

Islamophobia – The New Crusade

THE TRUTH ABOUT ISLAM
www.bnp.org.uk - 0700 900 2671

Intolerance
Slaughter
Looting
Arson
Molestation of women



Poster from the British National Party's 'Campaign Against Islam' October 2001

Arzu Merali & Massoud Shadjareh
May 2002

First published in Great Britain in 2002
by Islamic Human Rights Commission
PO Box 598, Wembley, HA9 7XH

© 2002 Islamic Human Rights Commission

Printed in England by Islamic Human Rights Commission

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereinafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN 1-903718-15-5

ISLAMOPHOBIA – The new crusade?

Based on a presentation at the 'Islamophobia Workshop' at the 'Justice or Just Us Conference', 11th May 2002, Liverpool organised by BRAIN (Black Racial Attacks Independent Network)

Introduction

"This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a long time "
George Bush Jnr., 16 September 2001

As activists, campaigners, advocates and researchers we have been involved in the recent history of anti-Muslim hatred, hostility and discrimination as played out in the local and international arena. Ten years back it was au fait to be polemical and talk about the continuing crusade in the British / Western psyche playing out at the conscious and sub-conscious level. It made good headlines and on occasion interesting press releases. But somewhere along the line, we got academic, the race industry moved in, we grew up and the term 'Islamophobia' was born.

In many ways it was a blessing. The Runnymede Trust report and subsequent studies using either that terminology or as we did 'anti-Muslim hostility etc.' focused on real and current experiences, structured and societal discrimination and posited recommendation after ignored recommendation for change. Enter George W. Bush Jnr., September 2001, and his declared crusade; the polemics were back and this time they meant business.

Despite the way this sounds, this is not meant to be a flippant or cynical analysis of the problems faced by Muslims or the many well-wishers, campaigners and supporters who have striven tirelessly from many backgrounds to eradicate this evil from society. It is however an on going attempt to make some large and part-polemical, part-experiential points about the state we live in today. Why the crusades again? We hope the reason we used this tool – although highly polemical – will become clear as we progress.

A brief history of Islamophobia

Terry Jones and Alan Ereira say in their book *Crusades*¹ – as an aside called 'The Massacre of the Jews' that the original and all subsequent crusaders refused point blank to understand anything about those they set out to slaughter in the name of truth, justice and Holy Jerusalem. Jews, according to the crusaders, including those who had lived amongst Jewish communities for decades, 'were killers, they killed Christ', 'it was the Jews who must be greedy', and finally, 'the Jews were aliens.' Muslims according to the Crusaders, again those with first hand experience of living with Muslims, saw them as polytheists who deified Muahammad (p.b.u.h.) and put simply were 'Christ's enemies.' As the authors point out the crusaders had failed to grasp that Muslims' most basic doctrine was that God is only one as well as the high position in which Christ is held in Islam. Jones and Ereira cynically point out that the crusaders whilst massacring Jews en route to the Holy Land looted their wealth. They further pointed out that their own theology held that the Divinity, although one was also three and the icons of Christian worship had yet to be reformed. Writing in 1994 to accompany their TV series, the authors stated:

¹ Crusades, Jones, Terry, Ereira, Alan, BBC London, 1994 pp18-19

“The crusaders had not only taken into themselves the notion that they would become better people through violence; they also projected on to the victims of their violence their own inner demons. This is probably the most obvious and long-lasting heritage of the Crusade. We still do it.”

Racism or Islamophobia?

This, in many ways, answers for us what is the difference between racism and Islamophobia. There are many crossovers of cases we have dealt with where the distinction is a moot point. Discrimination against an Asian girl of no obvious confessional background by teachers who consider she should not apply to university because ‘she’ll probably just get married half way through anyway...’ may or may not be compounded by the fact that girl also happens to be Muslim. It is perhaps only clearly Islamophobia when religion has been specifically cited as part of the equation – and we have had to deal with both types of cases.

