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Islamophobia as racialised biopolitics in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article provides a Foucauldian perspective on the racialised biopolitics of Islamophobia in the global north. It is argued that a pervasive, wide-ranging racialised logos is being used to undermine the citizenship potential of Muslim groups now forming an active presence in urban concentrations across wide political and cultural spaces. The negative characterisations of Muslim minority groups in the global north focus on various parameters of othering, with the experiences of Muslim minorities in the United Kingdom acting as a test case. A dominant hegemonic discourse perpetuates the view that British Muslims are undesirable because (a) they embody the most extreme 'other', (b) they are a risk to national security due to dangers associated with inherent radicalisation and (c) Muslim voices of resistance are untrustworthy. These forms of Islamophobia provide perspectives on anti-immigration, xenophobia and depopulation that racialises the Muslim minority category in the sphere of neoliberal globalised capital accumulation. It has significant local area implications for Muslim minority and wider identitarian politics, ultimately perpetuating a cyclical process through which political biases within dominant politics reproduce the racialised discourses of Islamophobia.

Introduction

Islamophobia in Britain has been documented extensively since the events of the Rushdie Affair, with the unassimilability of Muslim groups whose ethno-religio characteristics ostensibly prevent their integration emphasised, leading to mounting alarm over

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questions of majority national identity politics and the minority 'Muslim problem' as irreconcilable poles (Weller 2009). But today's critical analysis of the Brexit discourse in the United Kingdom suggests that Islamophobia has emerged not as a question of European integration but as a retreat into ethnic nationalism characterised by structural and cultural racism based on anti-immigrant, anti-minority and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This exclusionary tactic of biopolitics promotes hyper-ethnic nationalism as an argument against what is seen as creeping 'Muslimness' or 'Islamification' of society, supporting the development of an ethnic Englishness that reverts to a historically selective category as a response to neoliberal globalisation and local area community fragmentation.

The question of unconscious bias and the ways in which it affects patterns of ethnic and racial inequality in Britain suggest that racism is as rife as ever today. It impacts on the lives of people in the workplace, in both public and private institutions, with specific instances of bias concerning selection, retention and promotion in certain employment settings (Bhopal 2017; Noon 2018). None of this is entirely surprising given the toxic environment that is currently in play; one that has been revealed in the tragedies of the Grenfell Tower disaster, the Windrush scandal, and how populism, authoritarianism and white supremacism are the paradigms that dominate political thinking in relation to questions of difference, diversity and division in societies across the global north (Hirsch 2018; Mishra 2018). At the heart of much of Brexit lies the painful truth of xenophobia, anti-immigration hostility and, in particular, an emphasis on Muslim groups, whether existing or new, as confirming various threats to society – from an emphasis on cultural relativism to fears relating to national security and counterterrorism (Brown 2018; Virdee and McGeever 2018). There are numerous challenges facing secular liberal democracies as they confront the realities of globalisation and the ways in which nations see themselves as sovereign entities with borders that also, oddly, indicate clearly those they would wish to keep out (Anderson 1983). But there is also an uncertainty regarding the ways in which those who reside within these imagined borders must behave, act, think, or not think, as the case may be.

A field that receives a great deal of attention in the current period is the concept of Islamophobia. A much-contested category of social analysis in the UK, there are some on the left who deride the notion as they regard religion itself a problem, while some on the right see it as a ruse to mask unpalatable aspects of Islam (Halliday 1999; Wodok 2015). In November 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims published *Islamophobia Defined*, which, among its many statements, asserted that 'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and its victims are not just Muslims but also those who are perceived to be Muslims. Its effects are seen in individual behaviours and institutional processes' (APPG on British Muslims 2018, 7). Islamophobia first became prominent in the mid-1990s when the Runnymede Trust (1997) carried out research and policy analysis on the topic. Now Islamophobia applies in the British context and across Europe (Fekete 2009) more than ever, but it does so elsewhere too – that is, in countries where Muslims are majorities. For example, in Myanmar or Israel, there are issues of hate towards Muslims not necessarily because they are Muslim, but more because of questions of hyper-nationalism, economic opportunism and state violence bordering on population elimination. I centre on the British case for the purposes of exploring Islamophobia, with its newfound purpose, largely determined through the manifestation

of structural and cultural racism aimed at Muslim groups, whether as minorities or as refugees. In the process, it reveals ethnic nationalism and the whitewashing of diversity and multiculturalism through Brexit, further verifying the growing impact of Islamophobia on British society.

