

Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism – or what?

– concepts and terms revisited

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Summary and background

This paper begins by noting there is a diversity of terminology for referring to hostility towards Muslims and then discusses three of the terms that are in current use – ‘Islamophobia’, ‘anti-Muslim racism’ and ‘intolerance against Muslims’ – considering in each instance both their advantages and disadvantages. It then offers its own definition, plus a brief explanation.

The second part of the paper expands the definition and explanation by discussing causal, contextual and exacerbating features. This involves reference to globalisation in its various facets; moral panic; folk memories; and the desire to justify inequality and exclusion within Western societies. Finally, the paper notes some of the consequences of anti-Muslim hostility.

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Diversity of terminology

There is an international cluster of terms and phrases referring to negative feelings and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. The most widely known member of the cluster is Islamophobia. But competing with it in certain contexts, countries and international organisations, and amongst academic observers, there are several other terms. They include ‘anti-Muslim racism’, ‘intolerance against Muslims’, ‘anti-Muslim prejudice’, ‘anti-Muslim bigotry’, ‘hatred of Muslims’, ‘anti-Islamism’, ‘anti-Muslimism’, ‘Muslimophobia’, ‘demonisation of Islam’ and ‘demonisation of Muslims’.

There is a similar range of contested terms in other languages, not just in English. In German, for example, there is a contest between *Islamphobie* and *Islamfeindlichkeit*, the latter implying hostility, not fear. In French, the contest is in part between *islamophobie* on the one hand and *racisme anti-arabe* or *racisme anti-maghrébin* on the other, the latter two phrases indicating that the phenomenon is primarily to be seen as a form of anti-immigrant racism directed towards communities from parts of the former French Empire, not primarily to do with religion or culture. The Scandinavian term *Muslimhat* translates literally into English as ‘Muslim hatred’, though more accurately as ‘hatred of Muslims’, with echoes of legal usage in English terms such as ‘incitement to hatred’ and ‘hate crimes’.

Such differences in terminology reflect, but they do not exactly correspond to, differences of understanding and focus. For example, they reflect different views of causes, influences, drivers and key features, and therefore different kinds of proposal and practical agenda, and different approaches to media analysis. Also, the different terms may be used to distinguish between different manifestations of the phenomena under discussion, so that the term *anti-Muslim racism* is used to refer to hate crimes, and to harassment, rudeness and verbal abuse in public spaces, whereas the term *Islamophobia* refers to discourse and mindsets in the media, including the broadsheets as well as the tabloids (Sivanandan 2010). Underlying the diversity of terminology, key questions include the following:

- Is 'phobia' a more suitable term than terms such as 'fear', 'suspicion', 'worry' or 'anxiety', and in any case are the essential causes of fear (however named) primarily or solely inherent in Islam and Muslims or are there other significant factors at play which, in point of fact, have little or even nothing to do with Islam and Muslims? If so what are these other factors, and how should they be dealt with?
- Or are the dominant emotions that need to be named more accurately identified as hostility and hatred, not fear?
- Where are the phenomena that are feared or hated mainly located, both objectively and in perception and imagination? Primarily in one's own country or continent? Or primarily out there in the wider world, and if so in which countries or continents in particular? Or are they located everywhere in the world, without differentiation?
- Are the phenomena that are feared or hated primarily to do with 'Muslims' or primarily to do with 'Islam'? Namely, is it ethno-religious groups and communities ('Muslims') towards which there are feelings of animosity and anxiety, regardless of whether they are orthodox and observant in their practices and beliefs? Or is it a culture, civilisation or religion ('Islam') about which there is anxiety? Or is this distinction invalid?
- How does one identify and describe legitimate criticisms or anxieties on the one hand and hate-filled or irrational criticisms and anxieties on the other?

Questions such as these may seem unduly and even self-indulgently theoretical, a modern equivalent of speculating how many angels can perch on a pinhead. It is nevertheless important to ask them. How a problem is conceptualised fundamentally affects how it is addressed. The concept of Islamophobia (or whatever) is by no means as unproblematic as is sometimes thought. If media coverage of 'Islam' and 'Muslims' is to be adequately critiqued and improved it is necessary at some stage, and preferably at the outset, to elucidate thorny conceptual and semantic issues. What exactly are we gazing at, grappling with? The discussion in this paper starts with consideration of the term *Islamophobia* and then continues with notes on the various alternative phrases which have been proposed in recent years as more apposite. Later in the paper there will be discussion of underlying causes and of contributory and exacerbating factors.

