ISLAMOPHOBIA – AN INVESTIGATION

Enquiries, assignments and discussions: six papers

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These papers were prepared for a two-hour session at a university in England in February 2013. The purpose was to introduce the students (second year sociology) to the academic study of Islamophobia and to provide a preliminary basis for private study, and for preparing essays and posters. The session was supported by a substantial bibliography posted at http://www.insted.co.uk/islamophobia-books.pdf.

1. Facts, figures and phrases – a quiz

Working with one other person or in a group of three, guess the answers to these various factual questions, in order to begin taking stock of this morning's topic.

2. Facts, figures and phrases – answers and notes

Look at the correct answers. Which surprise you? What do you assume is the significance of the various questions, and the various answers?

3. What's the problem? – eight views of the world

What is the 'problématique' – the problems and issues we wish to understand and to address? Jot down your own thoughts, and then compare them with the eight contrasting points of view in Paper 3. Which three of these views do you consider most plausible? Which three are least plausible?

4. Causes and causal factors – things people say or suggest

What causes or encourages non-Muslim people in Britain to have negative and hostile views of Muslims? Jot down your own thoughts, and then compare these with the contrasting points of view in Paper 4. Which three of these views do you consider most plausible? Which three are least plausible?

5. Islam and Muslims – threads in the dominant narrative

What is the content of negative and hostile views – the default position, so to speak, in media representations of Islam and Muslims? Illustrate the threads in Paper 5 with examples.

6. The counter-narrative – principal threads

So what should be the counter narrative in the media and elsewhere? Illustrate the threads in Paper 6 with examples.

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Facts, figures and phrases – a quiz

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1.   The word 'Islamophobia'

When was the first recorded use of the word Islamophobia in English?

- 1910
- 1985
- 1991
- 2001

2.   Islam and Muslims in modern Britain – a) raw figures

According to the 2011 Census how many Muslims are there in England and Wales?

- 1.7 million
- 2.7 million
- 3.7 million
- 4.7 million

3.   Islam and Muslims in modern Britain – b) percentages

According to the 2011 Census, what is the proportion of Muslims in England and Wales?

- almost one in 5 (20%)
- almost one in 10 (10%)
- almost one in 15 (6.6%)
- almost one in 20 (5%)

4.   Islam and Muslims in the modern world

Here are the names of eight countries. Which has the largest number of Muslim citizens? Can you arrange the others in approximate order?

- Bangladesh
- Egypt
- India
- Indonesia
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Turkey

5.   Islam and the West over the centuries

Here in chronological order are some dates, and in alphabetical order some names of events. Can you match the dates with the events?

- 732   Battle of Tours
- 1095   Council of Clermont
- 1453   Expulsion of Muslims from Spain
- 1492   Fall of Constantinople
- 1683   Bombs in London
- 1948   War in Israel/Palestine
- 2005   Siege of Vienna

6.   Politicians, remarks and phrases

Here are the names of four politicians, and four phrases with which they are associated. Can you match the names to the phrases?

Four politicians	**Four phrases**
President Obama	Cricket test
Lord Tebbit	Dinner table test
Baroness Warsi	*Quran* equals *Mein Kampf*
Geert Wilders	Operation Geronimo

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Answers and notes in paper 2

ANSWERS AND NOTES

1. The word 'Islamophobia'

The first recorded use of the word Islamophobia was in 1985. It appeared in an article by the distinguished American scholar Edward Said.

The first recorded use by an English writer was in 1991, by Tariq Modood, nowadays professor of sociology at the University of Bristol and author of many seminal books about multiculturalism and British Muslims.

The first use of the French word *islamophobie* was in 1910.

Some people wrongly suppose the word was coined only in 2001, following 11 September.

2. Islam and Muslims in modern Britain – a) raw figures

According to the 2011 Census there are 2.7 million people of Muslim background in England and Wales. In 2001, incidentally, the figure was 1.6 million.

3. Islam and Muslims in modern Britain – b) percentages

The proportion of Muslims in England and Wales is about 4.8 per cent, so just less than five per cent, or just less than one in 20.

Muslims are not distributed evenly across the country. The proportion in London is 12.4%, and in the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber it is close to 7%. In Birmingham it is just over 14%

4. Islam and Muslims in the modern world

The country with the largest number of Muslims is Indonesia. There are bout 196 million Muslims there, out of a total population of 206 million (95%). In order of size (not proportion) of Muslim population the other countries mentioned in the question are as follows:

- India
- Pakistan
- Bangladesh
- Nigeria
- Turkey
- Egypt
- Saudi Arabia

5. Islam and the West over the centuries

For many centuries, and in several different parts of the world, there have been tensions, suspicions and conflicts between 'Islam' and 'the West'. (Inverted commas because both sets of realities are extremely large and complex, and cannot really be summarised with single words.)