The 2016 Brexit campaign has been described as an instance of *dog-whistling* – where the use of coded language was an attempt to appeal to right-wing sentiment already mounting due to the impact of austerity policy after its introduction in the wake of the 2008 global banking crisis. The notion that 75 m Turks were to join the European Union (EU) and eventually flood Britain is an example of the projection of racist hostility as immigration is tied to the EU policy of free movement. Nigel Farage launched the infamous 'Breaking Point' poster a few short days before the racist murder of Jo Cox MP, who was stabbed and then gunned down by the now-convicted racist neo-Nazi, Thomas Mair. Vote Leave and BeLeave campaigns were both found to have been fraudulent according to the Electoral Commission, but at the time of writing, 'the will of the people' is still used by the current Prime Minister Boris Johnson as a precursor to leaving the EU at the end of January 2020. There is also the question of the involvement of dark money and a potential Russian connection in the production of 'fake news', while the role of major social media companies in illegally micro-targeting certain voters through specific advertisement campaigns remains a concern (DCMS 2018). Ultimately, approximately 17.4 m voted to leave the EU in June 2016. Many who did so were from the north, not because they were explicitly racist but because they were led to believe that the EU was responsible for their wretched status as the 'left behind'. The idea of 'taking the country back' was, therefore, an aspiration to take their lives back – but richer voters in the south also voted Leave – and they did so because they felt the need to protect their wealth and status from any legislative interference from the EU. Both Leave geographies were also motivated by hostility to immigration (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017). Some ethnic minorities also voted for Brexit, largely because of their existing disadvantaged socio-economic position and the desire to improve their standings through improved domestic policies, although most ethnic minorities overwhelmingly voted to Remain in the EU in 2016 (Martin et al. 2019).

The origins of Brexit, however, have little to do with the social, political and economic needs of Britain. Rather, they reflect an inner struggle with the Conservative Party that has been fomenting since the early 1990s, when the then Prime Minister, John Major, dubbed Eurosceptics within his cabinet as 'the bastards'. Since the Major years, Islamophobia has been growing steadily in society but especially in the Conservative Party. In February 2019, Hope Not Hate (2019a, 3) found that after the 2017 terrorist attacks, which saw four Islamist and one far right terrorist incidents, '49% of 2017 Conservative voters think that Islam is incompatible to the British way of life and 47% think there are no go areas in Britain where sharia law dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter'. In the 2016 London mayoral campaign, Zak Goldsmith was criticised for his racist campaign against Sadiq Khan (Dobbernack 2019). In early 2019, the then Home Secretary Sajid Javid revoked the citizenship of an estranged former member of Islamic State, the Bethnal Green-born Shamima Begum, who had travelled to join the terrorist organisation as 15-year old but urgently wanted to return 'home' with her soon-to-be newborn child. She now remains stateless in a refugee camp

in Syria as her family appeals her matter. Hope Not Hate (2019b) carried out further polling to explore Islamophobia specifically in the British Conservative Party in mid-2019. It found 67% of party members stating 'there are areas in Britain that operate under Sharia law', and 45% agreeing that 'there are areas in Britain in which non-Muslims are not able to enter'. In addition, 39% said they believed that 'Islamist terrorists reflect a widespread hostility to Britain among the Muslim community'. The vast majority said they did not feel there was a problem with Islamophobia within the party, with three-quarters stating the party was 'doing all it reasonably can' to combat Islamophobia and other forms of racism. The Muslim Council of Britain (2019), the United Kingdom's most representative national umbrella group for British Muslims, carried out a review into Islamophobia in the British media. The most significant finding is that the industry average for negative news relating to Muslims in the media is 59% based on an assessment of over 10,000 articles. Newspapers such as the *Mail on Sunday* are the most likely to publish Islamophobic stories.

