

# PART I: UNDERSTANDING

# 1 Introduction: What is Islamophobia?

Farah Elahi and Omar Khan

## Introduction

In November 1997 the Runnymede Trust published *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. At the time the term 'Islamophobia' was relatively uncommon, but we argued that it was justified because 'anti-Muslim prejudice [had] grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed'. According to Wikipedia, Islamophobia as a term only 'reached public policy prominence' with the publication of Runnymede's report.

Twenty years on, it is of great concern to Runnymede – but more importantly to British Muslims – that anti-Muslim prejudice has grown further and wider. Public and policy debate now addresses Islamophobia more directly, but not always in a productive or coherent way.

In the intervening 20 years much has changed. Three particular changes are worth highlighting in the context of this 20th-anniversary report.

The first change is that the context – domestically and, perhaps more importantly, globally – has transformed fundamentally. After 9/11 and 7/7, Muslims became a greater focus of policymakers in the UK and around the world, but framed largely in terms of terrorism or as a civilizational threat. This framing of Muslims is, of course, centuries old, but has re-emerged in new and toxic ways since we published our report two decades ago.

Of course, the terrorist threat is indeed real. Attacks in 2017 alone included those at Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Finsbury Park and Parsons Green tube station, a frequency that inevitably increases public concern and fear, as well as requiring long-term support for the victims of these terrible attacks. For the most part the government, police, mayors, other officials and indeed victims' families have responded sensitively to these incidents.

As this report is about *Islamophobia* we do not discuss these issues in much greater detail. The issue of terrorism in Britain and across the world of course deserves policy and public focus and is a significant challenge for our society. At the same time, it's clear that the fear and threat of terrorism can be inflated by Islamophobia, and that Islamophobia

can increase in the wake of terrorist attacks. One of the 2017 terrorist attacks referenced above – in Finsbury Park – was in fact an Islamophobic attack deliberately targeting British Muslims. Race hate crime figures show that Islamophobic crimes increase following a terrorist attack (Travis 2017), and there is increasing awareness – not just among political leaders and the police but among the wider public and media – that we must be more considered in reporting on terrorist attacks, and not jump to the conclusion that all incidents involving injury are necessarily acts of Islamist terrorism (or that all public decisions involving Muslims are inherently suspect).

The second change is that, compared with 20 years ago, British Muslims are a larger, better-organized and more settled community. Compared with 1997 the population has grown considerably, to nearly 3 million (from approximately 1.2 to 1.4 million), with a young median age and a large number born in Britain. Furthermore the British Muslim population, especially compared with 1997, is much more organized, with a wide range of public, private and civil society voices, ranging from the arts and media to sports and politics. As part of this growing, more socially mobile, younger and more activist community, they have also challenged Islamophobia directly.

The third key change is that we have much more data on British Muslims – their population, distribution, attitudes and outcomes, in the labour market, education, housing and health. The original Runnymede report had to rely much more on other forms of data and analysis, though even today data on British Muslims is not as comprehensive as we need. Most prominent in the 1997 report was extensive media analysis, demonstrating the extent of Islamophobia in the press. Some of the more vulgar cartoons seen then would be unlikely to be republished now, but on the other hand Islamophobic narratives are now reproduced and shared globally, and the reach of social media has amplified those voices. Perhaps most worrying is the pernicious and acceptable suspicion towards Muslims generally, with misleading or outright incorrect stories and headlines, sometimes even driven by poorly designed surveys or proactive but inaccurate investigative journalism (notably the recent case of a Muslim family adopting a Christian child; Grierson 2017).

We do not include a chapter on the media in this report, in part because we now have so much further evidence on Islamophobia and in part because such data has been analysed and published elsewhere (Baker et al. 2013, Saeed 2007). However, this should not be interpreted as Runnymede being relaxed or uncritical about the extent and nature of Islamophobia that we still see in the British (and international) press. There are not enough Muslims (or members of other ethnic minorities, or indeed non-Oxbridge graduates) working in the British press and for British broadcasters, and stories about British Muslims are still likely to cast them as exotic or aberrant, when not directly associating them with terrorism. We have made a recommendation on how the media should better respond to Islamophobia, and seek to change its culture more widely. There should be no conflict between accuracy, non-discrimination and free speech, or in ensuring violations of these important press standards are provided with an adequate and proportionate response.

---

The original report was different from this report in some other respects too. This report, recognizing the range of issues that need to be addressed in relation to Islamophobia, is an edited volume. This means it contains a variety of chapters with a range of voices. The first two sections are a relatively coherent whole, with the first outlining what Islamophobia is conceptually or definitionally, and the second then mapping the evidence of Islamophobia in various social domains. The third and final section of this report gathers a more divergent but incisive range of some of the most important voices and arguments about Islamophobia as they've developed since 1997.

In contrast, the 1997 report was collectively produced by a Commission, as recommended by a previous Runnymede Commission on antisemitism. Robin Richardson, then Runnymede's director, explains this background in Chapter 16, and also highlights how and why the Commission's focus was then somewhat controversial. In particular, Runnymede followed many other race equality or anti-racist organizations in studiously avoiding too much discussion of or focus on religion or faith. Religion, faith and belief were seen to raise a different set of issues from those relating to race and ethnicity, which might even have more in common with gender or sexual orientation than with religion.