Iconic landmarks include the following. It is probably significant that most are not as well known in Britain as they are in many other countries.

- Battle of Tours, 732
- Council of Clermont, launching the Crusades ,1095
- Fall of Constantinople, 1453
- Expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain, 1492
- Siege of Vienna by Ottoman Turks, 1683
- War in Israel/Palestine, 1948
- Bombs in London. 2005

You can readily find out more about these iconic events, of course, by going to Wikipedia.

6.   Politicians, remarks and phrases

The term 'cricket test' is associated with Norman Tebbit (now Lord Tebbit), who claimed in 1990 that migrants to Britain from India, Pakistan and West Indies should support England in cricket matches against the countries from which they had come.

Baroness Saeeda Warsi used the phrase 'dinner table test' in a speech in 2011 in which she maintained Islamophobia is now respectable at middle-class dinner parties.

The hunting down and killing of Osama bin Laden under the supreme command of President Obama was known as Operation Geronimo, thus situating the pursuit within a grand narrative about American history, one much celebrated by Hollywood.

The Dutch politician Geert Wilders was prosecuted in 2010-11 (but found not guilty of inciting religious hatred) for claiming that the Quran is as dangerous as Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*.

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What's the problem? – eight views of the world

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1. Religion
'The problem is religion in general, which is merely ignorance, superstition and wishful thinking. The sooner human beings stop being religious the safer the world will be.'

2. Islam
'The problem is a particular religion: Islam. It is backward, barbaric and intolerant and is opposed to all things western. It is stuck in the Middle Ages, and needs a reformation, based on science and modern thinking.'

3. Islamism
'The problem is Islamism, namely an interpretation of Islam that has its intellectual roots in organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt after the First World War and subsequently developed by Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and Maulana Maududi in Pakistan. Alternative phrases or words instead of Islamism include political, militant or radical Islam; jihadism; extremism; and fundamentalism.'

4. The Middle East
'The problem lies in the specific history of West Asia, particularly the history of Arab nations. Key events and factors of the last 100 years include the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, the Balfour Declaration and in due course the creation of the state of Israel, processes of decolonisation, tensions and conflicts within and between Arab countries, the Sunni/Shi'a rift, and the emergence of oil-rich economies.'

5. The West
'The problem is the West. From the Crusades to colonisation, and from moral and military support for Israel to the recent invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, Western powers have oppressed Muslim countries and cultures, and have developed forms of anti-Muslim hostility, Islamophobia and orientalism in order to justify their own behaviour.'

6. Alienation
'The problem lies in the alienation of people of Muslim heritage born and educated in European countries, particularly the younger generation. They are marginalised and excluded by processes of religious and racist discrimination, and demoralised and depressed by the torrent of anti-Muslim stereotypes they see in the media. Some turn to an ideology of nihilism and terrorism, intermixed with Islamism (see above), as a rhetoric of self-justification.'

7. Conflicts of material interest
'The problem is not in the first instance to do with differences of culture, religion, ideology or civilisation. Rather, it is to do with conflicts of material interest. Globally, the key conflicts are around power, influence, territory and resources, particularly oil. Such conflicts become 'religionised' or 'culturalised' – each side celebrates and idealises its own traditions and cultural heritage, including religion, and denigrates and demonises the traditions of the other.'

8. Globalisation
'The attacks on 9/11 were a vivid reminder that the governments of nation states – even of extremely powerful nation states, most notably the United States – are unable to guarantee the security of their citizens. At the same time they cannot control, to the extent that they did in the past, economic, cultural and ecological borders. The resulting insecurities lead to scapegoating and moral panics, with Muslims as a convenient target, but not the real cause of uncertainty and insecurity.'

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Source: developed from an article by Timothy Garton Ash, _The Guardian_, 15 September 2005

Causes and causal factors – things people say

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1. Terrorism
'Large numbers of Muslims believe that terrorist acts against the West are justified or encouraged by their religion.'

2. Legacy of history
'For many centuries Muslim and other cultures have been engaged in military conflict with each other, and relationships and mutual perceptions have been deeply affected by colonialism and neocolonialism, and by resistance and struggle.'

3. Patterns of inequality
'There is a desire to justify patterns of inequality in modern western societies which work to the disadvantage of, amongst others, Muslim communities and neighbourhoods.'

4. Fossil fuel supplies
'There is a desire in western countries to maintain and defend fossil fuel 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.'

