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For "Jewish" Read "Muslim"? Islamophobia as a Form of Racialisation of Ethno-Religious Groups in Britain Today[1]

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> I believe we can learn a lot from the history of the Jews of Europe. In many ways they are the first, the oldest Europeans. We, the new Europeans, are just starting to learn the complex art of living with multiple allegiances… The Jews have been forced to master this art since antiquity. They were both Jewish and Italian, or Jewish and French, Jewish and Spanish, Jewish and Polish, Jewish and German. Proud of their ties with Jewish communities throughout the continent, and equally proud of their bonds with their own country.
>
> — Romano Prodi

INTRODUCTION

The de-stigmatisation of Jewish people is now a taken-for-granted fact in the United States, where a population of less than 2 per cent is firmly represented in the elites of a country, which, since about President Reagan's time, has started referring to itself as the leader of a Judeo-Christian civilisation. The transformation in Europe – a continent that, for many centuries, has been a nightmare for Jewish people – while not as remarkable and uneven across its various countries – is also a fact that receives little attention from scholars of contemporary (in)equality. While Jewish people are a significant presence amongst those working as students and practitioners on issues of 'difference' and inequality, Jews as minority population groups are not a primary focus of equality policy and legislation. In a marked contrast to the once seemingly intractable 'Jewish question' that haunted the continent throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which periodically facilitated episodes of persecution and genocide, there is evidence to suggest that the contemporary representation of Jewish minorities within European public discourses has undergone a process of 'normalisation' (Bunzl, 2007). The affirmations of Romano Prodi,

[1] This chapter draws on 'Refutations of Racism in the Muslim Question', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43(3/4), 332-351. We are grateful to the editors of that journal and Routledge for the permission to use sections from the earlier piece.

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former President of the European Commission, made during his tenure and elaborated above perhaps exemplify "the ways in which leaders today champion the preservation…of Europe's Jewish communities" (Bunzl, 2005: 502). And it comes as some relief to learn that "no European party of any significance and this includes the various extreme right-wing movements on the continent, currently champions a specifically anti-Semitic agenda" (ibid.).[2] An optimistic interpretation of this state of affairs would be to emphasise the existence of something like a mainstream consensus on the current unacceptability of public articulations of anti-Semitism (Benbassa, 2007).

Of course, this should not be read as a suggestion that European societies are free from all the guises that anti-Semitism can assume (Chanes, 2004). Even in Britain, where extreme right-wing and anti-semitic political parties have never flourished in the sorts of ways familiar on the continent partly due to an electoral system that squeezes out smaller parties, survey evidence complied by Field (2006) reports that hostility to British Jews continues to exist and often stems from the view that "the loyalty of British Jews to Israel transcends their allegiance to Britain" (Field, 2007: 465). Such findings may be added to others in support of the view that Britain is experiencing a resurgence of anti-Semitism.[3] This is a concern that has resulted in a high-profile All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism (2006), which has also been taken up in public and media discussion in a way that has incorporated the concerns of leading Jewish spokespeople and intellectuals.[4] What appears to have gone unnoticed, however, is that a number of surveys[5] have consistently found that:

[2] The same cannot be said of these European parties' attitudes to Muslims in Europe. See, for example, statements made by the Austrian Freedom party on the prospect of Turkey's accession to the EU; the Flemish Interest/Flemish Block's statement that "Islam is now the no. 1 enemy not only of Europe but of the world"; as well as the La Front Nationale literature on the "Islamization of France" (Bunzle, 2007, pp: 1-47). Parallels can be found in the leading, but much less mainstream, far-right British National Party (BNP) which frequently campaign on what it describes as 'the Muslim problem' (see Meer, 2007). For examples of less flagrant, more coded, but equally alarming comments made by British politicians and intellectuals see Meer (2006, 2008) and Meer and Noorani (2008).

[3] For example, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 547 anti-Semitic incidents during 2007 - the second-highest annual total since it began recording anti-Semitic incidents in 1984. These incidents include cases of extreme violence, assault, damage and desecration of property, threats, and abusive behaviour. See CST anti-Semitic incidents reports (2007) available at: http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/Incidents%5FReport%5F07.pdf accessed 1 March, 2008.

[4] See 'The War on Britain's Jews', Channel Four, 9 July 2007.

