ISLAMOPHOBIA
IN THE WEST

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In the name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

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'Dark times', 'Armageddon', 'Doomsday', 'Apocalypse': these were just some of the expressions used post-Brexit and post-Trump, defining the mood of many around the world following the hugely divisive political events of 2016.[1] For the unsuspecting majority, the rise of right-wing populism — a precursor to upheavals in global politics — unleashed a deep-seated fear of global fascism, and this fear was especially felt by minorities in the West.[2] The exponential surge of race hate crime in the UK, the US, Canada, mainland Europe and Australia in the lead up to and after the Brexit vote, and following Trump's 'landslide' victory proves that this fear was not unfounded. Clearly, the 'divisive, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic' political rhetoric used on both sides of the Atlantic[3] in what has been dubbed an era of post-globalisation[4] was responsible for much of this hate towards minority groups in general, and for creating an atmosphere of heightened suspicion[5] towards Islam. In fact, no group has experienced the backlash of globalism's failure more than the millions of Muslims all over the world living outside their countries of origin and being made to feel like outsiders in places they consider 'home'.[6]

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[1] 'Doomsday Ready: The British People Preparing For An Apocalypse', Olivia Blair, Friday 17 February 2017.

[2] 'British People Fear Fascism Is Spreading Across The World In Wake Of Donald Trump Victory, Poll Finds', by Joe Watts, January 1, 2017. See also Fekete 2009; Kundnani 2007; 2015.

[3] 'Divisive Political Rhetoric A Danger To The World, Amnesty Says', 22 February 2017.

[4] 'Donald Trump Represents The New Normal – On Both Sides Of The Atlantic', Rod Liddle, 19 Nov 2016.

[5] 'UN Blames UK Politicians For Brexit Hate Crime Spike', 26 August 2016.

[6] Kundnani 2007:1.

Fast-forward to the horror that unfolded in March 2019, where a lone gunman live-streamed his mass shooting of Muslims during the Friday prayer in Christchurch, and to 'an unprecedented spike in reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes'[7] across the world, such as the Finsbury Park vehicle-ramming attack in 2017 and the vandalism of five Birmingham mosques with sledgehammers in 2019. These events provide further proof that religiously aggravated hate directed towards Muslims has, in a short period, become the 'new driving force behind far-right growth'.[8] Part of this growth has been inspired by a conspiracy theory positing that the population of the global North, which is supposed to be white and Christian, is being replaced by Muslims, especially recent migrants.[9] European intelligence services are repeatedly warning that 'growing tensions within Western societies over immigration and Islamist attacks' have not only encouraged a rise in right-wing extremism and 'ethnostatism' but have also put Europe in great danger of such groups eventually sparking intercommunal clashes and a New Zealand-style attack.[10]

Since the brutal murder of MP Jo Cox in 2016, the UK Government has refreshed its counterterrorism strategy to achieve a more even focus on different kinds of terrorism 'irrespective of the ideology that inspires [them]'[11] — but Hellyer (2019), an expert analyst of extremist literature, highlights the shocking fact that much of the rhetoric present in the manifestos of mass murderers and white supremacists, such as Anders Breivik and the Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant 'can also be found in the mainstream media and

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[7] 'Hate Crime in London Soars Since Christchurch Attacks', May 1st, 2019.

[8] 'Islamophobia Has "Seeped into The Public Consciousness" As British Far-Right Movement Grows, Polling Shows', by Josh Wilson, March 25, 2019.

[9] 'The Deadly Myth of the "Great Replacement', by Eleanor Penny, 9th August 2019. See also Zempi and Awan 2019:201.

[10] 'European secret services view ultra-right as growing threat', March 20th, 2019. Source: thenews.com.pk

[11] '"Spies Brought in To Tackle Far-Right Terror Threat In UK", Home Secretary Says', by Lizzie Dearden April 10th, 2019.

political discourse'.[12] The use of 'caustic language' to describe the presence of Muslims in the West by 'US President Donald Trump ("I think Islam hates us"), and his former political advisor Steve Bannon (Islam is "the most radical religion in the world")'; by 'popular talk show hosts like Bill Maher (the Muslim world "has too much in common with ISIS")'; and 'Rod Liddle of *The Spectator* (Islam is an "illiberal, vindictive and frankly fascistic creed")', only makes 'the discourse of the terrorist that much more possible' (ibid).