Where the departure comes is where there is a clear association of ideological hatred of Muslims i.e. a hatred of their beliefs as perceived by the Islamophobe. As universalists we believe that belief – and this does not mean simply religion but any ideological perspective – is a choice, and we all make those choices be they informed or otherwise. Those who hate us as Muslims, perhaps do not share that view, and many Islamophobes express their hatred of Muslims as a form of racism in that they impute to Muslims inherent characteristics that include immutable belief systems. In other words they believe that Muslims believe x or y because they are Muslim, just as an Englishman has light skin because he is white. This is not just the perception of the stereotypical white lout who tanks up on curry and larger before bashing a paki, but can be found at every level of society. Samuel Huntington – that most famous of liberals – says in *Clash of Civilisations*:

“The West differs from other civilisations not in the way it has developed but in the distinctive character of its values and institutions. These include most notably its Christianity, pluralism, individualism, and the rule of law, which made it possible for the West to invent modernity, expand throughout the world, and become the envy of other societies...Europe as Arthur R. Schlesinger Jr. has said, is “the source – the *unique* source” of the “ideas of individual liberty, human rights, and cultural freedom...These are European ideas, not Asian, nor African, nor Middle Eastern ideas, except by adoption.” They make Western civilisation unique, and Western civilisation is valuable not because it is universal but because it is unique ”²

We could discuss endlessly critiques of Huntington’s theories and in particular this book. However we just want to highlight this assertion and its sub-text. Muslims – as it appears de facto non-Westerners regardless of our ethnicity, place of birth, or upbringing – are not only ‘backward, ill-educated or plain ‘thick’, we simply can’t be anything else.’ According to the above theory, human existence of any value i.e. free and equal, can only be achieved *not through* Western values alone, but *by the West and its European inhabitants alone*.³

² Huntington, Samuel *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, 1995

³ see Merali, Arzu *Other Voices in the Garden: Why Muslim Women Don’t Have Human Rights* Islamic Human Rights Commission, London, 1999

Definitions of Islamophobia also fall into this trap. The Runnymede Trust and others largely define Islamophobia in terms of a hatred of the ideological aspects of Muslim life that are immutable. They accept the communitarian analysis of society – that these people have an internal culture or value system which may fall short of our standards (to be fair to the report it did expose large numbers of stereotypes in this regard) but which we must respect as tolerant but still card carrying liberals. This is an oversimplification of a groundbreaking report, the more positive aspects of which will be discussed later. However the implications of this approach can be very negative.

- (i) it confirms the racists' perceptions that Muslims can't help their inferiority. They are innately stupid, immoral or even amoral;
- (ii) it posits Muslims as an ethical problem for liberal society to come to terms with (we disagree with their internal ethics therefore should we intervene or respect their boundaries?)
- (iii) it problematises Muslims at the point of their interaction with society at large i.e. Muslims come to our attention when they try to interact with wider society and this interaction is inevitably problematic as they can never adjust to the morally accepted norm;
- (iv) it requires Muslims to make concessions if they are to be recognised as participants in mainstream society (we shall discuss this in greater detail later)
- (v) it confines Muslim participation in wider society to their identity as Muslims. Therefore it is difficult to find a practising or obvious Muslim holding senior positions in the legal professions, political parties, the media etc. These people are confined to being 'professional Muslims' in society, and as such they cannot participate in the present structures let alone participate in changing those structures.

Again, whilst we accept that some racists do not see a distinction, we believe that Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred has an added dimension where the Islamophobe's hatred is based on recognition of a Muslim's choice to be Muslim. This form of hatred permeates liberal society. Polly Toynbee's diatribe 'Why I am an Islamophobe' published the day after the launch of the Runnymede Trust's report in November 1997 is just one tract that bears witness to the intolerance of so-called tolerant liberal society. Katarina Delacoura – currently incumbent at LSE – gives a more considered critique of political Islam and the choices made by Muslim women in particular. Whilst they claim to be equal but different, Muslim women she contends choose to be clearly subordinate in a hierarchy.⁴

To be a communitarian, you may pity the victimisation of Muslims who can't help the way they are. It is reminiscent of saying you're not racist because some of your friends are black and you deplore the racism they suffer because 'they can't help being black.' As a liberal viewing each of us as moral agents you are liable to positively hate Muslims for the ideological choices you perceive they / we have made, because well – we can help it if we want to.