There are four primary reasons for this vehement resistance to Islamophobia. First, there is a view that it is a ruse to limit free speech; that Muslims who advocate the need to fight Islamophobia do so because they wish to silence moderates, liberals or reformists. While there are numerous issues regarding development and education in the Muslim world, this is a reality of its recent colonised past, not an indication of the potential for reform. Second, there is a belief that Islamophobia is not the all-pervasive evil it is described by those fighting it. Detractors refute the idea of Islamophobia as racism by suggesting that Islam is not a race. This is to misunderstand racism: Islamophobia reflects the wider historical, institutional and cultural processes that have deep tentacles in the workings of society as a whole but those who benefit from racism often fail to recognise it. Third, there is a contention that the drive to thrust Islamophobia to the fore is an attempt to define a normative Islam (mainstream Islam): one that is hard line, narrow, rigid or doctrinal. This is to misunderstand Islam and Muslims. Activist groups such as Muslim Engagement and Development and CAGE are committed to fighting Islamophobia and hate crimes, no different from the workings of the Community Safety Trust, which monitors antisemitism. Muslims of all hues and distinctions are speaking out against Islamophobia, not merely those deemed as hard line and therefore potentially problematic in the eyes of certain political elites. Finally, there is a view that this new normative Islam has no nuance in relation to various issues, from animal rights to LGBTQ+ education. Cases such as the 'Trojan Horse plot' in Birmingham schools concerning an 'Islamic takeover' ultimately amounted to a witch hunt, aiming to delegitimise Muslim power for fear of what it may achieve (Abbas 2017; Cannizzaro and Gholami 2018). Islamophobia is indeed rooted in racism. The denial of Islamophobia is the disavowal of racism that always finds a way of reinventing itself. The reality is that the government is loath to legislate against Islamophobia because it invariably benefits from it at a variety of levels, from holding onto potential voters in certain areas to legitimising an interventionist foreign policy that especially affects the Muslim world, to suppressing legitimate dissent and taking attention away from Muslim suffering.

The problems of anti-immigration sentiment, Islamophobia and racism based on lurch to the far right suggest a continuation of the policy of biopower (Foucault 2003, 242–43), of which one consequence is biopolitics, which is the elimination, in reality, of members

of the population regarded as a drain on resources. In this instance, dominant politics is guilty of normalising anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment due to its inability to alleviate these social concerns through binding legislation, thus giving credence to elements of the far right who feel justified in subscribing to the view that Muslims en masse are a problem (Amin 2010). Working-class groups defined as the 'left behind' by the right are instrumentalised by the state in an attempt to support wider efforts to delimit the perceived problem of 'Muslimness', with Brexit as a device to help promote an exclusive ethnic 'Englishness', which is oppositional to an inclusive civic 'Britishness'. The combined effects of Brexit on Islamophobia and Islamophobia on Brexit reveal a potent form of racism. As Michel Foucault (2003, 258) stated,

> [t]he specificity of modern racism ... is bound up with the technique of power, with the technology of power ... The juxtaposition of – or the way biopower functions through - the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism. And it is, I think, here that we find the actual roots of racism.

This article argues that Islamophobia, in part, hastened Brexit, which has unleashed a wave of Islamophobia that is more toxic and virulent than its predecessor. This cyclical process reflects a shift towards an ethnic nationalism that has intensified given the current political trends in Britain and in other parts of Western Europe that struggle to cope with the impact of neoliberal globalisation on local area communities. Critical discourse analysis is the methodological framework utilised in this article (van Dijk 1993). First, Islamophobia is further discussed exploring its particular dimensions and its growth in recent periods. Second, the impacts of the Brexit vote on current matters of race, racism and racialisation are considered, discussing the implications for perceptions and attitudes towards Muslim groups in particular (Hackett 2018; Selod and Embrick 2003). In conclusion, it is argued that a virulent strain of Islamophobic, xenophobic and exclusivist ethnic nationalism is taking hold in England, with significant risks for community relations and national politics, all of which are continuities of racism reinvented in an age of anger, fear and loathing centred on Islam and Muslims in post-normal times (Hackett 2018; Miah 2018; Salem and Thompson 2016).

