The 'first' decade of Islamophobia:

10 years of the Runnymede Trust report "Islamophobia: a challenge for us all"

Chris Allen

Chris Allen

PO Box 4029
Stourbridge
West Midlands
DY9 9WZ

info@chris-allen.co.uk
www.chris-allen.co.uk

+44 (0)7952 173140

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Foreword

October 2007 sees the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia's report, "*Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*". Otherwise known as the 'Runnymede' report on Islamophobia, it was the first report of its kind to raise awareness about the very real and dangerous phenomenon in the public and political spaces.

It has also been without any doubt whatsoever, a hugely influential document, shaping and influencing much of the writing and thought about Islamophobia that has since emerged.

In this short collection, I include a short 'think-piece' along with two previously published pieces. In doing so, I reflect upon the past decade: what the legacy of the report has been; how this has shaped and influenced my own thinking and writing; and what might need to be done if we are to move on from here with a better and clearer understanding about the meanings and manifestations of Islamophobia.

The purpose of this short collection therefore is to not only mark the tenth anniversary of the report's publication but to also stimulate and initiate the much needed new thinking about Islamophobia that is so desperately needed. Desperately needed because Islamophobia remains 'a challenge for us all'.

Chris Allen
October 2007

The 'first' decade of Islamophobia

October 2007 marks the tenth anniversary of the publication of the groundbreaking and possibly the most influential document of its kind, the highly influential Runnymede Trust report, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all.* Produced by the Commission for British Muslims and Islamophobia, the report stated in its opening pages that, "Islamophobic discourse, sometimes blatant but frequently coded and subtle, is part of everyday life in modern Britain" It went on, "in the last twenty years...the dislike [of Islam and Muslims] has become more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous". Who on the Commission at that time, given the events that have unfolded since the report's publication would – or indeed could – have predicted the situation everyone is facing today?

Back in 1997, the report spoke of how 'Islamophobia' – "the shorthand way of referring to the dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims" - was necessitated by a new phenomenon that needed naming. Nowadays however, that same term is far from new where it is always seemingly lingering in the murky underbelly of our public and political spaces. Yet despite its wider usage, it remains questionable as to whether the debates concerning Islamophobia today and the way we use the term is any more informed than it was ten years ago. Increasingly the debates about Islamophobia sees one side pitted against an other, where claim and counter-claim, charge and counter-charge dictate what we know and how we voice 'what is' and 'what is not' Islamophobia.

Why then, despite the Runnymede report being so influential, are we still simplistic in the way that we speak about and understand Islamophobia? Why has Islamophobia failed to go away? With hindsight the answer, it seems, can be found in the Runnymede report itself.

At the heart of the report's notion of Islamophobia was the recognition of what it set out as 'closed' and 'open' views. So important were these views that the report changed its definition of what Islamophobia was: soon after the preceding definition, the Runnymede Islamophobia became the recurring characteristic of *closed views* and nothing more. Conceived by the Commission, the closed views of Islamophobia were seeing Islam as monolithic and static; as 'other' and separate from the West; as inferior; as enemy; as manipulative; as discriminated against; as having its criticisms of the West rejected; and where Islamophobia was ultimately becoming increasingly

natural. All of which are useful in being able to identify Islamophobia in certain given situations - for example in the media - but how for example might the closed views offer any explanation or even relevance in other equally important situations, in explaining how Muslims are discriminated against in the workplace, in education or in service provision for instance?

In doing so, the Commission failed to offer a clear explanation as to how this might be possible, preferring instead to focus on how say Pakistanis or Bangladeshis were discriminated upon rather than Muslims per se. Not only did this completely overlook the central tenet of what any Islamophobia must surely be, but what with existing equalities legislation rightfully affording protection to those groups such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, so the argument for a specific anti-Muslim anti-Islamic phenomenon was weak and any immediate legislative or other response could be deemed somewhat unnecessary. And so whilst those who held the power to make the changes were far from impressed, so a precedent was set that negated the reality of Islamophobia as a very real and dangerous phenomenon. And also as something that was distinctly different from other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

Because of the emphasis upon closed views, so the report established a simple premise from which those who wanted to detract from or dismiss Islamophobia could easily do so by merely suggesting that if 'closed views' equalled Islamophobia, so one must presume that 'open views' equalled Islamophilia. Those who wanted to argue against Islamophobia therefore suggested that the only solution being put forward by the Commission was an abnormal liking or love of Islam and Muslims (philia). The black and white duality of the love or hate of Muslims and Islam was therefore the only options available thereby ignoring all those grey areas that exist in. Since 1997 then, all that which has fallen within that grey has been given licence to gain momentum and form the basis upon which more indirect forms of Islamophobia have found favour. So for example, to what extent has a 'grey' Islamophobia been underlying the more recent debates about the need for better integration, the 'death' of multiculturalism, the niqab as barrier to social participation, the need for universities to 'spy' on the students and the need to look for the 'tell-tale' signs of radicalisation.

It is these unaccounted for grey areas that have contributed to a climate where those such as the BNP have found favour and gained an increasingly listened to voice. One result of this was that in 2006's local elections, where the BNP won 11 of

the 13 seats they contested in Barking & Dagenham. Making history through being the first time that a far-right political party has ever been the official opposition in any council chamber in Britain, on the evening of the first Barking and Dagenham council meeting attended by the BNP an Afghan man was repeatedly stabbed outside Barking tube station, his body left on the pavement draped in the union flag. How might the 'closed' views offer any explanation of this?

