

## **Mapping and mainstreaming Islamophobia: between the illiberal and liberal<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter will outline our concepts of liberal and illiberal Islamophobia. We argue that much research and analysis has attempted to define and theorise Islamophobia through dominant, singular and contextually specific forms, often stuck between determining whether it is religious prejudice and racism, mainstream or extreme, state or non-state, ignoring diverse and changing articulations which both co-exist and, in some cases, shift from one to the other. We propose the concepts of liberal and illiberal to capture such articulations. In this chapter, we will map the debates about defining Islamophobia, define and explain these two articulations and explain where they emerge, where they intersect and how they can be applied. Examples from Britain, France and the US will be used.

**KEY WORDS:** Islamophobia; Anti-Muslim Racism; Liberal; Illiberal; Terrorism; Extreme; Mainstream.

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## Introduction

In the aftermath of the attack on the office of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, the statement ‘Je suis Charlie’ spread throughout Paris, France and much of the western world. The public narrative was clear: this was an attack on freedom of speech, one of the supposed pillars of our democracy. Charlie Hebdo’s journalists were proclaimed as martyrs and their courage was symbolised in the 2006 publication of provocative cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed. They did what ‘We’ were afraid to do and mourning their loss seemed insufficient: ‘We’ must identify if not become them in solidarity and resistance. Somewhat contradictorily, criticising this essentialist and absolutist vision of understanding fell outside of freedom of speech and was considered something akin to cowardice if not treason. Yet, despite such discrepancies at the core of the hegemonic discourse explored elsewhere (Mondon & Winter 2017a; 2017b), the overall pattern is familiar: widespread and normalised criticism of an essentialised Muslim threat for its hatred of ‘our’ liberal freedom and tolerant societies, even as ‘our’ countries pass - and the population at large chooses to ignore - counter-terrorism and extremism legislation that curtails those very freedoms. This has become common place since US President George W. Bush (20 September 2001) stated in his 9/11 address, prior to the establishment of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act, ‘They hate our freedoms’. This was followed by First Lady Laura Bush’s justification of US invasion of Afghanistan based on the need to liberate women and girls (Gerstenzang and Getter 18 November 2001).

Islam has become central to the contradictions inherent to the construction (and presentation) of our identity and self-image as citizens of free and egalitarian liberal democracies: from evocations of free speech in defence of Islamophobes, while monitoring and censoring political speech under the auspices of countering Muslim ‘hate’ preachers and extremism, to evocations of gender rights in the west, particularly around banning the hijab and burka in the name of emancipation. As such paternalistic narratives developed and disproportionately targeted Muslim communities, they have distracted from failures to achieve gender equality on a structural level, as well as failing to acknowledge the growing anti-feminist backlash within western liberal culture. At the same time, we have seen a number of far more illiberal, authoritarian and violent attacks on Muslims, from US President Donald Trump’s ‘Muslim Travel Ban’ in January 2017 to Darren Osborne’s attack on a crowd leaving the Muslim Welfare Centre in London, while shouting ‘I’m going to kill all Muslims’, on 19 June 2017, as well as reports of increased hate crimes against Muslims in the US, UK and France following terror attacks (Mark, 18 November 2015; Al-Othman, 1 December 2015;

Friedersdorf 16 November 2015; LeMonde.fr, 17 July 2015; Levin and Grisham, 2015; Norton, 18 December 2015; Lichtblau, 17 September 2016; Potok, 14 November 2016; SPLC, 15 February 2017; Travis, 20 June 2017), and a rise in anti-Muslim hate groups (SPLC 15 February 2017)