[5] Compiled by Field (2007 – see appendix I pp: 472-5) and include:
(i) G-1990c: 1 June–20 September, Gallup, n=1,474; Timms, 1992, p. 17; Ashford & Timms, 1992, pp. 14–15; Inglehart et al., 1998, p. v.76; Hastings & Hastings, 1999, p. 547, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org;
(ii) G-1990d: 18–24 July, Gallup, n=1,015; Gallup Political Index, 360, August 1990, p. 15;
(iii) G-1996a: October–November, NOP, n=933 whites, 282 Asians, 252 Afro-Caribbeans, 252 Jews; Institute for Public Policy Research, 1997;

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> *Islamophobic views in Britain would appear easily to outstrip anti-Semitic sentiments in terms of frequency (more than double the size of the hard core), intensity and overtness… somewhere between one in five and one in four Britons now exhibits a strong dislike of, and prejudice against, Islam and Muslims*…. (Field, 2007: 465)

While quantitative surveys do not always provide the best accounts of prejudice and discrimination, they can be useful in discerning trends, alerting us in this case to the widespread prevalence of an anti-Muslim feeling.[6] What makes this alarming, however, is that such findings are frequently met with derision by otherwise self-avowedly anti-racist intellectuals or legislators who either remain sceptical over the scale of the problem (Malik, 2005; Hansen, 2006; Joppke, 2007) and/or, indeed, of its racialised character (cf Toynbee, 1997, 2005; Abbot, 2005; Davis, 2005; Marshall-Andrews, 2005;). This means that, while Muslims are increasingly the subject of hostility and discrimination, as well as governmental racial profiling, surveillance and targeting by intelligence agencies[7], their status as

(iv) G-1999a: 18 October–8 November, Quality Fieldwork and Research Services, n=1,000; Halman, 2001, pp. 37–43; Inglehart et al., 2004, table A128; Borooah & Mangan, 2007; http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org;
(v) G-2004a: 23–29 February, NOP, n=500; http://www.people-press.org; (vi) G-2005c: 25 April–7 May, NOP, n=750; http://www.pewglobal.org; (vii) G-2006e: 4–26 April, NOP, n=490; http://www.pewglobal.org.

[6] For example, in the first two weeks after the London Bombings, according to one charity that is comparable to the CST, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) registered over 200 Islamophobic incidents. These included sixty five incidents of violent physical attacks and criminal damage, and one fatal stabbing where the victim was accosted by attackers shouting 'Taliban' (IHRC press release, 25 July, 2005). More recent large-scale comparative studies conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Survey have confirmed this trend by putting forward the alarming finding that one in four in Britons expresses attitudinal hostility to Muslims (see http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=262 accessed 10 December, 2008).

[7] See, for example, calls from the outgoing head of MI5, Dame Eliza Mannigham-Buller, for the police to develop a network of Muslim spies who could provide intelligence on their co-religionists (Evans and Ford, 2007). This suggestion proceeds the disclosure that a number of British intelligence agencies have monitored over 100,000 British-Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca (Leppard, 2007), alongside an unpopular attempt by the DfES to encourage universities to report 'Asian-looking' students suspected of involvement in 'Islamic political radicalism' (see Dodd, 2006). These findings are compounded by the astonishing figure that between 2001 and 2002, instances of the 'stop and search' of 'Asians' (categorisations via religion are not kept for instances of 'stop and search') increased in London by forty one per cent (Metropolitan Police Authority, 2004 p. 21), whilst figures for the national picture point to a twenty five percent increase for the 'stop and search' of people self-defining as 'other' (Home Office, 2006a: p. 24). The latter can include Muslims of Turkish, Arabic and North-African ethnic origin, amongst others, for, while sixty eight per cent of the British Muslim population have a South-Asian background, the remaining minority are comprised of several 'other' categorisations. These examples would support Rana's (2007: 149) conclusion that "current practices of racial profiling in

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victims of racism is frequently challenged or denied. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that, instead of highlighting and alleviating anti-Muslim discrimination, the complaint of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia has conversely but, frequently, invited criticism upon Muslims themselves (Meer, 2008; 2007; 2006). In this article we explore some of the reasons why there may be less sympathy for the notion that Muslim minorities could be subject to racism by virtue of their real or perceived 'Muslimness' (in the way that it is rightly accepted that Jewish minorities in Europe can be the object of racism by virtue of their real or perceived 'Jewishness'). After setting out our argument and drawing upon primary interviews, we conclude that, taken together, our data is instructive in illustrating how an anxiety over the 'Muslim question' informs a hesitancy to name anti-Muslim sentiment as racism.

RELIGION AND RACIALISATION

The interactions between racial and religious antipathy can be helpfully drawn out through Modood's (2005: 9–10) description of anti-Semitism as "a form of [ethno-]religious persecution [which] became, over a long, complicated, evolving but contingent history, not just a form of cultural racism but one with highly systematic biological formulations." He continues:

> *[C]enturies before those modern ideas we have come to call 'racism'…the move from religious antipathy to racism may perhaps be witnessed in post-Reconquista Spain when Jews and Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled. At this stage, the oppression can perhaps be characterised as religious. Soon afterward, converted Jews and Muslims and their offspring began to be suspected of not being true Christian believers, a doctrine developed amongst some Spaniards that this was because their old religion was in their blood. In short, because of their biology, conversion was impossible. Centuries later, these views about race became quite detached from religion and in Nazi and related doctrines were given a thoroughly scientific-biologic cast and constitute a paradigmatic and extreme version of modern racism.* (ibid.)

