversial argument – that the lack of stable coalitions among Arab, Sikh, Muslim, and South Asian American civil society organizations is due to the success of conservative campaigns following the civil rights movements of the 1960s. He questions whether American civil rights advocates will have to develop new, race-conscious, strategies if Americans truly want to live in a racism-free society. Though Love does not prepare a recipe for combatting racism or Islamophobia, he calls upon stakeholders to utilize the historical development of Islamophobia as a case study of the important challenges facing civil rights advocacy as we move into undeniably tense and racially charged times.

Discrimination, particularly practices targeting Islamic communities, is not solely, or even primarily, an American issue. It is a problem that knows no national border. In light of recent events in Charlottesville, and protests and counter-protests which have ensued elsewhere, racism is clearly at the forefront of public attention. We are thus faced with the important question of how to solve the culture of discrimination permeating the public sphere. While *Islamophobia and Racism in America* does not claim to provide solutions to this problem, the book extends such debate beyond simplistic accounts of religion as a primary basis of discrimination against Muslims. By focusing squarely on race, rather than solely religion, as a basis of Islamic persecution, Love challenges us to think about some of the limitations of our attempts to bolster civil liberties rather than tackling the roots and practices of racism that disproportionately affect Muslim communities. Although some might argue that Love's treatment of racism contributes to well-established ideas of American exceptionalism, and the narrow title may not help in this respect, readers will likely find that the book provides an analytical foundation for the role of civil society organizations in countering racist ideologies beyond the United States. Love's study is therefore of interest to anyone curious about issues of racism and the strategies adopted to combat it. With news stories abound related to the reemergence of groups seeking to establish an ethno-state

in the Western world, and seemingly daily protests, counter-protests, and racialized violence, *Islamophobia and Racism in America* deserves a place on any bookshelf and should be read sooner rather than later.

King's University College

Derek M.D. Silva

REFERENCES

- Bail, Christopher A. 2015. *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winnant. 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States (Third Edition)*. New York: Routledge.

Derek M.D. Silva is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at King's University College in London, Ontario. His research interests include terrorism and counterterrorism, social inclusion/exclusion, racism, and policing. He is currently working on a project detailing the process by which counterterrorism policies have been significantly rearticulated around notions of preemption through the deployment of "radicalization" discourses. You can follow him on twitter @derekmdsilva.