To make sense of the contemporary landscape of Islamophobia, this chapter examines and explains the construction, functions and relationship between such diverse, seemingly contradictory and changing articulations of Islamophobia. Articulations that, we argue, at times, stand in contrast to definitions that are fixed or polarised between racism and religious prejudice, extreme and mainstream, state and non-state versions, or undifferentiated. This chapter will provide an overview of debates about Islamophobia and our analytical concepts of liberal and illiberal articulations of Islamophobia, which are the basis of our current research (Mondon & Winter 2017a; 2017b). Our aim with these concepts is to provide a more nuanced conceptual and analytical framework and tool to come to grips with the diversity, contradictions, transformation and increasingly slipperiness of Islamophobia(s), and racism itself, in order to combat it more effectively. Central to this chapter is our claim that these broad articulations are crucial to map the phenomenon of Islamophobia, but do not work in opposition: their borders are fuzzy, and that one cannot survive without the other giving it legitimacy. The first part of the article provides an overview of definitions of Islamophobia and debates in the field, and explains and justifies our use of the term Islamophobia over alternatives such as anti-Muslim racism. The second and third sections develop the two articulations of Islamophobias we believe are essential to provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of racism towards anyone deemed Muslim.

### **Islamophobias: Definitions and Debates**

Various surveys have shown that ‘anti-Muslim biases’ (Taras 2013, 426-431) have been prevalent across much of Europe and the United States. This includes everything from collective suspicion and securitisation and ‘Burka Bans’ in the mainstream to far-right campaigns and hate crimes. While there is relative consensus about the growing issue ‘Islamophobia’ or anti-Muslim hate, there is no consensus on the label or definition. The focus of research and debate has included a wide range of issues and originates from various perspectives and agendas. Research has focused on issues such as Islam and Muslim history, Muslim identities, media representations, multiculturalism and social cohesion, migration, citizenship, religion and culture, racialisation, secularism, gender, sexuality, nationalism, terrorism, extremism and securitisation. It is therefore not surprising that, as Chris Allen (2010) has argued, there is no clear and agreed upon definition. This section is thus devoted to explaining our own

definitional standpoint as clearly as possible to provide the basis for the framework developed in the following part.

In the wider public discourse, the most common term used is 'Islamophobia' and it has been widely viewed as an anti-religious prejudice, an attack on a set of ideas, tenets or a belief system. It is on this basis that some accusations of racism have been denied or displaced. There has been an effort though by scholars and activists to reject Islamophobia as a term and/or understand and define it as a form of racism to address its full character, targets and effects, as well as mitigate against such a defence or displacement. Halliday (1999) and others have argued that the preferred term should be 'anti-Muslim hate' or 'anti-Muslim racism, as hate and/or racism is more accurate than fear (or *phobia*) and it is directed against a people, rather than a religion. Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood (2009, 338) do not reject the term, but argue that Islamophobia needs to be seen in relation to/as a form of racism. For Pnina Werbner (2013, 455),

Whatever the case, the effects of securitisation and the attacks on Islamic symbols are racist, in the sense that they license the actions and discourses of individuals and groups who promote more offensive racist imaginaries.

In the Runnymede Trust's 2013 report 'The New Muslims' (Alexander et al. 2013), Claire Alexander (2013, 5) observes that 'as the "colour line" was for the early 20th century, "The Muslim Question" has become the defining issue of our times.' Alexander (2013, 6) noted that:

Since this period the race equality and religious equality agendas have become increasingly separate, and academic research in these areas has also become distinct... it is now seemingly possible to talk about religion without race and race without reference to religion. In the first instance, we risk separating out Muslims from a broader struggle for equality, and in the second we run the risk of subsuming or erasing the differences between experiences, priorities, groups and subjectivities for a one-size-fits-all definition of racism.

In addition to this article highlighting diverse articulations of Islamophobia and constructing a more complex, nuanced and inclusive definition of Islamophobia, this argument by Alexander highlights the need for a more complex, nuanced and inclusive definition of racism, where Islamophobia fits in.

