

## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Tell MAMA, 'Man threatened to shoot Muslim woman and their child during bus tirade'<sup>1</sup> (27 January 2023)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow.

On 26 November 2022, a Muslim mother and her young child and another Muslim woman were abused on the 133 bus.

Both women, who were wearing hijabs, were called terrorists and told to 'go back home'.

The Muslim mother, who was travelling from Kennington in South London, described noticing the perpetrators abusing a Muslim woman when she boarded the bus, but was afraid to speak out because she didn't want to compromise the safety of her child.

The perpetrators, however, soon directed their abuse towards her and her child. None of the other passengers intervened, even when one of the men threatened to 'shoot' them. The bus driver also failed to stop the bus despite the woman's requests.

The Muslim mother was unable to take pictures or videos of the attack, despite wanting to, as she feared for her and her child's safety.

The police did investigate the incident, but the case was closed as they were unable to identify the perpetrators and no witnesses came forward. This response made the Muslim woman feel let down by the police and left her fearful of taking public transport.

<sup>1</sup> ['Man threatened to shoot Muslim woman and their child during bus tirade'](#), Tell MAMA, 27 January 2023.

## Connection Questions

Discuss the following questions together. Then, write a short summary of the reading in your notebooks. You will be sharing your summary with a new group in the next part of the activity.

- 1. What impacts could such verbal abuse have on those who are targeted by it?**
  - What impact did this event have on the Muslim mother?
- 2. What could have been done to show solidarity with and support for the Muslim women at the time?**
  - Whose responsibility was this?
  - What could the other passengers and bus driver have done?
- 3. In what ways did the abuse refer to known Islamophobic tropes?**
  - What does this highlight about the challenges in countering Islamophobia?
- 4. What can be done to prevent such Islamophobic attacks from occurring on public transport in the future?**
  - What actions could members of the public take?
  - What actions could transport organisations take?
  - What actions could the police take?
- 5. How do you think acts of hate, such as targeted verbal abuse, impact communities?**
  - How could they make it more likely that people will commit violent acts?
- 6. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.**

## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 2: *BBC News*, 'London mosques receive offensive letters in quake aftermath'<sup>1</sup>

(16 February 2023)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow.

At least two mosques in London have received Islamophobic letters following the Turkey–Syria earthquakes. The author of a letter received by Erkin Guney, chairman of Masjid Ramadan mosque, in Hackney, said they “could not stop smiling” seeing the footage of the disaster.

[...]

The earthquakes have claimed more than 40,000 lives and seen some towns with 80% of buildings turned to rubble.

The anonymous letter wished for “more deaths” saying “the more Muslims that suffer the better”.

It read: “I could not stop smiling watching the people being pulled from the rubble, some dead[,] some still sadly alive.”

It expressed “comfort” at news of entire families being killed in the disaster and wished for another earthquake in the region.

Mr Guney, who has overseen 300 aid boxes dispatched from the mosque, also known as Shacklewell Lane Mosque, said he had received hundreds of supportive messages.

He said the first line of the offensive letter mentioned “sorrow”, adding: “It was only when I read the second line, I stopped in my tracks and realised it was a very hateful message. I was lost for words, it turned my stomach.”

Mr Guney has origins in Famagusta, in Turkish-controlled Cyprus, where he says his town has witnessed 48 deaths, mostly children.

He added: “We are all still in a state of shock and grief. I cannot comprehend how someone would take time out of their day to formulate such poison.

“I only pray for that person as he must have so much hate in his heart, and be in [a] dark hole.”

The Metropolitan Police confirmed another mosque in Stoke Newington had also received a letter with racist and Islamophobic language.

The force added no arrests had been made but inquiries were ongoing.

<sup>1</sup> ‘[London mosques receive offensive letters in quake aftermath](#)’, *BBC News*, 16 February 2023.

## Connection Questions

Discuss the following questions together. Then, write a short summary of the reading in your notebooks. You will be sharing your summary with a new group in the next part of the activity.