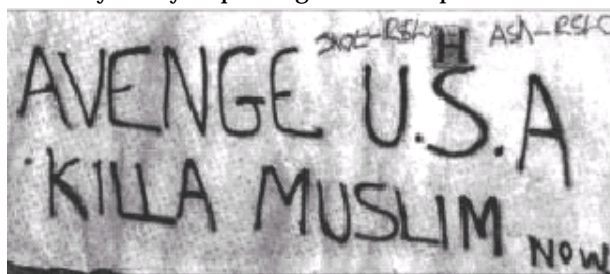
The political conditionality of victimisation

These scenarios have been played out in glorious technicolour in the post-9/11 environment. Many sympathise that the vast majority of Muslims don't sympathise with 'the terrorists' and backlash attacks against them are completely unacceptable. As regards to backlash attacks, our report for the UK shows that in the first month after the 9/11 attacks, in the UK reports of

⁴ ibid. p2

attacks stood at thirteen times⁵ the rate before the attacks. Likewise Canada saw some 110 serious incidents reported in the two months that followed the attacks⁶ and USA (60,000 US Muslims i.e. a threefold rise)⁷. However underpinning this is the conditionality that Muslims do not deserve these attacks only IF they do not sympathise with 'the terrorists.'

See the difference in reporting of a hate attack on a synagogue last week in Stoke Newington and an attack on Finsbury Park Mosque. The graffitied slogan 'God is gay' outside the Finsbury Park Mosque, was not headlined with the rest of the vandalism that mosque experienced in the wake of 9/11. It instead appeared as 'evidence' of support for the terrorist attacks by Muslims in the area in a piece entitled 'These Gloating Ghouls – Cynically exploiting our free speech, Islamic extremists in Britain hail the atrocities'⁸. We are not sure how credible it is that Muslim extremists, whoever they may be, would celebrate anything with the slogan 'God is gay.' It may well be that this is an example of a hate crime against Muslims, along with the rest of the graffiti daubed on mosque walls in the past few months 'Avenge USA – Kill A Muslim Now' being one of the more famous.



Graffiti on a mosque wall in South Shields

The attack on the Stoke Newington synagogue merited a full article on May 1, 2002 in the same paper and postured as to whether this act had been committed by 'Moslem extremists' – the synagogue it noted was not far from Finsbury Park mosque, or maybe the rise of the far-right in Europe. No such consideration for the walls of Finsbury Park mosque, their defacing according to that paper must be another example of 'Muslim extremism.'

The idea that Muslims hold unacceptable views is a thematic of demonisation that recurs repeatedly over the years. Whilst Salman Rushdie's right to free speech was deemed absolute, Muslims' right to hold not just so-called 'extreme views' but political values has been continuously undermined, often by the lobby that references itself as opposing Islamophobia. How? Is this some sort of insidious conspiracy? Probably not, but we would contend that the terms of Muslim participation in wider society have an inbuilt political conditionality to them which we do not see attached to other communities. The Runnymede Trust's recommendations on 'Bridge Building'⁹ in a subsection entitled 'Making common cause' calls on communities to make 'solidarity at times of tension.' Whilst suggesting that the communities affected by this are principally the Muslim and Jewish communities, and by implication this would mean both should do so, it goes on only to cite examples of Muslims doing so and receiving appreciative letters of response from Jewish figures. This is a dangerous precedent to suggest.

Apart from generalising as to the nature of the Arab / Israeli conflict and the understandings of both communities to it, it advocates that British Muslims must disassociate themselves from what the British Jewish community feels to be the cause of tension. Would they suggest the opposite? We doubt it. Likewise we have not seen such recommendations made to other communities e.g.

