ARTICLE

Contemporary Experiences of Islamophobia in Today's United Kingdom: Findings from Ten Small-Scale Studies

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ABSTRACT *In today's United Kingdom, Islamophobia is as contested as it is real. Challenging this contestation, this article presents findings from ten small-scale, qualitative studies that seek to evidence and better understand the lived, tangible experience of Islamophobia in real-world spaces. To do so, this article briefly explores the development and incidence of Islamophobia in public and political spaces and how contestation has ensued. From here, the findings draw out how Muslims experience Islamophobia in their everyday lives, ranging from instances of verbal abuse through threats and intimidation to physical assault and violence. As part of this exploration, new insights are afforded into the role and impact of terrorist attacks on hate crimes, geopolitical and military conflicts, the content of Islamophobic abuse, and the rapidly changing nature of that, which shapes and informs tangible forms of Islamophobia. In doing so, this article concludes by contextualizing the realities of Islamophobia within the far from conducive public and political spaces of the UK. This article makes a timely contribution to and improves knowledge about Islamophobia in today's UK.*

Keywords: Islamophobia, United Kingdom, Muslim Women, Muslim Men

Insight Turkey 2021
Vol. 23 / No. 2 / pp. 107-127

Received Date: 19/03/2021 • **Accepted Date:** 22/05/2021 • **DOI:** 10.25253/99.2021232.7

Introduction

Just over two decades ago, a groundbreaking report published by the anti-racism think-tank the Runnymede Trust stated that Islamophobia in the United Kingdom (UK) was becoming "more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous,"[1] describing the term itself as an 'ugly' word for an 'ugly' reality. One decade ago, Sayeeda Warsi –then Chair of the political party forming the majority of the Coalition government– announced that Islamophobia had passed the 'dinner table test,' as well as acquiring conversational civility and acceptability among the UK's middle classes, so to had it become quite 'normal' to say things about Muslims that would never be said about other minority communities.[2] Today, Boris Johnson, UK's current Prime Minister, has been routinely accused of being anti-Muslim, and the political party he leads has been lobbied for more than two years to investigate allegations of endemic Islamophobia within the party's membership.[3] According to London's Metropolitan Police Force, the number of reported Islamophobic hate crimes is increasing year on year.[4] Non-official datasets suggest much the same. A national non-statutory organization that offers support to Muslim victims of Islamophobic hate crime, Tell MAMA (MAMA an abbreviation for 'Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks') has similarly logged year-on-year increases for almost half a decade. In the UK today, Islamophobia is very real and very tangible.

At the same time, Islamophobia as a term and phenomenon has been socially, politically, and culturally contested.[5] This can be illustrated in a number of ways. For example, the Quilliam Foundation –a recently dissolved UK Government-funded think-tank that focused on counter-extremism and was established by former 'Islamist extremists'– claimed that merely acknowledging, let alone using the term Islamophobia, was enough to hand "a propaganda *coup* to Islamists who can… present themselves as ordinary Muslims who are victims of 'Islamophobia.'"[6] So influential was this statement that for a number of years, the UK government ceased referring to and subsequently using the term Islamophobia, something subsequent governments have rescinded on.[7] Beyond the political spaces, a similar supposition has been posited by commentator Douglas Murray. Citing Christopher Hitchens, Murray claims that Islamophobia is a word created by fascists only to be used by cowards seeking to manipulate those he referred to as morons.[8] Others, like the journalist Melanie Phillips, agree, contesting the very reality of Islamophobia by arguing that it is little more than a 'fiction:' one that functions to hamper legitimate and valid criticism of Islam and Muslims.[9] Many other examples exist in public and political spaces that either replicate or resonate with the underlying sentiment that Islamophobia is far from real and far from tangible. Nonetheless, both advocates and critics of Islamophobia are content to politicize it when it serves their respective agendas.

In the UK, the first academic studies that sought to investigate Islamophobia are little more than a decade old.[10] While early studies sought to better define and conceptualize Islamophobia as a discriminatory phenomenon, there has since been something of a critical turn in the scholarly study of Islamophobia in recent years.[11] With this came a shift from definitional and conceptual concerns to focus on the more real and tangible aspects of everyday, 'lived' Islamophobia. Those such as Massoumi, Mills, and Miller[12] sought to investigate the more structural aspects of Islamophobia and its embeddedness within the UK's public and political spaces. Hargreaves, however, remains critical, claiming that Islamophobia continues to be conceived as an all-encompassing phenomenon that conflates a vast range of different issues, many of which go beyond tangible manifestations of prejudice, bigotry, and hate.[13] For him, there is a need to better demarcate those tangible manifestations of Islamophobia that target Muslims from the vast array of structural systems and processes that shape how people think and act towards Muslims. For the purpose of this article, Hargreaves' criticisms provide a useful starting point.