Islamophobia revisited

Islamophobia is a number of different issues that come together as a whole, where the sum of its impact is as great as the total of the individual parts (Zempi and Awan 2019). At one level, the issue of perceptions is important as there are significant matters concerning pervasive anti-Muslim rhetoric. But Islamophobia is also anti-Muslim action, sentiment, belief and even propaganda. For example, the representation of a hijabi Muslim woman on Westminster Bridge after the attack in 2017 was promulgated in a way to suggest that not only are 'Muslims responsible for the attack' but that 'they' also show disdain when 'our' people die. It generated significant online hate. At another level, the denial of Islamophobia refutes a range of social, cultural, economic, political and legal issues that are important in eliminating inequality, racism and intolerance while building social and political trust. This ignores wider economic and social

divisions in order to sustain the emphasis on cultural relativism rather than structural disadvantage. Islamophobia is also a response. As prevailing discourses enhance and promote uncertainty in relation to Islam and Muslims, those who consume these distorted projections exhibit mistrust and anxiety. In the last few years, problematic newspaper headlines and statements by parliamentarians are everyday practices (Garner and Selod 2014). The problem of Islamophobia, therefore, is multi-dynamic. At some level, it is structural – that is, reflecting the workings of institutions. At another level, it is individual, that is, women face attacks on the streets because they wear visual markers of 'Muslimness'. It is also cultural. Here, its normalisation has made it all too easy to speak ill of Muslims and Islam without reservation and without grounding it in any verifiable 'truths'. Social media routinely dupes the ill-informed, for example, many habitually share problematic social media stories, memes or 'fake news' without due care or attention (Han 2017; Waibord 2018). Islamophobia is also ideological, which suggests that there are those who excuse their Islamophobia or seek to legitimise it through a focus on, for example, 'British values', which is a favourite trope of both the soft and hard right (Allen 2016). In alphabetical order, the following are a set of characteristics relating to Islamophobia currently in the UK.

> *Crime*: Hate crime against Muslims/criminalisation of Muslims in the criminal justice system
> *Cultural*: Orientalism and 'failed multiculturalism' discourses
> *Gendered*: 'Dangerous' brown men versus 'vulnerable' brown women
> *Ideological*: Both the political left and the right are hostile to Islam/Muslims
> *Institutional*: Groupthink in organisations lock in rationalisation and normalisation of Islamophobia
> *Intellectual*: Right-leaning and left-leaning thinkers in denial or co-opted
> *Media*: TV, print and social media and the press baron bias
> *Political*: Populism, nationalism and neoliberalism driving mass public sentiment
> *Religious*: Christian, Jewish, Hindu and others hostile towards Muslim minorities
> *State*: Law, policymaking, judiciary, executive
> *Structural*: Education and employment outcomes for Muslim groups; housing and health inequalities
> *Xenophobic*: Resistance to immigration and the limits of ethnic boundaries

The structural racism that affects Muslim minorities is a further example of the realities of Islamophobia. But there is also the issue of cultural racism, with its consistent attention on 'them' versus 'us' or 'good Muslim' versus 'bad Muslim' paradigms. Moreover, far right extremism feeds off and feeds into this Islamophobia, which also has a bearing on the radicalisation of British Muslims – as both radicalisation and Islamophobia thrive because of the wider workings of structural and cultural racism (Abbas 2019). The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (2018) report attempted to reconceptualise, strengthen and make the concept of Islamophobia more relevant to the current epoch by defining it as 'rooted in racism'. Anti-Muslim sentiment racialises and chastises Muslim groups for their presumed or otherwise religiosity and cultural practices. This definition was not met with universal acceptance, however. For

the Policy Exchange (n.d.), these classifications are seen as blanket generalisations that reflect on a wide range of characteristics that exploit political correctness by using it as a buffer against potentially problematic issues such as 'grooming' or female genital mutilation from gaining traction.

