

The 'Islam' in 'Islamophobia'

Examining perceptions of Islam as a faith in online British discourse

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Contents

ABSTRACT.....	1
INTRODUCTION: ISLAM IN BRITAIN	1
Research Questions: the ‘Islam’ in ‘Islamophobia’	2
Context: Islam as Other	2
<i>Orientalism</i>	4
Events in History and the Rise of Global Media: Portrayal and Perception	8
Islamophobia?.....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW	15
<i>Orientalism</i> , Its Critics and Its Vestiges.....	15
Islamophobia: the Term and the Phenomenon.....	17
Islamophobia: Definitions and Analyses	19
METHODOLOGY	24
Overview: Gathering Data Online	24
The Online Field: Identifying British non-Muslim Voices.....	26
The Data: Views on <i>Islam</i> Expressed by Non-Muslims	28
PRESENTATION OF DATA	31
Results from the Data – Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses	31
The Content: Positive, Critical and Neutral Comments	34
The Content: Tagged Comments	38
<i>Islam as Immoral/Oppressive</i>	40
<i>Islam as Violent/ Threatening</i>	43
<i>Islam as Unintelligent/Backward</i>	46
<i>Islam as Foreign/Other</i>	49
ANALYSIS: ISLAMOPHOBIC RACISM	55
CONCLUSION.....	59
Islam-Haters are Islamophobes – So What?	59
Bibliography	63

ABSTRACT

While several volumes have been published on the subject of Islamophobia, less attention has been given specifically to non-Muslim views on Islam *as a faith*, and how these views relate to the phenomenon of Islamophobia as a whole. Studies on Islamophobia tend to use the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims' interchangeably, but making a distinction between attitudes towards the faith versus attitudes towards its adherents is relevant particularly in the British context, where religious hatred legislation (the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act) explicitly protects "expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions" from legal penalty. So where insult and abuse directed towards Muslims may be illegal or even frowned upon, similar expressions towards Islam as a faith, strictly speaking, are not. This thesis shares a study which aims to isolate views on Islam expressed online by non-Muslims in response to representations of Islam on mainstream British television. Can hatred or contempt towards Islam be considered Islamophobic? And if Islam is 'not a race', how does Islamophobia relate to racism? These are some of the questions this paper aims to address. Furthermore, it discusses the implications of the findings in the context of a secular, 'post-racial' society.

INTRODUCTION: ISLAM IN BRITAIN

Multicultural Britain remains in a state of conflict over issues such as integration versus freedom of identity, assimilation versus freedom of expression, and tolerance versus equality. Ethnic, racial and religious minorities continue to struggle in the face of prejudice and bigotry, and no clear remedy to these social ailments appears to be forthcoming. Further research into the issue of anti-Muslim bigotry and anti-Islamic sentiment should therefore remain within the primary foci of the social

sciences, and it is hoped that this study will succeed in making a positive contribution to this field of enquiry.

Research Questions: the 'Islam' in 'Islamophobia'

Over the course of the past few decades, as issues of immigration, assimilation and cultural integration and the post-9/11 and 7/7 terrorist threat from Islamic fundamentalism have arisen, the subject of Islam has become both pervasive and unavoidable. Everyone seems to have an opinion on it, and the laws of secular Western nations allow the discussion of Islam to take place with a great deal of ease and freedom. Given that it is the second-most adhered to faith in the world, and, as per the 2011 census results, one that continues to grow in Britain, a detailed examination of perceptions of Islam as a faith amongst British non-Muslims has become both relevant and necessary. This dissertation will examine perceptions of Islam as a faith, as observed in online British discourse, as well as explore the implications of these perceptions. Furthermore, it will discuss the correlation, if any, between negative views on Islam *as a faith* and Islamophobia and subsequently suggest possible ways forward in both academic as well as social contexts in Britain. It therefore seeks to answer the following questions: are negative views on Islam Islamophobic? If yes, what justification can be offered for this conclusion? What is the relationship between racism and Islamophobia, and, if Muslims are 'racially diverse', how can Islamophobia be a form of racism? Furthermore, where can a discussion on 'hatred of Islam as Islamophobia' lead in the context of a secular, liberal society?

Context: Islam as Other

Before proceeding, it is worth acknowledging that neither 'Islam' nor 'the West' are easily quantifiable, homogenous or uniform realities; these two terms and their inflections will be used consistently whether with or without quotation marks, but suffice it to say from the outset that the presence of quotation marks is intended whenever either term is used. Use of either term refers to the notion of a perceived entity rather than its actual presence and function in the real world.

What makes the need for this research more urgent is that the perception of Islam in British society appears to have been considerably negative for some time now, and this impacts on the negative perception of Muslims as a group, a point which has already been made in several published volumes (Richardson J. 2004, Poole 2002, Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008).

Yet in some ways, at least in the British context, an examination of views on Islam could be seen as irrelevant – Muslims are afforded legal protection as a religious minority in Britain but Islam as a faith is not, and fears of the curtailing of criticism or satire of religion are indeed what influenced, with a view to protecting freedom of expression, the addition of clause 29J¹ in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006² (Barendt 2011, Goodall 2007, Thompson 2012). However, proponents of clause 29J often neglect to consider questions such as whether criticism of a faith deserves the same protection as contempt, or whether contempt expressed towards a faith can adversely impact its followers, or how contempt of a faith can be reflective of contempt of its followers inasmuch as the two share a direct associative relationship and can sometimes be difficult to delineate from one another (Barendt 2011). In *(Mis)Representing Islam* (2004), John E. Richardson asks if all forms of criticism are legitimate. Should everything said against Islam be considered justified and acceptable? And if certain forms of criticism of Islam are indeed considered unacceptable, what can be done about it? If negative perceptions of Islam as a faith influence and inform negative perceptions of (i.e. prejudice or bigotry towards) its adherents, then examining the perception of Islam remains a valid and necessary subject of enquiry. At the end of *Islam in the British Broadsheets* (2008), Elzain Elgamri concludes: “The overall contemporary picture of Islam and Muslims depicted by the press

¹ “29J Protection of freedom of expression

Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.”

² “29B 1) A person who uses threatening words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening, is guilty of an offence if he intends thereby to stir up religious hatred.” This contrasts with protection for racial minorities which includes “abusive or insulting” as well as “threatening” behaviour; the requirement of establishing intent is also unique to the religious hatred clause.

reinforces the pre-existing negative image of both in the readers' collective memory. Central to this image is the view of Islam as a monolithic entity associated with violence, intolerance and hatred of everything Western" (Ibid, pp. 214–215). So if an image of "Islam as a monolithic entity associated with violence, intolerance and hatred of everything Western" has been reinforced in the "collective memory" of the British public, what are the implications of this image, and how does it link to the concept of Islamophobia?

Orientalism

No study on the perception of Islam in the West can be complete without reference to Edward Said's seminal work on the subject, *Orientalism* (1978). Said demonstrates how the treatment of 'Islam as Other' in Western society is not a phenomenon which has come about after 9/11, the Taliban, or the Iranian Revolution; on the contrary, applying Michel Foucault's theory to explain the exercise of power through the dissemination of knowledge and discourse, Said notes the concept of 'Islam as Other' as having been perpetuated from as early as the mid to late eighteenth century CE to support an agenda of Western colonial domination. With the geographical East generically being described as 'the Orient' by Western Europe, Islam is continually portrayed as a defining but essentially negative characteristic of the Orient, one which is monolithic and unchanging. In observing how this affected the Orientalist perception of Muslims, Said notes the following about the work of Friedrich Schlegel:

As for the Semites³, whose language was agglutinative, unaesthetic and mechanical, they were different, inferior, backward. Schlegel's lectures on language and on life, history and literature are full of these discriminations, which he made without the slightest qualification. Hebrew, he said, was made for Prophetic utterance and divination; the Muslims, however, espoused "a dead, empty Theism, a merely negative Unitarian faith." (Ibid, pp. 99-100)

Just after this, Said also notes Islam as being central to a perception of "the bad Orient" in Schlegel's work: "[...] the 'good' Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in long-gone India,

³ Taken here to primarily mean Arabs

whereas the 'bad' Orient lingered in present-day⁴ Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam everywhere" (Ibid, p. 99).

Moreover, Said describes a consistent trend of judging Islam in relation to Western intellectual tradition (Ibid, p. 103-4) and especially in relation to Christianity (which is a theme observed in the dataset collected for this study as well):

For Louis Massignon, perhaps the most renowned and influential of modern French Orientalists, Islam was a systematic rejection of the Christian incarnation, and its greatest hero was not Mohammed or Averroes but al-Hallaj, a Muslim saint who was crucified for having dared to personalize Islam [...] Mohammed was thrown out, but al-Hallaj was made prominent because he took himself to be a Christ-figure. (Ibid, p. 104)

However, were Orientalism merely a phenomenon which essentialised, otherised and distorted Islam in words and theory, Said's argument possibly may not have held as much weight as it does today. The main 'problem' of Orientalism, as Said observed, was that it stemmed from a mindset of Western superiority which would not only essentialise, otherise and distort the Orient but would eventually provide justification for its economic, geographic and political colonisation. From Napoleon's exploits in Egypt to the rise of the British and French colonial empires (among others), Said lays out one example after another to illustrate the inherent racism of Orientalist thinking. Not only did this racism seek to justify subjugation and control of Eastern colonies, and all inhabitants therein, by iconifying European man as the ultimate example of human civilisation and culture, it further sought the help of evolutionary theories from Darwin et al. to justify through science, reason and biological determinism the superiority of white man over all others (Ibid, p. 206). Tyrer (2010 p. 105) similarly cites usage of the white male ideal in reference to present-day Islamophobia, and Orientalist attitudes and ideas continue to thrive in an informal capacity even to this day.

Said's *Orientalism* leaves little doubt that antagonism towards Islam as a faith, along with the general treatment of Islam as Other, is a phenomenon which has existed not for decades but for

⁴ C. 1808, when Schlegel's work was written

centuries in Western society. Said sums up the concept of Islam as a “dangerous representative” of the Orient when he says:

[...] Islamic Orientalists never saw their estrangement from Islam either as salutary or as an attitude with implications for the better understanding of their own culture. Rather, their estrangement from Islam simply intensified their feelings of superiority about European culture, even as their antipathy spread to include the entire Orient, *of which Islam was considered a degraded (and usually, a virulently dangerous) representative*. Such tendencies [...] became built into the very traditions of Orientalist study throughout the nineteenth century, and in time became a standard component of most Orientalist training, handed on from generation to generation. (Emphasis added; 1978, p. 260)

When we examine the rhetoric of Western politicians today with reference to Islam, this element of threat and danger continues; violent factions of Islam are given names like ‘Islamists’, ‘Islamic extremists’ or ‘jihadists’, always with an uncompromising association with terrorism or militancy, and with scarce mention of the role played by the West in whatever negative feelings Muslims in the East may have towards it. This attitude has carried on from the teachings of Orientalists, for whom Islam remained an essential, problematic characteristic of the East. And even while the general narrative on Islam altered with various historic movements in Europe, the core assumption remained: one of Islam as a backward, intellectually impotent faith, which remained unchanging in its essence and nature and therefore resisted, or was fundamentally incapable of, progress at any level (especially by Western standards).

The post-war period, which brought with it an end to many European colonies, spelled a change in attitude towards the Orient, but only in the sense that Western control of the Orient was no longer direct and geographic; the need for the West to civilise, educate and negotiate the Orient still persisted, particularly with a view to recognising and maintaining strategic Western political interests. This period therefore saw the re-positioning of the Orientalist from an academic expert in humanities and culture to a political strategist; an expert and advisor on all matters of policy which related to the Orient (Ibid, pp. 293–305). Along with this trend, Said describes the shift of the centre of academic Orientalism from Europe, namely England and France, to the United States. Despite the publication of *Orientalism* in the seventies, the Orientalist approach to Islam has persisted both in

American foreign policy as well as in academia. In the latter field, the Orientalist approach sometimes took manifest form, most notably through the writings of American academics H. A. R. Gibb and Bernard Lewis, and at other times adopted more latent forms of expression, e.g. via the works of American academic John Wansbrough in the seventies and later his students, including Andrew Rippin (author of *Muslims - Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, fourth edition published in 2011), Michael Cook and Patricia Crone (co-authors of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 1980).

Finally, one considerably influential Orientalist work, which Said himself critiqued in an essay in 2001, is Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). In an essay titled *The Clash of Ignorance* (2001), Said identifies Huntington's polemical approach to non-Western cultures and criticises Huntington's perpetuation of a highly aggressive 'us versus them' rhetoric. Huntington's views proved nonetheless to be greatly influential for American foreign policy, and their effects can be witnessed to this day (Sheehi 2011): the consistent portrayal of Islam as a monolithic, homogenous entity, the positioning of Islam as a force in constant, aggressive opposition to the West, the view that Muslims despise Western values and institutions without any reasonable justification (Kundnani 2007, p. 126), and perhaps most dangerously, the use of this "clash of civilisations" thesis as a pretext for American intervention and/ or political and cultural domination in non-Western nations.

So although, as a result of various historic movements, changes occurred in the specific ways in which Orientalism manifested itself in Western discourse, the defining characteristics of Orientalism have remained unchanged. During the Enlightenment, Orientalist discourse underwent a process of secularisation, or as Said says, "modern Orientalism derives from secularizing elements in eighteenth-century European culture" so that "Islam in particular [was released from] the narrowly religious scrutiny by which it had been hitherto examined (and judged by) the Christian West." (Said 1978, p. 120) however, he goes on to explain:

But if these interconnecting elements represent a secularizing tendency, this is not to say that the old religious patterns of human history and destiny and the “existential paradigms” were simply removed. Far from it: they were reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in the secular frameworks just enumerated. Yet if Orientalism provided the vocabulary, the conceptual repertoire, the techniques [...] it also retained, as an undislodged current in its discourse, a reconstructed religious impulse, a naturalized supernaturalism. (Ibid, p. 121)

What this suggests is that although Western criticism of Islam acquired a secular tone, its origin and intent remained inherently, almost subconsciously, Christian in nature. Today, with a considerable rise in atheism within Britain over the last century, there appear to be two “camps” of (originally Orientalist) criticism directed towards Islam which are observed in the empirical analysis as well; on the one hand, the otherisation of Islam takes the form of ‘Islam vs. the Christian West’, where non-Muslims comment on the need for Islam to undergo an Enlightenment, and on the other hand for Atheists, often fearing or disliking what has come to be known as ‘political Islam’, it takes the form of ‘Islam vs. the Secular West’. However, as mentioned earlier, regardless of its specific manifestations, the Orientalist treatment of Islam as a dangerous, threatening, backward Other remains consistent.