The most worrying aspect of all this is how far a toxic narrative of Muslims as 'outsiders' posing an existential threat has seeped into British party politics as well as the public consciousness. Only recently, London Mayor Sadiq Khan — who has also been 'repeatedly subject to anti-Muslim abuse from Tory members and supporters' (not to mention President Donald Trump) — challenged former Prime Minister Theresa May to adopt the definition of Islamophobia devised by an all-party parliamentary group for British Muslims and already accepted by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This definition views Islamophobia as rooted 'in a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness'.[13] Even Baroness Warsi, the UK's first female Muslim cabinet minister, has accused her party — the Conservatives, of being 'institutionally Islamophobic', a condition that has led to the eventual suspension of fourteen of its members because of the offensive remarks they made about Muslims in Facebook posts, although a short time later, many of these members were quietly reinstated.[14]

While Conservative politicians' social media posts have featured odious phrases such as 'turf all Muslims out of public office' and 'get rid of all mosques',[15] compared 'Asian people to dogs' and described

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[12] Grease Blog *Grease Blog Post #6*, *27 March 2019*, '*The NZ Mosque Shootings*' H.A. Hellyer

[13] 'Sadiq Khan Challenges Theresa May to act against Tory Islamophobia', by Michael Savage, March 24, 2019.

[14] 'Tory Islamophobia row: 15 suspended councillors quietly reinstated', by Frances Perraudin, March 24, 2019.

[15] Ibid.

Saudis as 'sand peasants',[16] what is even more disconcerting for Muslims in Britain is that this unchecked hate has affected political rhetoric to the extent that it has started laying the blame for far-right bigotry at the feet of its targets, accusing them of failing to accept 'British values' or of not 'blending in'.[17] This was woefully evident in the Casey report on social integration, which was commissioned by David Cameron as part of the government's efforts to tackle extremism.[18] The report, which was released in December 2016, focuses mainly on Muslim communities and states that segregation and social exclusion are at 'worrying levels' and 'fuelling inequality' in some parts of the country. Casey notes that these conditions are perpetuated by 'regressive religious attitudes' that 'run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws' (ibid). In order to quash failing integration and put 'an end' to 'misogyny and patriarchy' in these communities, Casey recommends that immigrants should take 'an oath of integration with British values and society' and that British values be taught to schoolchildren (ibid).

In condemning the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, then Prime Minister Theresa May also sought to link the threat of terror to a lack of British values rather than characterising it as a reverberation of British foreign policy that has effectively placed all 'Muslims under suspicion'.[19] Although social cohesion is a laudable aim, linking the lack of it to the threat of terror is 'dangerously confused' and only feeds an already toxic narrative that stigmatises and alienates an entire community — one whose members often know little of what causes lone wolf attackers, who have most likely been radicalised online, to commit terrorist acts (ibid). However, this line of thinking shows no signs of abating — recently, former Prime Minister Tony

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[16] Ibid.

[17] 'Integrate, Migrants Are Told. But Can They Ever Be Good Enough for The Likes of Blair?' by Aditya Chakraborty, April 24, 2019.

[18] 'Segregation At "Worrying Levels" In Parts Of Britain, Dame Louise Casey Warns', December 5, 2016.

[19] 'Theresa May's Talk About British Values Puts All Muslims Under Suspicion', by Myriam François, June 4, 2017. See also Kundnani 2007:2.

Blair suggested that the UK Government should be more proactive in acting as 'an *enforcer* of the duty to integrate'.[20] The blasé manner in which such draconian measures are being presented in order to ensure the survival of a 'myth' (British values) becomes even more troubling in light of the mainstreaming of xenophobic narratives by politicians such as Boris Johnson, the current prime minister, who has unrepentantly compared veiled Muslim women to 'letterboxes' and 'bank-robbers'[21] and described black people as 'piccaninnies' with 'watermelon smiles'.[22]