According to London's Metropolitan Police Force, the number of reported Islamophobic hate crimes is increasing year on year

Drawing on UK-based research into Islamophobia, this article seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the lived experience –the tangible realities– of Islamophobia in today's UK. To do so, this article begins by affording an overview of the methods and data used to evidence this article: ten small-scale, qualitative studies undertaken in the UK by the author, each of which sought to investigate and thereby better understand the victim experience of Islamophobia. From there, this article provides necessary context: briefly exploring the development and incidence of Islamophobia in the UK's public and political spaces. The article then sets out the findings from the research, drawing out how Muslims experience Islamophobia as a tangible reality in their everyday lives and settings. In doing so, this article builds on the existing literature while also affording a number of new insights and trends in the manifestation and content of those experiences. In conclusion, this article seeks to draw some conclusions from the lived experience of Islamophobia to the wider context of the UK and its public and political spaces. In doing so, this article seeks to make a timely contribution to the still relatively embryonic scholarly canon investigating Islamophobia, while also improving the knowledge and understanding of what remains a very real and tangible problem for the UK today.

Methodology and Data

For Crouch and Mackenzie, small-scale qualitative studies are increasingly common within the broad social science canon, due to their ability to pen-

A hate crime in the UK is generally understood as an act of violence or hostility directed at people because of who they are or who someone thinks they are

etrate what they describe as the realities of social life.[14] Accordingly, small-scale qualitative studies require researchers to foster close relationships with respondents, as a means of ensuring fine-grained and in-depth findings. They are especially valuable, therefore, to elucidating understanding and improving knowledge about specific situations in social settings. At the same time, small-scale studies have limitations, attracting the criticism that only larger samples can ever hold the promise of validity and generalizability. Morse, however, counters this by stating that generalizability must not be the sole measure of good research.[15] In acknowledgment of this point, the approach preferred by Noblit and Hare is adopted here.[16] With an aspiration to reduce rather than refute unrealistic scholarly criticisms about generalizability, they argue that researchers should seek to 'put together' findings from different small-scale studies as a means of improving rigor and robustness. While they add that, more generally, such an approach affords opportunities to generate new data and more rigorously evidenced findings, in the specific context of Islamophobia, so too does it afford an opportunity to counter the criticisms cited previously.

As noted briefly in the introduction, this article draws upon the findings from ten small-scale, variously funded qualitative studies, each designed and delivered by the author between 2014 and 2018, ranging from commissioned undertakings on behalf of third-sector organizations to the much larger, institutionally funded 'Birmingham's Muslims' project. Prior to 'putting together' the studies, a full critical appraisal of the studies and their respective findings was undertaken to ensure that appropriate ethical requirements were met, that consistent and comparative research methods were employed and that the gathered data was clearly and coherently recorded. For Cohen and Crabtree, such an undertaking ensures high levels of reliability, validity, and objectivity.[17] The critical appraisal subsequently highlighted no potential problems. As regards consistency and comparability, all of the respondents self-identified as Muslim and had experienced a hate crime they believe was motivated by Islamophobia. For context, a hate crime in the UK is generally understood as an act of violence or hostility directed at people because of who they are or who someone thinks they are.[18] While the ranges of questions asked were slightly different across each of the various studies, two questions appeared on all of the studies as topic guides and were shown to have been consistently asked of all respondents. Necessarily narrowing this article's focus to these two questions, not only ensures consistency but so contributes toward ensuring robustness and trustworthiness. Those questions were asked first about the respondent's experience of Islamophobic hate crime and second, what happened –verbally

A high police presence kept apart the far-right English Defence League (EDL) and anti-EDL demonstrators as the EDL made its way through Central London to protest against Islam in the UK on June 24, 2017.

JAY SHAW BAKER / Getty Images

and physically– during that experience. Captured in previously transcribed *verbatim* scripts that detailed the respondents' answers in their own words and phrases, these scripts were duly re-coded, from which process existing and new categories of interest were identified.

Data gathered from a total of 313 respondents was analyzed for this article. Of those, 38 percent were male and 62 percent female, a disproportionate split reflecting how Muslim women –in particular visibly recognizable Muslim women– have been shown to be more likely to experience Islamophobic hate crime in the UK than their male equivalent.[19] The age range of the respondents was necessarily broad, from 18 to 70 years of age. As is widely acknowledged, the UK's Muslim communities are extremely diverse and comprise a broad number of different ethnicities, schools of thought, and religiosity. While the make-up of the respondents was diverse, as the sampling was necessarily non-probabilistic and purposive, it was not possible to recruit a sample group that was nationally representative. Focusing on ethnicity (school of thought and religiosity were both deemed unimportant for the purpose of the studies) respondents included those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Turkish, Somali, Yemeni, and Eritrean heritage, as well as White British or Black British persons who had converted to Islam. The overwhelming majority had been born in the UK and held British citizenship. While the respondents were gathered from across the UK, most resided in locations where there were higher percentage populations of Muslims, most notably the cities of London and Birmingham.

