Islamophobia, Science and the Advocacy Concept

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Abstract

This article fully recognises the reality and detrimental impact of anti-Muslim sentiment and consequently that 'Islamophobia' describes an important social reality, especially in contexts where Muslims are a minority. However it is critical of 'Islamophobia' as a valid concept in the social science. In the sociology of Islam, it actually distorts research by concentrating on Muslims as invariably victims of social forces. This article is a modest proposal to reconsider differences between science and advocacy concepts, thereby recognising their different and distinctive roles in social movements and academic institutions. It is important that those undertaking any scholarly study of detrimental social behaviour motivated by hatred possess valid theoretical and empirical tools to counter false information or distorted views of minorities. To this extent, Islamophobia is a valuable advocacy concept in the public sphere and scholars should aim to keep it there. However, the article explores the history and deployment of Islamophobia as an advocacy concept and exposes its limitations as scientific description of social reality. There are two contrasted conclusions to this critique. The pessimistic view is that all human societies are constructed around social groups that have exclusionary boundaries. Although boundaries are always changing, the inclusion/exclusion dynamic never wholly disappears. Policy efforts enhance cosmopolitan virtues. The optimistic conclusion is that advocacy concepts and scientific practices, while not entirely compatible, are not systematically opposed. Advocacy may have greater effect when it is grounded in reliable facts and tested assumptions. Defending science and critical debate are important in a political climate of 'fake news' feeding off negative stereotypes, hate speech and incivility.

Introduction: In Groups and out Groups

It is a basic and simple claim of any introduction to sociology and social psychology that humans live in social "groups". This is an umbrella term that can include the family, the gang, the club, the association and so forth. Every social group has some notion of membership and hence a notion of some boundary between those who have membership and those who do not. These boundaries can be soft, such as a sports club where membership may involve an annual subscription, or they may be hard, such as

a criminal gang where membership may involve an initiation rite, tattooing or similar marker. Following Mary Douglas (1973), individuals are fundamentally produced by group processes and locked into systems of what Douglas calls group and grid. We can propose that the harder the boundary, the more likely it is that membership will be exclusive and ultimately give rise to rigid notions of an "Other" or "Outside", which will be ascribed deeply negative features.

We can add one complication to this introductory comment on human societies. These in-group and out-group tensions have been intensified historically by the rise of the nation-state and its consolidation into a system of nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The micro-structure of group life has been overlaid with larger macro-claims about national identity, loyalty to the state and exclusive citizenship rights and duties. These simple sociological facts are incontrovertible and consequently raise elementary problems for liberal theories of multiculturalism and recognition. Tragically the brutal killing of Muslims in New Zealand which occurred as we submitted this article to *Society* only

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served to underline the global spread of white nationalism. Brenton Tarrant, the Australian charged with carrying out the shootings, posted his rambling manifesto – *The Great Replacement*- that offered a list of grievances against, for example, Muslim fertility rates and the displacement of white populations in the West. In the manifesto, Tarrant asks himself a series of questions, including whether the attack was "islamophobic in origin". He stated that the attack was "anti-Islamic" owing to high birth rates and a desire for revenge for "the history of Islamic violence". He asserted later in the manifesto that "No, I am not afraid of Islam". Tarrant had drawn inspiration from a similar manifesto by Anders Behring Breivik the Norwegian terrorist who killed 69 participants of a Workers' Youth League in July 2011. The connection shows that white nationalism is a global development.

These structural aspects of human societies cannot be easily eradicated despite programs to educate children into acceptance of outsiders or incentives to adults to accept and promote cosmopolitanism. It is true that with globalisation and the acceptance of multiculturalism (especially in white-settler societies such as Canada and Australia) there has been growing awareness of the benefits of diversity and difference. It is perhaps unsurprising that Will Kymlicka (1995) is so much a product of the Canadian experience of multiculturalism. This positive embrace of globalisation and cultural diversity has, however, received several damaging setbacks in the last two decades, from the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new century. The obvious examples are 9/11, the bombings in London, the war on terror, and now the general crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. Perhaps the most damaging political shock has come from the widespread impact of populism across the Western world, which has transformed the stability of the two-party system that has been characteristic of stable democracies in the post-war period and exposed deep-seated animosity towards outsiders, including legitimate refugees and asylum seekers. Much of the hostility has been directed toward Muslims, and the presidency of Donald Trump has done much to legitimise anti-Muslim sentiment, for which he has considerable support from Protestant fundamentalists (Turner, 2018).

As we argue in this article, however, Trump is equally determined to exclude illegal migration from across the Mexican border. His observations about "s——" countries were not specifically directed at Muslim-majority societies. "Muslims" have become an important marker of in-group membership, but, equally, there is ample evidence of a generalised anti-Semitic moment in modern societies. Cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are in retreat as societies that were historically at the forefront of liberalism are calling for closed borders. Despite the broad agenda of populist movements worldwide and the wide net cast against migrants of many nationalities, research interest in Islamophobia has been particularly strong.

In this article we fully recognise the reality and detrimental impact of anti-Muslim sentiment and that therefore "Islamophobia" may be used to describe an important social reality, especially in societies where Muslims are a minority. Nevertheless, we are critical of this term as a *scientific* concept and secondly, argue that, in the sociology of Islam, it actually distorts research by concentrating on Muslims as victims of social forces rather than as agents shaping them. Consequently, we argue that the sociological study of Islam is in need of serious revision (Turner 2013).

Islamophobia research (hereafter IR) draws upon two important arguments. The first is that Christianity has long been in opposition to Islam, typically regarding the Prophet Muhammad as false and often treating Islam as merely another sect of Christianity. As a result of this historical opposition, Christianity lays the foundation for Islamophobia. Evidence for this view comes from modern Europe where populist movements often characterise themselves as defending Christianity or more precisely Christendom against an Islamic threat. There is, in fact, a political and ideological split between the Pope, who wants an open and hospitable Europe, and many lay Catholics, who want the opposite (Rosario and Turner, 2018). We argue that this historical view of Christianity is selective and misleading. Secondly, IR draws heavily and uncritically on the legacy of Edward Said's 1978 classic *Orientalism*, whereby IR can show how antipathy toward Islam is widespread in the West. We argue that, while Said, as a professor of comparative literature, developed a powerful critique of representations of the Orient in the humanities, the history of political theory points to a very different interpretation of Islam (Beiner 2011).