Since 2001, the BNP have become increasingly sophisticated and nuanced in the way in which it speaks about and refers to Islam and Muslims. Unfortunately, the same has failed to occur as regards Islamophobia and so in the Commission's last report published in 2004 there was little change in evidence, persisting instead with existing notions of Islamophobia, using the same language, ideas and meanings throughout. Continuing to refer to Islamophobia in such simplistic ways is therefore detrimental to understanding. More worryingly, the dualistic 'either-or' system of closed and open has reflected how Muslims have increasingly become understood in wider society. Whether 'mainstream' or 'extremist, 'moderate' or 'radical', as Ziauddin Sardar noted shortly after 9/11, Muslims have since been seen in one of two ways: either as apologetics *for* Islam or terrorists *in the name of* Islam. Take this further and the closed and open, apologetics and terrorists easily fall into that simplistic trap of being either 'good' or 'bad'. As such, if you're not a 'good' Muslim – moderate, mainstream and 'open' – then you can only be 'bad' – radical, extremist and 'closed'. What is known and understood about Islamophobia therefore rests upon the naïve premise that 'Islamophobia is bad only because it is' and nothing more.

As noted at the outset, the Runnymede report's views of Islamophobia were at their most useful in the media. Despite the report's apparent usefulness in terms of its ease of identification in the media and its associated recommendations to better the media's representation of Muslims and Islam, the situation has since the publication of the report dangerously deteriorated. If soon to be published research is anything to go by, the amount of coverage in a 'normal week' relating to Muslims and Islam in the British press has increased by almost 270% in the past decade. Of this, just over 90% of this dramatic increase is entirely negative and typically rooted in stories relating to war, terrorism, threat, violence and crisis. If this is where the report was most useful, where then has the Runnymede report achieved its impact?

The first decade of Islamophobia has therefore ended in a climate of ever worsening mistrust, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Whilst the Runnymede report stated in 1997 that Islamophobia was becoming 'more explicit, more extreme and

more dangerous', so in 2007 the same phenomenon has become more natural, more normal and because of this, far more dangerous than ever before. The need for a new approach to tackling Islamophobia is therefore clearly required, as indeed is a new language and greater knowledge to both explain and respond to the subtleties and nuances of Islamophobia that are at present overlooked and subsequently allowed to take root and flourish.

Given that the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia is once again in the process of reforming, so the need for a much more radical approach to Islamophobia is required. If the Commission – and indeed Muslims and wider society alike – fail to do this, then it is highly likely that in another ten years we will be speaking of the end of the second decade of Islamophobia. Now is the time to be much bolder and braver, addressing Islamophobia for what it is now and not what it was then. In doing so, we will become much clearer as to what Islamophobia is and more importantly, what Islamophobia is not: something significantly different from a mere shield to deflect those valid criticisms that the wider Muslim communities need themselves to acknowledge and accept.

It is necessary therefore to mark the end of the first decade of Islamophobia with the recognition of the groundbreaking document that was the Runnymede report, *Islamophobia – a challenge for us all*. But in doing so, we must also learn from the mistakes at the same time as recognise the limitations, allowing us to move forward and improve understanding, meaning and usage of the term and concept of Islamophobia. If not, we will continue to merely tread water as we continue to gaze into the past.

Review of the 2004 Commission on British Muslims & Islamophobia report

COMMISSION ON BRITISH MUSLIMS & ISLAMOPHOBIA (2004) *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action.* Stoke on Trent: Uniting Britain Trust & Trentham Books, 92pp, paperback.
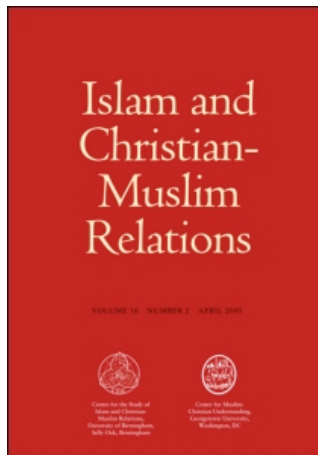
There can be no doubt whatsoever that had the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia not have published its 1997 report, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all,* the issue of 'Islamophobia' would neither have been as widely recognised as it is today, nor would the term be as discursively prevalent. So influential has that report been that it can be described – without exaggeration - as truly groundbreaking, both defining and conceptualising much of that which we currently understand as being 'Islamophobia'. That report therefore is the predecessor to this, the Commission's latest and possibly last report, *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action.* Heavily rooted in its parent document unsurprisingly, the latest report has evolved – albeit slight at times – with its essence being shaped and determined by a number of recent developments and events. Paramount in all of this is the long shadows still being cast by the events of 9/11.

One noticeable difference, and a significant improvement at that, is the report's style. Researched by journalists Hugh Muir and Laura Smith, the text is extremely accessible and clearly reflects their media backgrounds. Their writing is engaging and informative and this, along with the Commission's reputation, should broaden the audience to whom this report will appeal. However the use of journalists is an odd one and may leave the Commission open to question if not criticism, especially what with the media being largely regarded by many as being one of, if not the prime disseminator of Islamophobia in the contemporary climate (see chapter 10). Nonetheless, the writing is well accomplished and readable, and this should outweigh any criticisms subsequently posited.