1. What was Mr Guney's response to the letter? Why would the letter provoke such a response?
2. What impacts could such Islamophobic abuse have on those who are targeted by it?
  - What impact did receiving the letter have on Mr Guney?
3. What was powerful about Mr Guney's response?
4. What was done to show solidarity with and support for Mr Guney and the Muslim community?
  - What else could have been done?
5. What does the content of the letter and the fact someone sent it reveal about Islamophobia and some people's attitudes towards Muslims?
  - What can be done to tackle such attitudes?
6. How do you think acts of hate, such as targeted verbal abuse, impact communities?
  - How could they make it more likely that people will commit violent acts?
7. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.

## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 3: *The Independent*, “Anti-Islamic” posters in Essex showing crusader chasing woman in burqa with AK-47 investigated by police<sup>1</sup>

(Jon Sharman and Lizzie Dearden, 21 May 2019)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow.

Posters put up in an Essex town bearing the phrase “Islamists not welcome” are being treated as a hate crime, police have said.

Put up in several Rayleigh streets, they also warned targets to “stay back or we will kick you back”.

They displayed a symbol used by the pan-European white nationalist group Generation Identity alongside silhouette images of a mounted crusader chasing a pair of armed figures – one of whom is wearing a burqa.

[...]

Ahmad Khwaja, chairman of the Southend Ethnic Minority Forum, told the Standard: “It is both worrying and disappointing that anti-Islamic posters have been appearing. This Islamophobia is fuelled by ignorance and it is likely that the people posting them have had little or no contact with any Muslim people in their own lives.

“Sadly anti-Muslim bias is prevalent and has become normalised in the media and politics today. It is therefore yet to be taken as seriously as other hate crimes such as those of antisemitism or homophobia.”

Generation Identity calls itself a “patriotic youth movement” that believes in “homeland, freedom and tradition”.

It promotes the white genocide conspiracy theory that inspired the Christchurch mosque attacker and calls for a “reconquista” of Europe.

The phrase invokes the reconquest of Spain by the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, following centuries of rule by the Moors.

In their quest to “stop the Islamisation of Europe” and “reverse the Great Replacement”, activists crowdfunded [...] a boat to stop refugee rescues in the Mediterranean and patrolled European borders.

<sup>1</sup> Jon Sharman and Lizzie Dearden, “Anti-Islamic” posters in Essex showing crusader chasing woman in burqa with AK-47 investigated by police, *The Independent*, 21 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Moors is the term given to Muslims from North Africa. They ruled parts of Spain and Portugal until the fifteenth century, having claimed the territory during the Early Muslim conquests in the eighth century.

## Connection Questions

Discuss the following questions together. Then, write a short summary of the reading in your notebooks. You will be sharing your summary with a new group in the next part of the activity.

- 1. What can be done when Islamophobic posters are put up in public?**
  - How can communities respond in the moment?
  - What can be done in the longer term?
- 2. What could have been done to show solidarity with and support for the Muslim community after this attack?**
  - Whose responsibility was it?
- 3. Ahmad Khwaja, chairman of the Southend Ethnic Minority Forum, stated that '[...] Sadly anti-Muslim bias is prevalent and has become normalised in the media and politics today.'**
  - How does the normalisation of anti-Muslim bias impact Muslims?
  - What can be done to counter it in the media and in politics?
- 4. In what ways do the posters and the aims of the white nationalist group Generation Identity draw on Islamophobic tropes?**
  - What does this highlight about the challenges in countering Islamophobia?
- 5. How do you think acts of hate, such as the putting up of Islamophobic posters, impact communities?**
  - How could they make it more likely that people will commit violent acts?
- 6. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.**

## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 4: *The Guardian*, 'Windows smashed at five mosques in Birmingham'<sup>1</sup>

(Seth Jacobson, 21 May 2019)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow.

Counter-terrorism police are investigating after windows were smashed at five mosques in Birmingham.

[...]

Police and the West Midlands counter-terrorism unit are investigating the incidents, and forensic teams were gathering evidence at the scenes.

