Chapter 2: Islamophobic hate in the 20th and 21st century

Irene Zempi and Imran Awan

Introduction

There has been a spike in racist and Islamophobic hate crime across Europe over recent years. This is no more exemplified than in Britain, where following the tragic murder of three children in Southport on 29 July 2024 far-right riots erupted across England and in Northern Ireland that were fuelled by false claims circulated online that the perpetrator was a Muslim (BBC, 2024). As of 2024, the police made a total of 1,117 arrests and identified hundreds more suspects whilst the CPS brought a total of 677 criminal charges (NPCC, 2024). The Muslim Women's Network (2024) surveyed its members on how safe they felt in the UK before and after the riots. Three-quarters of Muslims stated that they were worried about their safety – a rise of almost 60% since the week of the riots. Evidence demonstrates that Islamophobia is racialised. According to Modood (1997), Islamophobia is at the heart of contemporary British and European cultural racism. In this context, Islam is routinely portrayed as an external 'threat' to distinctly European norms and values, especially in the globalised world that we live in. This chapter discusses the nature and scope of Islamophobic hate crimes, with specific attention paid to the role of 'trigger' events. The chapter also examines the impacts of Islamophobic hate crimes. It is argued that Islamophobic hate crimes have a disproportionate impact on the victim on the basis that individuals are being targeted because of their identity and visibility as Muslims. However, Islamophobic hate crimes not only impact the individual victims, but they also impact the wider Muslim community.

Understanding Islamophobia:

The recent surge in Islamophobic hate crimes cannot be fully understood without first examining the historical roots of Islamophobia in Europe. The origins of anti-Muslim sentiment can be traced to the early encounters between Christian Europe and the Islamic world during the 7th to 15th centuries, when the rapid expansion of Islamic empires brought them into direct political, military, and cultural confrontation with European Christendom. These encounters were often framed through a binary of civilisation versus barbarism, casting Muslims as both

military enemies and religious heretics (Alexander 2017; Tolan, 2013). The Crusades (1096–1291) were pivotal in solidifying this image. Popes and monarchs depicted Muslims as infidels and threats to Christian holy lands, thereby fusing religion, race, and geopolitics in ways that would influence European perceptions for centuries (Said, 1978; Tolan, 2013). Anti-Muslim discourse during this period portrayed Islam as a false religion, and the Prophet Muhammad was frequently demonised in medieval texts, further embedding stereotypes that equated Islam with violence, sexual deviance, and deceit (Daniel, 1960).

These medieval depictions were not simply theological or polemical but were central to the formation of a European identity that defined itself in opposition to Islam. This oppositional construction helped justify both the Reconquista in Spain and later imperial expansions into Muslim-majority territories, particularly during the rise of the Ottoman Empire, which was frequently represented as the embodiment of Eastern despotism and existential threat to Christian Europe (Kaya and Ayşe, 2019). With the onset of European colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries, Islamophobia was rearticulated through the lens of Enlightenment-era scientific racism and cultural superiority. European colonial administrators and scholars depicted Muslim societies as stagnant, irrational, and despotic—unfit for self-rule and requiring Western intervention (Said, 1978). This formed part of a wider orientalist narrative that naturalised Muslim inferiority and legitimised imperial domination.

The legacy of these discourses remained embedded in European thought and resurfaced in the post-colonial era as Muslim migrants arrived in large numbers from former colonies. These migrants were often not seen as citizens, but as perpetual foreigners, and the racialised perceptions shaped during colonial rule carried over into debates on immigration, national identity, and integration (Fekete, 2004; Meer and Modood, 2009). Alexander (1998; 2002) notes that ‘Muslims’ in post-war Britain were configured as ‘coloured’, then ‘Black’, then ‘Asian’, then ‘Pakistani’ and ‘Bangladeshi’ before they appeared as ‘Muslims’. Thus, Islamophobia’s long genealogy reveals it as a structural and historically contingent form of racism. It emerged not merely as individual prejudice, but as a product of Europe's religious conflicts, imperial ambitions, and identity construction. These historical processes continue to inform present-day forms of anti-Muslim hatred, policy-making, and exclusion.