Each of the small-scale studies had slightly different approaches to engagement. These included face-to-face, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and listening workshops depending upon the project in hand. Recruitment for each was necessarily non-probabilistic and purposive, not least because of the need to specifically identify those respondents that had experienced hate crime motivated by Islamophobia. Respondents were variously recruited through a range of stakeholders, including Muslim organizations, mosques, and Islamic centers, third-party hate crime monitoring groups, community and third-sector organizations, and existing networks (personal and institutional). As noted in the existing literature, a number of challenges are typically encountered when trying to engage victims of Islamophobic hate crime.[20] One of the most pressing is that up to 70 percent of all Islamophobic hate crimes are never reported to statutory organizations or services,[21] so using more traditional routes –such as via the police– is not conducive when it comes to Islamophobia. As such, it is difficult to know where best for researchers to identify and subsequently recruit respondents. For the purpose of this article, while all the respondents stated that they had experienced Islamophobic hate crime, not all had duly reported their experience to the police or any institutional equivalent. Raising questions about generalizability, it is important to note Polit and Beck's view that qualitative generalizability is somewhat utopian.[22] For Marshall[23] and Morse[24] alike, generalizability can never be the sole measure of important and robust research.

Islamophobia in Context: The UK's Public and Political Spaces

In contextualizing Islamophobia in the UK, it is worth reiterating the opening observations about how, shortly before becoming Prime Minister, Boris Johnson described Muslim women who choose to wear the *niqab* as looking like 'letterboxes' or 'bank robbers.'[25] Dismissed by Johnson as a '*gaffe*' or joke, this was not the first time he had been accused of Islamophobia. During the campaign to take the UK out of the European Union (EU), Johnson provoked unfounded fears about Turkey joining the EU and how its entry would result in high levels of Turkish citizens coming to the UK, years before having said of the genocide in Bosnia that "…the fate of Srebrenica was appalling. But they weren't exactly angels, these Muslims."[26] Among others, he also wrote in an editorial in a national magazine that the *Qur'an* was 'particularly vicious.'[27] It is, therefore, no surprise that since becoming Prime Minister and by consequence leader of the country's Conservative Party, he has repeatedly rejected calls for an internal investigation into allegations of Islamophobia within the party's membership.[28] At the same time, he has been vociferous of the need to investigate allegations of anti-Semitism in the main opposition party, Labour. Using Johnson as a yardstick, Islamophobia is routine, unquestioned, and wholly 'normal' in much of the UK's public and political spaces.

It is ironic therefore that Warsi, also referred to at the outset, was at the time of her speech a prominent member of the same political party as Johnson. More importantly, Warsi was the first Muslim woman to be selected by the Conservative Party as a parliamentary candidate in 2005. Despite failing to win the vote, she was subsequently appointed as Special Adviser for community relations soon after becoming Vice-Chair of the Conservative Party, Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion, and being bestowed with a life peerage (an honor that applies for the period of one's own lifetime). As Baroness Warsi of Dewsbury, she became the youngest member of the House of Lords when she joined in 2007. Then under David Cameron's Conservative-led coalition government, which came to power in 2010, Warsi was appointed Minister without Portfolio and Party Chair. The first Muslim woman to serve in a British Governmental Cabinet, Warsi made headlines by attending her first ministerial meeting wearing a *shalwar kameez*, a traditional South Asian style of attire.

For Warsi, Islamophobia had achieved a level of social and political civility that would be deemed wholly unacceptable were it to apply to any other form of prejudice, hostility, or bigotry against any other minority group or community

It was Warsi's 2011 intervention on Islamophobia, however, that created the greatest impact. Speaking at the University of Leicester, she announced that Islamophobia in the UK had passed the 'dinner table test:'

> Islamophobia has now crossed the threshold of middle-class respectability… For far too many people, Islamophobia is seen as a legitimate –even commendable– thing. You could even say that Islamophobia has now passed the dinner-table-test… Islamophobia should be seen as totally abhorrent… A phobia is an irrational fear. It takes on a life of its own and no longer needs to be justified. And all this filters through. The drip-feeding of fear fuels a rising tide of prejudice. So when people get on the tube and see a bearded Muslim, they think 'terrorist'… when they hear '*halal*' they think 'that sounds like contaminated food'… and when they walk past a woman wearing a veil, they think automatically 'that woman's oppressed.' And what's particularly worrying is that this can lead down the slippery slope to violence.[29]

For Warsi, Islamophobia had achieved a level of social and political civility that would be deemed wholly unacceptable were it to apply to any other form of prejudice, hostility, or bigotry against any other minority group or community. Politically important and publicly necessary, Warsi's statement went beyond anything that had occurred previously in the UK. Described as a watershed moment, her speech appeared to signal a new determination to tackle and duly eradicate Islamophobia in the UK.

