

# The Long View

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## Home, heart and community: rethinking and reclaiming the minority space



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# In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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Cover photo: Fight the far right:  
No to Tommy Robinson.  
No to Fortress Britain,  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2018 by and (c) Socialist  
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It is a sign of how far we have regressed that Muslim civil society veterans in the UK fondly remember the Satanic Verses Affair as the high point of community unity and activism. In the late 1980's it took the besmirching of the beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to bring together the diverse strands of the community and give birth to what represented nothing short of a political awakening. In the years that followed the experience of campaigning during these events spawned an array of representative organisations raising hopes that a newfound political consciousness would translate into effective political power. However, barring the odd notable exception such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the history of Muslim politics has been dominated by powerlessness, fractiousness, sycophancy and strategic miscalculations.

Charting the trajectory of UK Muslim activism, our lead article by IHRC's head of research Arzu Merali, explains its decline by reference to a wider Zionist, neocon, strategy of divide and rule, led by think tanks such as the Rand Institute. Using the old carrot and stick approach, western governments have co-opted and/or coerced independent Muslim voices into such lassitude that many of us are able to raise even a whimper of protest, let alone organised campaigns, against policies and actions that progressively undermine our religious and social life. Where we are outraged enough to speak out, such as for example on the issue of Islamophobic anti-terrorism legislation, the response has often fallen into the frameworks constructed for us by our adversaries thereby advancing their agenda instead of securing our own strategic objectives.

While she laments the slide into a trap set by our adversaries, this is not a nostalgic plea for a return to some imagined halcyon days. Rather it is a genuine, heartfelt call on the community by someone who daily lives and breathes the Muslim experience to reflect and reset if we are to ever become the kind of force our numerical presence and collective talents justify.

The recent election of a party led by an opportunistic xenophobe and misogynist will do little to ease things for Britain's Muslims and racialised minorities in general, not least of all because the poll was driven overwhelmingly by an issue that has its roots in racism: Brexit. The first of our articles on the subject by Faisal Bodi identifies the underlying causes for the popular support for the party that recast itself as the party of Brexit, paying particular attention to the flocking of Labour's traditional working class base to the dog-whistle of immigration. He highlights how Islamophobic and racist meta-narratives have

been placed centre-stage creating an environment of hate which encourages the popular expression of hitherto latent sentiments. While some have called for Labour to adjust to the new reality, something that effectively amounts to a policy of appeasing racism, others have urged the party to reconnect in new ways with people whose economic disaffection is vocalised in the language of race. There is no quick fix to the "white tide" sweeping Britain, argues Bodi, and things may have to get a lot worse for those on the receiving end before they get better.

The second article on Brexit, by Kasia Narkowicz, looks at how the issue has brought into sharp relief the racism and discrimination faced by people of Eastern European origin. The arrival of these expatriates in large numbers after 2004 coincides with an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment/hysteria in Britain. While Muslims are often depicted through old racist tropes of potential terrorists and sexual predators, Eastern Europeans are seen to be responsible for stealing jobs and resources. Since they are also likely to feel the force of racist post-Brexit immigration policy, it is a travesty that their plight is usually overlooked. Narkowicz says that while many Europeans from the former Soviet bloc have made Britain their home, they feel far from at home. They are scared and insecure. Narrowing, increasingly racialised, definitions of Britishness and rising hostility make these white and Christian migrants feel more and more unwelcome.

Our final article comes from a campaigner who was reluctantly thrust into anti-racism activism after her father was murdered by a white supremacist as he walked home from evening prayers at his local mosque in 2013. The killer of 82-year-old Mohammed Saleem would later be found to be responsible for planting bombs at mosques in the same area of the West Midlands. Maz Saleem recounts the Islamophobia she faced from a criminal justice system that initially treated her family as the prime suspects and showed little sensitivity to religious sensibilities pertaining to burying the deceased. But her focus is much wider, explaining the term 'institutional Islamophobia', and documenting its presence across the gamut of society from security legislation to education and health care.

The submissions this issue paint stark pictures of societal crises and upheaval. Yet from these analyses comes the possibility of joined up thinking and conversation. From there, maybe even action. Let's make a start.

**Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali**  
Editors

Join the conversation by emailing us on [info@ihrc.org](mailto:info@ihrc.org), tweeting [@ihrc](https://twitter.com/ihrc) or find us on Facebook. You can even send us an old fashioned letter to IHRC, PO Box 598, Wembley, HA9 7XH, UK. Or pop by to the IHRC Bookshop for one of our events (or watch online [www.ihrc.tv](http://www.ihrc.tv)) at 202 Preston Road, Wembley, HA9 8PA. Find out what events are coming up at [www.ihrc.org.uk/events](http://www.ihrc.org.uk/events).

# Hindsight in 2020: US think tanks and the deterioration of Muslim civil society space

The promise represented by the emergence of Muslim civil society activism in late 1980's Britain has failed to translate into effective political agency. In fact, if anything, it has regressed under the weight of internal contradictions, powerful external opposition, and the absence of principled strategies. **Arzu Merali** explores how Muslims can get back on track.

It's been a funny few years/decades. It has only just struck me how far the post-colonial narrative has shifted, and been shifted by Muslims in large part in the last 40 years. What has been all too evident is the countermovement of capitulation or internalisation of hegemonic colonial narratives at the day to day level of Muslim civil society in which I work. This piece requires me to add examples and anecdotes, and as far as possible I want to anonymise the organisations and individuals referred to. This piece is not about individual or organisational blame, though there is much to be doled out. It must be a critique of Muslim civil society and Muslim leadership in minoritized situations. A world which includes me, and a critique that starts with me too.

It is ironic or apt that I am writing this while overlooking a monument to Charles, Earl Grey KC. This (in context) radical political figure is here commemorated for the Great Reform Act of 1832, where some sort of semi-universal suffrage was granted to the English masses (at the very least rotten boroughs were abolished). He is also feted as presiding over the abolition of slavery and fell out with the Pitt the Younger over the latter's rejection of Catholic emancipation. He is also the man Earl Grey tea is named after. Tea, that most potent symbol of colonial humiliation. As they (don't) say, one man's radical is another man's symbol of oppression. I am drinking a cup of English breakfast tea as an act of accidental, muddled and muted resistance.

At the time of publication the following IHRC research projects may already be available or are in the final stages of publication: The New Colonialism -The US Model of Human Rights; a podcast on Genocide Prevention and Understandings of Genocide with one of the contributors to that volume, Saeed Khan, and a book on Political Islamophobia at American Policy In-

stitutes: Battling the Power of Islamic Resistance by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria. These three continue in detail micro and macro theorizing the conveyor belt of anti-Islamic and hegemonic forces that impact not just Muslims but many and all oppressed peoples in some form or another. The catastrophe of water contamination in Flint, the role of multi-national corporations and the economic desolation of swathes of the US since the 1970s (Saeed Khan in The New Colonialism), intersects and has unexpected consonance with the structural forces that the Kerner Commission, appointed to discuss the so-called race riots of 1967, identified as the foundational discourse of a country that built itself on the notion and praxes of whiteness (Mary K. Ryan *ibid*).

Saghaye-Biria's book, however, is what has largely motivated this article. I am lucky enough to be reviewing it pre-publication, and its analysis of the thinking and praxes of three US Think tanks – RAND, the Brookings Institute and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), highlights a sustained obsession with the world of Islam and Muslims that predates the Islamic Revolution in Iran, but which accelerates from then on as the primary driver of policy focus and recommendations to the US government. Saghaye Biria argues that their work must be understood by Muslim countries as having profound security implications for them. But it got me thinking, mainly about RAND and also the impact on Muslims – specifically our civil society – in minoritized settings.

What impact has this intense effort by US think tanks had on enervating our movements and work not just of efficacy but – as is their stated aim – their ontology and epistemologies? Here are some thoughts – a start or contribution to a very needed conversation about where Muslims are going and how.

## RAND in summary

The RAND reports that have some resonance amongst Muslim civil society date back to 2003, in particular Civil Democratic Islam by Cheryl Benard and Building Moderate Muslim Networks also co-authored by Benard in 2007. Benard in 2003 (amongst many other things) argues that Muslims could be categorised in four ways as: fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists. Let's leave aside the critique of such terms, but focus on the reality that they are made meaningful as praxes recommended by US think tanks.

In this neat and tidy Muslim world of RAND, only the secularists and some modernists can be engaged by the US to further US aims in the region. Make no mistake, at this level, conversations about the future of Islam and Muslims are brutal. RAND's overarching agenda is to reform Islam fundamentally, thus removing any possibility that should the US move towards a position of fostering or allowing democracy in the region – or indeed if there are momentums and movements that make the US' actions and aims moot – 'Islamists' do not come to power through the ballot box. All three think tanks fear this scenario, to a greater and lesser extent, looking to the Islamic Revolution in Iran as the main focus, but lumping in with this the Morsi government of 2012 in Egypt, the Sudanese regime involving the National Islamic Front of circa 1989 – mid noughties. RAND is clear – whatever the short-term benefits of working with Muslims of the fundamentalist/ traditionalist ilk, the US' long term interests lie solely with those who would either relegate Islam entirely to the private space, or better still, engineer its tenets to become an enlightenment 'religion lite' à la Christianity.

RAND's vision even then, saw more than simply alliances with 'traditionalists' as expedient realism. This was never to be a static relationship – the social changes being enforced in Saudi may attest, 17 years down the line, to being something akin to an aim of RAND. Having propped up a dictatorship resting on superficial Islamicity, the US now finds itself with an equally authoritarian but socially liberalized 'Islamic' country as its steadfast ally.