Events in History and the Rise of Global Media: Portrayal and Perception

With hostility towards Islam finding its roots in Orientalism, using an Orientalist framework can help us to understand and interpret various conflicts between Islam and the West which have occurred in recent history, and why they have been portrayed as they have in the media. In 1979, with the Iranian Revolution and the overthrow of the Shah, who was a clearly pro-West leader both in his secularist approach and his relations with the US and UK, perhaps for the first time Western nations (especially as secular Western nations) perceived and felt threatened by the force of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’. Regardless of the fact that the Iranian Revolution was a popular revolt which overthrew dynastic rule to bring a democratic system of government in its place, with its establishment of a theocratic state the Revolution was, and continues retrospectively to be, described as a problematic symptom of Islamic fundamentalism (Abbas 2005).

Another historical event which has significantly widened the Islam vs West divide is the formation of the state of Israel, and the subsequent military occupation of Palestine and displacement of millions of (Muslim) Palestinians. The concept of a global Muslim '*ummah*' or community thus created a rift, whether real or imagined, between Western policymakers and Muslims in diaspora communities (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p. 231). When Hamas was formed in the 1970s as a group defending Palestinian interests, what took shape in Western discourse was one of the earliest examples of the 'Muslim as terrorist' image, often referred to as the 'jihadist' – the angry Muslim insurgent. This image has persisted with various, often disparate, groups and movements being lumped under the banner of Islamist terrorism, from Hamas to the Taliban to Al Qaida; its only prominent marker, which remains consistent, is the description of a fanatical Muslim movement that seeks violence to achieve its aims, and does so entirely independently of Western actions and foreign policies. Moreover, in a post-Cold War world, Islam replaced Communism as the latest threat to the West (Fekete 2009). As the influence and reach of news media grew even more pervasive with the advent of satellite television, the image of Muslims as terrorists was disseminated quickly and persistently, and the rhetoric of fear and terror continually employed by the media served to further perpetuate an 'us versus them' divide between the West and Islam (Richardson J. 2004).

The culmination of this tension between West and East would be the attack on the World Trade Center in NYC on 11th September 2001, termed shortly after as 9/11. The environment of fear and paranoia which had been actively fuelled and fostered by American politicians and media thus far now reached boiling point (Sheehi 2011) – fear turned into hatred, as cases of hate crimes against Muslims, or people who were perceived to be Muslims, were reported both in the United States as well as across the EU (Allen and Nielsen 2007). Then American president George W. Bush proceeded in full force with what he termed the "war on terror", where "terror" became an absolute, universal evil, so that anyone who did not support the "war on terror" effectively supported terrorism by proxy (Sheehi 2011). With the Taliban taking over Afghanistan in 1996 the United States were threatened by the establishment of another theocracy in the symbolic East, and when Taliban rulers

subsequently gave refuge to Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, the United States now had ideal justification to invade Afghanistan and attempt to overthrow the Taliban regime.

Amidst the frenzy of post-9/11 militarism, the United States invaded Iraq a few years later with the support of several other nations including the UK and Australia and a purported charge of Saddam Hussain being in possession of weapons of mass destruction. British involvement in the military invasion of Iraq created an uproar and received widespread popular opposition. A few years later on 7th July 2005, after suicide bombings on public transport in London, one of the main perpetrators would be seen in his pre-recorded videotape as saying, “Your democratically-elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people [Muslims] all over the world [...] Until we feel security you will be our targets and until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.”⁵ In 2006, a similar recording by an accomplice was released in which the following statement was made: “What you have witnessed now is only the beginning of a string of attacks that will continue and become stronger until you pull your forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq. And until you stop your financial and military support to America and Israel.”⁶ The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq therefore appeared to have the opposite effect (Lyon 2005) in that rather than containing the terrorist threat to the West, they were among the main catalysts for the drastic, violent measures adopted by the perpetrators of the 7/7 attacks. The image that lingers in the popular British consciousness, however, is that of Islamic fundamentalists who perpetrated mindless acts of terror out of hatred for Western ideals – indeed, this image persists even in the aftermath of the more recent Boston marathon, Woolwich, and Nairobi attacks. As Said notes in a later work:

“Much of what one reads and sees in the media about Islam represents the aggression as coming from Islam because that is what ‘Islam’ is. Local and concrete circumstances are thus obliterated. In other words, covering

⁵ Extracts from video statements obtained online from this link (7 April 2014): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7_July_2005_London_bombings#Videotaped_statements

⁶ Ibid

Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what 'we' [Westerners] do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature *are*." (Original emphasis; 1997, p. xxii)

With regard specifically to the position of Muslims in Britain, it has had its own contentious history since the arrival of waves of immigrants, mainly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, in the 60s and 70s. Pnina Werbner (2009) describes how British Muslims went from being invisible to visible as a minority group in the aftermath of what came to be known as The Rushdie Affair in 1988. In response to Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, British Muslims moved away from being a largely assimilated, compliant minority to a visible, discontented one, in order to defend what Werbner identified as their faith as well as a sense of group honour (2009). A fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, which declared that Rushdie should be put to death for blasphemy, exacerbated the situation and again positioned Islam against the West. The difference now, as foretold by Said (1978), was that where classical Orientalism placed Islam in opposition to a Christian West, modern Orientalism placed Islam in opposition to a secular West, and Muslims were increasingly vilified, in the media as well as in British discourse, for being incapable of accepting the secular, liberal traditions and values of British society (Kundnani 2007, p. 126). While it was as a later consequence of The Rushdie Affair that the blasphemy law (which applied only to the Christian faith) was removed from British legislation, it is also interesting to note that in the UK there appears now to be greater recognition of the sensitivity of people of faith, and particularly of Muslims, to debasement or vilification of their religious scriptures and symbols. One example of this change in attitude is the case of the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad; these were published originally in Denmark in September 2005 and then in various parts of Europe, setting off a trend which saw the pictorial depiction of Muhammad as the ultimate symbol of free expression (Islam 2010, p. 67). However, the original cartoons were never printed in British newspapers (nor have any other Muhammad cartoons been printed since), and a student newspaper at Cardiff University which did choose to publish them in February 2006 had thousands of copies of the issue recalled and the editor suspended from his post along with others from his team. Another example is of the

controversial Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who was banned from entering the UK to show his anti-Islamic film *Fitna* to British audiences. The case of the highly inflammatory film *The Innocence of Muslims* is also a similar one; originally produced in North America, the film was not shown anywhere in the UK, and a threat from the English Defense League (EDL) to screen the film never materialised. Both *Fitna* and *The Innocence of Muslims* were defended by their respective producers as merely depicting truths about Islam which they felt needed to be exposed, but they were recognised by British authorities as being Islamophobic or inflammatory.

That is not to say that it has been, or will be, plain sailing for British Muslims in negotiating a space for their faith and their identity in Britain. In February 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron on the one hand rejected the thesis of a “clash of civilisations” between Islam and the West while on the other hand declaring that multiculturalism has failed, that integration of minorities “into the mainstream” should be the way forward, and that the real problem is “Islamist extremism.”⁷

Cameron’s distinction between a benign, unproblematic Islam and a pernicious “Islamist extremism” is one that Tyrer, in no uncertain terms, defines as Islamophobic (2010). While making this distinction Cameron simultaneously failed to offer any criticism or condemnation of far-right groups such as the EDL, who happened to be marching in Luton on the day that he delivered his speech – on the contrary, Cameron chose to disregard far-right elements in British society altogether, choosing instead to position immigration and Islamist extremism as primary causes for national concern.

Conservative MP Saeeda Warsi alluded to the perpetuation of Islamophobia in the British mainstream when she declared in 2011 that Islamophobia had “passed the dinner table test.” Yet with the image of Muslims, and of Islam as a faith, which has been popularised in the media over the past few decades, this is hardly a surprise. Muslims, by and large, are still portrayed as dangerous, fanatical and irrational (Petley and Richardson R. 2011, Elgamri 2011, Richardson J. 2004) and the

⁷ Delivered on 5 February 2011; Full transcript of speech available at <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>

vague term 'Islamism' has been coined to convey whatever in Islam might appear to be a threat to the Western world. The discussion and the perception of Muslims in British discourse thus appears to be caught in a vicious cycle: negative views on Muslims and Islam are portrayed in the media and more generally in British discourse, which causes a negative perception of Muslims and Islam among non-Muslims, which causes negative views on Muslims and Islam to be further perpetuated in British discourse, and so on.

Islamophobia?

The question that now poses itself is the one which is intended to be the main focus of this study, namely, is negativity towards Islam the same as negativity towards Muslims? If people are entitled to feel as they wish about any given faith, is a study on perceptions of Islam even relevant? Can an anti-Islamic statement ever be equated with being Islamophobic? If the question were phrased to ask, "Can an anti-Jewish statement ever be equated with being anti-Semitic?" the answer would likely be "yes". In January of 2002, the *New Statesman* printed two articles about Britain's Israel lobbies, and on the cover was a gold Star of David impaling the Union Jack. Members of the Jewish community (and others, according to *Haaretz*) raised objections to the cover being anti-Semitic, even though it used a Jewish symbol (in a seemingly derogatory manner) but did not say anything about Jews per se. *The Jewish Post* also cited the incident in an article titled *Britain: The Rise of the New Anti-Semitism*. The editor responsible for the cover illustration later issued an apology to the Jewish community.

Similarly, though not related to faith, in November 2012 a man was arrested for posting a photo of a burning poppy on Facebook around Memorial Day weekend. This act of burning a symbol was deemed to be disrespectful to the veteran casualties that the poppy intends to commemorate and also therefore offensive to those partaking in the Memorial Day commemorations. Also, in 2006, Iqbal Sacranie, then Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, was interviewed by police the day after he referred to homosexuality (not homosexuals) as "harmful" on BBC radio.

With regard to Islam and Muslims, Allen states that “evidence suggests [...] in targeting Muslims, some do so through Islam itself” (2010a, p. 137) and cites the BNP and their publication of the leaflet *I.S.L.A.M.: Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, and Molestation of Women* (Allen 2010, p. 174) as an example of this. Moreover, in a report titled *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime* by Robert Lambert and J Githens-Mazer (2010), the chapter 'Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim Hate Crime' echoes this point, made by Ronan Bennett, saying a statement such as "I just don't hear from moderate Judaism, do you?" would be considered anti-Semitic. Bennett makes the point that in the original statement the speaker refers to Islam, not Judaism, yet although the statement about Judaism would have been taken as being anti-Semitic, the same statement about Islam is not considered Islamophobic in the current climate. Also, with reference to depictions of the Prophet in the Danish cartoon controversy, Gottschalk and Greenberg argue that “The reduction of the Prophet Muhammad to a symbol of terrorism reduced all Muslims to the stereotype of the terrorist” (2008, p. 146). These examples, while not exhaustive, begin to explain the circumstances in which negative attitudes towards Islam can be identified as being Islamophobic. Although they may not provide a satisfactory answer to the question ‘can negative views on Islam be Islamophobic?’, they certainly provide a valid starting point, and enough motivation, to further pursue this mode of enquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In tracking the treatment of Islam as Other in the West, the subject of Orientalism is perhaps most relevant with regard to establishing a historical context. Alongside Orientalism, while numerous historical studies exist on the perception of Islam from various Western perspectives (Tolan 1996, Blanks and Frassetto 2000, Gunny 2003), much less has been published on the perception of Islam as a faith post-9/11, whether in general or specifically with reference to Islamophobia. Whatever limited contemporary studies exist on *Islam* as Other, or as a threat, are considered below. As already mentioned, current literature on Islamophobia tends to use the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims' interchangeably, presenting a gap in research with regard to how views specifically on Islam can be Islamophobic, which this work hopes to address. Other literature reviewed has been on the issue of Islamophobia in general, both its existence and its epistemology, as well as its relationship with the concepts of Orientalism and racism. Literature discussing the implications of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act for Muslims is also relevant here for the purpose of better understanding the implications of the freedom of speech clause which is intended to allow criticism of faiths to carry on unfettered.

***Orientalism*, Its Critics and Its Vestiges**

As a review of Said's *Orientalism* has already been incorporated into the contextual chapter in an exploration of the history of the concept of Islam as Other, repeating it here is unnecessary. Fred Halliday's critique of Said's work (which he refers to in terms of anti-Orientalism as it deconstructs the theory of Orientalism) is made on the grounds of it starting, and contributing to, a polarised, emotionally charged debate. While supporting much of the critique of Orientalism offered by Said and those who followed him, Halliday does go on to criticise, in four distinct areas, the evolution of anti-Orientalism as a disciplinary approach. First is the problem of framing 'Orientalism' as "the root of all evil" which can result in a "promiscuous [or indiscriminate] application" of the term (Ibid, p.

158). The second is the vagueness of the category of “the Orient”, as Halliday contends “Racist or oppressive writing is found about all subject peoples, whether they are Islamic or not” and comparing the wrongs done to one group over another suggests an “implicit yardstick” (Ibid, p. 158) which is best avoided; yet in making this criticism, Halliday employs this yardstick himself in pointing out that the genocide of Native Americans “was far worse than that of the peoples of Islam” (Ibid, p. 158). Third, Halliday criticises Said’s methodological approach in assuming any ideas produced in a context of domination to be invalid by default. Halliday’s final objection is regarding the “lack of analysis of ideas and ideologies of the Middle East itself” (Ibid, p. 160) offered by anti-Orientalists, as Said himself chooses to focus overwhelmingly on discourse analysis.