Now this should not be read as an endorsement of the view that all racism can be reduced to biological inferences. Biological determinism may be the classical form that racism took in Europe in the nineteenth century and later, but it should not be equated with racism per se. Indeed, in the example

the War on Terror perpetuate a logic that demands the ability to define what a Muslim looks like from appearance and visual cues. This is not based purely on superficial cultural markers such as religious practice, clothing, language, and identification. A notion of race is at work in the profiling of Muslims."

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above, modern biological racism has some roots in pre-modern religious antipathy – an argument that is also made by Rana (2007). Moreover, while racism in modern Europe took a biologistic form, what is critical to the racialisation of a group is not the invocation of a biology but a radical 'otherness' and the perception and treatment of individuals in terms of physical appearance and descent. The implication is that non-Christian religious minorities in Europe can undergo processes of racialisation, where the 'otherness' or 'groupness' that is appealed to is connected to a cultural and racial otherness, which relates to European peoples' historical and contemporary perceptions of those people that they perceive to be non-European (Goldberg, 2006). This means that how Muslims in Europe are perceived today is not un-connected to how they have been perceived and treated by European empires and their racial hierarchies, as well as by Christian Islamophobia and the Crusades in earlier centuries (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008). This is because their perception and treatment clearly has a religious and cultural dimension but, equally clearly, bares a phenotypical component. For while it is true that 'Muslim' is not a (putative) biological category in the way that 'black' or 'south Asian', aka 'Paki', or Chinese is, neither was 'Jew.' It took a long, non-linear history of racialisation to turn an ethno-religious group into a race (Modood, 2006). More precisely, the latter did not so much as replace the former but superimposed itself because, even though no one denied that Jews were a religious community with a distinctive language(s), culture(s) and religion, Jews still came to be seen as a race and with horrific consequences (see also Rattansi, 2007; Meer and Noorani, 2008). Similarly, Bosnian Muslims were 'ethnically cleansed' because they came to be identified as a 'racial' group by people who were phenotypically, linguistically and culturally the same as themselves. The ethnic cleanser, unlike an Inquisitor, wasted no time in finding out what people believed, if and how often they went to a mosque and so on: their victims were racially identified as Muslims.

BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL RACISM

So race is not just about biology or even 'colour,' for, while racialisation has to pick on some features of a people related to physical appearance and ancestry (otherwise racism cannot be distinguished from other forms of groupism), it need only be a marker and not necessarily denote a form of determinism. This is illustrated in the conceptualisation of cultural racism as a two step process (Modood, 1997). While biological racism is the antipathy, exclusion and unequal treatment of people on the basis of their physical appearance or other imputed physical differences, saliently in Britain their non 'whiteness,' cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse, which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British, 'civilised' norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who also suffer from biological racism. Post-war racism in Britain has been simultaneously culturalist and biological, and,

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while the latter is essential to the racism in question, it is, in fact, the less explanatory aspect of a complex phenomenon. Biological interpretations have not governed what white British people, including racists, have thought or done or how they have stereotyped, treated and related to non-whites, and biological ideas have had increasingly less force both in the context of personal relationships and in the conceptualisation of groups. As white people's interactions with non-white individuals increased, they did not become necessarily less conscious of group differences, but they were far more likely to ascribe group differences to upbringing, customs, forms of socialisation and self-identity than to biological heredity.

The interesting question arises as to whether it could be a one-step racism: could colour racism decline and fade away and yet cultural racism remain and perhaps even grow? One can certainly imagine a future in which a group could continue to have their culture vilified while colour racism simultaneously declined, and the distinction between what might be called racism proper and 'culturalism' is commonly held and continues to be argued for (Fredrickson, 2002; Blum, 2002). Yet, while it appears that to discriminate only against those perceived to be culturally different might be borderline racial discrimination, where cultural essentialism and inferiorization may be involved, it would certainly share some of the qualities of what we know of racist stereotyping and practise today. Even then, however, it may still be regarded as a cultural prejudice or cultural exclusionism rather than racism per se, so that, if persons are targeted only on the basis of their behaviour and not on the basis of their ancestry, then might we not have something we should call culturalism rather than racism?