First, it is relevant to list some of the principal phenomena which are being referred to. They include the following:

- negativity and hostility in the media and the blogosphere, in the publications of certain think tanks and influence-leaders, and the speeches and policy proposals of certain political leaders, both mainstream and marginal
- hate crimes on the streets against both persons and property, and desecration of Muslim cemeteries, cultural centres and religious buildings
- harassment, abuse and rudeness ('the unkindness of strangers', as the term might be) in public places
- unlawful discrimination in employment practices and the provision of services
- non-recognition of Muslim identities and concerns, and removal of Muslim symbols in public space – 'the best Muslim for us is the Muslim we cannot see' (Ramadan 2009)

Such manifestations of anxiety and intolerance contribute to the absence of Muslims from public life, including politics and government, senior positions in business and

commerce, and in culture and the arts. The absence of Muslims from public life contributes, in its turn, to the continuing prevalence of anxiety and intolerance.

'Islamophobia'

The first known use in print of the French word *islamophobie* appears to have been in a book entitled *La politique musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* by Alain Quellien, published in Paris in 1910 (Ezzerhouni, 2010). The context was a criticism of the ways in which French colonial administrators viewed the cultures of the countries now known as Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. The word then appeared in reviews of Quellien's book in academic journals, and in a biography of Mohammed by Alphonse Etienne Dinet (1861–1929), a French painter and convert to Islam who lived for most of his adult life in southern Algeria. His book was completed in 1916 and when published some two years later was dedicated to the memory of Muslim soldiers in the French army who had died in the First World War (Vakil 2008). In an English version of his book, the word *islamophobie* was translated as 'feelings inimical to Islam', not as Islamophobia.

The first use of the word in English in print appears to have been in an article by Edward Said in 1985, where he referred in passing to 'the connection ... between Islamophobia and antisemitism' and criticised writers who do not recognise that 'hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand' with antisemitism and 'has stemmed from the same source and been nourished at the same stream'. (Said 1985: 8-9). The next recorded use of the word in English was in the American journal *Insight* on 4 February 1991, referring to hostility of the government of the Soviet Union towards its own Muslim citizens and regions: 'Islamophobia also accounts for Moscow's reluctance to relinquish its position in Afghanistan, despite the estimated \$300 million a month it takes to keep the Kabul regime going.' (cited by Oxford English Dictionary, as reported by Runnymede Trust 1997).

In the UK the first known use of the word in print occurred in a book review in the *Independent* on 16 December 1991 (reprinted in Modood 1992: 75-6). Modood noted there is a view that *The Satanic Verses* was 'a deliberate, mercenary act of Islamophobia' but indicated that his own view was that 'while Islamophobia is certainly at work, the real sickness is militant irreverence'.

In October 2003 the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences in the UK was informed in oral evidence that the English word had first been coined by Dr Zaki Badawi, at that time principal of the Muslim College in London, or else by Fuad Nahdi, founding director of the magazine *Q News* (House of Lords 2003). If indeed the word was coined by either of these it would have been the late 1980s. The context would have included the campaigns led by *MuslimWise*, the predecessor of *Q News*, and by the An-Nisa Society, a community organisation based in Brent in north-west London, to counter anti-Muslim hostility not only in society at large but also, and more especially, amongst people working in the field of race relations. The latter included the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) nationally and race equality councils locally. Also, it included race equality officers and units in local government. All these were perceived to be insensitive and indifferent to the distinctive forms of ignorance, intolerance, discrimination and violence experienced by Muslims. The failure of the CRE and of race equality professionals more generally to take serious account of Islamophobia was itself an example, it was argued, of institutional Islamophobia.

The word has increasingly been used since about 2000 in the deliberations and publications of international organisations, including the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, previously the European Monitoring Centre, EUMC) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The word is now widely used in the UK media, though occasionally it still appears in inverted commas, to imply the meaning is not clear, or – in the author's view – not as clear as others claim. A further implication of the inverted commas is the claim there is in reality no such thing as Islamophobia: it is merely the figment of a paranoid or

politically motivated imagination; or constructed out of a desire to perpetuate a siege mentality and sense of victimhood amongst Muslims, or to put an end to legitimate criticism, or to engage in lazy abuse (Malik 2005, Phillips 2006).