Following decolonisation, many European countries saw large-scale Muslim immigration from former colonies. Rather than being integrated into national narratives, Muslim communities were often depicted as outsiders and subjected to socio-economic marginalisation (Fekete, 2004). In the UK, in 1996 the Runnymede Trust, an independent research and social policy

agency, established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. In November 1997, the Commission produced a report entitled 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All' (Runnymede Trust 1997). The aim of the Commission was twofold: (a) to counter Islamophobic assumptions that Islam is a single monolithic system, without internal development, diversity and dialogue, and (b) to draw attention to the principal dangers which Islamophobia creates or exacerbates for Muslim communities, and therefore for the well-being of society as a whole. The report described the nature of Islamophobic prejudice and drew a key distinction between closed views of Islam on the one hand and open views on the other. Islamophobia is equated with closed views and eight main features are itemised. The eight features are tabulated below (Runnymede Trust 1997).

Table 1: Closed and open views of Islam

Distinctions	**Closed views of Islam**	**Open views of Islam**
1. Monolithic / diverse	Islam seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.	Islam seen as diverse and progressive, with internal differences, debates and development.
2. Separate / interacting	Islam seen as separate and other – (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them.	Islam seen as interdependent with other faiths and cultures – (a) having certain shared values and aims (b) affected by them (c) enriching them.
3. Inferior / different	Islam seen as inferior to the West – barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist.	Islam seen as distinctively different, but not deficient, and as equally worthy of respect.

4. Enemy / partner	Islam seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in 'a clash of civilisations'.	Islam seen as an actual or potential partner in joint cooperative enterprises and in the solution of shared problems.
5. Manipulative / sincere	Islam seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage.	Islam seen as a genuine religious faith, practised sincerely by its adherents.
6. Criticism of West rejected / considered	Criticisms made by Islam of 'the West' rejected out of hand	Criticisms of 'the West' and other cultures are considered and debated.
7. Discrimination defended / criticised	Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.	Debates and disagreements with Islam do not diminish efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion.
8. Islamophobia seen as natural / problematic	Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal'.	Critical views of Islam are themselves subjected to critique, lest they be inaccurate and unfair.

Importantly, this report raised awareness about the problem of Islamophobia internationally. It defined Islamophobia as 'the shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims' (Runnymede Trust 1997: 2). It also defined Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam' and noted that 'It also refers to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs'

(Runnymede Trust 1997: 4). In essence, the report stated that the term Islamophobia refers to three phenomena:

- Unfounded hostility towards Islam;
- Practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities;
- Exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.

Since the publication of the report 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All' in 1997, Islamophobia has grown considerably. On the 20th anniversary of the initial report, Runnymede Trust has published a new report, which offered the following definition of Islamophobia (2017:1):

> Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

This definition, which derives from the United Nations definition of racism, highlights the ways in which racism operates: not simply as a prejudicial attitude but by denying people dignity, rights and liberties across a range of political, economic, social and cultural institutions (Elahi and Khan 2017). Referring only to 'anti-Muslim hate' does not fully capture the widespread (or structural) ways in which racial inequalities persist, whereby Muslims face particular economic or political disadvantages both historically and in a contemporary context; thus Elahi and Khan (2017) argue that a definition of Islamophobia as 'anti-Muslim racism' fits with historical and academic accounts of racism. Indeed, in a landmark report, the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (2018:11) proposed the following definition of Islamophobia:

> Islamophobia is rooted in racism, and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

This definition suggests that Islamophobia is a form of anti-Muslim racism. Muslims are targeted because of their minority status in terms of religion but also race. The notion of 'racism' captures the structural ways in which racial inequalities persist, whereby Muslims face particular economic and political disadvantages both historically and in a contemporary context as ethnic minorities. This definition also suggests that victims of Islamophobia can be real

Muslims but also those who 'look' Muslim. In other words, Islamophobia is rooted in racism and its victims are not just Muslims but also those who are perceived to be Muslims.

Finally, the United Nations (2025) have adopted the authors' definition of Islamophobia as follows:

> Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.

The direct impact of this has led to the emergence of an international day to combat Islamophobia which runs every year as part of the UN hate crime strategy.