⁵ Herbert, Ian and Burrell, Ian 'Dossier Reveals a massive rise in attacks on British Muslims' *The Independent* January 4, 2002 referencing IHRC's report 'UK Today: The Anti-Muslim Backlash since September 11, 2001.

⁶ American Muslim News Briefs, CAIR, 11th November 2001

⁷ 'Anti-Muslim Incidents up threefold in past year' CAIR press release, 30th April 2002

⁸ The Daily Mail, 14th September 2001, Christian Gysin; Gordon Rayner

⁹ Chapter 8, 'Islamophobia: a challenge for us all' The Runnymede Trust, 1997

the Hindu community with regard to the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and its effects on minorities there and the situation here. The report therefore has already taken onboard a slant or bias in favour of the views of one community over another in a general and not particular manner. Given some of the increasingly hawkish stances of groups like the British Board of Deputies and the Israel Solidarity Committee, it is worrying to think that British Muslims should be obliged in the view of the race industry to apologise for claiming that there were massacres or war crimes committed in Jenin.

This is dangerous in that it allows crass generalisation to be exploited by those with strong political views to the disadvantage of those who oppose those views. Last year, Richard Stone, now chair of the British Commission on Islamophobia stated in an article in *The Independent* that Muslims and Jews can make common cause easily, if only Muslims would isolate the young anti-Zionists that exist within their community. Whilst Muslims should and often vociferously do condemn anti-Semitism, why should they be asked to accept Zionism? It is like the white chairman of an anti-racist group stating in the 1980s that black and white communities could easily make common cause if only the blacks isolate the anti-Apartheid elements of their community. Apart from the glaring political conditionality, it also polarises perceptions of community relations. Maybe whites and Jews also oppose apartheid and Zionism.



Santiago Matamoros in action

The Terrorism Act 2000 exemplifies the role of Islamophobia at a societal level. For new legislation to be enacted, there is usually a call from concerned lobbies, or a review from within parliamentary bureaucracies, or an election pledge itself the result of either or both. Long processes of inspection and scrutiny precede its enactment. The last three terrorism Acts (1998, 2000 and now 2001) have dispensed with these rigours and gone completely against the grain of British legislative culture. The faster the better, seems to be the recurrent theme, the other being that Muslims are disproportionately targeted by these acts.

If Muslims are likely to be terrorists in the government's eyes, what succour is this to the far-right? The White Knights, the successor group to Combat 18, has adopted Santiago Matamoros as its patron saint. Santiago Matamoros – translated as St. James the Moor (i.e. Muslim) slayer – was renowned for his ethnic cleansing of Spain. The iconography speaks for itself.

The rise of the British National Party we feel can be seen to directly correspond to the failure of government, institutions and society at large to tackle Islamophobia. Section 4 of our report into the Oldham riots¹⁰ deals with the BNP's use of Islamophobia to provoke the riots as well as to garner political support. Some examples are repeated here:

Nick Griffin's campaign literature in the run-up to the 2001 elections states:

“Crazy, isn't it? Muslim rioters tear apart the town, attacking white people, houses and shops, and petrol-bombing and shooting at the police – and yet whites like us are getting the blame!”

¹⁰ Ahmed, Nafeez, Bodi, Faisal, Kazim, Raza & Shadjareh, Massoud *The Oldham Riots: Discrimination, Deprivation and Communal Tension in the United Kingdom* Islamic Human rights Commission, London, June 2001

It ends, “*Nick Griffin and the BNP or the pro-Muslim Labour party? Make up your own mind and think of your family as you vote British National Party.*”

Other literature referring to Oldham refers to the ‘problem is mainly Muslim -on-white’, and that the situation is like ‘Beirut’ or a ‘mini Bosnia’ caused by Muslims.