Along with Halliday, Habib (2005) comments on Said’s failure to include German and other European writers in his analysis apart from French and English, and criticises Said’s work for its “notable lack of rigour in terms of documentation and logic” (Ibid, p. 41). However, examples cited by Habib to ‘disprove’ Said’s observations about the nature of Orientalism, such as the Hungarian scholar Goldziher (Ibid), are anecdotal at best. Bryce (2013) on the other hand has perceptively noted the absence in Said’s *Orientalism* of the Ottoman Empire, which he describes as being situated at the convergence of European space and Islamic culture. While Bryce’s critique is valid and illustrates a shortcoming in Said’s analysis, Habib’s criticism of Said limiting his analysis to British and French writers is less relevant when we recognise that in *Orientalism* Said puts forth a theoretical frame of reference to be deployed to analyse any and all discourse about the Orient.

While a comprehensive review of studies on the perceptions of Islam, at various junctures and in various contexts of Western history, is beyond the scope of this work, the focus here will remain on works which address perceptions of Islam in more contemporary Western settings. One such work is *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam* edited by Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg (1995); this volume does explore the idea of ‘Islam’ as an entity being perceived as a threat to the West, albeit from the disciplinary lens of political science and international relations rather than sociology. In

part, it addresses from a political perspective how Islam came to replace communism as *the* enemy of the West in a post-Cold War world (similar observations have been made by Liz Fekete in *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe* 2009, p. 102). Moreover, as this volume was published in 1995, its contributions appear less relevant when studying perceptions of Islam in a post-9/11 context.

One important work which shares empirical findings on the perception of Islam and Muslims among British youth is that of Elisabeth Poole in *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (2002). In her Preface, situating her work in the context of the aftermath of 9/11, Poole notes: “Previously [...] a distant object in the consciousness of the majority of British people [...] [Islam] now has an uncomfortable familiarity. Islam is suddenly ‘recognisable’” (Ibid, p. 3). Poole consistently goes on to describe her approach as one that also considers views on Islam as a faith and an ideology, rather than focusing solely on views on Muslims as a group. While several studies have since considered the reporting of Islam in British media (Richardson J. 2004, Elgamri 2008, Petley and Richardson R. 2011), Poole’s contribution is unique in that it shares empirical findings of interviews with teenagers, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, who can be located in the British political mainstream (by newspaper readership) and whose views on prominent news stories Poole considers. While employing critical discourse analysis, Poole reflects not only on the content of British newspaper reporting on Islam and Muslims but also on how this content was received by the research participants, establishing that negative reporting appeared to result in negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, even among participants who had more regular contact with Muslims (e.g. through friends at school).

Islamophobia: the Term and the Phenomenon

Although the existence and prevalence of Islamophobia continues to be contested, the term was given legitimacy via the Runnymede Trust report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (1997) which described Islamophobia as “a new reality that needed naming” (Ibid, p. 1). Although generally

heralded as an important development in the formal recognition of the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment, the report has been criticised extensively by various scholars including S. Sayyid (2010, pp. 7-13) and Chris Allen (2010a) among others. The report defines Islamophobia as “fear or dread of *Islam* – and, therefore, to fear and dislike all or most Muslims” (emphasis added; Runnymede Trust 1997, p. 1) and goes on to describe Islamophobic views in terms of “closed views”, laying out the defining characteristics of these closed views, along with describing corresponding “open views” which the report endorses almost as antidotal to Islamophobia. Sayyid (2010, pp. 7-10) notes that while the *Islamophobia* report was based on a similar attempt by the Runnymede Trust to recognise anti-Semitism in 1994, the focus in the former on “unfounded” hostility towards Islam and Muslims, while similar emphasis was absent in the latter, suggested, to some extent, partial blaming of Muslims for the phenomenon of Islamophobia due to terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam. Allen (2010a) also notes that the “closed” and “open” views created a binary that was actually unhelpful in identifying Islamophobia in practice, and moreover that the report tended to marginalise certain groups of Muslims, recognising greater right of redress for a particular type of Muslim at the expense of others.

Another report which was seminal in providing an empirical base for the prevalence of anti-Muslim sentiment after 9/11 was that commissioned by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) titled *Summary Report into Islamophobia in the EU following 11 September 2001* (Allen and Nielsen 2002). Following the events of 9/11, the EUMC put in place measures to monitor “acts of aggression and changes in attitudes towards Muslims and other minority groups [...] in the wake of 11 September” in the fifteen EU member states (Ibid, p. 5). Oddly enough, although referring to “Islamophobia” throughout (but not offering much by way of definition of the term), and citing evidence of increases in anti-Muslim sentiment in varying degrees across the EU during the period studied, in its conclusion the report signals the presence of a “certain identifiable phenomenon” (Ibid, p. 54) but remains reluctant to definitively refer to this phenomenon as Islamophobia. Nevertheless, the scale of this study, as well as its results, contributed to the

establishment of an empirically-informed answer to the question ‘does Islamophobia exist?’ In the EU at least, the answer appeared to be a resounding ‘yes’. More recently, the report by Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert (2010) provides further empirical evidence for Islamophobia specifically in the British context.

In trying to understand the relationship between Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice, Ron Geaves (2010) makes an important contribution by arguing that in the case of Islam there is a complex relationship between racism, religious prejudice and xenophobia, so the issue is not merely one of religious hatred. This stands in contrast to Allen’s (2010) emphasis on the ‘Muslimness’ of victims needing to be evident in order to establish the presence of Islamophobia. Moosavi’s (2014) analysis of whiteness among Muslim converts similarly examines the complex relationship between racial and religious prejudice. The works of Liz Fekete (2009) and Stephen Sheehi (2011) have also commented on the entrenchment of Islamophobia at institutional levels in the EU and United States respectively.

Islamophobia: Definitions and Analyses

While it may be the case that naming a phenomenon lends to it a certain credence and adds to its ‘realness’ (Vakil 2010, p. 23), it is equally fair to say that the beginning of a phenomenon is not necessarily limited by its labelling as such (Meer 2009). Thus while the Runnymede report offered a definition and label for a “reality that needed naming” (1997, p. 1), Islamophobia, defined for now simply as anti-Muslim sentiment, existed far prior to the establishment and perpetuation of its contemporary identifier. While the origin and first use of the term ‘Islamophobia’ can be traced back to various points in history (see Vakil 2010, pp. 38-41 and Allen 2010a, pp. 5-7), it is contended here that Islamophobia as a phenomenon has been studied even prior to it being named as such, whether in the form of anti-Muslim racism in Britain and Europe more generally (Fekete 2004, Modood 2005, Kundnani 2007) or racism towards (predominantly Muslim) Turkish migrants in Germany (Jager M. referenced in Wodak and Reisigl 2001). These works also demonstrate how difficult it is to

disentangle what is generally referred to as racism from what is now referred to as Islamophobia, and the fact that there are many theoretical frameworks through which the relationship between racism and Islamophobia can be approached.

Regardless of this, since the Runnymede Report several varied works have now been published on the epistemology and ontology of Islamophobia as a term and a phenomenon. Among the most prominent of these is *Islamophobia* by Chris Allen (2010a), but equally useful by way of analysis of the term is the edited collection *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (Sayyid and Vakil 2010), with the chapters by S. Sayyid, David Tyrer, and Nasar Meer/Tariq Modood making important contributions to the discussion. Pnina Werbner also makes a valuable contribution to this discussion via her article *Islamophobia: incitement to religious hatred – legislating for a new fear?* (2005).

Allen's work on the subject offers an informative historiography of anti-Muslim sentiment, followed by a critical appraisal of the Runnymede Report, and finally a discussion on the nature of Islamophobia with a view to formulating a workable definition of the term (2010a). While applying the racism theory of Robert Miles, Allen identifies Islamophobia as having three constituent elements: ideology, modes of operation, and exclusionary practices. In this way, however, while Islamophobia appears to be a form of racism, Allen prefers to describe it as a distinct phenomenon in which the 'Muslimness' of victims must be clearly identifiable in order for it to be established as Islamophobia. Although appearing to have *prima facie* validity, this approach is problematic in practice for reasons which will be discussed later on. Moreover, Allen places emphasis on establishing an objective, empirically-grounded critical evaluation of Islamophobia in favour of claims that are unsubstantiated or "over-inflationary" (Ibid, p. 160, p. 189) as they often tend to be in Allen's view (2010a). However, Allen's use of the word "over-inflationary" is suggestive of a normatively presumptive tone which is often employed in the book, and which somewhat undermines his call for objectivity in the appraisal of Islamophobia, for example:

"It was the sight of some Muslims vociferously and *offensively* protesting when the Royal Anglican regiment returned from duty in Basra, Iraq, that was, as the EDL put it, the final 'straw'." (Ibid, p. 93)

"[...] the BNP produced another leaflet [...] where a number of aggressive young British Muslims held some of the most *despicable* placards that urged violence against those who insulted Islam." (Ibid, p. 91)

Emphasis has been added above to highlight words used by Allen which do appear to be subjective judgments rather than objective criticisms of Muslim groups. Moreover, while Allen finally offers a definition of Islamophobia as "an ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meanings about Muslims and Islam [...]" (Ibid, p. 190), when applying this definition Allen appears to be less clear as to what does and does not constitute Islamophobia. For example, in his case study on Islamophobia in the context of the Dudley "super-mosque", (2013a) Allen's application of his own definition appears to be somewhat vague and subjective, based on the term "not Islamophobia *per se*" (original emphasis; Ibid, p. 196-198) which Allen employs on several occasions but without specifying what constitutes "Islamophobia *per se*", and also without elaborating on why he interprets certain aspects of the behaviour of Dudley citizens as *not* being "Islamophobia *per se*". It does subsequently appear to be the case that Allen's insistence on a critical understanding of Islamophobia that is not "over-inflationary" in fact results in an implied charge of over-reaction or hyper-sensitivity on the part of Dudley Muslims, but no similar assessment of over-reaction can be detected towards non-Muslim Dudley citizens and local authorities (with the exception of the EDL), despite all sides in the dispute having misinterpreted certain facts. In sum, while Allen strives to offer a comprehensive and workable definition of Islamophobia, his definition proves lacking with regard to clarity, consistency and utility in real-life scenarios.

It will be argued here that a much more comprehensive, holistic, and consistent analysis, and consequently understanding of Islamophobia can be achieved by looking at it in clear terms as a form of racism. Allen's own position on Islamophobia as racism appears to be incoherent on close inspection, where he at one point argues:

[...] whilst it is essential to note that ‘anti-Muslim racism’ as an appropriate and workable name might be inappropriate, this same inappropriateness should not be confused with the correlative value that exists between Islamophobia and racism, of course which are two entirely different things. (2010a, p. 138)

While Allen’s use of the words “of course” again indicates a normative tone, this statement is more problematic in light of his later claim that there is “the possibility of Islamophobia being incorporated as a dimension of this much broader phenomenon [racism]” (Ibid, p. 151). So whether Allen believes Islamophobia and racism are two distinct phenomena, or that Islamophobia is a form of racism which can be “incorporated as a dimension” of it, remains unclear. This incoherence continues as Allen goes on to suggest that “theories relating to racism, in terms of Islamophobia at least remain not only under-explored but unexplored⁸, justifying the pursuance of such an investigation here” (Ibid, p. 152). Furthermore, Allen makes this claim notwithstanding comprehensive theorisation of the concepts of Islamophobia and racism in relation to each other which had already been published by Modood and Meer (2009a, 2009b) and Werbner (2005). Allen’s earlier contention that Islamophobia and racism are “two entirely different things” appears therefore to be undermined by his application of racism theories of Miles (1999), Thompson (1990) and Hall (1978), among others, to provide an explanatory framework for Islamophobia.

As mentioned previously, discussing Islamophobia as a form of racism appears to be a much more viable and theoretically sound approach, as evidenced through the works of Nasar Meer (2008, 2013) and Tariq Modood (1996, 2005). In comparing Islamophobia to anti-Semitism, Meer makes a strong case for the “racialisation” of Islam and of Muslims by extension (2013). Modood and Meer (2009) have also explored “the Muslim question” with reference to racism and identified a reluctance to refer to Muslims as a racialised group (especially when compared with Jews) despite the relevant theoretical bases for defining race as a socially rather than phenotypically defined notion (e.g. Modood 2005, Wodak and Reisigl 2001). In the volume edited by Sayyid and Vakil

(2010), Meer and Modood again offer an important contribution with regard to Islamophobia as racism, mentioning how, for Muslims, various markers of difference, including ethnic and religious identity, can contribute to their persecution; Allen's (2010a, 2010b) insistence on defining an Islamophobic act by an identifiable marker of 'Muslimness' is thus problematic.

Moreover, with regard to Islamophobia in a racism framework, and specifically with reference to religious hatred legislation in England and Wales, Pnina Werbner in her article *Islamophobia: incitement to religious hatred – legislating for a new fear?* (2005) provides a lucid epistemological discussion of Islamophobia using "racist dualisms" (Ibid, p. 7) by combining theories of Zygmunt Bauman and Michel Wieviorka. Werbner concludes that the (then proposed) legislation "asserts the state's rejection and condemnation of Islamophobia and its affirmation of the positive place of Islam in the public sphere" but while also, crucially for this study, stating that "there is an inherent ambiguity in the law given that vilifying a religion may be construed as vilifying its followers" (Ibid, p. 9).

The work of Meer (2008) has also been seminal in defining the nature of a Muslim identity with regard to the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act, arguing that religious identities can be as difficult to abandon as racial ones, therefore not merely rendering religious identity a matter of choice. He further contends that choice of religious identity should not be penalised when racial identity, also chosen⁹, is accepted and accommodated. These arguments are highly relevant when examining views on Islam which are expressed within the context of current religious hatred legislation in England and Wales, and they will contribute further in the concluding discussion about the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act.

