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Environment of Hate:

**The New Normal
for Muslims in
the UK**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK

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for the Islamic Human Rights Commission

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Background to report and project

'Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK' is the second UK-wide report studying Muslim experiences of hostility and discrimination and issues of anti-Muslim hate crime within the context of an increasingly institutionally Islamophobic environment. Now named Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations Project, IHRC's first report was part of the pilot study for the project with a survey undertaken at the end of 2009 and early 2010. Similarly, it looked beyond racially motivated criminal acts against Muslims or perceived Muslims and analysed the environment in which discriminatory acts are encouraged and legitimised.

Sadly, in comparison to the 2010 statistics, the situation has clearly worsened. The 2015 report shows that Islamophobia has evolved into new, accepted forms of discrimination against a particular group whose effects are apparent in all forms of daily life.

Methodology and sample group

The fieldwork consisted of a collection of up to 1,800 qualitative and quantitative surveys, among them 1,148 hard copies and 634 surveys that were conducted online. These surveys covered a wide range of demographics including gender, areas of the UK with a high Muslim population, as well as areas with a significantly low Muslim population and in between, a variety of ages, ethnic backgrounds, marital statuses, work statuses, employment sector, levels of education, categories of income groups, countries of birth and citizenship, self-deemed levels of religious practice and of course visibility of 'Muslimness'.

The qualitative survey questions sought to elicit the respondents' views as well as lived experiences on societal/governmental perception of Muslims, feelings on whether religious acts of hate are dealt with adequately, causes of racist/Islamophobic culture, if institutions such as the media contribute to such cultures, the role and effects on the behaviour of Muslims etc. In contrast, the quantitative surveys categorised experiences into five sections (discussed in detail in Chapter Five): Being a Member of a Hated Society, Ideology, Discrimination and Double Discrimination, Cross Cultural Schemata and Intercultural Sensitivity and Policy.

Some findings:

- Experience of those 'always' seeing negative stereotypes of Muslim people in the media rose from 10% in 2010 to 39.4% in 2014.
- In 2010, 30% of respondents said they 'never' saw negative stereotypes of Muslims in the media, in 2014 however, 94% of respondents said they saw negative stereotypes.
- 21.3% of those who described their religiosity as 'practising Muslim' felt they were 'always' witnessing politicians philosophise that Islam is problematic.
- In 2010 fewer than 60% of respondents said they encountered politicians using Islamophobic rhetoric and that figure has risen to almost 85% in 2014.
- The survey also reveals unsettling statistics on discrimination faced by Muslims in both the workplace and in an education setting.
- 87.7% of those surveyed agree that 'those who discriminate against us are highly driven by media content.'
- The experience of physical assault increased from 13.9% in 2010 to 17.8% in 2014.
- 58% of those surveyed felt they had experienced being treated with suspicion or being wrongly accused of something.
- 66% of those surveyed have experienced verbal abuse at some point – a definite increase from the 39.8% in 2010.

- In 2010, 34.2% agreed that they had seen political policies that negatively affected Muslim people. In 2014 this figure had risen to 59.2%
- In 2010, 50% of respondents had seen or heard Islamophobia against another person. In 2014, this figure rose to 80%.
- 51.1% of the sample believed that politicians condone discriminatory acts against Muslims.

Chapter One: A Background

Authors have contextualised the 2014 survey findings to outline their arguments for the increasingly damaging cultural, political and legal landscape; the following issues are discussed at length:

- From structural racism to the post-racial: authors argue against the discourse of a colour blind, universal, unified and post-racial society which masks structural inequalities ingrained in contemporary Britain. The idea that the UK is a tolerant country of equal opportunities assumes that the integration of peoples is complete with the main outstanding barrier a defiant Muslim community unwilling to integrate.