These challenges have, if anything, become more complex since 1997. The New Labour government that came into power in 1997 passed legislation that

extended anti-discrimination protection on grounds of religion or belief in the 2006 Equality Act and the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act. These bills were not without controversy, and the relationship between race and religion, and indeed between religion and other 'equality grounds' (gender, disability, sexual orientation and age), remained somewhat unsettled. The creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007 and the inclusion of religion and belief in wider 'equality and diversity' policies has somewhat papered over these issues.

This report – and the individual chapters – focuses on *Islamophobia* specifically, as a form of discrimination that affects British Muslims and those who are perceived to be Muslim. It does not offer a comprehensive account of British Muslims or Islam. Rather it offers an overview of the way in which Islamophobia affects individuals and communities in ways that are either structural or interpersonal. The purpose of the report is to put forward a definition of Islamophobia, create a resource for those working to challenge Islamophobia and discrimination in all its forms, and improve public policy and discourse on the issues affecting Muslims in Britain.

## Terminology and definition

Islamophobia in 2017 is complex and multifaceted. In this report, we focus on the manifestations of Islamophobia that we describe as anti-Muslim discrimination or racism. There is not sufficient public understanding of the ways in which Muslim individuals and communities experience discrimination, and this should also be the focus of policymakers and anyone else seeking to, or in a position to, improve the lives of British Muslims.

It must be acknowledged that the term 'Islamophobia' has itself led to some confusion. On the one hand, the term 'phobia' suggests a mental illness or a fear, rather than effectively picking out discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. The original report was clear and explicit about the link to discrimination, prejudice and exclusion; and the term can be interpreted similarly to the way 'homophobia' is, or rather should be, understood as discrimination towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

More than the suffix 'phobia', the first part 'Islam' has generated greater and deeper challenges. Many have argued that Islam as a religion is a system of beliefs, and so can and should be subject to criticism. We don't object to that formulation. At the same time, many who affirm their right to criticize

Islam as a religion don't consider enough how Muslims do indeed face discrimination and prejudice that has real effects in their lives – from the labour market to educational outcomes to violence in the street. Runnymede believes the focus on ideas (or 'ideologies') has obscured what instead should be a focus on people.

Social phenomena are often defined by terms that don't precisely correspond to those phenomena in a literal, dictionary way. Just as criticisms of 'antisemitism' that argue 'Arabs are Semites too' are pedantic distractions, so too many criticisms of Islamophobia suffer from bad-faith literalism.

In this context it is worth reminding ourselves of Runnymede's 1997 definition. The original Islamophobia report states that the term refers to three phenomena:

- Unfounded hostility towards Islam;
- Practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities;
- Exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.

We mainly agree with this broad definition. In our view, the focus should be on the second and third phenomena. To clarify the scope of how Islamophobia should be understood in a social and policy context in Britain, we offer the following definition of Islamophobia.

**Definition: Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism.**

This is obviously a short definition. We have also developed a longer-form definition, building on the United Nations definition of racism generally.

**Longer definition: Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.**

We have offered these definitions to forestall further confusion about the nature of Islamophobia, but also to focus policy and social change on what could best tackle Islamophobia and so improve British Muslims'

lives. The definition therefore is not simply what Runnymede thinks is the best analytical account of what Islamophobia is, but also points to our various recommendations on how to respond to it.

We recognize that Islamophobia as a form of racial discrimination is not the only challenge facing British Muslims. There are clearly widespread bigoted and false perceptions about Islam as a faith. These feed Islamophobia as a form of discrimination, for example justifying discrimination in the labour market. Justifying discrimination or inequality by referencing the cultural practices of minority groups is a defining characteristic of all forms of prejudice and racism.

As indicated above, our longer-form definition derives from the UN definition of *racism*. It is perhaps necessary to explain our use of the term 'racism', and why we have chosen it over a possible alternative: 'anti-Muslim hate'.

Among sociologists it is common to talk about different forms of racism, processes of 'racialization', and even 'racism without races'. The notion that 'race' is a social construct is more familiar today and indeed widely affirmed even outside the university and across the political spectrum. Just because something is a social construct, that doesn't mean it doesn't drive or explain individual and group outcomes in the real world. In fact, it is sometimes argued that the relevance of race to social outcomes was first justified by Enlightenment thinkers who deliberately created an essentialized notion of race to deny the otherwise universal proposition of equal moral worth to those human beings who were enslaved and colonized by Europeans.

The UN definition above picks out the ways racism operates: not simply as an attitude or prejudice, but by denying people dignity, rights and liberties across a range of political, economic, social and cultural institutions. Referring only to 'anti-Muslim hate' (or even 'anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination') doesn't fully capture the widespread (or structural) ways racial inequalities persist. It may also get things back to front: prejudicial attitudes about a group develop to justify the economic or political disadvantages experienced by that group.