In its 1997 report *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*, the Runnymede Trust defined Islamophobia as ‘unfounded hostility towards Islam.’ It identifies eight characteristics, including that Islam is seen as: a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change; lacking values in common with other cultures; as inferior to the West; as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist; as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism (Runnymede Trust, 1997). In their their follow-up *2017 Islamophobia Report: Still a challenge for us all*, they assert that ‘Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism’, basing their definition on the UN definition of racism and focusing on social, cultural, political and economic inequalities and harms (Runnymede Trust, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The debate between Islamophobia being about religion or race is not solely about what Islam or Muslims are, but what one wants to say about them, how they do it, its effects and how to challenge it. Religion does provide a convenient cover for those wishing to argue that they are attacking a belief and not people, and in a so-called ‘post-race’ context where racism is allegedly unacceptable, wriggle out of or deflect such charges. As, Alexander (2013, 6) pointed out in the 2013 report:

... the term ‘Muslim’ is too often a codeword for a series of pathologies. If we think of dominant representations, they appear in three main categories: gender (the hijab/forced marriage/ honour killings triad), gangs and grooming, and terrorists/extremists. ... [A]ll provide grist to the mill of the born-again racism without-race popular with both the EDL and the so-called liberal left because, apparently, it’s not racist to be anti-Muslim.

Defining and seeing Islamophobia only or primarily through the prism of religion not only ignores these issues, processes and effects, but is particularly problematic (or functional) in so-called secular societies such as France, Britain and to a lesser extent in the United States, where criticism of religion is considered a healthy and necessary practice to allow for freedom of thought and expression. We see this most acutely with the so-called ‘New Atheist’ movement including noted free speech liberal Bill Maher, as well as Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins, who have all targeted Islam. This is even the case

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<sup>2</sup> The longer 2017 definition, building on the UN definition of racism, states: ‘Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.’

when the identification and discourse about Islam as a 'religion' slips into 'culture', as highlighted by the 1997 Runnymede Trust definition, although the latter brings us closer to a form of racism. In this context, the Islamophobe is often praised for breaking taboos in the name of freedom of speech and secularism. This is particularly the case regarding Islam as it is often considered to take 'a conservative line' on issues such as gender, sexuality and equality in general, which have come to symbolise liberal causes and liberalism in the post-60s west. As highlighted by David Theo Goldberg (2006, 345), 'Islam is taken in the dominant European imaginary to represent a collection of lacks: of freedom; of a disposition of scientific inquiry; of civility and manners; of love of life; of human worth; of equal respect for women and gay people'. For Sayyid (2010, 1), its detractors perceive Islamophobia as simply a fig leaf behind which 'backward' (sic) social practices and totalitarian political ambitions are covered up and afforded bogus exemption from legitimate criticism and challenge'. In this article, we do not take the term 'Islamophobia' to be solely about religion (or fear, beyond a psychoanalytic reading in which underlying fear is an element), accepting the racism/racialisation thesis, but we do not reject it in favour of the term anti-Muslim racism. We use the term Islamophobia both as the most widely used term and to accommodate different forms of hate that include those focused on different aspects, such as those claiming to be referring to the religion or 'ideas' as opposed to people or 'race'. These arguments and analyses (in themselves and in relation to one another) demonstrate the diverse articulations of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate. Just as Alexander highlights the need for a more complex, nuanced and inclusive definition of racism, where Islamophobia fits in, we call for a more complex, nuanced and inclusive definition of Islamophobia where racism, and its avoidance or concealment can be acknowledged and accounted for as a particular discourse. This is one of the reasons that we use the term 'articulations' and identify different ones.

### **Understanding Islamophobias as Articulations**

Key to our framework is the understanding of Islamophobia as articulations rather than self-contained categories. Through the different modes of articulation outlined in the following section, the signifiers 'Muslim' and 'Islam' are constructed in different manners, but ultimately, they represent an Other, often described along racist lines in the current hegemonic discourse in much of the west. Yet, we argue, it is only through the dual offer of what we define as illiberal and liberal Islamophobias that this racist discourse can become naturalised and common sense, since it allows for those espousing the liberal position to justify their racist discourse by opposing it to the illiberal articulation, even though both are part of the same exclusionary paradigm. While it remains conceptual, contingent and may be contested, the distinction we make between the illiberal and liberal is important to accommodate different

articulations and acknowledge the construction of an opposition by those espousing the liberal version for functional and strategic reasons: to displace racism and appear more mainstream.