While Islamophobia has gained considerable momentum, there is still a problem of its wider acceptance. Islamophobia is many different things – but one thing it is not is some mere notion without genuine application. In fact, the greater narrative is to deny its existence at all – which, in some ways, is an attempt to legitimise existing norms in relation to anti-Muslim sentiment, racism and discrimination. Since the economic downturn that came about because of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the policies of austerity that have plagued less fortunate groups ever since then, society as a whole has suffered because of widening divisions, with notions of hyper-ethnic-nationalism coming to the fore (Burrell et al. 2019). It permits racists, xenophobes and supremacists to obtain the oxygen needed from certain elites to fuel their hate, discord and disdain (Foster 2019). In order to help eliminate the many different layers and levels of Islamophobia, the introduction of a legal definition that has teeth and bite, however, remains a difficult challenge. For example, if a white English person who has converted to Islam experiences discrimination, vilification, exclusion, violence or marginalisation, how does the notion of anti-Muslim racism, as analogous to Islamophobia, apply in such an instance? Furthermore, if a white English member of the public shouts Islamophobic abuse at an English woman who has converted to Islam, is this Islamophobia also anti-Muslim racism in the way it would be if the victim of this abuse was, say, a Somali woman? (cf. Semati 2010).

The closest alternative to Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism. Nevertheless, while it is possible to prosecute racists according to legal definitions of racism and hate crime, Islamophobia is greater and perhaps more pervasive than identifiable acts of racism that can be prosecuted at an individual level (not to deny the horrifying effects of racism on Muslim individuals at any one point in time) (Jackson 2019). Perhaps, therefore, the answer is to maintain using the concept of Islamophobia to identify anti-Muslim sentiment as it is a discourse, an action, an outcome, a perception, an experience and so on, but to now enhance the element of 'Muslim hate crime' into the existing legislation on hate crime (Awan and Zempi 2018). This actionable aspect converges on individuals, while the general discourse of combating Islamophobia allows the possibility of working with other groups experiencing vilification, demonisation and discrimination. Some elements of Islamophobia are about racism towards groups who are different by virtue of ethnicity, race, heritage and even gendered visibility. There is also the issue of Islamophobia as a much wider discourse of disdain, violence, hatred or enmity towards Muslim groups who are part of a faith that has a global identity but with localised nuances. This connection with racism and anti-racist law can protect these groups. In enhancing the legislation against those who perpetrate acts of Islamophobic violence or hatred at an individual level, it sends a signal to Islamophobes as a whole. But while there is a separation between the lived reality of Islamophobia and acts of Islamophobia that are discriminatory, the division between them has the potential risk of reducing Islamophobia to an individual matter that is not part and parcel of a wider social,

historical, political and cultural discourse that continues to grow ever more troubling (Awan et al. 2019).

The APPG report also attempts to reconcile the commonalities between Islamophobia anti-Semitism. The latter is the vilification of Jewish groups and their Jewishness with respect to institutions and individuals. The violation of Jewish graves, synagogues and people, for example, are approaches on the part of the assailants who are targeting a faith tradition represented in individuals or institutions. Therefore, whether in the public domain or in private settings, attacks against those who are perceived to look and behave as Muslims are done so on the basis of presumed characteristics. As some Sikh individuals and institutions report (Hopkins et al. 2017), the reality is they face their tribulations for whom others perceive them to be. These deleterious actions rest on imagined attributes at the level of phenotype or genotype but also due to a misunderstanding of Islam. Muslims are not a race defined by a colour category, which is invariably a consequence of pseudo-race science. There is no gradation of man or woman unless defined by some external agent whose interest it is to exploit and then legitimise these deliberately manufactured differences for the sole purposes of self-gain (Brabec 2019). Races are social constructions and racism is a socially learned concept.