⁹ Insofar as individuals from racial minorities who may appear 'white', e.g. some Arabs or mixed-race individuals, can self-identify as a racial minority, just as individuals more conspicuously of a particular race may choose not to identify strongly with their own race, for example, by choosing not to 'see colour' as part of their identity.

METHODOLOGY

Overview: Gathering Data Online

The choice of methodology for this research project is both innovative, due to its relative novelty, as well as opportunistic, due to the approach of gathering data readily available online. The methodological approach chosen for this study can be described as an “observation” of non-reactive data in Internet-mediated research or IMR (Hewson et al. 2003), which focuses on qualitative linguistic analysis (Hewson and Laurent 2008). The features and advantages of non-reactive data will shortly be discussed in detail; however, the specific methodology employed in the study was designed primarily with the aim of answering the question: what are non-Muslims in Britain saying about Islam as a faith? To that end, comments posted in response to online articles discussing or reviewing television programmes about Islam were surveyed, and ‘qualified’ comments referring to Islam were then selected for the dataset.

Comments to articles on the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* websites were the primary source of data; as Daniels and Hughey have observed, “the advent of the comments sphere of online news outlets has significantly transformed the discursive shape of racism” (2013, p. 333). The chosen approach could be described as unobtrusive (Lee 2000) as the participants were, in effect, contributing to this research without knowledge of doing so; however, this approach is ethically justifiable for various reasons. Firstly, the data can be assessed as appearing in the “public” domain (Eynon et al. 2008, pp. 36-37) due to the ease with which anyone connected to the internet can access the comment forums under examination (that is, via the online articles to which they are respectively linked). This also implies that participants, or commenters as seems to be the most appropriate term for them, are likely to be aware of the possibility of their views being seen, copied and otherwise interpreted in any way (Janetzko 2008, p. 162) by anyone who can access the online articles to which they have posted. Moreover, the majority of commenters use aliases and therefore remain anonymous; their

profiles on respective websites give away no personal information apart from their activities on the website itself, so using their comments as data does not pose any kind of risk to them as individuals, nor does it reveal any sensitive information. Even in instances where usernames may divulge identities of individuals, all responses have been anonymised in the presentation of data (Hewson and Laurent 2008, p. 71) in order to diminish any potential risk to commenters. Lack of personal information also meant that there was no way of seeking consent from individual commenters for participation in the study.

Moreover, it can be argued that the non-reactive data used in this study is, by its nature, a more candid and uninhibited reflection of participants' views than could be obtained through, say, interviews or questionnaires, because of the commenters' "nonawareness of the data-recording process" (Janetzko 2008, p. 161). Hewson and Laurent also describe the use of comment archives in the "observation" method of IMR as an effective means of gathering qualitative data due to the possibility of observing "naturalistic data" and "naturally occurring, non-reactive online interactions" (2008, p. 71). Also relevant here is Lee's (2000) concept of online spaces and lack of face-to-face contact offering participants a greater sense of security and freedom to "admit to socially undesirable behaviour" (Lee 2000, p. 3). Allen similarly observes from his Facebook study of reactions to the Dudley mosque, "It would seem that expressing something to a known and attributable individual was perceived quite differently from expressing much the same to a mass yet unknown and indiscriminate audience" (2013, p. 11). In this case, Allen refers to individuals posting regularly to a Facebook group but being less willing to come forth with their views in response to a request to participate in an academic study.

It is also interesting to note that a forum such as a Facebook group offers much less anonymity than forums on online articles, and yet individuals were still willing to express their views, "socially undesirable" (Lee 2000, p. 3) as they may be, on Facebook. This phenomenon is described by Elm et al. (2009, quoted in Allen 2014, p. 9), who explain how online spaces...

“blur the boundaries between private and public, where that which might typically be restricted to privatised spaces [i.e. socially undesirable views] now begins to permeate the public also, albeit those that exist online. Online spaces therefore create environments where social disruption occurs: where what is, and indeed, what is not acceptable and unacceptable, private and public, legitimate and illegitimate and more become increasingly blurred. [...] Given that prejudices and discriminations are typically restricted to the private, it is maybe unsurprising that such sentiment and expression are beginning to emerge online.”

While ethical concerns are more prominent in contexts where “private” online domains (such as emails or, to some extent, Facebook) are used for the gathering of non-reactive data (Eynon et al. 2008, pp. 36-37), these concerns are reduced to a great extent when gathering non-reactive data from public online domains (such as the online comment forums chosen for this study).

The Online Field: Identifying British non-Muslim Voices

The primary source of data for this project comprises of comments that were left online in response to the following articles:

- A review of Channel 4’s documentary *Islam: The Untold Story* which featured on the *Telegraph* website, published in August 2012 (481 comments reviewed)
- An opinion article in response to the above documentary which appeared on the *Telegraph* website, published in August 2012 (320 comments reviewed)
- A review of Channel 4’s *Islam: The Untold Story* which appeared on the *Guardian* website, published in August 2012 (60 comments reviewed)
- An opinion article on Channel 4 airing the Muslim call to prayer (or *adhan*) in the month of Ramadan which featured on the *Guardian* website, published in July 2013 (653 comments reviewed)
- Review and “live coverage” of response to BBC1 documentary *Muhammad, The Prophet of Islam* which appeared on the *Guardian* website, published in July 2011 (42 comments reviewed)

The above articles were chosen primarily with the aim of looking at contemporary views which could be considered mainstream within a predominantly British context. Just as Daniels and Hughey note that “racism seems to ‘erupt’ in comments not overtly about race” (2013, p. 333), so it appeared that Islam frequently emerged as a topic of discussion quite independent from the context of the articles to which commenters were responding. Comments to these particular articles were considered because these articles addressed the portrayal of Islam on British mainstream television, thereby facilitating the establishment of a (more or less) British context for the narratives that would emerge from the comments; this approach was informed by the reasoning that those who have watched or are affected by the broadcasts in question will be more inclined to read and comment on articles discussing said broadcasts. Where in contrast articles discussing more general issues involving Muslims in Britain, e.g. with regard to terrorism suspects or the niqab ban, could attract comment from readers anywhere in the world with online access to *Guardian* and *Telegraph* websites, the articles chosen above had a narrow enough focus to warrant attention mostly just from readers within Britain – although it is readily acknowledged that this assumption is not ‘airtight’.

Moreover, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* were chosen as the news outlets to review for this study because of their perceived ‘mainstream’ readership, given that according to a 2005 MORI poll 48% of *Guardian* readers were Labour party voters and 34% were Liberal Democrat voters,¹⁰ and 63% of *Telegraph* readers were Conservative voters. The *Guardian* and *Telegraph* were therefore selected as the chosen news outlets in order to explore the concept of Islamophobia in the mainstream, as opposed to Islamophobia as a phenomenon that thrives predominantly in the far right. Since Islamophobia in the far right appears to be an area where much academic study has already been carried out, especially by Chris Allen (2010a, 2012, 2014), there appears to be a greater need to

¹⁰ IPSOS MORI poll published 21 April 2005, *You Are What You Read?: How newspaper readership is related to views* https://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/240_sri_you_are_what_you_read_042005.pdf

explore Islamophobia in the mainstream. Finally, the articles specifically chosen above were selected to allow a more or less even number of comments to be considered from both websites, that is the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*; while analysis of the data was always intended to be qualitative rather than quantitative, considering a roughly even number of comments from both websites gave some scope for comparison of views expressed by readers on both sites.

The Data: Views on *Islam* Expressed by Non-Muslims

While the total number of comments reviewed came up to about 700 on the *Telegraph* articles and 695 on the *Guardian*, the dataset to be gathered for this project was intended to be comments specifically expressing views on Islam as a faith, or, by extension, views on symbols or practices associated with Islam. The reason for this focus was to explore the impact of the amended Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, which forbids incitement to hatred against religious groups but explicitly protects “expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions” from legal penalty. So where insult and abuse directed towards Muslims may be illegal or even frowned upon, similar expressions towards Islam as a faith, strictly speaking, are not. While academic definitions of Islamophobia include negative sentiments expressed towards Islam *and* Muslims (Runnymede 1997, Allen 2010a), it would appear that the 2006 act has resulted in the creation of a space in which negative sentiment towards Islam appears to be uncritically taken as acceptable.

Comments only expressing views on Muslims were not included in the dataset; it is worth mentioning at this point that the forums under review were all moderated by the respective websites and a significant number of comments appeared to have been removed by moderators, so it is possible that comments expressing strongly negative views on Muslims as a religious minority were removed. This is not to say that no negative views on Muslims were observed on the forums in the course of collecting the data, but merely suggests that the number of such comments would have been higher had the forums been unmoderated. What is also interesting to note is that all

comments included in the dataset reflect a level of acceptability merely by virtue of not having been removed by moderators on the respective websites.

As mentioned earlier, one of the features of participants in this study was not only their anonymity but also a general lack of background information which would otherwise allow some positioning of participants' views; apart from what is revealed through their comments (and, in some instances, their usernames), it is not known whether participants are old or young, working or middle class, male or female, what their level of education is, and so forth. More problematically for the purpose of this study, lack of background information meant not immediately knowing whether or not commenters were non-Muslim, as gathering non-Muslim views on Islam was the primary aim. A number of explicit and implicit markers were therefore identified in order to establish whether or not a comment could qualify for inclusion in the dataset.

Explicit markers included statements such as "I am a not a Muslim..." or "I don't believe in God..."¹¹ In some instances, usernames also helped to determine if commenters were or were not Muslim; however the decision to include or exclude comments was never based solely on usernames but included the tone and content of comments as a whole. Implicit markers included traits such as following references to the Prophet or his family members with reverent terms e.g. "peace be upon him" or "(ra)"¹²; as this is a practice which generally emerges from the Muslim belief in respect for the Prophet, his family and his companions, commenters observed using these terms were assumed to be Muslim and therefore, in the absence of any explicit evidence to the contrary, were excluded from the dataset. Also, it was assumed that Muslim commenters would not post comments which discussed Islam with an excessively negative tone; therefore, even where the aforementioned markers may have been absent, but the comments were of a very negative nature, it was assumed

¹¹ Or alternatively, statements such as "I am a Muslim..." which meant comments could not be included in the dataset.

¹² An abbreviation of the Arabic phrase loosely translated as "may Allah be pleased with them."

that the commenters were non-Muslim and such comments were included in the dataset. Finally, in the absence of the above explicit and implicit markers, where commenters could not conclusively be determined as being Muslim or non-Muslim, such comments were included in the dataset. Since excessively negative views on Islam were taken as an implicit marker, these neutral, positive, or critical comments were included in the dataset to provide some balance, so as not to skew the final data analysis.

Given all of the above, a total of 165 qualified comments were collected from *Telegraph* articles, and a total of 151 qualified comments were collected from *Guardian* articles. Following the collection of qualified comments to form the initial dataset, comments were divided into “positive”, “critical”, “neutral” and “tagged” categories, each of which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, where the data is presented.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Results from the Data – Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses

When gathering the data, the primary aim was to address the question: what are non-Muslims saying about Islam? Initially, the same number of qualified comments were gathered from comment forums on the *Telegraph* and *Guardian* websites, that is 165 from each website which either discussed Islam as a faith or Islam and Muslims in conjunction, and were identifiably made by non-Muslims according to the markers laid out in the Methodology section. However upon reviewing the data, some comments were removed for relevance, that is when the reference made to Islam was either too obscure or too subtle to make a meaningful contribution to the dataset; this resulted in 165 qualified comments from the *Telegraph* website and 151 comments from the *Guardian*. This difference of eleven comments is, however, offset by using percentages to express the final figures from the data. It should also be noted that while comparatively more comments were gathered from the *Telegraph* website, they originated from fewer commenters as compared to the *Guardian*; that is 165 comments from the *Telegraph* reflect the views of 71 commenters, as opposed to 151 comments originating from 121 commenters on the *Guardian*.

It should be stated from the outset that the comments gathered are by no means intended to be an exhaustive study of attitudes towards Islam in Britain, nor can they be used to draw general conclusions about attitudes of the respective readerships of the *Daily Telegraph/Telegraph Online* and *The Guardian*. While the intention behind selecting comments from these particular articles was to broadly establish a mainstream British context to the comments, the nature of the data dictates that there is no possibility of sampling the respondents or seeing what demographic they themselves, or their views by extension, may represent. Some degree of quantitative analysis has been applied to the data in order to categorise and draw comparisons, but the focus of this study is qualitative – examining the contents of individual comments and what they reveal in themselves

about the views and attitudes of commenters towards Islam. However, while caution must be exercised in assuming that the views expressed on the observed forums are representative of any particular demographic of the British population, the content of the comments can in itself make a substantial contribution to the process of understanding some of the prevalent views about Islam as a faith and how these relate to the concepts of Islamophobia and legal protection from religious hatred.

According to what they said about Islam as a faith, the comments were divided overall into four distinct categories: these were comments discussing Islamic beliefs or practices in a *positive* way, comments *critical* of Islam and its symbols, comments that were *tagged* for negative content, and a small proportion of comments which were *neutral* and fell into neither of the other three categories. Of the total of 316 qualified comments which formed the final dataset (165 from the *Telegraph* and 151 from the *Guardian*), it emerged that a significant majority, 68%, were tagged for negative content, 12% of all comments were critical without being significantly negative, 13% made positive statements about Islamic beliefs and/or practices, and the remaining 6% were neutral and comprised of descriptive statements while being neither critical nor positive or negative. This breakdown is displayed in Figure 1 below.