Being divided into individually contained chapters, those chapters cover a wide range of issues including conceptualising and defining Islamophobia, the international dimension, criminal justice, employment, education, community cohesion and belonging, as well as the report's history and the media. However, these chapters do sometimes feel superficial, sometimes failing to offer substantive evidence in preference of examples that either verge on the anecdotal or completely pointless (see for example 'Same shit, different lyrics', p.4). However despite numerous reports having highlighted the issue of Islamophobia recently, far too often in extremely broad swathes, the reality remains that very little research has actually been undertaken that offers any concretised or grounded evidence, so this is not specifically a criticism that can be solely posited here. Although if the Commission – or others - decide to produce any further reports, a much more specific remit might be more appropriate.

Nonetheless, the report is useful for those new to the topic. What with its extensive notes and excellent bibliography, the report contains a wealth of information for those either seeking to begin their enquiry or those looking to investigate individual debates more thoroughly. The report will therefore be an invaluable resource for those working at grassroots and community levels, through inter-faith and cross community activities, to those undertaking research for either socio-economic or academic reasons. Consequently it is hoped that the report will function as a start point from which other different and hopefully newer strands of debate will emerge because the biggest single disappointment of this report is that it does not bring anything new to that research which already exists.

Therefore if looking for a broad introduction, then this text will provide an overview approachable from a relatively uninformed vantage point. But if familiar with the original report and have an understanding of the literature available, then this report might leave you with a sense of déjà vu. Similarly, if one of the number that remain unconvinced of the reality of 'Islamophobia', then it is doubtful that anything here will begin to change those perceptions.

A timely publication no doubt, and whilst the Commission should be rightly applauded for their at times, singular championing of the cause against Islamophobia and of raising awareness of its unacceptability, it remains true that they have to a large degree merely ploughed the same furrow here as in 1997: only the events and circumstances having changed whilst not the ideas and concepts. In order that the discourse of Islamophobia is furthered, so the Commission needs to

evolve, moving on in new directions with new ideas. With this publication, that is something that they have – unfortunately – failed to achieve.

The impact of the Runnymede Trust on Islamophobia in the UK
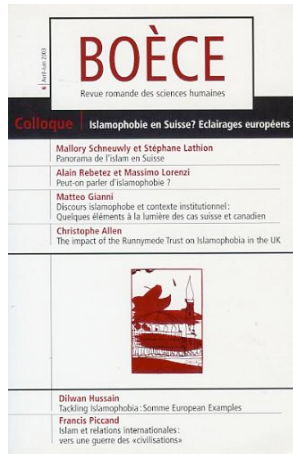
Issues relating to Islam and Muslims have become both a common and repetitive feature of media reporting in the United Kingdom (UK). Whilst the newsworthiness, albeit primarily negative newsworthiness of Muslims was clearly on the rise throughout the 1990s to the onset of the new century, since 11 September 2001 it has been extremely rare for a day to pass without a news headline further reinforcing many of the stereotypical representations that were already deeply embedded into the collective consciousness of the wider European mindset. Subsequently, what has ensued has been the exaggeration of a situation where ideas and attitudes towards Muslims have since appeared to have projected them as the chimerical 'Other' to contemporary society. As Jorgen Nielsen and myself noted last year in the European Monitoring Centre on Xenophobia and Racism (EUMC) report entitled *Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*[1]:

> "images and stereotypes [of Muslims and Islam] are now so deeply embedded and also necessary to media coverage, that Islamophobia is almost a natural process...the role and impact of the media become increasingly worrying, where accuracy and inaccuracy become increasingly blurred and where real Muslims and their stereotypical constructs become indistinguishably one...what is concerning is that if 'Muslim' and 'Islam' continue to be skewed in this value loaded way, then they will become increasingly synonymous with media constructed Islamophobic stereotypes"[2]

Within the British context at least, this process may well be further developed than one might expect. In comparing the manner in which the British press reported issues concerned with Muslims in the immediate aftermath of September 11th, whilst the Irish sources monitoring the situation for the EUMC noted that "British national newspapers published in Ireland have...been guilty of sensationalist type reporting which could

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[1] ALLEN, C. & NIELSEN, J. (2002) *Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*. Vienna: European monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. From hereon, this particular source will be referred to as the 'EUMC report'.
[2] p.48, ibid.

help create the conditions of Islamophobia", the EUMC's British equivalent made no reference whatsoever to any sensationalism, Islamophobia or anti-Muslim coverage in the any of the press[3]. As British monitors never even identified such, or possibly because it was unrecognisable as a relevant issue in creating a climate of hostility towards Muslim communities in the UK, it may be that some of the conclusions made in the EUMC report were much more influenced and dependent upon our own contextual setting and location than might have been understood at the time of writing. As such, when we concluded that the:

> "naturalisation of Islamophobia is a cause for concern...a greater receptivity towards anti-Muslim and other xenophobic ideas and sentiments has, and may well continue to be tolerated"[4]

It may well have been that we were much more influenced and aware of the situation at the local level, more so than at the continental.