Drawing on Kuhn's famous work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), we subject Orientalism and Islamophobia (a constituent element) to a thought exercise, testing the extent to which either enjoys paradigmatic status in breaking new scientific ground. We conclude that "Islamophobia" is an advocacy concept rather than a scientific one. The concept has too many anomalies and lacks the necessary consistency to constitute a coherent framework for rigorous analysis. As a framework, Islamophobia functions to mobilise people in support of particular issues and over time becomes the catchword of a social movement rather than a concept in scientific analysis. The value of an advocacy concept is not so much whether it provides reliable evidence or insight into prejudice, but rather whether it is successful in mobilising social movements against a perceived misrepresentation. Advocacy concepts have to be selective because social reality is always "messy" and full of contradictions and ambiguities. Ambiguous social messages are unlikely to succeed in mobilising social groups that require striking and dramatic slogans rather than dry empirical reports. Given the emphasis in many academic contexts for "public intellectuals" and "engagement", advocacy concepts circulate widely in the modern academy and are not confined to a popular audience. Thus, advocacy concepts are not so much true or false but effective or otherwise.
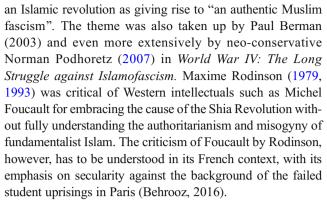
We need to make it clear that we see advocacy concepts playing an important role in political life as a platform for promoting the interests of particular groups - minorities, the excluded, the oppressed - but we simply say that they rarely have credibility as scientific concepts in objective research. This is particularly so where research aims to inform evidence-based policy making. This claim will obviously draw criticism insofar as we are appealing to a scientific vocabulary that does not pay attention to criticisms of scientific neutrality, for example, from "stand-point theory", or "positionality" or varieties of "post-modernism". We defend our view through a detailed critique of Islamophobia as a concept and define our own position via the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) on "reflexive sociology."

The History of Islamophobia

The concept of Islamophobia has been used in a variety of contexts since the 1920s. Islamophobia has, on occasion, been related to anti-Semitism and, indeed, one problem with the concept is how to distinguish it from more general categories such as anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia. Its contemporary usage, however, can be traced back to the 1997 Runnymede Trust Report entitled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All". The report is typically considered as having formed the foundation of the contemporary usage of the term. The report lists a set of characteristics that constitute Islamophobia. Those characteristics are primarily related to the "essentialization" of Islam, that is treating Islam as a static and singular manifestation rather than a complex collection of diverse traditions. Islamophobia is defined as "the shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, the fear or dislike of most or all Muslims" (1997).

Although the Islamophobia literature regards the Runnymede Trust Report of 1997 as its foundation date, anxiety about, and hostility towards, Muslims in Britain dates back to the Salman Rushdie affair that followed the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. Popular reaction was intensified by the 1989 *fatwa* of Ayatollah Ruthollah Komeini, which called for the author's death on a charge of blasphemy. While the American public had been alerted to the global implications of the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 by the Iran-Contra scandal of 1985, when a clandestine arms sale in return for the release of hostages was leaked to the press in November 1986, the British public became fully aware of the reach of the Ayatollah as a consequence of the Rushdie affair. The *fatwa* was probably the most significant challenge to the liberal notion of "freedom of expression" in modern British history and survived to polarise public opinion regarding liberal values and blasphemy. Alongside "Islamophobia", we now had "Islamofascism". The origins of this term are unclear but, in his *Atheist Manifesto*, Michael Onfray (2007) identifies

an Islamic revolution as giving rise to "an authentic Muslim fascism". The theme was also taken up by Paul Berman (2003) and even more extensively by neo-conservative Norman Podhoretz (2007) in *World War IV: The Long Struggle against Islamofascism.* Maxime Rodinson (1979, 1993) was critical of Western intellectuals such as Michel Foucault for embracing the cause of the Shia Revolution without fully understanding the authoritarianism and misogyny of fundamentalist Islam. The criticism of Foucault by Rodinson, however, has to be understood in its French context, with its emphasis on secularity against the background of the failed student uprisings in Paris (Behrooz, 2016).

Sociology has, of course, borrowed other concepts from everyday discourse and "Islamophobia" is thus no exception. The term was not, however, intended for scientific investigation (despite subsequent efforts to make it so). It was a warning to the government that all was not well in the public domain. Subsequently, the concept of Islamophobia has evolved into mainstream political discourse and even informed the development of an academic journal, many books and conferences on the topic. There is a common view that anti-Muslim political discourse is rampant; in fact, that it constitutes an "industry" (Lean, 2012) and that Islamophobia is simply an illustration of old Orientalist myths (Kumar, 2012).

Key Definitions and Themes in Definitions

There has been a great deal written about Islamophobia, particularly in the past two decades. A preliminary search using the Google Scholar "custom range" tool for the term "Islamophobia" between 1997 and 2018 found 21,100 articles on the topic. While these figures are by no means all-encompassing of all the work completed, a breakdown of these figures is particularly revealing in terms of the rapid growth of the concept in the literature in recent years. The period from 1997 to 2000 reveals that only 223 articles referenced or used the concept in some way. This frequency grew to 1390 articles in the five-year period from 2001 to 2005, and to 5940 articles from 2006 to 2010. The period 2011 to 2015 has seen 15,500 references, indicating that scholars are not only using the concept, but also cross-referencing other contributions. Indicating the exponential growth in usage of the term, less than half of these references (9390) are from the decade 2001 to 2011.