While this is an interesting question, it appears to go against what we should expect from communities and social dynamics since cultures and cultural practices are usually internally diverse, containing and omitting various "authentic" elements and adaptations and mixes**.** It follows then that the culturalised targeting could very easily be expansive rather than purist and so, in one way or another, catch most, if not all, cultural minorities in that group. For example, a non-religious Muslim might still be targeted as a cultural Muslim or Muslim by community, which means Muslim by background, which means birth and ancestry. This means that it is not clear that culturalism, where it is associated with distinct communities, can really be distinguished from racism in practice, even if it can be in theory. Some have argued that culturalism is a form of racism because it treats culture as a form of quasi-biological determinism and/or because culture is being made to stand in for a prior 'racism' (Barker 1981; Gilroy 1987; Solomos 1991). But this seems a misreading of cultural racism and is too committed to approximating cultural racism to biological racism. If we accept that racism does not necessarily involve attributing qualities that inhere in a deterministic law-like way in all members of a group, then we do not have to rule out cultural racism as an example of racism. This means that cultural racism is not merely a proxy for racism but a form of

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racism in its own right, and that, while racism involves some reference to physical appearance or ancestry, it does not require any form of biological determinism, only a physical identification on a group basis, attributable to descent. As such we should guard against the characterisation of racism as a form of 'inherentism' or 'biological determinism,' which leaves little space to conceive the ways in which cultural racism draws upon physical appearance as one marker amongst others. We thus maintain that formulations of racialisation should not be solely premised upon conceptions of biology in a way that ignores religion, culture and so forth (cf. Miles, 1989).

While these theoretical linkages illustrate how Islamophobia as anti-Muslim sentiment can constitute a form of racism, the discussion thus far has not considered whether and how it may be deemed less problematic than other forms of racism. Contrasting perceptions of anti-Muslim sentiment with anti-Semitism may, once more, provide a fruitful line of inquiry for the reasons a British Member of the European Parliament posits:

> *The media and Islamphobia are two of the most potent combinations of recent times…. You see anti-Semitism is loaded with a very heightened awareness…that creates a situation which is very emotive and rightly so. With Islam the difference is that there isn't that historical baggage. The media are not identifying a group of people and saying that this is what they suffered. […] There's also a sense of confusion about Islam versus cult like behaviour because there hasn't been a very good analysis in the media and popular culture generally*. (Interview with Meer on 3 January, 2008)

To explore these issues, the article turns its attention to some journalists who make these allegedly formative contributions to our understanding of anti-Muslim sentiment (for a fuller discussion of the role of journalists see Meer, 2006). To this end we detail in-depth British interview data[8] with one senior home affairs broadcast journalist and three senior newspaper commissioning editors, two broadsheet and one tabloid, to consider what this can reveal about the topic at hand.

FRAMING RACISM DISCRETELY

Our data suggests that one of the explanations for the degree of ambivalence attributed to anti-Muslim sentiment reflects a commonly held narrow definition of racism, which assumes that the discrimination directed at conventionally, involuntarily, conceived racial minorities cannot by

[8] This research was funded the by the European Commission and forms part of A European Approach to Multicultural Citizenship: Legal Political and Educational Challenges (EMILIE) Contract no. CIT5-CT-2005-02820. While some respondent were open to possibility of being named, to avoid any ambiguity all respondents remain anonymous.

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definition resemble that directed at Muslim minorities. This reckoning is premised upon the assumption that Muslim identities are religious identities that are voluntarily chosen (see Modood's (2006) rejoinder in his discussion of the Danish Cartoon affair and the case study of Incitement to Religious Hatred legislation in Meer (2008)). So it is frequently stated that, while gender, racial and sexuality based identities are ascribed or involuntary categories of birth, being a Muslim is about chosen beliefs and that Muslims, therefore, need or ought to have less legal protection than these other kinds of identities.[9] What this ignores, however, is that people do not choose to be or not to be born into a Muslim family. This is not to impose an identity or a way of being on people who may choose to passively deny or actively reject their Muslim identity because, consistent with the right of self-dissociation, the rejection of Muslim identification or adoption of a different self-definition should be recognized where a claim upon it is made. The point is that no one chooses to be born into a society where to look like a Muslim or to be a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility, or failure to get the job you applied for.[10] One frequent reaction to this complaint, however, is the charge that Muslim minorities are quick to adopt a 'victim mentality.' These two separate but interlinked issues are illustrated in the following comments of a very senior journalist with editorial and commissioning responsibilities at the national centre-right broadsheet:

> *It [Islamophobia] doesn't mean anything to me. No, it's a device or a construct that's been used to cover an awful lot of people and censor debate… The racism thing is a bit difficult to sustain because we are talking about a religion here, not race and you have plenty of people who are not Muslim, if you are trying to equate Muslims with South Asians, obviously that's not necessarily the case at all* (Interview with Meer on 22 January, 2008).