This definition emphasises the link between institutional levels of Islamophobia and manifestations of such attitudes, triggered by the visibility of the victim's perceived Muslim identity. This approach also interprets Islamophobia as a form of racism, whereby Islamic religion, tradition and culture are seen as a 'threat' to the Western values.

In light of this, the following paragraphs consider the relationship between Islamophobia and racism.

Islamophobia and racism

Allen (2010a) explains that racism can occur in situations where neither the reality nor concept of race actually exists. Meer et al. (2010) point out, understandings of racism should therefore not focus exclusively on race but must instead consider other social phenomena including religion and culture. Conceptualising racism exclusively as a form of 'biological determinism' would be to ignore the ways in which cultural racism draws upon other markers of 'difference' to identify minority groups and individuals that do not conform with 'mainstream' society. Modood (1997: 165) explains that:

> Cultural racism is likely to be particularly aggressive against those minority communities that want to maintain – and not just defensively – some of the basic elements of their culture or religion; if, far from denying their difference (beyond the colour of their skin), they want to assert this difference in public, and demand that they be respected just as they are.

Taking a similar position, Law (2010) highlights the complex chameleon-like character of racism, which changes in terms of form and content across different times and contexts. Law (2010) observes that racism takes many forms and links this reality to contemporary perceptions of Western superiority and to this end, legitimised violence towards Muslims. This new form of racism can be interpreted as racism of 'reaction', based on the perceived 'threat' to traditional social and cultural identities. It can also be understood as racism of 'surveillance' premised on the notion that cultural difference slides into the demonisation and stigmatisation of 'Other' cultures in the interests of 'protecting' the European people, which is a different entity to the European population as a whole (Law 2010). This line of argument suggests that the key element of contemporary racism is the attribution of negative cultural characteristics to 'Other' minority groups.

In light of popular debates about national identity, immigration and community cohesion, colour racism has ceased to be acceptable; nevertheless, a cultural racism which emphasises the 'Other', alien values of Muslims has increased (Zebiri 2008). In this context, cultural difference is understood as 'cultural deviance' and equated with the notion of cultural threat. Parekh (2000: 60) observes that contemporary anti-Muslim racism is 'one of the most serious forms of cultural hostility in modern Europe'. For advocates of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, there is a cultural war between Islam and the West. In the British context, Islam and Muslims have increasingly been seen to be 'culturally dangerous' and threatening the 'British way of life'. Whilst recognising that Muslim minorities differ in the context of European countries – predominantly Algerian in France, Turkish in Germany and Austria, Pakistani in the UK – it is increasingly Islamic religion, tradition and culture that have been seen as a 'threat' to the Western ideals of democracy, freedom of speech and gender equality.

Nevertheless, it is often argued that Islamophobia 'does not exist' as a form of racism. Alexander (2017) suggests that the de-raceing of Islamophobia can be traced to four interlinked arguments:

- First, the reduction of our understanding of racism to narrow biological markers strips it out its social, structural and historical context;
- Second, the denial of 'Muslim' as a racial or ethnic category (unlike, for example, Sikhs or Jews) and relatedly, the denial of Muslims being victims of racism as Muslims;
- Third, the placing of Islam as a category of choice rather than ascription, and thus as separate from the embodied being of its adherents ('culture' rather than 'race');

- Fourth, the over-emphasis on Muslim/Islamic culture as a foundational explanation for the 'demonisation' of Muslims.

The Racialisation of Muslim identity

In the present context, Muslims have been labelled as being both deviant and evil. As Islamophobia becomes more rampant, the conflation between race, ethnicity and appearance with the Islamic faith has constructed non-Muslim men as dangerous too. As a result, non-Muslim men have experienced racism and similar treatment through institutional forms of Islamophobia. Part of this polarisation and moral panic is the conflation of Islam and terrorism, which has led to questions around non-Muslim men and their loyalty, citizenship and identity.