BRITISH ISLAMOPHOBIA

Despite its relative success in Britain, a pluralist multicultural society is no longer portrayed as a common social goal since the political and public rhetoric has shifted to attacking Muslim communities — who have always tried to preserve some semblance of their culture and religion since their migration to the UK, for being 'closed in on themselves' and 'self-separated'.[23] Consequently, debates surrounding the future of multiculturalism and community cohesion now increasingly view 'Muslim "difference"' as a threat to '"our [British] way of life"', and it has even been espoused that multiculturalism is dead.[24] These suppositions which essentially see Muslims as 'indiscriminately different'[25] are mainly based upon the premise that such communities are 'stuck in the past' and follow a religion based on 'fundamentalist' Islamic discourses known to 'enforce gender segregation and restrict marriage choice; Female Genital Mutilation; and intolerance against homosexuals'.[26] The UK's

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[20] Chakraborty 2019, *Op. cit.*

[21] 'Boris Johnson Faces Criticism Over Burka "Letter Box" Jibe', 6th August 2018.

[22] 'We Asked Black People About Boris Johnson's "Piccaninnies" And "Watermelon Smiles" Comments', by Nadine White, 15th June 2019.

[23] Fekete 2009: ix.

[24] Allen 2010: 87.

[25] Ibid: page 88.

[26] 'RE and social integration: A response to the Casey report', by Dr Phillip Wood, March 21, 2017.

Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy, which has an 'overly broad definition of extremism — vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values', was intensified in 2015 to curb the problem of 'homegrown' terrorism,[27] and has played a major role in extending this racist attitude to second and third-generation[28] Muslims in Britain.

Thus, in a climate of intense anti-Muslim sentiment, frontline professionals such as teachers and doctors have been given 'broad discretion by the Prevent Strategy to act on their conscious and unconscious biases' by reporting any individual 'who they believe to be at risk of being drawn into violent and non-violent extremism to the police-led "Channel" support programme'.[29] However, a 2016 evidence-based report by the Open Society Justice Initiative, *Eroding Trust*,[30] not only finds that Prevent is unjust, but that it is unproductive: it creates 'a systemic risk of violations of the right to freedom of expression, the right against discrimination and the right to privacy'.[31] As a result of Prevent, details of the vast number of incorrectly referred cases are troubling — one example is Ofsted's investigation 'of a hidden Qur'an in a child's bedroom as a sign of radicalization', and a Catholic primary school that directly 'reported a seven-year old Muslim pupil to police after mistaking a piece of brass the boy had for a bullet'.[32] Ofsted even downgraded a nursery because it 'failed to spot if children as young as two are at risk of extremism'![33] The notion that Muslims and Islam pose a potential

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[27] 'Instead of Fighting Terror, Prevent Is Creating A Climate of Fear', by Amrit Singh, January 1, 2017.

[28] 'Normalization of Islamophobia – What do we mean by that?' by Martijn, March 30, 2019.

[29] Singh 2017, *Op. cit.*

[30] 'Open Society Foundations, "Eroding Trust: The UK's Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education', October 2016, Open Society and Justice Initiative.

[31] Singh 2017, *Op. cit.*

[32] 'School reports Muslim boy, 7, to police over "bullet" that was piece of brass', by Helen Pidd and agencies, November 6th, 2016.

[33] 'Nursery criticised for failing to spot signs of extremism among children as young as two', by Eleanor Busby, August 2, 2018.

security problem has become so normalised that it is hardly recognisable as a type of racism.[34] In the words of De Koning (2019):

> The questioning of Muslims' identity and subjectivity through the lens of security and integration has gained credibility, plausibility and even respectability among a broad audience because its Islamophobic character is hidden behind a stance that claims to defend cultural values and social cohesion, against what some people see as an aggressive ideology (ibid).

The outcome of this widespread legitimation of Islamophobia is clear: it endorses an 'us and them' mentality and has negatively impacted Muslim communities to such an extent that it is causing many to equate their experiences with the anti-Semitism faced by Jews in Europe not so long ago.[35] Such feelings are not unfounded: a UK Government report highlights that the socioeconomic effects of Islamophobia in British society means that Muslims are not only the most disadvantaged group in the country, but also 'more likely than non-Muslims to experience neighbourhood deprivation, housing, educational and health disadvantage, unemployment … [and] a broken social mobility promise'.[36] Moreover, Islamophobic crimes such as the senseless murder of Nabra Hassanen, a 17-year old visibly Muslim woman from Virginia dressed in an *abaya* (floor-length garment) who was attacked while walking from prayers at her local mosque in June 2017, is a stark example of the danger visible Muslims (especially women) face in the West.[37] Further, Hassanen's case also shows that Muslims still encounter institutionalised discrimination, since the police were 'quick to disabuse the public notion that hate was to blame' for her murder, despite the obvious hate-driven nature of the crime (ibid). Likewise, in Australia, heavily pregnant 32 year old Muslim woman Rana Elasmar who was attacked in a Sydney cafe

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[34] Martijn, 2019, *Op. Cit.*

[35] See Renton and Gidley 2017.