This helps us understand how all forms of racism have contained a 'cultural' component. It is sometimes argued that current forms of racism are more 'cultural' than previous forms of racism based more on skin colour. It is understandable why far-right groups might want to assert such a defence,

especially where public understandings of racism still focus on ‘colour’: they claim only to object to the culturally illiberal or otherwise undesirable practices of certain groups, but assert that they are not otherwise ‘racist’. Yet all forms of racism have contained a cultural element, symptomatically by attributing pathological, dangerous or aberrant behaviours to groups ranging from black to Chinese to Jewish people. Nonetheless, the focus on culture as a key component of current forms of racism is useful for understanding why racism and its effects persist even as essentialist biological claims about race have become unfashionable.

A definition of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism clearly, then, fits with historical and academic accounts of racism.

All forms of racism are based on non-scientific accounts of ‘races’ that seek to justify the persistent and extensive disadvantages and inequalities those groups face in society. It is of course true that there is a wide range of diversity among and within British (to say nothing of international) Muslim communities. At the same time, all Muslims are vulnerable to Islamophobia as a form of racism, and responding to that continued challenge is the main focus of this report.

## Recommendations

**1. The government should adopt our definition of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism.** As with many Black and minority ethnic groups, Muslims experience disadvantage and discrimination in a wide range of institutions and environments, from schools to the labour market to prisons to violence on the street. Policies to tackle Islamophobia should be developed in line with policies to tackle racial discrimination more generally, with the focus also on the real effects on people. Islamophobia is a complex issue, but so too are all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

**2. Public services but also private and charity sector employers should collect more data on Muslims and other faith/non-faith groups.** Given evidence of a specific ‘Muslim penalty’ across different sectors, and the diversity of the Muslim population, using existing census group ethnicity categories cannot capture the experience of Muslims in the public and private sectors. This should be part of wider efforts of public services and employers to improve their data collection, including response rates, on ethnic monitoring. Historically, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic group categories were used as

proxies for Muslim; these groups currently account for just over half (55%) of British Muslims.

**3. The government should reintroduce a target to reduce child poverty, and develop a wider anti-poverty strategy.** Given that over half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in poverty (DWP 2017), and given that the rates of poverty among Muslims generally are much higher than the average, tackling poverty would greatly improve British Muslims’ opportunities and outcomes. Preventing poverty is especially important for children not just morally but because it is a good preventive strategy for reducing inequalities in later life and for improving integration.

**4. Following up on its strong and commendable commitment to collecting race equality data, the government should adopt a wider strategy to tackle those inequalities which particularly affect British Muslims. This should be a central plank of its integration strategy.** The Race Disparity Audit has revealed inequalities across a range of outcomes, from health, housing and environment to education, employment and criminal justice. Tackling these inequalities – including but not limited to barriers to accessing English language provision – should be a priority for every government department (and local authority), and should also be linked up across government departments in a wider strategy to tackle racial inequalities at every stage of the life course.

**5. Employers and employment support organizations should address barriers to equal labour market participation.** Policies addressing racial discrimination within the labour market will also improve outcomes for British Muslims. This includes: publishing pay gaps, name-blind CVs, ensuring long- and shortlists reflect the local working-age population, measuring managers’ ability to progress minorities as a key performance indicator, and accountability for outcomes not just by human resources or senior leadership but at every level of management.

**6. Race equality, Muslim and other faith-led civil society groups and organizations should work more closely together to build a common platform to challenge all forms of racism and prejudice.** It is not enough for people or organizations to challenge only the form of discrimination that directly affects them; anti-discrimination and equality are universal principles that must be defended even when doing so doesn’t have a direct effect on us personally. It is important

to understand that different forms of racism have different attributes, whether anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim or anti-black, and that it is therefore reasonable and justifiable to understand and respond to specific forms of racism. But challenging racism requires challenging it in all its forms, and understanding anti-racism as a wider human rights and equality position entails defending other groups that experience discrimination too.

**7. Local mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners should ensure appropriate resources are allocated to tackling hate crime effectively at a local level.** In addition to criminal justice sanctions for the most serious hate crime offenders, the government should utilize community-based, restorative and rehabilitative interventions (see Walters et al. 2016) to tackle hate crime.

The Hate Crime Action Plan (Home Office 2016) commits to preventing hate crime by challenging the beliefs and attitudes underpinning such crimes and to working with young people and schools. This must involve **addressing the core curriculum and ensuring the history of migration is taught effectively.** See [www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk](http://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk).

Finally, and in line with the concluding recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the government should ensure that **public officials do not partake in hate speech, and that they robustly challenge hate speech and condemn any hateful ideas or policies** that promote intolerance and hostility (United Nations 2016).

**8. There should be a full independent inquiry into the government's counter-terrorism strategy, which must be conducted with transparency. The government should recognize its statutory equality obligations as set out in the public sector equality duty (PSED) in the implementation of all counter-terrorism policies.**

Counter-terrorism measures must not lead to discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, in purpose or effect.