This extract conveys the view that the term Islamophobia is used politically to silence potential criticism of Islam and Muslims and is particularly invalid

[9] For example, Polly Toynbee, writing in *The Guardian*, has stated that she reserves the 'right' to affront religious minorities on matters of faith because "race is something people cannot choose and it defines nothing about them as people. But beliefs are what people choose to identify with…The two cannot be blurred into one which is why the word Islamophobia is a nonsense" (see Polly Toynbee, 'My right to offend a fool', The *Guardian*, 10 June 2005). Elsewhere she has proclaimed: "I am an Islamophobe and proud of it!" (see Polly Toynbee, 'In defence of Islamophobia', The *Independent*, 23 October 1997).

[10] Of course how Muslims respond to these circumstances will vary. Some will organise resistance, while others will try to stop looking like Muslims (the equivalent of 'passing' for white); some will build an ideology out of their subordination; others will not, just as a woman can choose to be a feminist or not. Again, some Muslims may define their Islam in terms of piety rather than politics, just as some women may see no politics in their gender, while for others their gender will be at the centre of their politics.

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because racism is only plausible where ethnic groups – not ethnically heterogeneous religious groups - are concerned.[11] The journalist continues:

> *I think I probably went to the first press conference where the phrase came up, I think it was about five or six years ago... Since we were the ones that were being accused of it, it just seemed rather difficult for me to get my head around, because if Islamophobia means a fear of, literally, that was not what we were talking about. We were talking about fear of terrorists who act in the name of Islam; it's a different thing altogether* (interview).

The first sentence of this extract reveals this journalist's first interaction with the term and their sense of grievance in "being accused of it," while the second sentence invokes a criticism also made by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) who insist that it is analytically problematic to cast perceptions of prejudice or discrimination in the language of 'phobias.' The last sentence in this extract, which focuses upon terrorism, is particularly instructive and so will be addressed separately below. In the meantime the characterisation of Islamophobia may be contrasted with another that emerges in the less definitive account of a senior broadcast news editor with responsibilities across broadcast, internet and radio journalism. This journalist expresses a similar anxiety to that of our centre-right natioanl broadsheet respondent in reconciling what he considers to be a 'full and frank' account with the potential charge of anti-Muslim bias in their reporting:

> *[T]here are certainly quite vocal groups of Muslims who are very quick to stress the problems that Muslims can face in this country and work very hard to encourage journalists like me and others to reflect a particular view which might be described as a victim mentality… I am personally not persuaded that it [Islamophobia] is a huge issue in Britain. It is, racism in all its forms is a problem… I think for the most part it's really a very tolerant country so I'm kind of conscious that we mustn't allow ourselves for the sake of a good story to start painting a picture of a slice of British society which does suffer more than it really does….* (Interview with Meer on 3 January, 2008)

[11] Also writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, Michael Burleigh has stated: "Those claiming to speak for the Muslim community have played to the traditional Left-wing imagination by conjuring up the myth of 'far-Right extremism'. In reality, evidence for 'Islamophobia' as distinct from a justified fear of radical Islamist terrorism or a desire to protect our freedoms, institutions and values from those who hold them in contempt is anecdotal and slight" (see Michael Burleigh, 'Religious hatred bill is being used to buy Muslim votes', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 2004).

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While the latter half of this passage reveals a critical perspective on the prevalence of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment, it is interesting to note how, in a marked contrast to the centre-right national broadsheet journalist, the broadcast news respondent comfortably places the issue of Islamophobia alongside issues of racism, which "in all its forms is a problem." This may in part be due to the insistence of "vocal groups of Muslims" that this respondent refers to, for the broadcaster does have a significant policy of diversity awareness training, but the proactive inclusion of Muslim voices is a moot point and is returned to below, as is the characterisation of Muslim complaints forming part of an alleged 'victim mentality.' Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most Muslim-friendly attitude is to be found in the words of a senior figure at a centre-left national broadsheet who describes how treating anti-Muslim sentiment with "less seriousness" can bias the framing of news-items:

> *I think it is easy to slip into… I saw it the other day, and it was three headlines together on one page of the Daily Telegraph, and the headline said something like 'Foreigners live in 1.3 million houses'... Then there was a headline where the word Muslim was being used in a pejorative sense and I thought these things to my mind are quite dangerous… I think that's where some papers make a really big mistake time after time after time.* (Interview with Meer on 29 January, 2008)

One development that might alleviate this tendency is the greater presence of Muslim journalists working across news items on different newspapers. This is a point that is also raised by a senior correspondent with a national tabloid newspaper who contrasts the public service requirement of the BBC with the commercial imperatives of newspaper – and particularly tabloid – journalism, which pursues an aggressive drive for sales:

> *Because the way newspapers in particular work, I don't know that that's their job to reflect Muslims per se - do you know what I mean? […] In my time at the X I remember the Sun hired a Muslim commentator not long after 9/11 and she did a lot of discussion about whether she was going to wear her veil in the picture - Anila Baig. That was all a bit self-conscious. The X had a few first person pieces and features and so on… if there was a story that involved Muslim groups being invited to No. 10 then you would call the Muslim group to see how it'd gone but I wouldn't say it would go any deeper than that. […] I just report as I do every story. I'm not self-consciously having to check myself or judge myself.* (Interview with Meer on 18 January, 2008)

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This extract illustrates the dynamics involved in nurturing 'Muslim voices' within newspapers in a way that can draw attention to how issues of importance to some Muslims, such as the wearing of the veil, may be reported in an educative manner. So, even though it may be perceived as "a bit self conscious," it appears much more substantive than seeking 'Muslim comment' that – by this journalist's own admission – would not penetrate the framing of a story in much depth. This is then related to the final issue that emerges from this paragraph and which concerns the absence of reflexivity in this respondent's conception of journalism, something that is evidently in a stark contrast to our centre-left national broadsheet respondent.

PLACING THE ROLE OF RELIGION

What the last extract also touches upon is a related issue concerning the ways in which religion per se is met with anxiety. One particular implication is that, while curbs on defamation of conventionally conceived ethnic and racial minorities may be seen as progressive, the mocking of Muslims is seen to constitute healthy intellectual debate (for a discussion of these sentiments in Danish cartoon affair see Modood, 2006 and Levey and Modood, 2009). This tendency is perhaps heightened when the religion in question takes a conservative line on topics of gender equality, sexual orientation, and progressive politics generally, leading some commentators who may otherwise sympathise with Muslim minorities to argue that it is difficult to view Muslims as victims when they may themselves be potential oppressors. As Parekh (2006: 180) describes, this can be traced to a perception that Muslims are "collectivist, intolerant, authoritarian, illiberal and theocratic" and that Muslims use their faith as "a self-conscious public statement, not quietly held personal faith but a matter of identity which they must jealously guard and loudly and repeatedly proclaim…not only to remind them of who they are but also to announce to others what they stand for" (bid. 181).[12] It is thus unsurprising to learn that some attitude surveys report that 77% of people in Britain are convinced that "Islam has a lot of fanatical followers", 68% consider it "to have more to do with the middle ages than the modern world", and 64% believe that Islam "treats women badly" (see Field, 2007: 453). These assumptions are present in our BBC journalist's insistence that "the nature of the debate is such that some Muslims most certainly will be offended (interview)."

[12] This is also supported in survey evidence which reports anxiety over the intensity of Muslim religiosity. Field (2007: 457) notes that "in G-2004h, 70% acknowledged that they seemed to take their faith more seriously than Christians, while in G-2005b, 28% had a concern about the presence of those with strong Muslim beliefs. In G-2005c, 80% felt that British Muslims had a keen sense of Islamic identity which was still growing (63%) and which had to be reckoned as a 'bad thing' (56%), with the potential to lead to violence and loss of personal freedoms and to act as a barrier to integration".

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The recent furor that accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury's lecture on civil and religious laws in England and which touched upon the availability of recourse to aspects of Shari'a for Muslims who seek it in civil courts in Britain (see Modood, 2008) provides a good illustration of the implication of this journalist's position. Indeed, at the height of the storm, one of the authors received an email from a Daily Mail journalist which stated: "I was wondering if you might talk to us about sharia [sic] law in the UK, and the effects it might have on our society. […] What we do need is someone saying that Sharia [sic] law would not necessarily be a good thing, so if this is not for you, then don't worry!" (email received 8 February, 2008). This sort of approach is anticipated by our respondent from the tabloid newspaper who describes how it is widely accepted that concerns of accuracy and validity come second to getting a story on Muslims into circulation:

> *If you were being accurate you would be going to communities…and speaking to people. What we tend to do is report what is happening… someone from the Beeb might be if they are doing a story on whether or not Muslim women should be allowed to wear a veil when they go to see their MP. I would have talked to Jack Straw and someone from the organisation* (interview).