We thus see Islamophobia as a construct, and the Muslim signifier as one which does not come from the individual Muslim in a subjective manner. Instead, it is defined by the onlooker in a position of power and imposed onto people through various types of generalisation, misperception and stigmatisation. Such constructions can be articulated through different types of discourses, from the more traditional forms of biological racism in unreconstructed far-right and white supremacist circles, to more 'evolved' forms of racism based on culture and even progressive tropes.

In the following sections, we construct a framework to account for what we consider the two most prominent articulations of current Islamophobic discourse to provide a more flexible and comprehensive way to delineate Islamophobias and thus address them and where they intersect more precisely. These are, as stated, illiberal Islamophobia and liberal Islamophobia.

### **Illiberal Islamophobia**

Illiberal Islamophobia is 'illiberal' inasmuch as it is not only rejected by the liberal norm, but denounced as unacceptable and alien to our post-racial societies (Lentin and Titley 2011), thus allowing the legitimisation of other, more insidious and less racialised forms. Our distinction between the liberal and illiberal articulations here is not so much based on political and ideology theory, but rather on the perceived quality of each concept in the mainstream discourse. 'Liberal' thus refers to the prevalent obedience to the constitution and the rule of law particularly regarding equal treatment of citizens, and a loyalty to the deliberation processes central to liberal democracy particularly in the form of elections. Illiberal in our case refers to the treatment of certain groups, particularly based on ethnic and/or cultural generalised traits, and the possibility (discursive or otherwise) to circumvent the rule of law, the constitution and even electoral results should a threat be considered serious enough (for more detail, see Mondon & Winter 2017a).

Illiberal Islamophobia commonly emerges from exclusivist ideologies, discourses and identities associated with easily recognisable forms of racisms, typically originating on the far-right and within

ultra-conservative circles. This type of Islamophobia is closest to traditional racism and often presents Islam as monolithic and innately threatening and inferior (in terms of 'race' if not also culture). It is essentialist and total as it includes all Muslims without making distinctions in terms of the specific belief, background ideology, behaviour or activity of individuals or sub-groups. Muslimness becomes an immutable characteristic (akin to biology): Muslims are innately Muslims and there is no loyalty test possible. Illiberal Islamophobia can be witnessed in attacks, whether discursive or physical, against Muslims and mosques, but also in calls for repatriation or even genocide. However, illiberal Islamophobia is not synonymous to traditional, biological forms of racism, and is not restricted to white supremacist circles. While it is indeed most clearly related to traditional right-wing race hate, its most pervasive and insidious occurrences are represented by what Etienne Balibar (1997), amongst others (Taguieff 1994; Barker 1982), has termed the 'new racism', which moves from biological to cultural difference and from hierarchy of races to incompatibility of 'cultures'.

This type of discourse remains very much on the margin of politics because of its illiberal quality, insofar as it advocates for different rights to different people and cultures, but it occupies a space between the most reviled forms of racism based on biology and its more insidious occurrences based on culture. This is made possible by several factors specific to Islam and Muslims, most notably the status of Islam as a religion, as well as the legacy of colonial discourses in France and Britain, migration, and essentialised constructions of cultural difference. In terms of the latter, this can take the form of Orientalist colonial cultural essentialism and hierarchies or a pseudo progressive anthropological one. This opens the door to liberal Islamophobia by concealing its racism behind 'culture'. An example would be to represent an homogenous Muslim culture as one that is indiscriminately and innately backwards and illiberal towards women, homosexuality, free speech and democracy.

Obviously, as with other ideological elements, the borders between what is acceptable or not, what is mainstream or extreme, are fuzzy and in constant evolution, which has been both useful and damaging for those parties and movements trying to walk the tightrope. The illiberal articulation of Islamophobia has two elements central to our argument. The first is that it can be defined as a discourse falling outside of the liberal norm because of its calls for discriminatory practices based on culture, ethnicity and or/religion, but at the same time stirring clear from the crudest forms of racism. The second element relates to the positioning of the contingent line drawn between the mainstream and the extreme: what is acceptable and what is not. We argue that it is the construction and containment of a clearly delineated type of Islamophobia which falls outside of the liberal, mainstream ideal, which make it possible for subtler forms of Islamophobia to enter the mainstream discourse due their apparent allegiance to liberal democratic rules.