The West Midlands police chief constable, Dave Thompson, said: [...]

"At difficult times like this, it is incredibly important that everyone unites against those who seek to create discord, uncertainty and fear in our communities."

[...]

A spokesman for Witton Islamic Centre said the perpetrator used a sledgehammer to smash the mosque's front windows. He also urged the local community to stay calm.

He added: "For those that may be worried about attending prayers at the mosque, there will be an increased police presence to reassure the community. The general message to the community is to stay calm but vigilant."

Ian Ward, leader of Birmingham city council, said there was no room for "hate and Islamophobia" in the city.

"As we saw with last week's tragic events in Christchurch, Islamophobia is a poison that cannot go unchallenged," he said. "As a city it is important that we call out discrimination and intolerance in any form and we will continue to do so."

[...]

Waseem Zaffar, a Birmingham city council cabinet member, wrote: "Deeply shocking and concerning to learn about the attacks on masjids in neighbouring Aston and Erdington neighbourhoods.

"We will not let a very small minority divide our neighbourhood, the city and society and will fight back against any hate and division with love, peace and harmony."

[...]

<sup>1</sup> Seth Jacobson, 'Windows smashed at five mosques in Birmingham', *The Guardian*, 21 May 2019.

## Connection Questions

1. What was done to show solidarity with the Muslim community?
  - What else do you think could have been done?
2. The West Midlands police chief constable, Dave Thompson, said: 'At difficult times like this, it is incredibly important that everyone unites against those who seek to create discord, uncertainty and fear in our communities'.
  - How can people unite against perpetrators of Islamophobic attacks?
  - What can be done in the moment?
  - What can be done in the longer term?
3. These hate crimes occurred a week after the terrorist attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in which fifty-one people were killed.
  - Why is this significant?
4. Why is it important to, in the words of Waseem Zaffar, 'fight back against any hate and division with love, peace and harmony'?
5. How do you think acts of hate, such as abuse and the destruction of public property, impact communities?
  - How could they make it more likely that people will commit violent acts?
6. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.



## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 5: *The Guardian*, 'Britain had a far-right terrorist attack a week ago. Why the failure to call it by its true name?'<sup>1</sup>(Miqdaad Versi, 6 November 2022)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow. This excerpt is from an opinion piece concerning the 30 October 2022 terrorist attack on the migrant centre in Dover.

Counter-terrorism police have finally concluded that a firebomb attack on a migrant centre last week was terrorism motivated by the far right. But you'd never have guessed it from this past week.

There haven't been column inches from counter-terrorism ideologues laying out the drivers of this terrorist attack, nor has there been round-the-clock media coverage of the community where the perpetrator is from, asking why they hate so much. Most national newspapers didn't give the attack front-page prominence the next day.

[...]

This is despite the fact that the perpetrator had tweeted that he planned to "obliterate Muslim children" an hour before his attack. He [...] repeatedly wrote about Muslim "grooming gangs" and shared content from far-right Islamophobic groups[.]

[...]

At the Muslim Council of Britain's Centre for Media Monitoring, we analysed the media reporting of 16 officially designated terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2020 in painstaking detail. The report uncovered a huge disparity in the way the term "terror" (and related terms) has been used by the media. Unsurprisingly, "terror" was used far less commonly when the perpetrator was from the far right.

[...]

But it's not merely about the reporting of terrorism. It's also about why this far-right terrorist had such disgusting views about Islam and Muslims.

It's important not to assume that media discourse about Islam, Muslims and immigration directly led to this attack, but given the awful reporting about Islam, Muslims and immigration that has become commonplace in the rightwing press, the correlation is worth exploring.

[...]

In the week following the far-right terrorist attack on a migrant centre in Dover, [...] the Spectator published an article hostile to immigration with an image of a tidal wave of Muslim-looking individuals hitting the white cliffs of Dover. The Daily Mail [...] described it as an "intensification of Britain's migrant crisis", which came "amid new fears over the number of arrivals".