The optimism informing the view that it should be left to the BBC to play the role of an honest broker in reporting emotive stories concerning Muslims with impartiality is not something borne out by our interview data. Indeed our senior broadcast news respondent considers the portrayal of difficult stories concerning religious affairs generally and particularly stories focusing upon Muslims as constituting a necessary part of a public conversation, which, in the example below, proceeds by questioning for example the legitimacy of the wearing of a face-veil (niqab). As the extract highlights, this is informed by this journalist's view that visible markers of difference and diversity are intrinsically tied to broader, in this view, legitimate, public anxieties over immigration that should not be silenced in the interests of maintaining what the respondent describes as an artificially harmonious conception of multiculturalism:[13]

[13] In another part of the interview they state: "I think the X has been through an interesting phase which echoes that slight change that I've been talking about in the last few years which is I think there was a belief that we had to promote multiculturalism; that it was our job to try and do lots of stories about how lovely it was to have lots of people from different cultures in Britain and not report too much what tensions there were, certainly not allow the voices of those people who had concerns about the changing nature of their high street or whatever it was. I think that has changed over the last couple of years. I think there has been, quite rightly, a change of view that we do need in the corporation to ensure that we reflect whatever tensions and anxieties and indeed prejudices that may exist within British society and a recognition that for people to question, for instance the level of immigration

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> *It needs to be something that we do discuss and think about and have a national conversation about because from it flows all the other discussion about our expectations of those who come from other countries to live and work here. […] I've talked about the veil endlessly over the last year because I do think it's been a really interesting one… suddenly people began to say, well hold on, is it right that somebody can teach a class full of kids wearing a full veil? And I think it's a perfectly reasonable question and one that we need to discuss* (interview).

In a significant contrast to the public questioning – as an editorial line – of the visibility and indeed legitimacy of religion, our Guardian respondent describes how their newspaper seeks to incorporate religious coverage in an educative manner. One example may be found in its 'Comment is Free' section, which is currently 'blogging' the Qu'ran through serialisations penned by the writer and intellectual Ziauddin Sardar. Another example includes that of the appointment of a young Muslim woman as its religious affairs correspondent, which "probably raised eyebrows in one or two places." The journalist continues:

> *[S]he went on the hajj and did some video for the website, and what I thought was terrific as well, she was able to report pilgrim voices, and these were young British people, they were from the North of England, from London, and so on and so forth, and what the hajj meant to them, what their Muslim identification meant i.e. voices you don't normally get in a national newspaper.*

While these examples perhaps take us away from a direct discussion of racism and Islamophobia in the way that was elaborated earlier, it is still worth noting how much importance the paper attributes to the value of embedding plural constituencies within its journalism - perhaps as a prophylactic against unwitting anti-Muslim sentiment. This centre-left national broadsheet is, then, unique in its approach, for not only does it seek to afford space in which to cultivate the representation of religion in public discourse but it does so through a consciously Muslim interlocutor.

THE IMPACT OF ANXIETIES OVER TERRORISM

With a significantly different interest in the meaning and implication of Islam to its British adherents, other respondents place little importance upon garnering an empathetic understanding of the spiritual role of religion.

into this country is not of itself, beyond the pale. That is a legitimate position for someone to hold and indeed, has become a pretty central political discussion right now."

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The focus instead appears orientated toward an assumed relationship between religion and issues of terrorism, issues that are deemed to be specifically pertinent in their respective coverage of Islam and Muslims. As our tabloid newspaper respondent reiterated: "there's a global jihad going on that we're all involved in… everything changed after 9/11 and again after 7/7" (interview). This sentiment is repeated in the words of our centre-right national broadsheet journalist who summarises how 7/7 "was a surprise because what we were looking at in the late 90's and up to 2004 was the belief that it was going to be imported terrorist attacks… the big surprise was that they were going to attack their own country which was a bit of a turning point I think. It was a bit of an eye opener" (interview). There is evidence to suppose that this is a widely held view with Field (2007: 459) concluding that post-7/7 there has been an increased "tendency to criticize the inactivity of the Muslim population as a whole, and not just its leaders," a sentiment arising from the belief that "the Muslim community had not done enough to prevent support for terrorism in its midst." Indeed, he makes the finding that this belief has given rise to a wide-spread view that it is legitimate to proactively target Muslims for reasons of national security:

> *[T]hree-fifths argued that Britain's security services should now focus their intelligence-gathering and terrorism-prevention efforts on Muslims living in Britain or seeking to enter it, on the grounds that, although most Muslims were not terrorists, most terrorists threatening the country were Muslims…* (ibid).