As Saghaye-Biria explains:

“The Islamic world is not just facing different interpretations of Islam with some being in concurrence with American interests. Rather, powerful voices and forces among the American foreign policy elites and in the foreign policy apparatus are actively engaging in religion-building, fostering certain interpretations of Islam that would pacify the religion in the face of hegemonic Western powers.”

So what of civil society over here?

Benard and RAND more generally spoke of reaching out to traditionalists against fundamentalists thus:

- Publicize traditionalist criticism of fundamentalist violence and extremism; encourage disagreements between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
- Discourage alliances between traditionalists and fundamentalists.
- Encourage cooperation between modernists and the traditionalists who are closer to the modernist end of the spectrum.
- Where appropriate, educate the traditionalists to equip them better for debates against fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are often rhetorically superior, while traditionalists practice a politically inarticulate “folk Islam.” In such places as Central Asia, they may need to be educated and trained in orthodox Islam to be able to stand their ground.
- Increase the presence and profile of modernists in traditionalist institutions.
- Discriminate between different sectors of traditionalism. Encourage those with a greater affinity to modernism, such as the Hanafi law school, versus others. Encourage them to issue religious opinions and popularize these to weaken the authority of backward Wahhabi-inspired religious rulings. This relates to funding: Wahhabi money goes to the support of the conservative Hanbali school. It also relates to knowledge: More-backward parts of the Muslim world are not aware of advances in the application and interpretation of Islamic law.
- Encourage the popularity and acceptance of Sufism. (Barnard, pxii, 2003)

These partnerships are refined further in ‘Building Moderate Muslim Networks’: the US can work with “secularists; liberal Muslims; and moderate traditionalists, including Sufis.”

How far have these ideas been internalised by Muslim communities in minoritized situations? Whilst as a community we have berated and lambasted the direct engineering and attacks by government, their minions and supporters like the Quilliam Foundation, the Commission for Countering Extremism, Sufi Muslim Council et al, that desire to be ‘understood’, to show ourselves and more specifically Islam as sympathetic with the ‘West’ is a trend that can be found across our communities’ leadership.

Benard’s contention that:

“The traditionalist belief set does include democratic elements. It can be made to justify reforms, but not without significant effort. Traditionalists have produced a large number of publications sketching a “kinder, gentler” vision of Islam, in rebuttal of the religion’s negative image and of the public statements by radicals, whom they do not wish to be tainted by. These books typically praise the socially positive aspects of Islam, find rationalizations and softened interpretations for practices that are today considered oppressive, and argue that Islam is not only compatible with the principles of the modern age (democracy, equality, social welfare, education) but indeed pioneered them...”

can be found in any number of projects, documents, speeches and so on. Benard is in fact conceding that this thought process already exists. The Brookings Institute, as Saghaye-Biria points out, positively pushes the point for outreach to ‘good Islamists’. The introduction *To Power Sharing Islam* (ed. Tamimi, 1993) is just one of the many cases in point. Based on papers submitted to ‘contribute to the growing effort to bring about intellectual rapprochement between Islamic and Western thinkers, to eliminate misconceptions about Islam and Islamic movements...’. Naïve at best, this approach feeds into the later RAND type vision of an Islam that seeks the understanding of the hegemon – a capitulation to its power and an undergirding of its legitimacy. Contributors to this volume discussed in these terms, Jordan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Kuwait and Algeria. Tunisia and Yemen get a name check too. The editor made clear at the outset that this was set in juxtaposition to Iran, and its ‘anomalous interpretation of Islam’ under the revolution.

Ironically, as the years have worn on, from that list of countries, many have found themselves now categorised as Iran is, by Muslim civil society, intellectuals or activists. This dual track of West-focussed political organisation, coupled with denunciation of the ‘other’ Muslim, is ironically also part of not simply a RAND recommendation of outreach to those within ‘traditionalist’ camps, but a wider praxis of pitting Muslims against each other, a surprisingly British divide and rule which is echoed in WINEP’s assertions

regarding what is legitimate Islam.

Salman Sayyid has argued (2003) it was : “[Imam] Khomeini’s political thought, alone among Muslim thinkers of the last hundred years, [that] does not try to have a dialogue with western discourse”. It is this way of understanding and acting – where the political conversation does not begin and end or even acknowledge the relevance of traditional super-powers that RAND et al have devoted their energy to scupper and up-end.

Organisations and movements needn’t be formally or even consciously in support of US or Eurocentric interests and thinking. Understanding this, and reviewing civil society organisation around it is the basic challenge we face.

## Anomalous interpreting

The actual anomaly of an American think tank directing what is and isn’t Islamic – not least one considered to be staunchly pro-Israel in the case of WINEP – is an actual problem that Muslims should have been discussing, analysing and berating. Instead we appear to have implemented it wholeheartedly from the level of how to pray salah, to how to manage society – or even to accept that there is such a thing.

Mehdi Khalaji at WINEP, characterises the Islamic Revolution in a similar frame, seeking outreach to other Shi’i Muslim institutions to bolster them against any idea of *Velayat-e-faqih*. This endless turn in US think tank recommendations, of gutting Islam of its political content or urging change in the name of modernity or moderation is powerfully analysed by Saghaye-Biria. To adapt her words, the polarization of Muslim societies based on the moderation/radicalism duality is a strategy that has real... security consequences for Muslim societies. According to her use of a constructivist-framing, the lack of clarity that the think tanks have in the identity labels used, according to certain powerful frames, end in the excommunication (or *takfir*) of large segments of Muslims. Allowing Islamic political culture to be taken over by such polarization is surely disastrous. She argues:

“Ultimately, there is the danger that these labels would solidify over the long term into ideational structures. The solidification of such ideational structures can result in overlooking the real diversity of ideas within Muslim societies which has for years been a source of strength rather than weakness. Accepting the legitimacy of the moderation vs. radicalism duality hinders efforts at defining Muslim identity in terms of the *ummah* of Islam.”

The ummah, in this reading is vast, transnational, of diverse Muslim understanding and may even include oppressed from different traditions. Instead we find a drive to homogenize the understanding of the ummah around particularized identities of Muslimness.

Looking at Building Muslim Networks, in particular on existing ‘Moderate Euro-

pean Organizations' one could argue that the decimation of Muslim civil society space in the UK is a *fait accompli*. Those named and shamed in the report have been forced into a number of recalcitrant positions – dropping support for pro-Palestinian activism, no longer criticizing the problems associated with the foundation of Holocaust Memorial Day, dropping association with organizations deemed beyond the pale – all in the hope of reasserting their previous position vis a vis government. This latter hope is still elusive despite over a decade of transformation. Those lauded in the report as moderate are now promoted as leaders, or at least the only acceptable figures government will deal with. But can we simply blame the machinations of think tanks either in the US or UK?

In the wake of the killing of General Soleimani in January 2020 and the comments and reactions from Muslims, it seems even more apt to ask this question: how far have RAND et al won in the minoritized Muslim space in, say, the UK, North America etc. by dint of Muslim civil society and leadership's own lack of vision and desire to promote identity issues over ummatic ones? When each US think tank has identified Iran as its prime target, and sought to break Muslim solidarity with it, how bizarre that Muslim civil society leadership puts out statements claiming that secretly Iran is in league with the country that has done everything to cripple it for forty years, including targeted assassinations, an imposed war that it supported and, most recently, crippling and arguably genocidal economic sanctions.

Yet this is where we are at. What do we need to do if we are really serious about tackling the elephant in the room – being political Muslims through Islamised thinking?

## You can't be really serious?

Five years ago, IHRC started a modest campaign to take back the narrative on anti-terrorism laws. We want them all scrapped. Always have done. Alongside our long-standing rejection of Countering Violent Extremism projects, we felt that they were based on a knee-jerk response to be seen to be doing something but that in reality they were unfit for purpose and that existing criminal laws were enough to prosecute crimes of political violence such as terrorism. It's actually not that controversial, or at least it didn't used to be. However, the characterisation of Muslim dissent by targeting groups and advocates as extremist had the requisite chilling effect on Muslim civil society space. In 2015 we asked for collaboration from other organisations.

Whilst few Muslim organisations agreed (we had less trouble with members of the House of Lords, and other civil society groups), one Muslim group sent a lot of advice. A lot. I quote some below:

"We cannot endorse the last line about scrapping all legislation post-2000. It looks as though we are saying the problem is not as great as

imagined and we don't need these laws to exist. Unless we have scrutinised these things effectively, we cannot call for them to be dismissed. It's not sensible.

"Also, the letter is all negative. It should add a few positive points: Passing of Protection of Freedoms Act which repealed Section 44, passing of Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act which amended Schedule 7 (not fully, but some good changes introduced). Letter should acknowledge Government took good steps forward and is now taking considerable steps backward."

The letter was published in The Guardian without the changes requested above.

## Sensible is as sensible does

We are still not able to move forward without feeling the need to address as interlocutor the powers that oppress us. Any amount of honest reflection would highlight just how poor we all have been in this regard. From the endless submissions to government consultations, long after they became simply rubber-stamping exercises, to prevaricating over calling for Prevent to be scrapped (how many times have we heard 'we can't deny there is a problem?') A clear up of the office recently meant finding some left over early 'Know Your Rights' leaflets IHRC launched in the early noughties regarding anti-terror laws. A larger organisation with government approval issued the Know Your Rights and Responsibilities leaflet. IHRC's project sought to empower Muslims, then being targeted *en masse* by anti-terrorism laws with arrests and stops running into the thousands annually with few or no actual prosecutions. At a time when speaking of rights was more normative than now, it seems Muslims themselves felt they needed to undermine their status, putting in peril the idea that they were equal citizens.

