What is Islamophobia?

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Racism, Social Movements and the State

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Islamophobia, Social Movements and the State: For a Movement-centred Approach

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Despite a considerable growth in writing on Islamophobia in recent years there is still no clear agreement as to what it is, where it comes from and how it relates to other forms of racism. Indeed, two decades after the term entered into common usage in the English-speaking world, Islamophobia is still not universally recognised as a form of racism. This remains the case even in academia, where the literature on racism is still largely separate from work on Islamophobia. The relative inattention Islamophobia has received from sociologists of racism is surprising given the considerable growth in hostility towards Muslims in recent years, which could hardly have gone unnoticed. And it is all the more surprising given that one of the great insights of this subfield of sociology has been to recognise 'race' as a social construct arising in particular historical and political contexts, rather than a property of the victims of racism.

In this introductory chapter we offer a theoretically grounded, empirically rich, sociological conception of Islamophobia which focuses not on the characteristics of Muslim people, but rather on *political practices*. In this sense, our approach differs from much of the existing work on Islamophobia, which has tended to focus on the conflicting discourses around citizenship, identity, belonging and nationhood (Bulmer and Solomos, 2015; Esposito and Ibrahim, 2013; Modood, 2007). By contrast, we set out an argument that conceives of Islamophobia not simply as a product of abstract discursive or ideological processes, but of concrete social action undertaken in the pursuit of certain interests.

'In our view, solely focusing on the religious, cultural or even political identities of Muslim people only offers a partial view of Islamophobia. A more satisfactory approach than starting with how the meaning of Muslim identities are constructed and contested, for example, is to focus on the set of institutions and policies that disproportionately impact upon Muslims. This is an empirical question which can be investigated through conventional social scientific methods. Doing so should draw our attention not only to the structures, agents and practices that produce racist outcomes, but also to the social, political and cultural action undertaken which puts the infrastructure of subordination in place.

In this chapter, and others in this collection, we discuss these agents and institutions under the rubric of the 'five pillars of Islamophobia'. By this we mean that there are specific social actors (pillars) that produce the ideas and practices that result in disadvantage for Muslims. We argue that the state is the foremost of these, in particular as a result of the activities of the counter-terrorism apparatus. We suggest that there are four other collective social actors (or social movements) that are important in supporting and extending anti-Muslim racism. These are the neoconservative movement, (parts of) the Zionist movement, the counterjihad movement (and the far right) and elements of liberal, left, secular and feminist movements. Before discussing the state and these various social movements, we turn first to the question of why we should theorise Islamophobia as a form of racism.

Theorising Islamophobia

A key reference point for accounts of Islamophobia has been the late Fred Halliday's article, '"Islamophobia" reconsidered' (1999). This is the most highly cited article on Islamophobia on Google Scholar and after nearly two decades still has political purchase for those on the left and right who oppose mobilisations against Islamophobia. In the article, Halliday argued against using the term Islamophobia; a position rooted in his critique of 'communalist' identity politics. Unlike some other Islamophobia deniers (e.g. Malik, 2005), Halliday acknowledges the existence of anti-Muslim racism. But he argues that since such racism targets 'a people' rather than a religion, 'anti-Muslimism' is a more fitting

term. For Halliday, and others, the concept of Islamophobia inevitably conflates legitimate or honest criticisms of reactionary religious practices (particularly those based around gender) with racism, thus silencing progressive critics of Islam. This is an argument commonly made by liberals, and some leftists (as well as, more recently, the far right), and we deal with it and similar arguments in Chapter 11. For now though, it is worth considering in more detail the relationship between Islam and what Halliday calls 'anti-Muslimism' and what we prefer to call Islamophobia.

One response to Islamophobia from anti-racist campaigners – and one broadly in keeping with the Halliday thesis – has been to point out that while it may appear to target a religion rather than an ethnic group, in reality it overwhelmingly impacts upon ethnic minorities. Islamophobia is therefore *in effect* racist, even if as a set of ideas it might seem (or be presented as) unconnected to any particular ethnic group. But while it is certainly true that Islamophobia overwhelmingly impacts on people of colour, and this is an important point to bear in mind, in analytical terms this is nevertheless a very limited and limiting position to take, leading to the view that a policy, practice or set of ideas can only be considered racist insofar as it relates to a specific ethnicity. It is a position that implicitly assumes that 'race' is somehow more 'real' than religious identity, or at least that the latter is a more legitimate basis for discrimination and oppression. This is not a position we think politically acceptable or intellectually sustainable.