A survey of the literature reveals common themes in contemporary definitions of Islamophobia by scholars who embrace the term. Much of the key contemporary scholarship is located in the field of ethnic and racial studies. Many equate the concept with "dread or hatred of Islam", couched in anti-Muslim discrimination or racism (Allen 1997, Elahi and Kahn, 2017), while others equate the concept with correlate terms such as xenophobia (Sheridan 2006). Taras argues that Islamophobia "bundles

religious, ethnic and cultural prejudices together…" (Taras, 2013: 417) while Meer and Modood claim that Islamophobia has a "long, non-linear history of racialization to turn an ethno-religious group into a race" (2012). Others believe that "Islamophobia" covers a broader hostility toward multiculturalism (Marranci 2004: 115; Poynting 2007) and that Muslims have become, in effect, the new "folk devil" (Pedziwiatr, 2010; Shain, 2011; Werbner 2013). Salmon Sayyid, who has perhaps done the most significant theoretical work to advance the concept, claims that "Islamophobia is a concept that emerges precisely to do the work that categories like racism were not doing. It names something which needs to be named" (2014: 10). Philosopher Brian Klug celebrates the concept of Islamophobia as having "come of age", functioning as "an organizing principle for scholarship and research…" (2012: 666). Klug goes so far as to argue that the term has become established and acquired a "life of its own", and that, consequently, any attempt to critique the concept "becomes a quibble" (2012: 674).

As a framing concept, Islamophobia draws strongly on postcolonialism. As Meer remarks, for many observers, [Edward] Said is positioned as a seminal source for the study of Islamophobia (Meer 2014: 501). Although Said claimed that he was not seeking to "defend" Islam (2005:220), his work was critical of the notion that Western scholarship of the Middle East and Muslims was objective in contrast to the self-concept and knowledge of Muslims about themselves. Taking aim at Bernard Lewis, Said wrote:

> One would find this kind of procedure less objectionable as political propaganda — which is what it is, of course — were it not accompanied by sermons on the objectivity, the fairness, the impartiality of a real historian, the implication always being that Muslims and Arabs cannot be objective but that Orientalists … writing about Muslims are, by definition, by training, by the mere fact of their Westernness. This is the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioners (1979: 319).

Meer, a prominent intellectual figure in the recent development of the concept, notes that postcolonial thought (as articulated by Said), services an account of Islamophobia through its continuity (the reproduction of contemporary postcolonial relations), translation (utility of the Orientalist critique for the Islamophobia concept) and its contribution to the development of a Muslim "subjecthood" (2014: 502). For Meer, and many others, the symbiosis of the relationship between Orientalism, postcolonial thought and Islamophobia stems from a preoccupation with power, specifically a concern with addressing a power imbalance.

Despite the rapidly increasing popularity of the concept, the notion of Islamophobia has been criticised on a number of grounds. For example, Cesari (2006) has noted that the term is contested because it is often imprecisely applied to diverse phenomena, ranging from xenophobia to anti-terrorism. Cesari considers the term misleading as it presupposes the pre-eminence of religious discrimination when other forms of discrimination, such as race or class, may also be as or more relevant. Salmon Sayyid (2010), a proponent of the concept, has suggested that, to some, Islamophobia "comes off as a nebulous and perpetually contested category", allowing it to circulate widely but ineffectively. Kirstin Sinclair has claimed that the result of an imprecise use of the concept of Islamophobia is that the term becomes diluted, potentially even leading to the further essentialization of Muslims (2011: 453). Writing the opening article in the first edition of the *Sociology of Islam* journal, Bryan S. Turner (2013: 14-15) encouraged the sociology of Islam to move beyond "descriptive studies of Islamophobia that have become repetitive and predictable". Erik Bleich is simultaneously critical of scholars who use the term "Islamophobia" without defining it and those scholars who employ "vague, narrow or generic" definitions of the term. He notes, as we do above, that even when scholars adopt a more specific definition of the term, "there is still significant variation in the precise formulations of Islamophobia" (2011: 1582). Bleich makes the important point that the term has no psychological currency: "Although the American Psychological Association defines a phobia as "a persistent and irrational fear of a specific object, activity, or situation that is excessive and unreasonable, given the reality of the threat," Islamophobia is not a clinical psychological term" (2011). Most recently, Baehr has extended this criticism: "Phobia... has connotations that are distinctly medical and therapeutic. Phobic language unmasks because it transmutes one set of statements (for instance on immigration or radical Islam) into another that negates the sincerity, probity or rationality of the first. It transforms an account that expresses a political or moral arguement into a social sickness caused by toxic motives or interests" (2019: 25). In a review of several key texts on Islamophobia, Turan Kayaoglu has claimed that "none … offers a definition and typology that can help scholars to utilise the term 'Islamophobia' as a variable in theorizing its causes and consequences" (2012: 615). It is precisely this lack of a clear definition and the contested nature of the term that makes achieving accurate and scientifically sound measurement difficult, if not impossible.

Measuring Islamophobia: Social-Scientific Approaches

Science may be broadly understood as "the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence" (Science Council 2019). A key aim of social scientists is to develop approaches that account for a wide variety of

observations within a coherent and consistent theoretical framework. Science does not like anomalies and too many (if any) may undermine a claim to a scientific proof.

In establishing the scientific validity of a concept, it is essential that both a clear definition and consensus exists as to its key markers and that the study is, as far as possible, replicable. In the absence of such a definition and markers, scholars seeking to establish the existence of the phenomena defined by the concept have been forced into imprecise measurements and considerations. Sheridan, for example, notes that "the line between racism and religious discrimination is often blurred, with the result that measures of the former can serve to highlight the existence of the latter" (2006: 318). Sheridan suggests that visual identity markers such as the hijab can be used to determine when a Muslim is experiencing Islamophobia and, in doing so, questions what happens when a woman does not or is located in a position of intersectionality of race, religion and lower socio economic position?

The original Runneymede Trust Report, which coined the term in its modern usage, has noted in relation to establishing evidence of systemic attacks on Muslims:

> When you're looking at evidence, hard evidence, it's very difficult to find the actual data and statistics to actually prove this. It's not to say that it's not happening, but actually regarding the monitoring of these types of attacks it is very difficult to find (2005).