This exacerbating of Muslim vulnerability is not the only own goal. The desire to be the only partner – of government or other movements – from the Muslim community, is more evidence of the misplaced political gaze of Muslim leadership. This leads to gatekeeping and undermines solidarity. Whilst claiming to work on issues of society wide importance, this desire to keep out other Muslims negates that claim. Furthermore, it perpetuates Islamophobia – prioritising only your own voice and excluding others, is simply a replication of institutional exclusionary practice.

This failure to be both humble and show solidarity is not just a sorry spectacle to behold, a smaller and smaller group of Muslims NGOs vying against each other for a few political spaces, instead of struggling to make political space larger and better for everyone which we saw in the run up to the Iraq war. Muslim civil society marched, in

some cases led protests against the upcoming onslaught. It claimed that it did so NOT because it supported Saddam Hussein but because of the illegality of the precedent; the futility of war; the need to protect already beleaguered civilians and so on. We would do the same, we all argued regardless of whichever country was involved. Come 2011, and Syria, Muslim civil society did a *volte face*. This is civil society in minoritized settings. There is much to be said about this, and here is not the space. What can and must be said is that the dropping of principle so swiftly and obviously is seen as weakness. Its instrumentalization to such devastating effect is something we need to be deeply ashamed of. This is no longer about the denial of rights and discrimination. People are dead and murdered in thousands, millions are homeless. Yet we remain trying to explain how far our project aligns with Western interests, and remain bemused that once our role in destabilisation has been exhausted, and devastation reigns, we are now rejected, demonised even criminalised.

## Then there is (always) Palestine

Some time ago, perhaps even just before 9-11, a mosque contacted IHRC to say they had been contacted by the Charity Commission. The Commission was querying why it was that prayers after Jum'ah included prayers for Palestine. This is political they claimed and violates charities law on political causes. This space – the spiritual – where the Islamic diktat to at least hate injustice in your heart – has come frequently under attack in the years since. Now it is also the breeding ground for a project to legitimise Israeli illegality through the idea of inter-faith in particular, a project that looks at the similarities between Jewish and Muslim faith practices – in and of itself an excellent educational project. However, many complaints have been raised – the introduction of the idea of Israel as an undisputed article of faith, and criticism of it as anti-Semitic, and worse still to an audience of believers, an affront to religious sensibilities.

Arguably the 2019 Journey to Jerusalem trip, featuring senior Muslim ulema from the UK claiming that they aimed to: "advance peace and coexistence in the Holy Land of Muslims and Jews and Christians", is an extension of this.

Saghaye-Biria, discusses WINEP's contribution to developing similar sounding projects:

"Mohammed S. Dajani, the Weston Fellow at The Washington Institute, previously a professor of political science at al-Quds University in Jerusalem, founded the Wasatia movement of moderate Islam. Through this movement, he sought to break three taboos in Palestinian society: "attitudes toward the United States, toward Islamic education, and toward Holocaust education"

(Dajani, 2015a). Through his activism, Dajani aims to change Palestinian culture in three ways: creating a favorable image of the United States, a pluralistic vision of religion with Islam being one among other acceptable faiths, and a change of narrative regarding the Holocaust. This was carried out through the initiation of a Master's program in American studies at al-Quds University, starting the al-Wasatia (moderate) movement in Palestine in 2007, and doing student tours of Auschwitz and a Palestinian refugee camp.

"The Wasatia movement is especially noteworthy for this study. While Dajani (2012) calls the movement non-political, its ultimate goal is to create a favorable environment for "a negotiated peace with Israel that would help to bring peaceful solutions to the acute religious, economic, social, and political crises plaguing Palestinian society." In what he calls Islamic education, Dajani aims to further specific interpretation of selective verses of the Qur'an and Hadith to show how Islam is compatible with liberal values. Citing his own experience, Dajani says that at a point in his life he "began to think of [his] enemy as a partner." In line with WINEP's other expert productions on Islamism, he views the competing interpretations of Islam put forth by the several Palestinian Islamist parties as the obstacle to peace and reconciliation with Israel."

Sound familiar?

The German Kreuzberg Initiative Against Anti-Semitism (KIGa) project of taking Muslim, usually Turkish heritage youth to Israel to combat anti-Semitism fits this narrative too. Whilst far-right thinking rises in Germany, the exceptionalization of Muslim youth as singularly needing educa-

tion on the issue is becoming a repeated refrain. There are many arguments that Muslim civil society can make in response. Yet have they?

Hatem Bazian describes this type of process – specifically the US MLI initiative, as faith washing. He cites recent faith activist history as a warning that Muslims are failing to take on board:

"Instead of such contrived meetings, MLI participants genuinely interested in interfaith work should engage Jewish liberation theologians on the question of Zionism and Judaism so as not to conflate the two, and to refuse to operate within erroneous and pernicious nationalism.

"They should learn from the mistakes of Christian leaders in the US who long made what theologian Marc Ellis has criticized as the "ecumenical deal," where Christian-Jewish "dialogue" is structured around a *quid pro quo*: Jews absolve Christians for historic anti-Semitism on condition that Christians remain silent about Israel's abuses of Palestinians.

"Muslims are being invited to strike a new ecumenical deal with Zionism in the United States, which may result in access to circles of influence in civil society as well as other benefits.

"The only precondition is that critique of Israel is set aside and boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) or other effective forms of solidarity with Palestinians rejected.

This Zionist effort to co-opt Muslims, under the guise of "interfaith" understanding, comes at precisely the moment when the ecumenical deal with Christian denominations is eroding, as more and more people, including churches in the US and Europe, embrace BDS."

In the UK, Muslim and Jewish co-operation in the struggle against Israeli apartheid has strengthened in the last twenty years but is increasingly characterised by staunch pro-Israelis as anti-Semitic. A new project aiming to connect Jewish and Muslim liberation theologians and Jewish and Muslim activists to work on actual theological discussions around justice and peace, politics and injustice in Israel / Palestine is already being rolled out. Such projects need to tackle commonality and difference because difference is not bad. Our communities, whether at the micro level of Muslim or the macro levels of national and international, suffer from the ability to manage difference, from an insistence on singular identity and hierarchy. Only 'I' can be right, and 'I' must be boss.

The danger of an inter-faith dialogue premised on an acceptance of Israel right or wrong can be seen in the recent debacle around the invitation of a figure from the British Board of Deputies to speak on the issue of the persecution of the Uighurs at Regents Park Mosque. The venue was changed after protests from leading Muslim organisations. This latter act is an example of overdue action in this field. Without it, such events will legitimise anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hatred, by elevating the voices of pro-Israel organisations.

A long while back, whilst trying to persuade key Muslim organisations to sign a statement condemning the massacres in Darfur, one explained why they refused. Some Darfurian groups had set up shop in Tel Aviv. It was a step too far, a betrayal. As with the Stop war – Start war fiasco, the same leader had jettisoned these reservations when backing some of the more overtly pro-Israel opposition in the conflict in Syria.

We can break this cycle. One of the best examples comes from American Jewish youth walking out of Birthright tours in Israel. Taking part in such tours, widely promoted to get US Jewish youth to engage with and sympathise with Israel, many use the forum to protest Israeli atrocities – publicly and vociferously walking out of the



## Rohingya Appeal

The Rohingya are fleeing violence and persecution, and desperately need your support. IHRC Trust is raising funds to help MAPIM deliver critical aid to Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh and Malaysia.

To donate please call +44(0)208 904 4222 or visit <https://donations.ihrc.org/Rohingya-Appeal>

tours, recording their protests and circulating them on social media.

Put simply, maybe it is time to just walk out. It's time to protest.

January 2020 has seen the revelation that many left wing and anti-racist groups, alongside environmental groups have been added to lists of extremist groups and ideologies. This includes pro-Palestinian groups from outside the Muslim stable. Again, the attempts to demonize and marginalise Al-Quds Day is a case which requires Muslim civil society action. Whilst Muslim organisations have been pressurised to drop their support, ironically non-Muslim organisational support, and general attendance have increased. It is a sign of the chilling effect political pressure and Islamophobic discourses that posit Muslims (unjustly) as anti-Semites based on their critique of Israel, that Muslim leadership is running counter to both its grass-roots and progressive civil society.

### 'Ummahness' and border thinking

The narrowing of the idea of ummah to the mirror image of what you are – e.g. Syrian or Libyan of a certain stripe, is an act of theoretical, political and actual violence in combination. The victims are the diversity of the ummah generally, and Palestine in particular. As the Arab Spring collapsed under the weight of its contradictions, one Palestinian activist in London aligned to such thinking announced at an awards ceremony to celebrate writing on Palestine, no less, that, in effect, he did not care if there was no Palestine and only Israel, he just wanted the family house and land, which contained a mosque, back. He argued that there had never been a Palestine ever, it was only the Palestinian that required justice in the way he demanded it.

The idea that there could be some sort of accommodation with racist structures so long as individuals are recompensed is nonsensical. This obfuscation of the injustice of systems and structures is both a denial of Quranic ideas of *taghut* – of oppressor en-

titities and systems (Pharaoh was both a despot and the symbol of a structure of injustice), and an example of the internalization and universalization of the said systems of injustice as normal and natural. We no longer look to change how the world works, just our individual positions, or that of our narrow group within those structures.