The anti-essentialist concept of 'racialisation' – which was developed by sociologists to emphasise the dynamic and historically contingent nature of 'race' – offers a clear solution to the unnecessary analytical confusion which still surrounds questions of Islamophobia and 'race', as well as offering a definitive rebuttal to those who argue, one way or another, that Islamophobia, by definition, cannot be a form of racism. If 'race' is a fiction created when certain ethnic heritage or cultural practices attach to social advantage or disadvantage, it is hard to see religious identity as ontologically distinct from 'race'. For good reason then, racial-isation is increasingly used to explain Islamophobia as a form of racism (e.g. Garner and Selod, 2015). For some time though Islamophobia was somewhat neglected in the racialisation literature. The edited collection on racialisation by Murji and Solomos (2005), for example, contains no

chapters examining Islamophobia directly, and a review of the literature on the bibliographic database, Scopus, shows that until recently there was very little work utilising both concepts. In response to this gap in the literature, a relatively small number of scholars in recent years have begun to use the concept of racialisation to situate Islamophobia within the trajectory of contemporary racisms (Garner and Selod, 2015; Meer, 2013; Meer and Modood, 2009, 2011a; Vakil, 2011). These scholars directly challenge the position taken by Halliday and others by attempting to show that the anti-'religion' element of Islamophobia is in fact a form of racism in that it devalues the culture of a minority group (Meer and Modood, 2009, 2011a; Vakil, 2011). 'Cultural racism', according to these scholars, is not just a proxy for biological racism; the anti-Islam element of anti-Muslim racism is itself racist. (For an empirical explication of this position, see Khattab and Modood, 2015 on the 'Muslim penalty' in the employment market.)

These scholars have made an important contribution to the ways we understand race, religion and culture, and have rightly drawn attention to the neglect of Islamophobia within current sociological understandings of racism. But their strong focus on cultural recognition turns attention away from the agents and interests behind racism. This is a problem in the literature on racialisation and racism more generally, which has often placed too much emphasis on how the 'meaning of race' is negotiated and in different times and contexts, without sufficient attention to the practical action taken to put in place the infrastructure of disadvantage and subordination.

At this stage, it is perhaps worth stating that an empirical focus on political practices does not mean ignoring ideas. On the contrary, one cannot separate ideas and practices since they inform each other. But it is important to recognise the limitations of idealist explanations of racism. Ideas do not 'float freely', they are materially produced and disseminated by particular social actors with particular interests in the particular circumstances in which they find themselves. In the case of Islamophobia, ideas about Muslims of course play an important role in the political action we consider to be of central importance, but it is quite wrong to see the issue here as simply being a set of wrong ideas circulating in society.

In contrast to ideas-based approaches, we offer a materialist or realist account of Islamophobia which understands it as a structural phenomenon. But while we conceive of Islamophobia as – like other

forms of racism – a product of social structures, we think it crucial to recognise the social action that not only takes place in relation to structures, but also remakes or transforms them. Thus, we endeavour to provide an account which recognises the role of agency more than is often found in radical scholarly accounts of racism. The earlier work of Robert Miles (1982), for example, who in his updated book on racism (2003) offers only a very brief discussion of Islamophobia, exemplifies some of the problems with how racism has been understood in the historical materialist tradition, with racism treated in an overly determinist or reductionist manner, and seen as an instrumental ideology to divide the working class.[1] Similarly, Middle Eastern Studies scholar Stephen Sheehi (2011: 32) conceives of Islamophobia as an 'ideological phenomenon which exists to promote political and economic goals, both domestically and abroad', arguing that it is 'institutionalized by the US government ranging from war to programmatic torture to extrajudicial kidnappings, incarceration and executions to surveillance and entrapment'. Sheehi's book offers a much more developed account of Islamophobia, and one which commendably recognises the key roles of ideas, and indeed the vast range of think tanks and lobby groups spreading Islamophobic ideas and practices. But it does not focus on the practical action that is involved in the production of Islamophobia and seems to regard Islamophobic acts as the consequences of ideology, as opposed to the acts themselves being Islamophobic. Thus, Sheehi (2011: 32) writes that the 'effects of Islamophobia' include a series of acts such as those carried out by governments (war, torture, extrajudicial killings) or in the daily lives of Muslims (harassment, discrimination, hate speech). But in our view these actions are themselves Islamophobic, as opposed to being simply the result of a racist ideology.

Another significant intellectual current in studies of racism, and one that has commendably paid far more attention to the problem of Islamophobia, is work influenced by poststructuralism, which views Islamophobia through the lens of Orientalism and 'othering', taking inspiration from Said (1977) and Fanon (1967 [2008]) (Grosfoguel, 2012; Samman, 2012; Skenderovic et al., 2014). These scholars break radically from liberal, and indeed Marxist, accounts of racism, and effectively situate racist ideas historically and geopolitically. But in our view there are serious limitations to this body of work also, in that it similarly fails to

illuminate the social forces involved in producing racism, with interests collapsed into the hopelessly vague concepts of discourse or culture.