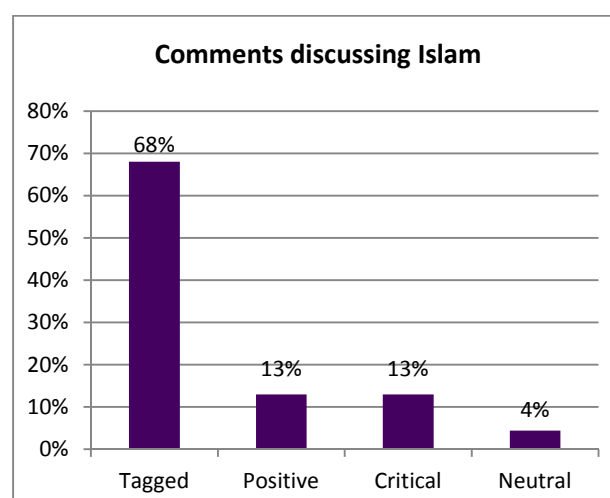


Figure 1: Breakdown of all comments gathered

Comments *tagged* for negative content, henceforth referred to as ‘tagged comments’, were termed such so that a non-judgmental label could be applied to them pending further detailed analysis.

Tagged comments were further broken down into four themes according to what was being said in them about Islam; these themes are as follows: Islam as immoral/oppressive, Islam as violent/threatening, Islam as unintelligent/backward, and Islam as foreign/Other. While these themes will be discussed in detail, the starting point was only to identify instances where people expressed views on Islam that were *not positive* and, at the same time, went beyond being just theological criticisms of the faith and its associated beliefs and practices, with the intention being to fully discuss the implications of these views at a later stage. It must be stated here that it is not immediately assumed that *tagged comments are Islamophobic*; on the contrary, following a detailed exposition of the content of tagged comments, an empirically and theoretically justified answer to the question ‘can negative views on Islam as a faith be Islamophobic?’ will be considered.

When broken down by media outlet, it was clear that the percentage of tagged comments was highest on both *Telegraph* and *Guardian* articles, that is 71% of comments from *Telegraph* articles were tagged and 65% of comments from the *Guardian*. The proportion of neutral comments was conversely very low on both outlets, that is 3% on *Telegraph* articles and 6% on the *Guardian*. The main difference in data gathered from the two media outlets can therefore be observed in the areas of positive and critical comments; only 8% of comments on *Telegraph* forums were positive, compared with 19% of positive comments from *Guardian* forums, and 18% of *Telegraph* comments were critical compared with 7% of *Guardian* comments. So while non-tagged comments on the *Telegraph* website were overall more critical and less positive, the reverse applied to comments from the *Guardian*. Figure 2 below illustrates this pattern.

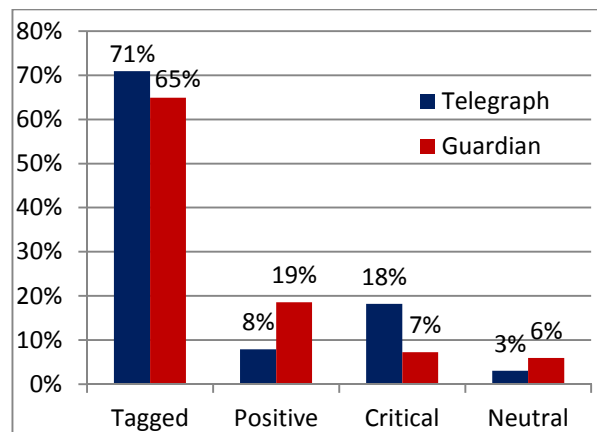


Figure 2: Breakdown distinguished by media outlet

The Content: Positive, Critical and Neutral Comments

Since an overwhelming majority of the data comprised of tagged comments, it may be simpler to first discuss the content of positive, critical and neutral comments in turn, broken down by media outlet and citing examples from the data in each instance. It should be mentioned at this point that examples cited below have been corrected for typos and obvious spelling errors so that these do not distract from the content; spellings of proper nouns, however, have been left unaltered, along with capitalisation as this can sometimes indicate the importance (or lack thereof) given to a particular name or term.

When defining the term 'positive comments', it is worth noting that these were positive *in comparison to the overall cohort of comments gathered*. While they may appear to be defensive or apologetic in some instances, the term 'positive' used to describe these comments is very much relative to the content of the dataset. As already mentioned, fewer positive comments about Islam were posted on the *Telegraph* forums when compared with the *Guardian*, that is 8% vs. 19% respectively. It's interesting to note that some who made positive comments also, in a continuing discussion, made critical comments on the same forum; comments are therefore being considered

as individual units rather than as a reflection of the commenter's views as a whole. Before considering specific examples from the data, it is worth a reminder that these comments have been made by those who could not be identified as 'Muslim' in light of the explicit and implicit markers laid out in the Methodology chapter (pp. 31-32 of this dissertation). While some positive comments in the data defend Islamic beliefs in light of the TV programmes being discussed, others also more generally make affirmative statements about Islam and its symbols. Some examples of the former from *Telegraph* forums are below:

"The Bedouin round the camp fire spoke of (pre-mohammed) the dishonour of the birth of a girl child and burying the girl child alive. He went on to say that mohammed spoke out against and stopped this. A humane decision no doubt but giving birth to girls rather than boys remains undesirable to this day as shown by abortions by gender... the modern day equivalent."

"For your information numerous non-Muslims did their own research into the life of Muhammad including John of Damascus who wrote his assessment of Muhammad within almost 50 years of his death. He was followed by Nicetas, Bartholomew, Paulus and Eulogius."

And some positive comments from the *Guardian* which similarly make reference to the programmes:

"Historian Tom Holland or Conspiracy Theorist Tom Holland, what this program does is to give the impression there is lack of evidence on Muhammad, more like Tom Holland had lacked the ability to find evidence, he failed to mention Original Letters of Prophet Muhammad to king heraclius of Rome and to maqaquis coptic king of Egypt and to khusroe parvez emperor of Persia in which Muhammad put his Seal on."

"Islam has been going strong for the better part of two thousand years; do you genuinely believe that prior to Channel 4's intervention, Muslims had no means of determining the correct time of day to pray at?!"

As mentioned earlier, several positive comments also went beyond referring directly to the TV programmes being discussed to make affirmative statements about Islam and its symbols more generally. Some examples of these from the *Telegraph* are below:

"Do you really think that anyone buys that nonsense relating to Mohammad being a run of the mill highway robber and murderer? Just because you hate the religion (and the followers it would seem) you can't just invent pages from a history book to back it up..."

"The Buddha, Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed are men of conscience - the fact that their words can be subverted is not their fault - it is the sin of others. Words they never said are treated as sacrosanct. The function of religion is not to conquer the world but to conquer self."

Some similar examples from *Guardian* forums, which make general positive statements about Islam without referring to the programmes in discussion, are noted here:

"[Referring to Islam] None of these faiths are the fast growing on the planet, set to eclipse Christianity (if it hasn't already). You think there is an issue in wanting to understand the cultures and values of a significant proportion of the global population? I don't. I'm happy to replace any ignorance I may have with reality and education across a broad range of subjects."

"The adhan during ramadhan must be equated to hearing 'jingle bells' everywhere during certain parts of the year. If Hindus and Muslims, Jews, Parsis and Sikhs can tolerate and learn to enjoy Christian Xmas jingles, the non-Muslims can also learn to listen to the adhan and show tolerance (if not love it)."

With regard to critical comments, these were higher on the *Telegraph* forums than the *Guardian*, that is 18% and 7% respectively. While some critical comments offered a theological critique of Islam, others were less substantiated; also from examples below it is apparent that the tone and content, even of comments marked as 'critical', was often derogatory; however, these comments expressed opinions that were not negative enough, or that did not fall into any of the four 'tagged' themes, to warrant being tagged.

Moreover, critical comments fell into two broad sub-categories; they either specifically criticised Islam, its tenets and practices, or they criticised Islam in comparison to, or along with, other Abrahamic faiths or religion as a whole. With regard to the former, some examples from the *Telegraph* forums are below:

"When you refer to muhammad's message of pure asceticism I wonder if you know the meaning of that word, i.e. severe self denial in bodily pleasures, no sir he was no ascetic not even close."

"Any report which states "the fact that the Qur'an is from God" can be ignored."

Still looking at critical comments which addressed Islam specifically, below are examples from forums on the *Guardian*:

"As I understand it, Allah requires everyone to stop what they're doing five times a day, bow to the east, and tell him what a good guy he is. It seems to me that Allah is a very emotionally needy sort of a god."

"C4 has always had a niche market approach. 3 million (the last figure I read somewhere) Muslims is a pretty big niche. If you can become recognised as the go to channel for the self proclaimed 'fastest growing religion on Earth' [Islam] you have a pretty nice ever growing market share. I think [the decision to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer is] purely a strategic business move and nothing to get too excited about."

As for the second category of critical comments, that is comments criticising Islam alongside other religions or religion as a whole, some examples of this from *Telegraph* forums are below:

"Islam is a fairytale like every other religion. People complaining over what they don't want to accept."

"Islam? Just another method of controlling the population. That's all religion is. It's not rocket science."

Similar comments were posted on the *Guardian* forums, some examples of which are as follows:

"So the Koran has as much to do with the life of Mohammed as the Bible does to Jesus' surprise surprise..."

"Religion is pointless. Starving yourself for a month because ya reckon it will please a fairy in the sky? Being an atheist rocks, for the next month I can eat and say what I like without fear of being smited by a bearded bloke above me."

To return to the comparison of critical and positive comments alluded to previously, forums on the *Guardian* articles had a higher percentage of positive comments than critical, whereas there were more critical than positive comments on *Telegraph* forums. However, when critical and positive comments on both the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* websites are compared, content for both categories largely appears to be very similar on both websites, with the same themes emerging on all forums despite there being fewer positive comments on the *Telegraph* and fewer critical comments on the *Guardian*.

Finally, the smallest percentage was of 'neutral' comments which appeared neither to make a criticism of Islam nor say anything positive or negative about it. Neutral comments generally described historical events or Islamic beliefs without appearing to place any normative judgment on Islam as a faith. The percentage of neutral comments was lowest on both the *Telegraph* and *Guardian* forums, that is 6% on the *Telegraph* and 3% on the *Guardian*. Neutral comments from *Telegraph* forums are below:

“Christianity has provided a book about a man, not by the man himself [...] Both Islam and Christianity have the distinction of having no other witnesses for the alleged revelations.”

“Christianity was invented by St. Paul. Islam was invented by Mohammed. The difference between the two constructions is a divine figurehead - the Jesus of Christianity. To that extent Islam is more akin to Judaism - a suite of rules and regulations requiring a 'followship' rather than a worship.”

Neutral comments from *Guardian* forums are as follows:

“Actually, all [the *adhan*] says is 'There is no god but God and Mohammed is his prophet', repeated a few times.”

“Islam is presumably like Judaism, Catholicism, or in fact probably any of the major world religions in that it's perfectly possible to identify with the culture through your family and upbringing, but be less sure as to the theology.”

Neutral comments could therefore be said to be those that described aspects of Islam without significantly expressing the commenters' individual views on the faith. While these comments can be assigned less importance due to their inert content as well as their low occurrence, the remainder of this chapter will focus on comments which did express views on Islam, and which were in the majority: the tagged comments.

The Content: Tagged Comments

68% of all qualified comments were tagged for negative content. As mentioned earlier, tagged comments were broadly seen to express four themes about Islam: Islam as immoral/oppressive, Islam as violent/threatening, Islam as unintelligent/backward, and Islam as foreign/Other. Said's (1978) observations on Western attitudes towards Islam have loosely been applied to identify these themes, which are in fact, despite the seemingly distinct categorisation, fluid and overlapping.

Before carrying out an in-depth qualitative analysis of these themes in turn, some observations from the quantitative analysis of tagged comments must be shared. The themes mentioned above were initially identified following a preliminary examination of the data, and tagged comments were then colour-coded and 'sub-tagged' under each theme. Sub-tagging was done so that the prevalence of each theme could be expressed as a percentage of the tagged comments only, rather than as a percentage of comments in the entire dataset.

It is important to clarify that while each individual theme is expressed as a percentage of the total number of tagged comments, tagged comments expressing different themes were not mutually exclusive, that is comments often expressed views which reflected more than one theme. The percentages of themes discussed below will therefore not form part of one whole as 100%, but rather each percentage individually answers the question: “what proportion of tagged comments show ... theme?” Before continuing with the quantitative analysis, it would therefore be useful to consider Figure 3 below, which shows each theme expressed as a percentage of all tagged comments:

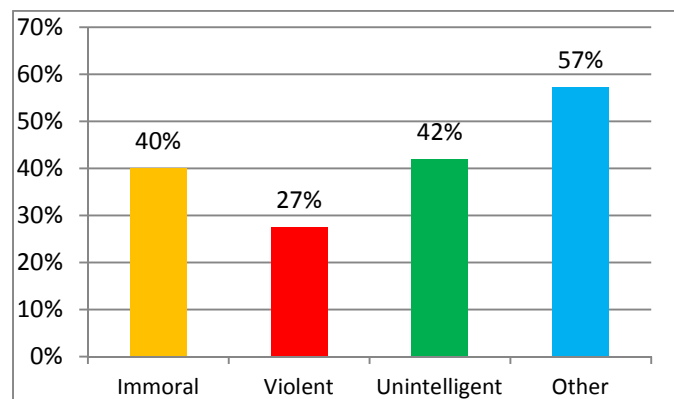


Figure 3: Prevalence of themes within tagged comments

Figure 3 illustrates that over half of all tagged comments had content which reflected a perception of Islam as Other, that is foreign, unwelcome, imposing, and uncompromisingly opposed to the values of the West. Also common, though less so, was the theme of Islam as backward: unintelligent, archaic, and not having made any original contribution to academic knowledge in the West. A significant proportion of tagged comments also described Islam as morally degenerate, for example through practices such as ‘child marriage’ or through draconian limits on personal freedoms. Perhaps unexpectedly, less than a third of tagged comments described Islam as being violent and threatening, either overtly associating Islam with violence or more subtly associating it with aggression, making this the least commonly expressed theme in tagged comments.

