In 1997 the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia published a report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* in which Islamophobia was defined as a Brian Alderson?useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam ? and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims?. The consequences of Islamophobia, according to the report, ?is injustice, characterised by social exclusion; a sense of cultural inferiority among young British Muslims; and an increasing likelihood of serious social disorder?.

Following last year?s 11 September attacks on the United States, a Home Office commissioned study from the University of Derby revealed that the British Muslim community was facing unprecedented hostility. The study also revealed that Muslims were complaining of growing discrimination long before that date. The Times Educational Supplement of 19 October 2001 reported on attacks, both verbal and physical, on Asian pupils.

Most of us who work with children and their literature acknowledge the role of books in promoting cultural diversity and combating racial and religious stereotyping to be potentially significant. In BfK?s 1999 *A Multicultural Guide to Children?s Books*, I commented in my introduction that ?Islamophobia appears to be on the increase?. It was also striking how few titles, both fiction and non-fiction, we could find to recommend in this Guide relevant to the contemporary realities, history and culture of the British Muslim community and of Muslims in the wider world.

One of the conclusions of Fouzi El-Asmar?s 1986 study of Arab stereotypes in Hebrew children?s literature, *Through the Hebrew Looking-Glass* was that that literature ?aims to destroy any prospect of regarding the Arab with a measure of understanding and respect? and that ?it aims to perpetuate a lowly and despicable image of the Arab?. A more recent study (1997) by Professor Bar-Tel of Tel Aviv university of Israeli school textbooks discovered that little had changed in the intervening years. Bar-Tel found widespread negative stereotyping of Arabs and few explicit references to peace and understanding: Arabs are widely portrayed as uneducated and primitive; in the religious sector, nearly two-thirds of Hebrew readers use labels such as ?wild mob? and ?aspiring for blood and robbery?.

But what about the depiction of Muslims of whatever nationality in the books available to young readers in Britain? When racial violence is so clearly linked to anti-Muslim prejudice, there is a pressing need for books which challenge distorted and negative images. In our March edition, BfK will carry the first of a number of articles on this important issue.

* *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* is available from Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN at £11.40 inc p & p.

** *A Multicultural Guide to Children?s Books* is available from BfK at £7.50.

*** *Through the Hebrew Looking-Glass* by Fouzi El-Asmar was published by Zed Press in 1986 and is now OP.