The perils of Britain's disintegration

As Brexit and Trump create new challenges on both sides of the Atlantic, a wave of populism, nativism, ethnic nationalism, authoritarianism and anti-immigration sentiment has spread to Germany, Poland and Hungary and in far-flung places such as Brazil. Today, the United Kingdom demonstrates political, economic and cultural polarisation, with far right extremism and growing anti-Muslim racism and discrimination as the norm. Such Islamophobic sentiment has become more than just everyday 'dinner table topics' (Warsi 2017). It has defined the dominant institutional, cultural and structural dynamics relating to the Muslim minority experience in the British context, including at the heart of politics. When debates in House of Commons descend into commotion, it is Muslim parliamentarians, such as Rupa Haq, Afzal Khan and Yasmin Qureshi, who are routinely told to 'go back home Paki' by other members of this otherwise venerated chamber (Haq 2018).

The imaginings of the Brexiteers are to 'go it alone' in the world by alluding to notions of Britannia rules the waves. But they represent a worldview that is arcane, inept and manufactured (Carroll 2015). The legacy of empire is unmistakable, with the relics of colonialism ensuring that a tiny but influential group remain the driving force in resisting questions of European integration. But the notion of the plucky Englishman defiant in the face of all that stands before Queen and country is a contrived concept, just as much as ideas of chivalry, civilisation and Commonwealth support a distorted view in relation to the inheritance of the postcolonial. The ghosts of empire are everywhere (Gilroy 2004). The denial of differences in society in an expression of English racism; from the casual to the violent; from the elite to the everyday. It exemplifies bigotry, vacuity and demagoguery. Meanwhile, far right extremism and radicalisation that grow from the seeds of Islamophobia are creating greater annoyances for the security and intelligence services, which is having to shift the existing dominant counterterrorism

strategy that targets entire Muslim communities through mass surveillance technologies, placing all Muslims in the category of 'at risk' of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism (Awan et al. 2019; Sharma and Nijjar 2018).

Populism, nationalism, a form of fascism and the deeply flawed inward-looking myths about the greatness of the nation have engulfed many western European countries (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017), with Britain leading the way in a regressive, narrow-minded and divisive politics. It leads to disdain towards the poor, the old and the infirm. It is racism, snobbery and cronyism that reflects a decline in critical thinking, including a desire to hold onto the existing but repeatedly-proven-to-be-failing neoliberal globalisation economic model at all cost. The British Brexiteers have come to dominate the debate on Britain leaving the EU – a decision made upon a referendum that was not legally binding. With their tentacles in politics and business, a certain set of elites could not muster the idea of the EU legislating against offshore tax havens that London is recognised for (Fernandez et al. 2016). This exclusive sub-set of the population projected the view that external agents were hell-bent on undermining the 'will of the people' whilst controlling 'their country'. They used all the dark and dubious methods of online persuasion to whip up an already beleaguered Britain facing the perils of austerity while projecting intolerance towards 'others' (Cadwalladr 2017; OHCHR 2018). Austerity led to resentment towards immigrants, minorities and the 'undeserving' poor. These sentiments were ratcheted up further by carefully targeted online and offline messages to appeal to the disaffected, disillusioned and disagreeable who were directed to blame those closest to them geographically but presented as seemingly the most distanced culturally. The refugee crisis that arose because of interventions in Syria affected populations across Europe as groups made their way through the Balkan route into Western Europe. Islamophobia and racism went hand-in-hand, with Brexit permitting self-selecting elites to reproduce but also legitimise this animosity and intolerance towards others for the purposes of self-gain.