Research also showed that Muslims increasingly felt that they were more likely to become a victim of hate crime than any other minority community

Prior to this, scant attention had been afforded to Islamophobia in either the public or political space –that is, in terms of the seriousness of the problem and the need to tackle it akin to other similar discriminatory phenomena. Despite being the first country in Europe and North America to acknowledge the reality of Islamophobia via the aforementioned Runnymede Trust report,[30] the New Labour government at the time largely dismissed the urgency of Islamophobia.[31] In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the reality of Islamophobia became readily apparent as the number of hate crimes targeting Muslims increased sharply.[32] In response, John Denham, a government minister at the time, suggested that Islamophobia would be cancer-like if left untreated.[33] Interestingly, it was one of the few times that any senior figure connected to New Labour made a specific reference to Islamophobia.

Causing consternation among Muslim organizations, some began to voice their concerns at the lack of governmental response to growing levels of discrimination and hate against Muslims. Others expressed concern about the new counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policies and legislation being introduced, many of which were accused of reinforcing the public's fears and anxieties about Muslims and the religion of Islam, a situation that was further exacerbated following the 2005 suicide attacks on the London public transport system.[34] Among the general public, greater levels of suspicion and mistrust toward Muslims became readily apparent. Part of this was undeniably due to the proliferation of news stories and reports that regularly and routinely appeared in the mainstream media about Muslims and their communities. From research undertaken at the time, the number of such articles in the UK's national press had increased by 260 percent from the previous decade.[35] More worrying was how more than 90 percent of that coverage coupled reports and stories about Muslims and Islam with matters of violence, conflict, and terrorism. Much the same was evident in the political spaces also. Not only did Muslim communities come under intense political scrutiny, but the trend also prompted a raft of new counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation that disproportionately problematized Muslims. In many ways, both the public and political spaces were mutually affirmative of Islamophobic attitudes.

The impact of this on the general public's views toward Muslims was readily apparent. From research published in 2010, 83 percent of the UK general public felt that the levels of discrimination and hate experienced by Muslims were higher than it had ever been.[36] Conversely, the 2009-2010 British Social Attitudes Survey showed that Muslims were the least popular religious com-

munity in the UK, with more than half of the respondents stating they would be concerned by the building of a large mosque near to where they live.[37] Only 15 percent felt the same about a large church. While not Islamophobic per se, the findings afford an illustration of how Muslims were increasingly being perceived and understood. Perhaps unsurprisingly, research also showed that Muslims increasingly felt that they were more likely to become a victim of hate crime than any other minority community.[38] Accordingly, the majority of Muslims felt that more needed to be done to tackle Islamophobia.[39]

Following the election of the Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010, and Warsi's speech a year later, two new responses to Islamophobia were announced: the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia (APPG) and a Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred. Both sought to replicate an earlier governmental response to anti-Semitism.[40] Warmly welcomed and understood to be politically symbolic, these responses were designed to signal to British Muslims that not only was the Conservative-led Government taking the threat of Islamophobia seriously but so too was it markedly different from its New Labour predecessor.

However, the APPG was dogged by controversy from the outset. Following recriminations at the appointment of ENGAGE –a London-based Muslim organization that undertook media, civic, and political engagement– as APPG Secretariat, a number of politicians publicly resigned, citing allegations that some affiliated with ENGAGE were 'Islamists,' a term that in the UK setting is used in a pejorative way and functions as a proxy insult. As the report of the investigation into the controversy notes:

> Most damning of all however is the realisation that Islamophobia… was completely removed from the frame within which all of the [stakeholders]… operated. Islamophobia was lost. All [of those involved] overlooked or sidelined any focus on Islamophobia, some in preference of pursuing their own individual, organizational, political or other agendas… since its launch in November 2010 the APPG on Islamophobia has been little more than a sideshow: an unhelpful, unwanted and unnecessary distraction from giving Islamophobia the rightful, timely and necessary attention it so desperately needs.[41]

Following the removal of ENGAGE, the APPG was relaunched in 2011. From early on, however, it was clear the APPG's initial impetus had dissipated. Despite facilitating a handful of meetings, the APPG became increasingly incoherent and lacked strategy. Tellingly, the APPG –unlike its anti-Semitism equivalent– failed to produce a single output.

The newly established Working Group brought together representatives from Muslim organizations and non-Muslim civil society organizations, as well as

Protestors, from the platform Stand Up To Racism, hold banners in front of Conservative Party offices, after former British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's Islamophobic article, which included negative references to women who wear niqab or burqa, August 9, 2018, London, UK.