## **Liberal Islamophobia**

While illiberal Islamophobia is usually easily recognised and widely denounced in mainstream discourse, we argue that a more mainstream trend has taken hold of public discourse and become increasingly normalised. While the liberal articulation of Islamophobia can be contrasted with the illiberal one by its proclaimed allegiance to a fantasised liberal and democratic principles, both share a basic structure based on a racialised understanding of culture. However, the liberal articulation takes its cultural understanding of racism a step further by explicitly distancing itself from, and even repudiating openly traditional racism and hate, and pretends to focus only on ‘religion’, ‘culture’ or values, and/in relation to democratic rights and tolerance as values inherent to Western societies, most notably free speech, women’s rights and LGBT rights.

Therefore, contrary to illiberal and more extreme forms of Islamophobia, liberal Islamophobia is anchored in a pseudo-progressive narrative in the defence of the rule of law based on liberal equality, freedom and rights (e.g. liberal versions of freedom of speech, gender and sexual equality). To gain legitimacy, it is thus crucial that liberal Islamophobia goes beyond its attacks on Muslims, and appears to challenge traditional far-right and ultra-conservative discourses and ideologies. In its self-proclaimed yet limited opposition to the reviled ‘racists’, ‘sexists’ and ‘fundamentalists’ of all kinds, it enables far greater mainstream and even progressive acceptance. Before going any further, it is important to note that, by stating that mainstream articulations of Islamophobia are couched in progressive terms and the defence of certain rights, does not mean that any criticism directed at discriminatory practices is necessarily Islamophobic. While oppression can certainly be expressed through particular versions and implementations of Islam, what this chapter describes as liberal Islamophobia is the creation of a loosely defined Muslim culture and community inherently and homogeneously opposed to some of the core values espoused in a mythical essentialised culturally homogenous, superior and enlightened West. In this vision, the progress achieved by the West is taken uncritically and portrayed as a natural state of things ignoring that democracy, human rights, free speech, gender and sexual equality and rights remain precarious, unequally distributed and unfulfilled.

Therefore, in our framework, two aspects make the liberal articulation of Islamophobia distinct, not from conservative, but extreme and illiberal forms:

- It allows for limited distinctions between ‘good’ (redeemable) and ‘bad’ Muslims subject to a loyalty test, that is through (demands for) explicit expressions of opposition and apologies from ‘moderate’ Muslims, even though the line to satisfy such demands is arbitrary, and always moving out of reach.
- It emphasises the apparent inclusion of other ethnic and religious groups typically hated by the far-right and traditional racists. Such groups provide a veneer of tolerance and progressivism as their victimisation is acknowledged, albeit diverted onto a particular scapegoat: the racialised and stigmatised group can join if ‘They’ decide to integrate through hate.

Contrary to illiberal forms of Islamophobia taking their ideological impulse from anti-egalitarian and authoritarian movements, liberal islamophobia acts as a decoy to provide ‘Us’ with a righteous sense of ourselves as the defenders of a more progressive vision of the world, and displaces these tensions, failures and inadequacies onto Islam as solely responsible for our problems. However, it is crucial to reiterate that the borders between illiberal and liberal islamophobias are fuzzy, and that such cover against accusations of racism present in the liberal articulation are often used by conservatives and even those usually associated with the more illiberal articulation as well.

We argued elsewhere that a number of elements of discourse have been key to justify this mainstreaming of Islamophobia. In this chapter, we would like to outline two briefly to highlight how the liberal articulation has been constructed and allowed Islamophobia to become increasingly mainstream: freedom of speech and gender rights (Mondon & Winter 2017a; 2017b). They are taken up not only by the far-right, but the state and liberal media which normalise and mainstream them.

