

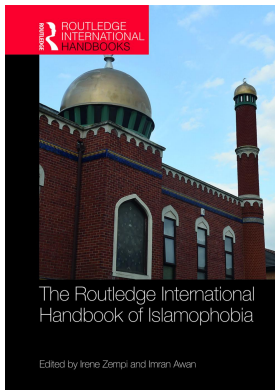
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Islamophobia as the hidden hand of structural and cultural racism

Tahir Abbas

Introduction

There is a natural rate of racism in Britain that persists in the post-war period, one that has transformed from an explicitly racialised discourse to a present focus on the culture and religion of visible ethnic minorities. While racism towards Black groups continues unabated, the particular experience of anti-Muslim racism has developed in the context of racialised groups who are also discriminated based on perceived cultural relativism and the presumption of potential radicalisation on the part of conservative Muslim groups. This chapter provides an analysis of how elite actors use the biopolitical discourse of hyper-masculinity as a way in which to construct a conflict narrative between far-right groups and 'Muslim extremist' groups in the UK context. They instrumentalise the oppositional positions taken by mutually counter-competing groups in order to reinforce reductive discourses on the threat of extremism and the apparent failures of multiculturalism. These forms of Islamophobia and Occidentophobia sustain a national and international hegemon that objectifies working class and 'underclass' groups in order to assert existing local and global ethnic and class relations. Effectively, both positions reflect the struggles of economic marginalisation, cultural exclusion, political alienation and social anomie specific to each group (Abbas 2017). This chapter argues that elite discourse depicts social conflict at the bottom of society as mirrored misrepresentations of each other, but omitting their shared characteristics, such is the nature of elite English urban racial and class authority at the centre vis-à-vis the periphery.

British Muslims responses to Islamophobia

In thinking through the issues on British Islam and Muslims in Britain, my mind wandered back to the 1980s as I recalled the Honeyford Affair. At the time, a disgruntled head teacher, described as borderline racist or even Powell-esque, spoke out against ideas of diversity of multiculturalism in schools. Was Honeyford racist or correct in calling out for Muslim integration through and in education? Should British Muslim families be forced to integrate? Alternatively, should an anti-racist multicultural education cater for differences, providing opportunities to celebrate those differences as part of a collective national psyche? In reality, at the time, there

was a growing hiatus between the home lives of Muslim children and practices within schools, combined with policy paralysis, as none of the teachers, government nor the communities as such were able to come to terms with the challenges (Troyna 1982). Little did I realise at the time that this incident was not a peculiar local anxiety, but that swathes of the British Muslim community, especially those found in the Midlands and in the north, having suffered the deleterious consequences of deindustrialisation and automation, were living lives that were potentially moving in the opposite direction to that of wider society. With Thatcherism came financial deregulation and the liberalising of markets through global trade and monetary exchange. A *moving further apart* was revealed in this instance, but it was indicative of something potentially deeply problematic. The attack on political correctness and on the race equality or race relations lobby had begun in earnest, and as has been witnessed over the course of recent history, it was only a matter of time until these systems, established up to keep racist, sexist and homophobic individuals and institutions in check, were dismantled. A few years later, the 'Rushdie affair' erupted into a major crisis. What started off as an ill-judged local efforts to ban and even burn the book soon became an international affair, with the Ayatollah Khomeini throwing his weight behind a fatwa calling for the death of this author (Samad 1992). By the mid-1990s, as the horrors of the civil war in Bosnia became apparent, British Muslims were abhorred by the idea that blonde-haired and blue-eyed Muslims, born and bred in Europe, faced ethnic cleansing. The year 2016 marked the heart-breaking two-decade anniversary of the Srebrenica tragedy. By then, Islamophobia had already become an established concept with extensive reach (Runnymede Trust 1997).