İLYAS TAYFUN SALCI / AA

imams and academics. It also included representatives from governmental departments, the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the private secretaries of individual politicians. From its terms of reference, the Working Group aimed to make recommendations to the government and others to reduce Islamophobia, respond to local or international events, review trends in anti-Muslim sentiment and hatred, increase and improve the reporting and recording of Islamophobia, and report progress to Parliament.[42] However, problems soon became apparent, including the lack of clarity about the Working Group's members. In addition to differences of opinion about the accountability of government, there were significant differences about the need to raise awareness of the realities of Islamophobia in the UK. As one member put it, there was no good argument to convince him of 'putting his head above the parapet,' a colloquialism implying that you do not want to do something because you do not want to be criticized for it.[43] For someone appointed to a public group, such an approach seems quite bizarre. Nonetheless, the Working Group continues to function, albeit in a largely invisible way, and, to date, has had little tangible impact.

Most recently, another APPG –this time on British Muslims– put forward a working definition of Islamophobia as a means of trying to resolve contestation over the term itself. In its report, *Islamophobia Defined: The Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia*, it proposed the following definition:

"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."[44] As the APPG explained, such a definition was necessary given that successive British governments, individual politicians, and the public had overlooked Islamophobia and, importantly, Islamophobia had been excluded from the UK government's Hate Crime Action Plan 2017.[45] Maybe unsurprisingly, the government rejected the APPG's definition. While Allen sets out a detailed exposition of the response to the government's rejection,[46] one aspect of this was the suggestion that Islamophobia was a 'type' of racism. While the popular consensus was that neither being Muslim nor adhering to the religion of Islam constituted a 'race,' similar debates have taken place in the scholarly spaces also. This is particularly evident in the work of those such as Carr, who argues that 'anti-Muslim racism' is more accurate and therefore, more appropriate than Islamophobia.[47] The reasons for this are twofold. First, because of the utility afforded by the term 'racism' and thereby, the potential to alert society to the process of racialization that is occurring as regards perceptions of Muslimness. Second, because society typically 'gets' racism and by consequence, the need to tackle it. While there remains a lack of consensus on the matter, it is worth highlighting this emerging front in how Islamophobia is conceived and understood and, importantly, criticized and contested.

To this day, therefore, there are no strategies, policies, or legislation in the UK that specifically seek to tackle Islamophobia

In hindsight, as commendable as it was promising, Warsi's speech did create wholly unrealistic expectations that every subsequent UK government has failed to meet. In this respect, the Conservative governmental approaches to Islamophobia that followed her speech have been as much a failure as those that preceded it. When the Conservatives came to power via the Coalition in 2010, the change did appear imminent. More than a decade on that change has never happened. To this day, therefore, there are no strategies, policies, or legislation in the UK that specifically seek to tackle Islamophobia. Likewise, there are no formally adopted definitions, nor is there any widespread consensus –whether in public or political spaces– that Islamophobia even exists, let alone requires a response. Even the name used, 'Islamophobia,' is routinely contested and criticized, rejected by some as inappropriate, and unfit to use. As the Runnymede Trust put it in 1997, Islamophobia remains a challenge in the UK.[48]

Understanding and contextualizing Islamophobia in today's UK today, therefore, is far from straightforward. Returning to Hargreaves, notions of Islamophobia continue to be vague and are –at times– routinely conflated with a range of quite disparate issues.[49] Such criticisms do however fail to take into

account the critical turn evident in the existing scholarly literature and the attempts by some to narrow the focus so that Islamophobia is understood and conceived in distinction from other discriminatory phenomena such as racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism among others.[50] Doing so makes it possible to differentiate actual manifestations of Islamophobia, which specifically target Muslims, from the vast array of socio-political processes that potentially shape how people think and act toward Muslims. Given that the latter is rather more subjective and thereby amorphous; focusing on the former affords greater tangibility and therefore reality. In this article, and in the following section, these tangible manifestations are focused on better understand how Islamophobia impacts and affects the everyday lives of Muslims living in today's UK. In the conclusion, an attempt to make some preliminary links between these tangible manifestations and the wider context of the UK's contemporary public and political spaces will be made.