There is substantial evidence that among the government's four counter-terrorism strands, the current Prevent policy is discriminatory, disproportionate and counterproductive. **Given the mounting evidence, the independent review must answer whether the Prevent strategy should be withdrawn and how to better separate the state's security apparatus from**

**wider safeguarding or social policy strategies.**

The government should develop funding and support Muslim and other disadvantaged communities to improve opportunities, encourage civic participation, and so provide the grounds for effective integration, but these policies should not be conceived in terms of counter-terrorism, and should not target British Muslims only.

**9. Full protection of freedom of speech and the freedom of the press is consistent with tackling inaccurate and discriminatory reporting. Media regulators should intervene more proactively in cases of allegedly discriminatory reporting, and in so doing reflect the spirit of equalities legislation, as recommended by the Leveson Inquiry. Where inaccurate or misleading content is published, corrections or retractions should be given equal prominence, and not relegated to a small box in an inconspicuous position.**

**A press regulator should investigate the prevalence of Islamophobia, racism and hatred espoused in the press.** This should focus on accuracy and discrimination, but also consider whether individual stories have wider, negative effects on whole ethnic groups, and on wider social attitudes. The press and the wider media should publish data on the ethnic and class diversity of their journalists, editors and senior management, and establish targets in line with local working-age populations.

The government should establish a group of media practitioners, and representatives from the press, local authorities, and race equality NGOs, to initiate new strategies to combat racial prejudice in the media and negative public perceptions of minority ethnic groups. All politicians should show greater accountability for the impact on race relations of negative media coverage and misrepresentation of minority ethnic and religious groups.

**10. Tackling Islamophobia is a responsibility for all of us. There is a need for greater awareness of how Islamophobia and all forms of racism affect people's lives in modern Britain.** It is good that British Muslims increasingly challenge Islamophobia. However, to challenge and end Islamophobia and all forms of racism effectively, we all need to confront and condemn it where we see it, and commit to raising awareness in others of its wider effects. Tackling Islamophobia and all forms of racism is not only the responsibility of Muslims or ethnic minorities, but nor is it only the government or the state that must show

greater responsibility in tackling it. Employers, neighbours, teachers and fellow citizens must all work to raise awareness and to act to combat racism wherever and however it appears.

Before summarizing the evidence and argument of this report it's worth saying something further about the original report's first plank of Islamophobia, namely 'unfounded hostility towards Islam'. There is little doubt that this still exists – if anything such hostility now has a wider platform and has been developed and promoted in new, disturbing ways (see Chapter 10, and Chapter 13).

In the intervening years, therefore, two contradictory concerns have emerged: it is both more necessary than before to explain and outline why Islam as such is not a threat to, or in inherent conflict with, 'the west'; and, at the same time, to allow and defend criticism of Islam (and all religions and beliefs) as a clear consequence of free speech. One reason we have chosen to focus our definition is that so much of the debate about free speech and criticism of Islam is irrelevant, or at best orthogonal, to the question of whether Muslims in Britain (and elsewhere) face discrimination – and what we in Britain should do about that discrimination.

The original report was of course concerned about this issue too. This is shown in the 1997 Commission's distinction between *open* and *closed* views of Islam, to differentiate between legitimate criticism or disagreement and unfounded prejudice or hostility. Even 20 years ago Runnymede recognized the limitations of the term 'Islamophobia', and the initial report's focus was similar to that of the current volume: to name anti-Muslim prejudice so that it can be identified and acted against.

An increasingly common argument is that Islam is a set of ideas and so there is no more a concept of Islamophobia than there is a concept of 'Communismphobia' or 'Christophobia'. Proponents of this view typically argue they are being rebuked for criticism of ideas, and many further argue that the term 'Islamophobia' itself is dishonestly used to shut down debate. The consequence of this line of reasoning, as Claire Alexander outlines in Chapter 2, is that it has become possible to hate and fear Islam without any reference to actual Muslims. The chapter traces the demonization of Muslim communities in Britain, linking the contemporary debate with the historical positioning

of Muslims within the British imagination. Alexander sets out the consequences of the 'separation of Islamophobia as ideology from Muslims themselves and, in a parallel move, the separation of anti-Muslimism from the longer and broader historical and social context of racial discrimination and racism'.

## Report summary

Alexander's chapter concludes Part I of our report where we outline what Islamophobia is conceptually and definitionally. Part II presents a summary of the evidence of Islamophobia in various domains, provides an account of how things have changed since 1997, shows the impact of Islamophobia on the individual and communities, and addresses a range of key policy issues. Throughout Part II we have included individual stories and perspectives on Islamophobia. We greatly appreciate the contributions of all who were willing to share their personal experiences with us. The case studies often make for difficult reading and highlight the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim.

## Twenty years of progress?

There has been a Muslim presence in the UK for hundreds of years; however, it was only after the 2001 census that hard data was available on the demography of Muslim communities. In 1991 the national census did not include any questions on religion, and its addition in the 2001 census emerged out of campaigning by Muslim organizations. In Chapter 3, Serena Hussain covers the emergence of Muslims as a faith community, where previously they were viewed primarily in terms of their ethnicity. The chapter provides an overview of what we know about Muslims in Britain. Some of the key patterns covered include population size and demography, ethnicity, geographical spread, education, employment, health and housing.