As insidious as this love of un-Islamic structures is the insidious term non-Muslim. Sometimes used as translation of *kafir*, more often just as a shorthand for anything not Muslim, it has a perverse normativity that homogenises those of other faiths, non-believers and the outright perverse and unjust. They are not all one.

The works of Imam Muhammad al-Asi and Imam Achmad Cassiem are instructive on this point. Muslim thinking is hampered by what is in effect a chauvinism against the non-Muslim 'other' at the level of the individual whilst internalising and celebrating the system.

Whilst national rhetoric cannot rid itself of the underlying jingoism of nation (one religion, one ethnicity, one language, one culture – all misimagined), ummah means that even the borders policed by passports then, and guns, walls and fences now, do not matter. Not morally and eventually – in the reimagined world – not politically either.

Where does that aspiration stand now? As we – Muslim activists – have gotten older, and the reality of the world more obviously complicated we have allowed that complexity to grind us down, or even worse to give up on the ideas altogether, or worse still reappropriated them to fit the very chauvinisms we supposedly deplore, and repurpose their narrow content to align with the very forces that had and would deny us any form of liberation.

The endless money poured into Muslim infrastructure promoting a one (type of) Muslim consciousness has resulted not in creating a unified Muslim ummah, but a variety of fractured and competing ummahs. The sectarian uber narrative has eventually created in response a competing set of narratives – Shi'i, sufi, jihadi and so on. All claim their universalism without a

hint of irony. In the current moment, ummahness has come to mean fighting and dying in nationalist causes (the correct Syrianess is but one painful example), and it can be fought alongside any old foe so long as that singular unified vision of who is the right Muslim can prevail. Yet another is the plethora of engagement projects that sprung up in the wake of the Rushdie Affair. Muslims are not political enough, it has been commented, again without irony. The Muslims of 1989 were affronted by a media and political onslaught that nothing, or at least nothing belonging to the oppressed, emotional, spiritual, cultural – is sacred. They fought back. Characterising them as apolitical is simply offensive. Political agency in that moment for Muslims was at its peak. Every day since has been a step backwards.

Whilst other liberation movements track towards transnationalism, why the Musexit from the ummah? This inability to connect with our diversity- especially in the face of overwhelming Islamophobia unravels apace. A recent claim to advocacy victory in the UK centred on the changing of the term 'imam' to 'Muslim leader' in a newspaper article. The term appeared in an article constructed through deeply racialising narratives. That was the point to call out. Read the recommendations on media from the UK paper on Counter-Islamophobia Narratives from media professionals and academics. Or the Kerner report, or any work of critical race theory and media. These counter-narratives are transferrable across national settings, just as much as the demonization they challenge.

This is a sorry state, but really it doesn't have to be. We have agency even if we keep denying it. It requires courage and a lot of humble pie. It requires taking on risk, and solidarity. Things are difficult, but we know that if it's not hurting it's not working.

#### Arzu Merali

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# After the 2019 General Election, Britain's minorities must brace themselves for worse to come

Labour's loss of its heartlands in last December's general election has been the subject of much dissection, introspection and recriminations. But aside from what it means for the party, the collapse of the fabled, once impregnable, 'red wall' under the onslaught of a nativist 'white tide' has more important and disturbing implications for the place of minoritised communities in England and Wales, argues **Faisal Bodi**.

The ease with which the wall crumbled in a poll widely seen as a re-run of the 2016 Brexit referendum defied history. Encompassing much of Wales and stretching across the northern half of England, this once impregnable barrier has withstood the ravages of time, deindustrialisation, neglect and even austerity to remain loyally Labour for the best part of a century. And while the decline of industry, trade unions and old-fashioned class-conflict over the last four decades has seen a weakening of the mortar that has bonded Labour to the 'traditional working classes', until now, Labour, as the party of the common man, has still been able to count on their support.

In the end it was the power of the forces propelling the Brexit campaign which sealed Labour's fate in the last general election. Brexit was, is, and always will be a racist right-wing project. The divisive impulses that motivated the poll to leave the European Union have unleashed a latent xenophobia that has long simmered uncomfortably under the surface of British society. With its defiant jingoism and outright opposition to 'non-natives', Brexit successfully tapped into this thick racist seam. As many political observers have remarked, Brexit was fought and won primarily on a single issue: immigration. Slogans such as 'take back control', repeated against the backdrop of alarmist posters and rhetoric predicting an invasion of migrants into mainland Europe as a stepping stone to Britain, resonated with communities already left behind by economic change and progress. They were dog whistles to a disenfranchised population whose pre-existing prejudices predisposed them to scapegoating.

Academic research supports the view that immigration weighed heavily on decision-making in the Brexit referendum. In "Brexit Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union", academics Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley, found that among a majority of voters, hostility to the EU fed into deeper fears about immigration which they opposed on a mixture of economic, cultural and social grounds. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) which would later splinter and give

birth to the Brexit Party, successfully exploited these concerns to mobilise the "left-behinds". The researchers say that it was no coincidence that in the 2016 referendum the vote for Brexit was strongest in areas that had given UKIP strong support in the two years prior. Leave was the preference for working class and poorer voters by a substantial majority.

"Leave's 'Take Back Control' message harnessed the motive power of immigration, an emotionally charged issue that had been baked into British psychology long before the vote was called. These immigration fears, not abstract concerns about a 'democratic deficit' that required rescuing UK sovereignty from Brussels bureaucrats, do much to explain why Britain voted for Brexit," conclude the authors.

Labour pundits and activists pounding the pavements in the latest general election reported much the same level of antipathy to free movement and immigration. Paul Mason was clear that the open racism he had encountered among traditional northern working class communities during campaigning was, in significant part, responsible for his party's drubbing. "Let's be frank: a minority of the working class abandoned Labour for authoritarian conservatism and nativism.....in towns like Leigh, where I campaigned, the main reason people want Brexit has always been to stem economic migration. We can go a long way to addressing the cultural insecurity of people whose lifestyles and industries have been destroyed. But when they complain there are 'too many foreigners' in the queue at their GP surgeries we cannot meet the implicit demand behind it, which is for two queues...." he writes. The fact that not even a staggering quantum of economic inducements dangled by Labour in front of its traditional base could persuade enough of it to vote red would seem to support this thesis.

## The immigration fallacy

This is not to give a clean bill of health to those positioned at the upper half of the socio-economic scale. Research undertaken in 2019 by Protection Approaches found a

slightly greater proportion of people in the £25,000 - £50,000 earnings bracket consider minorities to be a threat to Britain than do people who earn less than £25,000. In fact, concern about immigration ('immigrant' is often synonymous with ethnic minority) in British society as a whole has risen in line with increased immigration, even if Britons routinely overstate or exaggerate its actual scale.

Since the late 1980's the percentage of people who believe there are too many immigrants in Britain has never fallen below 60% and has even reached 80%. Opposition to immigration has increased since free movement came into effect following the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, spiking higher when central and eastern European countries joined the EU in two waves in 2004 and 2007. By 2006 "race and immigration" were recorded as the most important issues facing the country.

The question of whether hostility to immigration, especially of the levels facilitated by free movement, is necessarily an expression of racism is a fraught one. There can be no doubting that the issue is a gravitation point for out and out racists who use its emotive appeal to stoke people's prejudices and fears. But there are also those who claim that their opposition has nothing to do with racism and is instead motivated by social and cultural imperatives. Too much immigration too quickly, they say, threatens social cohesion.

This argument is the easiest to dismiss because underlying it is a "reactionary populism which demands the restoration of a mythical golden age of sovereign nation-states defined by cultural and racial homogeneity", in the words of Brendan McGeever and Satnam Virdee. It is the image constructed in the famous Hovis advert from 1973 (revived in 2019 suggesting it carries a renewed appeal in contemporary times) depicting a Britain of yesteryear that is idyllic, wholesome and also, even if subconsciously, white. The nostalgia is also laden with admiration for Britain's brutal, militaristic, racist, colonial past - even before Brexit 59% of Britons felt the Empire was something to be proud of (YouGov 2014). Since the begin-

ning of the so-called 'war on terror' politicians of all stripes have regularly exploited this nativist sentiment to attack multiculturalism, suggesting that the emphasis on diversity has been at the expense of national unity.

The second grounds invokes the concept of natural justice. It suggests that immigration of the type facilitated by free movement of people, goods and services, disadvantages those already suffering most the shortages and delays of a crumbling public service system. It is an act of harm inflicted on the poorest people already settled here to heap yet more bodies onto an already creaking employment sector and public services. Interestingly, this view also finds some degree of support amongst minority ethnic and religious communities. Many working class voters who deserted Labour at the 2019 general election express resentment for both the parties that support free movement and the newcomers it has brought in.

I find this argument just as unacceptable as the first. Hostility to immigrants on account of a policy over which they have no control is irrationally misplaced. And no matter how much it is dressed up in the language of fairness one cannot help feeling that it originates in a sense of racial privilege that positions some groups, on account of their status as 'indigenous' or 'here first', higher in the pecking order when it comes to the allocation of state resources.