These perceptions are perhaps embodied in terminologies that collapse different issues together; a good example of which may be found in attitudes towards the term 'Islamist Terrorism.' Our centre-right national broadsheet journalist, for example, remains convinced that terrorism by some Muslims is primarily an outgrowth of Islamism:

> *I think we still edge around certain issues… For instance the Government is reluctant to talk about Islamist terrorism even though somebody like Ed Hussein whose book The Islamist makes the point that there is a fundamental difference between Islam and Islamism. Unless you understand the ideological basis of it you don't understand anything.*

It is worth noting how, despite the contested and relational nature of terms such as 'terrorism' and 'Islamism,' which invite qualification and contextualisation, it is increasingly common to find the portrayal of a seamless association between the two. This is a good example of what Jackson (2006) has called a culturally embedded 'hard' discourse since so many other assumptions compound and reinforce it. One example of what is meant by this can be found in how Melanie Phillips has stated that "after the Rushdie affair, Islam in Britain became fused with an agenda of

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murder."[14] This characterisation comes close to conceiving the violence that is committed by Muslims as "something inherent in the religion, rendering any Muslim a potential terrorist" (Poole, 2002: 4). While some scholars and journalists have gone to great lengths to argue that most Muslims consider violence and terrorism to be an egregious violation of their religion (see Haliday, 2003: 107), attempts to de-couple the two are sometimes dismissed as oversensitive (cf Phillips, 2006; Gove, 2006; Cohen, 2007 and Anthony, 2007). It is worth remembering that in Field's (2007: 457) analysis 56% of a survey believed that a strongly held Muslim identity could lead to violence. The terms 'Islam' and 'Islamism' are therefore variably used and contested, but, in at least one dominant discourse, emotive conflation rather than careful distinctions are the order of the day and generative of dangerous stereotypes. While media discourses can be seen as contributing to this racialisation, practitioners in some part of the media are also under pressure to question their role in it. The senior broadcast news respondent of its internal debates over the issue of terminology:

> *In the end we've used a number of terms and you have to appreciate this is always tricky because in journalism you have to find more than one way of saying everything otherwise it becomes boring. So we talk a lot about Al Qaeda inspired terrorism; the word Islamist has become reasonably accepted as a way of describing a certain type of person who takes a view…but all these terms are tricky because there are people who might well describe themselves as an Islamist but who would never dream of wanting to blow people up. […] I've certainly been in meetings with…Muslims who have challenged the X… I suppose that's what I mean by we've come a long way, we have been forced quite rightly to think about all these issues and I think we still wrestle with it but I think we are better.*

This is an instructive account because it suggests that this broadcaster in particular can be lobbied to take account of minority sensitivities and the risks of stigmatisation, not only that but that they have also undergone an internal process of learning, which leads them to continue to 'wrestle' with these issues. The respondent balances their statement, however, with another in which they reiterate that the "real dangers for us and for all journalists in shying away from some of the real challenges that Al Qaeda inspired philosophy presents for British society as a whole and indeed for all Muslims within British society." On this issue even the centre-left national

[14] See Melanie Phillips (2006) 'After the Rushdie affair, Islam in Britain became fused with an agenda of murder', *The Observer*, 28 May, 2006, p28.

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broadsheet respondent shares a similar concern elaborated in the following extract:

> *I went to see Musharaf [the President of Pakistan on a visit to London] earlier this week and he got quite belligerent about this and he was saying 'don't you point the finger at Pakistan, most of your home grown people [terrorist suspects] are home grown, that means they were born, they were bred, they were educated here...' Of course, he's got a point; he's got a very good point!*

It is arguable that these perceptions give rise to the minority in question being perceived as a threat rather than in terms of measures designed to eliminate discrimination. This may of course stem from the ways in which it is difficult to sympathise with a minority that is perceived to be disloyal or associated with terrorism. There is also a political imperative to deny the victimisation of such a minority, to argue that racialisation is not taking, that evidence for discrimination is negligible, that there are no reasons for acting against Islamophobia – for the sake of prioritising security, even at the expense of equality.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored why there may be little sympathy for the notion that Muslim minorities are subject to racism by virtue of their real or perceived 'Muslimness' (in the way it is rightly accepted that Jewish minorities are sometimes the object of racism by virtue of the real or perceived 'Jewishness'). It finds that the reasons are four-fold and include, firstly, a conceptualisation of racism, which assumes that the protections afforded to conventionally, involuntarily, conceived racial minorities should not be extended to Muslims because theirs is a religious identity that is voluntarily chosen. One salient, discursive, trope germane to this view laments Muslim minorities for the adoption of a 'victim mentality.' Secondly, the way in which religion per se is frowned upon amongst contemporary British intelligentsia invites the ridiculing of Muslims as healthy for intellectual debate and not, therefore, an issue of discrimination. Thirdly, while ethnic identities are welcomed in the public space, there is much more unease about religion. This means that some commentators who may otherwise sympathise with Muslim minorities argue that it is difficult to view Muslims as victims when they may themselves be potential oppressors. Finally, some find it difficult to sympathise with a minority that is perceived to be disloyal or associated with terrorism, a view that leads to a perception of Muslims as a threat rather than as a disadvantaged minority subject to increasingly pernicious discourses of racialisation. Each of these findings invites further study and underscores the need for a greater exploration of anti-Muslim discourse.

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