In 1999, seven UK-born Pakistani Muslims were implicated in a plot to bomb the British Embassy and a nightclub in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. They served approximately five years each in a prison in Yemen. Soon after, the events of 9/11 occurred. The world today endures the implications of this event and the 'war on terror' that ensued. The present urgency is in relation to Islamophobia, which increased violently after these events, largely based on the widely projected perception that the problem of violent extremism is a problem with Islam itself. But when four British-born Bradfordian Muslims were implicated in the London suicide bombings of three tube stations and a bus, the 'rules of the game' did change (Abbas 2007). The policy of 'Prevent' has become the main engagement, community-development and countering violent extremism plank of UK counter-terrorism policy; the community-facing dynamic of the UK government's counter-extremism strategy. Despite being formally in existence since 2006, public knowledge and evaluation gaps about its effectiveness remain limited. For many, 'Prevent' conflates legitimate political resistance among young British Muslims as indications of the likelihood of violent extremism, thereby providing credence to critics who argue that Prevent is a form of social control (Heath-Kelly 2012). Prevent has created considerable headaches for government. Ever since the Blair era, the policy approach is focused on ideology as the root cause of extremism, but academia, civil society and government are unable to come to terms with their disagreements. As of 2015, Prevent is now a statutory duty affecting numerous public sectors, including education and the health services. Since the 'war on terror' and the events of 7/7, questions of terrorism, radicalism and the socio-cultural realities of British Muslims are usually spoken in the same breath, now heightened in the light of a number of issues occurring during the last few years. Specifically, the rise and now decline of the so-called Islamic State, the Syrian refugee crises, the predicaments facing the Eurozone after the global collapse of 2008 and rising populism that has resulted in outcomes such as Brexit and Trump in 2016. While this populism is anti-difference, anti-immigrant and anti-other, it is specifically anti-Islam. Furthermore, this resistance to Islam and Muslims is not individualised, it is against the collective concept of Islam.

Various politicians, policy-makers, journalists and social thinkers are actively directing this trend. In a post-truth post-normal world, there are no answers to the challenging questions that face humanity. In many senses, it is business as usual, and much remains the same. But what has become of real interest is the realisation that the 'left behind' are now angrier and more resentful than ever. They are prepared to vote for change, lashing out against the establishment, even though in the end it will create greater harm to themselves and society as a whole. Large segments of populations in traditionally secular Western societies are without voice, without comfort and without organisational capacity, and hence the rage against the machine. While the machine is violently kicked by Brexit and Trump, the machine will not change or reform as little momentum exists for anything else, even if there are pockets of reformist resistance entering mainstream thinking. *Counter-terrorism* is conceived as an overarching framework that seeks to create a set of policies and interventions that deal with terrorism through active counter-narratives, as well as operational matters of security, policing and intelligence. *Counter-extremism* is the notion of building community resilience and capability to defend and counteract what are problematic characteristics potentially affecting threats to national security.

However, when a young person dons a hijab or shows attitudinal changes regarding particular norms and values, perhaps deemed as acceptable in the recent past, suddenly decides to withdraw altogether from their peer groups, it suggests that something far more complex is going on. This is where Prevent should come into its element as an assessment tool, separating conservative social behaviour from actions that reflect a potentially problematic outcome. But the reality is that most cases referred to the Channel programme within Prevent are of merely frustrated young people who need direction and a cause in life – not a fundamental reason to self-annihilate for some greater good. No policy is perfect, as any history of social policy will inform. It is no surprise that professionals working within the framework of supporting the delivery of Prevent policy in their local areas regard Prevent as imperfect, needing revision, restructuring, rebranding and perhaps even re-rationalisation in the light of greater thinking and understanding in this area. However, the lack of public engagement on Prevent on the part of the UK government creates mistrust, distrust and disengagement on the part of the public with respect to the state. British Muslim communities face particularly acute challenges regarding their visibility and their negative representation in media and politics. The vacuum is subsequently filled by the critical voices who have no opposition or critical engagement from the government, the academy or the mainstream media.