We can, and should, be far more precise, focusing on the specific agents and institutions implicated in racist practices and in the production of Islamophobic ideas, policies and structures. Islamophobia is a form of 'structural racism'. But it does not flow intrinsically and mysteriously from culture, colonialism or imperialism, nor equally vaguely from a capitalist or neoliberal 'racial order'. For reasons we have already outlined, we agree with Kapoor and Kalra on the need to move beyond 'the plethora of identity [based] work' (Kapoor and Kalra, 2013: 6) in favour of an 'account of the destructive and disruptive operations of state power' (Kapoor, 2013: 228).

The Islamophobic state

We regard the state, and more specifically the sprawling official 'counter-terrorism' apparatus, to be absolutely central to the production of contemporary Islamophobia – it is the backbone of anti-Muslim racism. An increasingly powerful and largely unaccountable set of institutions, with close relations with multinational technology and security companies, targets 'extremists' and those said to have been 'radicalised', focusing on Muslims in particular. These concepts are imprecisely defined in official discourse. Consequently, the way they are operationalised in the state bureaucracy, together with the routine practices of the police and other public servants, means that many thousands of people in the UK, including non-Muslims, are now regarded as legitimate targets for suspicion, surveillance and intelligence-gathering. In this section we examine the range of powers deployed by the state, and illustrate how they systematically disadvantage Muslims (and some others).

The extraordinary powers of the UK counter-terrorism apparatus are partly a legacy of the prevention of terrorism powers introduced in response to the conflict over the British presence in Northern Ireland as 'temporary provisions'. These were put on a permanent footing by the Blair government in the shape of the Terrorism Act 2000.

Under Section 44 of that Act, the police were entitled to stop and search any person or vehicle without any requirement for 'reasonable suspicion'. Due to the draconian nature of this power, Section 44 was originally intended to be restricted to specified areas, and for limited

periods. But in the event, the Metropolitan Police were granted rolling authorisation, meaning that for almost a decade this power was in operation throughout the whole of the Greater London area. Guidance on Section 44 published by the Home Office in 2004 stated that:

> There may be circumstances where it is appropriate for officers to take account of a person's ethnic background when they decide who to stop in response to a specific terrorist threat (for example, some international terrorist groups are associated with particular ethnic groups, such as Muslims). (quoted in Kundnani, 2006)

Comparing the self-identified ethnicity of those stopped and searched under Section 44 with that of the population of England and Wales as a whole, Quinlan and Derfoufi note that Asians and Blacks were disproportionately targeted compared to Whites, with Asians in 2009/10 on average over six times more likely to be stopped and searched, and black people on average almost eight times more likely (the respective average disproportionality ratios for each group being 6.2 and 7.86) (Quinlan and Derfoufi, 2015: 136). Parmar's examination of the impact of Section 44 stop and searches in London concluded that minorities had been 'criminalised' on the basis of their religious background, and that this had deepened intra-ethnic tensions (Parmar, 2011: 369). Section 44 was declared unlawful by the European Court of Human Rights in January 2010, which noted in its judgment that 'none of the many thousands of searches has ever resulted in conviction of a terrorism offence' (Gillan and Quinton v UK, para.148).

Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 is a similarly draconian power which applies to port and border controls. Described by the civil liberties group Liberty (2017) as 'a breathtakingly broad and intrusive power', it allows police to detain people at ports and airports for up to nine hours, to conduct searches of their person and to seize their belongings for up to seven days. Those detained under Schedule 7 are not entitled to a publicly funded lawyer, are obliged to answer questions and, if detained at a police station, provide biometric data, including fingerprints and DNA. All this can be done without any requirement for 'reasonable suspicion', meaning that those detained under this power need not be suspected of any crime, yet have less legal rights than criminal suspects.

The religion of those detained under Schedule 7 is not recorded in official statistics, but there are figures on the ethnicity of those examined or detained. Hurrell (2013) has examined disproportionality in the use of Schedule 7 powers for the period 2010/11 to 2012/13 by comparing Home Office statistics on its use with demographic data from the 2011 Census and passenger data from the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department of Transport. Like Quinlan and Derfoufi, she uses the race disproportionality ratio (RDR), which has been used by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as a measure of disproportionality in police stop and searches. The RDR can be calculated by (1) dividing the proportion of the total individuals targeted by the authorities who identify with a particular minority by the proportion of white people targeted; (2) dividing the proportion of that ethnic minority in the population by the proportion of white people in the population; and then (3) dividing the former figure by the latter. A value of 1.0 indicates no disproportionality. Anything above this value indicates that that minority is being disproportionally targeted. Hurrell's calculations comparing 2011 Census data with the use of Schedule 7 power at airports in 2010/11 suggested that travellers identifying as Pakistani, African or a member of 'any other' ethnic group (a category which includes Arabs) have experienced extremely high levels of disproportional targeting under Schedule 7. Pakistani people in particular stood out. The RDRs for Pakistani travellers were 52.6 for total examinations, 135.9 for over the hour examinations and 154.5 for detentions (Hurrell, 2013: 28). What this means is that someone with Pakistani ethnicity is over 150 times more likely to be detained under Schedule 7 than a white person. By way of comparison, the headline figure for the EHRC's 2010 report *Stop and Think*, which revealed the continuing discriminatory use of police stop and search powers, was based on a black/white RDR finding of 6.5 (Equalities and Human Rights Commission, 2010).