The racialisation of crime has led to a drastic upsurge, following terrorist attacks. Islamophobia has now evolved into attacks against Muslim-looking people because of external factors such as their skin colour, facial hear and clothing. Ahmad (2002:101) argues 'Among the enormous violence done by the United States since the tragedies suffered on September 11 has been an unrelenting, multivalent assault on the bodies, psyches, and rights of Arabs, Muslim, and South Asian immigrants.' The increased attention around people's perceived identity and 'Muslimness' has led to the intersection between race, ethnicity and faith. Research has shown that this intersection can lead to experiences of discrimination and minority communities suffering victimisation. Understanding that Islamophobia can also mean racism is critical if we are to get an understanding of how racial stereotypes and attitudes target communities because of their perceived identities

In America, an Indian man wearing a turban was mistaken as a Muslim and shot dead while working at the gas station he owned (Basu 2016). Victims of these anti-Muslim incidents include not only Muslims but also anyone who looks like a Muslim or an Arab. Many non-Muslims such as Sikh men (with readily identifiable turbans and long beards) and Hindus, and many non-Arabs such as Indians, Pakistanis, and other South Asians are affected. Racism and Islamophobia are inextricably linked. Participants in Awan and Zempi's (2018) study on Islamophobia targeted at non-Muslim men noted how their appearances acted as a trigger for the types of hate and abuse they suffered. For example, if they had a beard or were perceived to be from a Muslim background because of the way they looked then they were more likely to be targeted for racist and anti-Muslim abuse.

Using a race-based traumatic stress injury model, Abu-Ras and Suarez (2009) argue that perceived or actual forms of racism will lead to different forms of discrimination i.e. racial prejudice, profiling, verbal assaults and hate crimes. The trauma experienced by participants in this case would mean uncontrollable anger but also impacting an individual's quality of life. Ahmad (2002) states that these forms of hatred perpetuated against people who look like Muslim manifests itself in the form of racial discrimination and harassment. For example, according to a YouGov poll about the "UK attitudes toward the Arab world" it showed that when respondents were asked if they would support racial profiling against Arabs or Muslims for security reasons, 55 per cent agreed (Dearden 2017). The types of hate incidents reported can be used to discuss structural racism inflicted within different segments of society.

This hate violence can be thus understood, as Ahmad (2002, p. 104) argues, as the result of "racial profiling's flawed logic (people who "look Muslim" are more likely to be terrorists, therefore if we are attacking terrorism we should attack people who "look Muslim")". Meer and Modood (2009) emphasise that understandings of racism should not focus exclusively on race and thus overlooking religion and culture.

Contemporary Islamophobia

Contemporary Islamophobia is a reflection of a historical anti-Muslim, anti-Islamic phenomenon, which though constructed in colonial times has increased significantly after the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks. In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, the launch of the 'war on terror' and the 'home-grown' terror attacks in London in 2005, Islamophobic hate crime has increased dramatically. In other words, the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks played a major role in heightening Islamophobic perceptions of Muslims in the West. These attacks and subsequent media portrayals of the events facilitated a deeper resentment and fear of Islam and Muslims than existed before. The Council of Europe's Commission on Racism and Intolerance 2010 UK country report (ECRI 2016) noted that 'Muslims, migrants and asylum seekers [and] Gypsies/Travelers are regularly presented in a negative light in the mainstream media'. These concerns were picked up by the Leveson enquiry and subsequent report into UK press standards (House of Commons 2012), which also stated that 'discriminatory, sensational or unbalanced reporting in relation to ethnic minorities, immigrants and/or asylum seekers is a feature of journalistic practice in parts of the press, rather than an aberration'.

The popular press has had a massive impact in terms of determining notions of the ‘threat’ of Islam. The political rhetoric and sensational media reporting in the aftermath of Islamist terrorist attacks illustrates the ways in which Muslim identities can be transformed across time and space. The effect of these transformations has been the construction of hate and fear, resulting in the rise in the level of Islamophobia through the construction of Muslims as synonymous with ‘deviance’, ‘un-Britishness’ and terrorism (Poole 2006; Saeed 2007). This discourse has positioned ‘the Muslim community’ as homogeneous, outside of and opposed to Britishness, and understood through stereotypes of ‘us versus them’ (Alexander 2017).