Far right extremism has increased significantly in the last few years, with the Brexit vote a reflection of some of the growing polarisations in British society, one divided between the haves and the have nots (Goodwin and Heath 2016; O'Becker et al. 2017). Those 'left behind' by the ravages of neoliberal capitalism, largely concentrated in the north where few benefits from it are to be found and those who have taken full advantage of opportunities for social mobility or have existing levels of inherent physical capital have been primed by Brexit. Far right groups use notions of race, blood or supremacism as a way in which to delegitimise, dehumanise and marginalise minorities, with Muslim groups often on the receiving end of the greatest levels of vilification and demonisation (Hopkins 2016). Moreover, there are institutions and individuals who are supporting these far-right groups across North America and Western Europe, in particular in promoting a certain brand of Islamophobic messaging online, all in an attempt to shift attention onto 'the other' (Halliday et al. 2018). Additional factors to take into consideration in explaining the increase of the far-right are that it is also a backlash against multiculturalism and diversity as well as the prominence of women in society, whether in the education system or in the labour market. A crisis of masculinity is conflating a sense of what it is to be a man, which has fundamentally altered in the light of the changing nature of economies and societies over the last four decades and largely as a result of the

processes of deindustrialisation that have also broken down traditional forms of urban patriarchy. Some young men are somewhat lost in relation to questions of manliness and nationhood and they find solace online with other like-minded introverts whose group-think is to normalise disdain towards 'the other' and to regulate the idea of their own inherent but entirely imagined superiority (Ging 2017).

The realities of Brexit and Islamophobia exist at a structural but also at a cultural level, underpinned by widening polarisations in society due to a neoliberal globalisation perspective that rewards existing privileged groups, and at a time when 'whiteness' or in this case ethnic Englishness is seen to be under threat. The hate of the other is a structural, cultural and political phenomenon and the conditions that create and subsequently allow it to thrive are in the hands of elites to shape. However, the political imagination has stalled, leading to no new ideas but rather retreat into self-interest, profit maximisation, rolling back all the frontiers of the state and rampant individualism. It is buttressed by political jingoism that reveals latent racism, rendering Brexit a white English exclusivist project. Nativism and populism represent a radical far right main-stream political project. Its initial success was correlated with rising immigration, especially from the EU (Kaufmann 2017), but as the numbers from the EU continue to decline, the weight of attention has shifted onto Islam and Muslims.

The challenges that remain

There is falsehood at the heart of the intentions of those who wish to deny the imperative of Islamophobia. The essential issues are not about Islam or Muslims. They are everything to do with how elite groups wish, or otherwise, to share the pieces of the cake, one that they see as diminishing in size relative to others. Selfishness, intolerance and insularity are the hallmarks of these groups who reproduce the very problems that they suggest that Islam and Muslims possess – which is bigotry, isolationism and self-interest. These elites feed the narrative that there is no Islamophobia, that Muslims are potentially a problem en masse and that Muslim complaints about their treatment at the hands of others are overstated and are therefore spurious. Invariably, Islamophobia does not typically fit the patterns of ethnic inequality, discrimination or disadvantage experienced by groups who are solely minority and Muslim, as anti-Muslim sentiment is not classed or raced. Islamophobia transcends these categories. Others denounce Islamophobia because they associate Islam with Islamism. Resistance to Muslims is precisely due to their perceived, imagined or enacted Muslimness, now seen as a growing threat, menace or danger. This outlook refuses to acknowledge that the force of their indignation has the power to misrecognise all Muslims in the context of a hostile media, political and cultural environment that mobilises the manufacture of Muslim monsters (Arjana 2015). Far right groups grow strong due to Islamophobia, with their disdain of foreigners and hostility towards immigrants and refugees coloured by the alleged threat of their alien, invasive and unreservedly inimical ways 'taking over' society. Self-interest and elitist ideology drive the wedges between people and communities that sustain these fissures (Hohle 2017).