We should not however be too surprised by this because just over half a decade ago, similar conclusions were being made in a report undertaken within the geographical constraints of the UK by the Runnymede Trust. Entitled, *Islamophobia a challenge for us all*[5] the report warned that:

> "the expression of anti-Muslim ideas and sentiment is becoming increasingly seen as respectable. It is a natural, taken-for-granted ingredient of the commonsense world of millions of people every day"[6]

Islamophobia therefore, despite the post September 11th upsurge that saw it become more voracious and extreme in its manifestations, is something that has been present for some time. As Islamophobia therefore is clearly not a new phenomenon, neither can be the associated processes through which such expression and sentiment have become almost 'commonsense' and 'taken for granted'.

Yet such is the nature of Islamophobia - a myriad phenomenon that can be seen to have permeated across different levels of society - that it has remained largely unchallenged and despite efforts to the contrary in Britain, has been allowed to

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[3] p.46, ibid
[4] p.43, ibid.
[5] RUNNYMEDE TRUST, The (1997) *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*. London: Runnymede Trust. From hereon, this report will be referred to as the 'Runnymede report'.
[6] p.10, ibid.

proliferate and become acceptable. Whether at the institutional levels of national government that have repeatedly failed to close an anomaly in the law that certainly allows hatred against Muslims to be perpetuated in favour of tightening security legislation that overwhelmingly affects Muslims communities only, or at the street level, where Muslim men, women and children have been subjected to various Islamophobically motivated verbal attacks, through to the rise of Islamophobically driven neo-Nazi organisations finding electoral gains in local elections, Islamophobia has become such that it cannot be overlooked if future, cohesive communities within a multi-faith, multi-ethnic society are going to be achieved.

Yet despite the processes of naturalisation that the Runnymede Trust suggested, it would be unfair and inaccurate to suggest that the phenomenon has become such without any subsequent recognition or notice. In fact, the term 'Islamophobia' has become increasingly common in the UK in both the media and popular discourse over recent years. Not only has usage increased, but so too has the recognition of the phenomenon gained a wider audience where most would know it to be 'anti-Muslim' or 'anti-Islamic' in its expression. Yet Islamophobia in Britain remains quite unique: it is a term that is used to describe an acknowledged dangerous and real phenomenon, whilst at the same time being a phenomenon that is without a clear definition as to what exactly it is. 'Islamophobia' is, at best, a term that everyone knows and uses but probably could not accurately define. So little has the research been, in particular academic research, undertaken into the phenomenon in Britain that whilst organisations and individuals have been trying to combat the consequences of such contemporary anti-Muslimism, they simultaneously struggle to define what it is they are attempting to combat. When coupled with the processes of naturalisation that have so obviously occurred, conceptually defining a phenomenon that is so normal and natural may also have contributed equally to compounding this problem.

To illustrate this, last year as an invited lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton, I asked a group of final year religious studies undergraduates to suggest what they felt Islamophobia was. Aside from the obvious 'anti-Muslim' and 'anti-Islamic' ideas, the answers that I received highlight the disparity and ambiguity that British understanding recognises. As such Islamophobia was suggested as being:

- An excuse that Muslims hide behind to avoid criticism
- A rather vague 'it's a phenomenon'
- Prejudice towards Muslims and Islam

- Discrimination against Muslims and Islam

- An *irrational* fear, or phobia of both Muslims and Islam

- A *rational* fear of phobia of Muslims and Islam

- Political correctness is its latest manifestation

- A Muslim cause for Muslims and others to unite behind

- An academic concept, something that is possibly un-real[7]

Without making any judgement as to the validity or otherwise of these responses, whilst all of the students were aware of the term, there was very little agreement amongst them as to just exactly what Islamophobia is. Yet this was no surprise, because in practice, very few attempts have been made to answer this questions, and what with the limited research into the topic and without an awareness of the Runnymede report, similar exercises will continue to be probably just as vague and inconclusive as these. So whilst this is a mere illustrative tool, I would suggest that the problem with Islamophobia within the entire British context is that to its detriment, it lacks a real clarity of thought.

As such, definitions tend almost instinctively towards those purported by the Runnymede Trust report, where it described Islamophobia as, the "unfounded hostility towards Islam...to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims"[8]. At the time of its publication, the report stated that it was also a "new reality that needs naming"[9]. In not only naming this new reality, the report also established an eight point typology with a view to creating a greater and more accessible way of understanding Islamophobia. The Runnymede typology described 'closed' as opposed to 'open' views being the key to greater understanding and recognition. The 'closed views' that they established were that[10]:

1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities

2. Islam is seen as separate and other - (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them

3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West - barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist

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[7] University of Wolverhampton, April 2002
[8] p.4, Runnymede report.
[9] p.5, ibid.
[10] Adapted from original table in Runnymede report.

4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in a 'clash of civilisations'

5. Islam is seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage

6. Criticisms made by Islam of the 'West' are rejected out of hand without consideration

7. Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and their subsequent exclusion from mainstream society

8. Anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and 'normal'

Being overwhelmingly simplistic - maybe even because of it - the initial impact and subsequent legacy of the Runnymede's research has been both highly significant and deeply influential, not as a policy document from which perspective the report was conceived and written, but as a blueprint for academic engagement. Almost all academic research subsequent to the report's publication concerning Islamophobia in Britain has had a major tendency to acknowledge its indebtedness to this very typology and has very rarely gone any further than this particular understanding. As a consequence, the Runnymede findings, definitions and typologies have since been attributed with an authoritative status that has, and indeed continues to, remain neither questioned nor challenged. And despite the socio-economic, political, ideological etc contextual shifts that have so dramatically occurred at the local, national and global levels of society since 1997, where the frame of reference through which Muslim communities operate within society has almost irretrievably altered, independent thought and ideas associated with Islamophobia have not undergone a similar transformation.