Concurrently, counter-terrorism measures have contributed to the ‘demonisation’ of Muslims in political, media and public discourses, portraying Islam and Muslims as a security ‘threat’. A series of policies around securitisation and ‘tackling extremism’ have positioned all Muslims as a ‘suspect community’. There has been an institution(alisation) of surveillance of Muslim groups on the streets (as in the Birmingham ‘spycam’ affair; Awan 2014; Hussain 2014), by police, in prisons, in the immigration system, in their own homes and on the internet and, particularly worryingly, across the education system from primary schools to universities (Alexander 2017). This has particularly affected young people, who bear the brunt of this hostility, creating a climate of fear and suspicion (Alexander 2017).

Far-right parties, across Europe, including France’s National Rally, Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), and Austria’s Freedom Party (FPÖ), have mainstreamed anti-Muslim rhetoric, linking Islam to threats against national identity, gender equality, and public safety (Betz and Meret, 2009; Kaya and Ayşe, 2019). Terms like “Islamisation of Europe” have gained traction, implying an existential threat from Muslim populations. The AfD’s 2016 manifesto stated:

> "Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values."

Of particular concern is that the party received the largest percentage of the public vote in Germany’s 2025 general election.

Even in states governed by ostensibly left-leaning administrations, public policies have often reinforced narratives that portray Islam as a security threat. For instance, the UK Government’s anti-terrorism strategy has caused further feelings of stigmatisation and alienation amongst Muslims. Awan (2012: 1168) states that ‘“while counterterrorism policies such as Prevent have

an overall goal of community engagement to combat extremism, it may alienate sections of the Muslim community through counterterrorism policing tactics. Such policies have, in effect, constructed a "suspect" community within the dictum of community engagement for counterterrorism purposes"'. British Muslims have reported feeling increasingly alienated and isolated (Choudhury and Fenwick 2011). Seen through the prism of security risk, incompatible 'difference' and self-segregation, Muslims in the West have emerged as the new 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972) of popular and media imagination. This is particularly apparent in the gendering of Muslim identities. Islam is understood as a violent political ideology, religion and culture, Muslim men are perceived as the embodiment of terrorism, fundamentalism and extremism, and Muslim women are viewed as the personification of gender oppression in Islam, especially if they are veiled. Such stereotypes provide fertile ground for public expressions of Islamophobia including verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, harassment, physical assault and violence, property damage, hate mail and literature, as well as online abuse.

Manifestations of Islamophobia

Islamophobic hate crimes and incidents often occur in public spaces such as streets, city centres and public transport networks. Common locations for these incidents also include shops, restaurants, gyms and other business environments accessed by members of the public, as well as surrounding public areas (Tell MAMA 2017). Rather than being single, one-off incidents, Islamophobic hate crimes can sometimes form part of an ongoing process of victimisation that often makes up part of a victim's everyday experiences of hostility. Individuals can also be targeted in schools or Higher Education, workplace, household or private property. Indeed, a significant proportion of hate crimes are committed by perpetrators who are known to the victim such as neighbours, local community members, and even friends, carers, family members and work colleagues (Chakraborti et al. 2014; Mason 2005; Quarmby 2008; Roxwell 2011; Sibbitt 1997). The All Wales Hate Crime Project found that 43 per cent of victims reported that they knew their perpetrator (Williams and Tregidga 2013).

TELL MAMA supports victims of anti-Muslim hate and is a public service which also measures and monitors anti-Muslim incidents. In the report entitled 'The Geography of Anti-Muslim Hatred', Tell MAMA (2016) found that a high proportion of Islamophobic incidents occurred near public transport hubs. Islamophobic hate crime on public transport networks is a particularly stressful social situation in which passengers may feel trapped in enclosed and

overcrowded spaces where people of 'difference' come into close contact with one another, and where micro aggressions can quickly escalate into violent altercations (Walters and Brown 2016). Finally, Muslims who work in the night-time economy such as security guards, late night takeaway and restaurant staff as well as taxi drivers appear to be particularly vulnerable to Islamophobic attacks. In this case, incidents appear to be fuelled by alcohol, which lowers perpetrators' inhibitions (Tell MAMA 2017).