When the 1997 Runnymede Islamophobia report was published there was a small emerging Muslim civil society, with limited expertise to respond adequately to the challenges identified. In the last 20 years Muslim organizations have been catalysed to change and now are significant actors within the civil society landscape. Chapter 9, by Chris Allen, considers the journey these groups have undertaken over two decades, how key socio-political factors have shaped and/or hindered it, and the impact of counter-terrorism policies. Allen identifies two key crucial socio-political factors that have shaped how Muslim communities are perceived and, in turn, determined how they are able to engage in public and political spaces.

The first is counter-terrorism policy, framing the Government's thinking about Islam and Muslims, and the second is the requirement for groups to unequivocally accept and support certain government assumptions. As a result Muslim groups 'were faced with having to be complicit and agreeable or be excluded from the discussion'. The chapter goes on to discuss the impact of top-down approaches to structuring Muslim political representation. These factors have significantly impaired the capacity of Muslim groups and organizations to address Islamophobia, something that might not have been envisaged in 1997.

Another feature of the last 20 years has been the proliferation of political mobilizations against Islam by far-right groups and 'counter-jihad' movements. This has extended across many European and North American countries and included campaigns against mosques and halal meat and for 'burqa bans'. Ed Pertwee, in Chapter 10, traces the extensive international networks that share organizational models, strategies and resources. Pertwee argues that this sphere of activity goes beyond casual prejudice or bigotry towards Muslims and is grounded in a developed political ideology, supported by complex organizational structures. The chapter provides an overview of this transnational movement, the political ideology underpinning it and its internationalization. A key aspect of the ideology is that it is premised on a vision of western crisis and conspiratorial narratives of left-wing collusion with Muslims to bring about the 'Islamization' of the west. It relies on the idea of Islam as a hostile 'alien' culture. The impact of these counter-jihad movements has been violence directed towards Muslims, while their ideas are now influencing and entering the mainstream, as is most visible in the US with the election of Donald Trump.

### ***Impact on the individual and community***

As outlined at the start of this chapter, despite widespread use of the term 'Islamophobia' there is very poor understanding of its impact on individuals and communities. Much of the public debate separates the phenomenon from Muslims themselves and fails to account for its practical consequences. This report includes a range of chapters mapping the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims, or those perceived to be Muslim, in some key domains.

British Muslims have some of the lowest employment rates and earnings for any group in Britain, and concurrently suffer significant economic disadvantage. Removing the barriers to economic

integration must be a cornerstone of addressing inequality. Chapter 4, by Anthony Heath and Asma Mustafa, investigates the relationship between Islamophobia and poor labour market outcomes for Muslims. The evidence covered in this chapter disentangles religious penalties from ethnic penalties, including evidence from the Social Mobility Commission and numerous field experiments. In addition to particular barriers at application and progression stages, Heath and Mustafa also cover the impact of perceptions of discrimination on potential applicants and the 'chill factor'. We do not suggest that Islamophobia is the only driver of poor labour market outcomes for Muslim people, but it is clear that without addressing Islamophobia outcomes will not improve.

The relationship between Islamophobia and mental health is seldom addressed, despite the fact that much research has identified racism to be a focal element of ethnic inequalities in health. In Chapter 5, James Nazroo and Laia Bécades chart the health inequalities experienced by Muslim people, and the relationship between Islamophobia as a form of racism and health. They show the harm that Islamophobia does to ethnic minority people's health, both directly and through consequent social and economic disadvantage. A core aspect of their argument focuses on the need to address the stress associated with having a negatively racialized identity, and the importance of tackling structural inequalities.

Hate crime is one of the most obvious dimensions of Islamophobia, and over the last few years the numbers of recorded incidents has seen a sharp rise. Imran Awan and Irene Zempi, in Chapter 6, identify patterns in Islamophobic hate crime as well as the impact on both the individual and community. On an individual level, Awan and Zempi highlight the increased vulnerability that is experienced as a result of being targeted for being (or appearing to be) Muslim, and the consequent implications for levels of confidence and self-esteem. They draw attention to mechanisms that victims use to decrease vulnerability, such as changing the way they live their lives or how they express their Muslim identity. The significant gendered element of Islamophobic hate crime often means that women's options and life choices are particularly constrained. They also highlight how the harm associated with hate crime is not restricted to direct victims, but rather extends to all group members by impacting on notions of belonging and cohesion.

A core aspect of the state's interaction with Muslim communities in Britain takes place through the security apparatus and counter-extremism policies.