[36] 'From '9/11' to hate groups: the economic marginalisation of the West's Muslims', by Cj Werleman, September 13, 2017.

[37] 'Hate Crime Laws Are Further Marginalizing American Muslims', by Maryam Jamshidi, July 3, 2017.

feared she would have been killed had others not intervened. Rana Elasmar, 32 was '38 weeks pregnant when Stipe "Steven" Lozina approached her, punched her several times and then stomped on her head at Bay Vista in Paramatta in November 2019'.[38] Similarly, in Britain, 47-year-old Zaynab Hussein, who remains incapacitated since she was run over twice by Paul Moore who said he believed he was doing 'the country a favour' in 'retaliation for terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic extremists in the UK', is also another example of the danger visible Muslim women continue to suffer in the face of hatred towards Islam and those who appear to practice it.[39]

GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

Much controversy surrounds the issue of what is meant by the popular term 'Islamophobia' and how it intersects with anti-Muslim hatred, racism and xenophobia. According to Allen's (2010) historiography of contemporary Islamophobia, a comprehensive and critical overview of the possible origins of the term shows that even though it has been widely adopted by the media in recent times and placed within 'a broader discussion of racism and xenophobia', in actual fact 'Islamophobia' can be traced all the way back to the much debated topic of 'Orientalism'.[40] Further, even though 'Islamophobia' continues to be a contested term and concept wherein bigots such as Melanie Phillips of *The Times*, and far-right activist Tommy Robinson, as well as writers such as Rod Liddle and Brendan O'Neil, argue that it is nothing more than 'a fiction to shut down debate' — mainly as a means to defend their bigotry towards

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[38] Pregnant Muslim Woman Attacked in Sydney Café Feared She Would be Killed, Court Hears', by Australian Associated Press, November 2019, The Guardian. Source:https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/15/pregnant-muslim-woman-attacked-in-sydney-cafe-feared-she-would-be-killed-court-hears

[39] 'Man Jailed for Life After Running Over Muslim Woman in Leicester', by Kevin Rawlinson, 27th March 2018, *The Guardian*. Source: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/27/man-jailed-life-running-over-muslim-woman-leicester-paul-moore-zaynab-hussein

[40] Allen 2010: back cover.

Muslims and Islam,[41] many theorists agree that since the attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 a new form of structural racism has emerged.[42] Whilst many of these same theorists Allen (2010), Lean (2002), Fekete (2007), Morgan and Poynting also argue that 'this process did not [strictly speaking] begin with 9/11',[43] there does exist a general consensus amongst them that since then it has expanded rapidly to reshape the politics of multiculturalism in various societies wherein 'central to the domestic war on terror… within what the US and UK governments call a preventative approach to counterterrorism… an attempt is [being] made to identify individuals who are not terrorist now but might be at some later date'.[44]

> The immigrant is no longer just a classic insider but also the terrorist within … most likely to be a Muslim … [and] suspect until proved innocent.[45]

In general, therefore, Islamophobia[46] is recognised as being 'an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences [and defined] … as *indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims*'.[47] Bangstad (2020) too in his report submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief follows Gardell (2011) in his understanding of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred as being:

> Socially reproduced prejudices and aversions against Islam and Muslims, and actions and practices which attack, exclude and discriminate against people on account of these people either

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[41] 'Islamophobia is Real. Stop the Obsession with Semantics', by Miqdaad Versi 15th May 2018.

[42] Allen 2010; Elgamri 2010; Kundnani 2007, 2015; Lean 2002; Morgan and Poynting 2012.

[43] Morgan and Poynting 2012:1.

[44] Kundnani 2015:11.