Islamophobia has been growing in the global north for the greater part of the last decade and a half, accelerated by the 'war on terror' that began in the aftermath of the

events of 9/11 (Kumar 2012). It is a form of cultural and structural racism that reflects on patterns of discrimination, exclusion and demonisation based on perceptions of an individual or group's 'Muslimness', which is perceived in generally negative terms due to various stereotypes, cultural dissonance and what Edward Said would call the cultural archives. This Islamophobia builds on existing issues of orientalism in relation to the global east as well as post-war problems of racial discrimination based on questions of migration and settlement of minority groups with a history of colonisation, subjugation and in some cases cleansing. There is also the rather pernicious impact of institutions and individuals who are invested in perpetuating Islamophobia through online methods in particular, but the wider print media is also culpable in reproducing daily instances of misreporting and distorted reporting regarding Muslims and Islam. Islamophobia also misrepresents the global reality of Western economic exploitation that remains ongoing and systematic, affecting much of the global south, which also concentrates most of the Muslims in the world. There are certain interests promoting the need to misrepresent Muslims at home and abroad in the wider aim of misdirection away from failings in relation to equality and diversity at home. It has become expedient for some British political elites to concentrate on Islam and Muslims as the ultimate bogey categories as a way in which to deviate attention from far more fundamentally significant issues of poverty, inequality and uneven economic development that affects the entire country.

Brexit is a symptom of the social, political and economic divisions that have grown deeply over the last decade. Austerity policy that came about after the 2008 global financial meltdown has largely impacted on the working class and poorer groups in society in disproportionate ways, thereby adding to their anger, frustration and sense of voicelessness, which was ultimately instrumentalised by populist slogans and soundbites during the Brexit referendum campaign of 2016. But Brexit is also a symptom of wider failed domestic economic and social policy, and it reflects on a growing normalisation in relation to cultural racism against minorities of observable immigrant and minority backgrounds, often casually lumped together as 'Muslims'. The debate is compounded by misleading political and media voices, such is the level of misunderstanding and miscommunication regarding issues of diversity in Britain, including the role of minorities in shaping what is Britain today. However, this is not to argue that British Muslims are only ever on the receiving end of negative outcomes. A whole host of young professionals are making themselves seen and heard in all sorts of activities: in the workplace, in the realm of art and culture, on television programmes as prized bakers, or in television dramas and films not always playing the radicalised man or vulnerable woman (Janmohammed 2017). In the realm of reasonably minded people everywhere, Muslims are active members of society, including in charitable institutions. They are communitarians in every sense.

Benedict Anderson argued that nations are imagined in the minds of their creators and followers. Moreover, these nations have bloody borders. The current wave of ethnic nationalism that is engulfing England is reflective of a surge in remaking the idea of the nation based on the conjuring up of an imaginary glorious past. At one point, Britain, for which England is the significant progenitor, ruled the waves, becoming wealthy and powerful through trade, commerce and mercantilism that exploited distinct resources, lands and populations of the world. Brexit reflects on a variety of ethnic nationalism that

is based on a limited concept of borders – not as means of keeping people out but as a variation on the type of people who are to be kept in. It reveals racism grounded in a sense of exclusivity, largely in response to a projection of concerns relating to immigration and the EU, both presented as a perennial threat, a mythical dragon, and all because the global north is shrinking and its hegemony is subsiding. Sociologists regard nationalism as a form of racism and Britain's current wave of toxic Islamophobia and rampant ethnic nationalism confirm precisely this. It is Islamophobic, xenophobic and exclusivist in nature and its impact is being felt in all spheres of society. These challenges are likely to remain in the near future, especially during the long and difficult separation from Europe that Brexit will ultimately entail as well of the fact of higher rates of population growth of Muslims in the West. It is combined with the reality that, more than ever, Muslims across the world are on the move due to war, famine, crises, persecution and, in some cases, opportunity. Islamophobia, Brexit and creeping ethnic English nationalism are all indicators of the blunders of the elitist political classes, the trials of globalisation and the failures of social policy since the 1980s. The onset of neoliberal globalisation, individualism and a focus on the financial and services sector as the main contributors to economic growth and the well-being of the nation have perpetuated an inward-looking, exclusivist and highly selective configuration of the nation with all the ramifications it brings for society as a whole. Brexit is the inevitable outcome of this drift into morbid decline with Muslim minorities at the sharp end of its destructive narratives.

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