Evidence also shows that Islamophobia is highly gendered. Muslim women are more likely to be attacked or abused than men in public settings, particularly if they are visibly Muslim (for example, wearing Islamic clothing such as a headscarf, face veil, abaya), and the largest proportion of perpetrators remain white males (Tell MAMA 2017). In a report published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), Allen and Nielsen (2002: 35) found that the stimulant behind the vast majority of Islamophobic incidents was the fact that victims were identified as Muslims by 'visual identifiers', namely something that could be recognisably associated with Islam:

> It seems that behind the vast majority of attacks and infringements upon specific communities and individuals was the fact that they were identified as Muslims, whether they in fact were or not, by something that could be recognisably associated with Islam; this we call visual identifiers. Whilst these were not necessarily in themselves the reason for any attacks, it would seem that they were the single most predominant factor in determining who or what became the victim of retaliation.

Within this paradigm, the visual identifiers of Islam are the tools for identification upon which Islamophobia can be expressed. This approach demonstrates why certain individuals and groups are more likely to become targets for hostility than others. As Allen (2010b) points out, when the visual identifiers of Islam hold such primacy in determining who or what become the targets for violence, it is veiled Muslim women in particular – possibly the most visually identifiable religious adherents in the West – who become the primary foci for retaliation. This ties in with the suggestions of Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) who documented the heightened sense of vulnerability of Muslim women who wore hijab or niqab in public places in London.

Certainly, another focus for manifestations of Islamophobia has been mosques. As Allen and Nielsen (2002: 37) point out, mosques have become a 'very easy and readily identifiable target' due to their visible nature. Between May 2013 and June 2017, 167 mosques in the UK were

targeted in Islamophobic incidents and attacks (Tell MAMA 2017). Taken together, these equate to an average of one incident against a mosque every week.

Trigger events

The prevalence and severity of Islamophobic hate crimes are influenced by 'trigger' events of local, national and international significance. Williams and Burnap (2015) argue that hate crimes are communicative acts, which are often provoked by antecedent events that incite a desire for retribution in the targeted group, towards the group that share similar characteristics to the perpetrators. Hate crimes increase following 'trigger' events as they operate to galvanise tensions and sentiments against the suspected perpetrators and groups associated with them. Indeed, evidence shows that Islamophobic hate crimes have increased significantly following 'trigger' attacks including terrorist attacks carried out by individuals who choose to identify themselves as being Muslim or acting in the name of Islam (Hanes and Machin 2014). Spikes in Islamophobic hate crimes and incidents following 'trigger' events are not confided to offline settings; rather, the offline pattern is replicated online (Awan 2014).

For example, on 13 November 2016, Paris and Saint-Denis in France were targeted in a coordinated attack by ISIS. The attacks by gunmen and suicide bombers hit Bataclan music hall, the national stadium, restaurants and bars, almost simultaneously – and left 130 people dead and hundreds wounded, with more than 100 in a critical condition. Cuerden and Rogers (2017) found an increase in the number of referrals for race hate crime at the time of the Paris attacks, before returning to more stabilised numbers in the following week. On 22 March 2016, ISIS claimed responsibility for the coordinated attacks at Brussels Airport Zaventem and Maalbeek Metro Station, which killed 32 people and injured over 300 people. Cuerden and Rogers (2017) found that the number of referrals of race hate crime increased during the time period when the attacks took place.

Other recent high-profile events such as the EU referendum the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016, and debates around immigration have promoted Islamophobic sentiments. According to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), racist or religious offences recorded by police forces in England and Wales increased by 41 per cent in the month after the referendum vote with 5,468 hate crimes recorded in July 2016, up from 3,886 such crimes in the same period a year earlier (Home Office 2016). Tell MAMA (2017) recorded a 475 per cent increase in the number of Islamophobic incidents in the week following the EU referendum vote (from 12 incidents in

the week beginning 17 June to 69 incidents in the week beginning 24 June 2016). Cuerden and Rogers (2017) argue that the toxic rhetoric around Brexit encouraged some individuals to engage in open hostility towards immigrants across the country. For example, incidents have been reported in the media of racial abuse being hurled at minority ethnic individuals in places such as Manchester, Basingstoke, and Cardiff amongst many other places, as well as online race hate abuse towards individuals (Cuerden and Rogers 2017). Islamophobic narratives are reproduced and shared globally, and the reach of social media has amplified those voices (Elahi and Khan 2017).