However, the Runnymede's definitions and typologies have played an important role in understanding and identifying Islamophobia, and it might be fair to suggest that the report's overview of the coverage and subsequent representation of Muslims and Islam in the British medias became the catalyst that inspired and shaped much of the work relating to 'Muslims in the media' to have emerged since. Those such as Elizabeth Poole and her analysis of the representation of Muslims in the British press, and others with a much broader geographical focus, including Malise Ruthven, Kai

Hafez and Mohammad Siddiqui have all taken on this mantle and produced works of very high quality[11]. Indeed, it might be fair to suggest that the topic of 'Muslims and the media' has achieved a contemporarily fashionable status within some academic circles since the Runnymede report, despite Edward Said having previously highlighted many of these issues some fifteen years or so beforehand[12].

The report therefore acknowledged the seriousness of Islamophobia in the media, where it suggested that many medias were guilty of not only perpetrating inaccuracies and misinformation, but also that these same inaccuracies and misinformation were attaining an unchecked and blanket acceptance as fact without any alternative recourse to accuracy or accountability. Added to the proliferation of medias themselves, and their rapidly expanding globalised audiences, the situation appeared bleak. Whether at the local or the global the problem was suggested to be as equally relevant. As the report wrote:

> "closed as distinct from open views of Islam [are] routinely reflected and perpetuated in both broadsheets and tabloids, in both the local press and the national, in both considered statements and casual throwaway remarks, and in editorials, columns, articles, readers' letters, cartoons and headlines as well as in reports of events. Closed views are also prevalent in electronic media, in news reports as well as in documentaries"[13]

The media was therefore a very serious concern, with the report providing some very serious examples of Islamophobia from within the British press to support its claims. Ranging from the more covert and insidious of examples, through to the most explicit and confrontational of opinions, the highlighting of the role and responsibilities of the media is one that would appear to remain as unequivocally valid in the contemporary climate as it did at its publication, and indeed before then. As it noted

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[11] See POOLE, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: media representations of British Muslims*. London: IB Tauris, and POOLE, E. (2000) Framing Islam: an analysis of newspaper coverage of Islam in the British press *in* HAFEZ, K. (ed.) *Islam and the West in the mass media: fragmented images in a globalizing world*. Cresskill: Hampton Press; RUTHVEN, M. (2002) Islam in the media *in* DONNAN, H. (ed.) *Interpreting Islam*. London: Sage, pp.51-75; HAFEZ, K. (ed.) *Islam and the West in the mass media: fragmented images in a globalizing world*. Cresskill: Hampton Press; and SIDDIQUI, M. S. (1997) *Islam, Muslims and media*. London: Naamps, respectively.

[12] Originally SAID, E. (1981) *Covering Islam: how the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, however one may prefer the later revised edition from 1997 published by Vintage (UK) and Random House (Australia & elsewhere).

[13] p.20, Runnymede report.

then, not much had changed since 1989 when the legacy of the Satanic Verses affair, an issue that located Muslims as the centrally placed 'enemy within' in the British societal consciousness, had codified the re-emergent global spectre of the archetypal Muslim 'Other' raising like a phoenix from both the Iranian Revolution and the oft hysterically reported spread of 'fundamentalist', 'extremist' or 'militant' Islam[14], as being of concern in Britain. One can trace the legacy of the events of 1989, through the 1990s to the present day, highlighting the complexity of stereotypes that are so regularly and repetitively used today, culminating in the post-September 11th world where as Jorgen Nielsen describes, we are living through an era of 'urgent history'[15].

Consequently, September 11th has become a day of distinct metaphoric and hyperbolic value, and one that, if allowed, could overshadow all issues concerning Muslims and Islam, including Islamophobia where a broader recognition of a pre-existent and equally dangerous anti-Muslim phenomenon could be seriously diminished. Nonetheless, September 11th also offers a unique window of observation and analysis from which to view and access a vast amount of relevant data. So much so, that since the events themselves, in developing the Runnymede Trust's observation that Islamophobia was routinely reflected and perpetuated across all types of media, one might fairly conclude that statistics emanating from the British press in the immediate post-September 11th period, would almost certainly confirm that Islamophobia was a central issue. Between September 12th and October 11th 2001 Brian Whitaker, a journalist with the daily newspaper *The Guardian*, monitored the incidence of Muslims and the religion of Islam as a newsworthy entity. From his results, he found that British broadsheets had a remarkable increase of just over 300% of stories, reporting and photographs with a Muslim-specific ethos. For British tabloids however, in the same period, the rise was even more dramatic, having a massive 658% increase in the amount of newspaper coverage linked with either Muslims or

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[14] I acknowledge that these terms are largely inappropriate but use them here to highlight how their popular usage and implementation at both the political and media levels established both the terminology to gain a certain credence in non-Muslim discourse and also to somewhat exaggerate the threat posed by such. See BRUCE, S. (2000) *Fundamentalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, for a good discussion of this topic. Also SAID, E. (1981) *Covering Islam: how the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, or a much more detailed exegesis of the impact and legacy of the Iranian revolution affecting the American mindset in particular.