Allen (1997) notes in the original report that much of the evidence is anecdotal and based on a perception of hostility on the basis of faith. Such approaches have led Bleich to argue as follows:

> In short, Islamophobia is an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences. Yet, there is no widely accepted definition of the term. As a result, it is extremely difficult to compare levels of Islamophobia across time, location, or social group, or to levels of analogous categories such as racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia. Without a concept that applies across these comparative dimensions, it is also virtually impossible to identify the causes and consequences of Islamophobia with any precision (2011: 1582).

Salmon Sayyid (2014) has sought to provide a deeper theoretical framing of how Islamophobia might be measured. He attempts to develop a "repertoire of Islamophobia" across six clusters, ranging from attacks on individuals perceived to be Muslim, attacks on property and acts of intimidation, through to institutional discrimination, negative public and political discourse, and state-based targeting of Muslims. However far from a scientific elaboration of how this might be measured, he claims that detecting Islamophobia is a learned activity that is ultimately best revealed through a holistic mastery of context. He states:

> Interpreting Islamophobia (or anti-Semitism or racism) is not a subjective practice, but rather a skilled one in which there has to be a sufficient degree of overlap between one's reading and the other readings in play in the culture at the time. One way to understand the different responses to the occurrence of Islamophobia is to focus on variations in skill levels of the reading on offer. Some people who have had intensive and frequent experience of Islamophobia can often detect it with great acuity, and share that knowledge with similarly skilled readers (2014: 22).

Such an approach is centred entirely on the concept of positionality, automatically restricting the study of anti-Muslim political discourse, racism or discrimination to Muslims based on their personal interpretation of local context. While this indeed may overlap with the experience of others, there is no systematic and reliable mechanism through which to do so. Stating as much does not mean that we are "innocent of social theories of knowledge" (Larson and Spillenger 1990). Rather, it is necessary to determine whether the approach has any social scientific validity, particularly when claims are made as to measurement. This depends on where one locates oneself on the social scientific spectrum. If we take the positivist (strictly empirical) and interpretivist (context based) approaches as a starting point for our understanding of social science, then we have two ways forward. We view the two approaches (positivist and interpretivist) as intertwined and central to social scientific inquiry.

The aim of interpretivist approaches to social science should be, as far as possible, scientifically sound and aimed at providing a coherent evidential basis to inform positivist quantitative analysis. Objectivity and neutrality are central features of the research process and inform truth seeking. The extent to which a select few possessing the requisite intellectual and cultural capital and, indeed, mastery, may determine that they are experiencing Islamophobia within a narrowly predefined analytical frame is problematic to say the least and indicative of the scale of the challenge in wielding the term with any effect in scholarship. How might a secular sociologist empirically utilise the concept? Indeed, are there any other such instances in the social sciences where this is the case or should we merely study ourselves? This phenomenon is not unique to writing on Islamophobia but has become pervasive across the social sciences, as qualitative studies based on perception, often accompanied by a reifying label, have come to the fore in a world dominated by identity politics.

Bourdieu's reflexive sociology has an important contribution to make to this effect. Bourdieu addressed what Wacquant referred to as the "seemingly irresolvable antagonism between subjectivist and objectivist modes of knowledge" (1992: 3),

promoting the practice of a reflexive sociological approach, with the goal to seek to "effect the dissemination of weapons of self-defence against symbolic domination" (1992: xiv). For Bourdieu, sociology is capable of "producing awareness of those mechanisms that make life painful, even unliveable" and in "bringing contradictions to light" (1999: 629). Such a purpose has much in common with those seeking to identify and address the dimensions of hostility towards minority communities, including Muslims.

Bourdieu (Wacquant 1989: 3) asserts that "one of the chief sources of error in the social sciences resides in an uncontrolled relation to the object which results in the projection of this relation onto the object." This has the net result of not only undermining scientific objectivity, but actually reproducing through research outcomes the current system of power relations as they exist. Bourdieu asserts that three types of biases may "blur the sociological gaze" (Wacquant 1989: 39). The first results from the social origins of the researcher that influence their schematic (habitus) for interpretation and analysing the world. This is regarded as the most obvious bias and one that can be controlled through intellectual introspection. The second bias results from the researcher's location in the academic field; what the possible intellectual positions available are and how this shapes the possibilities for different streams of thought and analysis to emerge.

The third bias may be considered the "intellectualist" bias that tempts the academic to view the world in abstract terms as a series of "events" or "spectacles" to be analysed rather than as concrete, real life problems that require practical solutions. Bourdieu argues that this can have a greater distorting impact upon analysis than the former two biases because a failure to comprehend the reality of that being observed can result in the collapse of practical logic into theoretical logic. Wacquant notes that these biases are built in to concepts and instruments of both analysis (questionnaires, statistical techniques, etc) and applied practical research (coding, rules of thumb in field research) (1989: 40). A failure to practise reflexivity as a core dimension of the social scientific process has the impact of not only undermining the quality of work, but, most importantly, of preventing the research serving its desired goal of casting a light on structures of symbolic domination, thus undermining the emancipatory potential of sociological inquiry.

As a reifying concept based on negative actions against Muslims, Islamophobia is also unable to explain the complexities of deeper sociological phenomena. In recent years, several sociological and legal studies have demonstrated how Sharia – Islamic law – has been negatively understood by governments and media when it relates to family law and the acceptance of Islamic legal precepts in Western courts. This may be represented as a form of Islamophobia based on hostility toward Islam, though it also speaks to a hostility