Over the last few decades, the discourse of integration has changed – multiculturalism has been discarded without being fully tested or applied, while integration means assimilation – much like how it was in the 1950s and 1960s, or indeed until the 'liberal hour' (i.e. the late 1960s). Muslim groups are defined and seen only through the lens of religion. Instead of supporting Muslim groups to achieve better integration through social mobility and equality of opportunity, the focus is on Islam as the unit of change – an entire religion, not its people. So where does all this leave Muslim minorities (more than 35 million in western Europe and in North America, and around 3 million in Britain)? Where does it leave the role and position of Islam in the public sphere? Since the Rushdie Affair and the fall of the Berlin Wall, occurring almost simultaneously, the desire has been to see differences as bounded by culture, ethnicity and even heritage, but not by religion, or specifically Islam. Islam is portrayed as an alien monolith. Coupled with the socio-economic inequalities facing all in society, a body of poor, alienated, marginalised and voiceless groups, both white and Muslim, remain pitted against each other for the least in society (Ebner 2017).

When 9/11 happened a few weeks after the 'northern disturbances' in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley, the official government response was to build community cohesion – and

wholly abandon all concerns in relation to ethnic inequalities (Amin 2002). Difference, of a kind, is tolerated, but trying to ensure that different individuals achieve equality of opportunity *and* equality of outcome has been eliminated from any social policy discourse. The language of containing Muslim identity politics – even voices that seek to resist domestic and foreign policy failures – has become the norm. By its very nature, Prevent, depicted as an enabling force, is in effect a disabler of all other debates concerning Muslims in Britain. Prevent's claims for recognition focus on Muslims only through the re-shaping of the Islamic and Muslim presence in society. However, this is deeply flawed – and potentially dangerous. It misunderstands Islam: homogenising and essentialising a diverse faith. It affirms the neoliberal paradigm – namely, rolling back the frontiers of the state, bringing *freedom* to *markets* and championing individual competition, namely *homo economicus*. The collective shapes Islam, not the individual; however, attempts are made by the state to engineer it for the population as a whole, with present-day political elites focusing on the few at the expense of the many. But Islam in the mainstream is also struggling because of its 'bad rep'. There are a few leading figures who bridge the gap between media, politics and society, but they do so at the behest of the state. Moreover, these Islamic institutions are held in the hands of older but not so wiser men who are out of touch with the needs and wants of the world, especially Muslim youth and millennials who are comfortable with diversity but uncomfortable with authoritarianism.

Ergo, there are two competing forces to consider here. One element of society seeks to reduce Islam while those who garner credit for their apparent authority over it stifle those who are trying to expand Islam from within the faith. It leads to malaise, discord and stagnation. As the West struggles with its post-West future, Islam struggles with reaching a state of pre-West state. This signals an opportunity but also various risks, as the individuals required at the vanguard of change do not exist in the number or quality required. As such, the challenges outnumber the opportunities. However, the relatively gloomy realities of the last few years are likely to persist. The Western globalised capitalist hegemon is not collapsing. It is expanding, but it does so by concentrating wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands. Muslims across the world suffer the consequences of this expansion, as they have done for the greater part of the last few hundred years through colonialism, imperialism, immigration, forced assimilation and ultimately subjugation. All the while the West selectively remembers its past, constantly reinventing the narrative of the nation, currently retreating into a sinister hyperbolic regarding ethnic nationalism, reflecting on the panic of whiteness, not in retreat, but in denial of its inevitable reconfiguration at the hands of the very force that has created the disquiet – globalisation.

In reality, British Muslims are not in control of managing the idea of British Islam. These challenges are beyond the scope of British Muslims to define on their own, but they are asked to do so by those whose objectives are to promote a *muscular secular liberalism* – the single dominant strand that resists the current configurations of contemporary British Islam. The situation facing British Muslims remains precarious at best, with no obvious clarity concerning its direction. There is also the disturbing rise of populism, which plays on Islamophobia, but more worryingly, how far its reach has extended into popular culture and dominant politics. There is anger and frustration afflicting a significant body of Muslims in the inner cities and this is where most of the challenges will continue to remain.