One of the most criticized elements of this policy has been the government's Prevent strategy – in particular since the establishment of the Prevent duty, which requires schools, universities, hospitals, local councils and prisons to prevent people being drawn in to terrorism. In Chapter 7, Barbara Cohen and Waqas Tufail address the discriminatory nature and impact of the Prevent policy. This includes its breach of the public sector equality duty, the impact on free speech and the poor quality of training currently on offer. The chapter highlights the relationship between the Prevent duty and the normalization of viewing Muslims with suspicion, reflected in the substantial over-representation of Muslims among Channel referrals. The chapter authors argue that it is in the interests of all citizens to be safe from terrorism, but that 'it is contrary to both equality and human rights law that Muslims, far more than any other group, are expected to pay for such safety at the cost of being subject to suspicion, demonization, racial stereotyping and unwarranted interference with their private lives'.

Not long after the publication of the 1997 report, Muslims and their perceived lack of integration emerged as a key area of public policy concern. Over the last 20 years numerous inquiries and reports have characterized Muslims as leading 'parallel lives' and as distinctive in their behaviour and values. Chapter 8, by Ajmal Hussain and Nasar Meer, covers 20 years of integration policies and the positioning of Muslims as a 'fifth column' within them. In particular they note how the integration debate is played out with reference to Muslim 'no-go areas' and images of niqab-wearing women. Schools have become the frontline of managing this, through transmitting so-called 'fundamental British values' and the policing of transgressors. The 'Trojan horse' hoax symbolized the inflection of Islamophobia in the policing of Muslim mobilization. Most recently the Casey review highlighted the 'mood in government that sees Muslims as "outsiders" who need to be brought "inside"'.

The last chapter in Part II addresses the gendered discourse in media and policy debates about Islam. Chapter 11, by Naaz Rashid, analyses how debates about the veil, gender violence and the 'war on terror' contribute to stereotypes of Muslim women: as oppressed, passive victims, symbolic of Muslim communities' alleged failure to integrate, and increasingly as potential extremists. These stereotypes deny Muslim women (and men) agency or the ability to make the moral and social choices other groups are assumed to enjoy. While she emphasizes the importance of

addressing gender-based issues affecting Muslim women, Rashid highlights the need to centre the voices of Muslim women and to tackle sexism and patriarchal practices and structures wherever they exist. Tackling gender inequality without tackling Islamophobia is not sufficient for addressing the inequalities facing Muslim women. Rashid concludes by reaffirming the need to challenge all forms of gender and racial inequality.

### ***Different conceptions of Islamophobia***

At the beginning of this chapter we set out a definition of Islamophobia as a form of racism. That definition should be taken as Runnymede's position, and one that informs all of our recommendations.

Part III of this report is a collection of essays that raise important questions about and challenges to our definition. We recognize that definitions or accounts of Islamophobia address a variety of complex issues, and that people genuinely and reasonably disagree about how Islamophobia should be conceived. Part III recognizes this diversity of views, and aims to foster a healthy and better-informed debate about Islamophobia.

Runnymede is fortunate to be able to publish contributions from some of the most influential and insightful thinkers on Islamophobia: Tariq Modood, Shenaz Bunglawala, Kenan Malik, David Feldman and Robin Richardson. Some of the various questions that they address are: the role of group identity within an anti-essentialist struggle against Islamophobia; the focus on negative views about Islam as central to the experience of Islamophobia; the consequences of criminalizing dissenting speech; the commonalities and differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia; and the history of the original 1997 Runnymede Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia.

The authors may disagree on how precisely we should define and understand Islamophobia, but they all agree we need a better and more focused policy and public response to it.

## 2 Raceing Islamophobia

Claire Alexander

### Introduction: Islamophobia without Muslims?

The landmark 1997 Runnymede report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* defines Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam'. It continues, 'It also refers to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs' (Runnymede Trust 1997: 4). Islamophobia, the report notes, is a relatively new word (tracing the emergence of the term to late 1980s America, though others have traced it to the early 20th century: see Meer 2015b), but one that refers both to a longer history of hatred and suspicion of Muslims, and to a more recent intensification of this phenomenon from the 1980s onwards. Capturing 'a new reality' – the growth of explicitly anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain and elsewhere in the decade prior to its publication – the report seeks to hold two aspects in tension: antipathy towards Islam as a religious ideology and set of practices, and discrimination against Muslims. The latter, the report insists, is inseparable from the former, with 'dread and hatred of Islam' leading 'therefore to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims' (Runnymede Trust 1997: 2, my emphasis). Of the eight definitional distinctions between 'open' and 'closed' views that define Islamophobia, there is an equal balance between 'Islam' and 'Muslims', and Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice are used interchangeably throughout, linking ideology and people, thought and deed, in important ways (Runnymede Trust 1997: 4).