directed at legal pluralism. These same studies have revealed, however, that other forms of Islamic practice that emanate directly from the Sharia, including Islamic finance, have been praised and accepted in a neoliberal market where Islam operates as a point of differentiation, offering a new market base (Roose and Possamai 2015; Black and Sadiq 2011). In October 2013, London became the first Western city to host the World Islamic Economic Forum (the Muslim equivalent of the World Economic Forum). Speaking at the forum, Boris Johnson, who has often been accused of Islamophobia, boasted about being the first Lord Mayor of London of "Muslim extraction" (due to his great, great grandfather Ahmed Hamdi). Johnson then announced a £100 million fund to encourage IT start-ups to move from the Muslim world to London (Chorley, 2013). At the same meeting, then British Prime Minister David Cameron stated that the UK would become the first non-Muslim nation to issue a Sukuk (Islamic bond). Such actions saw these same leaders castigated by readers of tabloids as "selling their soul", as "pandering to Muslims" and as the actions of a "traitor" (Chorley, 2013); in short, the opposite of Islamophobic. Such contradictions in behaviour and action are not uncommon in individuals, let alone governments, where political pragmatism, rather than deep fear, may shape political approaches. Furthermore, such space is actively developed by Muslims displaying often exceptional levels of entrepreneurialism and engagement in wider society (Boubekeur 2005; Roose 2012; Peucker and Akbarzadeh 2014) not as victims, but as active citizens. The question must be asked: how precisely does Islamophobia act as a valid measurement amidst this complexity?
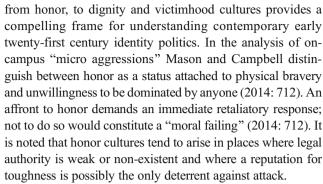
Islamophobia as a Paradigmatic Shift?

In the context of the increasing popularity and efforts at intellectual expansion of the concept of Islamophobia on the one hand and apparent scientific limitations on the other, it is important to consider an alternative proposition; that of Islamophobia as a paradigmatic shift. To explore this proposition we consider Kuhn's highly influential The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962). In this work on the history of Science, Kuhn focuses on paradigm shifts between one "time-honoured scientific theory in favour of another incompatible with it" (1962:6). These paradigmatic shifts were stimulated by the notion that the scientific conventions, modes of inquiry and vocabulary of a specific period of time would hold new discoveries back until the sheer weight of anomalies challenging the established tradition force the development of a new framework of understanding.

New paradigms challenge the established rules of the game and shape new directions in research. To Kuhn "competition between segments of the scientific community is the only historical process that results in the rejection of one previously

accepted theory or in the adoption of another" (1962: 8). Said's work is argued by a number of scholars to constitute a "paradigm shift" in thinking about the relationship between the West and the non-West (Burke III and Prochaska 2007; Burney 2012) and indeed with further elaboration, it has shaped the development of a number of sub-fields from post-colonial studies and subaltern studies to Islamophobia research. To this extent, Islamophobia may be postured, as it is by its proponents, as a new paradigm for understanding social discrimination and political hostility. Methods, such as "intuitive understanding" based on subjective interpretation and "mastery of context" as outlined by Sayyid (2014) which have little place in the contemporary framing of social scientific method may be, so to speak, ahead of their time. It may well be the limitation of our current social scientific vocabulary and imagination, indeed as Said has stated, our "Westerness" that holds us back from a truly revolutionary moment in the history of social science. To test this proposition we propose a Kuhnian thought exercise to test the view that Islamophobia constitutes a paradigmatic shift in the social sciences that many, including the authors, fail to grasp due to the intellectual limitations of their context. Drawing on Kuhn's argument that this may only become clear with the benefit of time, let us travel forward in time by half a century. Looking at the roots of the development of the concept, it is clear that Islamophobia coincided with the emergence of sizeable, home-grown communities of Muslims across Western contexts and largely alongside the "war on terror" after 9/11 and subsequent invasion of Muslim majority nations. The term, framed as the "irrational fear of Islam or Muslims" might be considered an attempt to describe the sudden and overwhelming effort by Western states to control Muslim populations in the context of a perceived threat and to subvert the notion that all Muslims have a radical agenda. To this extent, the term is clearly concerned with a relationship of power (or lack thereof) with the state apparatus and representations of Muslims as a threat.

Yet the concomitant growth in usage of the concept across a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives and attempts to measure the concept as a distinct scientific area of inquiry across Western contexts over the next two decades, particularly as terror attacks from radical Muslim groups increase might be considered to signify a different set of drivers. The emergence of the Islamic State movement (2014–2019) with many thousands of Western Muslim foreign fighters, attacks on major landmarks, Muslim on Muslim sectarian violence (including in Western countries) and the continued threat of violence emanating from a small, but highly active minority challenge the notion of "irrationality" despite the well-established argument about the "silent majority" of law abiding Western Muslims (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011). Seeking to situate the term in historical context, future scholars may look to the research of Mason and Campbell whose work on the transition from honor, to dignity and victimhood cultures provides a compelling frame for understanding contemporary early twenty-first century identity politics. In the analysis of on-campus "micro aggressions" Mason and Campbell distinguish between honor as a status attached to physical bravery and unwillingness to be dominated by anyone (2014: 712). An affront to honor demands an immediate retaliatory response; not to do so would constitute a "moral failing" (2014: 712). It is noted that honor cultures tend to arise in places where legal authority is weak or non-existent and where a reputation for toughness is possibly the only deterrent against attack.

In contrast to honor, a dignity culture is based on public opinion and the notion that there exists and inherent self-worth that cannot be alienated by others (Mason and Campbell 2014: 713; Berger 1970). In this context it is "commendable to have 'thick skin' and if an intolerable conflict does arise, to appeal to third parties be it the authorities or public opinion" (2014:713–14). They argued that early in the twenty-first century society experienced a new direction in the evolution of moral culture to that of "victimhood" characterised with concern by "status and sensitivity to sleight combined with a heavy reliance on 3rd parties". In "'Victimhood culture,' people increasingly demanded help from others and advertised their oppression as evidence that they deserved respect" (2014:715).

Fifty years on, we might ask ourselves was Islamophobia a scientific or moral imperative? Did it ever provide a cohesive empirical base through which to understand discrimination against a small percentage of the community (let alone a more structural and entrenched discrimination against minorities generally)? Or was it a moral imperative that walked a fine line between dignity and victimhood cultures with the intent of providing a political challenge to entrenched anti-Muslim racism? Was its development limited by the weight of its own contradictions and anomalies rendering it scientifically marginalised at best? Or was the concept merely poorly framed by Western social scientific language and academic orthodoxies and did subsequent intellectual developments contribute to a recognition of Islamophobia's role in a paradigmatic shift in the social sciences? Ultimately the answer must be speculative, but we outline a plausible answer through the notion of advocacy.