The hyper-normalisation of Islamophobia

Since the events of 9/11 in the USA and various acts of terrorism throughout Western Europe in the last decade or so, considerable attention is given to the topics of Islamophobia and its associated concerns, Occidentophobia. They are mutually reinforcing discourses that perpetuate Islamic

extremism as a function of certain religious norms and values associated with an ethnic and cultural category. Namely, Muslim minorities in western Europe, and the ways in which these very same Muslims hold specific anti-Western attitudes that disengage them from wider society, thereby further deepening their associations with a problematic religious and cultural identity that sets them apart from mainstream society. The forces of English elite class structure perpetuate a perennial conflict between different sectors of the working class and the 'underclass' of British society. The ideological concerns that affect white working class young men and British-born Muslim minorities are related to issues of national and local identity, social opportunity and mobility, economic marginalisation, political disenfranchisement, and cultural alienation. In effect, both groups are experiencing the same kinds of issues, however complex. These concerns are generated by an elite discourse, which is internalised by these groups, who in turn regard their relative counterparts within the same oppositional framework, thereby further legitimising existing modes of domination and subordination that stem from English elitism and classism (Misha 2017; Hirsch 2018).

Some find it difficult to accept the 'R' word. Racism is a concept that has completely disappeared from the popular vernacular in relation to understanding differences in society. Greater concern is placed on notions of values, or in relation to certain community norms seen as antithetical to Britishness. Much of this refers to the seemingly intractable problem that emerge from being British and being Muslim, as regularly expounded by the dominant hegemonic media and political elite. Race has disappeared from the agenda, not by accident, but by design. Antiracism had its heyday in the late 1970s but then meandered. By the 1980s, multiculturalism was the buzzword; as if it would solve the problems of racism. However, while multiculturalism raises awareness of differences it did not fully fight racism, structural discrimination or ethnic inequalities. After 9/11 and 7/7, multiculturalism has been reduced to a security agenda that isolates Muslims and immigrant groups. The issue is that Muslims are treated as a racial group, where religion is replaced as the defining characteristic of racism. Racism, however, is not the same as racialism, which is the idea that we are all tribalistic to some extent. A strong undercurrent suggests it is acceptable to be anti-racist, *but there are Muslim-specific issues that worry 'us' about their 'values'*. It results in blindness to the deeper structural factors that lead to discrimination and a desire to focus on culture, or multicultural, as a means to fight racism, which is almost impossible because racism or indeed equality is not all about culture.

This Islamophobia as a newfound anti-Muslim racism has become the dominant hegemon that divides 'us' and 'them'. This critique is essentially an implicit misrecognition of Muslim minorities in western Europe (Lentin and Titley 2012). Moreover, this Islamophobia has driven far right social, community and political activism right across western Europe. From the English Defence League (EDL), Britain First and National Action in Britain, to the National Front in France, to the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, to the Northern League in Italy, to the Pax Europa Citizen's Movement in Germany, far right groups have re-entered the popular imagination in local area communities and in national politics (World Policy Institute 2011). Thus, the racialisation of Muslims through the political, and media manufacture Muslims as monsters goes beyond managing extremists as such to the more general signifier of Muslim as extremist (Tyrer and Sayyid 2012). In recruiting minorities into minority screen productions further enhances the racialisation of groups through the dominant mode of production that coaxes minorities through a neocolonial logic, such is the power of institutionalised racism (Saha 2012).

The EDL formed in 2009 based on a combination of circumstances. Its founding members, originally from the town of Luton, witnessed a demonstration by angry young Muslims against the return of British soldiers who marched through the city centre. Local white Britons felt that radical Islamists had penetrated the city. The EDL promotes Islamophobia through their proselytising the view that there is a risk of 'Islamification' in Britain and in Europe more widely,

a thesis commonly propagated by a range of far right groups. The EDL also emerged out of the failures of the British National Party, which effectively disintegrated due to internal struggles for power and connectivity (Allen 2011). Its founding leader, Tommy Robinson, courted considerable publicity for his politics and his organisation until August 2013 when he stepped down as its head. There were concerns around his growing criminal record as well internal discord within the organisation. In January 2014, Robinson and a number of close associates were jailed for mortgage fraud. Robinson continues to be involved with various groups and in the media, regularly getting in trouble for inciting hatred.