## Labour at the crossroads

Addressing the economic resentment that is vocalised in the language of racial hatred and prejudice is a huge challenge for Labour, even more so as the scale of the election defeat increases pressure from within the movement to rethink its stand on immigration to reclaim the working class. For the so-called "Blue Labour" activists/academics such as Goodwin, reformulating policy to take into account its impact on communities is an urgent imperative. Labour simply cannot afford to ignore the strength of (white) working class feelings on the issue if it wants to become re-electable. However, as critics have charged, this would amount to embracing the politics of appeasement.

Yes, Labour must reconnect to its working class in a new post-industry, post-unions era but it cannot simply throw minorities under the bus, either out of expediency or principle. Approximately one in five ethnic minority voters prefers Labour at the ballot box compared to one out of 20 who vote Conservative - in fact their collective vote is the deciding factor in many constituencies. More importantly though, Labour needs to articulate convincingly the truth that it is the logic of unchecked capitalism, not immigration, that is the real enemy and come up with workable policies that empower and improve the life chances of those who feel left behind.

In his post-election obituary of Corbynism Paul Mason charts this as the way forward: "We are now fighting a strong and

virulent nativism: the assumption by older white workers that their family history entitles them to go to the front of the queue for public services, and veto over who can live and work in their community. This ideology is growing all over the developed world, and if the election shows one thing it is that pure cultural liberalism has no effective answer to it. The antidote is to create a community based around citizenship: where the fact that you live and work in Britain entitles you to use services and benefits from day one, and where refugees and migrants are welcomed into a single civil society, composed of diverse groups that respect each other. If we create agency in the diverse communities we represent then, even if their cultural values and lifestyles diverge, there is a chance that - at the crucial moment of the next election - their separate narratives converge into a single story: of hope, social justice and a plan to meet the climate emergency."

## What next for minorities?

For the here and now though, Britain's minorities must brace themselves for authoritarian, majoritarian government by a party whose lurch to the right has made it indistinguishable from the extremists inhabiting the outer edges of the political spectrum. If that ideological alliance was not evident in the run up to the 2019 general election when Nigel Farage withdrew his Brexit Party from over 300 Tory constituencies to help the incumbents, and far right rabble rousers such as Katie Hopkins and Tommy Robinson endorsed the Conservatives, it was certainly underlined after the poll when the neo-Nazi organisation, Britain First, exhorted its supporters to join the party to help shape it from within.

For all Farage's protestations and "mis-givings" about a Boris Brexit, he and his bed-fellows on the right see in the current prime minister a demagogic strongman formed in their own image, leading an inner coterie intent on reshaping Britain along the fault lines of race and religion. Remember, this is a Tory party described by its own ex-chairwoman as institutionally Islamophobic, one which stubbornly refuses to embrace a widely accepted definition of Islamophobia and has already backtracked on promises to launch an independent inquiry into the problem, and which is determined to continue the war against multiculturalism and minorities through its ever-widening Prevent anti-extremism programme and 'hostile environment' immigration policies.

In pursuing their agenda, the Tories will be able to count on the support of at least one important and powerful racial/religious minority. During the 2019 general election campaign Britain's Jewish community, or at least the part of it represented by the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, effectively endorsed the Conservatives by saying that Labour's anti-Semitism problem made it unfit to govern. The intervention was the culmination of a long-running campaign seeking to undermine the dominant pro-Palestine Cor-

bynite wing of the party. It did not go unnoticed that Mirvis' attack on Labour effectively exonerated Johnson and fellow Tories for a litany of racist abuses against Muslims and people of colour.

Johnson infamously referred to Muslim women wearing the burkah as resembling bank robbers and "letter boxes", a remark for which he was referred to the Equalities Commission, and described black people as "piccaninnies" with "watermelon smiles". Michael Gove's 2006 anti-Muslim polemic *Celsius 7/7* is premised on the belief that Islam poses an existential threat to European civilisation. Not coincidentally, one of its chapters is entitled 'Trojan Horse', the same name given in 2014 to the fabricated scandal about a supposed plot by Islamists to take over several inner-city Birmingham schools. Gove's wife, the *Daily Mail* columnist Sarah Vine, has called Islamophobia "clever and funny".

To date the fight against racism in Britain has, in the main, seen Jews, Muslims and other racialised minorities put aside their differences to tackle a common threat. However, with their unashamed backing of the Conservatives in an election fought largely on the terrain of immigration and race, a large segment of British Jewry have adopted the short-sighted position that serving Israel's interests trumps the need to maintain the integrity of any alliance in the anti-racism struggle at home. How those who have been swept under the bus now react to their betrayal will determine the make-up of the anti-racism movement in post-Brexit Britain.

Not surprisingly, the right-wing pro-Zionist mainstream media made as much hay as possible under the sun of Labour's alleged anti-Semitism, seizing and manufacturing every possible opportunity to uncritically repeat the accusations. Like sharks drawn to a kill, they tore lumps out of a victim already presumed guilty at the same time as they turned a blind eye to the Conservatives' woeful record on Islamophobia.

Despite Muslims outnumbering Jews by 10 to 1 and there being no suggestion that anyone in the current Labour leadership has made any openly anti-Semitic remarks, the disproportionality in coverage between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism has been glaringly obvious, suggesting that one type of racism is more unacceptable than the other.

## Media propaganda

Framed by an alliance of politicians and willing journalists, the issue of immigration has been forced up the agenda under successive Conservative governments since 2010. The Migration Observatory, an independent think tank, found a substantial increase in the volume of articles about immigration published in the national British press between 2012 and 2014. When British newspapers have chosen to describe immigration in some additional way over the 2006-2015

period, about 15% of the time they explicitly used the modifiers 'mass' and 12% of the time "illegal". When the press explicitly described immigrants and migrants during 2006-2015, 3 out of 10 times (30.4%) it was with the word 'illegal'. And when news articles explicitly used a word to describe 'immigration' in the first five months of 2015, about 6 out of 10 times it was with a word related to its scale or pace. Is it any wonder then that Britons overestimate the number of immigrants in the UK by over 50% (31% compared to the actual incidence of 13% - Ipsos Mori 2013)?

If 'scale' has framed one side of the immigration debate, the other scaffold has been 'undesirability'. The Migration Observatory found that when newspapers mentioned either EU or illegal immigration between 2006-2005, the majority (approximately 70%) tended to focus on perceived problems rather than achievements. The increasing conflation of immigration issues with welfare fraud in the popular press has also exacerbated negative attitudes towards migrants in an audience largely dependent on the media for information on the issue.

Islam and Muslims have received special attention in Brexit Britain. An anti-Muslim meta-narrative constructed around issues such as grooming gangs, no-go areas, Muslim women's attire, imposition of shariah law, takeover of schools and terrorism has resulted in 56% of the general public believing that Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation (Populus 2016) and the same number believing that Islam is incompatible with British values (Comres 2016). The British public hugely overestimates the number of Muslims in the country: on average, the public think that around one in six Britons are Muslim, rather than the actual incidence of fewer than one in twenty (Ipsos Mori 2016).

A study by the Muslim Council of Britain of over 10,000 articles and clips referring to Muslims and Islam in the last quarter of 2018 found that 59% of all articles associated Muslims with negative behaviour. Our own report from 2015 explained the otherisation of Muslims and its consequences by reference to its location inside a Domination Hate Model of Inter-

cultural Relations by which the Muslim minority becomes victim to the social attitudes of the majority - learned through government policy and the media they consume - and this is then expressed in acts of hatred, hostility and violence.

With the PM reneging on his pre-election promise to launch an inquiry into systemic Islamophobia in the Conservative Party and appearing equally keen to kill off Leveson Pt 2 which promised to make the media more accountable, the signal has already gone out to the media magnates that business should continue as normal (it was surely more than coincidental that Johnson's first soiree after the election victory was at a party held by the Tory-supporting Russian proprietor of the London Evening Standard). Having repaid his friends in the media, Johnson's next task will be to ensure that the areas of the country that turned blue for him remain so. That means actualising the kind of racist Brexit and immigration policies they voted him in to deliver.

### Bleak outlook

For racialised minorities things are set to get a lot worse before they get better. Nearly a decade of Tory and Tory-led government has seen them 'otherised' and their voices marginalised to the point where Muslims in particular have effectively been cast out of public-policy making and consultation. "We are living in a moment described as an environment of hate against Muslims," wrote IHRC in a briefing published last year. "This environment is the product of the cross fertilising and mutually reinforcing of anti-Muslim racism, and political, media and policy discourse. Attacks on Muslim civil society organisations must be understood as part of this climate which is part of the deeper crisis of the political and social culture we live in."

Authentic and independent Muslim voices that do not conform to preconceived official strategies or desired policy outcomes have been pushed to the margins through delegitimization in the media, denial of funds and outright exclusion. It has become standard practice ignore genuine Muslim

voices in consultations that directly relate to their communities. Instead officials now seek to co-opt deferential and conformist elements that can serve as a rubber stamp for government policy. The era of Uncle Tom is back with a vengeance.

The challenges presented by the new alliance of right, far right and Zionist politics are formidable. Clearly, minorities' ability to affect policy is hugely attenuated by the closure of channels for genuine civil society participation, as is the ability to direct media discourse. But rather than being a reason to abandon the battlefield it should spur groups who believe in social justice and multiculturalism to greater action. Statistics suggest that turning back the white tide will be a generational endeavour driven more than anything else by the passage of time. There is little mileage in focussing on the older half of the population, the lost generations fixated on restoring an imaginary white utopia. Instead we must redouble our efforts and concentrate them on the under 40's who are overwhelmingly less predisposed to anti-immigrant, right-wing narratives, exposing racism and highlighting the dark places it leads to.