The 20 years since the publication of the Runnymede report have seen an intensification and banalization of Islamophobic sentiment, policy and practice in Britain, alongside the increased targeting, both violent and mundane, of British Muslims. However, we might argue that one of the most dangerous sophistications in Islamophobic discourse has been the separation of Islamophobia as ideology from Muslims themselves and, in a parallel move, the separation of anti-Muslimism from the longer and broader historical and social context of racial discrimination and racism. The consequences of this are (i) to decouple Islamophobia from racism, so that (as with migration, the other, and parallel, incarnation of early 21st-century racism), it is apparently possible to

hate and fear Islam without any reference to actual Muslims; (ii) to deny that anti-Muslimism is racism, because, in an update of the 'new racist' paradigm, it focuses on religious or cultural practices rather than inherent ethnic or racial characteristics; (iii) to separate out Muslims from other racialized minority groups, while parasitically building on long-established racist discourses and images around black and South Asian migration and settlement; (iv) to erase the differences within and between 'Muslim' groups, including histories, patterns of settlement, practices and politics; and (v) to deny the histories and practices of solidarity, resistance and resilience across black and Asian, Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Britain. An unintended consequence of the focus on Islamophobia, then, has been to undermine the struggle against racism against Muslims.

### Islamophobia without racism?

The focus on Muslims in Britain is most usually traced to the *Satanic Verses* affair in 1989, which fractured the fragile liberal anti-racist consensus, and placed Britain's largely South Asian Muslim communities under the spotlight. The nearly 30 years since the publication of Rushdie's novel have seen a series of moral panics around British Muslims, first in the protests around the Gulf War in 1991; later, and most dramatically, in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, the launch of the 'war on terror' and the 'homegrown' terror attacks in London in 2005; and more recently in the response to so-called 'jihadis' heading to Syria to fight (or marry) for Isis.

These more 'spectacular' moments need, however, to be placed against a longer and broader backdrop of Muslim demonization in Britain and, I would argue, cannot be understood without this historical and discursive racist hinterland. As Nasar Meer (2013) has powerfully argued, the Muslim presence in Britain has long been seen as unwelcome and problematic – a perception predating, in fact, modern ideas of biological racism and running in parallel with long historical antisemitic antecedents, which have pathologized and persecuted religious difference marked through descent, 'race' and 'culture'. As the Runnymede report notes (1997: 5), whether we see this discourse as continuous, or as conveniently resurrected, this history provides

a powerful repertoire of anti-Muslim sentiment that feeds seamlessly into contemporary Islamophobic discourse, rehearsing ideas of medieval cultures, barbarism and timeless antagonism to 'the west'. At the same time, anti-Muslim or Islamophobic discourses draw on 'modern' racist and Orientalist (Said 1978) discourses emerging from colonialism, decolonization and mass post-war migration, in which Muslims form one strand in a broader tapestry of racist stereotypes, images and discourses. It is important to remember, for example, that 'Muslims' in post-war Britain were configured as 'coloured', then 'black', then 'Asian', then 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi' before they appeared as 'Muslims' (Alexander 1998, 2002) – and while the labels may have changed, the racist content of the category largely did not.

It is this racist 'commonsense' (Lawrence 1982) which places the 'spectacular' moments within a broader framework of marginalization and pathologization of 'the Muslim community' – what Michael Gove so memorably termed 'the swamp' within which extremist 'crocodiles' swim (Watt 2014). This has positioned 'the Muslim community' as homogeneous, outside of and opposed to Britishness, and understood through stereotypes of poverty and the underclass, criminality, misogyny, cultural and generational conflict, identity crisis, and the clash of civilizations. These older racial and ethnic stereotypes have been dusted down and recycled to explain everything from the 2001 'riots' (Alexander 2004) to grooming, 'gangs', forced marriage, FGM (female genital mutilation), mythical Trojan horses (Miah 2017) and electoral misconduct. It is worth noting, for example, that explanations for the 'Asian gang' folk devil of the 1990s (Alexander 2000) drew on the same images of cultural dysfunction and identity crisis that demonized black youth in the 1980s (Alexander 1996), urban 'gangs' in the 2000s (Alexander 2008), and Muslim 'grooming gangs' and 'fundamentalism' in the 2010s.

## (De)culturing Islamophobia

The de-racing of Islamophobia can be traced to four interlinked conceptual sleights of hand: first, the reduction of our understanding of *what racism is* to explicit and violent interpersonal expressions of hatred focused on narrow biological markers, stripping out its social, structural and historical context (Song 2014); second, the denial of 'Muslim' as a racial or ethnic category (unlike, for example, Sikhs or Jews) and a corollary denial of Muslims being victims of racism as *Muslims*; third, the placing of Islam as a category of choice, rather

than ascription, and as therefore separate from the embodied being of its adherents ('culture' rather than 'race'); and fourth, and relatedly, the over-emphasis on 'Islamic culture' or 'Muslim culture' as a foundational explanation for the slew of assumed pathologies discussed above.