Critiques of Islam and Muslims based on illiberalism, particularly in terms of free speech, found their contemporary roots in the wake of the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie 2008, Appignanesi and Maitland 1989). Such critiques gained further traction after the cartoons affair in 2005, when Danish newspaper published twelve drawings of the Prophet Mohammed, claiming that the aim of the cartoons’ publication was to test ‘the boundaries of censorship in a time of war’ (Battaglia, 2006, p. 29; see also Klausen 2009). For Ferruh Yilmaz (Yilmaz, 2011, p. 11), Jyllands-Posten was ‘extremely successful in (a) creating an intense debate that can easily be described as a “moral panic” about Islam’s compatibility with “Western” values, (b) making freedom of speech the central question in the debate, and (c) mobilising sides on the basis of Muslim and Western “identities,” regardless of what their own identifications and arguments are otherwise’. The cartoons affair therefore

allowed right-wing voices to rework their neo-racist argument into part of the fuzzy enlightenment project: the new crusades would be between innately reactionary Muslims and indiscriminately progressive western societies. This line of argument was extremely successful, creating deep divisions within and throughout the left as intellectuals and activists wrongly felt forced to choose between secularism and racism: to defend universalism and secularism the essentialisation and exclusion of part of the population was deemed necessary (see Mondon & Winter 2017b). The attack on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 mainstreamed this argument further. As noted elsewhere,

*The magazine became 'a flagbearer for such a civilisational project: 'Je Suis Charlie' was the assertion that the West and France in particular identified with the magazine as its symbol or proxy for freedom of speech, and stood together in solidarity with them for it and the attack on it/them/us' (Mondon & Winter 2017b, p.32).*

In the US, with free speech enshrined in the constitution and the national psyche, we have seen liberal comedian and TV host Bill Maher, even prior to the attack on Charlie Hebdo, argued that Islam is the 'mother lode of bad ideas' (Cohen, 23 Feb. 2017) and 'Islam is the only religion that acts like the mafia that will fucking kill you if you say the wrong thing' (Jalabi 7 October 2014). Defending himself against charges of Islamophobia, Maher argued '[w]e are not bigoted people. On the contrary! We're trying to stand up for the principles of liberalism!' (Jalabi 7 October 2014). He argued that 'To count yourself as a liberal, you have to stand up for liberal principles: Free speech. Separation of church and state. Freedom to practice any religion or no religion without the threat of violence. Respect for minorities, including homosexuals. Equality for women' (Maher 27 September 2014).

Following the 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo, the group Stop Islamization of America and Jihad Watch, hosted a 'Prophet Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest' in Texas. According to SIA leader Pamela Geller: 'We decided to have a cartoon contest to show we would not kowtow to violent intimidation and allow the freedom of speech to be overwhelmed by thugs and bullies'. During the event, two gunman committed a drive-by shooting, hitting a security guard, which Geller called a 'war on free speech' (Bever 4 May 2015).

Similarly, the issue of gender became increasingly prominent following 9/11 with the invasion of Afghanistan justified partly by coalition partners in terms of emancipating women from the Taliban

(Khiabany and Williamson 2011, 175). The criticism or attack on Muslims using women's rights (or the expression of what some, such as Sara Farris, have termed 'femonationalism') has spread and gained increased currency more recently, most notably with calls to ban, and actual bans on, different Muslim women's head coverings, as well as the 'burkini', in France and the UK (see Zempi & Chakraborti 2014; Delphy, 2015; Massoumi, 2015; Rashid, 2016; Farris, 2012; Farris, 2017, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2017a). In 2017, the UK educational authority Ofsted even sought to interview and investigate young girls wearing head covering as a 'safeguarding' issue (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-42046371>). This gendered liberal islamophobia has also focused on issues that are not-Muslim specific, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