[15] The term 'urgent history' is referred to in an as yet unpublished paper prepared by Professor Jorgen Nielsen on racism and xenophobia across Europe in the post-11th September 2001 climate.

Islam[16]. In reminding ourselves of the observation by the EUMC's Irish agency of sensationalism in the British tabloids, it would seem fair to assume that this massive hike in column inches was not solely one that was founded upon balance, fairness, and accuracy, and similarly, that the British agency failed to notice it. In reinforcing the Runnymede's conclusions however, the reality of the situation was such that much of this coverage was concerned with reporting and stories that were distinctly negative about mainly marginalised individuals and communities, with a disproportionate amount of coverage being about fringe players and organisations, employing inappropriate and indiscriminate stereotypes of severe proportions.

So by utilising the Runnymede typology of closed and open views to consider a few examples of this media coverage and reporting from the period can highlight just how relevant, and indeed prevalent, these closed views continue to be. However, despite the report's nine-point programme of recommendations for positive action and reform in the media, the reality remains that Islamophobia continues to be a serious issue across all sectors. Due to the constraints of this paper, it is necessary to limit the examples highlighted here, however the two examples shown are indicative of a much broader range of similar instances of reporting and coverage that can be gauged from detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis. As such, they are useful and worthwhile, albeit in a limited context.

The first is an article from a daily regional newspaper from the West Midlands, *The Express and Star* on the 13th October 2001. Beneath the headline, "Why they hate you…", the photograph is taken shortly after Friday prayers outside Birmingham's – England's second city - largest, most prominent and well known mosque. The photo is clearly framed so that the Arabic is central to the focus, and as worshippers are leaving the mosque, so the image would suggest that they are all queuing for the books, tapes and CDs that the seller has to offer. There is some 'us' and 'them' contrast quite blatantly placed, for instance in the central focus of the juxtaposition of the words "Birmingham Central Mosque', which most readers would be able to associate with, to the Arabic calligraphy next to it. Similarly, with regards the man selling the goods, his appearance would clearly suggest a 'non-Western' outlook as well. The short text accompanying the photograph – the full amount of which is reproduced here – informs the reader that this 'non-Western' man was also once 'Jewish'; he was 'giving out' - rather than selling - pictures of Usama bin Laden,

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[16] Whitaker, B. (2002) Islam and the British press *in* WAHID, A. (ed.) *The quest for sanity: reflections on September 11 and the aftermath*. London: Muslim Council of Britain, pp.53-57.

videos and CDs; and through these, one might understand why Muslims everywhere hate the West.

From this premise, many of the Runnymede closed views are easily recognisable. Islam, or more appropriately Muslims are seen to be all the same, by implication if nothing else, of whom all are alleged supporters of Usama Bin Laden as well. Islam is blatantly established as distinctly separate and other from 'the West', the 'us' and 'them' dualism. Muslims through their apparent interest in such materials can be easily interpreted as being threatening and supportive of terrorism, especially 'directed towards western powers'. In addition, Islam is implicated as being largely synonymous as a political ideology, where any criticisms that Muslims may justifiably have of the 'West' are rejected out of hand, and also where any hostility towards Islam or Muslims could be construed as finding justification in this piece from a culmination of the other 'closed views' highlighted.

However, I remain unconvinced that they illustrate everything detrimental and denigratory – possibly Islamophobic - to Muslims that can be located in both the photo and the text. To do this, one needs to re-analyse this particular article from the premise of the final closed view, that Islamophobia was becoming increasingly naturalised. As such, from the headline alone, not only does it reaffirm the dualistic opposition of these over-employed simplistic entities, 'Islam' and 'the West', but its use of 'they' – who are 'they'? A quite definite and wholly indiscriminate reference to 'Muslims' as an external and separate entity or group – confirms that *all* Muslims ('they') hate 'you', where 'you' becomes the everyday reader, part of an equally indiscriminate and homogenous group. In addition, this image at the same time reminded its readership that this was happening at the very established heart of Muslim communities in Birmingham. Consequently, the logical assumption might be that from such blanket demonising and inappropriate generalisation, the newspaper's readership may become subsequently more suspicious and distrustful of those Muslims and their respective communities that may well be next-door neighbours in the local community. As a result, the culmination of these possible conclusions, stereotypical assumptions and logical extensions might be that Islamophobically motivated beliefs and attitudes become increasingly accepted and taken for granted as fact; in other words, the process of 'naturalisation' occurring.

Probably the most significant aspect of this whole article however is to ask the question, 'why?' Why for example was the picture printed, why were there so few

words, and why was this particular piece printed in preference to others, particularly when Birmingham experienced no problems with regards its Muslim and non-Muslim communities at the time? To answer this, one's questioning must go beyond that of the Runnymede's typology of open and closed views because whilst they give indicators that negativity is present, they do not explain why or answer questions relating to the thought processes or reasoning underpinning the phenomenon. Since there was no backlash or public questioning of this piece either, one must also ask why such articles can covertly embody such meaning whilst maintaining a natural or normal enough appearance.