There must be a special focus on winning back the 'white working class', the new social category that the right has successfully racialised and managed to isolate from the rest of the working class. The shit show that is Brexit will do the rest. Nationalist fantasies will be dashed against the reality of maintaining markets in the EU, continued immigration to fill labour shortages, and an economic downturn for which neo-liberal economics has no answers for those that will be hit the hardest. As events take their course, we must all hope and pray that when the political fraud of Brexit is finally exposed and when immigration can no longer be blamed for all the nation's ills, it will concentrate minds on finding real solutions to the actual problems facing the nation rather than usher in a new, altogether uglier round of scapegoating.

### Faisal Bodi

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### Forcoming publication

## Political Islamophobia at American Policy Institutes: Battling the Power of Islamic Resistance

by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

Available in March 2020 in paperback and digital  
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Looking at the RAND corporation, the Brookings Institute and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Saghaye-Biria overviews these three think tanks' obsession with Islam and Muslims since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. She discusses the implications for Muslim societies of the direction of travel proposed.

### Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

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# Brexit and the hierarchies of Europeanness

Despite what British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says, not all EU migrants in Brexit-Britain treat this country as if it is their own. Those that do are the already privileged and desirable, the bona fide migrants, the proper Europeans whose whiteness is never put into question. But many on the receiving end of rising post-Brexit hate crime do not feel at home in Britain, with their daily lives precarious and their futures uncertain. **Kasia Narkowicz** explores the hierarchies of Europeanness and the racialisation of Central and East Europeans in the context of Brexit.

A few days before the 2019 UK general election, Boris Johnson complained that EU migrants had come to Britain and treated this country as if it was their own. In order to prevent migrants from feeling at home in the UK, a points-based system discouraging unskilled workers will be implemented. Boris Johnson's comments about migrants treating the UK as home caused anger across EU migrant communities. In a letter to the Guardian, Maike Bohn, the co-founder of 'the3million' challenged Johnson saying that 'for most migrants working, studying and raising families in the UK, home is here and we are here to stay'. In the same letter she said that many migrants, including her, came to the UK unskilled, 'curious to discover other countries'. Others, like the journalist Halla Mohieddeen tweeted that her Italian husband only regarded the UK as home, a home in which he 'bought a house, paid tax, made friends'.

These are voices of privileged Western European migrants and certainly does not represent the reality for all. In contrast, many Europeans from Central and Eastern Europe live hard lives in the UK, working in low-skilled jobs (even if they were skilled upon arrival), renting rooms and houses with no prospect of home ownership and with a deepening sense that the home they left years ago is not home anymore, and the UK might never be. The truth is that even if many Eastern Europeans, like the Polish, arrived in Britain en masse over 15 years ago, they do not necessarily feel at home here. In my work as a sociologist, I have been conducting interviews with Polish immigrants in the UK. Their situations are diverse and their commitment to the UK varied, but very few take their lives in the UK for granted. Instead many talk of feeling insecure, scared and unwelcome.

## Brexit and Racisms

Since coming to office as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson has been set on deepening the hostile immigration policies introduced by

Theresa May back when she was Home Secretary in 2012. The fact that the policies were actually named 'the hostile environment' might seem refreshingly honest for any political party, but it says something about the political climate we live in and about the things that can and cannot be said about immigrants in Britain today. In a short book of the same name, actor turned activist John Cusack met Indian activist Arundhati Roy and two whistle blowers; Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden. In an elegantly worded, idealistic and depressing book they discuss what can and cannot be said in various nations around the world that, as they conclude, tend towards the imperial. This rings true within the borders of a once global hegemon that has become so much less significant in today's global economy.

Here in Britain, the imperial project is intimately bound up with a national identity that is currently being reclaimed in Brexit Britain, one of 'taking back control'. But imperial nostalgia is only one part of the coin, the other is an inward-looking nostalgia, a return to a Britishness void of all those foreign bodies that were never wanted within. In their article on Brexit and racism, Satnam Virdee & Brendan McGeever show how racism is central to Brexit because of these two parallel historical developments; the loss of empire as one loss and neoliberalism contributing to structural decline since the 1970s as the second loss. With that came a loss of working class politics and consequently, working class solidarities that stretched across racial divides weakened.

In the Brexit campaign, racism was central yet rarely called out for what it was. Politicians openly said that they wanted to make the lives of migrants unbearable and tabloid journalists referred to immigrants as cockroaches. Even if this kind of rhetoric gets a light slap for echoing Nazi propaganda, it is this idea of immigrants as draining 'our' resources and polluting 'our' spaces that has led to a strong Conservative victory in the 2019 national elections, putting the final seal on Brexit.

After over 40 years of membership in the

European Union, the Brits have filed for divorce because they believe, or hope, that their lives will be better without. They have been told that the source of their increasingly difficult lives are the waves of immigrants. It is the Polish plumber and the Syrian refugee, the Eastern European and the Muslim, that steal whatever is left after a decade of cuts to public services. While the Muslims are often depicted through old racist tropes of potential terrorists and sexual predators, the Eastern Europeans are responsible for stealing jobs and resources. But as Maya Goodfellow argues in her recent book titled 'Hostile Environment', despite the things that can and are said of immigrants, the facts consistently show that there is little evidence that immigrants are responsible for our economic problems.

But then the facts have consistently had little to do with Brexit and people's perceptions at large. British people believe that almost a quarter of their population is immigrant, while in reality the number of foreign-born people in the UK is about 14%. A large proportion are EU migrants. According to statistics from The Migration Observatory just over half of the 3.6 million EU migrants in Britain hail from countries that entered the Union on and after 2004, which predominantly includes countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Of these, the largest group are the Polish.

## The hierarchies of EU whiteness

Among the countries that joined the EU before 2004 are Western European countries including Denmark, Netherlands, Spain and Belgium. In 2004 the EU expanded with the enthusiastic inclusion of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - all formerly part of the Eastern Bloc. In 2007 the EU further integrated Bulgaria and Romania. More countries wish to join the EU, among them Albania and Georgia. But the more the Eastern neighbours wish to be part

of the Union, the lesser the Western countries seem satisfied where their project is heading, even leading to talks about a Swexit, a Swedish EU exit.

The European project is a racial project and one that scholar David Theo Goldberg argues is committed to producing and maintaining Europe as Christian and white. However, within that are also hierarchies that date back further and uphold Western Europe as the cradle of civilisation, Enlightenment and progress, and Eastern Europe as their backward cousin who is on what seems a never-ending journey of catching up with the West. After 1989, with the collapse of Communism, Poland invited Western investment to the degree that economist Thomas Piketty calls it a 'foreign-owned country'. Yet, as Aleksandra Lewicki points out, the Eastern expansion of the EU did not only benefit the formerly Communist states. Although the 2004 EU accession was framed in a language of bringing back democracy to Eastern Europe, as Lewicki argues: 'Western European countries were keen to secure their own economic progression by further expanding into novel markets'.

In Western discourse, Poland and other Eastern European countries have often been depicted as homogenous. Indeed, Poland is one of Europe's most homogenous countries. But as the work of the Polish Nobel Laureate Olga Tokarczuk so masterfully depicts, Poland was once a multi-ethnic and multi-religious place with a diverse population of Christians, Jews and Muslims. The country's homogeneity is a more recent phenomenon, a consequence of the redrawing of the country's borders and mass persecution of its minorities by the Nazi regime, most significantly Jews during the Second World War, and later the Communist regime.

Historically, and well before the Cold War split between East and West, the region of Central Eastern Europe was already considered as part of lesser Europe, outside the ideas of Enlightenment - irrational, superstitious and industrially backward. Back in 1824, Leopold Von Ranke who was a German historian said about Central and Eastern Europe:

'It cannot be maintained that these peoples too belong to the unity of our nation; their customs and constitution have ever separated them from it. In that epoch they exercised no independent influence, but merely appear subordinate or antagonistic.'

German philosopher Hegel had similar thoughts. As Teshale Tibebu argued in his book on Hegel and the Third World, the philosopher considered Slavic people as not having made any significant contribution to world history. As Catholics, he considered them to not have developed a sense of individuality. Hegel said of the Slavs:

'This entire body of peoples remain excluded from our considera-

tion... it has not appeared as an independent element in the series of phases that Reason has assumed in the world'.

The recent political shift in Central Eastern Europe, perhaps most notably in Hungary and then Poland, has given ample reason for a continuation of a narrative of Western exceptionalism and Eastern backwardness. Despite the fact that the politics of closed borders, keeping out Muslims and maintaining Europe as Christian and white is central in these narratives, the migrants from Central Eastern Europe are, upon entrance to the West, nevertheless racialised as the Other; not quite European, not quite white or not white enough. This translates to feelings of not belonging and actual experiences of racism.

## Both victims and perpetrators

In the UK, hate crimes and hate incidents have been defined as occurring across five categories: race, religion, disability, sexuality and transgender identity. In some places, like Manchester, other categories such as sub-cultures are also recognised as hate crimes.

In the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, several hate crimes and incidents targeting Eastern Europeans were recorded. Although hate crime statistics generally have increased yearly since hate was introduced as a category of crime, in July 2016 the numbers rose by over 40% causing people to make links between Brexit and hate crime. Cards with the words 'No More Polish vermin' were posted through letterboxes, the Polish Social and Cultural Association in London (POSK) was targeted with graffiti and there were several reported incidents of violent hate crimes towards Poles across the UK. According to studies on hate crime Eastern European migrants experienced predominantly verbal abuse at work, on the street and online. Lincolnshire, where one of the studies took place, has one of the largest EU migrant populations and was also one of the highest Leave voting areas in the UK.

