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*Islamophobia and the Struggle for Recognition*

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1:00pm  
White Hall 206  
Emory University

The Runnymede Trust (London) launched the public career of the concept of Islamophobia in 1997. It was too located in the field of religious tolerance and pluralism and I pioneered an alternative understanding of Islamophobia that defines it as anti-Muslim racism in the context of multicultural citizenship. I am delighted that this is emerging as the dominant interpretation of Islamophobia, (having been accepted some years ago by UNESCO and recently by the Runnymede Trust itself). And more generally that the concept is establishing itself in social science and public discourse alike. Yet I have some misgivings by the direction that some Islamophobia/Muslim studies are taking. My approach sees racialised ethno-religious group identity as having an ‘inside’ but in much of social science it is understood as something that is ‘constructed from the outside’, namely that it is an ascribed identity, constructed as a form of ‘othering’. I think that both these aspects of groupness have a real world existence and political significance, and cannot be reduced to each other, but a lot of social studies is focused on ‘othering’ alone. I challenge this latter orientation by arguing that being a Muslim is an identity that is capable of being ‘recognised’ and so necessarily has a dimension of group inter-subjectivity. I make a multiculturalist plea for studying Islamophobia (and groups negatively perceived from the outside, generally) within a normative framework which priorities groups fighting outsider perceptions by boosting insider identifications (‘the struggle for recognition’).

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