These views were also split by media outlet for comparison which is illustrated in Fig. 4 below. While the theme of 'Islam as immoral' was observed in similar proportions in tagged comments on both the *Telegraph* and *Guardian* forums, the theme of 'Islam as violent' was more prevalent (by about 8%) on *Guardian* forums than on the *Telegraph*. It also appears from comparing the forums that commenters expressing negative views about Islam on *Telegraph* forums expressed more frequently a view of 'Islam as unintelligent', and commenters on *Guardian* forums expressed a view of 'Islam as Other' significantly more frequently than those on *Telegraph* forums.

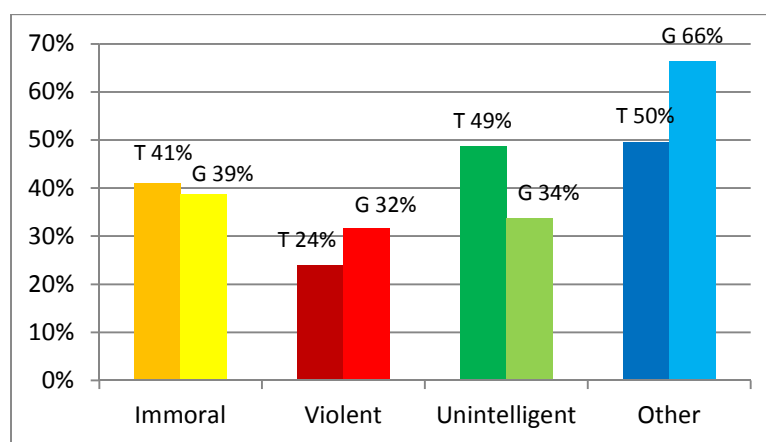


Fig. 4: Comparing proportion of themes by media outlet

As mentioned previously, due to the lack of sampling/background information available for commenters, these trends cannot be said to be indicative of the respective readerships of the *Telegraph* or the *Guardian*, nor should they be used to draw conclusions about overall perceptions of Islam in Britain. However, a qualitative study of comments under each theme, supported by examples quoted from the dataset, will give scope for a much more meaningful and rigorous analysis.

Islam as Immoral/Oppressive

Comments tagged under this theme expressed a variety of views, all of which, in some form or another, described Islam as a faith that is morally degenerate and, by extension, despotic and

oppressive. One view frequently expressed in this theme was that of Islam as misogynistic, where the mistreatment and oppression of women in Muslim countries was often attributed to the alleged lower status of women in Islam. Some examples of this are below from *Telegraph* forums:

"Of course it is very important to challenge religions when they go against the interests of society as a whole, and Islam is full of idiotic rules that should be changed quickly. The oppression of women in the "Muslim" culture needs to be addressed again and again, for example."

"Women in islam are lesser beings then men."

"Couldn't he [Tom Holland] just once have considered the impact of Islam on the 21st century - and wondered whether his romantic imaginings weren't just galling to anyone who is alarmed by the precarious awful position [Islam] insists on keeping women in right across the world?"

Similar examples from this theme from the *Guardian* forums, referring to the position or treatment of women in Islam, are as follows:

"Sadly, Islam offers no education (particularly for girls), improvement or bettering yourself."

"As a woman, I've got a few 'culturally educational' things to say about women in Islam. Have a look at today's Deccan Herald [...] Huge complaints are being made about the plight of Indian muslim women, following a series of obnoxious edicts from various muslim theological leaders, that deny muslim women education, riding a bike, and condone abuse. It's the fact that these misogynist edicts are trotted out with such sickening regularity, that Indians are noticing and complaining about their constitutional rights. Everywhere, the belief that a woman is worth much less than a man causes problems. The Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences found that 90% of Pakistani women have been badly beaten, and sexually abused. In Kuwait, Saudi and elsewhere, women can't even vote, let alone be in public office. Honour killings are widespread throughout the Islamic world and go unpunished. In iran recently, a father cut off the head of his 7 year old daughter because he suspected she had been raped by her uncle. By the way, the legal age for marriage in Iran is 9 years old. Pre-pubescent brides are also common in Afghanistan. 75% of all women in jail in Pakistan, are behind bars for the crime of having been a victim of rape."

Although the theme of Islam as immoral was more prevalent in tagged comments on *Telegraph* forums, the view that *Islam* by its very nature mistreats and oppresses women was expressed more on *Guardian* forums than on the *Telegraph*. As seen in the last comment quoted above, a closely related view expressed in this theme was that of child marriage, and views linked to this were those associating Islam with paedophilia and polygamy. Some examples of these from *Telegraph* forums are as follows:

"[In comparison to Prophet Muhammad] The emperor Gaius, or Caligula as he was insultingly known, was certainly 'mad, bad & dangerous to know'; but he is not known to have been a child molester."

"So polygamy and asceticism go together for muslims then... You say muhammad did not act like some roman emperors but propagated a message of pure asceticism next you will assert he had no wives concubines or slave women at his behest."

"Mohammed (if indeed he existed) was a man of such moral character that he had sexual relations with his 9 year old wife."

And some similar examples from *Guardian* forums are below:

"Spot the differences (among many others - treatment of women, polygamy, halal killing, sharia law, etc.) between the two faiths [Christianity and Islam]? Now whose Creed do you prefer?"

"Next on Channel 4... Wives Swap; [...] How to Look Good Completely Covered; No Peep Show."

"I wonder if the BBC will censor in this documentary the Satanic Verses incident and the thing about that 9 year old girl."

Furthermore, the theme of Islam as immoral featured comments which referred to Islam's alleged endorsement of morally and socially unacceptable practices such as "looting"/theft or

"lying"/deceit.¹³ Interestingly, these views were only observed on *Telegraph* forums, with comments from *Guardian* forums featuring neither references to theft nor to deceit; examples from *Telegraph* forums are below:

"It is a moral duty for non-Muslims to find out about Islam for themselves from more independent sources than Muslims themselves can offer. There is after all a long standing tradition of religiously sanctified lying in order to protect the faith."

"And no doubt you will be defending the black hearted cleric who has been arrested for framing a backward young girl in pakistan. Methinks you will need to brush up on your taqiyya for that one [...], but mind you the koran is very forgiving of a liar who furthers its cause."

"If the Muslims at Medina weren't trying to recover stolen goods, why then were they plundering Meccan caravans? Muhammad provides the real reason for the looting and the killing."

¹³ The latter with reference to the practice of *taqiyyah* or concealment of one's faith, permissible in some Islamic schools in situations where there is a threat to life.

Finally, comments describing what was perceived to be the moral redundancy of Islam expressed a view of Islam as a cultish faith, being uncompromisingly prescriptive, imposing due to its proselytism, and repressive due to its intolerance (of criticism as well as of non-Muslims). Examples of these views from *Telegraph* forums are as follows:

“One moment they argue that their cult religion is the only real one - the next minute they argue that their texts are distorted or not real! What is it going to be?”

“Muslims are not allowed to question their 'faith' in any way.”

“A totally proscribed life, devoid of the realities of personal responsibility is a profound handicap and frankly must be a factor in the relative failure of Islamic nations.”

Similar examples are below from *Guardian* forums:

“Too often, Islam, and those who praise Muhammad, seek authority and make audacious self-claims in an atmosphere of fear created by a taboo against criticism, [and] a violence and slander taboo that overhangs the whole subject. It is the sense of a kind of brazen 'one way street' of a proselytising religion that demands respect 'or else', and asserts a projection of its own taboos against criticism and refutation onto others. It makes it feel like a slightly sinister coerciveness is at play.”

“Bear in mind the difficulty, or sometimes impossibility, of belonging to the Christian/any other than Muslim/no faith in a Muslim majority country. Try and say Mass in Saudi Arabia, for instance.”

“As for seeking understanding of Islam, by all means listen to the call to prayer; it is great theatre but read the Koran, the message goes through it like words through a stick of rock: the unbelievers burn.”

The content shared above from comments tagged under the theme 'Islam as immoral' will hopefully go some way to justifying the overall identification and labelling of this theme, and also demonstrate why respective comments were grouped under this theme. While comments under this theme expressed a variety of views, they shared in common a view of Islam as an ideology which espouses beliefs and/or practices that would ordinarily be considered immoral or oppressive and therefore socially unacceptable, particularly in Western society.

Islam as Violent/ Threatening

The theme of 'Islam as violent' was least prevalent in tagged comments on both *Telegraph* and *Guardian* forums. Comments tagged under this theme shared a view of Islam as an aggressive,

threatening, militant faith which possessed an inherently violent quality e.g. due to purported punishments in sharia law or an association with terrorist atrocities particularly in the US and Europe. One of the views frequently observed under this theme, on both forums, was that of Islam as threatening, most commonly associated with the Rushdie Affair or the Danish Cartoons controversy; such views from forums on both outlets suggested that there hung a tangible threat over anyone who dared to publicly criticise Islam or its symbols. Some examples of these are below from *Telegraph* forums:

“Well guess what. Channel 4 has cancelled [a second screening of *Islam: the Untold Story*] because Tom Holland's life has been threatened. What a religion of peace it is.”

“It is always illustrative when Muslims claim to be ‘offended’ by a TV programme. Such ‘being offended’ often ‘morphs’ into death threats and violence. Such things provide such a clear illustration of what ‘pure Islam’ REALLY means. No thought of ‘reasoned discussion’ in response to analysis and/or comments upon Islam, just threats and violence.”

“The question perhaps isn't whether or not mohammedism [sic] can accept higher criticism (I don't believe it can) but whether or not those outside this narcissistic and stifling creed can challenge and expose it - and live. [...] Tom Holland might do well to invest in some body armour.”

Examples of similar comments from *Guardian* forums are below:

“The problem is that anything other than a reverential piece that submits to the general taboos of Islam, and that is therefore effectively a kind of propaganda for Islam, would result in severe repercussions for those who produced the documentary. Some questions: (1) Why is there a violence/murder taboo around the criticism of Muhammad? (2) How can a true appraisal of Muhammad take place when scrutiny and criticism of him is governed by fear of that murder/violence taboo?”

“Trouble is you are unable to have a proper discussion about Islam without inciting hoardes of Muslims to leap up and down threatening death to everyone.”

“It was almost as if [Tom Holland] was looking over his shoulder, half expecting a fatwa at any minute.”

Another feature of comments grouped under this theme, which was noted on both outlets but was more common on *Guardian* forums, was the mention of what was perceived to be a “mandatory” death penalty for apostasy in Islam. Examples are cited below from *Telegraph* forums:

“The reluctance to “drop out” from Islam might have something to do with the immediate death penalty for doing so? The mandatory death penalty for apostasy is one of Islam's more distasteful aspects (there are many others).”

"Muslims however intelligent are saddled with embarrassing pronouncements; for example my dentist, a Muslim assured me that the world is 6000 years old, full stop. He knows this is bunkum but to disagree or certainly proclaim it to be untrue is committing apostasy the penalty for which is a bit more than a few speeding points."

And below are examples from *Guardian* forums:

"While we're being honest with ourselves, not all [Muslims] have freely chosen Islam. After all, it does have the death penalty for apostasy."

"Christianity no longer goes in for persecuting others of different (or no) faith and [...] apostasy from the Christian faith is not punishable by death."

Another view expressed on both *Telegraph* and *Guardian* forums, although more common on the former than the latter, were those describing the Prophet as violent, with the implication being that Islam was founded upon and/or has an inseparable association with violence. Some examples of these views are below from *Telegraph* forums:

"Mohammed beheaded people [and] was a mass murderer."

"How can anyone revere a man who butchered prisoners in cold blood, had opponents assassinated and swapped captured girls with his mates?"

"[Quoting a *hadith*] "When the Apostle heard about Abu Sufyan coming from Syria, he summoned the Muslims and said, 'This is the Quraish caravan containing their property. Go out to attack it, perhaps Allah will give it as a prey.'" (Ibn Ishaq/Hisham 428)"

Similar examples from *Guardian* forums are noted below:

"What is the difference between General Moses, General Constantine and General Muhammad? None. They all founded religions of peace."

"[...] that the general public want to learn and engage with Islam and come to "understand it". I would guess that this is probably as far from the truth as the constant claim that Islam is a religion of peace. Mohammed certainly didn't spread it peacefully. He spread it using war and enforced it on the local populations, much in the same way the Christians spread Christianity."

One feature of comments under the theme 'Islam as violent' which was observed only on *Telegraph* forums was the mention of historic Islamic battles, combined with the inference that Islam has had a sustained "agenda of conquest" since its inception.

"Did [the documentary *Islam the Untold Story*] mention the reason [Islam] spread had a lot to do with the genocide the Muslims did on the Jews (including many ethnic Arabs whose ancestors had converted to Judaism) and the allowance to plunder and pillage their possessions?"

"The Battle of Badr: [Quoting a *hadith*] "(The Muslim raiders) encouraged each other, and decided to kill as many as they could of them and take what they had. Waqid shot Amr bin al-Hadrami with an arrow and killed him... (Ibn Ishaq/Hisham 425)""

"Kyle Reese in Terminator: "Listen, and understand! That Terminator is out there! It can't be bargained with. It can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead." Islam has been conquering places Terminator style since the 7th Century and their goal is to get rid of everybody else."

On *Guardian* forums, while similar inferences were absent, what did feature is a prominent emphasis on linking Islam with terrorism. Similar views were absent from *Telegraph* forums with the exception of one comment mentioning the promotion of "genocide against non-Muslims". Specific comments from *Guardian* forums linking Islam with terrorism are below:

"Imams need to address that there IS a problem with Islam instead of just ignoring extremists as not Muslims. They are after all quoting the Quaran [*sic*] when they do their actions."

"While Woolwich may have been committed by a "couple of lone wolves" the statements they made were very much based on the Koran and its various interpretations. As were the actions of the other "lone wolves" who committed the 7/7 terrorist attack."

"It is indeed significant that a segment of the population - 5%, apparently, commands such public focus. Could this be because since the Fatwa against Salaman [*sic*] Rushdie, the bombing of the twin towers, the Madrid and London bombings and the recent Woolwich killing, all done in the name of Allah suggests that a section of Muslim believers most definitely do not wish us well?"