Language is a major theme in the experiences of exclusion among Eastern Europeans. In contrast to French, Spanish or Italian, their languages are not the languages that serve as elective choices in Western school curricula and are not considered as internationally desirable. In my own work, I have interviewed Poles in London, a city with the largest concentration of Eastern European migrants in the country alongside Birmingham, Slough, Leeds and Southampton. There, people talked about feelings of not belonging, a sense of insecurity and fear about their lives as migrants in the UK.

Many expressed that they felt less secure and less welcomed in Britain since 2016. One woman told me that she always 'looks behind her shoulder' when speaking Polish on the phone when walking in the street. Another man said that while he always speaks Polish

with his British-born kids, he doesn't think that it is received positively by the British public, in contrast with if he was speaking French. He said that it makes him more aware of people around him when out with his Polish-speaking family and that makes him feel uncomfortable. Several interviewees, often those that reported feeling most integrated and experiencing least racism, have either changed their names entirely or have made their Polish names sound English. One woman was told by her boss that she should not speak her language with the other Eastern Europeans in her workplace, despite the fact that each of them spoke a different Eastern European language and could not possibly communicate with one another in any language other than English.

Sociologist Alina Rzepnikowska from the University of Manchester has mapped experiences of racism among Eastern Europeans before and after Brexit. She discusses how markers of difference such as speaking Polish, having a differently sounding name and clothing that is considered unfashionable, serve to differentiate and racialise Eastern Europeans despite their shared whiteness with those who racially abuse them.

Perhaps the case that made the biggest headlines in the UK and abroad was the death of a Polish man only two months after the Brexit referendum. Arkadiusz Jó wik died on a night out after being pushed by a teenager and hitting his head on the pavement. It was reported that Arkadiusz was the victim of a racially motivated attack because he spoke Polish, however evidence later emerged that Arkadiusz and his friends were also making racist comments about the teenagers before the attack. While this finding doesn't undermine the real rise of hate crimes towards Eastern Europeans, it does point to an important aspect of being an immigrant from this part of Europe; the relative ways in which whiteness can be claimed and taken away from those migrants to the UK that occupy that precarious place of being white but not always white enough.

## Relative whiteness

Eastern European migrants have been called 'in between migrants' by scholars because while they are affected by the hostile environment of immigration policy they are also protected by their whiteness and Europeaness, something which grants them rights that immigrants from outside the EU don't have access to. On a global scale of border regimes, Eastern Europeans from countries like Poland, Hungary and Romania have been privileged with free movement and the ability to work in the UK while often, but not always, also being read as European and white.

As Akwugo Emejulu has pointed out: 'It seems some people are only concerned with racism and xenophobia when their own privileged migration status is challenged'. Indeed, the Guardian and other sections of

the liberal press have frequently published stories of distraught white, Western European and often middle-class migrants. An Austrian woman admitted that with Brexit she had made a realisation: 'now I am the immigrant'. It is remarkable to think that an immigrant might never have realised that they are one, never felt it from the looks of others, when their names are not only mispronounced but not recognised or when their traditions and food are treated with either suspicion or with an ironic fascination. Having never felt that is a privilege that few immigrants and non-immigrant people of colour can claim experience of.

Post-Brexit, Western EU migrants seem to have noticed racism and claim that they are its victims. While this should, and has been, critiqued, it should also be treated differently to the discrimination that Eastern European EU migrants are experiencing. Not many Central Eastern Europeans can be accused of not noticing that they are im-

migrants. Often arriving with no money, no connections, no work and no home, the fact that no one could or would bother to pronounce their names was the least of their worries. The Austrian immigrant that shared her story with the Guardian ended her commentary with this: 'I will pack my suitcase later – for now I am just gobs-macked.' Because she is the deserving, desirable migrant that Boris Johnson does not want to lose, she can pack her suitcase later.

Other immigrants might not have the opportunity to pack any bags but instead be put on a charter flight 'back' to a place they might not even call home. As Luke de Noronha writes in his research on deportations, borders are not for white people, and so they feel 'betrayed' and 'offended'. But as de Noronha also notes, Eastern Europeans occupy a more hybrid space of in-betweenness. They are not quite white enough to feel offended by Brexit and increasingly hostile border regimes but privileged

enough to have time to pack their own bags and be granted indefinite leave to remain.

When Boris Johnson suggested that EU migrants treat the UK as their own country, it seems that he targeted the wrong kind of immigrants. The ones that he really wants out, the ones who do not qualify for an acceptable Europeaness, are those who already do not feel at home here despite their relative privileges. With their daily lives precarious and their futures uncertain, Eastern European migrants already know that their presence in the UK is not welcome and their existence here remains as it has always been: precarious.

#### Kasia Narkowicz

is a lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Gloucestershire. She works on issues of racism and Islamophobia in Europe. Kasia has published on the rise of Islamophobia in Poland and is currently researching the experiences of racism by Poles in the UK.

# The scourge of Islamophobia

In the space of just a couple of decades Islamophobia has become the bane of western societies. In Britain, its incidence has soared as it has become embedded in the very core of our institutions. **Maz Saleem** analyses the pervasiveness of this more acceptable face of racism and how it is manifested in everyday social and political life.

**A**phobia, according to the Cambridge dictionary, is 'an extreme fear or dislike of a particular thing or situation, especially one that is not reasonable'.

Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism which manifests itself in an exaggerated fear, hatred, hostility and rejection towards the Islamic religion and Muslims, perpetuated by negative stereotypes.

When these result in bias, discrimination and the marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, educational institutions and against the civic lives of Muslim individuals and communities, it is called institutional Islamophobia.

In line with the definition of institutional racism employed by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry institutional Islamophobia consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their Muslim background or faith. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and stereotyping which disadvantage those perceived to be Muslim.

Islamophobia is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. The 2015 Islamic Human Rights Commission report 'Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK' by Arzu Merali and Saied Reza Ameli shows

that even pre-9/11, Muslims were widely viewed as different and as a threat to national security. However, as the report also highlights that Islamophobia and institutional Islamophobia have increased exponentially over the past two decades.

#### Anti-terrorism laws

There are several areas in which institutional Islamophobia manifests itself in the UK. The most prominent of these is anti-terrorism legislation.

Under the controversial Schedule 7 counter-terror law, Muslims are being detained in disproportionately high numbers at ports and airports even though the conviction rate from such stops is 0.007%, according to the human rights group CAGE. In the 20 years it has been in operation approximately half a million people have been stopped under this power.

Muhammad Rabbani, International Director for CAGE, says:

"The discrimination faced by Muslim travellers highlights how embedded Islamophobia is in Schedule 7, and in broader counter-terrorism powers. Officers routinely ask intrusive questions about religion and practice, which amounts to a modern-day inquisition."

"Over the last decade alone, Schedule 7 has seen over 400,000 people stopped,

99.993% were innocent of any wrongdoing. This highlights the disproportionate use of the power and illustrates its abuse with devastating consequences for thousands of people. The practice amounts to the most exhaustive racial profiling strategy witnessed in modern times."

Schedule 7 is part of the Terrorism Act, 2000. But running parallel to the legislative framework to combat "terrorism" (an amorphous, ever-widening term that seems to be based more on political expediency than any precise definition) is another sinister social engineering programme that seeks to eradicate views and beliefs of resistance within the Muslim population. It is called PREVENT. Ever since its introduction in 2003 Prevent has focused its attention primarily on Britain's Muslims and has probably done more than any other policy or law to entrench their status as "problematic" citizens. It has been widely criticized for spying and infiltrating Muslim communities, browbeating and financially inducing them to become compliant and assimilated.

In 2015 the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act widened the scope of Prevent even further, placing a duty on specified institutions and authorities to be vigilant and show "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism." As a result, nearly two million public sector workers are trained to spy on Muslims for

## Institutional Islamophobia

signs of extremism. The government has outsourced its intelligence gathering to normal society. Human Rights organisation 'Liberty', has called PREVENT the biggest spying programme in British modern history. Most people feel its aims within educational institutions is to disarm Muslim children and adults politically and stop them from speaking out.

### Education

Education is another area in which institutional Islamophobia is pervasive.

The National Education Union has been concerned at the insidious ways in which Islamophobia is operating and intersecting at the structural, community, cultural and interpersonal levels and is becoming part of society. They have expressed the normalisation of anti-Muslim racism must not be allowed to blight and affect the lives of Muslims, and everyone perceived to be Muslim. It undermines the concept of equal rights for all and as such undermines British democracy.

Young Muslim children in the UK say they have been called "terrorists" at school and been told by strangers to take off their headscarves. In 2018 alone, according to government figures, religious hate crime increased by 40% across the UK, with more than half directed at Muslims.

The NEU has stated that at 'at national level, the debates around Brexit, the anti-Muslim narrative of senior politicians, the securitisation agenda including Prevent and the statements by the head of OFSTED are worryingly impacting on schools and colleges'.