Although there is considerable attention devoted to the ways in which minority groups use the lens of religion and culture to mobilise society, in effect, they operate within the political landscape where new political representations emerge alongside these less integrative approaches. Religion offers opportunities to engage in a critique of state institutions for Muslim groups but also for Christian groups (Back et al. 2009). It is not possible to eliminate the role of the state and the reproduction of elite racism, in particular in relation to Muslim groups in the current period. Racism is not the preserve of far right groups; rather it is institutionalised in the workings of state apparatus. It is also to do with the way in which nations imagine their identities, or rather how they are constructed in the light of selective memories of the origins of those nations (Anderson 1992). Ever since the economic downturn that the Western world has experienced since 2008, there has been systematic projection of the glorious nation with a tremendous history presently facing a threat from within and without, much of which also led to the Brexit vote on 2016 (Khalili 2017).

This threat is named as Islam and Muslims, and the configuration of these topics is such that they sustain society's perpetual anxiety thus legitimising the status quo. The crisis of capitalism has led to an illiberal set of policies on the part of seemingly liberal plural democracies (Williamson and Khiabany 2011). Here, the position of ethnic and religious minorities is not simply a reflection of groups subjected to racism but that they are part of a dominant white worldview that intersects capitalism with racism. Moreover, 'Islamophobia, like other racisms, can be colour-coded: it can be biological (normally associated with skin colour). But it can also be cultural (not necessarily associated with skin colour), or it can be a mixture of both' (Cole 2009, pp. 251–252). The resurgence of Orientalism in the USA combined with a current approach to Islamophobia is linked to imperialism and dominant US foreign policy in the Middle East. Islam and Muslims are cast in a reductionist and essentialist terms that evoke a sense of imminent danger from a primitive body of people and their ways. This framework has existed since the events of 9/11 and it remains an ongoing phenomenon in the USA (Kumar 2010).

In the midst of the numerous challenges facing young men in British society, there is concern in relation to hyper-masculinity. This is about the expectations placed upon men that create fear, anger and pain rather than a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood. As such, 'jihadis' and far right young men are all thus the same in this regard, where differences in religion and culture in relation to 'the other' are problematised and subsequently politicised. Effectively it focuses on questions of identities, which are exploited through elite discourse, and internalised at the bottom of society in relation to former working-class groups and the offspring of immigrant groups. Hyper-masculinity is failing young men in Britain in considerable ways. The consequences are that it encourages the need for young people to prove themselves – to seek recognition – to become somebody. An elite media and political discourse creates and sustains these oppositional perspectives between two sets of groups in society that effectively suffer the same sets of social, economic and political problems, thus fuelling Occidentophobia and Islamophobia. It exploits the social cleavages facing young men. At the heart of the issue is the need for elites to maintain their position while 'othering' others. In reality, there tends to be a far more positive negotiation

between seemingly conflictual norms and values, and it is precisely a sense of positive Britishness, European-ness or American-ness that encourages young Muslims to speak out and critically engage with the discourse that focuses on their apparent unassimilability (El-Haj and Bonet 2011). While there is some degree of association made with a particular faith identity, the vast majority of British Muslims are pro-integration, where foreign policy is a marginal issue in their daily lives (Thomas and Sanderson 2011). A positive approach to improving ethnic and cultural relations with white majority groups remains a distinct focus for Muslim minority communities in the north of England in particular: a body of people who have been subject to considerable negative attention given the northern disturbances of 2001 and ongoing problems deindustrialisation and economic marginalisation facing the region. The decline of masculinity is at the heart of the problems created by English class structure facing the pressures of neoliberal globalisation.

While there remains considerable interest in the field of 'Islamophobic studies' and publications with Islamophobia in their titles are routinely cited, there remain problems of classification, categorisation and generalisation that afflicts the concept. For some, it is as a step between a product and a process, where the latter includes history as well as contemporary politics, and the former relates to patterns of social outcomes that can be measured as distinct racial, cultural and religious discrimination. However, there remains an analytical and ideological gap between what is conceived, what is perceived and what is ultimately realised. For others, the ambiguity of the concept is its strength as Islamophobia takes many different shapes and forms depending on context and opportunity. These have different local and global manifestations, and how they are found within specific spheres of intellectual, political, cultural and social ontologies (Sayyid and Vakil 2011). Other scholars have come to focus on its relationship to existing patterns of, xenophobia, Orientalism and imperialism that affect liberal plural democracies and constructions of multiculturalism found within them (Esposito and Kalin 2011).