In the US, liberal Bill Maher and Robert Spencer, founder of the neo-conservative SIA and Jihad Watch, have attempted to champion women's rights. Spencer is the author of 'The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam', while Jihad Watch 'seeks to bring public attention to: The plight of women under Sharia provisions ...' (Jihad Watch 2016). This, like free speech, has allowed movements traditionally thought of as extreme, such as SIA and Jihad Watch, as well as the EDL and Pegida, to move closer to the centre ground and mainstream. In 2016, Pegida and other groups have attempted to exploit the New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne which were blamed on Muslim refugees. Anne-Marie Waters of Pegida has argued that Europe is experiencing a 'rape epidemic' due to Muslim migration and refugees (Waters, 6 Oct. 2015). Many anti-Muslim activists and commentators, such as Pegida, EDL, BNP and Nigel Farage have referred to Sweden as the 'Rape Capital' of Europe due to Muslim migration (Lusher, 21 Feb. 2017). Far right anti-Muslim activists have also focused on and campaigned around cases in Rotherham and Rochdale, UK, where gangs of Asian-Muslim men were accused of grooming young girls for sexual exploitation (Smith, 13 Mar. 2013; Tell Mama, 2014). These are all articulated as defences of women against sexual exploitation, assault and violence, at the hands of Muslims.

### **Blurry Lines, Contradictions and Functionality**

While there are many ways to demonstrate the potency of Islamophobia in our society, this chapter argues that the division between liberal and illiberal articulations can help us shed more light as to the ways in which it travels and has been mainstreamed in different political and cultural contexts. However, this division does not mean that the concepts are exclusive. In fact, they are linked by the target and at the borders.

The acceptance of liberal Islamophobia within the mainstream rests on that of illiberal Islamophobia being both easily identified, contrasted and denounced. Yet the mask slips easily and often. This is not only because of the blurred or slippery relationship between the two concepts based on a shared antagonism, target and structure, but also because both are responses or backlashes to the impact of the liberal social movements of the 1960s-80s: feminism, anti-colonialism, LGBT rights and anti-racism despite liberals claiming to champion some of these. While it is widely accepted that those espousing Illiberal Islamophobic discourses stand strongly against these and want the clock turned back, liberal Islamophobia has allowed for a more mainstream backlash route. Since the 1990s, a counter-hegemonic discourse has gained ground, positing somewhat paradoxically that the demand for 'real' equality by some minorities may pose a risk to western culture, despite its universal claims. Therefore, liberal Islamophobia, with its discourse based in fantasised liberal rights and universalism, is in fact anchored in racist discourse as it rests upon the assumption of an innate superiority of 'our' way of life, while creating an essentialised 'other' as a threat. It is also never long before the racist illiberal hate peeks out through or sheds the liberal veneer, for their target was always the same: Muslims. While this process started in the 1980s, the liberal version recently found its argument legitimised in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. It was following the November 2015 Paris attacks that the conversation turned from liberalism, freedom and rights back to security and explicit fear and hate, calls for bans on Muslims and Syrian refugees and a spike in hate crimes against Muslims.

In the UK, while we see the weaponisation of free speech against Muslims post-Charlie Hebdo, the state's Prevent legislation, designed to identify and prevent possible and potential radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, has been criticised for subjecting Muslim speech to extra scrutiny and illiberal censorship. In terms of gender, what becomes clear is that, as developed elsewhere, such defences of women's rights are based on traditional reactionary principles:

*calls to ban the hijab for example present themselves as attempts to emancipate women from an oppressive patriarchal culture, but really only target and punish women with charges and penalties by demonising a particular garment, without ever considering the agency of the bearer. Muslim women are thus given a choice: remove the items or remove yourself from the public sphere and associated rights and resources (e.g. employment, social services and education) and return to the private sphere (Mondon & Winter 2017a).*

In the Cologne, Swedish and Rotherham and Rochdale, as well as wider European, cases, the female victims being defended and protected are not Muslim, but white-European. This is because these are

merely updated expressions of traditional racist-nationalist patriarchal discourses in which white men appoint themselves (or are appointed) protectors of white women against men from different cultures and races seen to pose a sexual threat not only to the women, but white male masculinity and the nation, which is what the far-right trades in. Furthermore, despite the claim that it is women's interests and emancipation that are being defended and protected, research has shown that it is Muslim women, most notably those wearing the very head coverings that get so much attention in these liberal discourses, who are on the receiving end of illiberal hate crimes and violence (Zempi and Chakraborti, 2014; Perry, 2014), as well as securitization (Rashid, 2016). According to data compiled by Tell Mama in the UK, in the week following the November 2015 Paris attacks, hate crimes against Muslims increased more than 300% to 115 and most victims were Muslim girls and women 'in traditional Islamic dress' (Mogul 23 November 2015). This also points to the rise in illiberal Islamophobia that would run parallel and, as this illustrates, intersect, with the liberal version.