Experiences of Islamophobia

*"F**k off Back to Iraq if You Don't Like It Here" – The Othering of Verbal Abuse*

As the existing literature shows, Islamophobic hate crime in the UK is largely experienced in 'low-level' ways.[51] In this context, 'low-level' can be seen to refer to hate crimes that manifest as verbal abuse, being spat at, having headscarves or face veils forcibly removed (from Muslim women), being harassed, or receiving expressions of mild intimidation.[52] Nonetheless, it is important to stress that 'high-level' incidents do occur regularly in the UK. Among others, these include the murder of 82-year-old Mohammed Saleem in Birmingham in 2013, the deployment of nail bombs outside three mosques in the Black Country region the same year, and the van ramming of Muslims leaving London's Finsbury Park Mosque by Darren Osborne in 2017, killing one. Nonetheless, from the research undertaken, it is evident that the majority of experiences have centered around verbal abuse that draws on a variety of stereotypical tropes about Muslims and Islam. The first of these emphasizes the perceived 'Otherness' of Muslims and the view they do not belong in the UK. Accordingly, respondents routinely spoke about being told to "go home" or "go back to where you belong." One male respondent explained how:

> I was on my lunch when this man –he looked in his 40s– just walked past me and screamed, "f**k off back to Iraq if you don't like it here you dirty f**king Muslim…" I didn't know what to do and by the time I did, he'd walked off anyway. Funny thing is, I've never been out the country and my family is originally from India, nowhere near Iraq.

What is clearly apparent is the lack of accuracy included in much of the verbal abuse: perpetrators seemingly unable to comprehend that Muslims could

ever be a part of 'us' and all that is perceived to comprise. While some consideration has been afforded to the attribution of 'Otherness' and the influence of the 'Islam' and 'the West' dichotomy,[53] here the research shows just how deeply embedded an 'us' and 'them' distinction was/is.

Another way verbal abuse conferred 'Otherness' was through the widespread incidence of racialized terms and attributions

Looking across the studies, the reference to 'Iraq' appears as part of a wider process where verbal abuse routinely included comments being made about Muslim-majority countries where the UK, the U.S., or both had been militarily active. This process was far from static, however. While earlier studies evidence reference being made to countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the latter see these being replaced by references to Syria and ISIS. While theories of Islamophobia have detailed how ideological frames homogenize and essentialize all Muslims without differentiation,[54] the findings here go beyond this, illustrating how theoretical concepts find tangible form in ordinary and everyday thinking about Muslims. To this extent, one might tentatively suggest a link between UK experiences of Islamophobia with geopolitics and 'Western' military conflict in particular.

Another way verbal abuse conferred 'Otherness' was through the widespread incidence of racialized terms and attributions, a topic highlighted by those such as Meer[55] and Garner, and Selod,[56] and which resonates both with the APPG's definition cited previously and with the scholarly work of Carr.[57] In the UK, a more pernicious process was recurrent where verbal abuse would 'double-Other' victims. Here, racialized terms and attributions were un-problematically co-joined with those relating to Muslims and Islam. Some examples include being derogatorily referred to as a "nigger Muslim" or "Muslim monkey." The most common manifestation, however, was the co-joining of the term 'Paki,' a shortened version of Pakistani that in the UK setting is used in derogatorily racist ways. Routinely experienced, one respondent spoke about how she had been told, "f**k off you dirty Paki Muslim." As before, this type of verbal abuse highlights the lack of accuracy evident previously. This was starkly experienced by a white female convert: "…it doesn't matter how white you are…he [the perpetrator] just gave me a really dirty look and said 'f**king Paki bastards.' We're all 'Pakis' in everyone's eyes… all the same, no difference whatsoever… just white Pakis." Her experience resonates with Moosavi's[58] investigation into the experience of white British converts to Islam and Pędziwiatr's[59] study on Polish converts in the UK.

"Soldier Killers" – The Influence of Terror Incidents

In the UK, there is an established link between terror incidents perpetrated by Muslims and sharp increases in hate crimes targeting Muslims in the im-

Boris Johnson, UK's current Prime Minister, has been routinely accused of being anti-Muslim.

JEFF J MITCHELL / Getty Images

mediate aftermath of such incidents.[60] While this is true of the research undertaken here, the findings suggest the potential for a much greater impact and influence. While terror incidents may catalyze an immediate, albeit temporary increase in hate crimes, so too do those same incidents continue to shape and inform the content of Islamophobic hate crimes for a much longer period of time. On one level, this is evident in the recurrence of both male and female respondents being called 'terrorist.' For female respondents, this was typically embellished with accusations of them carrying bombs or explosives under their clothes or bags. One female respondent traveling on a busy commuter train spoke about how two men repeatedly called her 'a terrorist,' asking whether she was 'carrying a bomb.' Refusing to answer, the men then tapped her head to check whether there was anything under her *hijab*.

The research also offers some preliminary evidence that in the UK at least, the longer-term impact of terror incidents is dynamic. In this respect, each new terror incident supersedes and updates the content of the verbal abuse experienced. In the early studies, this was evident in the impact of 9/11 and al-Qaeda: i.e., male respondents speaking about being called "bin Laden." One female respondent remembered being called "Mrs. bin Laden" while being physically assaulted. Following the brutal murder of British soldier Lee Rigby by two Muslims on the streets of South London in 2013, references to 9/11 and al-Qaeda were superseded and updated with the more contemporary epithets of 'murderer' and 'soldier killer.' This link was not lost on respondents:

> [It was] definitely a reaction to recent events… because [Rigby's murder] was so horrific… the Muslims who do it cause a backlash and antagonize a lot of people… ordinary people like us then get it in the neck… we get the brunt of their rubbish even though we've done nothing wrong.

