"The Symbiotic Relationship between Islamophobia and Radicalization"

By [Tahir Abbas](#)

This situation of radical Islam among young people in the British context has become of special interest in the last two decades or so, especially since the Rushdie Affair, and particularly since the events of 7/7 in London in 2005. There are a whole host of interesting dynamics as part of this analysis, and my arguments below discuss them as relevant variables in the analysis of this phenomenon. I would like to divide my thoughts into three key areas.

The first relates to aspects of migration and settlement of post-war immigrant and now minority citizens of Muslim origin and the ways in which the integration process have been somewhat lacking and how this has implications for subsequent issues in relation to radicalization. I would also like to talk about the role of Islamophobia. This concern is a function of issues of the xenophobia, racism and Orientalism. It creates a context in which anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination can flourish, and in the current climate without any real checks or balances on its impacts. Finally, I would like to discuss the ways in which radicalization and Islam are symbiotically related to each other, such that one reinforces the other.

In order to break the cycle, it is necessary to understand the roles of various actors and institutions in this regard. Indeed, the issues of migration, settlement, intergenerational disconnect and problems of identity politics affecting the nature of the lived experience of young Muslims today is without a doubt an important consideration. But it is also the experience of Islamophobia and the failures of both foreign and domestic policy in exacerbating many of the problems that impact on Islamophobia that are also important to understand. That is, the ways in which radicalization and Islamophobia have both internal and external discontents that are interrelated.

There are a number of issues to explore when considering the topic of migration in the context of the study of radicalization. In many instances, across Western Europe, what one is referring to is often in the context of post-war immigrant groups that have subsequently settled and adapted to parts of society, invariably in countries such as Germany, France and England, those countries of old Europe as it were, and have over the generations become citizens of their new homes. Some of these groups share the cultural characteristics of majority society, while others have not been able to adapt in the same way largely due to issues of education, employment and forms of residual cultural relativism. The lack of integration has led to problems that are experienced within communities but also in relation to contact with majority society, which regards these groups as the alien other, where such notions feed off existing racialization and exoticization as well as being a function of ongoing patterns of discrimination and prejudice. Within communities there are distinct intergenerational issues around concerns relating to identity, religion, culture and society.

Islamophobia has many manifestations. Part of it is based on hostility to immigration. Another is related to misunderstanding in relation to the idea that Muslims are monolithic, monocultural and in many ways culturally, intellectually and emotionally the opposite of the European self. There is also an association made with the notions of terrorism and extremism, which are regarded as a problem that is a function of the nature of the very religion of Islam itself. Aspects of Islamophobia are reinforced by various media and political discourses that maintain the view that Muslims are not just a threat to forms of multiculturalism, but in more recent periods are a threat to the very security of the nation itself. The latter has emerged in response to terrorism that was carried out in the 2000s in various parts of Western Europe, namely the Netherlands, Spain, England and more recently in Germany.

Thus, radicalization and Islamophobia reinforce each other. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. They effectively feed off the motivation, drive and expectations of the other. In order to break down the cycle one needs to get to the heart of what is in play. While there is a sense of enmity between Muslims and the other, which is based on present manifestations of politics, historically there have been many positive

relations between the Muslim world, Christian world and other civilizations. However, memories are short and emotions are easily led. The framework in which Islamophobia and radicalization operate is essentially political, and which has local and global effects.

Muslims are at a crossroads in their history of immigration to, and settlement in, Western Europe. At the same time, one striking feature of their structural experiences is their socioeconomic position. This group constitutes one of the most marginalized, alienated, isolated, discriminated against, and misunderstood groups in society (although there is a small burgeoning Muslim elite). They are negotiating a set of identities and realities that are constantly changing, and it will be important to see how they develop in the near future. As research questions continue in the areas of race, ethnicity, religion, and culture, as well as public policy concerns at the local, national, and international levels, the ongoing study of Western European Muslims and issues of radicalization and Islamophobia remain important within this contextual and analytical framework.

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