Islamophobia as Advocacy Concept

Our position in this article is not primarily to criticise the concept of Islamophobia. Rather, it is to offer a new way of looking at Islamophobia as an "advocacy" concept – one that purports to describe a situation from a position of neutrality, as well as one that aims to encourage an audience to take action. Its purpose, therefore, is not to describe the world but to change it (Turner, 2015).

Advocacy concepts are widespread in the social sciences. They have often entered through social movement discourse about discrimination towards women, blacks, religious minorities, the elderly, and the disabled. They answer to the widespread belief that academics should be engaged. Sociology has been somewhat at the forefront because the notion of social constructionism provided an ideal platform for believing what has been constructed can be unconstructed. Berger and Luckmann (1967) provided the ideal conceptual recipe for demonstrating that notions about race, age, and gender concealed taken-for-granted prejudices that could and should be deconstructed. Social constructionism offered rich foundations for a variety of advocacy movements.

Although such notions have worked well in mobilising the academy, it remains the case that not all things are equally socially constructed. The idea of construction and its more extreme versions has given widespread legitimacy to identity politics over objectivity, with potentially damaging consequences for policy.

As a demonstration of this challenge, consider a thought experiment we term the "advocacy policy dilemma". Let us imagine a newly elected progressive left-wing government. After the flight of capital, it only has $1,000,000 to spend on welfare improvements. There are two large advocacy groups – care for the elderly and care for children. Each claims well over the budget limit. The government has limited options in making a decision. It can (A) toss a coin (the relativism option); (B) accept the most powerful advocacy group (power politics); (C) divide the funds equally leaving both dissatisfied (liberalism); or finally (D) assess the facts and examine its core values, and then decide which option can maximise the impact of the welfare expenditure (consequentialism). Cabinet ministers in the government discover the figures for elderly need are wildly exaggerated and their values underline the care of children as a priority. No option is perfect, but option D has a practical and ethical element consistent with a progressive government. Our argument in favour of depending on scientific facts and values is a version of Amartya Sen's puzzle regarding different versions of justice (2009). There are no completely satisfying outcomes, but some are definitely better than others.

Advocacy concepts are neither true nor false – the question is whether or not they work. Such a charge has been, in effect, acknowledged by Allen, the individual who has done most to develop the concept of Islamophobia. In referring to the original Runnymede Trust report, Allen (2012) stated a "very specific intent" to shape and influence understanding and to make a significant impact and, by consequence, achieve change. This ties in closely to the preoccupation of Said and postcolonial scholars with challenging power relationships.

To work as an advocacy concept, Islamophobia cannot recognise too much empirical complexity. In addition, does the widespread use of the term by activists create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which people believe that the prejudice is widespread on the basis of extreme cases such as attacks on mosques? Paradoxically, public fear of Muslims has indeed influenced government policy. Public perception of Muslim radicalization was met with anti-terrorist campaigns such as *Prevent*, the likes of which, it has been argued, have exacerbated the challenges faced (O'Toole et al. 2016). But how widespread is Islamophobia in daily experience? In a study of Bangladeshi youth in London, Daniel DeHanas found that his Muslim subjects had not directly experienced anti-Muslim prejudice, "though all were aware from news sources, text messages or Facebook that it happens elsewhere" (DeHanas, 2017: 65).

There have undoubtedly been many instances where Muslims have been targeted for state surveillance, irrespective of the extent to which they were individually culpable. This has been acutely felt amongst second and third generation Muslims across the West, where religion, rather than race, is the common denominator, and Islam becomes the central identity marker (Roose 2016). In Australia, for example, counter terrorism laws enable individuals to be contacted by security agencies and sworn to secrecy about the dimensions of their interviews. Meanwhile, in the United States, the New York Police Department has, since 9/11, conducted widespread surveillance of Muslims, with its practices only being subjected to judicial review for the first time in 2018. The UK state security response to terrorism, conversely, was predictably rushed and bungled, without any great nuance, and, in the early days after the London 7/7 attacks carried out by British-born Muslims, was often overbearing. As mentioned above, the negative impact on locally-born Muslims and the sense of victimization felt among Muslim communities was compounded by government strategies such as *Prevent*, by significant negative tabloid media coverage, and by a willingness on the part of some politicians to seek political capital out of the issue. Attacks on mosques became relatively frequent. Muslim schools are often a key site of contestation in Western contexts and observant Muslim women wearing the hijab, niqab or burqa are often subjected to abuse. These developments go in some part towards explaining the significant increase in the use of the concept of Islamophobia in scholarship over time, particularly after London 7/7. What is not explained, however, is that state policies have become significantly more nuanced and effective and agencies have become far more effective at both working with communities and targeting specific radicalized networks.

Checks and balances in the legal system have also been drawn upon to target anti-Muslim politicians, media commentators and unjust laws. Notwithstanding a clear improvement on the part of states and more responsible coverage by the mainstream (if not tabloid) media, the employment of the concept of Islamophobia continues to grow and proliferate.

This has been particularly the case following the emergence of the Islamic State movement and in the context of contemporary populist movements. In order to understand this, however, we must first go back to a period before the concept had any currency.
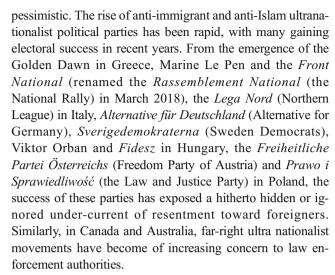
The Historic Dimension of Islamophobia as Advocacy Concept

The historical evidence suggests that Islamophobia was not widespread in Europe before World War II, when Muslims were generally well integrated into Western societies. In Weimar Germany, for example, Muslims represented an economically prosperous and socially accepted community, but this Muslim middle-class cohort largely disappeared in the aftermath of the War (Ozyurek, 2015). It is claimed that European hostility toward Jews has been replaced by the growing fear of Muslims (Weller at al, 2013: 197). Although the German government, with the emphatic backing of Angela Merkel, welcomed refugees from Syria during the 2015 crisis, it also gave further ammunition to hostile anti-migrant groups, with significant protests erupting in Dresden and elsewhere.