Until recently, incidentally, the word has been much commoner in Europe than in the United States. In 2007 it was used hundreds of times in the *Guardian* but on only twenty-six occasions in the *New York Times* (Cesari 2006). Nowadays, however, the term appears to be at least as common in the United States as in Britain, as can readily be seen from a Google search.

The disadvantages of the term *Islamophobia* are significant. Some of them are primarily about the echoes implicit in the concept of phobia. Others are about the implications of the term Islam. For convenience, they can be itemised as follows.

1. Medically, *phobia* implies a severe mental illness of a kind that affects only a tiny minority of people. Whatever else anxiety about Muslims may be, it is not merely a mental illness and does not merely involve a small number of people.
2. To accuse someone of being insane or irrational is to be abusive and, not surprisingly, to make them defensive and defiant. Reflective dialogue with them is then all but impossible.
3. To label someone with whom you disagree as irrational or insane is to absolve yourself of the responsibility of trying to understand, both intellectually and with empathy, why they think and act as they do, and of seeking through engagement and argument to modify their perceptions and understandings.
4. The concept of anxiety is arguably more useful in this context than the concept of phobia. It is widely recognised that anxiety may not be (though certainly may be) warranted by objective facts, for human beings can on occasions perceive dangers that do not objectively exist, or anyway do not exist to the extent that is imagined. Also it can sometimes be difficult to identify, and therefore to name accurately, the real sources of an anxiety.
5. The use of the word *Islamophobia* on its own implies that hostility towards Muslims is unrelated to, and basically dissimilar from, forms of hostility such as racism, xenophobia, sectarianism, and such as hostility to so-called fundamentalism (Samuels 2006). Further, it may imply there is no connection with issues of class, power, status and territory; or with issues of military, political or economic competition and conflict.
6. The term implies there is no important difference between prejudice towards Muslim communities within one's own country and prejudice towards cultures and regimes elsewhere in the world where Muslims are in the majority, and with which 'the West' is in military conflict or economic competition.
7. The term is inappropriate for describing opinions that are basically anti-religion as distinct from anti-Islam. 'I am an Islamophobe,' wrote the journalist Polly Toynbee in reaction to the Runnymede 1997 report, adding '... I am also a Christophobe. If Christianity were not such a spent force in this country, if it were powerful and dominant as it once was, it would still be every bit as damaging as Islam is in those theocratic states in its thrall... If I lived in Israel, I'd feel the same way about Judaism'.
8. The key phenomenon to be addressed is arguably anti-Muslim hostility, namely hostility towards an ethno-religious identity within western countries (including Russia), rather than hostility towards the tenets or practices of a worldwide religion. The 1997 Runnymede definition of *Islamophobia* was 'a shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims'. In retrospect, it would have been as accurate, or arguably indeed

more accurate, to say 'a shorthand way of referring to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims – and, therefore, dread or hatred of Islam'.

Despite its disadvantages, the term Islamophobia looks as if it is here to stay – it cannot now be discarded from the lexicon. Not least, this is because it has acquired legitimacy and emotional power amongst people who are at the receiving end of anti-Muslim hostility and prejudice, and acts therefore as an activist concept (Bevelander and Otterbeck 2012) capable of mobilising opposition and resistance. 'It has been observed,' say Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, 'that movements against discrimination do not begin until a commonly understood label evolves that brings together under one banner all forms of that particular prejudice.' They continue:

Resistance to gender discrimination coalesced under the term 'sexism'. The civil rights movement gained momentum when harnessed to the notion of 'racism' that encapsulated the variety of innate prejudices and institutional obstacles in a white dominated society. The concept of 'antisemitism' has provided a powerful tool to object to anti-Jewish sentiment that was once, like the denigrations of women and blacks, considered normal and left largely unchallenged by people fitting the norm. Increasingly, and particularly among Muslims, 'Islamophobia' provides a term to similarly draw attention to a normalised prejudice and unjustified discrimination. Undoubtedly this term will elicit the same unease among and even backlash from some of those whose notion of normal it challenges, just as its historical predecessors have and still do. (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008: 11)