In the most recent studies, references to Rigby were subsequently superseded and updated with references to ISIS. Similarly, the research undertaken across the ten studies also shows how non-terror-related issues and incidents are also evident in the content of Islamophobic hate crime. This was most notable in re-

lation to male respondents and the widespread use of the term 'paedo' or 'Muslim paedo,' an abbreviated, colloquial term for pedophile. The use of this term increased rapidly across the ten studies, correlating with the increased focus in the public and political spaces on a number of sexual exploitation scandals involving men of Pakistani heritage.[61] So too was there some correlation with the increased use of the phrase 'grooming gang' by the UK's mainstream media to refer to those same scandals. As one male respondent put it, "people are simple… they look at headlines and they make their minds up for them."

To date, little has been shown to be known about the male experience of Islamophobia in the UK

"I'd Only Be More Visible if I Started Waving a Flag" – Identifying Muslim Women

In the existing literature, much has been made of the negotiation of Muslim women's identities in the context of the 'Western' world. While these include those such as Knott and Khocker,[62] Afshar *et al.*,[63] Dwyer,[64] and Haw[65] among others, some have specifically focused on the visibility of Muslim women and the wearing of *hijab* or *niqab*, among them Dwyer,[66] Tarlo,[67] and Afshar.[68] This body of work has clearly shaped and influenced research into the experience of Islamophobic hate crime among Muslim women. What is known is that much of the verbal abuse targeted toward them focuses on their visibility, the *hijab* and *niqab* functioning as a trigger:

> We're the most recognizable people in the country nowadays… who doesn't know what a Muslim woman looks like? They look exactly like me. They can see me a mile off… I'd only be more visible if I started waving a flag.

As another female respondent put it, her appearance made her an 'easy target' for anyone looking to take revenge for any number of terrorist incidents. As she explained, "the way I look makes it easy, so easy for them to take revenge on Muslims for whatever reason." While there is little research into perpetrator motivation, a number of female respondents spoke about how –in the wake of their experience of Islamophobic hate crime– they questioned whether they should change the way they look; whether they should try and look –as one respondent put it– 'less Muslim' when in wider UK society.

For those wearing the *niqab* –which is estimated to be less than 1 percent of all Muslim women in the UK– their experience, is rather more aggressive and threatening. This included respondents being spat on, having their *niqabs* forcibly removed being variously pushed (into the road, off buses, and downstairs), and randomly punched. In the most extreme case evidenced by the research, one *niqab* wearer recounted being attacked with bicycle chains. Much of the verbal abuse experienced focused on the shape, analogous style, or perceived

What was interesting was how some attributed this to developments within the UK's far-right and how they had begun to use pig's blood and body parts in protests against mosques across the country

function of the *niqab*; one respondent said she was mocked in a supermarket by two women who said she looked like 'a f**king letterbox;' another was surrounded by a group of young people chanting 'ninja, ninja, ninja.' Others spoke about being told to 'take that f**king thing off,' that their *niqab* 'was disgusting' and, in line with earlier findings, being told she 'doesn't belong in this country… it ain't British.'

To date, little has been shown to be known about the male experience of Islamophobia in the UK.[69] There is a likely pragmatic explanation for this: Muslim men experience lower levels of hate crime, and are less visible and therefore, less identifiable than Muslim women. While so, male respondents did speak about how beards, caps, and certain types of attire associated with the religion of Islam seemed to be causal. The majority of male respondents however made no mention of this. From the research undertaken, some distinct differences were apparent as regards male and female respondents. While the majority of female respondents spoke about being targeted for how they looked –as 'easy targets'– the same was not always clear for male respondents. One who was hit across the back of the head before being verbally abused explained:

> He [the perpetrator] must have seen me leave the *masjid* [mosque]… how else would he have known I was Muslim? I mean, he did because when he hit me, he called me a 'f**king Muslim' then a 'f**king paedo'… I don't even look like one, do I?"

The rhetorical question is interesting because the research shows an acute awareness among Muslim men of the potential impact and consequences of their visibility despite the fact it did not seem that causal. Nonetheless and like some female respondents, some Muslim men spoke about thinking of changing their appearance. One spoke about how he had given serious thought to how he 'might look less Muslim.' Some did change certain behaviors, for instance carrying rucksacks, reading Arabic texts on their phones, and speaking non-English languages in busy public spaces across the UK. Self-censorship and changing behaviors over a change of appearance appeared more acceptable to Muslim men.