The above comments, while showing some variation in views, will hopefully illustrate the need for these and other comments expressing similar views to be tagged under the theme 'Islam as violent'.

Islam as Unintelligent/Backward

Comments tagged under this theme shared a view of Islam as essentially backward, irrational and intellectually impotent. In most cases, a common factor in these comments was a comparison to Western rationality and progress, which in turn was often represented through scientific discovery or political liberalism.

Consequently, a common view in comments tagged under this theme, though more so on *Guardian* than *Telegraph* forums, was that of Islam as an archaic ideology which needed an Enlightenment similar to the period of rationality and intellectual reformation undergone by the Christian West from c. 17th to 18th century CE. Similar views were those of Islam being stuck in “the dark ages” or in an intellectually backward period of history. Below are some examples of these from *Telegraph* forums:

“Watch [*Islam: the Untold Story*] online - don't let the violent propagandists suffocate real western critical learning - Islam must live with the Enlightenment in the West, it can retreat to fanaticism in the East if it wants.”

“The circumstances that produced the Enlightenment in Christendom have yet to come into being in the Muslim world.”

“[Quoting Winston Churchill] Individual Moslems may show splendid qualities, but this influence of the religion paralyses the social development of those who follow it. No stronger retrograde force exists in the world.”

Similar examples are below from *Guardian* forums:

“The most acute observation in the review is “The gap between western liberalism and Islamic liberalism suddenly looked frighteningly large.” [...] The old truism about Islam not having yet had its “reformation” and “enlightenment” seems more apposite than ever :(”

“[Islam] invites followers to return to a medieval superstition with plenty of hatred and bigotry thrown in.”

“Ideally we Europeans should have given up on religion, aware that it had nothing to do with reality, and we should be trying to persuade Muslims to do likewise; to actually see how irrational their religion and all religions are.”

“That’s the problem. Islam is stuck in the 6th century.”

Another closely related feature of comments tagged under this theme, which was shared on both *Telegraph* and *Guardian* forums, was a view of Islam being fundamentally irrational and opposed to critical thinking. Examples of this from *Telegraph* forums are cited below:

“Whereas, in the case of Jesus there is no down side to not agreeing or finding the stories a bit farfetched Islam is different. It is not open to reason as the Koran is the direct infallible word of God (Allah).”

“Mohammedan's [*sic*] ferocious aversion even to informed doubt and intelligent scepticism is surely that of an ummah with something to hide. They seem terrified of impartial forensic analysis, which seems odd coming from those claiming such unshakeable certainty and absolute confidence. Could it be that “islamaphobes” [*sic*] and infidels have been right all along?”

"The human condition is to pursue knowledge, and no intellectually bankrupt religion can withstand the advance of scientific enquiry."

Some examples of comments expressing similar views on *Guardian* forums are as follows:

"Islam and its citadels are not places where an honest inquiry of Islam can take place. A good treatise can only take place where critical thinking is discussed in a detached and logical manner and not where the lowest common denominator whose typical mode of response is physical rather than intellectual threatens the conclusions of such a treatise. Unfortunately the Muslim world has for centuries not been a place where critical thinking is the norm especially about Islam."

"Islam seems determined to maintain an unquestioning, literal interpretation of the Koran. While it does so it cannot demand the 'respect' of rational thinkers."

"It is not rational to believe that an angel delivered the word of god to a man who rode a magic flying horse. The fact that 1.6 billion people believe this does not make it any less irrational [...] Some 2 billion people believe that Jesus was the son of god and performed miracles. They are also deluded. I can say this because I have used my critical faculties to assess the information in the light of any evidence."

Moreover, some comments which expressed a view of Islam as intellectually redundant did so by criticising the content or form of the Quran; these were more common on *Telegraph* forums, examples of which are below:

"The 'produce a sura like it' challenge is stupid, and God would not be so stupid as to come up with it. I've just explained to you that I did in fact come up with a sura like it, I came up with a sura that surpasses it. It's just that when translated into English it kind of looks like normal, completely unextraordinary, barely poetic, unbelievably repetitive and dull, sometimes not totally coherent words without enough proper nouns. Like the Qur'an."

"There is nothing godlike about the Koran, just semi-coherent, violent rambling nonsense."

"It's not even that well written, it is full of holes, inaccuracies, laughable "science" and much of it is just gibberish."

Examples of similar comments from *Guardian* forums are below:

"A program on all the scientific mistakes in the Quran would be wonderful as well as many Muslims, particularly the young, think the Quran contains scientific "miracles"."

"Anyone who had any kind of education that encouraged critical analysis must know it's all a fairy story. Magic flying horses? Resurrection? Really? Not to mention all the inconsistencies, contradictions and interpretations in apparently "infallible" texts."

Finally, considering that about 15% more tagged comments from *Telegraph* forums fell under this theme as compared to *Guardian* forums, one view which was observed almost exclusively on

Telegraph forums was that of Islamic intellectual tradition having been stolen or “plagiarised” from other faiths, with a related suggestion being that Islam has not made any original contribution to knowledge. Some examples of this are as follows:

“But WHY is Abraham the “father” of all jews and Muslims? Because the Quran has no prophet or origin from an authentic teacher. It is a potpourri of OTHER faiths from the entire region. When writers have no knowledge, they tend to steal from real writers to fake knowledge...Nothing new.”

“[The Quran] simply plagiarises the Torah and the Gospels.”

“Try to get your slow brain around the fact that the bible and its prophets were muhammad’s main inspiration when he travelled around for his uncle and khadija.”

To summarise, while an ‘Islam vs. the West’ comparison could be observed in many comments tagged under this theme, in *Guardian* forums, with greater emphasis on secular rationalism, the comparison seemed to be more along the lines of ‘Islam vs. the Secular West’, whereas in *Telegraph* forums, with greater criticism of the Quran and of Islam’s “plagiarism” of other Abrahamic faiths, the comparison was more between ‘Islam vs. the Christian West’. This is possibly one of the most significant differences observed between views expressed on *Guardian* and *Telegraph* forums.

Islam as Foreign/Other

Out of the four themes, this theme was most prominent in tagged comments on both *Guardian* and *Telegraph* forums. Comments tagged under this theme described Islam and its associated symbols as categorically foreign and alien to Western society and culture. This view of Islam as Other was manifested in several different forms, one of which was that Islam received (undeserved) “special treatment” in comparison to other faiths, a view which was more prevalent on *Guardian* forums than on the *Telegraph*. Examples from *Telegraph* forums are as follows:

“This programme was a vast improvement on the usual stroking of the Muslim ego that we tend to get on TV.”

“The question that Ed West should be asking is not whether Islam can accept higher criticism, but whether politically-correct types, like the moderators, will allow anyone to criticise it.”

Similar examples of Islam receiving special treatment, without being entitled to it, are below from *Guardian* forums:

"The degree to which Holland tiptoed around the subject and apologised for his findings went way beyond what [...] would have been on offer for any other religion. [...] Meanwhile the UK press, included this paper, seems to share Holland's concern as they still refuse to show the Mohammed cartoons although they have been happy to show worse for other religions."

"As a matter of interest have any other services ever been broadcasted such as Judaism or Sikh? I'd be interested to know why Ramadan is put before these other religions."

"Why on earth should we need to 'learn about Islam'? I have often wondered what the apparent obsession with Islam is. Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, Ásatrú, none of these faiths receive the same kind of attention."

Another prominent view in comments tagged under this theme was that of Islam as extremely imposing and invasive, while being equally unwelcome. Among comments made in response to the online *Guardian* article which discussed Channel 4's decision to air the *adhan*¹⁴ during Ramadan, this view was manifested through feelings towards the *adhan*, the broadcast of which was seen as an imposition on British viewers. This goes some way to explaining why the theme of 'Islam as Other' was comparatively more prevalent in comments from *Guardian* forums. Feelings towards the *adhan* were often coupled with sentiments of fear over 'creeping sharia' or the increasing 'Islamisation'¹⁵ of the UK to describe Islam as an ideology that is invading Western society, culture, or civilisation.

Comments from *Telegraph* forums, while missing references to the *adhan*, also frequently described similar views, examples of which are below:

"This emphasis on submit is a giveaway, that Islam is an imperialist ideology of Arabs in the garb of religion. The imperialism is of mind and the soul much dangerous than conventional imperialism."

"How about a documentary: 'Sick of The Sight And Sounds of Islam'"

"Nothing has changed in 1400 years but will you stunned Europeans awake in time before Islam takes you over??? I sure hope so..."

¹⁴ Muslim call to prayer.

¹⁵ This despite the fact that the *adhan*, lasting no more than a few minutes in length, was scheduled to be broadcast only once a day, around 3:00am in the morning.

Examples from *Guardian* forums of the views described above are as follows:

"Anti-muslim sentiments are also stoked by a feeling of the "creeping islamisation" of the UK. Broadcasting the muslim call to prayer is hardly going to calm those fears; I'd say it is more likely to reinforce them."

"The muslim call to prayer serves exactly the same purpose as loyalist flute bands: it is a provocation and a show of strength to everyone outside their community. Maybe atheists should hire some loudspeakers and broadcast Richard Dawkins finest rants five times a day."

"Outside the sniggering Left-media axis most people will regard this as offensive, intrusive and shallow - it will further promote in the sense in people's minds that Islam is being rammed down their throat. This will further promote hostility to Muslims - who after all still only number around 5 per cent of the population - at a time, following the murder of Lee Rigby, many feel, once again, the need to disassociate themselves from Islamic extremism. Instead we have C4 beaming in the call to prayer 5 times a day."

Another view which emerged under this theme was that of Islam as emphatically foreign, alien, and again, equally unwelcome; these views described what were seen as irreconcilable differences or enmity between Islam and the West. Some examples of these from *Telegraph* forums are as follows:

"No doubt Islam is a harsh religion, and it certainly is totally incompatible with the climate and culture of Europe."

"If you really think [...] that the Muslim Allah is the same as the Jewish and Christian Jehovah, you need to do some serious, serious reading. The differences are so enormous as to be light years apart."

"It's inevitable that even the most despotic, intolerant, abhorrent world view that is Islam will be proven wrong by objective sceptical analysis."

Similar examples are cited below from *Guardian* forums; among these, again, the 'difference' of Islam is highlighted through feelings toward the *adhan*:

"The problem with the muslim prayer thing is that it sounds to me like just some bloke yelling stuff really loudly and it gets on my nerves. In the same way evangelicals yell at you in the street; it makes me edgy. [...] To me it just sounds like a bloke howling and I don't like it."

"More Muslims learning about (but not necessarily believing in) UK society could help reduce tensions between non-Muslims and Muslims in the UK. But that isn't really going to happen is it. Islam does not conform it demands and dominates with no attempt to integrate or compromise. I would post a verse from the quran to confirm this but my post would be removed."

"The adhān belongs to quite a different culture: it is an unequivocally insensitive theological declaration with profoundly political implications, and is invasively 'in-your-face' and 'down-your-throat' (or whatever the audial equivalent be)."

Finally, as an extension of the view of Islam as foreign, alien and the Other, comments tagged under this theme often included expressions of contempt or hostility towards Islam or its associated symbols. Examples of these are quoted below from *Telegraph* forums:

"As [Tom Holland] squatted in the desert, I couldn't help hoping he'd ask the 'locals', 'Do you think Islam has helped improve your lifestyle?' or, 'Are you ever tempted to use the Koran to get the fire going?'"

"He's not the messiah, he is a walking talking fountain of horsecrap."

"When the prophet of plsslam conquered and invaded non-Muslim areas, the pile of cut heads was so high even while mounted on a horse they could not see beyond it."

"[Aleister] crowley and your murdering lustful prophet would be ideal hell dwellers."

"Given the enormous firepower and ability to deliver that firepower anywhere on Earth within 30 minutes and that tolerance of Islam outside Arabia and South Central Asia is nil to non-existent [...] Then Islam had better take a cold hard critical look at itself before any one of the Nuclear powers decides to glass over the Muslim lands. If they keep spouting the Kuffar S*** eventually a Westernised State will just wipe them out, as sure as night follows day.... They must deal with their salafist /wahabbi and other religious nutters or the west will reach a point and decide for its own welfare and security to wipe out and destroy whole nations and populations."

Similar expressions of hostility or contempt towards Islam from *Guardian* forums are as follows:

"[Referring to the *adhan*] I used to have a tom cat and before we had him done it sounded a little like this. god awful racket."

"I say b*****s to manmade fairy tales that promote division, alternative legal systems, repression of women and homosexuals. An utter anachronism in 2013 if there ever was one."

"Presumably from now on Channel 4 will have 5 minutes of church bells as the call to Christians to attend the 10.00 am service at their local church, or at least at the month of various key Christian celebration dates. If not why not? ... because Ch 4 wants to be first channel to announce that it now sees UK as a muslim agenda dominated country? or 2 fingers at those protesting at planned and carried out atrocities in UK specifically in the name of islam?"

Finally, as it was mentioned previously that comments tagged under the different themes were not mutually exclusive (which quotes above may already have shown) below are some comments which illustrate this overlap, colour-coded as in the original data-gathering process to show the various themes. While many tagged comments expressed more than one theme, the comments quoted

below have been chosen because they express within them all four of the identified themes; the following are from *Telegraph* forums:

“How can someone who has dedicated themselves to a mass murderer and robber, admit to themselves that they are basically too dumb to reason? It's shameful enough that they are stuck in a death cult that indoctrinates small children from the moment they can speak, to call Jews and Christians 'dogs and pigs', and for them to always be aware that genocide against non-Muslims is a good and recommended act. A normal human being even with mediocre IQ would soon recognize how insane the entire foundation of it all is.”¹⁶

“The question perhaps isn't whether or not mohammedism can accept higher criticism (I don't believe it can) but whether or not those outside this narcissistic and stifling creed can challenge and expose it - and live. Tom Holland has performed valuable service by looking more objectively than muslims ever could, at this creed's possible origins and historical deeds done in its name. Seen this way, peaceful and tolerant it certainly always wasn't, "perfect" it clearly isn't, and as the untarnished, complete message from Al Lah delivered, unwitnessed, in a cavern's dank gloom, it seems increasingly dubious. [...] Mohammedan's ferocious aversion even to informed doubt and intelligent scepticism is surely that of an ummah with something to hide. [...] Could it be that "islamaphobes" and infidels have been right all along?”