The second example is a cartoon from the Daily Mail, the highest circulated daily newspaper in the UK. Printed in the edition of the 20 September 2001, the cartoon is semiologically simple: a group of stereotypical Muslim men, standing in front of the Houses of Parliament – the symbolic and iconic home of British democracy and freedom – protesting against Britain and the United States (US) in support of Usama Bin Laden and al-Qaida. On a visual level, the cartoon is immediately readable and clearly taps into the growing climate of fear and suspicion in the aftermath of September 11th. The caption below the cartoon reads: "Parasite: (Chambers English Dictionary) a creature which obtains food and physical protection from a host which never benefits from its presence"[17]. It would seem quite clear from this that the cartoonist, Mac, is not only referring to those individuals that make up the subject matter of his drawing. Instead it can be better read as analogously stating that any Muslims that are anti-Western and indeed voicing these sentiments here in the UK are not only hypocritical, but also parasitic.

From the Runnymede typology perspective, the closed views are again apparent. Muslims are seen largely as a single entity – the attire suggests little differentiation between British Muslims and those mediatised Muslims from Afghanistan at the time; Muslims, at a time when very few commentators would air opinions counter to those of either the British or American governments, are presented as being quite separate and other; indeed, inferior through the presentation of them here being overtly barbaric, irrational and by default primitive; clearly violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and willingly engaged in a 'clash of civilisations'; and also as a political ideology, used to challenge perceptions of, in this case, British democracy and freedom. In addition, those criticisms being made by some Muslims were also clearly being rejected entirely out of hand and without any consideration

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[17] *Daily Mail*, 20 September 2001

whatsoever. The closed view typology therefore offers a very simple and accessible way to identify this type of information in presentations, and re-presentations rather than representations that are negatively loaded.

Yet this typology does not go far enough in explaining what can be legitimately construed to be Islamophobia. Employing the stereotypical representations that the cartoonist has, one might presume that by extension that not only are the Muslims in the cartoon and their anti-Western realities parasitic, but through the lack of clarification and of course the already distinct lack of any identification or discrimination between Muslims elsewhere in the media's realm, that the charges being made here about a few could be relatively easily stretched to refer to the many, even the entirety: the 'they' from the previous example. As Muslims are mediatised as a homogenised entity, so too must the value-loaded assertions and accusations made about them be homogenously similar also. As the cartoonist offers no differentiation whatsoever, how far the reader engaging with this cartoon may well react and interpret in a similar way remains unclear. Whilst Islamophobia may well emerge from this type of process, it is far less overt, far less contentious, and far more naturalised that the relative isolation of the 1997 crop of closed views and its associated typological framework, may be able to either accommodate or suggest. Yet again the question remains as to 'why' the cartoonist feels justified to demonise all Muslims and why such blanket vilification is accepted without criticism or complaint.

The semiology of the cartoon therefore is such that without these issues being highlighted and being drawn to attention, the readership's engagement, and indeed subsequent acceptance of such, may well provide the type of evidence necessary to suggest that such ideas, expressions and hostilities can be easily disseminated and accepted. Naturalisation therefore, whilst being established as a closed view may well also be a culmination or collaboration of closed views itself, and as such does not readily fit into the isolated, simplistic and 'black and 'white' distinctions that the report suggested Islamophobia can be and is. Consequently, naturalisation may therefore become diminished and detrimentally overlooked in that it is seen as being relatively separated from the identification of a series of other views. Islamophobia is clearly not as simple and single-layered as indeed the Runnymede report might have, or possibly just appears to have suggested. Naturalisation, and the obvious exclusion of anything within its typology that can even begin to ask 'why', has left the theoretical framework designed for understanding Islamophobia largely redundant beyond anything but the superficial.

In reiteration, one's questioning must go beyond that of the Runnymede's typology of open and closed views because other indicators – very preliminarily highlighted with these two examples - exist to suggest that Islamophobia also has other layers of understanding and expression. The 'open-closed' distinction is not, and subsequently cannot, either be or accommodate subtlety, complexity, difference or implication. And whilst it can identify, it cannot answer why.

Islamophobia in the contemporary climate therefore, to some degree at least, is a significantly different protean and chimerical entity to that which it was when the Runnymede report was produced. Events, within the local and global contexts, have given impetus to anti-Muslim expression; have given hyperbolic overstatement to blanket accusations; and have given credence to theories and ideas that had academically been previously dismissed[18]. As it remains, whilst being authoritatively and typically defined in terms of the Runnymede report in the British context at least, it is right to ask to what extent such authority and status continues to be relevant and justified today. Within the remit of the Runnymede typology and definitions, and its implementation onto a framework of media analysis, whilst examples and incidences of Islamophobia can still be readily and easily identified under this system, it would seem that a reasonably vast disparity also exists between what is a simplistic Islamophobia via Runnymede, and a much more insidious, complex, implicit and naturalised version that sits outside of this framework. Such processes can clearly be identified through a more detailed discursive or semiological analysis of the material to hand, and whilst an interdependence will almost certainly exist, there is much to suggest that research into Islamophobia needs to now go beyond the Runnymede baseline.

One might therefore resort to the earlier observation that Islamophobia and its definition is therefore one that is largely ambiguous: at worst, a concept that is over-simplified yet consistent, whilst at best a complex and unclear phenomenon. Either way, a situation evolves that leaves it easy to dismiss either superficially or through a lack of real clarity. As the complexity and understanding of the global and local forces, nexuses and catalysts that have and indeed are continuing to influence and impact upon the processes through which Muslims and Islam are understood, perceived, interpreted and represented, so the ways in which we understand Islamophobia must also be similarly shaped. In the British context however, the

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[18] See for instance the credence and seriousness attributed to theories such as Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' theory in some quarters since the events of 11 September 2001 in comparison to the consensus opinions aired some half a decade earlier.

reluctance to move on from the Runnymede report to understand and interpret on more than one level, has meant that this has not been done.