Since September 11, the BNP have launched its ‘Campaign Against Islam.’ Amongst its campaign pack literature is the leaflet entitled ‘LOOTING, ARSON and MOLESTATION – it’s all in the Koran!’ It states:

“The problem is *not* a matter of race. In the last few years those Muslims oppressing and murdering ‘infidels’ and women have included Arabs, Pakistanis, black Nigerians and white Bosnians.”

It continues:

“Unless Islam is moderated...it remains a menace to **freedom, democracy and peace**, not just in far-off countries but on the streets of Britain, where its followers make up probably the largest single religious group.”

Its contentions about Islamic faith and practice are vile – at one point it describes good Muslims as de facto rapists. It ends with a call to oppose Islam’s war on the west (having lamented that there is no war on Islam):

“It’s a war in which the weapons of the enemy are immigration, high birth rates, and the old political parties. A war in which the only response that can do any good is to organise a new political party – one which will stop immigration and ensure that the British remain the majority and take back control of our own country – the British National Party.”



We all know that this is the rhetoric that National Socialism – Nazism – was born out of in 1930s Germany. This particular leaflet ends with a picture of a Templar Knight, shield raised and sword drawn: ‘Join our crusade.’

BNP Anti-Islam Supplement to the October 2001 edition of the BNP magazine *Identity*

Where is the Outcry?

How can we lay the blame for this level of hatred and demonisation on the powers that be? We are not suggesting that the British government holds these views – although some could argue that they may not be far off – we do contend that their lack of concern with regard to Islamophobia has created an atmosphere where Muslims are seen as deserving of the discrimination and hostility they face. Worse still, others may see this as a green light to pursue an anti-Muslim agenda.

Jack Straw's comments at the launch of Runnymede Trust report exemplify for us the contempt with which Muslims and the problems they face are regarded, and the stereotypes ala Huntington, that they face. Not only did Jack Straw not recognise the problem, saying that he was unconvinced by the report, but he stated that he had good news for the Muslim community that day. This news had been widely anticipated by many present as the long overdue announcement that Muslim schools would be receiving state funding. The Home Secretary announced that he would be helping Muslims by maintaining the level of s.11 funding i.e. funding for teaching English as a second language. Again this posits Muslims as illiterate and therefore unable to participate in society as opposed to victims of Muslim specific discrimination and exclusion from society.

Muslims, illiteracy and solving the Islamic question

Muslims as an illiterate scourge of British society is a theme that has been picked up variously in the last few weeks and months. It is part of the so-called 'Islamic question' that politicians, press and pundits have picked up and expounded.

The BNP repeatedly announce that Muslim are illiterate they have used it to promote the idea of Muslims as a violent threat to British society. On the articles page of its website, it pastes an article allegedly sent by and unnamed Sikh source called 'Understanding Islam is our birthright.'

It states:

"Most demonstrators, who set fire to the book at a public demonstration in Bradford a few years ago, shouting abuse at the author, were illiterate. They could not understand a word of English nor had seen a copy of the book before..."

"Compulsory Koran classes for Muslim children are a waste of time for most pupils at school who are forced to learn Arabic at the cost of learning Physics, English, Maths or Geography..."

It concludes:

"Islam, therefore, holds a world record in the number of VOLUNTARY killers and assassins on earth. Salman Rushdie is not the only one seeking safety from Islamic killers. The others have been killed promptly. None is living even to be protected!"

This section of articles on the BNP website reiterates their claim that they are "the only political party with the guts to tackle the Islamic question honestly and openly."

Dated September 29, 2001, this is mirrored on May 12, 2002 by *The Sunday Times*, who laud Peter Hain MP, Minister for Europe, as quoted in their paper as sounding an 'honest warning,' and "sound[ing] the alarm about Islamic asylum seekers who...refuse to adapt to Britain's way of life, sometimes even refusing to learn English."¹¹

Peter Hain's 'honest warning' references the problems of 'isolationist Muslims' who can be exploited by Bin-Laden' or other extremists.¹² Once more the spectre and stereotype of Muslims as illiterate is raised and associated with violence of an extreme nature.