It appears that even after a terrorist attack from someone who used such language, incendiary language about Islam, Muslims and immigration has not died down, but has actually escalated.

[...] [W]hy has this happened? First, there is a deliberate unwillingness to take far-right extremism seriously across the media and political establishment. [...]

Second, it is because anti-Islam sentiment remains acceptable in mainstream discourse.

[...]

Finally, it's because in parts of the media and politics, narratives blaming an "other" for society's ills play a crucial role. They distract from the real forces undermining British society, and get a lot of clicks.

<sup>1</sup> Miqdaad Versi, 'Britain had a far-right terrorist attack a week ago. Why the failure to call it by its true name?', *The Guardian*, 6 November 2022.

## Connection Questions

1. Miqdaad Versi outlines the differences between how far-right acts of terrorism are reported when compared to Islamic extremist acts of terrorism.
  - What are these differences?
  - Why are they problematic?
2. What does Versi view as responsible for this anti-migrant and Islamophobic attack?
3. What can be done when anti-migrant and Islamophobic sentiment lead to violence?
  - How can communities respond in the moment?
  - What can be done in the longer term?
4. What could have been done to show solidarity with and support for the Muslim community and for migrants after this attack in Dover?
  - Whose responsibility was it?
5. How do you think acts of hate, such as abuse, impact communities?
  - How could they make it more likely that people will commit violent acts?
6. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.

## Contemporary Islamophobia Case Studies

### Case Study 6: Tell MAMA, 'Racist and dehumanising graffiti targeting Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians found in west London'<sup>1</sup> (24 June 2021)

**Directions:** Read the case study about an Islamophobic incident and discuss the connection questions that follow.

An upstanding member of the public, out walking in west London, discovered racist and anti-Muslim graffiti in two locations that dehumanised and disparaged Arabs, Palestinians, and the Prophet Muhammad.

Speaking to Tell MAMA and wishing to maintain their anonymity, the individual described passing through a quiet street on June 22 where, upon a steel girder, written in permanent marker[,] they found the racist and deeply upsetting statements "F\*\*\* Arabs" and "F\*\*\* the Prophet Mohammed".

Having walked further, they soon discovered other graffiti that included "F\*\*\* Palestine".

Tell MAMA has since reported the incident to the Metropolitan police and flagged the racist graffiti with the local council.

Anyone can report graffiti in public areas anonymously – be it on bins, benches, and public buildings – to their local council, online or otherwise.

In May [2021], [which saw a resurgence in conflict between Israel and Gaza], Tell MAMA recorded a disturbing spike in reports of anti-Muslim hate, discrimination, and Islamophobia across social media and in some schools.

On social media, we catalogued examples of users referring to young Muslims as 'future terrorists' for articulating their support for Palestine.

The Independent reported on May 19, in an article headlined, "Israel-Gaza conflict triggers spike in antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate in UK" that our service "recorded 56 anti-Muslim and Islamophobic incidents between 8 and 17 May, compared to 13 in the week of 1 to 7 May" – a spike of 430 per cent since May 8.

[...]

<sup>1</sup> 'Racist and dehumanising graffiti targeting Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians found in west London', Tell MAMA, 24 June 2021.

## Connection Questions

1. What was done to show solidarity with the Muslim community?
  - What else do you think could have been done?
2. What can be done when Islamophobic graffiti is sprayed on walls?
  - How can communities respond in the moment?
  - What can be done in the longer term?
3. In what ways did the social media content draw on Islamophobic tropes?
  - What does this highlight about the challenges in countering Islamophobia?
4. Tell MAMA reported that the Israel–Gaza conflict led Islamophobic hate crimes to spike by 430 per cent.
  - Why is it Islamophobic to target Muslims for the conduct of Hamas?
  - What message is this sending to Muslims who are targeted like this?
  - How does it suggest others view them?
5. Can you think of any other examples in society when people have been blamed or held responsible for the actions of a person/people just because they share some identity traits?
  - What were the consequences?
6. In your own words, write a two- to three-sentence summary of this article in your notebooks.