As noted, it was not until 1997 that the concept of "Islamophobia" was first defined in Britain by the Runnymede Trust to describe the nature and scope of prejudice against Muslims and to recommend that the *Race Relations Act 1976* (UK) be amended to make discrimination on religious grounds unlawful. This amendment was rejected by the government, which argued that the *Human Rights Act 1998* (UK) would provide sufficient protection for minorities (Fetzer and Soper, 2005: 32).

Attitudes towards Muslims vary across Europe depending on specific national factors. The French example, with its policy of *laicite*, is unique. While Europe appears to be struggling with religious diversity as such, Islam is thought by some scholars to be a special challenge in French culture. In *Can Islam be French?* John Bowen (2010) claimed that Islam touches raw nerves in French culture. The entry of Islam into public culture has changed the topography of France and raised old anxieties about "colonial repression, modern anti-Semitism, and the struggles between Catholics and Republicans" (Bowen, 2010: 15). In Eastern Europe, official attitudes towards Muslims have hardened to an extent arguably not seen since the 1930s. The leader of the Polish Law and Justice Party (and former Prime Minister) of Poland, Jarosław Kaczyński, stated at a political rally in 2015, for example, that Poland may have to resettle 100,000 Muslim refugees, who carry "all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which … while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here" (Cienski 2015).

The mood of European scholarship with respect to the recognition and integration of Islam is perhaps unsurprisingly pessimistic. The rise of anti-immigrant and anti-Islam ultranationalist political parties has been rapid, with many gaining electoral success in recent years. From the emergence of the Golden Dawn in Greece, Marine Le Pen and the *Front National* (renamed the *Rassemblement National* (the National Rally) in March 2018), the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) in Italy, *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany), *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats), Viktor Orban and *Fidesz* in Hungary, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria) and *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (the Law and Justice Party) in Poland, the success of these parties has exposed a hitherto hidden or ignored under-current of resentment toward foreigners. Similarly, in Canada and Australia, far-right ultra nationalist movements have become of increasing concern to law enforcement authorities.

Writing about "Jews" and "Muslims" from an historical or sociological perspective raises considerable difficulties because these labels obscure significant cultural, social and religious differences within the two categories. A further difficulty in defining and contrasting religious identities is that, especially among youth, believing, belonging and behaving are no longer systematically connected (Davie, 1994).

In studying examples of attacks on Muslims, it is important to take a comparative view because the experience of inclusion or exclusion varies considerably between societies depending on the composition of the Muslim community, the date of its arrival and the legal context. In the United States, the constitutional emphasis on religious freedom and the separation of church and state has played an important role in the relatively successful integration of Muslims into American society. In addition, Muslims are not new migrants to the United States; rather, African Muslims were first brought to the United States as slaves up to 400 years ago, thereby making American awareness of Islamic cultures not particularly exceptional.

The constitution of the state of Virginia has, in particular, been foundational in protecting minorities, including Muslims. Famously, Thomas Jefferson owned a copy of the Qur'an and included Muslims under the protection of the law (Spellberg 2014). In this respect, Jefferson closely followed John Locke's 1689 *Letter on Tolerance* (Goldie 2010), in which protection of religious belief was extended to Muslims (often referred to as "Turks"), Jews and dissenters. Muslim migrants to the United States are, however, generally different to Muslim migrants to Britain (mainly from Pakistan and Bangladesh) or to France (mainly Algerian and African). There is considerable evidence that despite 9/11, Muslims in the United States are well established. The Pew Research Center report of 2007 reflects this success in its title – *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and mostly Mainstream.*

Of course, when we think of Islamophobia, we need to consider what it is about Islam or Muslims that people actually

fear. It is generally agreed that the veiling of Muslim women was a political problem in Europe but not in the United States (Joppke, 2009). By contrast, the debate about the *Sharia* in the United States has emerged as an increasingly divisive political and legal issue, partly because opposition to the open practice of *Sharia* has become (unofficially) part of the agenda of the Republican Party and the Tea Party. Several states, namely Arizona and Oklahoma, have already banned references to the *Sharia* in American courts. Although the media has contained much negativity towards the (alleged) spread of *Sharia,* academic reports suggest that it is becoming embedded in legal practice, especially in domestic dispute resolution (Possamai, Richardson and Turner, 2015; Joppke and Torpey, 2013).

Perhaps the principal intellectual lesson of recent research is that understanding domestic or national conflicts cannot be achieved without a detailed and close understanding of international politics. The growing crisis of African refugees in the Mediterranean and the millions of displaced Syrians, alongside the spectre of the so-called Islamic State and jihadist terrorism in the streets of Europe, has only served to strengthen domestic opposition to immigration across European societies. Consequently, the challenges facing Muslim minority communities are unlikely to dissipate and, indeed, may grow exponentially.

It is in its capacity as an advocacy concept that Islamophobia has been of greatest significance. The term is at its most substantive when applied to describing anti-Muslim activists and the broad coalition of avowedly anti-Muslim media commentators, quasi-intellectuals and politicians seeking to promote a fear of Islam amongst the electorate. Labelling of specifically anti-Muslim activism as Islamophobia has proved an effective tool in political struggle, enabling activists and scholars alike to identify a particular genre of pseudo-scholarship and political rhetoric.

We have, in passing, outlined some standard objections to the concept, but we now get to the root of the issue. The notion of "phobia" immediately implies that *any* anti-Muslim sentiment or criticism or fear is, by definition, irrational. This conceptual move immediately rules out any meaningful dialogue – here we conjure up both Rawls and Habermas as presenting models of dialogue that facilitate truth seeking behaviour – between Muslims and non-Muslims or at least rules out open rational dialogue by two otherwise opposing positions. To offer one possible comparison, in the United States one might argue that fear of gun-related crime is rational, whereas the probability of being attacked by terrorists claiming to be "Muslim" is low by comparison. Therefore, a blanket fear of Muslims is irrational.