Add to this the new citizenship tests, and the obligation on new immigrants to learn English imposed by David Blunkett MP, the present Home Secretary, and we see an increasing association between Muslims and illiteracy, with a running sub-text of violence.

¹¹ Comment, p. 16 'An Honest Warning' *The Sunday Times*, London, 12 May 2002

¹² *ibid* pp1-2 'Minister fears 'isolationist' Muslims', Nicholas Ruford.

Straw's stance is not new. His predecessor Michael Howard was more explicit. He blocked EU legislation on religious discrimination on the basis¹³ that it would allow the prosecution of Rushdie. Currently one of the government's excuses against protecting victims of religious discrimination is that it is hard to define religion, although the same government finds it unproblematic and easy to define freedom fighters and terrorists.

Our experiences of the Education system are similarly negative. Our report, 'Anti-Muslim discrimination and hostility in the UK, 2000' outlines many examples and case studies and nature of anti-Muslim hostility within education, as example of macro and institutionalised nature of prejudice.

The role of the media in exacerbating Islamophobia particularly post 9/11 and the role of the media in provoking police and security action and vice versa e.g. the case of Lotfi Raissi are key to some of the problems faced by Muslims today. Despite repeated assurances from police, Downing Street and even David Blunkett that there is no security threat to the UK from any terrorist organisation or group, we have seen repeated claims of the opposite in the press. The case of Lotfi Raissi is one in point. He was eventually released after five months of being detained on suspicion of linkage to the 9/11 attacks. Ultimately there was no evidence to substantiate the claims but his case was used to legitimise press claims that networks of international terrorist operated within the British realm, and this in turn legitimised the government's draconian response.

9/11 has been used by many to 'legitimise' these forms of hatred. The media in the UK turned to renowned Islamophobe and Zionist Daniel Pipes to outline a way forward for British society in the wake of 9/11 in 'Protecting Muslims but routing out Islamists' in *The Telegraph* 13th September, 2001, Pipes describes 'Islamists' of which we the IHRC and the Muslim Council of Britain in his opinion appear to be examples of as, 'peaceable in appearance, but they all must be considered potential killers.' Given the current events in the Middle East this level of demonisation has been exploited by racists of varying background be they far-right white or Zionist left. We may decry Nick Griffin, but the mainstream media and racists of every hue are voicing his malevolence as vociferously as he has.

Conclusion

This cannot / could not have happen(ed) if there is/was no institutional Islamophobia. Our research shows that Islamophobia has permeated every level of society – all the way to the government, judiciary, social services etc. Expressions of prejudice are not only acceptable but have become the norm against which the community and individuals should be defined by.

The fact that the race relations law itself discriminates against (inter alia) Muslims – by covering Sikhs, Jews and Rastafarians under the Race Relations Act itself exemplifies again the level of institutional Islamophobia. The perception of Muslims as inherently problematic and subjects of justifiable fear and hatred is as prevalent today as the crusaders demonisation of Muslims before their massacre. Islamophobia is the new racism. Tony Blair's slip of the tongue last year – referring to Osama Bin Laden as Islama Bin Laden¹⁴ exemplifies the level of subconscious vilification, of the continuing crusade in the Western psyche.

¹³ Sarah Helm 'Howard opposed racism law 'to protect Rushdie'' 25/11/95 *The Independent*

¹⁴ 'Conference Diary' 1st October 2001, *The Guardian*.

Islamophobia's proponents characterise Muslims as immoral, politically extreme, violent, polytheist, enemies of Christ and / or human rights and are as much a projection of this society's inner demons, its own failures vis human rights, women's rights, aggression at home and abroad in its internal dynamics and international relations as it is a (mis)characterization of Islam and Muslims. As Jones and Ereira said, 'We still do it.'



PO Box 598
Wembley
HA9 7XH
United Kingdom

1-903718-15-5