The NEU has also raised deep concerns about the PREVENT policy saying that it encourages treating pupils as 'suspects not students'. Evidence has continued to mount that the PREVENT policy is causing fear and discrimination for Muslim pupils. In the NEU's report 'Barriers' teachers talked about how "PREVENT is so strong that teachers feel

that disagreeing with them is seen as condoning extremism and there is pressure to 'watch' Muslim students and their work." The emphasis on PREVENT, and in particular, on Muslims, left many teachers feeling conflicted about their role as teachers and (for

**We remember bricks thrown into passing cars and Asians being spat on by thugs with scary tattoos and body piercings. Many of these memories come flooding back when I see images of the English Defence League and Britain First.**

some) as members of Muslim communities.

The third-highest number of PREVENT referrals comes from the education sector but only five per cent of referrals are sent to Channel, a programme providing support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism. High referral rates according to the NEU 'could be a sign that teachers are misreading the signs of radicalisation or they are being overcautious or using a form of profiling. However, a referral can mean long term stigmatisation and trauma for the child'.

PREVENT is also having a hugely detrimental effect on Muslims in the health sector.

The PREVENT duty was introduced in the NHS in 2011, not because there was evidence associating terrorism to health issues but because of moral duty for everyone to play their role in countering terrorism and radicalisation.

Islamophobia in the National Health

Service is legitimised through policies in healthcare by prejudice towards Muslims. NHS staff have been told that they must trust their "gut feelings" when looking for key signs of radicalization, according to Dr Tarek Younis. He goes on to say in his most recent work 'Islamophobia in National Health Service: An Ethnography in PREVENT's Counter-Radicalisation Policy', that 'no other social ill with such deficient evidence has such a strong public duty. He asks why there is not a dedicated programme to report (largely white male) pre-criminals vulnerable to spouse violence considering that in a period of just three years there have been 300 domestic homicides in the UK

Younis states that the advice to use your 'gut feeling' is key to understanding how racial prejudice is legitimised through institutional racism. He gives an example of a GP who immediately thought of PREVENT when a Muslim male said he wanted to homeschool his children. The doctor withheld asking further questions. This is just one example of a racialised interaction between doctor and the patient. Would the GP have thought of PREVENT if the patient was white and wanted to homeschool their child?

### Media

Much of what is known about Islam and Muslims in Western societies is derived from the mass media. Studies have shown that over three-quarters of people in Western societies rely on the mass media, mainly television, as their primary source of information about Islam and Muslims.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the sustained intensity of media coverage of Islam and Muslims resulted in an almost universal distorted awareness of Islam and its beliefs.

Research has shown that Western media coverage of terrorism is often based on Islamophobic assumptions. Islamophobia in the Western media is increasingly spreading to other parts of the world, which rely on

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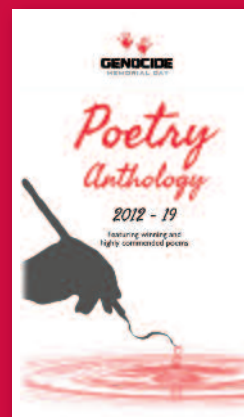
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Western news outlets, yet have little everyday exposure to Muslims.

In the UK, there are many examples of news headlines and coverage that could potentially instill fear and the possibility of 'otherising' Muslims. Mainstream newspapers such as The Daily Express, The Sun and The Times, the Daily Mail have run offensive headlines, including "Ramadan A Ding-Dong", "Christianity Under Attack", "Muslims 'Silent On Terror'", "Britain Goes Halal... but Nobody Tells Public", "1 in 5 Brit Muslims Sympathy For 'Jihadis'" and others.

While these are some of the most obvious examples, instances of Islamophobia also exist in other parts of the media and entertainment, including newspapers, radio, TV and films. Since the war on terror, the representation of Muslims in the media is as a domestic terrorist threat. Immigration, the niqab/burqa, and forced marriages have been used as tools to portray Muslims as 'foreigners', and 'outsiders'. The so-called Muslim grooming scandals tag all Muslim males as predatory. Mosques and madrasas are regularly represented as 'problematic' and incompatible with British society.

The portrayal has been largely negative and stereotypical informed often by a violent, radicalised Islamophobic narrative. The British media contributes daily to growing tensions between communities through negative representations of Muslims and consistently carries Islamophobic stories that play to the far-right.

It has become a mainstay of western journalism that Muslims are asked to condemn every alleged terrorist attack carried out by any Muslim anywhere in the world. Yet few in the mainstream media even stop to consider that the majority of victims of terrorist attacks are Muslim. A 2019 study by researchers at Georgia State University and the University of Alabama found that journalists are much less likely to dedicate coverage to terrorist attacks not committed by Muslim perpetrators - attacks committed by Muslims get 357% more media coverage than attacks committed by other groups.

## Criminal Justice

The UK often claims to possess the finest justice system in the world, with a "colour blind" approach to the law. Unfortunately, this just isn't true. Historically, the UK justice system has been used to legitimise slavery, and then colonialism, from Victorian days. The British Empire has institutionalised apartheid and discrimination since its inception.

Take for example, the brutal killing in 2013 of my father, Mohammed Saleem, by neo-Nazi terrorist and mosque bomber, Pavlo Lapshyn.

The injustices within the legal system made us feel we had regressed back to the 1980s and to the days of the National Front - frightening times when non-white families would not dare venture out after dark or on days when football matches were being played. I remember growing up in an inner-

city area of Birmingham popular with skin-heads. We remember bricks thrown into passing cars and Asians being spat on by thugs with scary tattoos and body piercings. Many of these memories come flooding back when I see images of the English Defence League and Britain First.

I will draw upon my own family's experiences of criticism of the judiciary and the police. Not much seems to have changed since the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. My 82-year-old father, Mohammad Saleem, was knifed to death by Lapshyn, a self-confessed white supremacist, as he walked back home after attending prayers in his local mosque in Small Heath, Birmingham. After my father's murder we were treated with suspicion by the police and placed under surveillance. We were all suspects for our fathers brutal murder according to West Midlands police - to the point that I believe one of us would have been charged if Pavlo Lapshyn had not been caught standing at a bus stop near our house in Small Heath, Birmingham (months later) based on random evidence given by an alleged 'drug addict' from the area (we were told by police). When we saw our father's body in the mortuary for the first time since his brutal killing we were subjected to two male family liaison officers staring at our reactions as if we were all potential suspects rather than victims of one of the vilest Islamophobic terrorist acts on UK soil.

Our father's body remained in the mortuary for many months and this was excruciatingly painful for all of us especially because, Islamically, the burial should be completed as soon as possible. Understandably, given the circumstances, we knew it would take longer but we didn't expect several months to pass. We were subjected to seven inquests in which the coroner played the role of God. During the first two inquests he seemed sympathetic to our religious beliefs, but then his abruptness left us feeling distressed. We were desperate to get our father's body released from the mortuary but the lack of compassion and a two-week holiday in between these inquests left us deeply upset and angry. We were told that if we dropped our official complaints about West Midlands police and they would consider releasing the body.

## Islamophobia in the Conservative Party

The Muslim Council of Britain, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi and many other high profile organisations and politicians have expressed their concern over Islamophobia in the Conservative Party being ignored quite blatantly.

The Prime Minister Boris Johnson has publicly humiliated Muslim women who wear the niqab and the burqa. Boris Johnson has faced much criticism but he has still refused to apologise. In 2014 he published a blatantly Islamophobic book "Seventy-Two Virgins - A Comedy of Errors" with references to "Islamofascists", "Islamic headcases" and "Islamic nutcases" and a stereotypical suicide bomber plot.

The Muslim Council of Britain has repeated many times their call for an inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party. And now, following a ridiculous number of Tory candidates, members and Councillors being suspended for anti-Muslim comments and abuse, Baroness Warsi has admitted that there were "weekly occurrences of Islamophobic incidents" in the Conservative Party.

There have been an unprecedented number of cases that have been brought to the public's attention, suggesting a culture within the Conservative Party where Islamophobia is not only widespread, but institutional. The Tories have disgracefully ignored calls for an independent inquiry on anti-Muslim hatred and are failing to take action against Islamophobes in the party such as MPs including Bob Blackman, Zac Goldsmith, Michael Fabricant and Philip Hollobone.

## Recommendations and Opposition

The government needs to adopt a definition of Islamophobia. In contrast to the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, drawn up by Jewish groups, it has so far resisted an agreed definition put forward by campaign groups and Muslim organisations.

The racist PREVENT duty needs to be scrapped as soon as possible because it has been a catastrophic failure. There is absolutely no evidence that PREVENT has actually prevented any act of "terrorism". From the very start it has almost entirely focused on abhorrent racial profiling of Muslim communities. PREVENT has fuelled the perception that there is an inherent problem of "extremism" in the community. There also needs to be a far-ranging public inquiry into Islamophobia similar to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the outcome must be implemented in all social and political institutions.

The government must give priority to educating people about Islam and its historical positive influence and contribution in the world. It must also demand better from the mainstream media.

The UK Government should commit to ending all involvement in military intervention in foreign countries and to strengthen its efforts to resolve conflicts humanely and peacefully. This is extremely important in reducing political violence and it is important to end disastrous British counter terror policies which only have resulted in bloodshed, a huge refugee crisis and anti-Muslim hatred across the globe.

### Maz Saleem

is an active anti-war and anti-racist campaigner who has written for a variety of publications, including the Independent, 5Pillars, Middle East Eye and Stop the War Coalition websites. Maz will soon be launching an educational website addressing 'Anti-Muslim Hatred' and delivering anti-racist workshops in schools in memory of her father, [www.efpmohammedsaleem.com](http://www.efpmohammedsaleem.com) - Education for Peace in memory of Mohammed Saleem.

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