The argument here is typically side-tracked into a discussion of claims and counter-claims about what is considered to be "Muslim" or "Islam". Thus, ISIS and al-Qaeda, for example, are not Islamic organisations because killing human beings is counter to the basic message of the Qur'an. Yet ISIS claims to be authentically Islamic by proclaiming and defending the name of the Prophet, by collecting taxes in the name of charity (*Zakat*), by defending the dignity of women by ensuring that they are veiled in public, and so forth. Critics of ISIS normally dismiss such claims by showing that recruits to ISIS are often violent criminals who carry out their barbaric acts only in the name of Islam. These critics have also mobilised imams and clerics and issued *fatawa* to undermine the claims to Islamic legitimacy of ISIS. Much of the vocabulary of ISIS is taken from the radical Wahhabi doctrines of Saudi Arabian imams and from the Saudi state, which enforces harsh *hudud* laws against deviance from Wahhabi norms. ISIS considers that any Muslim who fails to join their fight, notwithstanding the fact that they have the means to do so, is not a true Muslim and is, therefore, a legitimate target for acts of terror and warfare.

What counts as authentic Islam has many internal ambiguities and unsettled debates. The sectarian divide between Muslim communities in both Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority contexts is a compelling case in point. Bloodshed between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims has pervaded Islamic history and, in recent years, spread to Western contexts. Scholars have been reticent to explore the dimensions of any sectarian or intra-Islamic tensions within the scholarship on Islamophobia. Khaled Abou el Fadl suggests that:

The reluctance of many Muslims to recognise the existence of a schism within the faith is in many ways due to the powerful influence of the dogma of unity in modern Islamic thought … contemporary Islamic thinkers and activists heavily emphasise the compelling need for unity among Muslims, demanding that all Muslims regard themselves as a single person… (2005: 14). If this is accurate, we may see the challenges of relying on subjective measures of Islamophobia at all. Do Sunni Muslims demonstrate a phobia of Shia Muslims? How might we frame intra-group fear and hatred from a social scientific perspective? In order for "Islamophobia" to work as an advocacy concept it cannot fully recognize let alone countenance these internal uncertainties, otherwise the certainty about "phobic mentalities" would not work as a mobilizing notion.

We have, however, suggested briefly that the idea of "Orientalism", from the legacy of Edward Said, might offer "Islamophobia" a rich theoretical back-stop to overcome its weakness as a scientific concept. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has had a profound impact on research on Islam and the Muslim world. As Hussain and Bagguley note, while he did not utilize the term "Islamophobia", he did "view many features of Western representations of the "Arab other" as based on a fear of Muslims" (2012: 718). Said's work has had its critics (Varisco 2007), but the work remains central to the claims underpinning Islamophobia. One criticism of Said is that, while his work is an important criticism of literary

sources, his knowledge of social and political theory was limited (Turner 1978). The problem is that anti-Islamic sentiment in political theory from Thomas Hobbes onwards is difficult to support. Generally speaking, Western political thought treated Christianity as an anti-political religion, the millenarian beliefs of which rendered it unhelpful in supporting a sovereign state. As Hobbes bluntly wrote in *Leviathan* (1985: 600), "a man cannot serve two masters" and, in the interests of state sovereignty, he was not enthusiastic about the Church meddling in society or politics. Religious strife destabilized states. If we look at Western political theory, from Hobbes to Nietzsche, Christianity weakens the West because it is effeminate, it corrodes political sovereignty because Jesus's kingdom was not of this earth, and it breeds religious wars that have been disastrous. These writers, including Rousseau, Montesquieu and Machiavelli, all looked favourably on Moses and Muhammad as strong political leaders who created states. These authors favoured civil religion as it had developed, for example, in the Roman Empire, combining pagan religion and loyalty to the empire (Beiner 2011). In addition to this tradition, Edward Gibbon (1902) in his six volume *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire between 1776 and 1788*, created the foundation of an Enlightenment view of history that saw Christianity (or religion in general) as corrupting political institutions.

If these writers supported a religious solution to the coherence of civil society, it was a pagan religious tradition, or they looked towards the Ottoman Empire as a political system based on manly strength. In short, Orientalist attitudes in the West are neither uniform nor dominant. This complexity does not support Islamophobia as an academic discourse, but only as an advocacy concept.

Conclusion: Islamophobia as an Advocacy Concept

This article is a modest plea to reconsider differences between science and advocacy concepts, thereby recognising their different roles and locations in social movements and academic institutions. In a context increasingly defined by identity politics, social media is a force multiplier for extremist political narratives. It is therefore important that those seeking to undertake the scholarly study of detrimental social behaviours motivated by hatred possess a highly calibrated theoretical and empirical tool kit to undertake such tasks. To this extent, Islamophobia is a valuable advocacy concept in the public sphere and scholars should aim to keep it there.

There are at least two possible conclusions to our arguments. The first is pessimistic. All human societies are constructed around social groups that have boundaries defining insiders and outsiders. The boundaries are always changing but the inclusion/exclusion binary never wholly disappears.

Policy efforts to create or enhance cosmopolitan virtues will always run up against this limitation, as will advocacy movements in favour of respecting Islam and Muslim communities.

The second is optimistic. Advocacy concepts and scientific practices will never be completely compatible, but they are not always in opposition either. One might reasonably expect advocacy to have a greater effect when it is grounded in reliable facts and tested assumptions – even where this scientific underpinning produces a less obvious and compelling advocacy message. The intention of this article is to ultimately move not towards divorce, but towards a measure of reconciliation of science and advocacy. To do so, however, requires difficult conversations towards challenging the doxa of a field (no matter how recent it may be). Optimistic conclusions, if they are grounded in reliable evidence, that look towards the future are to be preferred over pessimism of the present especially in a populist political climate of apparently irreconcilable ideologies.

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