The challenge of Islamophobia is not one that Muslims can undertake on their own. There is a need to ensure that Muslims can work with other religious minority groups who face comparable patterns of discrimination, intimidation, violence, exclusion and racialisation. A positive outcome reduces the likelihood of counter-competing narratives and wastefulness in relation to resources and political opportunities (Weller 2006). In many ways, Europe is experiencing a sense of disconnection from its historic construction of a continental identity because of associations made with extremism and violence in relation to Islam and Muslims. However, the irony is that the presence of Muslim majorities in Europe is redefining Europe, recreating notions of European-ness, and thereby reconfiguring notions of national identities across western Europe (Allievi 2012).

The tragedies of symbolic and actual Islamophobic violence

In August 2017, Grenfell Tower burned. The ravaging fires killed over eighty people in the process. Many of the victims were Black and Muslim minority groups not on the radar of immigration or welfare services. Shortly before this tragic event, a 48-year-old drove into worshippers who were leaving late evening prayers on a balmy July night outside Finsbury Park Mosque. The media and political responses to the attack were lame. Arguably, Darren Osborne would not have been radicalised if Muslims were not being demonised in the media on a daily basis. He had no other motivation than wanting to 'kill all Muslims'. Osborne was ultimately convicted for the murder of Makram Ali and for injuring eight others.

The murderous, violent intent of terrorists derives from hate leading to violence and death. It is directed towards specific ethnic, religious or racial minority or majority groups. Otherwise, any 'mentally ill' person, 'unemployed loner' or 'drifter' with a history of domestic violence or

abuse towards others could seemingly carry out these acts of violence. It, therefore, becomes a problem for newspapers and other media outlets that do not emphasise randomness in these acts of violence and extremism. In under-exposing the objective explanations behind the political or ideological motivations behind attacks, it intimates a far greater demographic capable of such acts. At the same time, Islamism is presented as thriving among radicalised Muslims who use it to legitimise violence. It avoids all nuance. In the case of far right extremists, not only is there limited recognition of the wide-ranging problem of far right radicalism and terrorism, over-emphasising the 'loner' angle is a useful distraction away from implicating the wider negative structural and cultural forces at play. Meanwhile, Islamophobia has normalised in society to such an extent that even to evoke it is to suggest that those challenging the issue in particular, Muslims, are being disingenuous, at best, or downright treacherous, at worst (Josse 2017).

In reporting on responses to attacks, Islamist extremists are interpreted as purely ideological while English or other white ethnic majority individuals are said to have social and psychological problems. This suggests a general degree of acceptance on the part of society that their violence towards Muslims is somehow legitimate (i.e. because of something that Muslims espouse or adhere to, e.g. their faith, or because they are somehow responsible, as an entire faith community, for the actions of a limited few). Orientalism, scientific racism and now racialisation based on ethnicity, cultural and religious category suggest institutionalised Islamophobia: wholesale, widespread, menacing and omnipotent. Islamophobia takes attention away from structural racism, which further institutionalises Islamophobia. A deeper understanding of Muslim differences in society reorients others interested in Islam and Muslims toward the counter-terrorism/countering violent extremism space, while Muslims outside of this realm are not only rendered homogenous but, crucially, invisible (Amin-Khan 2012). This homogeneity is not open-ended, diverse or layered with class, racial, sectarian and cultural characteristics but rather a more sinister representation of Muslims as various threats to society. Engagement with Muslims is restricted to a focus on problems seemingly emanating from a Muslim cosmos. By potentially relegating anti-Muslim hatred to the realm of counter-terrorism, it further absolves the state's responsibility in relation to Muslims everywhere else in society.