This emergence of illiberal Islamophobic hate out from beyond the acceptable liberal articulation post-Charlie Hebdo, and the former taking over the latter, could be seen in the United States with Trump's campaign threat and later attempt to ban Muslims from entering the country and a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate groups in 2015 and 2016 (Levin and Grisham 2015; Norton 18 December 2015, Lichtblau 17 September 2016, Potok 14 November 2016, SPLC 15 February 2017), many of whom supported his candidacy (SPLC 2016; Neiwert and Posner 21 September 2016, Hafner 25 February 2016). In response to the rise in illiberalism during the campaign, *Salon's* Jeffrey Tayler (13 December 2015) called for people to: 'Follow Bill Maher's lead, not Donald Trump's: There's a way to critique ideology behind religion without resorting to hate'. What Tayler failed to recognise was that Maher helped set the stage for acceptance of Trump's Islamophobia in mainstream, and that these two articulations were converging. The situation seemed to get worse when Trump was elected, with the SPLC reporting a spike in hate crimes against Muslims and other groups in the month following the election (SPLC 15 November 2016), and then when he took office. A week after being inaugurated on 20 January, Trump issued his executive order *Protection of the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*. The order banned Muslims from seven countries, including refugees from Syria, from entering the United States for 90 days and suspending the Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days (Merica 30 January 2017). In response to this, fellow 'New Atheist' Sam Harris appeared on Bill Maher's *Real Time* on 3 February and both opposed it, in the latter's words, 'because we are liberals'. Harris argued that a blanket ban was counter-productive because 'we' are 'desperate for moderate Muslims in society' as 'only secular, liberal and former Muslims, frankly, can police this for us' (Harris 2017). Harris, like Tayler, was trying to differentiate between two articulations of Islamophobia and failed to see the Islamophobic construction of the good vs bad Muslim underpinning his argument or the fact that, along with Maher, he had a role in mainstreaming the Islamophobia that Trump mobilised.

Although Harris may have a sense that the two articulations are converging, which may lie behind his attempt to police the boundary between them so explicitly at this point in time. This convergence became clear when Maher hosted Breitbart editor, alt-right figurehead and Trump supporter, Milo Yiannopoulos on *Real Time* on 17 February and the two bonded, despite different opinions on Trump, over their shared Islamophobia. Yiannopoulos often articulated his, like Maher, in terms of free speech and 'gay' rights, but not gender or progressive liberalism which he despised, naming one speech: Feminism and Islam, *The Unholy Alliance* (12 October 2016). In the interview, Yiannopoulos complimented Maher by saying 'You're sound on Islam unlike most people on your show' and Maher responded 'Yes, that's true' (Obeidallah 20 February 2017).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to contribute to the debates on the understanding and definition of Islamophobia by providing an overview of our concepts of liberal and illiberal Islamophobias in the context of existing literature and political developments. We argued that these concepts are essential to respond to more narrow, contingent definitions and polarised debates about how to define Islamophobia (e.g. racist vs anti-religious, extreme vs mainstream and state vs non-state expressions), capture the diverse, changing, seemingly contradictory and slippery articulations of Islamophobia and provide a framework for mapping and analysing these as they appear and transform. We have used examples from France, the US and UK to show how such articulations operate in and apply to different contexts, which also point to the spread of Islamophobia in recent years. Liberal and illiberal Islamophobia are not, as pointed out, mutually exclusive, as the unacceptability of illiberal anti-Muslim hate or racism provides a negative comparison that allows liberal articulations to avoid criticism. This allows Islamophobia to gain mainstream traction in ways that traditional racism could not. At the same time, this allows for the normalisation of Islamophobia which legitimises and emboldens hate that can then manifest in illiberal, authoritarian and violence expressions.

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