The most influential piece of research into Islamophobia therefore in the UK desperately needs re-evaluating and re-focusing, not only in the light of the reality of global contemporariness, but also in the light of the fact that the report itself stated that the phenomenon was going to undergo change, whereby it would shift and become relatively unidentifiable and unobserved as it undergoes increasing naturalisation. And as the sophistication of media reporting changes and reacts to these very same processes, along with the very definite shifts that have occurred in this period of 'urgent history' – the changes in attitudes, beliefs and perceptions in a newly defined and re-drawn socio-political global order - so too must the way in which we analyse the media in order that we are validly able to maintain a rigorous and legitimate anti-Islamophobia critique of it. To do this, defining and understanding Islamophobia in this context must therefore be flexible and fluid enough to be able to accommodate and acknowledge that some form of naturalisation has, and indeed will probably continue to occur. Unfortunately, this is again where the evolution of the report and research into the phenomenon has since failed: not only has its legacy been stagnant across academic research, possibly because of its distinctly 'non-academic' remit, but also as a policy document it failed in getting many of its recommendations implemented The media is just one area of many within which the recommendations made have since been largely overlooked.

Understanding Islamophobia is therefore extremely important and highly relevant in the contemporary climate. Few days pass without another negative news story associated with Muslims in Britain and elsewhere, and because of the permeation of ideas and the contemporary gaining of society's information and knowledge through the medias, it is vital that the potential of the 'drip' effect of this daily negativity is acknowledged and contextualised. Naturalisation – a clear by-product of this constant process of 'drip' dissemination through the media – would appear to be justifiably confirmed in the EUMC report when it noted the 'greater receptivity' of society towards such ideas. The ongoing ability to recognise and categorise through an outdated typology of definition may therefore only be a temporary one if it does not evolve or become superseded soon. Without a radical overhaul of ideas, thought and theoretical understanding, the increasing levels of naturalisation and the greater sophistication and complexity of such disseminated messages and meanings may result in a situation that becomes even more difficult to comprehend, define, typologise and ultimately, erase. It is therefore essential that research into

Islamophobia is continued and that this acknowledges but does not remain rooted in the Runnymede legacy.

One point that might be interesting is that when Jorgen Nielsen and myself worked on the EUMC report, we never set out any definition of what Islamophobia was, nor did any of the EUMC's national research organisations. Which returns me to one of the first observations that I made, that it would appear that Islamophobia is something that whilst most people would appear to know of it, they cannot, or more probably could not, set about adequately defining just what it is. On a positive note this would appear to suggest that Islamophobia is at least recognised, whereas more negatively, it makes the issue extremely difficult to comprehend, understand and counter because of the lack of comparative consistency. As we noted in the EUMC report, despite it being a pan-European initiative, the largest of its kind in the world specifically monitoring Islamophobia whilst simultaneously producing 75 nationally based reports, the conclusions and concepts relating to what Islamophobia was and how it can be understood was noted as requiring a greater effort before a full understanding of "a more complete spectrum" might be achieved[19]. Is it possible that we do not clearly know what Islamophobia is?

In addition, is it also necessary to ask to what extent we need to acknowledge an awareness and possible implementation or replacement of 'Islamophobia' with such terminology as anti-Islamism, anti-Muslimism and anti-Muslim racism, as well as less specific terminology relating to such equally relevant issues as stereotypification, Muslims in the media, social anthropology and so on: all of which touch upon and may help deconstruct Islamophobia outside the remit of the current focus that such research has.

Hence the reason why I feel, as I stated at the outset, that a newer defining framework of Islamophobia is now a necessity. If not to act as a standard, at least to provide a basis from which further discussion and research may evolve: to evolve and develop, generically if necessary, a new impetus to the thought and understanding of Islamophobia because maybe attempts to explain Islamophobia have failed at all levels of understanding. Maybe a new definition, albeit one that is either broader and less constraining, or one that confines the remit of understanding or even offers a new typology within which Islamophobia might be located, would act as a somewhat necessary catalytic influence from which the issue of Islamophobia might be

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[19] p.32, EUMC report.

engaged with from a fresh perspective, but not to the extent where as with the Runnymede report and typology it dictates far too rigidly and the typology itself somewhat becomes the sole understanding of the phenomenon. Maybe it is time to ask why as a society we do not need to employ typologies of antisemitism, racism by colour, sexism etc in order to understand and acknowledge them, whereas with Islamophobia the implication is that we genuinely need to. Why are we sophisticated enough to understand how to identify racism but not apparently anti-Muslimism?

In order to build upon a foundation that is both much more universal and transposable to across all historical and geographical contexts, it is essential that these thought processes and essential questions are begun to be addressed now, and that much more thought and research into Islamophobia is undertaken with a view to furthering the debate rather than merely perpetuating it.

Chris Allen
PO Box 4029, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY9 9HH

info@chris-allen.co.uk
www.chris-allen.co.uk

+44 (0) 7952 173140