Moreover, there is a media influence upon reporting whereby Muslim men have been constructed as 'The New Folk Devils' (Shain 2011; Cohen 1972). National scandals such as the grooming of young girls across the UK by groups of organised criminal 'grooming gangs', twisted by the far-right into a 'Muslim' issue has also been identified as a 'trigger' event. Awan and Zempi (2015) found that in the wake of the Rotherham scandal, 'Muslim' is deployed in order to cast *all* Muslims as synonymous with child abusers. Indeed, evidence shows that widespread child sexual exploitation by 'Asian/Muslim gangs' in Rotherham led to a rise in Islamophobia towards Muslims in Rotherham and elsewhere in the UK (Tufail 2015).

More recently we have observed increases in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Awan and Williams 2020), and even more recently the Israel-Gaza conflict have led to spikes in recorded hate crime across the continent (Williams et al., 2023). For instance, Germany has recorded one of the most significant surges. According to the German Interior Ministry, Islamophobic crimes rose by 140% in 2023 alone, following a sharp increase in far-right mobilisation and social unrest linked to the Israel-Gaza conflict (CLAIM, 2024). A total of 1,926 anti-Muslim incidents were documented by the NGO CLAIM, ranging from physical assaults and mosque desecrations to online abuse (CLAIM, 2024). The German Council of Muslims has called attention to the state's insufficient response, with many incidents going unpunished or under-investigated.

France has experienced a similarly troubling pattern. In late 2023, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) reported that 14 mosques were vandalised and numerous community members received threats in the weeks following the October 7 Hamas-led attacks (SPCJ, 2024). These acts of retaliation against the Muslim community reflect long-standing tensions in French society, where debates over laïcité (secularism) and national identity frequently entangle Muslim visibility with notions of social threat (Kaya and Ayşe, 2019).

Trigger events do not always occur in isolation. Indeed, when they converge with multiple high-profile incidents, and online misinformation which is amplified by hostile political rhetoric, they can catalyse broader outbreaks of large anti-Muslim hostility and violence. This occurred in the UK from 30 July to 5 August 2024, following the tragic murders of three children in Southport on 29 July 2024. Riots led by the far right erupted across England and in Northern Ireland which were fueled by false claims circulated by far-right groups online that the perpetrator was a Muslim and an asylum seeker (BBC, 2024). The police have a made a total number of 1,117 arrests and identified hundreds more suspects in connection with the riots whilst the CPS have brought a total of 677 charges so far (NPCC, 2024). The Muslim Women's Network (2024) surveyed its members on how safe they felt in the UK before and after the riots. Seventy five percent of respondents stated that they were worried about their safety, compared with 16% before the riots – a rise of almost 60% (PressTV, 2024).

In the wake of the recent far-right riots in England and Northern Ireland, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the British government to pass measures to curb hate speech and racist, xenophobic rhetoric used by British politicians and high-profile public figures which had played a direct role in fuelling these riots (The Guardian, 2024). The UN Committee members declined to name which politicians or public figures had made comments triggering the Committee's concern but added that the Committee 'is concerned about the persistence and in some cases sharp increase of hate crimes, hate speech and xenophobic incidents' (Reuters, 2024). This included racist and xenophobic speech by politicians and public figures in print, broadcast and online media.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the enduring and evolving nature of Islamophobic hate crime across Europe, tracing its roots from medieval and colonial encounters through to contemporary manifestations shaped by securitisation, political populism, and online misinformation. It has demonstrated how Islamophobia is not merely a matter of individual prejudice but a structural and racialised form of hostility that targets Muslims – and those perceived to be Muslim – through everyday acts of violence, institutional practices, and exclusionary discourses. The chapter highlighted the disproportionate impact of Islamophobic hate crimes on visibly Muslim individuals, particularly women, and the wider psychological and social harms to Muslim communities. It has shown how 'trigger' events, when amplified by toxic media and political

rhetoric, can escalate Islamophobic sentiments into widespread hostility and violence. The normalisation of anti-Muslim narratives, including by mainstream political actors, has further entrenched Islamophobia into the social and political fabric of many European states. Addressing Islamophobic hate thus requires more than reactive criminal justice measures; it demands structural responses that confront the historical, institutional, and cultural conditions that continue to legitimise anti-Muslim racism across Europe.

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