Positioning Muslims/Islam as a chosen/assumed identity seemingly ascribes an element of volition, of choice, which seemingly removes them from the status of victim. Similarly, the recourse to 'Muslim culture' places the focus on beliefs and practices as distinct from Muslims themselves; it is here that what Sayeeda Warsi terms the acceptability of liberal 'dinner-table' Islamophobia (BBC News 2011) finds its alibi. At the same time, and paradoxically, 'culture' assumes a collective foundation, which works to homogenize all Muslims, erasing differences in ethnicity, nationality, migrant history, legal status, socioeconomic positioning, religious practice or belief, location, gender, sexuality and so on. 'Culture' is lifted outside of its historical and social context, and assumed to be unchanging, anachronistic and, most usually, antagonistic to the 'modern' west. This is particularly apparent in the gendering of Muslim identities – e.g. in the recent discussions around 'gangs' and 'grooming', or on the hijab, marriage and English language competency. It can be seen too in the positioning of all Muslims as a 'suspect community' through a series of policies around securitization and 'tackling extremism'. In Britain, there has been an institution(alization) of surveillance of Muslim groups on the streets (as in the Birmingham 'spycam' affair; Hussain 2014), by police, in prisons, in the immigration system, in their own homes and on the internet (on suspicion of 'Googling while Muslim' as my colleague Wendy Bottero evocatively described it), and, particularly worryingly, across the education system from primary schools to universities. This has particularly affected young people, who bear the brunt of this hostility, creating a climate of fear and suspicion.

This has shifted attention away from broader social and economic structures and can be seen as 'blaming the victim' or as exceptionalizing Muslims as a group, and as a 'problem'. This vicious cultural(izing) circle thus works to place the blame for inequality or discrimination either on the individual's way of life (or dress, or facial hair) or on the 'way of life' of the imagined group. At the same time, it offers an illusion of change and of choice – the cultural promise is that if only Muslims were more like 'us', then other problems of inequality, discrimination and exclusion would suddenly disappear. Islamophobia is largely understood to be a question of (their)

'culture'. However – and here's the cultural catch – because questions of culture are primarily understood through the essentializing lens of 'race', 'ethnicity' or 'religion', they are seen to be internal, immutable and, therefore, not a problem that can be solved – privileging what the Runnymede report terms 'closed' over 'open' views of Islam (1997: 5). 'Muslim' thus becomes a naturalized category linked to an assumed 'mode of being': as Paul Gilroy has previously argued about ethnicity, 'the cultural flavour of today's racism may mean that no mention is made of old-style biological races at all. There are of course colour-coded ways of talking about race without using the actual word' (1993: 56). To paraphrase de Beauvoir (1953), today, it seems, 'culture is destiny'.

## Conclusion: re-raceing Islamophobia

Or, perhaps more accurately, Islamophobia suggests that 'religion is destiny' – apparently trumping and transcending 'narrow' appeals to 'race', ethnicity or nationality, while at the same time reducing the richness, textures and diversities of Muslim lives (Alexander et al. 2013) to conveniently packaged and caricatured 'dog-whistle' emblems of what Islam 'is', or has come to stand for in the dominant cultural imagination – beards and burqas, forced marriage and FGM, sharia law and jihadi outlaws. In so doing, it necessarily conjures the spectre of 'race' as a key signifier of religio-cultural difference – it is impossible, and indeed disingenuous, to separate either Islam from Muslims themselves, or 'Muslims' from the black and brown bodies who form the largest proportion of Muslims in Britain, and globally. To do so separates 'Muslim' bodies from the longer and broader histories of race and racism, and from the broader structures of discrimination and violence that place Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim communities as some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged and vulnerable in the UK today. At the same time, it erases the vibrant history of Muslim communities in Britain, and their role in shaping contemporary British cities, culture and society – from the contribution of Muslim lascars in imperial trade and two world wars to the multi-billion pound 'Indian' restaurant trade and the celebration of 'chicken tikka masala' as Britain's national dish (Alexander et al. 2016). It ignores too the broader political solidarities across racial, ethnic and religious differences – from the Asian and African anti-colonial and independence movements of the early to mid-20th century through the Asian Youth Movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Ramamurthy 2013) and the embracing of 'political blackness' (Alexander 2002), to the contemporary anti-war and anti-racist

campaigns, and the shaping of popular culture from Asian Dub Foundation and Fun-Da-Mental to Riz Ahmed and even Zayn Malik (Kim 2015).

This is not to deny the historical and contemporary specificities and contours of Islamophobic discourse, nor to deny the impact of Islamophobic rhetoric, policy and practice on the lives of British Muslims: quite the opposite. It is, however, to caution against what Meer (2015b) refers to as 'making a fetish out of words' and to consider the dangers of focusing too much on the borders of what Islamophobia *is* rather than what it *does* – as a form of, and alibi for, contemporary 'race-making' (Meer 2015b). Racism has always proven itself to be a multifaceted and malleable force of discrimination, as a form both of categorization and of persecution – what John Solomos and Les Back have termed a 'scavenger ideology' (1996). Contemporary Islamophobia builds on, feeds off, transforms and adds to a store of racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes – a ragbag of racist ideas, policies and practices selected according to convenience and wielded against a particularly (if not uniquely) visible and vulnerable community. Nevertheless, it is crucial that we recognize that Islamophobia is not simply 'a Muslim problem', that it implicates and affects everyone, and that, importantly, we must build alliances across other minoritized and discriminated people and groups, and all people of good will, to stand against racism in all of its forms. Islamophobia remains, 20 years on, 'a challenge for us all'.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Nasar Meer and Ajmal Hussain for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this piece.