"A Bomb, Nah I Just Laughed" – Intimidation, Violence, and Threat

Not all experiences of Islamophobia were low-level. Some respondents had high-level experiences, including threat, intimidation, and physical violence. Some were especially extreme: one respondent talking about how their local

mosque was subjected to an arson attack while two others recalled having nail bombs planted outside their respective mosques. As one respondent said:

> …I couldn't believe it was my mosque… a bomb, nah I just laughed, it couldn't be, right? But then I started panicking because what if I'd had my son with me and it'd gone off… gone, he'd have been gone just because I'd had him with me… scary.

It is interesting that despite the above respondent's experience relating to one of three nail bombs left outside mosques, there was relatively little national media coverage of this, highlighting the uncertain relationship that exists between the realities of Islamophobia and the UK's mainstream media referred to previously.

One trend to emerge from the research involved the use of pig's blood and pieces of pig's carcasses during the more high-level experiences of Islamophobia. While relatively low in number, the experiences of two respondents afford a worrying insight. The first spoke about how a number of pig's heads were left around the perimeter of her house in the time between her husband leaving for work and the respondent taking their children to school. While she said it did not intimidate her, she admitted it did make her fearful for her children's safety in the confines of their own 'safe space.' The second spoke about how:

> I had a call from the guy who opened the mosque every day… I got there, there was blood all over the door, round the frame… a pig's head had been thrown on the roof and a snout had been nailed to a post. I mean, it's disgusting… who even thinks about doing that?

What was interesting was how some attributed this to developments within the UK's far-right and how they had begun to use pig's blood and body parts in protests against mosques across the country. Perhaps the most prominent instance featured the far-right group Britain First, which claimed to have buried a pig's carcass on the ground where a mosque was scheduled to be built in Dudley, West Midlands.[70] While there was no specific evidence that these incidents were linked, it is interesting to note the resonance.

Islamophobia in the UK: Tangible Experiences versus Public and Political Acknowledgement

The new findings presented here clearly help to better understand exactly how Muslim men and women experience tangible forms of Islamophobia –in the form of hate crimes– in today's UK. In addition to adding new evidence to that which was already known from prior research and the existing scholarly canon, so too did the ability to look across the ten qualitative studies help with

In the context of the UK's public and political spaces, the evidence presented here from the analysis of the ten studies unequivocally challenges the contestation that Islamophobia in the UK is little more than mere 'fiction'

the generation of new knowledge and understanding. In going beyond mere affirmations of that which was already known, the research here illustrates how different types of attire –whether Islamic or not– caused different levels of aggression and threat, the most extreme being associated with the wearing of the *niqab*. Likewise, also the process of 'double othering and the routine coupling of racial and religious insults and abuse. In this respect, Islamophobia would not only seem to be driven by the 'Otherness' of Muslim-ness but also by the 'Otherness' of race. While so, the shifting nature of the attribution of notions of belonging to/in Iraq and Afghanistan before being replaced by Syria and ISIS showed that perceptions of the 'Otherness' of race and belonging are prone to change, seemingly shaped by geopolitics and military intervention as much as anything else. Similar also, the rapidly shifting language that was shown to go from 'bin Laden' and 'Mrs. bin Laden,' to 'murderer' and 'soldier killer,' and even more worrying 'paedo,' the latter being one of the most concerning developments in the contemporary UK setting.

In the context of the UK's public and political spaces, the evidence presented here from the analysis of the ten studies unequivocally challenges the contestation that Islamophobia in the UK is little more than mere 'fiction.' Articles like this, and the research that underpins them, are therefore rightly and indeed necessarily disruptive. Juxtaposing empirical evidence of the tangible realities of Islamophobia alongside the politicization and contestation attributed to Islamophobia in the public and political spaces highlights the very real tension that exists in the UK and has indeed existed for some time. Evidencing Islamophobia as a real and tangible discriminatory phenomenon goes some way toward countering how that same Islamophobia is rendered quite invisible, roundly ignored, and dismissed as insignificant in the UK's public and political spaces. That the UK continues to have no policies or legislation to specifically tackle Islamophobia in all of its manifestations, despite the very real impact it has on the lives of individuals, families, and communities, remains staggering. Accordingly, there exists a substantive disconnect between Islamophobia as a publicly and politically contested concept and Islamophobia as a real discriminatory phenomenon.

In the UK today, Islamophobia is a highly political and politicized phenomenon. Likewise, its contestation. So too is Islamophobia a real and tangible phenomenon, that detrimentally impacts and affects a host of ordinary people going about their everyday lives for no other 'reason' except that they either

identify as being Muslim or are perceived as being Muslim by others. For that to change, more needs to be done about the very real and tangible experiences of Islamophobia evidenced here, while simultaneously highlighting the paucity of evidence underpinning the unfounded claims regularly put forward by Islamophobia's critics and the ongoing indolence of those with the power –publicly and politically– to bring about change.

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