It often happens that people at the receiving end of religious intolerance turn to their religious tradition for solace and moral support, and this strengthens their sense that it is their religion which is primarily under attack (Birt 2009). For this reason too, the concept of Islamophobia is now here to stay. It is helpful to recall in this respect that the concept is recognisably similar to terms such as homophobia, xenophobia and europhobia, none of which imply mental illness, and that it not infrequently happens, in the history of language, that words are coined that are less than ideal. The word *antisemitism*, for example, is lexically nonsensical since there is no such thing as semitism; and in any case not all Jewish people are so-called Semites, nor are all so-called Semitic people Jewish. The word has been current long enough now, however, for it to be generally accepted as unproblematic. The same kind of acceptance is apparently being accorded to *Islamophobia*, despite the problems and disadvantages outlined above. It is nevertheless apposite to note and discuss some of the alternative terms which have been proposed, in particular 'anti-Muslim racism' and 'intolerance against Muslims'.

'Anti-Muslim racism'

In its discussion of racism, the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000) emphasised that 'hostility which uses skin colour and physical appearance as markers of supposed difference does not represent the whole picture'. It continued:

There is also hostility using markers connected with culture, language and religion. The plural term 'racisms' is sometimes used to highlight such complexity. For anti-black racism is different, in terms of its historical and economic origins, and in its contemporary manifestations, stereotypes and effects, from anti-Asian racism. Both are different from, to cite three further significant examples, anti-Irish, anti-Gypsy and anti-Jewish racism. European societies, it is sometimes said, are multi-racist societies. Specific words have been invented over the years for certain types of racism directed at particular groups – the term antisemitism originated in the mid-nineteenth century, and more recently the terms orientalism and Islamophobia have been coined to refer, respectively, to anti-Asian racism in general and anti-Muslim racism in particular (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000: 59-60.)

An obvious objection to the term 'anti-Muslim racism' is that Muslims are not a race and that therefore hostility towards them cannot be a form of racism. But, as is well known, the human species is a single race and distinctions between so-called races have no basis in science. From a scientific point of view it is as nonsensical to say that Africans, Asians or Chinese are races as to say that Muslims are. In legal parlance in the UK, the term *racial group* is 'a group of people defined by their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origin'. This is an extremely broad definition and clearly encompasses groups that are not normally thought of as races. If the term religious were to be added, or if the term *ethnic* were understood to encompass ethno-religious, then certainly Muslims would be defined in UK law as a racial group and the full force of race relations legislation would be brought to bear against hostility towards them.

Either way it would need to be understood that Muslim identity is not necessarily or universally to do with holding distinctive beliefs or engaging in specific practices – it can be primarily to do with a sense of belonging, or of being perceived to belong, to a broad cultural tradition. In this way, and to this extent, the term *Muslim* in England, Scotland and Wales can be similar to the terms *Protestant* and *Catholic* in Northern Ireland. Also in other parts of the world, including Nigeria, Lebanon and South Asia, the term refers to identity and belonging, not necessarily personal belief and piety. 'The South Asia I am from,' writes Tariq Modood, 'is contoured by communal religious identities. It has nothing to do with belief. If you assert "I am an atheist", people will still think it meaningful to ask, "Yes, but are you a Muslim, a Hindu?"' (Modood 2005a: 16). It follows that hostility towards a certain ethno-religious community has nothing necessarily to do with hostility towards any specific religious beliefs.

A key distinction must be drawn, this is by way of saying, between 'belief' on the one hand and 'affiliation' or 'association' on the other. Anti-Muslim racism, like antisemitism, sectarianism and factionalism throughout the world, targets certain people because of their affiliation, or assumed affiliation, not because of their beliefs. Such affiliation, unlike belief, is not chosen. 'No one chooses to be born into a Muslim family,' writes Modood. 'Similarly, no one chooses to be born into a society where to be a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility, or failure to get the job you applied for' (Modood 2005b).

It is relevant in this connection to note that the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) emphasises entirely explicitly that, so far as combating intolerance is concerned, the categories of race and religion are in certain respects interchangeable. Their definition of racism is: '... the belief that a ground such as "race", colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin justifies contempt for a person or a group of persons, or the notion of superiority of a person or group of persons.' It is unfortunate that European anti-discrimination legislation, unlike ECRI, sees 'race' on the one hand and 'religion or belief' on the other as entirely separate strands, each with separate legal terminology and mechanisms of enforcement. In Britain, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) draws a distinction between 'belief' and 'the believer', as if the latter term is an accurate way of referring to anyone associated in any way with a religious tradition, regardless whether they are observant or pious (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009: 8).