We can utilise a similar method to examine referrals to 'Channel', the UK government's 'pre-criminal diversionary programme', which it claims 'provide[s] support for people vulnerable to being drawn into any form of terrorism'. While the government does not publish figures on referrals, some data has been released under the Freedom of Information Act by the National Police Chief's Council. A 2013 disclosure stated that between April 2007 and December 2011, 67 per cent of those referred to the programme were Muslim. No data on the religion of persons

referred was then recorded between January 2011 and March 2012, and the proportion recorded as Muslims from April 2012 to March 2013 fell to 57.4 per cent. These figures, however, are somewhat misleading since they include a substantial proportion of individuals whose religion is not known, a different category to those of no religion, or who preferred not to state their religion. Excluding this unknown category suggests that in the earlier period of the programme over 90 per cent of those referred (whose religion was known) were Muslims. Then from April 2012 to March 2013, it would suggest that Muslims made up approximately 78 per cent of those referred. Over the whole of that period, according to the same disclosure, 14 per cent of referrals were categorised as being related to far-right extremism. Figures disclosed for 2013/14 state that 689 of the 1,252 individuals referred were categorised as Muslims, which again excluding those whose religion is not known (388), suggests that Muslims made up over 79 per cent of referrals in that more recent period.

In short, the available data on Channel reveals that Muslims certainly make up the majority of referrals, and likely make up the great majority, with the far right making up the remainder. While the proportion of Muslims making up the referrals to the Channel programme is remarkable enough in itself, to appreciate the significance of these figures they should be compared to the proportion of the population as a whole which Muslims make up, which according to the 2011 England and Wales Census is 4.8 per cent. If being Muslim had no significant impact on the probability of referral to the programme, therefore, we would expect Muslims to make up roughly the same proportion of persons referred to the Channel programme. This is obviously not the case and even taking the lowest proportion of referrals suggested by these somewhat patchy official figures (78 per cent) would suggest Muslims are overrepresented by a factor of 16.25, and that a Muslim is over 70 times more likely to be referred to the Channel programme than a non-Muslim.

The most recent figures released under the Freedom of Information Act show that there has been a sharp increase in Channel referrals following the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which introduced a statutory duty for designated public institutions to pay 'due regard' to 'prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. While there were a total of 6,306 individuals referred in the eight years between April 2007 (when Channel was established) and May 2015, between July 2015 and June 2016 there were 4,611 referrals, a 75 per cent increase on the

previous year. Notably, of these some 2,311 were children (including 352 under nine years old). At the time of writing, the youngest person known to have been referred to Channel was three years old.

The introduction of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 inaugurated a new phrase of the 'War on Terror'. This has meant that the counter-terrorism apparatus has spread from its traditional home in the police and intelligence services, to occupy almost every branch of the state, from schools and universities, to GP surgeries, social care, opticians, libraries and even nurseries. It has meanwhile become increasingly difficult for Muslims to engage in politics or public life. Between 5 December 2012 and 8 May 2014 the Charity Commission marked 55 British charities with the new code, 'extremism and radicalisation' without the organisations' knowledge, while Freedom of Information requests made by the *Guardian* have shown that more than a quarter of live investigations by the Commission concern Muslim charities (Ramesh, 2014). In October 2014, David Cameron awarded extra powers and £8 million to the Charity Commission to 'confront the menace of extremism'. The Charity Commission intervened to choke off future funding to advocacy group Cage, which works with victims of the 'War on Terror'. Charitable donors, including the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), came under what JRCT called 'acute regulatory pressure' to cut off future funding, and acceded. A subsequent Judicial Review brought by Cage was withdrawn when the Charity Commission conceded that 'it does not aim to restrict trustees exercising their discretion in advancing their objects, including around funding decisions' (Ritchie, 2015).

Theorising state racism

Given the above, it is surprising how little critical attention is given to the state in discussions of Islamophobia. In various liberal accounts, scholars have focused not on how citizens should respond to racist state practices, but rather how the authorities can best ameliorate racism in society. Such research tends to examine how the state and its citizens should respond to the challenge of cultural and religious diversity, examining the status of Muslims within liberal democracies and considering how liberal citizenship frameworks should be adapted to accommodate the challenge of 'difference' posed by Muslim migration (e.g. Cesari, 2004, 2013). Multiculturalists – in a variation on this liberal theme – go