- NGOs/Civil Society and Victorian Models of social responsibility: reflecting upon the 2011 riots, white riots of the 1990s and Asian riots of 2001, the authors discuss the way in which certain communities are seen as the cause of their own and mainstream society's problems which calls for state intervention and self-reform. Consequently, the focus is turned away from systemic bias within the criminal justice system and towards the demonised culture of the community in question.

- Anti-democratisation as the outcome of subalternisation: the authors discuss the production of a Hate Environment, i.e. the Prevent strategy, CTS Act, Contest etc, and the pervasive surveillance of Muslims which provides an impetus for street-level hate. Such demonisation has created a subaltern space – a space where Muslims are feared and despised by the majority – and identity for Muslims in the UK. As a result, scope for dissent is silenced and democratic participation by Muslims is curtailed and surveilled.

- Militarisation and subhumanisation, and securitisation: the authors discuss a range of issues surrounding militarisation concerning loyalty to the British state in relation to the plight of Muslims abroad, political conditionality, impact of UK's military interventions on Muslim communities in the UK, the dehumanisation of Muslims and the role of the media in advancing the 'creeping' militarisation of Britain.

- Grassroots backlash: the authors look at the effect of the heightened perception/misperception of Muslim related issues as a result of hate representation by the media and politicians, the lack of critical reflection by institutions and the state and thus the backlash from civil societies against policies.

Chapter Two: Talking the Talk – Anti-Muslim Racism in Media and Political Discourse

The anti-Muslim representation presented by the media and in political discourses results in an environment of hate. Such damaging, biased representations have a long lasting impact on the public's impressions of Muslims at large. As a result, Muslims become victims of acts of hatred and discrimination and are then blamed for failing to integrate. The negative impact of the media which influences the public overlaps into a political discourse and has resulted in the creation of government policies which specifically target Muslims, most notably the PREVENT agenda, thus enforcing the legitimacy of structural racism.

Biased headlines and media coverage situates Muslims within specific categories, e.g. stories related to violence, sexual depravity, misogyny and disloyalty. This bias goes further by attacking both genders. The media tends to stereotype male Muslims as sexual groomers, preying on white women and female Muslims are stereotyped as being submissive to men and boxed into a discussion of their choice of clothing. These portrayals feed into the view that Muslims are inferior to the White British majority which has wider implications on the controls placed on Muslims.

This political discourse alienates Muslims from the mainstream and is exacerbated and encouraged by media coverage; ergo Muslims are themselves blameworthy for their isolation. This legislation then feeds into the prejudiced media portrayals of Muslims creating a self-sustaining vicious circle from which it is hard to escape.

Chapter 3: "PREVENT" as the socialisation of hate

Reflecting on key findings from the 2010 report, this chapter provides an overview of Islamophobic incidents reported over the last few years. The authors discuss the thematics of individual attacks such as security, veils, and far-right ideas and symbolism to name a few, and cases in which victims' affiliation to practices associated with being Muslim is a clear target.

Negative political and media discourse, alongside laws that discriminate against Muslims such as the Counter-Terrorism Security Act and the PREVENT programme, work together to create a hate environment within which the negative experiences of hated societies are produced.

Hate crime has become a widely accepted concept. However there is a big disparity in the sentencing of Muslim and non-Muslim perpetrators. This is evidence of double standards and hints at a separate legal regime for Muslims. The media reporting of crimes by both groups is also significantly different in that non-Muslim perpetrators are described in a manner which undermines the significance of the crime, while the religion and ethnic background of Muslim perpetrators are emphasised.

A great portion of this chapter also provides a background to the Trojan Horse/Hoax affair, as well as an introduction to the PREVENT strategy, and whether their intent was to prevent terrorism or promote demonisation and violence. Ultimately, the authors conclude, the PREVENT agenda is playing a great role in creating a police state.