'Intolerance against Muslims'

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) uses the term *intolerance and discrimination against Muslims* (ODIHR 2011), as does the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, and focuses in particular on situations in OSCE states where people of Muslim heritage live as minorities – hence intra-national relationships, essentially, not inter-national. The inclusion of the term *discrimination* is a valuable reminder that there is a behavioural component as well as an attitudinal one. In international English, though not in UK English, 'discrimination' refers to a wide range of behaviour, including hate crimes of various kinds, not only actions that are unlawful under equalities legislation.

Tolerance was originally a political or legal term which referred to permitting and protecting, as distinct from forbidding, persecuting and eliminating, opinions different from those of the majority in any one situation or country. The word *intolerance*, accordingly, refers in the first instance to the denial of rights and freedoms to certain minority groups and communities. In the course of time, however, the two words have developed new meanings and implications, for they now refer not only to legal and political systems but also to the attitudes, feelings and opinions of individuals which underlie such systems. In consequence, the term intolerance is now close in meaning to words such as bias, bigotry, hatred, hostility, meanness, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, racism and xenophobia. It is frequently used in this wider meaning in the policy documents of international organizations, including not only the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe but also the Council of Europe, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the United Nations.

As a concept describing the attitudes and mindsets of individuals, the word *tolerant* has become increasingly close in meaning to words such as fair, generous, open-minded, patient, sympathetic and understanding; the noun *tolerance*, accordingly, implies not just putting up with or enduring opinions different from one's own but also, and more especially, a readiness to engage and interact with such opinions and to learn from them, and to seek ways of living and working with others not only in peaceful coexistence but also in active partnership and cooperation.

Tolerance, to summarise, has both a narrow and a broad meaning. Narrowly, it refers to permitting. Broadly, it means active readiness to engage and work cooperatively on equal terms. In both its meanings it locates OSCE's project in the centuries-old and European-wide history of relationships between majorities and minorities in relation to religion. Iconic events in this history include the Edict of Nantes (1598) in France and the law of toleration of all religions (1773) under Catherine the Great in Russia. Within Britain, the terms *intolerance* and *tolerance* recall struggles over many centuries for emancipation and civil rights by Jews and Roman Catholics. The OSCE's wide perspective in time and space valuably directs attention to issues of rights, recognition, reasonableness and co-existence.

Definition and comment

In the light of the discussions in the previous paragraphs, a broad definition of the term Islamophobia and its close synonyms can be formulated as follows:

A shorthand term referring to a multifaceted mix of discourse, behaviour and structures which express and perpetuate feelings of anxiety, fear, hostility and rejection towards Muslims, particularly but not only in countries where people of Muslim heritage live as minorities.

An explanatory comment may be added:

Some of the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour to which the word refers have existed for many centuries. Others are relatively new, and have developed only since sizeable Muslim communities were established in western societies from the 1970s onwards. In all its forms Islamophobia has had a range of different causes and drivers, most or all of them more to do with the nature of western societies than with the nature of Islam.

Causal, contextual and exacerbating factors

The explanatory note proposed above requires, of course, clarification. What are the causes and drivers in western societies that have led, and continue to lead, to attitudes, beliefs and behaviour expressive of hostility and fear towards Muslims? To this question this paper now turns.

The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, chaired by Bhikhu Parekh in the period 1998–2000, noted that racisms in the modern world arise in part from what it called the ‘unsettling’ of nation states caused by neoliberalism and globalisation, and from consequent feelings and narratives of decline (‘declinism’, as the term sometimes is). The reference was not only or primarily to post-war immigration but to:

- industrial re-structuring and consequent unemployment and under-employment, and therefore new demands on education systems
- loss of control on the part of national governments in relation to the movement of global capital and investment, the increasing importance of supra-national institutions, and the emergence of non-state actors such as al-Qaida in possession of formidable military resources and capacity to mobilise support for their use
- the influence of the internet and blogosphere, similarly undermining the capacity of governments and other traditional arbiters to mould hearts and minds
- the growth of local and regional identities and loyalties (‘glocalisation’)
- postmodernism, and moral and social pluralism combined with lack of deference towards tradition and elders
- the desire to justify inequalities, discrimination and exclusion between and within countries
- the increasing salience of ecological factors which make a mockery of human-made borders and boundaries, and compel cooperation and new ways of living together (*vivre-ensemble*) whether humans like it or not

