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Executive summary

- There has been a stark rise in hate crime pre and post BREXIT referendum (BBC, 2016) and within this a sharp increase of anti-Muslim, Islamophobic attacks. Evidence of this can be identified within the employment sector, educational institutions and through political parties.

- The APPG on British Muslims have consulted a range of academics, civic organisations and community members to provide a clear and succinct definition on Islamophobia in order for this term to be adopted. The definition acknowledges the lived experiences of British Muslims and in order to name this as a specific hate crime based on racializing individuals’ religious affiliations as opposed to one based on origin or descent. The EHRC (2019) have successfully defined and shed light on forms on anti-Semitism and identifying the need for this definition to be integrated in race equality agendas; legal frameworks and adopted by the state. Similarly, the definition of Islamophobia needs to be adopted like that of anti-Semitism and other forms of hate such as those targeted towards the LGBT communities which has resulted homophobic attacks. Policies are required in dealing with hate crimes that are specific to each part of our diverse British communities and this include British Muslim communities. Thus, tailored specific definitions of forms of hate are required to further enhance policies and legislation.

- Divisive political and media narratives have allowed for perpetual hatred to be targeted towards Muslim communities which has furthered emboldened far-right activists and alike to justify their agendas of hatred and dread against British Muslims.

Introduction

As an independent academic, civic activist and member of Muslim communities I am able to provide contextual insight into the discourse around Islamophobia and also as someone who has been on the receiving end of facing one of many Islamophobic attacks (BBC, 2010). From this submission, the endeavour is to help shape policy which is informed by an academic and lived experience. I have also been involved in Muslim civic organisation for over twenty years thus combine sociological, academic and activist perspectives in order to apply a social scientist approach towards analysis of Muslim communities in the UK.

Analysis

1. The othering of British Muslim communities and continual dehumanisation has led to a rise of Islamophobia. British Muslims face disadvantages based on their ‘religious’ identities. For instance, if you are Muslim you are less likely to be employed and three times less likely to be offered an interview based on having a ‘Muslim-sounding’ name (Wykes, 2017). In the context of Higher Education there has been a consistent rise of inequality and inequity faced by Muslim students (Stevenson, 2018). Furthermore, there is evidence of gendered Islamophobia whereby Muslim women faced a ‘triple penalty’ when attempting to acquire employment (WEC, 2015).

2. The definition of Islamophobia has undergone various amendments, the one which has been proposed by the APPG on British Muslims together with academics has been considered appropriate into providing an explanation into the forms of hate experienced by British Muslims. To further add to this, Modood (2014) has stated Islamophobia to be interpreted as ‘anti-Muslim racism’ which clearly outlines the individual and group experience of British Muslims who face racism whether it be through subtle microaggressions or more obvious overt forms of hate which lead to violent attacks.

3. Hate has been fuelled through political figures which has been facilitated through media outlets. The gendered Islamophobia comments within newspapers such as the Telegraph article. Allow conservative member, Boris Johnson to comment on Muslim women as ‘letterboxes’ and ‘bank
robbers’. This further solidifies a culture of normalising hatred targeted towards those who adhere to the Islamic faith either through religious attire or by belonging towards religious grouping simply by name. Political leaders are able to combine their position of power to shape negative media narratives [as well as partner with them] towards/and against British Muslims. This again dehumanises British Muslims further as little or no action is taken in addressing or challenging their views as unacceptable and breeding intolerance to difference.

On the issue of the rise of hate crime:

3. There has been an increase of 70% of hate crimes against Muslims in London alone as reported by the Metropolitan police who found a total of 816 Islamophobic offences in 2015 (BBC, 2015).

4. Tell MAMA annual report shows a surge in Islamophobic attacks, with 1,201 verified reports submitted in 2017, a rise of 26% on the year before and the highest number since it began recording incidents. The group has found that most hate-based attacks have been directed towards Muslim women (Tell MAMA, 2017).

5. In the education sector, there has been a sharp rise of racist bullying. A 69% increase was recorded by ChildLine in racist bullying in playgrounds with the most common term being used as ‘bomber’ and ‘terrorist’ (NSPCC, 2017).