Present-day Islamophobia is the normalisation of anti-Muslim hatred that has grown exponentially since the outset of the 'war on terror' culture that began after the events of 9/11. During this time, intolerance, bigotry and the development of alt-right, far right, radical left and other religious extremist groups have found succor in the vacuum of dominant discourses to stabilise societies that provide opportunities, as well as outcomes, for the many, not the few. These cumulative extremisms at the margins of society incubate the discourses of intolerance and hate that allow these subgroups and their ideas to foment. Radicalisation is intimately tied up with Islamophobia. Fanned by the internet, which acts as an echo chamber, and present politics, there are similar fires burning in the USA and across Europe. It is undoubtedly the case that there is a degree of virulent Islamophobia that bubbles to the surface time and time again, breaking down existing weak community relations, exacerbated by various media and political discourses that emphasise the unassimilability of Muslim minorities. However, the number of Muslims in the West, especially in parts of western Europe, will continue to rise relative to the indigenous population because of relatively higher birth rates. The visible residential concentration of Muslims in certain parts of towns and cities creates consternation among commentators who argue that there is a problem of Islamisation, which has the effect of making majority groups even more fearful of difference, of others. That majority populations repeatedly overemphasise the numbers of Muslim minorities in their countries is no accident.

The events of the Grenfell Tower tragedy reaffirmed the state's neoliberal, majoritarian nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-European and anti-Muslim hegemonic narrative defined by years of neglect, allowing shoddy practices to linger, paying little or no attention to criticism of

policy from all other sectors of society. Austerity policy since the 2008 economic crash has led to instability, populism and uncertainty. It is hyper-normalisation in post-normal times, where the state has no clear idea of where to take the nation. British Muslims are relegated to a lowly position as the next few years will be all about Brexit and its implications – which erupted out of an unnecessary xenophobic, Islamophobic, anti-European, anti-human rights discourse reflecting an internal Tory party battle running for four decades.

Concluding thoughts

Since the events of 9/11, there has emerged not only Islamophobia industry but also a (de)radicalisation industry orchestrated by various governments in attempt to placate domestic and foreign policy and to focus on group differences as the cause of extremism. As part of this experience, a body of people have come forward with various initiatives to support the government in relation to the causes and the solutions of Islamic political radicalism (Kundnani 2009). It sustains the view that the problem of violent extremism rests within the religion and culture of specific groups rather than the workings of society (Abbas 2011). It takes away tension from concerns relating to structural disadvantage and discrimination, which are arguably the more significant drivers that affect young Muslim men in declining urban areas (Alexander 2004).

In conclusion, various periods in Britain's social and political history of have determined a natural rate of racism as applied to Muslims through Islamophobia and radicalisation. External to the British Muslim communities there are specific instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric that have permeated public and private institutions, political systems and a general rhetoric in relation to an 'us' and 'them' divide sustained by an elite racial discourse. This has sought to securitise integration and diversity as well as institutionalise securitisation in relation to education, the charity sector and other civil society organisations. Internal to the British Muslim communities are issues of low education, high unemployment, poor health and limited housing as realisations of structural disadvantage and discrimination. Muslim communities also suffer from limited political participation and representation. These issues have grown to become more problematic in the light of the 'war on terror' culture and the policing and incarceration of young Muslims who suffer the deleterious consequences of deindustrialisation, technological innovation and the internationalisation of capital, with former working class groups also seeking direction, recognition and opportunity in relation to their own lived experiences. The causes of Islamophobia and radicalisation relate to social mobility, anomie, political disenfranchisement, national identity crisis, neoliberal globalisation with the effects seen in anger, fear, loathing, intimidation and violence. This Islamophobia is therefore political, cultural and economic. It has the effect of inducing radicalisation of both Islamist and far right groups, based on counter-competing ideological perspectives take shape at the bottom of society among groups who are competing for the least in society. The challenge is that both the Islamophobia and radicalisation need to be taken seriously as a problem for society as a whole. Until then, with ongoing geopolitical concerns in relation to the Muslim world, widening social divisions because of neoliberal globalisation and as national identities falter due to limited recognition of differences, the challenges far outweigh the opportunities.

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