In unsettled and unsettling situations human beings look around for scapegoats or, in a different metaphor, for lightning conductors with which to name and channel their anxiety and ensuing anger. Muslims are not the causes of the anxieties; they may nevertheless get to be blamed for them. Liz Fekete refers strikingly to this phenomenon across Europe in the title of her book about Islamophobia: *A Suitable Enemy* (2009). The search for convenient scapegoats is additionally fuelled by concerns, programmes and agendas such as the following:

- the desire for legitimacy of western national governments, particularly in relation to their core supporters, and in relation to their desire to control and contain dissidents of every kind
- the desire to maintain and defend oil supplies in the Middle East, and to justify the military invasions of Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, and to motivate Western troops and security services to mistreat, torture and kill
- the desire to stand by and support the state of Israel, particularly the policies and outlook of Likud
- widespread scepticism, as articulated by for example ‘Hitchkins’ (Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens) and the Platitude of the Day website, towards religious beliefs and institutions – all religion, not just Islam – mixed with resentment and perhaps even envy towards those who claim religious certainty
- the desire to sell newspapers, and therefore to excite and orchestrate frissons of fear, and spread and respond to moral panic, reassuring readers that threats to identity, status and normality are understood and can be dealt with.

Moral panics

The search for and construction of suitable enemies involves the spreading of moral panic, defined and explained as follows:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible ... [P]ublic concern about a particular condition is generated, a symbolic 'crusade' mounted, which with publicity and actions of certain interest groups, results in...moral enterprise [or] 'the creation of a new fragment of the moral constitution of society. (Cohen, 1972)

Ethical responsibility for journalists lies in seeking to acknowledge and understand anxiety but not pandering to it, not inflaming it into panic, not creating bogey figures. It is in competition with commercial responsibility, however, for consumers of the media enjoy a certain frisson of anxiety – the news value of a story about Muslims is enhanced by the hint of menace. 'If the media was doing its job,' it has been observed by a reporter on a mainstream paper (Smith and Muir, 2011 in Petley and Richardson, 2011: 243), 'it would help Britain's two million Muslims to be able to develop a kind of reasoned, questioning attitude within itself ... But instead it's far easier and a more potent story to paint a picture of this kind of green peril on your doorsteps.'

Painted as 'green perils', Muslims are the latest incarnations of folk devils in a lineage which since the 1950s has included also teddy boys, mods and rockers, punks, video nasties, recreational drug-taking, yardies, African-Caribbeans, welfare scroungers, dangerous dogs, teenage mothers, trendy teachers, asylum-seekers, Gypsies and travellers, and immigrants of many kinds. Moral panics have some or all of the following features in common:

- the construction of folk devils seen as the embodiment of all that is negative and deviant and, in some cases, wholly evil
- criticism of officials in the civil service, local government and public services ('bureaucrats'), in churches and other voluntary sector organisations ('do-gooders' and 'bleeding hearts') and in academia ('ivory towers'), for not understanding the seriousness of threats by which society is apparently faced
- a linking together of apparently disparate threats, implying they have a single cause and all are symptoms of the same underlying malaise
- an increased sense of 'us' and 'them', with no similarities, commonalities or shared interests between the two
- a strengthened sense of self-righteousness and moral indignation in the majority of the population – namely, an idealising of 'us' accompanies, and is reinforced by, the demonising of 'them'
- exaggeration, distortion and sensationalism in the media – objective molehills are made into subjective mountains
- a pervasive sense of crisis and collective nightmare, 'one damn thing after another', and of social and cultural change out of control
- and, as a consequence of all the above:

- appeals and greater support for more restrictive and punitive laws, and curtailments of civil liberties.