And below are similar examples from *Guardian* forums:

“You're right, many muslims are pretty lax, normal people, like the rest of us I mean. The concern I have is the hypocrisy at its heart, the destruction and damage it causes and hindrance it poses to intellectual honesty and personal rights and freedoms. There's no running from that reality, since we live in a multicultural society and some of us need to take a stand once in a while imo”

“Bear in mind, however, that Christianity no longer goes in for persecuting others of diifferent (or no) faith and that apostasy from the Christian faith is not punishable by death. Also bear in mind the difficulty, or sometimes impossibility, of belonging to the Christian/any other than Muslim/no faith in a Muslim majority country. Try and say Mass in Saudi Arabia, for instance. Spot the differences (among many others - treatment of women, polygamy, halal killing, sharia law, etc.) between the two faiths? Now whose Creed do you prefer?”

The results presented above are intended to provide both a qualitative and quantitative breakdown of this empirical study. Tagged comments, while forming the majority of the quantitative breakdown, also provide the most significant insights in terms of qualitative analysis. The four themes in the tagged comments, while not mutually exclusive and having some degree of overlap between and across each other, can nevertheless provide a useful means to interpret the data which

¹⁶ Key: Islam as violent; Islam as irrational; Islam as immoral; Islam as Other

has been gathered. The question which remains to be answered, then, is “can negative views on Islam be Islamophobic?”

ANALYSIS: ISLAMOPHOBIC RACISM

Returning now to the research questions posed at the start, a critical discussion of the data presented above is required in order to answer the question: are negative views on Islam Islamophobic, and if yes, how can this conclusion be justified? Before discussing the content of themes from tagged comments, it was mentioned that Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has been used as a guide to identify prominent themes in negative perceptions of Islam; it does not follow, however, that just because these comments can be described as having an Orientalist influence, they are necessarily Islamophobic. Upon studying both concepts, it is relatively uncontroversial to conclude that Islamophobia and Orientalism are similar but separate phenomena, as Allen contends that "contemporary Islamophobia may have evolved out of Orientalism" (2010a, p. 141) and, in offering a comparison of the two terms, Zebiri suggests that "While the term "Orientalist" has been primarily applied to academic production, as well as to art and literature, the term "Islamophobia" generally applies more to popular culture, including the media and grassroots prejudice" (2008, p. 5). In this comparison, however, Zebiri appears to miss out the pervasive component of "discourse" which was central to Said's assessment of Orientalist literature, and an analysis of which can be applied to academic production or literature as much as it can to popular culture or grass roots prejudice. Sheehi compares the two concepts by noting that "Orientalism [...]has paved the way for [Islamophobia] and, indeed, perhaps Islamophobia is the heir to Orientalism after Said and others have successfully [...] delegitimised its paradigms"¹⁷ (2011, p. 38).

It is interesting to note that in Zebiri's study of 2008, three of the 'Islamophobic' themes identified by her overlap with the themes identified in tagged comments for this study; these are: gender, violence and foreignness. Having justified in the literature review the theoretical position of

¹⁷ Sheehi later goes on to suggest that Orientalism is distinct from Islamophobia because it focused on anti-Arab racism, but this is easily disputed by reference to Said's *Orientalism* (1989) which has been quoted extensively on pp.4-7 of this dissertation, where Said himself describes Islam as being at the centre of Orientalist mistrust of the East.

Islamophobia as a form of racism, Werbner's model of racist dualisms (see Table 1) will be employed to interpret the data, or specifically to interpret the tagged comments expressing negative views on Islam, in order to establish whether negative views on Islam can be considered Islamophobic. This analysis will also serve to answer the question: how can Islamophobia be a form of racism?

Table 1: Werbner's model of Racist Dualisms

	Internal	External
Wieviorka	Inferiorisation	Differentiation
Bauman	Assimilation	Expulsion

From reviewing the tagged comments in particular, it does appear to be the case that many of them can be defined as Islamophobic in that they indicate a position that either inferiorises Islam, differentiates Islam (i.e. through 'othering'), expresses a desire to assimilate Islam, or expresses a desire to expel Islam.

With regard to the theme of 'Islam as immoral', this can be identified as falling under inferiorisation as well as differentiation of Islam, as accusations of paedophilia, lying, stealing, and misogyny all clearly suggest a view of Islam as being both inferior and different to core Western values. While assimilation cannot immediately be detected here, what can be inferred is a frustration with the inability to assimilate differences, e.g. polygamy, which is then expressed in the form of expulsion – 'your polygamous practices and child marriage aren't welcome here'.¹⁸

In the theme of 'Islam as violent', Islam can again be noted as being inferiorised, differentiated, and expelled for lack of assimilation. References to the Rushdie Affair, the death penalty for apostasy, historic Islamic battles, and terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Islam, all offer a perception of Islam that is inferior, due to the perceived encouragement of violence, as well as different due to

¹⁸ Not a direct quote from the data; intended only as an explanatory/indicative statement.

its threatening and illiberal response to criticism. The inherent violence of Islam also offers a prime motive for its expulsion.

The theme of 'Islam as unintelligent' is one which is identified and explored in addition to the three themes identified by Zebiri. Comments on Islam's intellectual redundancy, its failure to experience an Enlightenment or reformation, its opposition to reason, rationalism and critical thinking, the "plagiarism" of its beliefs, and the poor quality of its scripture, all point to the perceived inferiority and difference of Islam in relation, at various times, to the Christian or Secular West. Following a failure to assimilate, expulsion is again used to deal with this challenge: 'deal with our standards of rationalism and critical thinking or go back to where you came from.'¹⁹

Finally, the theme of 'Islam as Other' is possibly one in which all other themes can be incorporated, as demonstrated by the application of 'difference' to all of the previously mentioned themes. Islam as the Other is, by definition, inferior to the Western Self and thus worthy of contempt, and remains foreign, unwelcome, and therefore imposing by its very presence. Islam as Other offers the ultimate challenge to assimilation, in the threat of 'Islamisation' and 'creeping sharia', and so expulsion is seen as the most appropriate solution for coping with it.

The above analysis informed by Werbner's racist dualisms is based on a general overview of comments under each theme, and it should be noted that within each theme a degree of diversity did exist, so that negative sentiments were expressed more strongly in some comments than in others. Based on the above, it is concluded here that all tagged comments can be described as Islamophobic, albeit to varying degrees; Tyrer's (2010) approach is one which demonstrates that Islamophobia is communicated not just in overt and extreme forms but often also in subtle and coded meanings. Moreover, while negative sentiment was expressed to varying degrees in the tagged comments, all tagged comments attributed to Islam an essentialised inherentism, giving

¹⁹ Again not a direct quote from the data.

Islam ontologised negative traits which can be compared to the colonial-era attribution of traits such as savagery which resulted in the inferiorisation of the entire Black race (Kundnani 2007, p. 11). So in answer to the questions “are negative views on Islam Islamophobic?” and “how can Islamophobia be a form of racism?”, with the application of Werbner’s framework of racist dualisms presented above, negative views on Islam can indeed be concluded as being ‘Islamophobically racist’.

This is not to say that all those expressing negative views on Islam, or even just those having been identified through this study as expressing negative views on Islam, should be criminalised for doing so; just as colour racism can carry on in subtle and coded forms in everyday contexts, legislation has its limitations in the regulation and counteraction of any form of racism. However, upon establishing an empirical link between negative views on Islam and Islamophobia, we can begin to explore how this evidence can best be applied both within and without the British legal context. To conclude, an answer is sought to the final question: where can a discussion on ‘hatred of Islam as Islamophobia’ lead in the context of a secular, liberal society?

CONCLUSION

This study makes an important contribution to existing literature on Islamophobia, in that it looks beyond hate crime, right wing media and far right groups, and provides empirical evidence on the subtle and nuanced ways in which Islamophobia can manifest. It also raises questions about the process which leads to the formation of Islamophobic attitudes. It is hoped that this study is the first of its kind in its attempt at establishing a link between negative views on Islam as a faith (and not Muslims as a group) and Islamophobia. Furthermore, it establishes a link between Orientalist views on Islam as described by Said (1978) and Islamophobia, in that the sub-themes identified within the tagged comments, particularly the theme of 'Islam as Other', can be described as Orientalist as well as Islamophobic.

Islam-Haters are Islamophobes – So What?

The discussion that must follow is about the appropriateness of existing religious hatred legislation, but it is also about going beyond legislation to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role played by Islam in identity-formation processes for Muslims (Meer 2008), and moreover it is about understanding Islamophobia as a lived reality for Muslims which must be appropriately defined and given due recognition. The 2006 Racial and Religious Act is fundamentally inegalitarian in the protection it affords to 'racially diverse' versus 'racially homogenous' religious groups (Thompson 2012, Goodall 2007); this is a fact that disproportionately affects Muslims as a vilified, ethnically diverse minority, and therefore must be addressed with some urgency. The Act is also clearly misconceived in its understanding of 'race' as a phenotypical trait versus 'religion' as a chosen identity (Meer 2008) and thus it further perpetuates an undermining of 'Muslim' as a minority group identity. Finally, clause 29J in the 2006 Act is redundant in its function (Thompson 2011), especially since in practice, with examples of the Danish cartoons and anti-Islam films cited earlier, vilified depictions of Islam have been interpreted as being threatening to public order, and their distribution

has thus been banned in the UK. Moreover, clause 29J serves to disadvantage those who may experience religious hatred (Goodall 2007), and this study has demonstrated that it is possible to distinguish between criticism and contempt towards Islam without a great deal of difficulty.

Richardson J. (2004), Werbner (2005), Allen (2010a), Sivanandan (2009) and Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) have also already pointed out that vilification of Islam can, in fact, lead to vilification of Muslims; this is confirmed by the inclusion of “negative views on *Islam*” in most theoretical definitions of Islamophobia (Allen 2010a, Sayyid 2010, Fekete 2009).

With regard to the conceptual treatment of Islamophobia, while it may be true that the term has entered the lexicon to the extent that this cannot be undone (Vakil 2010), it is argued here that the separation of Islamophobia from the concept of racism, and the continued lack of public recognition for scholarly work on Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism (Mac an Ghaill 1999, Modood 1996 and 2005, Werbner 2005, Kundnani 2007, Fekete 2004 and 2009, Meer and Modood 2009 and 2010, Meer 2012,) has in fact served to marginalise Muslim communities and further perpetuate Islamophobic sentiment. The justification that ‘Islam is not a race’, and therefore it is impossible to be racist towards Muslims, is one frequently cited in defence of Islamophobia²⁰. In a ‘post-racial’ society, Islam is the new “folk devil” (Cohen 1973).

Further issues exist with the practical treatment of Islamophobic incidents which must be considered here. Firstly, while Allen’s contention that in order to identify Islamophobia a sign of ‘Muslimness’ must be in evidence may be true, it is equally true that in the formation of exclusionary attitudes, difference is hardly delineated by type (Meer and Modood 2010). Kundnani (2007, p. 3) observed how in the Elizabethan era “Although Islam was a multiracial civilisation, it was reduced in the European mind to the ‘Moors’ and associated with Africans. In the suspicion of the ‘moor’, race and

²⁰ E.g. *Message to Richard Dawkins: 'Islam is not a race' is a cop out* by Nasrine Malik, 20 September 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/20/islam-race-richard-dawkins>
Or: *Get Over it, Islam is Not a Race* by Pete Parker, 29 January 2014 <http://clashdaily.com/2014/01/get-islam-race/>

religion were intertwined in a way that would recur in later centuries.” The higher burden of proof on victims of religiously motivated hate crime stems in part from the difference in racial and religious hatred legislation, given that an *intention* to harm must be proven for religiously motivated hate crime where no such requirement exists for racially motivated hate crime. However, for victims of Islamophobic hate crime the burden of proof has the potential to be higher still if the identification of ‘Muslimness’ is over-emphasised, to the extent that it can make redress more difficult to obtain for victims of Islamophobia. A further problem with the insistence on clear proof of Muslimness being attacked is that the burden of proof for an Islamophobic hate crime is potentially *higher for an ethnic minority Muslim* than it would be for a white convert, considering that for white converts, their Muslimness is the *only* identifiable factor of difference (Zebiri 2008). Instead, it is suggested that Modood’s concept of oppression being defined by the oppressed themselves (2005) should be applied to identify Islamophobic incidents among ethnic minority Muslims.

In conclusion, it is argued here that in the past decade or so, despite the recognition of Islamophobia at grassroots and international level, significant hurdles exist in the accommodation of Muslim minorities in Britain. Muslims have either, while ‘not being a race’, been excluded from an anti-racism defence in a post-racial society (Modood 2005), or, while not being identifiably religious, have been denied redress for Islamophobic sentiment in a secular society (Meer 2008). Islam in Britain thus treads a tightrope between racism and secularism on a daily basis. The solution proposed here is to view difference, of Muslims and of other minorities, not in neatly delineated labels – ‘black’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Muslim’ – but as a problem of *compounded difference* when considering multiply disadvantaged groups. Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality (1989), applied so far to the intersection of racism and sexism, can here be applied to Muslims in that ethnic minority Muslims, who constitute the overwhelming majority of British Muslims, must be seen at the intersection of colour racism and Islamophobia. Crenshaw suggests that “multiply burdened” (Ibid, p. 140) groups in society, that is those who bear not just one social disadvantage but several (race, religion, sex, class,

disability), should be accommodated with regard to their unique situations and their multiple burdens. Without taking this approach, Muslims will, whether for lack of race or for lack of religiosity, continue to be marginalised.

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