[45] Fekete 2007: viii-ix.

[46] Read Sayyid and Vakil (2011) 'Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives', for a critical understanding of the concept, its history, and its usage in different contexts and geographical locations.

[47] Bleich 2011.

being, or being presumed to be Muslim, and to be associated with Islam.[48]

Consequently, Muslims are increasingly being 'characterised in terms of "them" and "us"' and defined by the media as '"sleepers' or "fifth columnists" that are in our midst"'.[49] This has been confirmed by 'various commentators [who] have observed[50] that in the global "West", the racialized "Muslim Other" has become the pre-eminent "folk devil" of our time'.[51] As a result, 'cultural markers associated with Muslimness (forms of dress, rituals, languages, etc),[52] or in other words, 'visual identifiers of Islam' have made 'all Muslims... legitimate targets for hatred and abuse'.[53]

Although the lived experience of 'Islamophobia' and 'Islamophobic' hate crime is vast and unique to each context in which it occurs, extensive research[54] shows that in recent times visible Muslim women (i.e., those wearing Islamic clothing, such as a headscarf, face veil, *abaya*, etc.)[55] have been disproportionately targeted by such crimes. Often, trigger events such as high-profile terror attacks and political events 'have drawn out public debate on issues such as immigration, international relations and the "War on Terror"' resulting in these women becoming victims of 'retaliation' and retribution because of their hyper-visibility in public spaces (ibid: p15). However, visible Muslim women are more commonly subjected to 'low-level' incidents of discrimination 'that can escalate to acts of harassment such as verbal abuse, spitting and intimidation'.[56] This

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[48] Gardell 2011: 17; authors' translation, cited in Bangstad 2020:1.

[49] Allen 2010:86.

[50] Poynting et al. 2004, Welch 2004, 2006, Bonn 2010, cited in Morgan and Poynting 2012:1.

[51] Morgan and Poynting 2012:1.

[52] Kundnani 2015:11.

[53] Allen 2010:86.

[54] 'Islamophobia Still a Challenge for us All', by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, November 2017.

[55] 'A Constructed Threat: Identity, Intolerance and the Impact of Anti-Muslim Hatred', TellMAMA Annual Report 2016.

[56] Ibid: page 18.

type of 'thrill-seeking' hate crime, which accounts for 66% of all hate offences, is well known to occur 'in public spaces such as streets, city centers and public transport networks'; inevitably it has caused visible Muslim women to live in fear of victimisation, stay inside their homes and limit their daily activities outside to their local 'neighborhoods in which they feel safe' (ibid: p13). Further, visible Muslim women are not just subjected to hate crimes that are carried out by 'violent bigots' who 'operate at the margins of society' — rather, 'everyday' hate has become 'a seemingly ordinary part' of their daily lives (ibid: p19). According to TellMAMA, which measures the impact of anti-Muslim hatred on Muslim Britons:

> The psychological toll of everyday anti-Muslim incidents, whereby low-level but consistent prejudice, often not recognized within society, causes victims to experience considerable psychological stress. Moreover, hate crime victims are more likely to experience deeper psychological trauma due to the targeted nature of abuse and attacks. Anti-Muslim incidents can lead some to limit their activity and engagement with wider society in order to avoid situations in which they may feel at risk (ibid: 11,12).

Unfortunately, Muslim women who wear the *niqab* (face veil or 'burqa') have become particularly vulnerable in the political storm 'framing Muslim integration', especially in terms of the 'Muslim question'[57] — an expression that relates contemporary Islamophobia to European antisemitism of the past[58] — and lack of integration or 'failure to conform to British values'.[59] Therefore, in just a short period, the dominant view of the niqab in Europe has shifted: what was once frequently thought of as a sign of oppression and passivity

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[57] 'Framing Muslim integration, Ajmal Hussain and Nasar Meer, Islamophobia Still a Challenge for us All', November 2017.
[58] Renton and Gidley 2017.
[59] Kumar 2012 cited in 'Everyone is a feminist when it comes to Muslim women': Gender and Islamophobia, Naaz Rashid, Islamophobia Still a Challenge for us All, November 2017

associated with the idea of Islam as a 'uniquely patriarchal religion'[60] now raises security concerns attributable to its association with religious extremism, violent or not.

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[60] Ibid.

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