Folk memories

The construction of folk devils is assisted by folk memories. General Henri Gouraud (1867–1946) was the commander of the French army in the Middle East during the first world war and the first governor of Syria and Lebanon under the French mandate. It is said that when he arrived in Damascus in July 1920 he went directly to the Omayyad Mosque and stood at the tomb of Salah al-Din (died 1193), the inspirational Muslim leader whose armies defeated the Europeans in the Third Crusade. He announced: 'Nous revoilà, Saladin!' – 'We're back, Saladin!' or 'Here we are again!' It is said further that he added: 'My presence here consecrates the Cross over the Crescent.' The story well illustrates the power of folk memories to affect and interpret the present. It does not, however, demonstrate that there is a single unbroken story of mutual animosity, even though frequently over the centuries the Crusades (1095–1291) have been used by both Muslims and non-Muslims as a template which explains essential and supposedly irreconcilable differences between them.

Other iconic events over the centuries which have possessed the power to focus strong feelings of anger and hostility include the Battle of Tours (732), *The Song of Roland* (eleventh century), the rise of the Ottoman Turks as an imperial power and the conquest of Constantinople (1453, the siege of Vienna in 1529, the Reconquista, the European (including Russian) empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries leading in due course to wars and movements against them of resistance, liberation and decolonisation. Modern Islamophobia is not merely a continuation of previous antagonisms. It does, however, use imagery and ideas from them, and is strengthened by them (Ansari, 2004; Jonker and co-authors, 2009; Kumar, 2012; Malik, 2010).

Justifying inequality and exclusion

A high proportion of Muslim communities in European countries where they have settled relatively recently are affected by poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. Intolerance against Muslims is in part generated by a desire to justify or excuse this state of affairs. To say this is to recall a famous dictum about the history of racism: 'slavery was not born of racism. Rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.' It can happen that negative attitudes are sometimes generated by the desire to explain and justify unequal power relations and discriminatory practices, but are not themselves the main cause of inequalities and discrimination (Fekete, 2009).

Consequences

The electoral success of political parties which use anti-Muslim slogans and messages in their propaganda may mean that more mainstream parties fail to distance themselves explicitly and in a high-profile way from such intolerance against Muslims. There is a lack of political will to address their concerns, and insufficient attention is paid in race equality programmes, organisations and activities to the specific features and consequences of intolerance against Muslims.

Muslim citizens, particularly those belonging to the younger generation, may in consequence feel demoralised and depressed, for they see no future for themselves in the society in which they were born. Human beings have a basic need for self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. The sources of these are relationships with others, and the perceptions of oneself that one receives from others. Disrespect and intolerance from wider society can lead to feelings of alienation, disaffection and anger amongst young Muslims and these in their turn may lead or contribute to educational failure and to unemployment. Such feelings are exacerbated if there is a perceived or real bias in employment opportunities, as also if there is a perceived or real bias in criminal justice systems, with the consequence that Muslims are more likely than non-

Muslims to be stopped, questioned and searched by police officers and if they are perceived to receive harsher punishments than non-Muslims for similar offences.

Muslim citizens or residents are prevented from playing a full part in the political, cultural and economic activities of their societies. This not only has consequent disadvantages for themselves, as mentioned above, but also for society more generally. For example, Muslim approaches to personal, moral and social life do not get an adequate hearing. Democratic debates, critical thinking and dialogue about mutual understanding and common citizenship are rendered increasingly difficult. It is difficult for Muslim communities to engage in self-criticism, particularly in public.

A significant minority of young Muslims may be attracted, because of their disaffection and sense of injustice, towards violent extremism. At the same time Government measures to win the hearts of minds of Muslim communities, in the overall tasks of preventing violent extremism, are likely to be hindered.

Concluding note

The stand-up comedian Ken Dodd used to observe sadly sometimes in his act that what he likes about the British is that they are not foreigners. Such world-weariness can raise a wry smile. But differences of nationality and language, as also differences of age, gender, ethnicity and social class, are inescapable. Human beings never exist outside cultural and social locations, and therefore outside situations and relationships of unequal power, and outside historical circumstances. No one is totally unaccommodated – or, it follows, unaccommodating. On the contrary, everyone is embedded in a cultural tradition and in a period of history, and in a system of unequal power relations.

Everyone, therefore, is engaged in unending tasks and struggles to accommodate and adjust to others. How talk and text in the media help modern societies to understand and to live with differences of perception and of value-system is crucial. The Ken Dodd response to such differences is certainly beguiling. But removing differences of perception and values from the world is psychologically not beneficial, morally not desirable and politically not possible. Demonisation is not an option.

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PLEASE NOTE

There is a fuller, longer and more up-to-date bibliography
about Islamophobia at
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