Chapter 4: Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations and the Expansion of Hate Environment

In Professor Ameli's theory of DHMIR hate crimes are placed within the broader context of hate policy, hate representation and hate environment. DHMIR has been developed to offer a proper critical theoretical framework in which to study minority groups' mistreatment in western countries. Consisting of several elements and concepts, this model puts hate crime in a wider context and explains which forces are in operation when a member of a minority group is subjected to a hate crime. Thus, the victim of a violent assault is simply experiencing hatred somewhere along a spectrum of experiences that is the culmination of the interaction of various structural forces enabled by institutional discourse and praxis. Likewise the perpetrators of hate crimes, to some extent, fall victim to the hate environment as they are incited to commit discriminatory acts due to an environment of structural racism. Authors analyse motivating factors behind acts of hate. There exists a clear tendency of motivation arising from a point of belief or instigation based on an authoritative voice. In other words, perpetrators are also a type of victim of those structural biases.

Chapter 5: From the Multicultural to the Hierarchical: Experiences of Everyday Hate for Muslims in the UK

Demographic overview:

- Respondents were overwhelmingly citizens and residents of the UK at 75.4% and 88.4% respectively, with 52.9% born in the UK
- A majority of the respondents cited Pakistani or British Pakistani as their heritage followed by Bengali / British Bangladeshi
- A total of 43% of the sample has some sort of degree or postgraduate qualification
- 54% of respondents were male and 46% were female
- 38% of respondents were aged below 24
- Respondents are mainly from the middle income group
- In terms of work status, 12.1% stated they were unemployed, 14.8% self-employed and 45.7% employed
- Religiosity, as self-perceived, ranks highly amongst respondents, with 72% stating they are practising Muslims and a further 15.6% stating they are highly practising Muslims
- 83.3% of respondents state they are visibly Muslim, with 1.1% stating they were not Muslim but sometimes mistaken for being Muslims
- 40.8% of respondents said they lived in an area where Muslims numbered less than one third of the population and 27% lived in areas where more than two thirds of the population are Muslims.

The authors provide tables and statistics gauged through survey responses and comments from respondents to discuss the pervasiveness of ideological hatred against Muslims - that is encoding of demeaning representations and ideas of Muslims in public, media, educational and political discourse, as well as witnessing them directed against someone.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendations: Hopelessness or Beginning Something Good

The report sets out recommendations provided by respondents, as well as their own recommendations based on this, and previous reports. Essentially 11 key possibilities are identified by the respondents:

- Education
- The need for Muslims to condemn atrocities
- Better public relations and raising awareness
- Integration
- Prayer, the call to Islam, love, Islamic behaviour and positivity
- Action from the government and law enforcement
- Action from the media
- Action from wider society
- Action from other actors
- Dialogue
- Nothing can be done

In brief, the authors propose the following recommendations:

- General educational campaigns and public awareness campaigns whereby the government does not obstruct the process of education
- Educational programmes initiated by Muslim organisations. Action from outside the Muslim community, from centres of power, to change discourse
- Media regulatory standards need to deal with issues of institutional racism rather than operating within the framework of a post-racial society
- Self-renewal in the UK media; this can only be driven internally and requires a cultural shift in the thinking of media institutions
- Organisations founded upon anti-racism, community cohesion, faith relations and human rights need to take a stronger stand in denouncing Islamophobic discourse
- Strong relationships between Muslim organisations, as well as between other groups campaigning against racism and prejudice in the media
- Groups on a variety of levels, including academic institutions and of course media outlets themselves need to be earnest in assessing ways Muslims are demonised so as to not repeat such tropes. The government should also be a part of this process
- Acknowledgment by the government and the media that a range of emotions surrounding supplication and injunctions to pray from Muslims (or other groups) is acceptable
- An end to double standards in treatment of issues relating to Islamophobia, anti-Muslim prejudice and racism
- A radical rethink of government strategy attempting to deal with the problems facing Muslims in Britain

The book 'Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK' is available to buy in hard copy here: <http://shop.ihr.org/environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk-saied-r-ameli-arzu-merali>

and as a PDF here <http://shop.ihr.org/environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk-saied-r-ameli-arzu-merali-pdf-download>.

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