6. At Higher Educational institutions there is a lack of understanding (institutional and individual) about Islam and Muslim students which has led to staff, students’ peers to espouse intended or unintended racism and Islamophobia (Stevenson, 2018; Malik and Wykes, 2018). Statistically, Muslim students also experienced challenges in accessing the esteemed Russell group universities in comparison to other students who adhered to a faith or no faith (Malik and Wykes, 2018).

On the issue of the need for a definition:

7. The APPG on British Muslims and civic organisation have recently produced a large body of work around Islamophobia, the report by the APPG (2018); the Countering Islamophobia Tool Kit (Easat Daas, 2018); the Islamophobia awareness month launched by MEND (2018) and the IHRC launch who worked on a two year project with the University of Leeds (IHRC, 2018). These provide contextual understanding of the extent of Islamophobia in the UK.

8. By supporting a definition of Islamophobia it supports the state’s duty to protect its citizens through discourse around hate based crimes which are targeted specifically towards British Muslim communities. The acknowledgement of the definition in legal terms would also address the inequalities and discrimination faced by Muslims as found within the ‘Missing Muslims’ report by Citizens UK which detailed the experiences of Muslims of the UK (Citizens UK, 2017). There is currently a stark rise of anti-Muslim racism in the UK and for politicians, state, media to adopt this definition would aid in perceiving this as a social problem which needs to be countered. Currently UK law has a nonspecific and broad understanding of ‘incitement to religious hatred’ which means offences are not always prosecuted.

9. The ambiguity and lack of definition and ‘wide area incitement to religious hatred’ has offered far right groups and Islamophobes the opportunity to use anti-Muslim hatred in nuanced ways which helps them to avoid being prosecuted.

On the issue of the state’s responsibility to protect victimised communities:

13. Muslims make up over 4.8% of the population in England and Wales (Census, 2011) and British Muslim citizens contribute to all aspects of UK life. Like citizens who identify as being Jew,
non-religious, LGBT or BAME, the state has the duty to safeguard its citizens from harm. Thus, protection of hatred through language, media, government are vital in order to overcome hate in all its forms. To recognise and legitimise that there is a concern of the rise of Islamophobia to be translated into speech by politicians would enable a shift in debate and an actual acknowledgement to tackle this problem swiftly.

14. For this to develop there needs to be a shift in how our state, government, legal and police sectors address the various challenges which British Muslim communities are facing. British Muslims contribute over £30 billions to the UK economy (EBMAN, 2011) and thus pay taxes and entrust their leadership to address their concerns of continual hate being highlighted from internally within communities and also externally through academic literature and civic organisation (APPG, 2018; Easat Daas, 2017; Malik and Wykes 2018).

15. Research has found that many perpetrators of hate crimes generally are male (Perry, 2013). Yet victims of anti-Muslim attacks are often women (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010) who are visibly Muslims (Stevenson, 2018). Muslim women avoid going into highly populated areas because of the verbal and physical abuse they would have to endure if they wore a headscarf (Kundnani, 2002). This furthers the alienation of Muslim women from the public space and thus oppresses them.

Recommendations

16. Hate crime is rising and this needs to be tackled through policing and legal frameworks to punish those who engage in hate-based crime and to inhibit and/or prevent others from being encouraged to continue to engage in hate crimes. Gender-based violence is of particular concern as women visibly Muslim are at the receiving end of hate-based attacks (Perry, 2013).

17. Once a working definition has been adopted, supported and acknowledge through political and legal frameworks this will contribute to the humanisation of Muslims and the acceptance of hatred specifically targeted towards British Muslim communities. There needs to been a recognition of hatred towards British Muslims and once it is problematise then this will lead to stamping out racism, hatred in all its forms. We must acknowledge that all forms of hate are unacceptable and thus includes hatred targeted towards British Muslims and their varying communities.

18. Larger accountability is needed of political leaders and the media, thus inquiries of Islamophobia within the conservative party to address bigotry and hate within its party is needed (BBC, 2019). Similarly, the media needs to be brought to account more thoroughly through greater monitoring by organisations such an IPSO rather than relying on civic organisations like the MCB and individuals such as Miqdaad Versi to have to continually bring the media into account (Guardian, 2018). The findings of Levenson inquiry need to be acted upon to challenge the ongoing unaccountability of the media.

References