5. Israel
' countries, particularly the United States, wish to stand by and support the state of Israel, particularly its current leadership in its dealings with Palestine.'

6. Insecurity
'Governments cannot control, to the extent they did in the past, economic, financial, cultural and ecological borders. The resulting insecurities lead to scapegoating and moral panics, with Muslims and other minorities being convenient enemies and targets, though they are not the principal causes.'

7. Ignorance
'Anti-Muslim hostility is caused by ignorance and lack of contact. If non-Muslims were better informed they would be less prejudiced.'

8. Commercial pressures
'Proprietors and editors wish 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.'

9. Electoral politics
'Political parties wish to gain votes in local and national elections, and to diminish the attractiveness of political opponents. This frequently leads them to play "the Muslim card", sometimes in code ("dog-whistle politics").'

10. Scepticism and secularism
There is widespread scepticism in western countries towards religious beliefs, identities and institutions – all religion, not just Islam – mixed with resentment and perhaps even envy towards those who claim religious certainty.

Islam and Muslims: principal threads in the dominant narrative

All the same
Muslims are seen as all much the same as each other, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, social class, geographical location and political outlook, and regardless of how observant and religiously-oriented they are, or are not. With regard to terrorism and violent extremism for example, it is imagined there is a slippery slope between moderates and extremists, with even the most moderate Muslims being potential extremists.

All religiously motivated
It is thought that the single most important thing about a 'Muslim' is that he or she has certain religious beliefs and engages in certain religious practices. Accordingly, it is thought that everything a Muslim does is motivated by religion. So if a Muslim engages in violence, for example, this must be because their religion advocates violence. If a Muslim-majority country is economically backward or abuses human rights this too, it is thought, must be much more due to the prevailing religious tradition of the country than to any other factor.

All totally other
Muslims are seen as totally other – they have few or no interests, characteristics, needs, concerns or values in common with non-Muslims, and this was as true in the past as it is in the present. In short, the values of Muslims and non-Muslims are incompatible with each other. Amongst other things, this means Muslims are not seen as possessing any relevant and valuable insights, perspectives and achievements from which non-Muslims may learn and benefit.

All inferior
Muslims are seen as culturally, intellectually, politically and morally inferior to non-Muslims – quick to take offence, prone to irrationality and violence, hypocritical in the practice of their religion, sexist and oppressive in their treatment of women, homophobic in their views of sexual identities, intolerant towards world-views different from their own, fundamentalist and narrow-minded, disinclined or unable to engage in reasoned debate, and hostile and hateful towards 'the West' for no good reason. It is allegedly a sign of Muslim inferiority and backwardness that the governments of certain Muslim-majority countries have little respect for democracy and human rights, and that economic and social development has been slight. The only language Muslims understand, it is said, is the language of force and violence.

All a threat
Muslims are seen as a threat to non-Muslims. Globally, they may attack non-Muslim countries, as on 9/11, and are a threat to the existence of Israel. Within non-Muslim countries they are a treacherous and disloyal fifth column or enemy within, in active collusion or tacit sympathy with international terrorism, engaged in a clash of civilisations and in a global conspiracy and jihad against 'the West'. In addition, they are a threat to non-Muslim cultures, societies and values, intending the 'Islamisation' of Europe and turning the continent into 'Eurabia'. Further, it is claimed they are a demographic time-bomb, and will fairly soon be a numerical majority in certain European cities and countries.

All impossible to work with
As a consequence of the previous five perceptions, it is believed there is no possibility of cooperation and partnership between 'them' and 'us', Muslims and non-Muslims, working as equals on tasks which require mediation, negotiation, compromise and partnership.

Source: *Pointing the Finger*, edited by Julian Petley and Robin Richardson, 2011

The counter-narrative

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Diversity and difference

There is and always has been much diversity within Islam and much internal debate and deliberation.

Observance

People of Muslim background have a range of different attitudes towards religious belief and practice, as do people born into other traditions.

Common humanity

Muslims and people from other religious or cultural backgrounds share a common humanity and therefore have a great deal in common
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Positive interactions

People belonging to differing religious or cultural communities, including Muslims, Christians, Jews and others, and also atheists and humanists with no religion, can and do have positive impacts on each other, and frequently work and live together in close co-operation and partnership.

Contributions to world civilisation

Islamic cultures and civilizations have made substantial contributions over the centuries to science and technology, architecture and the arts, and law, ethics and philosophy

Joint working

All over the world – locally and nationally, and in international and global contexts – Muslims and others can and must live and work in cooperation with each other to deal with shared problems.

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